

# THE PORTRAIT OF MAHALI ECONOMY IN MIDNAPUR

SYAMALKANTI SENGUPTA



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The book is the first attempt to provide materials on *Economic Anthropology* in Indian context. The earlier Indian scholars of Anthropology included the economic life of a caste or a tribe or a village, in the framework of general outlines. In this respect this publication is a maiden effort.

The Mahalis are a scheduled tribe in West Bengal. They are traditional bamboo worker and an off-shoot of the Santals. The present study is confined with the Mahalis of Midnapur district and the sample covers more than 30% of the population. In Midnapur they live with the caste Hindus, in the same village but in separate hamlet.

Their traditional bamboo-work includes *basketry of domestic use* which has seldom market in the village at present, and now is only prepared for scattered sale. They, now primarily prepare big baskets locally known as *Jhuri* for the betel-leaf dealers. The demand of the consumer villagers is replaced by the consumer betel-leaf dealers. This change in consumers' preferences, changes the basketry patterns of the Mahalis. Paddy as medium of exchange in the village market has been replaced by the money medium, in the market outside. This change in earning patterns of the Mahalis and their adjustment in the village economy are the objective of this portrait.

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# CATALOGUES





# The Portrait of Mahali Economy in Midnapur

## The Earning Patterns of Tribal Basket-makers

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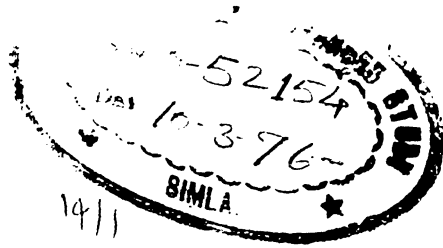


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## PREFACE

The present study is an effort to furnish materials on economic anthropology with a view to add one more string to the already existing ones. A scheduled tribe community named Mahali, living in Midnapur district of West Bengal has been selected for the purpose of providing concrete ideograph of the subject in Indian context. In this respect it is a maiden attempt. Apart from its exclusiveness and microstructural focus, the scholars will find many gaps in its comprehensiveness because of its particularistic approach rather than all pervading. This purposive particularisation, however does not prevent anybody to conceptualise the earning patterns of the tribe in question. This is an exposition to illustrate an economic portrayal of a tribal basket maker community, who oscillates between the two poles of economic incentives—the bamboo work and the agriculture.

The bamboo work is traditionally ordained though its structure and content have taken a new form and shape from the previous one, with subsequent shift in income towards more certainty. The sale of basketry of domestic use has been submerged under the sale of big basket or *Jhuri*. The former is only prepared for scattered sale on seldom contract from the villagers and the latter for the packing of betel leaves of the betel-leaf dealers or *Pan Mahajans* but on contract from the basket traders or *Jhuri Mahajans*. Thus the villagers' preferences as consumers of the basketry have been replaced by the betel-leaf dealers' preferences and fluctuation in price of basket is dictated by the preferences of the latter. The direct contact between the producers and the consumers has been cut out by the intervention of the basket traders as intermediaries. These also lead to the movement of the Mahalis between the nonmonetary and monetary media of exchange. Demand-supply dichotomy and supplier-purchaser relationships encourage competition among the basket-makers or sellers which cut down the interfamilial cooperation. This leads to structural atomism in Mahali society. But paddy is the mainstay of the Mahalis. Hence in agricultural season they resort to cultivation only to add some paddy to their more certain income from basketry. But their inadequate possession

and landlessness force them to take part in agriculture either as share cropper or agricultural labourers.

Thus there exist village markets and the markets outside the village; the former for scattered sales of domestic baskets and labour in agricultural lands while the latter for sales of big baskets to the basket traders to satisfy the wants of the betel-leaf dealers. The present study has designed to portray, how the Mahalis have been adjusting themselves in two markets for earning their livelihood being the member of a non-complex and technologically less advanced society.

The author is grateful to University Grants Commission for the award of Research Fellowship during the period of 1st August, 1964 to 31st July, 1967, to carry out extensive research among the Mahalis on the project, "Society and Economy of the Mahalis of Midnapur." The present study is a part of this research. He is most indebted to those teachers of the Calcutta University, who read and criticised the parts of the work. The Head of the Department of Anthropology, Calcutta University provided the author all the facilities to use the departmental library of the University and extended fruitful suggestions when required. The author thinks himself fortunate to avail the chance of presenting the book to him as a token of respect and in an effort to recognise the academic indebtedness to his veteran affectionate teacher of anthropology. The author is thankful to Deputy-Director, Cultural Research Institute Government of West Bengal, whose advice was a constant source of inspiration. Besides, he offers his thankfulness to all the scholars, members and officials of all the Research Institutes and Universities of India who wittingly or unwittingly contributed for the outcome of this volume. Author's wife kindly has gone through the manuscript. He owes debt of such nature to her that meagre acknowledgement seems a vain gesture. Lastly for their faithful and reliable assistances, the author thanks the Mahalis of Midnapur.

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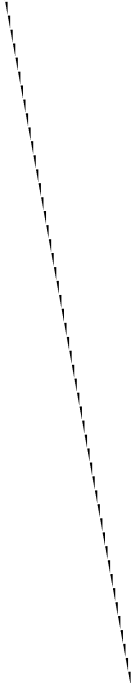
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# CONTENTS

	PAGE
INTRODUCTION	
I—Cultural matrix ..	1—7
II—Theoretical premises of economy ..	7—14
III—Village settlement and demography ..	14—23
CHAPTER I: Mahali economics: Overview ..	24—32
CHAPTER II: Economic resources and activities ..	33—53
CHAPTER III: Occupational pattern: Traditional ..	54—72
CHAPTER IV: Occupational pattern: Supplementary ..	73—91
CHAPTER V: Economic balance: Macroview ..	92—112
CHAPTER VI: Economic portrait: Summary ..	113—122
INDEX ..	123—130
ERRATA ..	131

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## INTRODUCTION

The portrait of the Mahali economy is an exposition of the earning patterns of tribal basket-makers of Midnapur district in the State of West Bengal. The study is designed for its threefold importance. It adds string to the human knowledge on a special subject now known as economic anthropology. It provides materials for the use of other branches of social sciences. It subscribes some materials for practical use.

This exposition is a part of a full-length research project on "Society and Economy of the Mahalis of Midnapur" carried out by the author during the period of 1964-67 with the financial assistance of University Grants Commission. The present part of the research is recaste and reformulated for the purpose of maintaining a sequence for an independent publication. Hence for the convenience of the reader the introduction is distributed in three different sections. The section one is intended to provide information on the habitat, origin and matrix of Mahali culture in brief. The section two is posed for the discussion on certain theoretical premises of the Mahali economy. In the section three, setting of the Mahali villages, sampling of the same and some aspects of demography are considered.

### I

The Mahalis are traditional bamboo-workers and are considered at present as one of the little-known scheduled tribes of West Bengal. They are scattered unevenly in the district of Jalpaiguri (13098), Midnapur (5538), West Dinajpur (2103), 24 Parganas (1515), Malda (1327) and Burdwan (1100).<sup>1</sup> In other districts they live in small numbers. The bulk of the population is concentrated in Jalpaiguri and Midnapur which constitutes about fifty percent of the population of the State. Their total population in West Bengal is 28233.<sup>2</sup> They are also found in the States of Bihar and Orissa.

The earlier writers consider the Mahalis as one of the tribal derivatives of mixed origin. Risley mentions that the Mahalis are a Dravidian people of labour class who are mainly palanquin-bearers and work on bamboo. They are found in Chhoto-Nagpur and Western parts of Bengal.<sup>3</sup> Risley's contention is

that the main body of the Mahalis is merely a branch of the Santals, separated comparatively at a recent date from the parent stock. It is possibly based on the fact that both these communities have got a few common totemistic clan names which they use as surnames at present. Risley divides the Mahalis into five sub-groups: Bansphar-Mahali who make basket and do all kinds of bamboo-work, Pator-Mahali are the basket-makers and cultivators, Sulunkhi-Mahali who are cultivators and labourers, Tanti-Mahali who carry palanquins and Mahali Munda whose occupation he does not mention. However, he assumes that the Mahalis are separated from the parent tribe with the adoption of bamboo-work as a new occupation which the Santals consider as degrading. Hutton<sup>4</sup> thinks that the Mahalis are a tribe of labourers, pastures and basket-makers in central India having affinities with the Santals, Ho and Munda tribes. Grierson<sup>5</sup> subscribes that the Mahalis are a divergent group of Santali linguistic stock. Russel<sup>6</sup> concludes that the Santals and the Mundas were originally one tribe. It seems that the Mahalis are the derivatives of both of them. They are separated as settlers of villages and work as labourers, palanquin-bearers and bamboo-workers or hired labourers for Hindus. Hence their status might have fallen than the parent tribe who remained in their own villages in the jungle. Dalton<sup>7</sup> subscribes that many 'Bedyas' sometimes call themselves as Mahali. They also observe many Hindu customs. In this context Russel<sup>8</sup> remarks that some of the Mahalis may have joined the 'Bedyas' community. Sherring<sup>9</sup> points out that in Berar (now in Vidyarva region of Maharashtra) the barber castes like Nan, Hajam and Nai introduce themselves as Mahalis. These earlier references explain that the Mahalis are a occupationally segregated community of mixed tribal origin.

Bamboo-work has been the most important means of their livelihood since a long time and to-day it is difficult to ascertain when and how they adopt bamboo-work. They at present mainly prepare bamboo baskets which are largely used by the betel-leaf dealers to pack leaves for its disposal. The Mahalis usually sell their baskets to the basket-trader in bundles. The basket traders supply these baskets to the betel-leaf dealers. Thus they act as 'intermediary' between the Mahalis and the betel-leaf dealers. Besides, the Mahalis work as agricultural labourers or tenants in the field of local landholding Hindu-castes. A few

have also very little cultivable land and also cultivate the fields of others on share cropping basis or on contract system as well. Women regularly participate in bamboo-work and other outdoor economic roles. Herding and serving as domestic servant are the jobs of a few Mahali children, by which they help their parents in economic activity. Almost all families possess a small poultry of birds of native varieties. In times of emergency these are sold in the market for cash. They are also hunters and prepare their bows and arrows of bamboos. They also prepare traps of bamboo splinters and large variety of fishing traps are also made by them both for personal use and for sale among neighbouring tribes and castes. In economic sphere, the Mahalis have to depend to some extent on blacksmithy, pottery and weaving. They get their implements of basketry and agriculture supplied and sharpened by the blacksmiths, their household utensils are secured from the local potters and clothes from the weavers. Thus functional diffuseness<sup>10</sup> is replaced by the functional specificity. In agricultural pursuits they usually work in the lands of the neighbouring landowner Hindu castes like the Brahman, Mahisya, Sadgop, Raju and the Tamboli and others. They take loans in needs from these landholding castes and local money lenders. They also take loans from the basket-traders.

The Mahalis do not consider themselves socially inferior to other castes of the Hindu community though they have no actual position in the social hierarchy. Many informants dissembled their clan names and quoted surnames akin to local Hindu castes. For example clan *hansda* (wild goose) is represented as Hanti, clan *mandi* (grass) as Mondal, *besra* (hawk) as Bera. All these surnames are the surnames of the local dominant cultivator caste named Mahisya. The Mahali clan is a patrilineal unit. After marriage girls are initiated into respective clans of their husbands. Each clan has a totem and certain strict taboos are observed with regard to them. Marriage within the same clan is prohibited. There are altogether thirteen clan names among the sample of study. These are Baske or Kanti (a kind of herbal vegetable) Besra (hawk), Hansda (wild goose), Hembrom (areca nut), Kisku (king fisher), Mandi (a kind of blue bird), Murmu (a kind of animal), Soren (the constellation pliedates), Tudu (ground rat), Chhre (lizard), Samah (grass), Pirhi (round pumkin) and Khangar (jack-daw).

The first ten clans share common names with the Santals.

There are practically no status differences amongst the members of the clans. The Mahali clan names are derived from the names of some local plants or animals or inanimate objects. A few clans have several subdivisions which are marked by differences of affiliated totemic objects. In legal spheres certain clans are preferred than others for instance the village headman is mostly selected from the Mandi clan. The assistant headman is selected from the Besra clan. The deputy headman is generally selected from the Baske clan. But these preferences are not common to all the families of a particular clan group, but to a particular family based on heredity.

The average family size is approximately 5.4 persons per family. Hence it can be concluded that families are mostly medium-sized. Generally there are four types of families. Frequency of elementary or simple family is highest among the Mahalis nearly 64.60%. Intermediate family is found in appreciable number (20.05%) and joint or extended family is small in number (9.90%). The polygynous family is exceedingly small in percentage (5.45%). The process of nuclearisation starts when sons leave their father or brothers separate after the death of the father. This is the main cause of the predominance of simple family in such higher percentage. Primary causes of fission in joint family are personal conflict and uncompromisable allocation of differential labour potential of each married couple. The Mahali families are patrilineal and virilocal in nature. Married women leave parental house and go to the house of their father-in-law to join their new families. The pregnant women in Mahali society observe certain taboos and restrictions. She always carry some iron implements mostly the beaked cutter to avert evil spirit. Some old lady performs the service of midwife and cuts the umbilical cord with bamboo knife. Purificatory bath is taken after nine days of child birth. In name giving ceremony after twentyone days of birth father gives the name to the child. Usually the names of grand-parents are given to the child.

Marriage is usually monogamous type though frequent cases of polygyny occur. Adult marriage is the general rule. A few cases of child marriage are found now-a-days. The age of marriage varies normally from 16 to 20 years of age in case of girls and 20 to 25 in case of boys. The Mahalis prohibit marriage among certain categories of relatives. Marriage with-

in the same clan groups and immediate kin-groups are strictly prohibited. Marriage with blood-kins and woman related in the direct line of descent are strictly avoided. A man marry his wife's relations of same or descending generation. Tribal endogamy is strictly maintained. Union between cross-cousins takes place incidentally. Payment of bride-price in cash and presentation of women clothes are important aspects of Mahali marriage. Bride-price varies from Rs. 24.00 to Rs. 64.00 according to bride's beauty, ability of running household work and economic condition of the bridegroom's father. There are atleast seven types of approach by which the Mahalis secure their wives. These are (a) *Salish bapla* i.e. regular marriage by negotiation through marriage-broker or *Dutamdar*, (b) *Indigosh* or *Duar lebet* i.e. keeping of a girl in husband's house before the actual consummation of marriage having preliminary talk with the parents of the girl; (c) *Gharmechrano* i.e. marriage by intrusion, (d) *Angir* i.e. marriage by elopement or *Aur-apur* or *tana* i.e. marriage by force; (e) *Sanga* i.e. widow remarriage; (f) *Rajikhusi* or *Raja-raji* or *Nirboloona* i.e. marriage by courtship or mutual consent; and (g) *Ghar-jowie* or resident son-in-law. Sororate and levirate are not obligatory now but they are found to occur quite frequently. Divorce is quite easy in Mahali society. Any of the partners may bring complaint and after hearing in the *Bichar Sava* or organisation of justice of their own, divorce is permitted on sufficient grounds. Three causes of divorce are mainly predominant namely adultery, barrenness or sterility and incompatibility.

The dead bodies are both buried and burnt. Children below five years of age, death due to epidemic diseases and dead body of leper, are usually buried. The Mahalis have their separate burial or cremation ground known as *Sasan*. During cremation or burial all the belonging of the deceased are cremated or buried. The utensils of brass or any other objects of high price are auctioned in the cremation ground. Excepting the relatives and clan members of the deceased, anybody can purchase these things. Purificatory ritual is observed after ten days when the agnates of the deceased shave and take purificatory bath.

The Mahalis, like other tribes of the area, have got their own democratic organisation. They have their own organisation of justice or *Bichar sava*, which keeps control over the administration of the village as a whole. The *Bichar sava* is cons-

stituted of all grown-up male persons as its members. The cases are dealt with by this *Bichar sava* according to traditional tribal norms. All the members are required to present in the meetings of the *Bichar sava* which is presided over by the village headman or *Manjhi Haram*. The office-bearers of the Mahali Bichar sava are Manjhi Haram, Goraitis or assistant headman, and Paranik or deputy headman. All the posts are hereditary. Though the posts are hereditary but the succession of office depends on the efficiency of the inheritor. This succession is based on the prescribed qualifications attaining which any of the descendants may inherit it.

The Mahalis believe in the mysterious powers possessed by certain objects, persons, spirits and deities. There are spirit doctors, witch-finders called *Ojhas* or *Gunnis* who are able to exercise these spirits and ghosts. Spirits or Bongas may be differentiated or classified according to their attributes. Some of them are benevolent in nature such as Basumata (Mother earth), Dharam (God of righteousness), Garam (the tutelary deity of the village), Sitla (Goddess of epidemic diseases), Chandi (a female forest deity), Mansa (Goddess of snakes), Haramko (Ancestor spirit). The Goddess Sitla and Chandi are held with awe and respect because of their hot temper. They easily become angry for minor negligence to their propitiation and become beneficent when appeased with the proper prayer, offerings and sacrifices. The malevolent spirits are Yugini or Sima Bonga who reside at the outskirts of the village and other ghosts of lower order like *Chirghuni*, *Baghot*, *Gomua* etc. There are experts who practise both sacred and profane occult arts. They are known variously in Mahali society. The sacred specialists mainly exert their influence for the betterment of the Mahalis. Naeke i.e., village priest performs all religious performances; Pargana i.e. ceremonial disposer of the deadman's bones in the river; Paranik assists the village priest; Rum i.e. shaman who ascertains the ensuing misfortune; Gunni or Ojha performs several functions as diviner, medicineman, sooth-sayer, spirit-harbourist, witch-finder etc. The profane-specialists are the evil doers. The sorcerer or the black-magician practises black-magic which is known as *Ban* or *Singer*. It causes illness or harm. The Dain or witch practises occult art. They are anti-social in habit and take delight in malevolent practices. They can be both male and female persons.

There are number of festivals prevalent in Mahali society. Some of them are connected with the worship of their deities and spirits who are supposed to protect them from natural calamities and others are associated with their economic life. Magh sim is a communal festival performed in the month of Magh (January-February). This is the festival of certain new fruit offerings. They believe that the observance of this festival protect them from epidemic diseases like small-pox, cholera etc. Fowl sacrifice is made to the diety named Dharam, Garam, Marangburu (Hill God), Haramko and Yugini (Goddess of epidemic diseases) as a token of respect. Baha festival is observed on the full-moon day in the month of Phalgun (February-March). Offerings of flowers like Sal (*Shorea robusta*), Polash (*Butea frondosa*), and Mahua (*Madhuka latifolia*) are made to the deities. Likewise Asaria is performed in the month of Ashar (June-July) before the paddy-seeds are sown. Dasai festival is observed in the month of Aswin (September-October) on the 8th day of the brighter half of the moon to avoid attack of evil eyes and evil spirits. This is held in honour of Goddess Durga. Nal sakrat is held in the month of Aswin (September-October) to feed '*Sad*' (the desired food) to Goddess Lakshmi (Goddess of wealth). Akhan festival is observed on the first day of the month of Magh (January-February) to express gratitude to God Dharam for good harvest. Sakrat is held in the month of Paus (December-January) and involves individual worship of Goddess Lakshmi. The Mahalis like their caste neighbours also perform Tusu festival. Karam festival is performed on a new-moon day in the month of Bhadra (August-September). Besides, the Mahalis also worship, Lord Hari, Lord Satyanarayan (the truth incarnate) Viswakarma (the deity of mechanics and technology and Goddess Kali (Goddess of strength). All of them belonged to the Hindu religious pantheon.

## II

Portrait of the Mahali economy is an exposition of earning patterns of the Mahalis. The study is designed to discover social regularities in an alien setting and to attribute meaning to these regularities. The Mahali economy portrays a small scale non-monetary or partially monetised economy. The entire ranges of economy are based on the collecting of household

census, recording the patterns of basketry and its technology and ways of disposal, plotting of landholding, recording of share-cropping and labourerships, taking data on income and expenditure patterns from representative samples, observing the context of exchange and valuations and calculating the output of the productive unit. These have been considered as the standard field procedures to form a specific idea of the earning patterns of the tribe concerned. There is no pretention to quantify the available economic data for methodological innovation like the construction of subsistence exchange ratio for the extended household of Northern Nigeria<sup>1</sup> or the development of annual output indices for the artisan communities<sup>2</sup> and ratio of labour export in Rhodesian tribal society<sup>3</sup>.

Mahali economy is the pivot of peculiar and pervasive organisation and remarkably differs from the monetised, market directed or industrial society. The portrait of the Mahali economy is designed to interpret and explain these differences in some measures. The conventional interpretations of primitive economies "as polar opposite to market economies" were made on the basis of some field investigations<sup>4</sup>. The modern field work has revealed that there are many variables which govern the economy of non-industrial society and it is a complex phenomenon. The question about the economic incentives, maximisation and thinking of advantage often arise many confusions. The study reveals the patterns of rationality, of choice, of action in the arrangements of socio-cultural variables rather than the queries to the presence of rationality in Mahali economy. The economic choice and activity are subserviant to socio-cultural structures.

Economy is the whole problem of living, the economical use of every resources available<sup>5</sup>. The economy as the functional sub-system of the society emphasises the study of the nature of economic functions and the ways in which they are related to other functions. The concrete structure of the Mahali society has certain aspects which collectively constitute a system of their own. The variety of structural patterns of the Mahali social institutions whose primary functions are economic have been considered to elaborate their earning patterns. The study also embraces the detailed description of the Mahali economy in Midnapur and attempt has been made to assess its level of



performance. Economic action is provision of goods and services for the satisfaction of wants. Provision includes exchange and transportation of goods since they anticipate to such goods where they actually wanted<sup>6</sup>. The terms provision and "production of utilities" are synonymous. Both of them emphasise the production of goods and services which are the means of satisfaction of wants. Direct want satisfying action is therefore non-economic. The direct satisfaction of wants within economic system is production, for instance, the suppliers of baskets (Mahalis) are supplying baskets to the basket traders and by which they are satisfying the 'want' that arises out of the demand of baskets by the betel-leaf dealers for the packing of betel-leaves. The basket traders place orders to the basket supplier to meet the demand of the betel-leaf dealers. This want is intermediate one, it is the packet of the betel leaves that can satisfy wants outside the economic system of the Mahalis itself.

Production of consumer goods to satisfy human wants is the rationale of economic activity<sup>7</sup>. Economising is a process of doing things by allocation of scarcity and choice from the alternatives<sup>8</sup>. Thus the term economy emphasises conscious decision, choice, determination and desirable or essential role of alternatives between choice and efficiency. Scarcity involves economising. Economic factor of course may enter even in the case of the utilisation of free goods which entail economising. The application of the concept depends on the ends for which it is sought. For maximisation of satisfaction choices are made and free goods becomes an economic one. The provision of basic needs (food, clothing and shelter) and implements involve choice which are governed not only by the available items but by the cultural patterns of the individual and his technological skills. Goods and services to satisfy want is not only the determinant of choice between alternatives. The satisfaction also depends on the available goods and types of wants. Hence economising is dependent on the cultural matrix. Cultural needs and available resources circumscribe the wants of peoples. Social conventions, religious beliefs and faiths, aesthetic conceptions, ethical prescriptions all govern the diameter of the wants of people together with time, place and circumstances in which they can be satisfied<sup>9</sup>. The Mahalis consume lavishly in the month of Magh (January-February) and Phalgun (February.

March) on festive occasion when there are plenty of paddy after harvest. But they suffer acute shortage in the month of Sravana (July-August), Bhadra (August-September), Aswin (September-October) and Kartick (October-November) which could be dragged with little effort if the food is conserved in the month of Magh (January-February) and Phalgun (February-March). It is a question of choice governed by the drive to maximise satisfaction in terms of traditional values and culture. The earlier economic theory i.e. the individual is the point from which all theoretical principles begin have changed to the process of economising, essentially based on the broader organisation of the society. Individual of course is referred in specific situation. Man's economy is submerged in his social relationship<sup>10</sup>. Thus Paulme's<sup>11</sup> statement that the individual acts not for the safeguard of his self interest in the possession of material goods but for the safe-guard of his social standing, social claims and his social assets. The value lies in the material goods only when they serve this end. Paulme's conclusion subscribes that the individuals and social factors in the economic process are more realistic. Motivation of each individual lies consciously but indirectly in the desire of the well-being, wealth, prestige of the community as a whole. Strong ethnocentrism and patriotism or feeling of oneness are characterised by the Mahali society. Hence whatever the nature and extent of choice and whatever the determinants of it, choice is ultimately the individual's concern. The choices of the individuals are limited and dictated by the scarcity and resources and values of his culture. Thus the individual is considered as the economic unit who operates as a member of his society in accordance with the culture of the group. The consumption of goods to satisfy wants depends on the natural resources and the man-power of the Mahalis. The technologies of the Mahalis though simple are expressed in the form of goods which are to be thought of, as the technology permits man to take advantage of "ultimate" resources. Hence natural resources, man-power, technical knowledge, capital equipment must be present in the productive processes of any fluctuating economy<sup>12</sup>. In Mahali economy, the natural resources and man-power are the prime factors. Capitalisation is scarce. The equipment of technology is simple and intermediate steps between the raw materials and the production of consumable goods are few. Besides, the inventory goods and services and

the range of wants to be satisfied, as expressed in the standard of living of the people are relatively restricted. The margin between the available resources and physical survival is slender. The scarcity of available goods in this society holds the factors of choice to the narrowest ranges. The wants are biological in considerable degree and in the form of survival itself. The production of goods and distribution involved little of the profit motive and only in special cases labour is hired. There is little room for entrepreneurial function. The Mahalis are living closest to the marginal or subsistence level with poor technical knowledge and few implements of simple type. Thus their choices are circumscribed by the capacity of exploitation of natural resources.

The family is the unit of production and consumption in Mahali society. In the economic system pecuniary factor partially enters. Elementary types of goods and services occur mostly on the basis of an immediate *ad hoc* kind of give and take. Hence the problem arises in assessing the nature and forms of exchanges and the kinds of choices that are made, which also take on a new and particular shape. Inside the village, where the Mahalis reside, there is a face-to-face relationship between a producer of basketry and a consumer of it. He may belong to any community. Here the market exists in rudimentary form by definition only. Outside the village in the more complex system of economy based on special basketry market (the big basket locally known as '*jhuri*' which the basket-traders purchase to supply it to the betel-leaf dealers for their disposal of betel leaves) is run on exchanges involving the use of pecuniary media that is money. The market here possesses an objective and formal existence which facilitates exchange of goods (baskets) between the Mahalis and other community rather than between a Mahali and a Mahali. The degree of specialisation in production involves the importance of market to effectuate the exchange of goods.

Economic activity of the Mahalis always involves allocation of resources which implies choices, for instance choice between different applications of available resources, choice between different applications of effort, choice between present and future needs. Specific wants are always cultural to some extent and thus varies from society to society. Because of scarcity of the resources some of the wants of individuals or groups of a

particular society are satisfied less fully than actually desired. Economic action differs from economising which in the simple sense is allocation of scarce resources among two or more ends. All economic action involves at least implicit economising. The economy refers to a system in which goods and services are produced and provided.

In two senses the economic action is rational. Firstly the production of utilities requires some technical rationality and secondly production of utilities requires economising and the producers must think of costs. However in both the senses rationality is a matter of degree. The problem of efficiency and the problem of assessing are difficult in both the senses. The Mahali economic system is traditionalistic. In this economic system, the modes of production is always dictated by the customs and conventions. Hence in Mahali economy, the concern for technical efficiency for the improvement of the want satisfying aspects of utilities are slight. Even in the traditionalistic economy of the Mahalis there lies little scope for rationalising the production in the sense of production of utilities with minimum cost. So the remarks that the economic action is directed towards maximisation of production or satisfaction of wants or production of utilities cannot be made<sup>13</sup>.

The concrete fusion of economic system with the other sub-system of the society has been called the "embeddedness" of economy<sup>14</sup>. The embeddedness of economy in Mahali society is of course, disturbed when the use of money becomes more important owing to increasing demand of their baskets for packing betel-leaves in Midnapur. One of the most common effect of this is the weakening of kin-groups and kin-relations beyond the immediate family and decreasing of the size and types of the family. Structural atomism of the society is the outcrop of it. The individual is to some extent cast adrift from the close interpersonal relations. The Mahalis become more and more conscious of what money can buy; their standard of living, their wants are gradually changing. These developments, of course, weaken the old kinship ties. The basket-traders induce the Mahalis to change their patterns of basketry and consequently Mahalis are gradually becoming dependent on the basket-traders rather than consumer villagers and vulnerable to fluctuation of price and demand in a wider market. Thus the demand of Mahali baskets in Midnapur tends to substitute universalism

for particularism, ascription for achievement and diffuseness for specificity<sup>15</sup>.

The process of production requires four factors, namely land, capital, labour and entrepreneurship. Land as a factor of production includes three kinds of resource. Firstly the physical resources of production includes land in the narrow sense, such as land used for agriculture and other resources given in nature i.e. bamboo for basketry and also which modified by human effort. Secondly, there are skills based partly on knowledge and partly on ability say for instance skills in technology, knowledge of market condition and business experience. Lastly there are certain attitudes and motives necessary to production as an ordered and continuous social process which include eagerness of work and willingness to reserve some physical resources for production rather than consumption. These components of land underlie the whole processes of production in the Mahali society. In spite of their fluctuations in specific opportunities for production and remuneration for each economic act, these components of land are relatively stable and constant. These components of land depend on the cultural matrix of a community. Technology and the rest that is the cognitive components are mainly cultural. But the attitudinal or motivational components are dependent to certain cultural values, for instance, the values of work, values of economic rationality and values of saving and investment.

The capital differs from the land in that it is fluid and changeable in quantity and only is available for some specific return. The Mahali institutional patterning of production involves the transformation of capital into utilities which return directly or indirectly through sale of baskets, sale of labour etc. Capital is the means of all production. The third factor of production is labour and similar to capital it is relatively fluid and investment is made for a particular productive role for acceptable remuneration. The fourth factor of production is the function of combining other factors of production in new ways for the adjustment to changing situations, for the introduction of new technology and products, for new organisation or for opening of new markets. This is the entrepreneurial function. The entrepreneur is an innovator. The Mahali economy is more or less stable and in stable economy emergence of entrepreneur is difficult.

In Mahali society labour is contributed by family members. Though the head of the family are expected to provide food and shelter for his 'parivar' (by which a Mahali means his wife and sons) yet the entire family, i.e. the wife and other male and female members excepting the immature children of the family in some way or other contributes to the production of basketry. Thus the productions of basketry and in some occasion, other productions are the outcome of the investment of labour power of the family members. These aspects of family contribution, these skills and values are part of land. Land is relatively stable than other three factors of production. This governs the entire economy of the Mahalis and even regulates the movement of other factors of production. For instance the quantity of labour varies according to its availability and specific fields of activity to which it is applied but it always presupposes land because of a recognition of the value of working in general. The labour, capital and entrepreneurship are more flexible even in short-run market conditions. Though in long-run land itself i.e. values and knowledge of production changes yet in short-run however, land is not changeable contribution. Capital is provided in Mahali society by the well-to-do caste Hindus, money-lender, surplus agriculturists, basket-traders, shop-owners, near friends, kins and in the form of labour, family members provide capitals encouraging productions. The capital from all the sources may come in cash or in kind. In case of reciprocity, a Mahali gives his labour or services to another with purely tacit understanding on both the sides that the other will at some time give something of equal or greater value in return. This exchange lacks formality of contract.

### III

The present study is confined to 25 sample villages scattered all over the Mahali concentrated areas of different police stations of Midnapur. These villages are selected at random which comprised of 404 Mahali families. These families embrace 2,193 persons which include 1,084 males and 1,109 females. The sample thus constitutes 39.05 per cent of the total Mahali population of the district which is 5,538 according to 1961 census. The Mahalis live mostly in multi-ethnic villages. In such villages though Mahalis live together with other castes and







communities yet they live divisively apart in separate hamlet. There is no definite plan of their settlement. The village roads and lanes are poorly developed with ill-sanitary arrangements. In some villages mere foot-tracks along the paddy fields are the only communicable links. The main source of drinking water is pond or well or natural sources like stream and rivulet. One or two tube-wells in some villages are found which are sunk by the local Block Development Department of West Bengal. Each village has some public or communal places like the Jaherthan (sacred grove), or the deities Dharam, Garam, Jaher-era etc.

The random samples include twenty-five villages from seven police stations. The detailed lists of the villages of each police station are appended below. The number of total families live in each village is given in parenthesis. There are four villages in Dantan police station, namely Kanjipara (18) with 107 persons including 56 males, 51 females, Panchrol (22) with 154 persons comprising of 80 males and 74 females, Jayrampur (17) with 102 including 54 males and 48 females and Ganjipur (15) with 75 persons including 38 males and 37 females. There are seven villages in Narayangarh police station. These are Kotai (31) with 165 persons comprising of 77 men and 88 women, Bhadrakali (13) with 56 persons including 31 men and 25 women, Bankatala (6) with 27 persons comprising of 16 men and 11 women, Chotomatkatpur (12) with 60 persons including 31 men and 29 women, Amidangar (12) with 50 persons including 24 men and 26 women, Nilambarpur (4) with 20 persons including 10 men and 10 women and Ektal (13) with 56 persons including 31 men and 25 women. Three villages have been selected from the Kesiari police station, namely Tilabani (14) with 79 individuals including 38 men and 41 women, Pirot (15) with 82 individuals including 42 men and 40 women and Aguibani (12) with 76 individuals including 39 men and 37 women. Likewise three villages also have been selected from Kharagpur police station, namely Phatikchua (14) with 84 individuals including 40 men and 44 women, Kuldiha (17) with 110 including 53 men and 57 women and Jhilinga (20) with 89 individuals comprising of 41 men and 48 women. There are four villages in Sankrail police station for instance Baghuansol (22) with 141 persons including 62 men and 79 women, Gurigot (15) with 81 persons including 38 men and 43 women, Bhallukkulla (13) with 60 persons including 31 men and 29 women and Bhankisol (11) with 56 persons

including 25 men and 31 women. Three villages have been surveyed from Nayagram police station for example Chouka-pathra (26) with 125 persons including 65 men and 60 women, Dhumsai (28) with 140 persons comprising of 65 men and 75 women and Guriansol (18) with 109 persons including 56 men and 53 women. Only one village has been surveyed from Jambani police station namely Kenduasuli (16) with 89 persons including 41 men and 48 women.

The analysis of age group gives us a clear picture of the proportion of the people, who are of productive age and those who have to be sustained by the society. The age and sex compositions of the population are shown in Table 1. For the purpose of clarity and convenience of analysis various age groups have been divided into three broad categories :

- (i) persons below 15 years of age being termed as infants and children
- (ii) those between the ages of 15-60 years shown as adults, and
- (iii) persons of 61 years of age and above are marked as olds.

These main categories have further been divided into small age groups.

It is seen from the table 1 that infants and children below 15 years account for 29.45 per cent of the total population. This shows that the rate of growth of the population is not very high. The adults of the age group 15-60 account for 56.26 per cent of the total population. The old persons account for 14.29 per cent of the total population, which is a positive indicator of the longevity of life of the Mahalis.

A comparative analysis of males and females in different age groups shows that there are more females than males in children and old age groups, whereas the males outnumber females in the adult age group. It is seen from the Table 1 that out of the total population, 49.43% are males and 50.57% females. Thus females predominate over males by 1.14%.

In the age group 0-14, females predominate over males. Similarly in the age group of 61-up, the females predominate over males. But at adult ages, in the age group from 15-60, the males predominate over females. The main reason for the preponderance of the males in the adult age group is that the males marry in later age than the females.

TABLE—1

Distribution of population by age and sex

Age group	Male	%	Female	%	Total	% of total	Sex ratio of males per 100 females
Infants and children :							
0-4	90	4.10	102	4.65	192	8.75	88.23
5-9	117	5.34	118	5.38	235	10.72	99.15
10-14	109	4.97	110	5.01	219	9.98	99.09
Sub-total	316	14.41	330	15.04	646	29.45	95.45
Adults :							
15-20	99	4.51	92	4.19	191	8.70	107.60
21-25	89	4.05	89	4.05	178	8.10	100.00
26-30	96	4.37	96	4.37	192	8.75	100.00
31-35	101	4.60	100	4.56	201	9.16	101.00
36-40	92	4.19	88	4.01	180	8.20	104.54
41-45	59	2.69	56	2.56	115	5.25	105.36
46-50	48	2.18	51	2.32	99	4.51	94.12
51-60	36	1.68	42	1.91	78	3.59	85.71
Sub-total	620	28.27	614	27.99	1234	56.26	100.97
Old :							
61-up	148	6.75	165	7.54	313	14.29	89.69
Sub-total	148	6.75	165	7.54	313	14.29	89.69
Grand total	1084	49.43	1109	50.57	2193	100.00	97.65

The other interesting feature noticeable is that the predominance of the females over the males in the "infants and children" category goes on increasing when sex ratio in the age group 10-14 increases to 99.09 from 88.23 in the age group 0-4. This indicates that the male child mortality in the village is high. In other age group of 61 and above too, the females predominate over males by a considerable extent and there are 89.69 males for 100 females. This clearly indicates that females live longer than males.

The classification of marital status adopted for the purpose of present analysis is fourfold and includes unmarried, married, widowed and divorced.

The distribution of population of the village by age, sex and marital status has been provided in Table 2. The table shows that out of a total population of 2,193, approximately

Age-group	Male					Female					Total population				
	Unmar- ried	Married	Widow	Divorced	Total	Unmar- ried	Mar- ried	Widow	Divor- ced	Total	Unmar- ried	Mar- ried	Widow	Divor- ced	Total
<b>Infants and children :</b>															
0-4	90	—	—	—	90	102	—	—	—	102	192	—	—	—	192
5-9	117	—	—	—	117	118	—	—	—	118	235	—	—	—	235
10-14	105	4	—	—	109	101	9	—	—	110	206	13	—	—	219
Sub-total	312	4	—	—	316	321	9	—	—	330	633	13	—	—	646
Percentage	98.73	1.27	—	—	100	97.27	2.73	—	—	100	97.83	2.17	—	—	100
<b>Adults :</b>															
15-20	51	48	—	—	99	35	57	—	—	92	86	105	—	—	191
21-25	21	63	2	3	89	—	77	7	5	89	21	140	9	8	178
26-30	1	82	4	9	96	1	82	2	11	96	2	164	6	20	192
31-35	1	79	2	19	101	—	79	2	19	100	1	158	4	38	201
36-40	—	73	6	13	92	—	65	6	17	88	—	138	12	30	180
41-45	—	39	13	7	59	—	39	8	9	56	—	78	21	16	115
46-50	—	32	10	6	48	—	36	8	7	51	—	68	18	13	99
51-60	—	19	12	5	36	—	21	13	8	42	—	40	25	13	78
Sub-total	74	435	49	62	620	36	456	46	76	614	110	891	95	138	1234
Percentage	11.94	70.16	7.90	10.00	100	5.86	74.27	7.49	12.38	100	8.92	72.20	7.48	11.19	100
<b>Old :</b>															
61-up	—	108	24	16	148	—	104	31	30	165	—	212	55	46	313
Percentage	—	72.97	16.21	10.82	100	—	63.08	18.79	18.18	100	—	67.73	17.57	14.70	100
Grand Total	386	547	73	78	1084	357	569	77	106	1109	743	1116	150	184	2193
Percentage	35.61	50.46	6.74	7.19	100	32.20	51.30	6.94	9.56	100	33.88	50.89	6.84	8.39	100

33.88 per cent are unmarried, 50.89 per cent married, 6.84 widows or widowers and 8.39 per cent divorced. The proportions however vary among the two sexes. Whereas 50.46 per cent of the males are married, the corresponding percentage of the female is 51.30. Out of 150 widowed, 73 or 6.74 per cent are widowers whereas 77 or 6.94 per cent are widows. This indicates the general trend that there are proportionately more married women than men, but there are more widows than widowers.

Widow remarriage is in vogue among the Mahalis and polygyny is also practised by them. The table shows a total of 547 males and 569 females as married couples, i.e., an excess of 22 females, which is due to some people taking plural wives. Twentytwo men of different age groups are seen to marry two wives, 9 of them are married as virgin and the rest 13 are either as widowed or divorced.

An analysis of the marital status by age groups reveals that there is not a single married person in the age group 0-9, but in age group 10-14 only 4 men and 9 women are married which signifies that child-marriage is not common, but has occurred in certain cases. In the category of adults 72.20 per cent are married, 8.92 per cent are unmarried, and 7.69 per cent are either widow or widower and 11.19 per cent are divorced. The proportion of married females is higher being 74.27 per cent in comparison to males, which is 70.16 per cent. Out of a total of 357 unmarried females, 321 belong to age group 0-14, 35 to age group 15-20 only 1 to the age group 26-30. As regards the age distribution of 386 unmarried males, 312 belong to the age group of 0-14, 51 to the age group 15-20, 21 to the age group 21-25 and 1 each to the age groups of 26-30 and 31-35.

It was told that the reason for the males remaining bachelors so long was due to their inability to collect bride price, without which marriage could not be negotiated or solemnised. Two Mahalis remained unmarried in the age group of 26-35 because they suffer from physical deformities.

The above analysis reveals the significant demographic feature that due to contact with caste people, a tendency to marry in lower ages both among boys and girls is slowly growing.

The Mahali individuals who are just able to read and write a little or can sign their names are considered as literates. The total number of the literate persons in various age groups in the

different Mahali villages under survey have been considered for collecting data on literacy. The details of their condition of literacy are given below in Table 3.

TABLE 3  
Literacy on age group basis

Age group	Literate			Illiterate			Total
	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total	
Infants and children :							
0-4	—	—		—	—		—
5-9	36	21	57	81	97	178	235
10-14	31	25	56	78	85	163	219
Sub-total	67	46	113	159	182	341	454
Percentage	14.76	10.13	24.89	35.02	40.09	75.11	100.00
Adults :							
15-20	21	12	33	78	80	158	191
21-25	17	9	26	72	80	152	178
26-30	13	6	19	83	90	173	192
31-35	20	11	31	81	89	170	201
36-40	7	5	12	85	83	168	180
41-45	9	4	13	50	52	102	115
46-50	11	7	18	37	44	81	99
51-60	5	2	7	31	40	71	78
Sub-total	103	56	159	517	558	1075	1234
Percentage	8.36	4.54	12.90	41.89	45.21	87.10	100.00
Old :							
61-up	20	6	26	128	159	287	313
Sub-total	20	6	26	128	159	287	313
Percentage	6.39	1.92	8.31	40.89	50.80	91.69	100.00
Grand total	190	108	298	804	899	1703	2001
Percentage	9.50	5.39	14.89	40.18	44.93	85.11	100.00

Out of a total population of 2193 of all ages 192 infants belonging to age group 0-4, owing to their immaturity they are excluded from the table 3 and thus calculation is estimated on total population of 2001. In 25 villages, only 298 or 14.89% are literate. Both young and old people show very little interest in education. It may be said that with the Governmental effort to eradicate illiteracy by imparting free basic education, Primary Schools have been established in many villages. Night Schools for adult education have also been started in many Mahali villages. But towards this effort, the Mahalis show very little response.

On the basis of sex the comparative analysis of literacy shows that males predominate over females by an appreciable extent. Out of 298 literates there are 190 men and 108 women, representing 9.50% and 5.39% respectively.

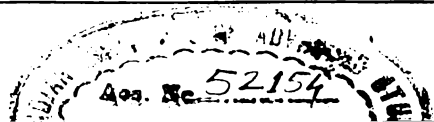
On the basis of age groups the children between ages 5-14 show more percentage of literacy than adults and old persons. Thus it is found that in age group 5-14, nearly 24.89% are literates among them 14.76% are boys and 10.13% girls, which shows that boys predominate over girls by 4.63%. Again in the adult age group of 15-60 a total of 12.90% are literates, of whom men constitute 8.36% and women 4.54%. Thus men predominate by 3.82% over the females in this age group. In the older age group of 61-up, only 8.31% are literates, of whom old men constitute 6.39% and old women 1.92%. Thus old men predominate over old women by 4.47% in this age group.

From this analysis two interesting facts come into light. Firstly, with succeeding generation, percentage of literates have increased from 8.31—12.90—24.89 respectively. Secondly with succeeding generation, the percentage of literacy among the females have increased from 1.92—4.54—10.13 which shows that women are taking education in recent generations in a degree slightly more than what it was in older generation.

Information on how many persons among these literates left studies and how many students are still attending schools have also been collected. The data included in the table below have been categorised into three age groups to show how early the children leave studies. Zeal for education could not be developed amongst them owing to several factors : first for ignorance and cultural vacuum the parents or guardians have not the real inclination for education; and secondly for economic reasons the Mahali grown up persons are to utilise the services of boys and girls who from early boyhood or girlhood days have to work

TABLE 4  
School going literate.

Age group	Students attending school		Students who have left studies			
	Male	Female	Male		Female	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
5-9	17	47.22	9	42.86	19	52.78
10-14	15	48.38	7	28.00	16	51.62
15-20	5	23.86	2	16.66	16	76.14
					10	83.34



with their parents to assist them in their professional and earning occupation.

The details of the school attending students and those who have left their studies are given in Table 4 in accordance with their age.

The table 4 shows that out of 36 boys in age group 5-9, 17 boys or 47.22% are still going to school and 52.78% have left their studies. Out of a total 21 girls of the same age group, 42.86% are still attending school and 57.14% have left their studies. Thus it is seen that the school-attending boys predominate over school-going girls by 4.36%. In the age group 10-14, out of 31 boys, 48.38% are still going to school whereas 51.62% have left their studies. In the same age group 28% girls are attending school and 72% left studies, school-going boys thus predominate over school-going girls by 20.38%, a considerably higher percentage. The main reason is that at this period, the girls have to do a lot of household work as their mothers mostly remain engaged with bomboo-work and as such the girls find little scope to attend schools. In the next age group of 15-20, the percentage of school-going students decreases in both the sexes, with gradual increase in percentage of students who left their studies.

Adults from 21 years of age were seen to have completely left the studies among the Mahalis of these 25 villages, only five persons are seen to work as primary school teacher.

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## MAHALI ECONOMICS : OVERVIEW

## I

The Mahali technology of basketry and cultivation is relatively simple and the tasks involved in any productive act are few. Each family (nuclear, joint or extended) has a single (scarcely) or a number of producers that carries production from the beginning to end. The Mahalis draw their livelihood mainly from bamboo-work with uncertain contract from the basket-traders locally known as '*Jhuri Mahajan*' and from the local villagers i.e. caste Hindus whom the Mahalis call '*Diku*'. In agricultural season the Mahalis also do the job of agricultural labourers, tenants of neighbouring land-holding Hindu caste and a few engage as owner-cultivator of small plots of land in their possession. Intricacy of their bamboo-work require searching of bamboo in the village or outside, bringing it to home on shoulder, sizing, splitting, scraping, weaving and carrying it to basket traders or the local villagers for sale. They go out in search of bamboo in the resident village or adjacent villages which occasionally located at a distance of ten to fifteen miles. After selection of bamboo and settling of its price with the owner, they climb the bamboo-grove, cut several branches from the main bamboo-trunk with the axes to separate it from all obstacles the branches do and pull down the bamboo to the ground. With skill and labour they prepare baskets out of the bamboo. The system is one of balance in a complex demand but task structure is simple and the tools involved require only human energy to operate. The searching and carrying of bamboo to the home and then sizing it to pieces for the convenience of splitting are the men's business. Men and women equally do the splitting, scraping and weaving and even carrying for sale. One man and woman are virtually as good as another in skill of bamboo work.

In agricultural operation the Mahalis plough the field, sow, transplant, weed and harvest the crops. Except in ploughing and sowing men and women equally participate in cultivation. The division of labour follows lines of sex and age. The Mahalis

tend to learn productive skills in the ordinary business of growing up and within age and sex categories there is high substitutability of productive workers. The task and work are allocated to the persons with much regard to functional differences in skill of basketry or cultivation or other productivity which almost always is circumscribed by age and sex. The basketry also limits the size of the working partners who are almost always family members. Except at the peak periods of bamboo-work when the basket traders lay stress on hoarding basket for future use just before the commencement of agricultural season and at the time of ploughing, transplanting, harvesting or at organised hunt at some day or fishing and gathering of wild products, large working parties are not found. The working parties among the Mahalis are usually kins and community friends in the neighbourhood. However, the effort and production of basketry depend on the load of the agricultural works.

There is no separate organisation in Mahali society which exclusively deals with the production. Similarly the Mahalis also lack stable social unit based on the principle of productive activities only. Henceforth the productive unit is dependent on and derived from other forms of social interaction. The family is the productive unit and the bonds of kinship within and between families and kindreds often provide the structure for economic activities. The political structure of the Mahalis with 'hereditary nobilities' never forms any productive unit. There is no territorial bonds to create local organisation of production. Economic unit is based on some kind of social relations. The Mahali productive unit like many other tribal communities of the district is multi-purposed with the limitation in its recruitment of personnel, investment of capital, distribution of production for the absence of labour-market, capital market and system of distribution to factors of production. The Mahalis studied here, are composed of 404 families. Each family prepares mainly big baskets locally known as 'Jhuri' for sale to the basket traders. Besides some other baskets of domestic use are prepared for seldom sale to the local villagers on their sudden needs. Virtually each family follows the same technology<sup>1</sup>. Many people pursue agriculture mostly either by sale of their services as labourers on daily wage or as tenants of the local landholding Hindu castes on terms of equal share of paddy of total outturn. The services of the Mahalis as free unattached agrarian labourers and tenants drive them to seek their employment right from the

onset of agricultural season and at this period the production of bamboo-work falls. The local landholding castes (mostly the Sadgop, Mahisya, Raju, and Brahman) are always in search of the labourers or tenants and hiring of labourers or tenants is a delicate job. The social distance and social position of the labourers though are not considered yet the recruitments are based on the good understanding and faith between the employer and the employee. The relations are almost always extra-economic. The multi-purposed productive unit of the Mahalis provides the accumulation of capital and its utilisation. Utilisation of capital is based on non-economic criteria as the membership of the productive unit is limited by the whole task structure of the social unit rather than only economic.

Mahali economy is less flexible. They are carrying out their livelihood from basketry for centuries together. The cultural matrix, social constitution of the productive unit and poverty have obstructed the inclusion of minimum scope of technological advancement and any organisational innovation. The change is also retarded by the act of exclusion of all risk. But all economics change the peripheral margin of the economy leaving the core content unchanged under supply-demand dichotomy. This is the flexible nature of economics. The Mahalis too, change the articles of production i.e. the types of basketry. Their bamboo-works were mainly comprised of small-baskets of domestic use, winnowing fan, umbrella etc. But with the improvement of betel-leaf cultivation in the district, the betel-leaf dealers are largely in need of the big baskets to pack their betel-leaf for disposal. The basket traders supply the baskets to the district. Thus the Mahalis include in their bamboo-work, a new type of basket under strong pressure of demand from the basket-traders, retaining the core content of their economy intact. This flexibility is thus enhanced by the contractor-strangers (basket-traders). These strangers have channeled their economic activities. The flexibility or oscilation of economy between the two poles i.e. bamboo-work and agriculture is also provided by the resident strangers. They are the landholding castes of the villages, where the Mahalis reside. The roles of these contractor-Mahalis for business reason are to come in contact with the and latter for supply of labour in agricultural fields. Both of

them lend money to the Mahalis, purchase their commodities and labour for which they bind the Mahalis in larger network of exchange. But the contractor-strangers and the resident strangers are not morally bound to the Mahalis as they live outside the core of the Mahali social structure.

The Mahalis supply their baskets to the basket traders and receive money for them. Again they supply baskets of domestic use to the villagers and receive payments both in cash and in kind. They are familiar with the monetary medium of exchange. Inside the village, the standard of exchange is the paddy currency, sometimes salt currency with the shop owners, pottery currency with the potters or reciprocal exchange of commodities with other exchangers. Money in the sense of measure of the value goods and services are less frequent inside the village. Whenever money exists, usually it is the standard with the widest sphere of exchange like "marriage money", purchase of bullocks from the markets, some luxury items, some items which confer status and prestige (commercial medicine for treatment, transistor sets etc.) and for ploughing one's field. However, media of exchange depend on the appropriateness to each sphere of exchange. Big baskets are exchanged with the basket-traders for money and domestic basketry are exchanged for money or paddy or some other appropriate commodities inside the village. Labour in the agricultural field is exchanged for paddy and sometimes for money, cloth for money, grocery for money or basketry, bride for money or services as resident son-in-law. The media and circuits of exchange are dependent in various systems of exchange. The common system of exchange are markets and reciprocity. The market system is widespread among the Mahalis. It is free and open. Each basket-trader has some client basket supplier (Mahalis) who supply the baskets to the traders regularly for years together. Sometimes a special bond of patron-client or personal attachment grow up between this basket supplier and the basket trader which often turns into an extra-economic relationship. The basket trader lends money in needs, offer tenancy when possible. However this extra-economic relationship often cuts down the risk of economic uncertainty of the basket supplier and short fall of the supply of baskets to the basket traders in extreme needs. The exchange in market centre of the village is often run on credit for reciprocal interest of mutual advantage or obligation. The surplus agriculturists

of the village provide credit facilities to the basket makers for which they demand assurance of labour in crucial time and interest of loans.

Reciprocity is a form of exchange and is widely found among the Mahalis. Reciprocity suppress the bargaining between two parties. A Mahali offers free labour in his neighbour's fields and receives free labour in exchange. Thus two friends of the same village or other villages, two kins, two families reciprocate each others need. Sometimes this reciprocity of exchange occurs between two parties of different communities of unequal but less social distance. Again reciprocal exchange of commodities and mutual services occur. For instance a Mahali gets an earthen pitcher from a potter in exchange of a winnowing fan. A smith sharpens the plough of a Mahali in exchange of a small basket. These exchanges are for near equivalence of goods and services and approach fixed rates.

Men are the chief capital goods in Mahali society. Tools of basketry, livestock, agricultural implements and other improvements in productive resources are controlled by conventions and allocation of men. Manpower is organised to flow according to concepts of maximisation. Capital, property rules, or economic choices do not work against the values and norms of the society.

However the economic activity of the Mahalis derives its meaning from the norms of the society. The resource is defined by the norms and values. A commodity, control over certain goods and services, the process of distribution and standards of economic behaviour are also defined by the norms and values. The norms govern the most social interaction. The society and economy are functionally interdependent<sup>2</sup>. The same Mahalis are actors in the economic, kinship, political and religious spheres. Thus role performance of the head of the family as father also fit in some way with the role of the basket-maker, which also fit with the believer of the *Orak bonga*, *Jaher bonga*, and also role of authority position in the family. The religious specialists in Mahali society forbid the economic role of the pregnant women.

The forms of social structure determine the nature of goods and services. The shift in available facilities also enhances the shift in the society. The volume and variety of goods and services change in accordance with the shift in social structure. The

change in the peripheral economic life of the Mahalis comes from the expansion of the sale of big baskets and spread in the demand of agricultural labourers in the villages where the Mahalis reside. The big demand of the basket traders allow the Mahalis to earn money in cash. The spread of monetisation gives the Mahalis incentive to move upwards in the status ladder of the region and they are trying hard to be absorbed in the Hindu caste fold. This cry for status elevation, of course is substantiated by radical changes in the social structure with certain inclusion and exclusion of upper caste customs. The monetisation and new opportunities tend change in the role of corporate kin-groups and place more emphasis on the families to evaluate the goods of society and to change traditional orthodoxy.

The function of economy is depended upon the interaction of its own parts. Keynes<sup>3</sup> fostered the concept of economic data as a systematic body of interrelated information. The Mahali economic data embrace the ranges of production, consumption, saving and investment for the economy as a whole. The gross income of the Mahalis shows how from different sources and economic activities income comes to individual families. The personal income account shows the income received by individual Mahalis in their role as participants in the productive process. This also shows how much income the Mahalis dispose of, that is, how much of their incomes go for consumer expenditures and taxes and how much is saved. The account of saving and investment shows the excess of income over expenditure and capital formation if any.

## II

The Mahali society is little developed both technologically and economically. The action and behaviour patterns of them are described as "traditional". These action patterns are inefficient, technologically non-complex and strongly resistant to innovation. In the concept of Redfield's<sup>4</sup> "folk society", the social acts in Mahali society typically are not "single interest" but "multiple interest" actions. Thus Mahali productive activity not only has an economic purpose but also is conceived of by the members of the society as containing ritual elements, elements pertaining to social cohesion or structure, "political goals" and others. Thus "multidimensionality" of all social behaviour is at

the back of all hurdles in bringing out changes in behaviour. In case of unidimensional social behaviour change is easy. A given action is conceived of not for a single specific objective but to meet number of objectives, for example the behaviour as ploughing others field, sowing of paddy seeds, harvesting, splitting of bamboo, weaving of baskets or engaging in exchange is conceived of not only as economic activity but also as behaviour to keep status, and stable relations of a Mahali with other persons in his culture. So different forms of economic activity only are acceptable to the society when they can meet most of the other objectives which are met by the activity to be replaced.

In the sense of Tonnies' "small community" the small group in Mahali society is the relevant unit of social cohesion, the members of which stand in face-to-face relationships having tribal origin or kinship relations. Though the Mahalis are a tribal group but they have strong association with other caste groups of the village having several socio-economic ties and joint occupancy of the village. The Mahalis have low status and they tend to interact most frequently with the other caste groups of the village. The family as a productive unit loses its place cwing to establishment of economic ties outside the kin group with the basket traders and other caste groups. Similarly the intimate relation with their own deities loses its full significance as they are gradually entering in the caste society. This tends to produce conflicts within and beyond the Mahali community.

Weber's<sup>6</sup> concept of "traditional behaviour" describes that the tradition oriented or traditional social action is based upon the psychic attitude set for the habitual work a day and belief in the everyday routine as an inviolable norm of conduct. This does not mean that the traditional action retards change. It is difficult to separate the Mahali society at different levels of economic performance by the relative "quantity" of tradition-oriented behaviour that their members show. The traditionalistic action is a conscious demand of revival and revitalisation of old values and norms. Traditional action sometimes conflicts with the demand of innovation and acts as a reinforcing element in retarding dynamicity or rapid change. Traditionalistic action on the other hand tries to elevate the out dated customs and practices to the level of current behavioural norms. Traditionalistic action has a reactionary character and tends to check economic change.



Thus there arise the conflict between the traditionalistic action and modernistic action. The latter tries to obstruct the elevation of the outdated customs and practices to the current behavioural norms and approves change in social behaviour in accordance with contemporary needs. Hence, emergence of two groups: 'conservatives' and 'progressives' occur in the Mahali society. The latter group by the process of exclusion of some traditionalistic action of the tribe and by the inclusion of some modernistic action i.e. upper caste custom tries to accelerate certain socio-economic change in the society. However, traditional action and traditionalistic action are implicit in Weber's work.

Talcott Parsons<sup>7</sup> develops the theory of pattern variables to elaborate the characteristics of tradition oriented society. Parsons model consists of achievement—ascription, universalism-particularism and specificity—diffuseness dichotomies. The Mahali society, in the sense of Parsons' non-industrial society predominantly exhibits features of ascription, particularism, functional diffuseness in the fields of corresponding social action and to a certain degree of functional specificity. The assignment of economic roles in Mahali society is on the basis of status or ascription, though agriculture is open to all. Parsons concludes that the social mobility or the social change is difficult in the society where economic roles are ascriptive. The Mahalis are basket makers. The particularistic norms of economic action prescribe specific occupation to them. Certain markets and transactions are monopolised by them and admission to it by the outsiders are resented by them, for instance the Mahalis weave a special kind of baskets locally known as 'Jhuri' for the basket-traders which they supply to the betel-leaf dealers. Besides, the other kinds of basketry like winnowing fan, thick-sheet of basketry called 'Chanch' are exclusively monopolised technology. The functional diffuseness is not strictly characterised the Mahali society. Though a Mahali not only performs the tasks connected with bamboo-work and agriculture, he also repairs and builds his house, makes his hunting and fishing implements, prepares his tools, occasionally makes fishing nets and other consumption goods yet functional specificity circumscribes certain economic roles. For instance a Mahali produces his baskets and crops. His implements of basketry and plough share are fitted and sharpened by the smith in usual case. His earthen utensils are supplied by the potters, clothes by the weavers and so on. Thus in the village the system

of social division of labour under the predominance of caste has led functional specificity, though certain economic roles are functionally diffuse in Mahali society where mobility is difficult. Thus the stability of the Mahali economics depends on the "multi-dimensionality" which gives it the character of functional diffuseness and incidentally retards change. The cohesion and compactness of the Mahali society are accelerated for ascriptive economic roles. Though there is certain degree of specificity in different economic roles in the village, the ascriptive norm enhances stability and internal compactness and retards change.

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## ECONOMIC RESOURCES AND ACTIVITIES

## I

The Mahalis of Midnapur district are a twin occupational group. Their economy is pivoted vocationally on bamboo-work and avocationally on agriculture. Throughout the year, they continue to do bamboo-work, but only in agricultural season, they reduce their activities partially and resort to agricultural pursuits. But very few of them possess substantial arable land. So they take part in agricultural operations, either as day-labourers or as seasonal labourers to cultivate lands of their neighbours of the same village or adjacent villages. Many of them cultivate small pieces of land under share-cropping (Bhagchas) system or on contract basis (Sanja) from the existing land-owners. Some of them also till the "Khas" or Government-owned lands or small pieces of land under their personal possession. In the present situation, the income from bamboo-work alone is not sufficient for the maintenance of their families in the majority of the cases. Taking the village as a whole it would appear that they are economically well below average, like the Kols<sup>1</sup> of Central India. So they pursue agricultural pursuits to grow paddy which are used for the consumption of their own families. However, though the performance of these agricultural pursuits are not the primary sources of their income, these help them to meet a large part of their financial needs, which remain unbalanced only with the income from bamboo-work.

Children are sometimes sent casually by their parents for herding cattle of the local people and to earn some money thereby. Some of them do the job of domestic servants and thus relieve their parents from economic burden to some extent. Very few Mahalis are service-holders (office-peon, employees in grocer's shop and rice-mill, pointsman in Railway Station, lorry-driver), in the local areas and a negligible number (only 5 persons) have taken the profession of teacher in primary schools.

Besides, income from livestock is another stable source of subsidiary earning of these people. Almost all the Mahali families have a few livestock like, hens and cocks. A few of them herd swine, goats and bullocks are found in some houses.

Hunting and fishing occasionally add to their earning although nominally. Collection of wildy grown products like, edible roots and tubers and other vegetables, faggots, etc. are a daily practice of Mahali families, which is more intensive in jungle areas than in non-jungle areas. Co-operation of all the members of the family is very significant in Mahali families.

## II

The components of an economic system are individuals or group of individuals when such groups are organised in some way. They fall into two clearly difinable classes. Production units, on the one hand and consumption or income-pooling units on the other. A production unit is any individual or group of individuals engaged in or organised for the purpose of engaging in productive activity<sup>2</sup>.

The adult members, both men and women of the family, remain mainly engaged in bamboo-work and in major agricultural operations all the day. Even tender-aged boys and girls also do many jobs, to assist their parents and thus help in supplementing the family income. The children of about 6 or 7 years join and firewood, sometimes accompanied by other elderly members ther. A boy of about 12 years can prepare handsome baskets for basketry, or for the agricultural fields and helps him in agricultural operations, or looks after the bullocks. Similarly, girls of about 10 years, follow their mothers when they go out for bringing water for domestic purposes. When the mother engages herself in cooking or sweeping the courtyard, or any other household duties, her daughter helps her in all possible ways. Girls too, assist their mothers in basketry-work and agricultural pursuits. Thus it shows that children as a non-labour force take part in productive activities, owing to pressing financial needs

The table 5 indicates that out of 2,193 persons, 1,701 persons of all ages are workers, that is nearly 77.56 per cent of persons i.e. 1,701 are workers and 492 are purely dependents. Thus the ratio between workers and non-workers stands at 3.5 : 1 which means the number of purely dependents are very meagre

**TABLE—5**  
Workers and non-workers in Mahali families

No. of families	No. of persons			Workers			Non-workers		
	Total	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female
404	2193	1084	1109	1701	851	850	492	233	259

in the Mahali families. Women equally participate with men in productive activities. For instance out of 1,701 workers 850 are women which is nearly 49.97% of the total working force.

The table 6 below will indicate how far children and old women can be treated as non-labour force even though they take part in productive activities with the actual labour force group<sup>3</sup> and how many of them remain as totally non-participants.

Many persons belonging to non-labour force in the age-groups of 5-14 and 61-up, participate in productive activities.

**TABLE—6**  
Frequency of participation of non-labour and labour force as working force

	Workers (working force)				Non-workers				Total
	Male	Female	Total	%	Male	Female	Total	%	
A. Labour force :									
Ages 15-60	620	614	1234	100.00	—	—	—	—	1234
B. Non-labour force :									
Ages 0-4	—	—	—	—	90	102	192	100.00	192
5-14	141	136	277	61.02	85	92	177	38.98	454
61-up	90	100	190	60.71	58	65	123	39.29	313
Total	851	850	1701	77.56	233	259	492	22.44	2193

Out of a total of 454 persons belonging to non-labour force group (5-14), 277 persons take part in productive activities, i.e., only 117 persons remain non-participants, which means nearly 38.98% in age-group (5-14) are non-workers, while 61.02% are workers. Again, in non-labour force group of 61-up out of a total of 313 persons, 190 persons take part in economic activities of some sort or other and only 123 persons remain non-participants. Thus it is seen that nearly 39.29% are non-workers in this age-group. It further indicates that the ratio of workers in labour force

group and non-labour force group stands approximately at 2.8 : 1. In the age-group (0-4), all the persons are purely dependents. due to their tender age and their number stands at 192.

All the persons in labour force group (15-60) are workers. It is therefore apparent from the table 6 that 492 persons are non-participants, i.e., a total of 22.44%. Among these 492 persons, children belonging to age-group (0-4) constitute 8.75%; and boys and girls belonging to age-group (5-14) constitute 8.07%, while old men and women of the age-group (61-up) constitute 5.62%, which shows that the percentage of non-participants in economic activities is maximum in the age-group (0-4). The table thus indicates how in early life and in old and infirm condition, the Mahalis participate in economic activities.

### III

The synoptic chart below about participation of the non-labour force in different activities will show the division of labour between the sexes, what kinds of work they perform and how far each of them participate in similar activities to run their families.

#### *Types of participation of non-labour force in different activities (5-9 years)*

##### *Boys*

Occasionally they join hands with their parents or elderly members of the family in bamboo-work, to assist their elders in tending goats, driving away birds, hens, cocks, so that they cannot do any harm to crops, look after grains kept for drying in the sun, carry water, food, etc., to their parents and brothers working in the field. At the end of this period of duty they regularly go out for collecting faggots, tubers and wild edible roots from the jungle and catch fishes from paddy fields in company with other siblings.

##### *Girls*

At the beginning of this period they do similar duties like the boys. Towards the end of this period, they accompany their mothers to bring water from tanks in small pots. Often they nurse infants and help their mothers in sweeping the courtyards. They accompany their mothers in fishing or for collection of edible roots and tubers.

## (10 – 12 years)

*Boys*

They regularly participate in bamboo-work and assist in basket-making. At the end of the period, they accompany their fathers to the paddy fields and help them in sowing, ploughing and taking care of bullocks. They accompany their fathers when they go out in search of bamboo or collection of faggots, and go to the market for disposal of baskets. They are also sent to the houses of other neighbouring castes to work as domestic servants or herders.

*Girls*

They regularly participate in bamboo-work and assist their mothers in all sorts of domestic work like, cooking, nursing of infants, cleaning of household utensils, carrying, drinking water, serving food to the family members, etc. They also go to market with their parents for selling things. Help their fathers in sowing, weeding, etc. Often they are sent to shops for purchasing various articles.

## (12 – 14 years)

Their activities are same as above, but done with more responsibility. They take responsible care of livestock, do bamboo-work, look after infants, do the job of herdsmen or domestic servants in the houses of neighbouring castes, collect faggots and jungle vegetable products regularly and take part in fishing and hunting operations, at times. They catch fishes from neighbouring ditches, tanks and paddy fields. Occasionally make winnowing fans and other basketry products and split bamboos and scrape these into strips for basket-making.

All their activities are similar to the above, they take charge of responsible domestic duties and associated ceremonial performances, take care of livestock, nurse infants, serve and cook food and edible jungle products. Collect small pilas for cooking, etc. and assist the family members in preparing rice beer during festivals.

(61-up)

*Old-men*

They do bamboo-work regularly, right from splitting of bamboos to disposal of basketry products, join their sons in the paddy-fields for sowing, ploughing and weeding operations and go to other villages for securing bamboos. Very old persons also do bamboo-work and weaving, but do not take part in agricultural operations or go for procuring bamboo. They also do not split bamboo. They only scrape and weave these into baskets. Occasionally they take rest and do these jobs whenever they feel inclined and comfortable.

*Old-women*

They regularly take part domestic duties and bamboo work, right from weaving to disposal of these products. They do not take part in agricultural operations. At the ripe old age they only weave and nurse infants and scarcely take part in other domestic duties.

*Different activities of labour force*

(15 - 60 years)

*Men**Daily domestic duties :*

(1) Bringing firewood, taking care of children, scaring away birds to protect grains, taking care of fowl, goats, pigs, bullocks, sweeping courtyard in some instances, or cooking food.

*Women*

Drawing water for domestic use, collecting fuel, bringing firewood, sweeping and cleaning house and courtyard, preparing and serving food to family members, husking and pounding of rice, making beds, taking out daily requirements of grains from Morai for husking, winnowing, grinding and pounding corns, brewing rice beer and taking care of livestock.

*Food collection :*

(2) Searching about and catching tortoise, collecting mushrooms.

Searching about and collecting edible leaves, fish, tortoise.



*Men*

rooms, fishes, meat, wild-fruits, roots and edible tubers for domestic use or for selling them in the market.

*Basketry :*

(3) Carrying bamboo, splitting and scraping of thin strips, making large and small baskets and other types of basketry. Preparing stand for scraping bamboo splits, bamboo hammer, etc. preparing axe-handle.

*Garden and field work :*

(4) Ploughing, hoeing, sowing, digging, manuring, transplanting, weeding, harvesting, carrying paddy from fields to threshing ground, threshing and stacking grains etc.

*Hunting and fishing :*

(5) Preparation of hunting implements like bolt, bow, spear-shaft, arrow-shaft. Trapping games, birds, mice. Fishing by nets, basket traps, spearing fishes with trident harpoon and catching fish with hooks, etc.

*Hut construction :*

(6) Marking out land for construction of huts, bringing poles, ropes, straw, thatching, erecting, trampling mud for plastering hut, rough plastering of door made with bamboo strips, etc.

*Women*

small pilas from ponds and gathering wild vegetables.

Carrying bamboo, splitting and scraping these into thin strips. Preparing large and small baskets and other types of basketry.

Transplanting, weeding, harvesting, carrying bundles of paddy and straw to the threshing arena when required.

Catching fish angling with thread, bait, hook and trapping them with basket traps, nets, etc.

Making ready straw bundles for thatching, water for mud-making, plastering walls and plinth, ramming of floor with small bamboo hammers, making small lumps of mud for hut making and assisting males in building walls.

The divisions of economic activities, according to sex, have been described in some chronological details in the synoptic chart above. In the discussion below emphasis will be laid on the, observation of some of the more marked aspects of activities of adult life.

It is obvious that the basic division is drawn between indoor activities, associated with production and processing respectively. A woman's tasks are limited mainly to the home and the backyard, while a man's work is conceived of as lying outside his house. In practice however this is not always followed rigidly in the Mahali life. For example almost all women have to work in fields and for basketry and in this way their participations in outdoor work are becoming more and more frequent through the increasing agricultural pursuits and demand of baskets, performance and production of which depend upon numerous working force.

On the other hand, men pass a good deal of their time indoors, for processing of bamboo-work and sometimes for repairing houses and other household objects and often in sheer idleness. Although ideally the man should be food-provider and producer and the woman is the food-processor, almost all families live on the bigger share of income, provided by the women through basketry and agricultural pursuits. In general terms, it can be said that with the increasing necessity of economic subsistence, the division of labour between the sexes becomes less and less marked.

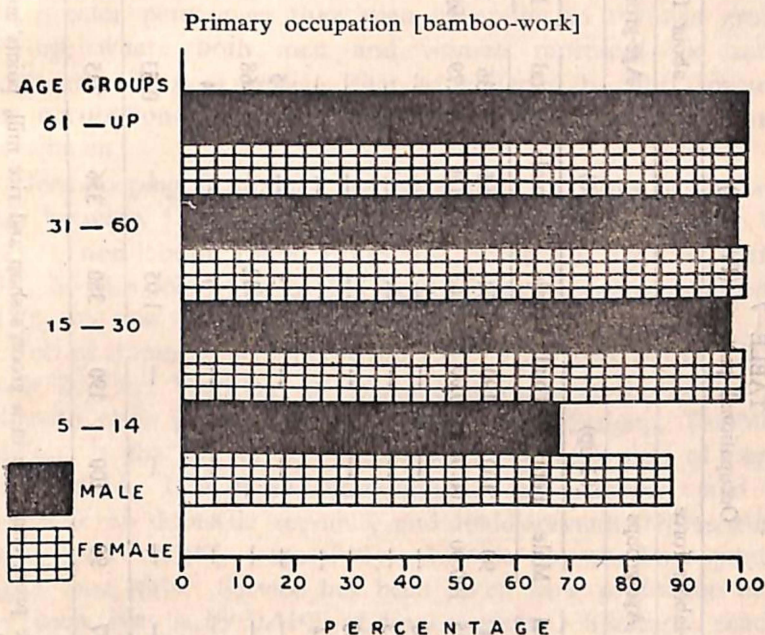
Very few distinctions are drawn between the man and the woman, and there are more and more activities that are being performed by both the sexes, simply because survival or maintenance of a given economic level demands it.

A few words may be said here about the specialists. Labour specialisation is meagrely developed in this society and not a single individual makes his living exclusively by a certain specialised activity. The basket makers are also agriculturists. Two or three people work as carpenters, are also basket-makers, agriculturists and work as hired labourers doing odd jobs. Amongst the Mahalis, school teachers and service-holders also do similar jobs. Gunnis or Ojhas or the Medicinemen mainly are food-growers in agricultural fields and prepare baskets to sell them to the basket-traders like other ordinary Mahalis.

Thus it seems that everyone derives his daily sustenance from a variety of activities for which special skill provides only a fraction.

#### IV

Occupational patterns of the Mahalis comprising 1701 workers of both sexes have been depicted in Table 7 to show what types of work they pursue to earn their living.



It is clear from the table 7 that the Mahalis are primarily bamboo-workers. Out of 1,701 workers, 1,626 persons of all ages engage in bamboo-works, i.e., nearly 95.59 per cent do so.

In non-labour force in the age group of (5-14), out of 277 boys and girls, 214 or 77.25 pursue basketry, among whom 95 boys out of 141 and 119 girls out of 136 do this work representing 67.37 and 87.50 per cent respectively. Thus girls predominate over boys in this occupational type. In the age group of 61-up, all persons do bamboo-work, although they belong to the non-labour force group and thus constitute a part of the total working force. In the labour force age group of 15-30, 736 persons (98.79%), out of 745 persons take part in

TABLE--7  
Occupational patterns (Primary)

Occupational patterns (Primary)													
Occupation	Non-labour force						Labour force						Total
	Age-groups						Age-groups						
	(5-14)			(61-up)			(15-30)			(31-60)			
	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total	
1. Bamboo work	95	119	214	90	100	190	371	365	736	237	249	486	1626
Percentage	67.37	87.50	77.25	100.00	100.00	100.00	97.63	100.00	98.79	98.75	100.00	99.39	95.59
2. Herding	20	—	20	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	20
Percentage	14.18	—	7.23	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	1.18
3. Domestic servant	26	17	43	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	43
Percentage	18.45	12.50	15.52	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	2.53
4. Service*	—	—	—	—	—	—	5	—	5	2	—	2	7
Percentage	—	—	—	—	—	—	1.32	—	0.68	0.83	—	0.41	0.41
5. Teacher	—	—	—	—	—	—	4	—	4	1	—	1	5
(Primary school)	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Percentage	—	—	—	—	—	—	1.05	—	0.53	0.42	—	0.20	0.29
Total	141	136	277	90	100	190	380	356	745	240	249	489	1701

\*For the convenience of study office peon, employee in a grocer's shop and rice mill, points' man in Railway Station and lorry-driver in rice mill are included in service group.

basketry work. Out of 380 men, 371 do bamboo-work, i.e. nearly 97.63 per cent, while all women take part in this pursuit. Again in this age group, women predominate over men in this occupation. In the next age group of 31-60 out of 489 persons, 486 (99.39%) take part in basketry work. Out of 240 men and 249 women, 237 men and 249 women engage themselves in bamboo-work, representing 98.75% and 100% respectively. As such, in this age group, women predominate over men. Thus it is apparent that in all age groups, women take part in this activity in greater percentage than men excepting in the age group of 61-up, where both men and women represent the same percentage. Thus it reveals that a tendency to shift towards other occupations is a little greater in proportion among men than women.

Herd-keeping is mainly the occupation of boys of the age group between 5-14. Out of a total of 1,701 workers, only 20 boys of non-labour force group are herdsman, that is nearly 1.18% do this job. Out of 141 boys of ages between 5-14, only 14.18% do this job of herd-keeping.

Job of domestic servants is done by 43 persons, out of 1,701, that is 2.53%. Working as domestic servants in the houses of well-to-do caste people like, Kayastha, Karan, Sadgop, Tambuli, Mahisya is the job of 43 (15.52%) boys and girls of ages between 5-14. Out of 141 boys and 136 girls, 26 boys and 17 girls work as domestic servants, and maid-servants representing 18.45% and 12.50% respectively. In this pursuit, boys predominate over girls. Service has been taken as a profession only by 7 men, that is by 0.41% of total workers. Similarly, teaching is the profession of only 5 men, representing 0.29% of the total workers.

Thus it would be seen from the table that non-labour force belonging to age 5-14 do the job of herdsman and domestic servants in small numbers and in the quinquennium 15-30 and 31-60, only a few persons have taken service and teaching as the main profession, while the rest pursue the occupation of bamboo-work. The bar-chart representation reveals the same. The shift from bamboo-work in the age group 5-14 is rather circumstantial and not conscious. They had been mostly put to other jobs by their parents to get a lump-sum amount of paddy from the employers in lieu of wages, which is customary. The shift from bamboo-work in age groups 15-30

and 31-60 is however, a self-choice. Where the persons are little educated, they do not want to remain attached to basketry work because they think it to be beneath their dignity and at the same time, they want to raise their personal status giving up this bamboo-work.

Besides, basketry work calls for a good deal of physical labour which an individual, by nature, is not inclined to do, if he could find other easier means of earning. However, the women in the Mahali families are almost engaged for whole time in productive activities. It is seen that in each group, women belonging to non-labour force or labour force, participate in all economic pursuits in a large number.

## V

As regards secondary occupation it may be said that an individual on account of compelling demand of the family, takes part in various agricultural pursuits. Many persons take part in diverse agricultural activities. As such we find there is some sort of overlapping in various economic activities. The share cropper, and contract cultivator also do the job of day-labourers or wage earners. One who cultivate his own land or government owned khas land may be found to cultivate the land as share-cropper or hired agricultural labourer. Thus there is a constant rotation of the personnel in two or more categories of agricultural activities. But these types of diverse economic activities are limited to a small number of persons in Mahali society as it is seen whenever a Mahali becomes free from any of the agricultural activities, at once he resumes his traditional bamboo-work. Of course 75 persons belonging to labour force group are seen to participate in diverse economic activities which may be categorised into four combinations of secondary economic activities as follows :—

- (a) Twentyfive persons are seen to cultivate land on contract basis and work as agricultural day-labourers;
- (b) Thirtyone persons are seen to cultivate khas land and work as day-labourers on others fields,
- (c) Nine persons cultivate small pieces of personal lands and also cultivate land as share-croppers;
- (d) Ten persons are seen to cultivate land on contract basis, work on others' fields as day-labourer and also other work on daily wages.

However, these 75 persons are considered separately for their diverse agricultural activities, to find out in which category of work they participated during the major days of the agricultural seasons. Only those activities have been taken into consideration to avoid complexity and to maintain uniform statistical representation in the table of secondary occupation.

From the table 8 it is revealed that out of 1,707 workers, 1,457 persons of all ages and sexes pursue other avocations, that is nearly 85.65% do so. Only in non-labour force belonging to age groups of 5-14 and 61-up, a few persons do not participate in secondary occupation. Besides, three persons (two servicemen and one primary school teacher) also do not take part in secondary job. The table indicates that out of 277 persons in age group (5-14) 144 persons are engaged in secondary occupation i.e., nearly 48.37%. Again out of 141 boys and 136 girls of this age group, 75 boys and 69 girls take part in secondary occupation representing 53.16% and 50.73% respectively. In age group 61-up only 82 persons take part in secondary occupation (43.58%). Out of 96 men, 37 (41.11%) are engaged in secondary occupations while only 45 (45%) women out of 100 take part in secondary occupations. In labour force belonging to 15-30 age group all persons take part in secondary occupations.

Table 8 indicates that out of 1,457 persons 454 (31.15%) do the job of agricultural day-labourers. The job of seasonal labourer is done by 25 persons, that is, by approximately 1.72%. Share-cropping is one of the agricultural pursuits of the Mahalis, which is practised by 291 persons of all ages and thus represents 19.97% of the total labour force. Cultivation on contract basis and cultivation of own land are performed by 285 and 308 persons of all ages which constitute 19.56% and 21.15% respectively. Cultivation of governmental owned khas land is the avocation of 82 (5.63%) persons. Wage earners are very few among the Mahalis and only 12 (0.82%) persons work as such.

In considering non-labour force, it is seen 144 persons of ages between 5-14 pursue secondary economic activities of different types. The table indicates only 15 (10.42%) persons do the job of agricultural day-labourer among which 7 are boys and 8 girls and it signifies that the non-adult Mahali day-labourers are appointed in lesser percentage. Similarly 10 persons (6.95%) of this age group pursue the work of seasonal labourer. There

**TABLE 8**  
Occupational patterns (Secondary)

Occupational patterns (Secondary)													
Occupation	Non-labour force						Labour force						Total
	Age-groups						Age-groups						
	(5-14)			(61-up)			(15-30)			(31-60)			
	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total	
A. Cultivators :													
1. Day labourer	7	8	15	—	—	—	128	101	229	101	109	210	454
Percentage	9.33	11.59	10.42	—	—	—	33.68	27.68	30.75	42.62	43.75	43.21	31.15
2. Seasonal labourer	10	—	10	—	—	—	15	—	15	—	—	—	25
Percentage	13.34	—	6.95	—	—	—	3.95	—	2.02	—	—	—	1.72
3. Share-cropper	18	26	44	17	21	38	55	95	150	28	31	59	291
Percentage	24.00	37.69	30.55	45.96	46.67	46.35	14.47	26.02	20.13	11.81	12.46	12.14	19.97
4. Cultivation of contract land	15	18	33	13	17	30	58	69	127	46	49	95	285
Percentage	20.00	26.08	22.91	35.13	37.78	36.58	15.26	18.90	17.05	19.42	19.68	19.55	19.56
5. Cultivation of own land	18	13	31	7	7	14	86	90	176	45	42	87	308
Percentage	24.00	18.85	21.53	18.91	15.55	17.07	22.63	24.66	23.59	18.98	16.85	17.90	21.15
6. Cultivation of Government													
Khas land	7	4	11	—	—	—	26	10	36	17	18	35	82
Percentage	9.33	5.79	7.64	—	—	—	6.85	2.74	4.84	7.17	7.23	7.20	5.63
B. Wage earners	—	—	—	—	—	—	12	—	12	—	—	—	12
Percentage	—	—	—	—	—	—	3.16	—	1.62	—	—	—	0.82
Total	75	69	144	37	45	82	380	365	745	234	249	486	1457



is no girl in this avocation, signifying that the job of seasonal labourer in this age group is solely the secondary pursuit of the boys, which represent 13.34% of a total of 75 persons. Share-cropping is the pursuit of 44 (30.55%) persons among which 18 are boys and 26 girls. Mostly these boys and girls participate in this pursuit with their parents. Likewise 33 (22.91%) persons take part in cultivation of contract land to render assistance to their parents or other elder relatives. Among these 33 persons 15 boys and 18 girls participate in cultivation of contract land. Cultivation of own land is the secondary pursuit of 31 persons (21.53%) among which 18 boys and 13 girls are found to help their parents in cultivation of this personally possessed land. Similarly 11 persons (7.64%) among which 7 boys and 4 girls are found to participate with their parents in cultivating khas or government owned land. Preponderance of females over males in the occupations of day-labourer, share-cropping and cultivation of land in contract basis is due to their non-participation in the job of seasonal labourer and participation on a lesser percentage in other three avocation, like cultivation of own land, share-cropping, and khas land. There are no wage-earners in this age group of non-labour force category.

In the age group of 61-up 82 persons pursue secondary occupation of different types. But there is no person among them who does the job of day-labourer. It seems that the aged persons due to their physical infirmity, do not take part in the work of day-labourer. Similarly no person of this age group is found to work as seasonal labourer. Share-cropping is the pursuit of 38 (46.35%) persons. Most of them take part in this activity with their sons or relations to render assistance. Likewise 30 (36.58%) persons take part in cultivation of contract land. Among these 30 persons, 13 are men and 17 women. Here also they render their assistance to their sons or other relations performing lighter agricultural operations during cultivation. Cultivation of own land is the secondary pursuit of 14 (17.07%) persons. In this activity 7 men and 7 women co-operate with their sons contributing their labour for earning paddy. There are no cultivators of khas land and wage earners in this age group.

While considering labour force group, in age group of 15-30, 299 (30.75%) persons are found to work as day-labourers. These 229 persons of this age group constitutes 128 men and 101

women. Seasonal agricultural labourers comprise of only 15 (2.02%) men. Share-cropping is performed by 150 (20.13%) persons of whom 55 are men and 95 are women. One hundred and twentyseven persons (17.05%) cultivate lands on contract as subsidiary occupation. Amongst these 127 persons 58 are men and 69 are women. Another subsidiary means of livelihood is the cultivation of small pieces of personal land in which 176 (23.59%) take part. These 176 persons comprise of 86 men and 90 women. Government owned khas land is cultivated by some Mahalis (4.84) to earn an additional amount of paddy. Among them 26 are men and 10 are women. There is only 12 (1.62%) wage earner in this age group. All of them are men. All persons take part in these secondary pursuits, even including the servicemen and two school teachers.

In the age group of 31-60, 210 (43.21%) persons are found to work as day-labourers amongst whom 101 men and 109 are women. There is no seasonal agricultural labourers in this age group. In share-cropping 59 (12.14%) persons participate as one of their avocation of whom 28 are men and 31 are women. Ninetyfive persons (19.55%) are found to cultivate lands on contract basis as subsidiary occupation. Amongst these 95 persons, 46 are men and 49 are women. Eightyseven persons (17.90%) cultivate personally possessed land. Out of these 87 persons 45 khas land is the pursuit of 35 (7.20%) persons of whom 17 are men and 18 are women. Thus it is found almost all the persons holders and one primary school teacher) pursue some sort of secondary occupation to keep economic balance of their families.

The tables 9 and 10 show one month's activities executed by six men during non-agricultural and agricultural seasons.

#### *A Non-agricultural season :*

No. 1 is a youngman of 30, having his wife and two immature children. In the non-agricultural season he performed the job of bamboo-worker for 20 days and spent one day in his own house for fencing, thatching and replacement of old bamboo poles to the hut. For another two days, he helped his brother to thatch roof on a hut without any remuneration for this. For two days he worked for clearing a garden of a caste people on a wage of 0.50 paise a day and 1 kg. of rice, a small quantity of salt, red peppers and mustard oil, and a mid-day meal.

TABLE — 9

One month's activities of six men in non-agricultural (March)  
season (in days)

Activity	Persons					
	1	2	3	4	5	6
Bamboo-work	20	23	21	24	20	18
Working in own house	1	—	—	—	1	—
Helping others	2	—	1	—	2	—
Wage earners	2	—	1	—	—	4
Travelling and attending markets, selling baskets etc.	2	—	3	2	2	2
Participation in festivals and ceremonies	2	2	2	2	2	2
Sick and not working	—	2	—	—	4	—
Fishing	2	3	1	3	—	4
Not working	—	1	2	—	—	1
Total	31	31	31	31	31	31

For selling bamboo products to the basket traders in four weeks and attending market, he spent half of a day per week, which means two days in total, per month. He spent another two days for attending festival of the community in the village. For two days he went for fishing in near about ponds for about 4 to 5 hours daily and then he took rest in his own house. Although during the month he earned only Rs. 51.00 personally, the baskets made by his wife every day provided additional income, amounting Rs. 46.00 and their joint income enabled them to meet the expenses of family maintenance.

#### B. *Agricultural season :*

The same person worked for ten days in his own field and for four days as day-labourer in the field of a caste people (Sad-gop). He devoted his time for bamboo work only for eight days. He spent two days for attending market to sell his products. For four days, he had been sick and did not work and

TABLE 10

One month's activities of these six men in agricultural (July) season (in days)

Activity	Persons					
	1	2	3	4	5	6
<b>A. Agricultural</b>						
Working in own land	10	—	—	—	—	—
Working in share-cropping	—	15	—	—	—	—
Working in contract land	—	—	12	—	—	—
Working in fields as agricultural day-labourer	4	3	5	15	—	13
Working in government owned khas land	—	—	—	—	10	—
<b>B. Non-Agricultural</b>						
Bamboo-work	8	7	9	7	10	7
Working in own house (repairing, fencing etc.)	—	—	1	1	—	—
Helping others	—	—	—	—	2	1
Travelling	2	2	2	2	2	4
Sick and not working	4	—	—	3	—	—
Fishing	3	3	2	3	5	5
Not working	—	1	—	—	2	1
Total	31	31	31	31	31	31

for three days, he went to catch fishes for about 5/6 hours a day. The catch was more than his requirements and a portion was sold for Rs. 4.00 to the neighbouring castes. It is seen that in agricultural season, he resorted to agricultural operation which is responsible for his participation in bamboo work for a lesser number of days.

*A. Non-agricultural season:*

No. 2 is an old man of 50 having his wife and two boys of 12 and 10 respectively. He did bamboo work for 23 days right from securing of bamboo, to their weaving. For two days he remained in the house being sick and took rest for one more day. He attended the community festival for two days as-usual. For the selling and marketing of bamboo products he did not spend even a day, as his sons and wife did this job. But he went to catch fishes for 3 days for family consumption. During this month he earned personally Rs. 48.00 but the assistance rendered by his wife and sons helped him to balance his family budget. They prepared the baskets of worth saleable at Rs. 63.00.

*B. Agricultural season :*

The same person has no land in his own possession. So he tilled the land of a caste people (Mahisya) on share-cropping basis for fifteen days. For three days, he worked as day-labourer in the house of a Brahman. He remained engaged in bamboo work only for seven days. He spent two days for attending the market and carrying saleable baskets to the market. He spent three days for catching fishes and remained in the house for one day only for taking rest.

*A. Non agricultural season :*

No. 3 is an unmarried man of 21 having his widow mother and a sister of about 14. He was engaged in bamboo work for 21 days. He assisted his elder brother remaining separately for one day for thatching and received only the mid-day meal there. He also spent a day working as wage-earner in the house of a caste people (Mahisya) and received payment of 0.50 paise, 1 kg. of rice and a small quantity of salt, red peppers and mustard oil and mid-day meal, for clearing marshes from the pond. He spent another 3 days for travelling, two days for attending the market and another day for visiting his relatives' house in Jhilinga (10 miles from his village). He spent two days for participation in festivals and two days for fishing. He did not do any work for two days, but his mother and sister did basketry-work on those two days.

*B. Agricultural season :*

The same person is landless, but cultivated land of a caste people (Kayastha) on contract basis for twelve days and worked

as agricultural day-labourer for five days in the land of another people. Only for nine days he did bamboo-work. He worked for only one day in his house. He spent two days for attending market and carrying baskets to the market and caught fishes for another period of two days. This person earned Rs. 52.00 by his personal labour and his mother and sister made baskets of Rs. 34.00 in the market value.

*A. Non-agricultural season :*

No. 4 is an old man of 55, having his wife and a son of 20. He did bamboo-works for 24 days. He spent two days for attending market and carrying of baskets to the market. He spent two days for participation in festivals and went on fishing for three days, when his wife and son carried on the job of basketry. This person earned from his basketry about Rs. 41.00 and his wife and son earned Rs. 65.00 by selling baskets.

*B. Agricultural season :*

This person neither possesses land nor does he get any land for cultivation on share or contract basis. As a result, he had to work for fifteen days as agricultural day labourer in three houses of caste people, two belonging to Mahisya caste and the other being one of a Brahman. He prepared baskets only for seven days. He spent one day in his house for repairing it and another two days for carrying basketry products and attending *hat*. Being sick, he remained in his house for three days. He spent three days for fishing.

*A. Non-agricultural season :*

No. 5 is a boy of 18 years, having his widowed father and two sisters of 11 and 9 years of age respectively. He was engaged in basketry work for 20 days and assisted for two days his father's brother to construct the plinth of his hut, without remuneration. He spent one day for clearing the kitchen garden, fencing, etc. around his hut. He spent 2 days for carrying basket to the godown of a trader and attending markets. Unfortunately, he fell sick and remained confined in the house for four days, when his sister and father pulled on with the job of weaving and splitting of bamboo. He attended festivals for two days. This man earned by his personal labour Rs. 45.00 and his father and two sisters earned Rs. 53.00 and somehow managed to procure the family subsistence.

### B. *Agricultural season :*

This person worked for ten days for cultivating the khas land and for another ten days was engaged in bamboo work. He helped for two days, his brother-in-law for repairing his hut without remuneration. He spent two days for carrying baskets to the traders and attending the market and another five days for fishing. The catch was good and a small quantity of it was sold to the neighbours. For two days, he remained in his house without any work.

### A. *Non-Agricultural season :*

No. 6 is a man of 40, having his wife and no issue. He was engaged in bamboo work for 18 days and for another 4 days, he worked as wage earner. He spent two days for attending market and two days for festival. For another five days, he did not do any work. His family is small and their requirements could be fully met from the earning he made doing jobs for 22 days. He went to catch fishes for 4/5 hours a day, for four days and took rest for one complete day. This man earned Rs. 40.00 by his personal labour and his wife assisted him contributing Rs. 35.00 by her labours.

### B. *Agricultural season:*

This person worked for thirteen days as day-labourer and for seven days was engaged in bamboo work. For one day, he offered his labour in his brother's house for repairing his hut, without any remuneration but received his mid-day meal. He fell sick for five days and remained in his home. On one day, he did not work and remained idle in his home.

These six men, who are all residents of village Kotai form a representative sample. As these days were chosen during the month of maximum activity, both the agricultural and non-agricultural seasons, it may be supposed that during the rest of the year, the pace of individual work becomes considerably slower.

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## OCCUPATIONAL PATTERN: TRADITIONAL

## I

The Mahalis are primarily bamboo-workers and traditional basket-makers of various kinds. The big baskets locally known as 'Jhuri' are their major products and have considerable bearing on the Mahali economy. The betel-leaf dealers are the largest buyers of these baskets, which they utilise extensively for packing betel-leaves for export to other places. They cannot, however, purchase these straightway from the Mahalis, but get these from the local basket traders belonging to various caste groups like the Brahman (Priest & Scholars), Karan (Scribe), Kayastha (Writer), Mahisya (Cultivator), Tambuli (Betel-leaf Seller), Sadgop (Cultivator), Solanki (Cultivator), Jele (Fisher-man)\* and a section of Marawari trader, popularly known as 'Mamu' (maternal uncle) to the Mahalis. They purchase largest quantities of big baskets from the Mahalis of Dantan, Kesiari, Sankrail and Narayangarh Police Stations and supply these to the betel-leaf dealers.

There are mainly five types of such baskets for which there is normally a high demand amongst the betel-leaf dealers and according to their demands, the suppliers or the basket traders place their orders to the producers (the Mahalis). The basket traders act as intermediaries between the users and the makers i.e., the betel-leaf dealers and the Mahalis. The name of each type of basket conforms to its size and measurements. The Mahalis usually maintain the size of these baskets by simple measurements with hands. The size of the basket is calculated on the length of the warp, known to the Mahalis as 'Bada'.

In local terms the types of these baskets are called

- (i) Das-sera means basket containing approximately 10 seers of betel-leaves, the 'Bada' (warp) measured 28'' in length.
- (ii) Panera-sera means basket containing 15 seers of betel-leaves, the warp measured 36'' in length.
- (iii) Bis-sera means basket containing 20 seers of betel-leaves, the warp measured 42'' in length.

\* In parenthesis traditional occupation of each caste is mentioned.



- (iv) Pachis-sera means basket containing 25 seers of betel-leaves, the warp measured 45'' in length.
- (v) Rengun means basket containing 30 seers of betel leaves, the warp measured 55'' in length.

The baskets are sold by the Mahalis to the basket-traders both in piece rate as well as wholesale in bundles. Each bundle consists of 40 or 50 such big baskets according to their sizes, as for instance, one bundle of Pachis-sera or Rengun basket comprises of forty such baskets whereas one bundle of Das-sera or Panera-sera baskets consists of fifty such baskets.

Usually the Mahalis carry all their week's products; the volume of which varies from family to family according to the number of working members but on average they carry usually one and half bundles to a basket-trader on a fixed day of the week, preferably on a weekly market day, because they are benefited by such bulk sale, being able to earn a lumpsum in a single deal and could also purchase with the money thus earned, their weekly food requirements and other needs from local market. Of course, occasional sales and purchases of baskets take place on other day too, if a Mahali family needs money on any other day during the intervening period. In such cases, they sell out one or two days' outturn at a time. Persons of both sexes carry and bring their baskets for disposal to the traders who purchase and stock these in their godowns for future sale. The basket traders export these baskets to the betel-leaf dealer by lorries and goods trains. In this connection, it must be said that Tamluk Police Station of the district of Midnapur is the largest business centre of betel-leaves and so, for these baskets too. As none of the Mahalis takes the trouble of supplying baskets directly to the betel-leaf dealers, so they forego the expected profits made by the traders.

It has been assessed from the basket-traders that by selling these baskets to the betel-leaf dealers, the basket-traders generally make profits varying from Rs. 4.00 to Rs. 5.00 per bundle. This is not of course their nett. profit per bundle, because during the period between receiving baskets from the Mahalis and their disposal to the betel-leaf dealers, they have to incur a variety of expenses. Loading of the baskets in lorries or carts, despatching these to the railway station for booking in the name of the betel-leaf dealers at Baghnan, Mecheda, Tamluk, Kaktia and others involve a lot of loading and

unloading expenses and booking charges. Besides, during transactions, many of the baskets become damaged and are rejected by the betel-leaf dealers. However, on average, a basket-trader makes profits between Rs. 2.50 to Rs. 3.00 per bundle in normal transactions.

In the area under study, there are certain other characteristic products of bamboo-work like, Kula (winnowing fan), Chhata (umbrella), Pachhi (small basket), Pakha (hand-fan), Khaloi (small basket for keeping fishes), Tator (plain sheet of thick basketry), Dole (container for keeping paddy) and Dobka (bowling vessel) etc. Neighbouring villagers of different castes and communities are the largest purchasers of these basketry products needed for their domestic use. The following is the list of basketry products with their approximate market prices.

TABLE—11  
List of bamboo products

Name of basketry	English equivalent	Mahali equivalent	Price of each
1. Chhoto kula	Small winnowing fan	Suptit	0.37 P.
2. Bara kula	Big winnowing fan	Hatha	0.50 P.
3. Chhata	Umbrella	Chhatam	2.00 P.
4. Pachhi	Small basket	Tupla or Futia	0.25 P. to 0.50 P.
5. Pakha	Hand-fan	Bichna	0.25 P. to 0.37 P.
6. Khaloi	Basket for washing fish	Kharai	0.37 P.
7. Tator	Plain sheet of thick basketry	Chanch	0.50 P. to 0.75 P. per cubit.
8. Tukri	Big basket of very thick weaving	Thaka	0.50 P. to 0.62 P.
9. Morai	Container of paddy	Dole	2.00 P. to 2.50 P.
10. Dobka	Bowling basket for removing water	Dobka	0.37 P. to 0.50 P.

These basketry products are not regularly manufactured. Often they prepare these things to sell in the local market.



"Basketry is easier than cooking", shyly says the newly-wedded girl.



Sometimes they make these against orders received from the local people. Thus their sales are somewhat scattered and elastic.

Green bamboos are indispensable for basketry-work. The Mahalis wander about in the nearby villages in search of bamboos. If they do not find any good quality of bamboo in these places, then only they go to distant villages in search of bamboos.

There are three varieties of bamboos as stated below which are usually used by the Mahalis for basketry.

- (1) Bamboo of Tarala type (*Bambusa tulda*)—This thin bamboo is extensively used for making baskets. These are short and slender in girth and cost about 0.50 P. each of average size.
- (2) Bamboo of Bardia type (*Bambusa arundinacea*)—This type of thick bamboo is primarily used for making big baskets, winnowing fans, thick sheets of basketry. These are long and much wider in girth than the previous type and cost about Rs. 1.50P. each.
- (3) Bamboo of Chapat type (*Bambusa balcooa*)—This type of thin bamboo is mainly used for making various baskets of domestic purposes. Their length and girth are between Tarala and Bardia types and the cost is about Re. 1.00 each.

The tools and other accessories required for basketry-work are of simple types. Each family possesses such tools in appreciable number. The following tools and other accessories are mainly used by them for bamboo-work.

- (1) Buria (axe)—It is locally known as Kural and consists of two parts, a bamboo handle and an iron blade. Its price varies according to its size, between Rs. 2.00 and Rs. 2.50P. each.
- (2) Katan (big cutter)—It is locally known as Dao and consists of two parts, namely an iron blade and the iron handle. Its price is about Rs. 2.50P. each.
- (3) Katu (small cutter)—It is also made up of iron and has two parts, the bill-hook blade and the iron handle. Its price varies between 0.62 P. and 0.80 P. each.
- (4) Jambati ((brass cup)—Whenever the Mahalis sit for bamboo-work, they keep these cups full of water

- by their side, for sprinkling water on the bamboo strips to soften the materials.
- (5) Lasher Dhiri (stone block)—This is a stone block used for sharpening the implements.
  - (6) Ganrah (seat)—This is made up of a thin wooden plank or small splits of palm-leaves or of bamboo. The splits are woven in a check pattern.
  - (7) Mugar (hammer)—It is a solid piece of bamboo, used for hammering during splitting of bamboo knots.
  - (8) Ghura (stand)—It is a bamboo tripod, used during scraping of bamboo splits. The splits are scraped and smoothened, keeping these on the longer logs of the Ghura.

The unit of production is the family, the members of which work together in a systematic way, to ensure regular and bulk production. Though co-operation of other families of the village is not required in such bamboo-work, yet it may be necessary in some cases, as for procuring bamboos, sharpening of tools, disposing of weekly production, etc. Such co-operation amongst co-villagers is in vogue, which points to the existence of mutual adjustment amongst them. All the members of a family engage themselves in bamboo-work, specially for preparing baskets. From about 60 years old men and women to children of merely 6 or 7 years, none remains unattached to this work, in some way or other. But the boys and girls of 6 or 7 years, only do the work of easiest types for basketry. They cannot split the bamboos into sizes or splinters and could prepare the basic part or the core structure of the baskets. Bamboo-works like Pachhi, Khaloi, Chhata, Kula, Chanch, and other domestic types are solely the adults' job. However, children of tender ages usually help the family in economic activities.

There is no regular procedure to train up the children in bamboo-work. They learn the technique of basketry, simply by observation and gradually become professional by acquiring skill. The children first learn to weave the big baskets or 'jhuri' for betel-leaf dealers, the techniques of which are not very difficult to learn. Later when they are acquainted with all the techniques of big basket-making, they gradually try to learn other types of bamboo-work. No initiating ritual is held for employment of the child in basket work. They do not believe in any

supernatural agency or power who has to be propitiated for bestowing skill in basketry work. Some of them are gifted with special skill in the art of basketry like, kula, chhata, khaloi, pachhi, etc. There are some others, who are famous for their dexterity in basket work, they would say. But that does not carry much weight with the basket traders who pay them not for skill but for quantity of the products they buy.

All day long, Mahalis remain busy in bamboo-work during the non-agricultural season. They are early riser. From about 6 a.m. to 1 or 2 p.m. they work ceaselessly, though in between these hours, they take their morning meal, consisting mainly of soaked rice. After 1 to 2 P.M. they stop working for sometime and go for bathing and taking their mid-day meal and a little rest thereafter. About 3.30 p.m. they start their work again and continue working till dusk. Sometimes, if they cannot make their baskets in the earlier part of the week, for some reason or other, they engage themselves in this work even after dusk, sitting in front of a kerosene lamp or in the courtyard under moon-lit night, to make up the lost time.

TABLE—12  
Productive hours per week

Activity	Time spent in each activity (in hours)									
	Men					Women				
	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5
1. Collection of bamboo	8	4	10	3	6	2	4	—	—	6
2. Splitting of bamboo	38	30	34	32	28	28	25	28	20	18
3. Preparing baskets and other types of basketry	34	40	37	40	42	26	30	35	30	26
4. Selling of baskets and other types of basketry	6	8	4	6	5	6	3	10	9	12
Total	86	82	85	81	81	62	62	73	59	62

The activities of 5 men and 5 women belonging to 25 to 35 years of age and are largely dependent on bamboo-work, even in the agricultural season have been recorded as a representative sample for the purpose of conveying a general idea about their total productive and non-productive hours in a week in the non-agricultural season, in the month of Magh (February-March).

The tables 12 and 13 show that out of a total of 168 hours in a week, the Mahali men remain engaged in productive activities from 81 to 86 hours, i.e. on average for approximately 83

TABLE—13  
Non-productive hours per week  
(for the same individuals)

Activity	Time spent in each activity (in hours)									
	Men					Women				
	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4..	5
1. Rest at home (eating, bathing, sleeping, excretion)	58	59	61	55	61	62	59	55	63	61
2. Sick and confined	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
3. Gossip at home, discussions, visiting neighbour's house	12	14	11	15	10	13	12	15	12	18
4. Attending market	6	5	6	7	8	5	7	5	6	—
5. Doing household work (cooking, washing of cooking utensils, sweeping courtyard, bringing faggots, looking after livestock, children etc.	6	8	5	10	8	26	28	20	28	27
Total	82	86	83	87	87	106	106	95	109	106



hours a week, while women remain engaged in productive activities between 59 and 73 hours, i.e. on average for 63.6 hours. Women devote less hours than men in productive activities because they have to spend much time in household works. The women generally do not go for securing bamboo to distant places. When required, if they have to secure it, they try to find these out within the village or nearby villages. Thus it is seen that they spend less time in the activity of securing bamboo for which they mostly depend on their husbands or on other male members of the family. The total non-productive hours as seen are between 82 and 87 in case of men and between 95 and 109 in case of women, which stand on average approximately at 85 hours and 104.4 hours respectively. Most of the non-productive hours in the case of men are spent in sleeping and gossiping, whereas in case of women these are spent by sleeping and doing domestic works.

There is no clear-cut division of labour for this vocation. Both men and women of a family take part in this work together. In all phases of activities concerning basketry, right from the procurement of bamboos to the disposal of the products, both men and women take part together. It was told by them that the women generally carry the bamboos from the bamboo groves on their head, instead of carrying these on their shoulders, which are usually done by men. It is their conviction that the women cannot carry loads on their shoulders as the men do. Besides, it becomes an object of ridicule also if any woman tries to carry bamboo in this fashion.

For all types of basketry, bamboo is first split into splinters or strips. Five kinds of splinters or bamboo strips are necessary for big baskets namely, *Bada*, *Chhipti*, *Pendaardli*, *Puraardli* and *Pataardli*, for big baskets. *Bada* is a thick and short bamboo strip approximately two centimetre in breadth. Fourteen to eighteen such *Badas* are arranged in the fashion of a star and tied at the centre by a *chhipti*, passing over and under the *Badas* alternatively. The *chhipti* is a very thin bamboo splinter of about 10' to 12' in length and one centimetre in breadth. Only two or one-and-a-half such *chhiptis* are necessary for making a basket. This process is called '*Ateth*', i.e. tightening of the *Bada*. This structure is usually made by adult members of the family. Children of 9 or 10 years of age who are also employed in basketry work, cannot do it properly.

The next phase is '*Penda*', i.e. fixing of *Ardli*, which constructs two-thirds of the baskets. The *Ardli* is a comparatively thick and long bamboo splinter of about 8 mm. in breadth. During fixing of *Ardli*, usually care is taken to avoid double turning, at any place. As this phase is known as *Penda*, the *Ardli* used also is known as *Penda-Ardli*. The *Bada* now forms the warp and the *Ardli* the weft. The *Bada* remains stationary, whereas the *Penda-ardli* passes over and under the *Bada*, singly and alternatively. The tightening of the *Chhipti* during *Ateth*, the *Bada* turns upwards and the *Ardli* and the *Bada* are woven in a check pattern.

The next phase is '*Purao*', i.e. the fixing of more *Ardlis* to make the body of the jhuri stronger and complete. At this stage, the *Ardli* is known as '*Pura Ardli*'. The *Ardli* is woven under and above the *Bada*, in the similar fashion as the *Penda Ardli*. At the end of weaving, strokes are given at random on the body and the upper end, with the help of the back of a cutter to make the weaving tight.

The next phase is '*Murimara*', i.e. the fixing of three thicker bamboo splinters at the free-end or the margin of the baskets to prevent the *Ardli* from getting loose and detached. These bamboo splinters are called *Pata-ardli* and are partly green and thick, the length of which is about 10' to 12'. They are tied together, passing them over and under the *Bada*. The first *pata-ardli* is inserted under the *Bada*, the second one is fixed just under the *Bada* following the former, and the third one is fixed just under the *Bada* following the second. These three *Pata-ardli* are woven alternatively, one above the other, under and above the *Bada*. Strokes are then given on the top of the weft inbetween the warps to make it tight. After this, the projecting portion of the *Bada* or the free-ends are twisted and inserted into the cleft of the *Pura Ardli* to prevent the *Ardli* from crossing or coming out, or snapping during use. During all these processes, water kept in a jambati is sprinkled on the bamboo splinters to protect these from getting dry.

The general patterns of investment and outturn or income from basketry will reveal the economic position of the Mahalis partially. An attempt has been made in the following lines to show how much a Mahali family earns in a year by basket-making. These data have been recorded by survey of 200

Mahali families, living in Dantan, Narayangarh, Kesiari, Sankrail, Nayagram and Kharagpur Police Stations.

The following are the statements of accounts of the nett cost of production and nett profit per 100 basketry products of four types, namely big baskets (jhuri), small baskets (pachhi), winnowing fan (kula) and chanch (tator). These have been culculated on average costs and selling prices.

TABLE—14  
Cost of production

Items	Quantity	Approximate price of raw material*	Labour required in terms of rupees	Total cost
1. Big baskets:				
(a) Bisshera (big)	2 bundles	9.00	10.00	19.00
(b) Pachisshera	2½ bundles	13.00	14.00	27.00
(c) Rengun	2½ bundles	15.25	14.50	29.75
(d) Small baskets (Pachhi)	100	8.00	16.00	24.00
(e) Winnowing fan (Kula)	100	20.00	22.00	42.00
(f) Chanch (3 cubits in breadth)	Per 100 cubits	27.00	30.00	57.00

The tables 14 and 15 show that the Mahalis, if they have to employ any labour for helping them in basketry work, would earn very little profit, unless they could sell these at a considerably high prices than the prices they sell at present. But the Mahalis generally do all these work themselves and the family members are all unpaid labourers. The profit of basket-making are insufficient to maintain the basket-maker and his family in marginal comfort. There arise no question of surplus or any attractive competition. Identically, Bailey comments about the position of basket-makers in Bisipera<sup>1</sup>.

\* Price of bamboo was taken to be Re. 1.00 each for the convenience of determining the approximate cost of production.

TABLE—15  
Selling price

Items	Total price	Nett profit (selling price minus cost of production)
(a) Bisshera jhuri (big)	@ Rs. 14.00 per bundle = Rs. 28.00	+ 9.00
(b) Pachishshera jhuri	@ Rs. 16.00 per bundle = Rs. 40.00	+ 13.00
(c) Rengun jhuri	@ Rs. 17.00 per bundle = Rs. 42.50	+ 12.75
(d) Small baskets (Pachhi)	@ Re. 0.40 P. each = Rs. 40.00	+ 16.00
(e) Winnowing fan (Kula)	@ Re. 0.50 P. each = Rs. 50.00	+ 8.00
(f) Chanch	@ Re. 0.75 P. cubit = Rs. 75.00	+ 18.00

The income from the Chanch is the highest and income from basketry like, Pachhi and Kula are larger than that of big baskets. But these products of basketry have very little demand in the locality and a family cannot sell them in good numbers locally, excepting a few. But the demand of baskets is higher and more or less constant. So the Mahalis generally produce these items.

The month-wise average production and sales of basketry in individual Mahali families are given in the table 16 to assess their gross income from sale of basketry products throughout the year.

The gross annual disposal of basketry products on average per family as seen from the table 16 is Rs. 995.55, i.e. the value of average monthly disposal of basketry products is Rs. 82.96 approximately. The peak months of sales of basketry are the months of Magh (January-February), Phalgun (February-March) and Chaitra (March-April) during which they earn about Rs. 98.89 on average, it falls down from the month of Vaisak (April-May) and reaches the minimum in the months of Ashar (June-July) and Sravana (July-August) and again during Kartick

TABLE—16  
Month-wise average production and sales of basketry

Months (in Bengali calender)	Items disposed of	Price
1. Paus (December-January)	4 bundles of Bis-sera baskets (small), 4 winnowing fans and 8 pachhis.	Rs. 60.00
2. Magh (January-February)	3 bundles of Pachis-sera baskets, 2 bundles of Bis-sera baskets (small), 2 bundles of Das-sera baskets, 6 Pachhis, 4 cubits of Chanch, 3 Pakha.	Rs. 101.33
3. Phalgun (February-March)	3 bundles of Pachis-sera baskets, 2 bundles of Rengun baskets, 10 Pacchis, 4 Khalois, 4 Pakhas, 2 Umbrellas.	Rs. 90.98
4. Chaitra (March-April)	4 bundles of Bis-sera baskets (big), 3 bundles of Panera-sera baskets, 6 Pachhis, 4 winnowing fans, 4 Khalois, 2 Thakhas.	Rs. 104.36
5. Baisak (April-May)	4 bundles of Das-sera baskets, 2 bundles of Bis-sera baskets (small), 1 bundle of Rengun basket, 6 Pachhis, 4 winnowing fans.	Rs. 89.00
6. Jaistha (May-June)	3 bundles of Bis-sera baskets (small), 2 bundles of Panera-sera baskets, 2 bundles of Das-sera baskets, 3 Pachhis, 2 winnowing fans.	Rs. 87.49

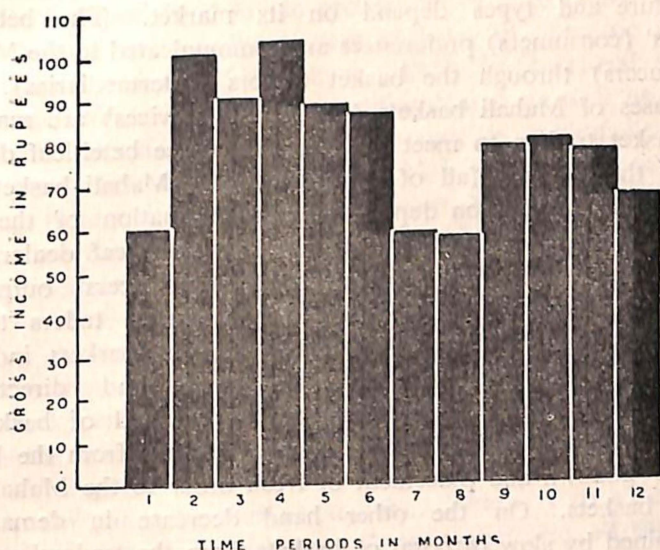
TABLE 16 (Contd.)

Months (in Bengali calender)	Items disposed of	Price
7. Ashar (June-July)	4 bundles of Bis-sera baskets (small), 2 Pachhis, 4 Khalois, 2 winnowing fans.	Rs. 58.62
8. Sravana (July-August)	2 bundles of Panera-sera baskets and 2 bundles of Bis-sera (big) baskets, 2 Dobkas, 2 Khalois, 2 winnowing fans.	Rs. 58.28
9. Bhadra (August-September)	2 bundles of Das-sera baskets, 4 bundles of Bis-sera (small) baskets, 3 Dobkas, 3 Khalois, 2 Thakas.	Rs. 79.02
10. Aswin (September-October)	2 bundles of Pachis-sera baskets, 2 bundles of Rengun, 1 bundle of Panera-sera, 2 Khalois, 5 Pachhis.	Rs. 80.62
11. Kartick (October-November)	2 bundles of panera-sera, 3 bundles of Bis-sera (small), 1 bundle of Das-sera.	Rs. 78.00
12. Agrahayan (November-December)	2 bundles of Pachis-sera, 3 bundles of Das-sera, 5 Pachhis.	Rs. 67.85
Total		Rs. 955.55

(October-November) to Paus (December-January). In all these months the Mahalis as said before, partially remain engaged in agricultural activities, as a result of which, their productions of bamboo-work dwindle very much.

It is apparent from the table 16 that the Mahalis during the non-agricultural season, fully subsist on income from basketry products barring occasional participation in other supple-

Monthwise Average Gross Income from Basketry



Time Periods in Months :

1. Paus (December-January); 2. Magh (January-February); 3. Phalgun (February-March); 4. Chaitra (March-April); 5. Baisak (April-May); 6. Jaistha (May-June); 7. Ashar (June-July); 8. Srabana (July-August); 9. Bhadra (August-September); 10. Aswin (September-October); 11. Kartick (October-November); 12. Agrahayan (November-December)
11. Kartick (October-November); 12. Agrahayan (November-December)
11. Kartick (October-November); 12. Agrahayan (November-December)

mentary occupations like, hunting, fishing, procurement of wild products and rarely as wage earners. But in the agricultural season, most of the Mahali families earn their livelihood from basketry-work as well as from agricultural works, supplemented by hunting and fishing, in the majority of the cases.

## II

Knight<sup>2</sup> classifies the function of economy. Of his fivefold classification, only four functions have been considered here. These are (a) determination of output composition; (b) organisation of production; (c) distribution of production or income; and (d) provision for the future. These are the main problems of resource allocation framework. Outside this framework their lies media of exchange or money, price level and level of employment. From the foregoing description

it may be subscribed that the production of Mahali baskets or its nature and types depend on its market. The betel-leaf dealers' (consumers) preferences are communicated to the Mahalis (producers) through the basket traders (intermediaries). The purchases of Mahali baskets (goods and services) are made by the basket traders to meet the demand of the betel-leaf dealers. Hence the rise and fall of the price of the Mahali baskets and profit in its production depend on the fluctuation of the consumers' (betel-leaf dealers) wants. The betel-leaf dealers also govern the increase or decrease of the producers' output indirectly by controlling the order of the basket traders to the Mahalis. Again fall or rise in the price of baskets indicates the nature of demands of the same and direct the patterns of its production. Increase in demand of baskets is indicated by the rapid disappearance of baskets from the basket traders' godown and placement of fresh order to the Mahalis for more baskets. On the other hand decrease in demand is determined by slow disposal of baskets from the traders' godown and subsequent delay in placing fresh order. The prices are controlled on the nature of demand. Thus fluctuation in demands dictates prices of the baskets. On the basis of demand the prices of baskets are administered by the traders which are directly governed by the betel-leaf dealers' preferences. Even the sizes of the baskets are controlled by the choice of the betel-leaf dealers. Thus the production of baskets and its markets are fully responsive to the changes in betel-leaf dealers' tastes. The Mahalis (producers) make their baskets (product) only for a few betel-leaf dealers whose choices are communicated to them by the basket-traders. This market system characteristically provides the Mahalis more scope for earning of certain dependable amount which they cannot deserve by selling basketry of various types and sizes to the villagers for their domestic use. Hence the taste of the betel-leaf dealer as consumer offers a strong incentives to the Mahalis to develop a new patterns of basketry of utility which have gained betel-leaf dealers acceptance and proved profitable to them.

Production involves combination of 'factors of production' which determines the expected output. There are tripartite concepts in the economics of production: Division of labour, specialisation and exchange. In Mahali society much production is carried out by individuals and small groups like the families



of different types. Output is solely consumed by them. The Mahalis are specialised in the production of a particular type of bamboo-work and usually prepare basketry of domestic use for the villagers and also big-baskets (Jhuri) for betel-leaf dealers. In village-India occupation is tradition-bound as well as ascriptive. The specialisation of bamboo-work is monopolistic and large production is possible as the Mahalis seldom waste time moving from this ascriptive occupation to some other open occupation excepting agriculture. Though their access to agriculture certainly minimise production to certain period of the year yet this minimisation<sup>3</sup> is balanced by maximisation of production in non-agricultural season. However this monopolistic specialisation and concentration to this particular activity (bamboo work) and subsequent maximisation of production to overcome the minimisation of it in certain period make large-scale production possible which can meet the demand of the betel-leaf dealers and the basket traders. There is practically no division of labour in basketry. A man performs all the activities right from carrying the bamboo from the bamboo grove to its piecing, scraping, weaving, and even disposal of the product. Woman performs alike.

The cost of output is minimised by the efficiency of the producers and fruitful utilisation of the resources. The natural resources are green bamboos which the Mahalis carefully choose and use for preparing baskets. Bamboos are split and scraped by expert adult members of the family to avoid even minimum wastage of it. Labour is contributed by the family members. Even children of about ten or twelve contribute their labour. The time of bamboo-work is judiciously spent. Even leisure time is spent for weaving and in gossiping. Moon lit night is used for weaving. The bamboos are secured in exchange of money with prolonged bargaining. Money is scarcely invested at random. Thus utilisation of bamboo, labour, time and money involve judicial and preconceived idea of production.

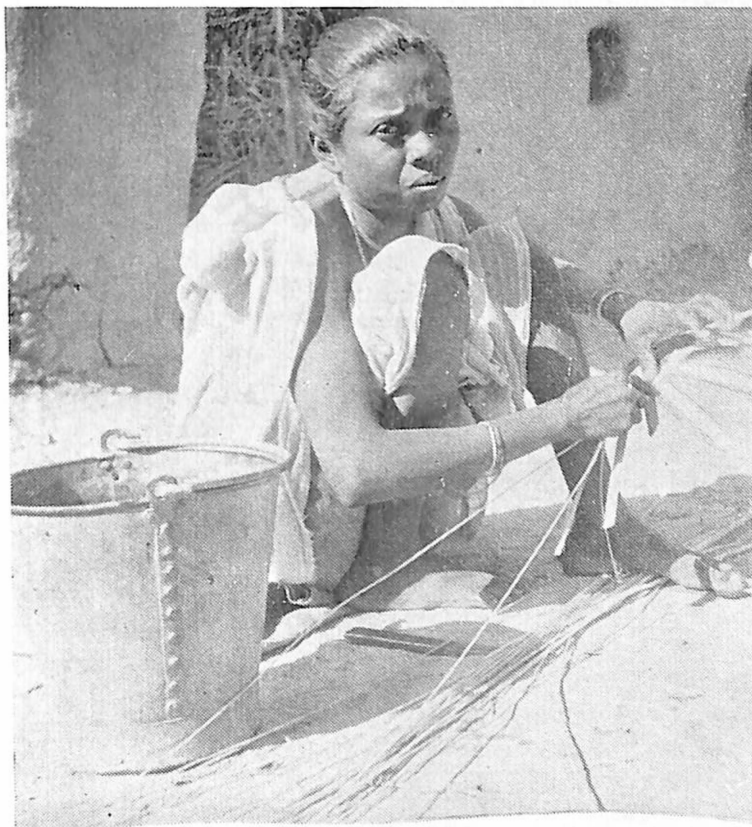
The distribution of income from basketry is confined within the family members. Each family consumes largely the products of its own labour. Most income of basketry comes in money which represents purchasing power or command over necessary goods and services available for sale. The Mahalis generally use money income to purchase paddy and other available raw ingredients necessary to their subsistence. The income

from basketry is actually consumed. The consumption on average is more than actual income and as such there is practically no saving.

Future provision includes conservation of natural resources, maintenance or replacement of existing stock of basketry and accumulation of wealth. A Mahali never gets an incentive to spare a bamboo for future use because if he fails to procure it now it may be taken by some other member of his tribe. He cannot reserve it advancing money to the bamboo-grove owner for three reasons: firstly for subsistence he cannot invest money for future needs instead of meeting the immediate needs; secondly the bamboo-owner does not agree to accept the advance as the price of the bamboo fluctuates in short run and with different purchasers; thirdly requirement of bamboo depends on the demand of baskets and available time to spend for its processing.

The maintenance of the existing stock of baskets is not worrisome to the Mahalis. Usually they dispose of their products once a week to the basket traders. In average the Mahali families can do two to two and half bundles of baskets. In dry season their maintenance is not a question only in damp weather the bamboo strips of the baskets are blackened by the growth of some fungae and become brittle which the basket traders do not purchase. Generally the Mahalis scatter the baskets in open courtyard to dry them up sufficiently to check the growth of the fungae. Besides, maintenance for future sale for future provision is out of question. Saving and accumulation of wealth are unthinkable. Most of the Mahalis belong to subsistence or below subsistence level. Only in a few families have surplus, where consumptions are less than the total productions. They invest the surplus in landed property, livestock and contingences like house repair, erection of new huts, illness, marriage in the family etc.

Exchange of a few types of basketry of domestic use takes place with the aid of barter—the direct exchange of one commodity or services for other. The essential characteristic of barter as found among the Mahalis are: (a) goods for goods, goods for services and services for services which are exchanged without the money medium (b) every transaction involves two parties i.e. either two individuals or two groups and (c) each transaction involves 'proper' or 'just' equivalence. The Mahalis exchange their basketry of domestic use for salts, pulses, mus-



Basket to earn to live from hand to mouth.



tard oils, paddy, flattened rice (Chira) fried rice (Muri), earthen pitcher, clothes, etc. Again a Mahali gets the service of a barber in exchange of a winnowing fan. The blacksmith too, sharpens the implements of basketry in exchange of a thick-sheet of basketry (Chanch) locally used for partition in the verandah or room. Again a Mahali gets help from a Santal or a Kaibartta or a Hadi in ploughing the land simply by offering his services in their fields. The near equivalence is settled among the parties involved. However, in addition to barter, the basketry of domestic use are also sold to the villagers in exchange of money. The big baskets are always sold to the basket traders in exchange of money.

But the prices are not fixed here. Hence prices are determined by competition among the sellers (Mahalis) on the one hand and buyers on the other hand. For instance the basket traders often bargain with the Mahalis and *vice versa*. The scope of bargain depends on two factors: (a) supply demand dichotomy and (b) seller-buyer relationship.

In supply-demand dichotomy three conditions crop up. Firstly, pressure falls on the Mahalis (sellers) when demand of baskets shrinks either for fall in the preference of the betel-leaf dealers or for low buying capacity of the basket traders (buyers) or for huge supply of baskets. The basket traders bargain with the Mahalis demanding reduction of price of the baskets whilst the Mahalis also offer cheap rates for ready sale and competition. Secondly, pressure falls on the basket traders (buyers) when demand of baskets increases either for consumers' preferences or attendance of large number of buyers in the market and small number of sellers or only for scanty supply of baskets. The buyers face competition when they offer a bit higher price of baskets than usual to attract the sellers. The bargain in this situation is done by the Mahalis (seller) instead of basket traders (buyer). This situation is scarce in Midnapur. Thirdly, there arise a situation where supply and demand are almost balanced. Here bargain is not involved : sales and purchases are made on the principle of buyer-seller relationship. The buyer-seller relationship involves certain amount of sacrifices on either side.

In course of transaction for years together there develops a buyer-seller relationship. There are some Mahalis who supply their baskets specifically to one or more fixed basket-traders.

As such, an extra-economic relationship is developed between them. The traders sometimes help their suppliers leasing lands in tenancy, loans in needs and in lieu, the suppliers (Mahalis) out of obligation also give them baskets in crucial needs without charging extra prices.

Thus when the Mahalis (sellers) offer usual price at the time of highest demand i.e. bright market for the sellers, the basket traders purchase the baskets in usual price at the time of huge supply but minimum demand i.e. dull market for the sellers. Thus the problem of proper or just equivalence is solved.

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## OCCUPATIONAL PATTERN : SUPPLEMENTARY

## I

The Mahalis practise agriculture as one of their avocations. Agricultural activities are only seasonal in this region and they do not depend on it to an appreciably great extent. But do such jobs only to get some paddy or rice in return for their day-to-day maintenance. It is however, theoretically possible for non-agricultural Mahalis to live largely independent of the village economy by preparing baskets for a weekly market and basket-traders. Thus basket-maker can make a living largely outside the village economy. This is however, infrequent as a weekly market does not provide the same security of livelihood that grain payments in agricultural works do, unless the market is an exceptionally big one. It is more usual for a basket-maker to sell his baskets to a weekly market simply to supplement his more certain income from sales of baskets to basket-trader, outside the village. Another alternative for supplement basket-makers' income is to take up agriculture as tenants and hired labourers within the village. The similar condition is observed by Srinivas among the basket-makers of Mysore village<sup>1</sup>. The Mahalis pursue agriculture for a few months in the year, when they stop partially their bamboo-work and find a demand of the agricultural labourers in the locality.

Very few of them possess substantial arable land, as a result of which, they have to cultivate the lands of others as tenants. Tenants are of two types : share-cropper (Bhag Chasi) where the tenant and the owner divide the crop equally, and contract cultivator (Sanja) where a fixed sum in cash or kind is paid to the owner of land after harvest as in Ramkheri<sup>2</sup> with the exception that the Mahali share-cropper has to bear all expenses including paddy seeds. Besides they (Mahalis) also engage themselves as hired agricultural labourers. Two types of labourers exist. Every year at the start of agricultural season in March-April some land-owners arrange to have a labourer for the rest of the year. Payment is made in kind or cash. They are known as seasonal labourers (Baramasi majur) and the labourer hired on

daily payment basis are called day-labourer (Din majur). The former is always at their master's command and some men condemn the loss of independence. But the advantages are year's security at a rate of pay more or less equal to what a day-labourer might expect to earn. Mayer also found two types of labourer of similar nature in Ramkheri<sup>3</sup>

The hired agricultural labourers do all sorts of agricultural operations right from the ploughing to threshing. There is no prejudice about such work amongst them. These labourers usually try to remain employed in the fields of the local people. The payment of wages to these labourers varies according to the nature of agricultural operations they undertake to do and also according to the month of working and their sex. Women and non-adult persons are given less wages than adults.

Thus it is seen that payments are made both in cash and in paddy. Cash payment is made only in case of ploughing. The Mahalis prefer payment in paddy. An older and for more general reason the Mahalis, like the Kota<sup>4</sup>, the Rampur villagers and many other Indian countrymen prefer grain payment to money payment because it makes transaction a direct and intimate one. Women are given less wages because they work for lesser time than men as also outturn of their work is lesser than that of men. The wages of labour, increase from the time of harvesting, as during such time, they have a good demand in the villages for rendering help to the agriculturists. Besides, harvesting has to be done within a stipulated period and as quickly as possible, to save the crops from destruction by natural calamities, from theft, and from inroads of animals and birds.

Labour charge falls at the time of weeding i.e. during leanest period due to less demand of the labour and in many fields, this operation requires very few labourers and it creates a labour excess. From the period of harvesting, although the price of paddy falls appreciably, but the operations are considered very urgent and as a result, labourers have to be employed on higher wages.

Non-adult boys usually participate as day-labourers with their parents and get 3 seers of paddy for their work in the agricultural lands. It is also a common practice that in addition to these payments, each labourer gets one meal usually of parched rice and molasses.

The Mahalis also participate in agricultural activities as



seasonal labourers occasionally according to the nature of contract. Women are not found to work as seasonal labourers in the villages under survey. The payment of seasonal labourers is made in two instalments. Half of the wages is given when the labourer joins his work and the other half is given at the end of the term. These types of labourers are comparatively small in number among the Mahalis (vide table 10).

The adult seasonal labourers are engaged generally for a period of six months beginning from agricultural operation like ploughing to threshing. They on an average, get between Rs. 150.00 and Rs. 200.00 for the whole season, if they are paid in cash, which however, is rarely done. But when they are paid in kind, they usually get 8 to 11 maunds of paddy for their work. Younger boys of ages from 12 to 14 are paid according to their age and ability to do such jobs. They usually get 4 to 6 maunds of paddy. Payments are made to their parents. Besides this, the employer has to bear the charges of their board, lodge and clothing (usually 1 cloth, 1 napkin and 1 *ganzi* are given) for the period i.e. the agricultural season.

Only in few cases, a few Mahalis get the advantage of cultivating land on share-crop basis. The lands are given by the local land-owning people. In the normal share-cropping agreement, the owner of the land provides only the soil. The man who takes the land must prepare it, do all the work of transplanting, weeding, harvesting, threshing and winnowing and even provide seeds. But Bailey observes two exceptions in Bisipara, the owner normally sends a representative to help at the time of harvest, mainly to see that he is not cheated and the cropper is entitled to deduct the amount of seed sown before the division of the harvest.<sup>5</sup> But among the Mahalis, after harvesting the share-cropper gives half of the total outturn of the crops to the land-owner. Straw is taken by the cultivator. The rent of land is paid by the owner of the land.

Lands are also often given on contract basis. In contract basis the land-owner's demand is made fixed and better types of lands are given to one for cultivation. The amounts fixed are usually given to the land-owners after harvest. In this case, the cultivator may make profit or loose but he must pay the quantity of paddy or amount of money which was so fixed earlier. The contract rate is largely variable and it depends on the type of land. Usually in these Mahali villages, it has been found that

it varies from 4 to 6 maunds of paddy per bigha (1 $\frac{1}{3}$ rd acre of land), when paid in kind. The most important difference between the agricultural day-labourer and the tenant is the labourer's lack of security of employment. The tenant once he acquires land, is assured of some work for at least one entire season. In contrast, the agricultural day-labourer has often to seek employment from day to day. Just before the commencement of agricultural season one can see landless Mahalis are waiting on the house of the land-owners and approaching them for a small plot of land on share-cropping basis or contract basis. Failing in these they may request the land-owners that they may be provided some work in their own lands. Among the Adi-Dravida Beteille also finds the similar condition in Sripuram.<sup>6</sup>

The Mahalis who possess land, cultivate it by their own agricultural implements. Most of the cultivating families have ploughs, bullocks, and other necessary implements. Those who have no such implements, hire these from other Mahalis or from other people of the village with whom they have good terms.

Let us now consider, how much land on average a Mahali family cultivates under the share-cropping system or on contract basis and how much government owned khas land and personally possessed land a Mahali family cultivates. These data have been given from the last year's (1966) record.

The table 17 indicates that in 1966, a total of 146 families cultivated 301 bighas of land i.e. on average each family cultivated 2.08 bighas of land on share-cropping system. Again 101 families cultivated land on contract basis i.e. on average 3.12 bighas of land. A man gives his land to a share-cropper or to contract cultivators because he is unable to work himself. Very occasionally a rich man allows a Mahali as a favour to share-crop a field, but usually it is necessity which drives the owner to let some one else do the work. A well-to-do caste family commonly allows to be share-cropped only those fields which lie in a village at a distance for cultivation by him or his servants. In Bisipara an identical situation is observed by Bailey.<sup>7</sup> Cultivation of government owned khas land is done by 42 families and they cultivate land of 112 bighas i.e. on average 2.47 bighas. Only 205 families possessed personal land and total amount of land they cultivated is 457 bighas i.e. on average of 2.00 bighas. There are four ways by which a person can earn an income from agriculture other than owning land. These four are share-cropping, cultiva-

TABLE—17  
Cultivation of different classes of land and the family

Class of land	No. of families	No. of individuals participated in cultivation from families	Total quantity of land cultivated in bighas*	Average land cultivated in bighas
1. Cultivation on share-cropping system	146	291	301	2.08
2. Cultivation on contract basis	101	285	316	3.12
3. Cultivation of government owned khas land	42	82	112	2.47
4. Cultivation of personally possessed land	205	308	451	2.20

tion of others' land on contract basis, cultivation of government owned khas and work of agricultural labourers. But in Bisipara there are only three ways, share-cropping, plough-service and casual labour.<sup>8</sup>

In the table 17, it is also indicated how many individuals cultivate the said quantity of land. Of course, some of the individuals are the helping hands of their parents and husbands. But they have been included as participants only to assess co-operative efforts of the Mahalis for cultivation of land. The table 17 also signifies that the Mahalis cultivate less land on share-cropping than other classes of land. It has already been mentioned that very few of them possess substantial arable land and so they cultivate land on share-cropping and other ways. The neighbouring castes prefer to offer more land on contract basis than that of share-cropping as share-cropping system involves many risks on their part. Procuring of paddy share from the cultivator after harvest becomes difficult for them as most of the cultivator conceal the nett outturn of the cultivation and

\* One bigha is almost equal to one-third of an acre.

also make part payment so the land-owner has a great chance of deprivation of correct share. In contrast in the contract basis of cultivation this risk in the part of the land-owner is less. The majority of the Mahalis who are engaged in agriculture land owned by others and this constitutes the basis of economic and social ties between the different classes of people in the village. There is a considerable circulation of personnel between the different agricultural classes. A man who is a tenant one year may and sometimes does become an owner-cultivator next year. Similarly the agricultural labourer may be transformed into a tenant and vice versa. An identical scene is seen by Beteille in Sripuram<sup>9</sup>.

It has already been mentioned that the Mahalis work as day-labourer, seasonal labourer, share-cropper and contract cultivator in the lands of the neighbouring people. They work in the lands of tribes and castes of their own villages as well as adjacent villages.

As regards day-labourer out of 454 individuals in 1966, 424 worked in the fields of caste people like Brahman (44 individuals), Kayastha (33), Baidya (29), Vaisnab (31), Karan (38), Sadgop (34), Raju (65), Mahisya (72), Solanki (33), Kaibartta (21), Tanti (6), Kumar (7), Jele (6),\* Tambuli (13) and Moira (16). Among these 424 persons 95 persons had to go in search of employment to the adjacent villages. The rest of the labourers got employment in the same village. Thirty persons did the job of day-labourers in the fields of the tribes like Bhumija (21 individuals) and Santals (9). Among these 30 persons only 5 persons had to go to adjacent villages for this job.

In respect of seasonal labourers 25 persons were seen to work in the house of Brahman (2 individuals), Vaisnab (3), Mahisya (5), Raju (7), Sadgop (3), Solanki (4) and Tambuli (1).

The Mahali families who cultivate land on share-crop system took over land for the purpose in 1966 from the caste group like Brahman (17 Mahali families cultivate land), Vaisnab (13), Baidya (14), Kayastha (12), Karan (10), Mahisya (16), Raju (19), Sadgop (13), Solanki (3) and Tanti (6).

\* In parenthesis No. of total individuals have been mentioned.

Kumar (3), Jele (2), Tambuli (9), Moira (3), Bhumija (4) and Santals (2).\*

Similarly cultivation on contract basis also involved economic interaction with the above caste and tribal groups. The important part played by the Mahalis in the processes of agriculture as 'free' or unattached labour is a feature of the agrarian class structure<sup>10</sup>. Brahmans and well-to-do non-Brahmans depend largely on the labour of tribals like Mahalis, Bhumijas, Santals and Koras of the area for most of the physical work associated with tillage. The higher caste economically better off section invest their lands more on share-cropping and contract cultivation than other lower castes. Brahman land-owners engage tenants from non-Brahmans as well as Mahalis. Often the non-Brahman tenant of a Brahman land-owner engages Mahali labourers to cultivate the land he has taken on lease. A complex set of ties thus bind together the Brahmans, non-Brahmans and the Mahalis of the village in a web of economic interdependence. In Sripuram Beteille also sees a similar complex set of ties thus bind together the Brahmans, non-Brahmans and the Adi-Dravidas<sup>11</sup>.

The details of lands they possess have been given in the table 18 on village and family basis.

From the table 18 it can be said that out of 404 families, 199 or 49.26% families are landless and only 205 families possess personal land i.e. nearly 50.74% of the families possess land. Again only 451 bighas of land are possessed by these 205 families which means that these land possessing families on average possess about 2.20 bighas of land. Only 13 or 3.22% families possess 10 or more bighas of land. Eleven or 2.27% families have land measuring 5 bighas or more, whereas 25 or 6.17% families possess 3 bighas or more each. Fiftyone or 12.64% families have 1 bigha or more land, while 105 or 25.99% families possess lands measuring less than one bigha. It was seen that these 205 families possess 276 bighas of low land or wet land† and 175 bighas of high or dry land‡.

For agricultural operations a few tools are necessary.

\*In parenthesis number of families have been recorded.

† The price of the low land varies from Rs. 700/- to Rs. 1000/- per bigha.

‡ The price of the high land varies from Rs. 300/- to Rs. 500/- per bigha.

**TABLE—18**  
**Land-holding (cultivable) of Mahalis**

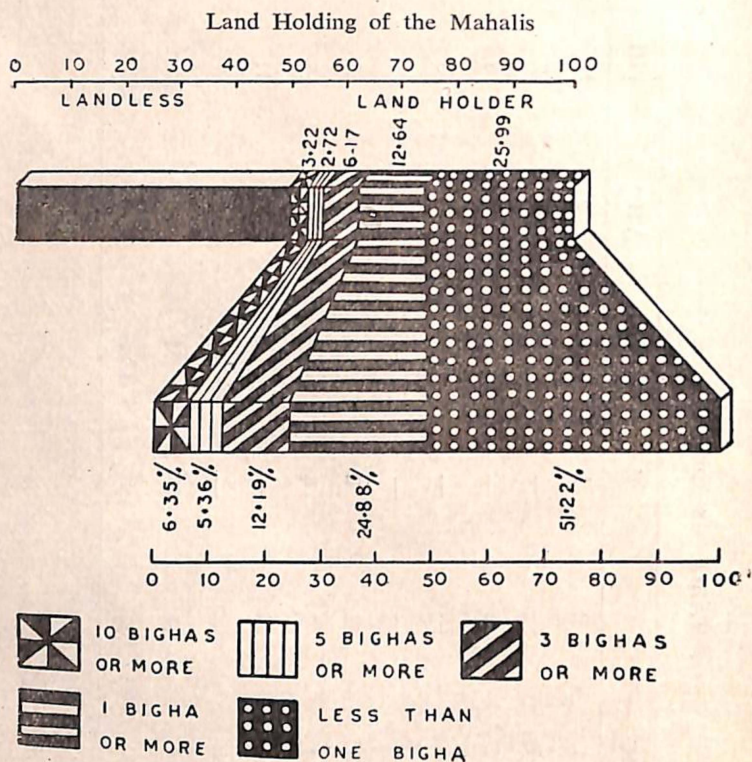
Name of villages	Total No. of families	Land owned in Bighas * by the families					No. of families pos- sessed land	Landless
		10 bighas or more	5 bighas or more	3 bighas or more	1 bigha or more	Less than 1 bigha		
I	II	III	IV	V	VI	VII	VIII	IX
1. Kotai (includ.)	31	1	2	3	3	7	16	15
2. Bhadrakali	13	—	—	—	2	4	6	7
3. Bankatala	6	—	—	—	—	2	2	4
4. Chotamatkatpur	12	—	—	1	1	3	5	7
5. Amidangar	12	—	—	—	2	3	5	7
6. Nilambarpur	4	—	—	—	2	2	4	—
7. Ektal	13	—	—	—	2	5	7	6
8. Kanjipara	18	—	2	—	2	4	8	10
9. Panchrol	22	—	—	1	3	7	11	11
10. Jayrampur	17	—	—	2	3	4	9	8
11. Ganjipur	15	3	1	3	5	—	12	3
12. Tilabani	14	1	—	3	—	7	11	3
13. Pirot	15	—	—	2	3	4	9	6
14. Aguibani	12	—	—	—	3	4	7	5
15. Phatikchua	14	—	—	—	—	7	7	7
16. Kuldiha	17	—	—	3	2	4	9	8

\* 1 Bigha = 50 Decimal,

TABLE—18 (Contd.)

I	II	III	IV	V	VI	VII	VIII	IX
17. Jhilinga	20	1	2	1	4	3	11	9
18. Baghuansol	22	1	—	—	3	5	9	13
19. Gurigot	15	—	—	—	3	5	8	7
20. Bhallukkulla	13	—	—	—	—	5	5	8
21. Bhankisol	11	—	—	—	—	3	3	8
22. Chaukaphra	26	1	2	2	3	—	8	18
23. Dhumsai	28	2	2	4	2	5	15	13
24. Guriansol	18	3	—	—	3	5	11	7
25. Kenduasuli	16	—	—	—	—	7	7	9
Total	404	13	11	25	51	105	205	199
Percentage	100.00	3.22	2.72	6.17	12.64	25.99	50.74	49.26

These are garden spade, hoe for removing weeds, plough of Bengal type and a leveller. These agricultural tools are generally purchased from the local market. These are prepared by the



blacksmith of the locality. A few of the Mahalis have bullock-carts which have two wheels and are largely made of wood and split bamboo. It is used for carrying paddy from the agricultural field. Of course, bamboo baskets for sales are also carried on this cart.

The Mahalis primarily cultivate paddy, but its harvest takes place at different periods of the year. One variety is reaped in the month of Bhadra-Aswin (September-October), which is known as 'Aus' crop, whereas the other is harvested in the month of Agrahayan (November-December) and is known as 'Aman' crop. The cultivation of these two types start just after the advent of monsoon. The 'Aus' crop is cultivated by very few families those who cultivate 'Aus' crop cultivate it generally on high land.



The prevalent method of cultivation is broadcasting though transplantation is not at all unknown to them. In low land they usually prefer the broadcasting method. Manuring is done by a very few Mahali families. Native manure of kitchen refuse and cowdung are decomposed in the manure pit, attached to every household. Rain-water is the only source of irrigation of the fields. The average cost of cultivation of paddy per bigha of land in Mahali villages varies widely from family to family. The cost is appreciably less than that incurred by the non-Mahali\* families. Because most of the Mahalis do not use improved manure and irrigation water, and devote less time for weeding, ploughing, etc. as a whole, they practise crude agricultural methods, so also the yield is less than that obtained by other non-Mahali people.

In broadcasting method the first ploughing (Ugal chas) is done at the beginning of the month of Chaitra (April-May) after a few showers. Second ploughing is done with 6" deep furrow. To save the bullocks from strain, the Mahalis always try to avoid large number of turns in the field. Levelling is done after ploughing.

The next operation is sowing of seeds on the entire bed, after which a fresh ploughing is done immediately and the plot is levelled by means of a leveller. The next operation is the ploughing, which is known as 'Karan', when the plants are about 6" in height. After the ploughing the field is levelled by a leveller. As a result the plants are more or less uniformly distributed in the field with subsequent removal of weeds. Sometimes, a few plants are destroyed due to this ploughing and subsequent levelling. So their places are again filled up by transplanting new plants which have grown profusely at one place in a cluster. Then casual weeding takes place. As the rain water is sufficient and the bed retains sufficient water at that time, there is no need for waiting for the accumulation of water trickling down from the Bandh (embankment) to the bed through contrived channels.

Cultivation of low land by transplantation is more or less similar with a little variation. The first ploughing is started in the month of Ashar (early part of July) and the second plough-

\* Non-Mahali term includes caste people of economically better section and the tribal groups like the Santals and the Bhumijas of the locality.

ing is done after 5 to 8 days of it. Levelling is accompanied with ploughing. The third ploughing is done after a few days to convert the bed into thick mud. It is also levelled at that time. Next, transplantation is done on that day or the day after. The paddy plants are removed from the nursing bed and transplanted in rows. Day by day, as the plants gain height, the quantity of water is regulated in suitable cases by allowing more to come inside the plot. The whole of the month of Sravana (August-September) is utilised for this purpose. Weeding is done in the month of Bhadra (September) and the grains are harvested in the month of Agrahayan and early part of Paus (November-December and December-January respectively).

TABLE—19  
Cost of cultivation of a Bigha of land.

Items	Cost of production	
	Low land (transplantation)	
1. Seed	5 kg.	2.50
2. Repairing of implements		2.00
3. Rent		1.00
4. Manure		
5. Approximate cost of food on working days		9.50
6. Ploughing		
(i) Seed-bed	1 labour unit	2.00
(ii) Transplantation-bed	6 labour unit	15.00
7. Preparing dikes	2 labour unit	3.00
8. Sowing and immediate ploughing	1 labour unit	1.25
9. Wet ploughing	Not done	
10. Uprooting seedlings from seed bed and transplantation	5 labour units	8.00
11. Gachan	Not done	
12. Weeding	4 labour units	6.40
13. Harvesting	4 labour units	7.20
14. Binding the harvested paddy into bunches	3 labour units	5.40
15. Carrying bunches to the threshing floor	2 labour units	3.60
16. Threshing	4 labour units	6.20
17. Winnowing and storing	3 labour units	3.00
Total		76.05

Women also take part in all agricultural operations with men, excepting in ploughing, levelling and in preparing dikes.

The average costs involved in cultivation by transplantation method in low land has been shown in the table 19. The cost of labour in transplantation is more than that of broadcasting and for this reason, they do not follow this method generally. The cause of this excess expenditure is the additional amount, they have to invest for preparing a seed-bed. Besides, for the higher rate that is charged by the labourers in wet-ploughing and for more physical strain involved in this process than in actual transplantation, they practise broadcasting, because the profit in Sol land (wet land) is good, when it is cultivated by broadcast method, as the fertility of the land is better, being situated in the lowest level and the yield is good as rain water brings some soil wash due to erosion from the upper level and thus increase the fertility of the soil.

The figures in the table 20 subscribe reasons of their disinclination or apathy towards transplantation, which they do not

TABLE—20  
Usual outturn (if rainfall is favourable)

Type of land	Method of cultivation	Price of total yield		Cost of production
		Paddy	Straw	
Low land	a) Broadcast	5½ mds. (571 lb) @ Rs. 18.00 per md. = Rs. 103.50	12 pans or ½ kahan* = Rs. 12.00	Rs. 65.00
	b) Trans-plantation	6½ mds. (533 lb) @ Rs. 18.00 per md. = Rs. 117.00	16 pans or 1 kahan = Rs. 16.00	Rs. 76.05

practise on account of higher cost as well as not getting much greater outturn than in broadcast method. Under the system of share-cropping, the nett cash earned by a man from a bigha of low land is nearly Rs. 25.00 only. But the actual expenditure that has to be incurred to get the above outturn cultivating in broadcast method amounts to Rs. 65.00. Therefore the cultivator is not able to get back even half the amount he invested. But in actual practice, no money is spent for such cultivation

\* One kahan is 1280 smaller bundles of straw.

by the Mahalis, as the family members do all these works and none of whom are paid.

The crops grown in the fields are mainly disposed of, in the following ways, e.g. keeping seeds for the next sowing, family consumption and repayment of loan. Paddy is not sold for cash, unless there is an emergency.

It is seen that the paddy is the staple crop and the main source of income from cultivation is paddy. Barring this, almost in all the families a few pieces of land are cultivated at the back of the houses, which consist of 3 to 5 decimals on average. These are kitchen-gardens of the families concerned. In these kitchen-gardens different kinds of vegetables, fruit plants, and spices are grown. The total output is mainly consumed in family and a little quantity is sold or disposed of, to the local people, either in the market or in the village if there is surplus.

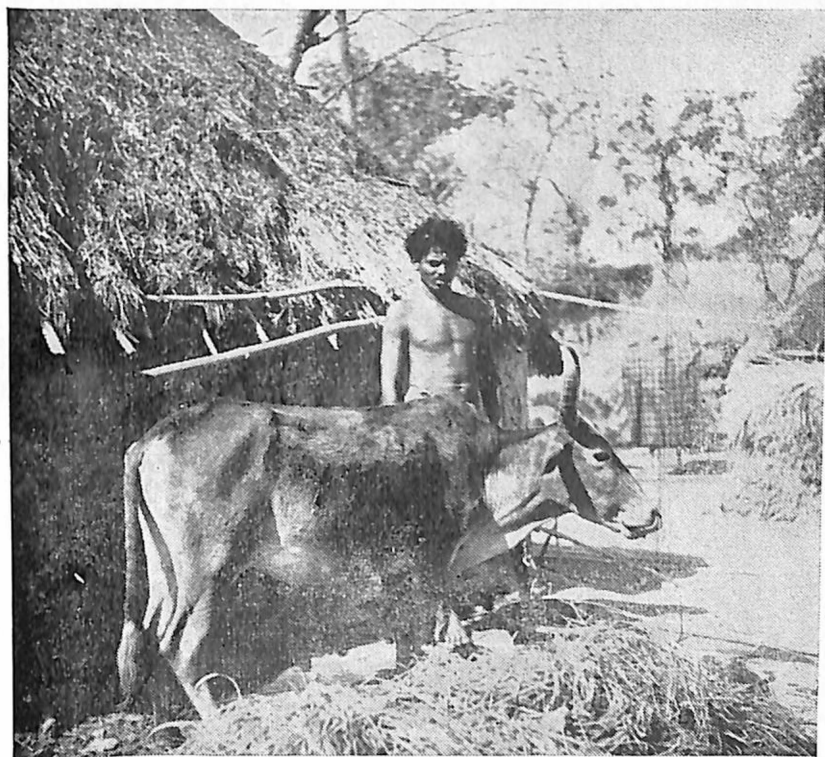
These garden crops comprise mainly of onion, garlic, brinjal, tomato, gourd, ladies finger, chillies, cauliflower (in small numbers) and various kinds of vegetables like Lal note (*Amaranthus tristis*), Puisak (*Basella rubra*), Radish (*Raghanus sativus*), Jhinga (*Lufa acutangula*) Shim (*Dolichos lablab*), etc. and the fruits are mainly guava, wood-apple, bel (*Aegle marmelos*) tamarind, mango (found in a very few families) etc.

Certain operations are strictly restricted to men, e.g. ploughing, levelling, sowing, preparing dikes and channels with the hoe, etc.

Some operations are done mainly by women, e.g. husking and winnowing of the husked paddy. A few operations are done commonly both by men and women, e.g. uprooting and transplanting seedlings, weeding, harvesting, carrying the harvested paddy from the field to the husking floor, threshing, etc. There is taboo for women to touch the plough. The Mahali belief is that if a woman touches a plough and if anybody ploughs his field with that, it will not yeild any crop and there will be no rain.

The household, which in the majority of the cases, is a simple family, is the production unit that organises production of paddy in the field. However, in a few cases it is found that two closely related agnatic families residing in the same village having separate hearths, also work together and the cost of production has been minimised thereby.

In several cases, reciprocal aid is given by two or more



"I look after my bullock and in return it draws the plough to bring cash to me".



families, who habitually help one another in ploughing, transplanting and harvesting operations. This co-operation is based on the consideration that agnatic kins living in proximity in a hamlet and close relatives living in the same or adjacent villages or having ceremonial friendship should help one another.

## II

Livestock are one of the important subsidiary source of income in the Mahali economy. Each Mahali family has a number of hens and cocks. A few families have also bullocks and cows. Many of them have a number of goats, ducks and a few families herd swine. The Mahalis place considerable significance and emphasis on having as large a livestock as possible. Some of the advantages of having a large stock are obvious. They represent a form of wealth that is not easily frittered away, but tends to increase as years pass.

In the Mahali families, fowls that are reared, are consumed in the household. In festivals and rituals a large number of fowls are normally sacrificed to appease their deities and ancestral spirits as the fear of incurring their wrath without such sacrifices regulates their life considerably. The killing of fowl in honour of guests is an important part of their social customs. One may expect to find in a Mahali family at least four or five occasions, in a year, in which one or more fowl are killed for celebration or entertainment purposes. At least in this respect, they economise their expenses keeping fowl in large numbers. Again cock-fight is an attractive and enjoyable pastime in the society. They participate in it at least once in every week, from the month of October to February. The winner in each fight gains the defeated cock of the other contestant, which in money value is about Rs. 8/- to Rs. 15/-. Some of the Mahalis occasionally sell their good cocks to the local tribal people who want to secure such cocks during the season of cock-fight. Fowls are also sold to the local people. The eggs are not usually consumed at home. These are sold in the market for cash. Ducks are also kept by the Mahalis for taking their meat in times of need or on ceremonial occasions, or during entertainment of guests as part of their diet of special menu. Eggs of ducks are also sold to neighbouring castes either in the market or in the village.

Pigs are kept by a few families for taking its flesh and

serving it on ceremonial occasions or in gathering of friends and guests in their houses. Besides, the swine they rear are regularly purchased by the Santals from them.

Goats are sold sometimes to outsiders who sell these animals to others and a few are kept for offering as sacrifice for appeasement of their deities and ancestral spirits in fulfilment of vows or on ceremonial occasions. Sometimes the goats are sold at a good price to the neighbouring castes people or persons who trade in these. The goats are however of very poor breed.

Bullocks are kept by some cultivator families for ploughing the land and those who have bullock-carts. By ploughing others' fields the Mahalis earn a small amount of money in the agricultural season. Besides the neighbours of both caste and tribal groups like Dom, Tanti, Kumar, Moira, Bhumi, Santal and others who have no bullocks, hire them from the Mahalis in times of need.

Possession of cows and calves is rare among the Mahalis. Only those who have cows, earn by selling the milk to the neighbours in the village or in the market, although occasionally a few families also take milk in small quantities. The table 21 shows the varieties and number of livestock possessed by the Mahalis on family basis.

TABLE—21  
Livestock owned by Mahali families

Livestock	No.	No. of families possessing livestock		Average ownership per family
		No.	%	
Bullocks	162	86	21.28	1.88
Cows	25	25	6.81	1.00
Calves	31	31	7.67	1.00
Goats	192	176	43.56	1.09
Ducks	176	121	29.95	1.45
Fowls	1256	404	100.00	3.10
Pigs	172	65	16.09	2.64

The table 21 shows that bullocks are kept only by 86 families, i.e. 21.28% families. Cows are kept only by 25 families i.e. 6.31% families. Thirtyone or 7.67% families have



calves. Goats are found in 176 families i.e. in 43.56% families. Ducks are owned by 121 i.e. 29.95% families, whereas fowls are possessed in good number by each family, the average of which per family is 3.10%. Pigs are also kept by 65 families and the ownership is only 16.09%. In a few families, each category of these livestock are found and in some others, only one or two categories.

A few better-off families possess livestock of mixed types.

TABLE 22  
Mixed type of livestock owned by Mahali families

Combination of livestock variety	No. of families
1. Bullocks, cows, goats, ducks, fowls and pigs	2
2. Bullocks, goats and fowls	34
3. Bullocks, calves and fowls	31
4. Calves, goats, fowls and ducks	36
5. Goats, pigs and fowls	26
6. Cows, goats, pigs and fowls	21
7. Fowl, goats and ducks	33
8. Fowls and ducks	83

Thus it is seen from the table 22 that only 2 families possess all types of livestock and a few families with varieties of combinations as indicated in the table 22.

### III

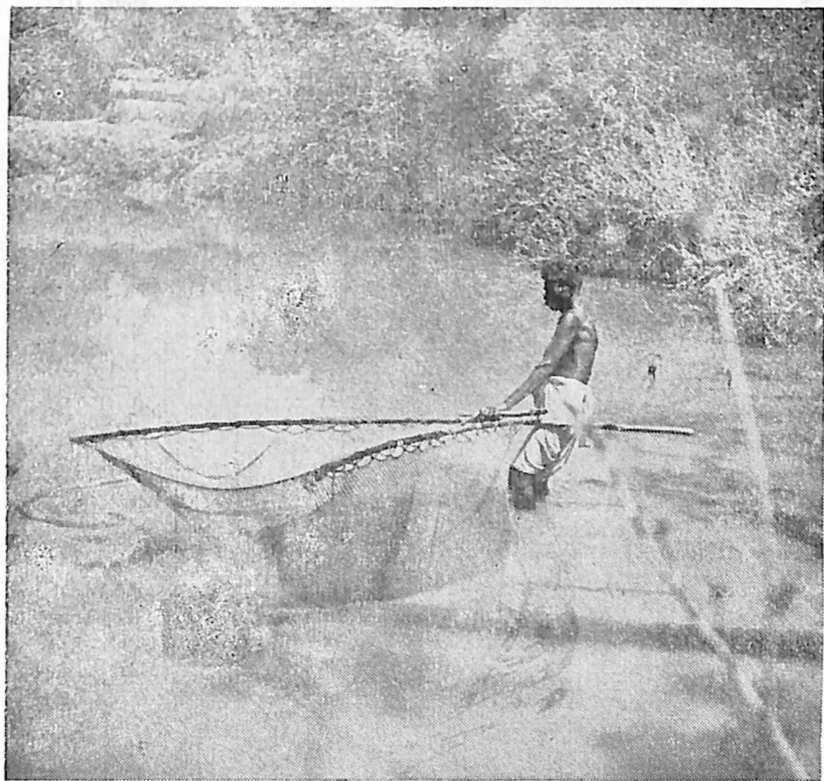
Hunting is done more as sports than as a means of livelihood and provides an exciting diversion from the monotony of daily life. The Mahalis have bows, bolts and arrows, and different varieties of traps and snares for catching birds and hares. Boys of about 10 to 15 are more adept in the use of traps and snares and they usually go out for hunting in a group of 4 to 5, to catch birds and small games, which replenish their edible dishes very often.

Similarly, in rainy season or autumn, the Mahalis, including young boys and children catch plenty of small fishes from the paddy fields. When the catch is abundant, they sell a quantity of fishes to their prosperous neighbours. Where there are many tanks and water sources they catch these fishes throughout the year. Particularly at the end of the winter, in the

scorching heat of the sun, when the water of the ponds dry up, with the permission of the owners of the ponds, they get down into the shallow water, to catch fishes in groups. The females also participate in such catches and get a good share of the catch. Apart from this, the young boys and girls catch small fishes of the local varieties like Koi (*Anabas teosdineus*), Magur (*Clarias batrachus*), Singi (*Heteopheustes fassilis*) Lata (*Ophicephalus punctatus*), Puti (*Pustius ticto*), Chang (*Channa gachua*) etc. from the paddy fields, with hook and rod. The Mahalis use two types of hand-nets, namely Chabijal and Chaknijal and a cast-net like Jhakijal. Use of the Chabijal and Jhakijal requires much physical strength and skill. These are only used by males. The children and females use Chaknijal. In shallow muddy water, catching of fish by bare hands is a common practice. They often use basket-traps of bamboo locally known as Ghuni. These are placed against the water current either in paddy fields or in streams. Small fishes enter into this trap through the valved mouth with water current and cannot go out, due to its valve action. Most of the fishes are consumed in the family. But generally when catches are abundant a portion are sold to local people and some are made sun-dried and taken to the market where they can be sold to other tribal and a few lower-caste people.

#### IV

Procurement or collection of wildy grown produce sometimes occupy a significant place in the Mahali economy especially among those who live in the jungle area. A Mahali, whenever finds an opportunity, goes out for collecting fire wood. They generally collect dry branches of trees and prepare head-loads of such bundles of faggots and carry these to their huts for domestic use. Such forest resources are however not available for general use. In the scrub jungles of the vicinity, they have only limited scope of collecting firewood. Besides they also go out with a hoe or a garden spade to collect a few varieties of edible yams or tubers from these scrub jungles for their own consumption. During the course of enquiry it is found that every menu of their food is supplemented by various kinds of leafy and non-leafy vegetables. Most of them are jungle products. Among the leafy vegetables, leaves of Kalmi (*Ipomea*



"Fish often brings delicacy to my dishes."



*reptans*), Sajna (*Moringa pterygosperma*), Gima (*Moluga spergula*), Punannaba (*Boerhaavia repens*), Hinche (*Enhydra fluctuans*), Kata note (*Amaranthus spinosa*), Arum (*Colocarea antiquorum*) and Oal (*Amorphophalus campanulatus*) are commonly used. A few kinds of wild edible roots and tubers are almost daily used in their food preparation. Around the village, there are a few fruit bearing trees, Mango (*Mangifera indica*) and Jamkul (*Eugenia jambolana*), Chalta (*Dillenia indica*) these are consumed in large quantities by the village boys, most in unripe condition. Children in groups, often go to pluck wild plums, Amra (*Spondias mangifera*) in its season. These are mostly eaten up by them on the spot. Wild green-figs are collected by the Mahalis which occasionally enrich their vegetable dishes. Children often collect ripe figs and eat them with a relish. Tender tamarind leaves and ripe Kadh bel (*Feronia elephantum*) are also collected by the Mahalis and consumed in their household very often.

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## ECONOMIC BALANCE : MACROVIEW

## I

We can assess the efficiency of Mahali economy against the three classes of demands, which it must satisfy, e.g. firstly, the primary necessities of livelihood (food, shelter, clothing), including the working capital on which production depends like, purchase of tools for basketry and its raw materials, land and seed-grains for cultivation, livestock and fodder for animals and birds and some surplus funds to be spent on financing family labour; secondly—obligatory expenses like giving of bride-price, gifts to relations on ceremonial occasion, making sacrifices for cure from certain crises of life, appeasement of deities and payment to specialists for treatment of diseases or for exorcising spirits; thirdly—for meeting certain voluntary but institutionalised expenses designed to enhance individual prestige, like subscribing for communal festivals and village festivals etc.

The final category of demands and the intermediate position between necessities and voluntary expenses as spending for construction of residential huts, buying more expensive and impressive clothes or ornaments or footwear, etc. or in other words, on the luxuries of life must be determined.

The obligatory customary expenses are to some extent elastic. The scale of gifts or feasts for relations vary with economic means of the individual; sacrifices can be postponed if sufficient livestock are not available at the moment and if the father is unable to give the full bride-price—the onus for payment then devolves on other relatives or the young bridegroom himself. Thus it is seen that the primary “economic necessities” can be regarded as rigid economic demands. The standards of these primary necessities as conceived by the people, are strikingly lower in comparison to other local social groups.

The extent to which the economy of an individual or a family is able to balance its wants, can be divided into three different economic levels, e.g. ‘below-subsistence’, ‘subsistence’ and ‘above-subsistence’ level, which contains them into certain

comprehensive economic stratification (non-institutionalised) of the society.

Out of 404 families, to cite concrete and elaborate illustrations, the domestic budget of 200 families have been recorded by the author. Income and expenditure in all the levels of economy indicate large variations, from family to family, and the picture of these have been given here on average basis.

The Mahalis have been categorised under three different levels of standards of living as it is already stated. These divisions are not very clearly demarcated and very difficult to differentiate them on the basis of standards of living. These distinctions in levels of livelihood are mainly based on difference in earning and consumption norms. It may be generally said that those families which incur excess expenditure than earning every month and have to depend on loans, are regarded as belonging to 'below-subsistence level', those which have no surplus and the expenditure is about the same as the monthly earning are regarded as belonging to 'subsistence level', and those which have surplus in their budget, are regarded as belonging to 'above-subsistence level.' The average family unit\* is 6 in most of the Mahali families.

TABLE—23  
Income of the individual families per annum and average labour unit per family

Income group in rupees	Families surveyed (200)						Total
	Below subsistence	Average labour unit	Subsistence	Average labour unit	Above subsistence	Average labour unit	
600—700	12	2.0	—	—	—	—	12
701—800	15	2.5	7	2.7	—	—	22
801—900	13	2.9	10	2.9	—	—	23
901—1000	12	3.1	13	3.0	3	3.2	28
1001—1050	14	3.9	11	3.2	2	3.9	27
1051—1100	13	4.0	7	3.9	5	4.2	25
1101—1200	12	5.0	5	4.0	7	4.9	24
1201—1300	11	5.0	8	5.1	5	5.3	24
1301—1400	—	—	4	5.6	7	5.6	11
1401—1500	—	—	—	—	4	5.8	4
Total	102		65		33		200

\* Family unit considered : Adult male = 1: Adult female = .8:  
Adolescent = .6; Children = .4.

According to these classifications, out of a total 200 families, 102 families belong to 'below-subsistence', 65 families to 'subsistence' and only 33 families to the 'above-subsistence' levels.

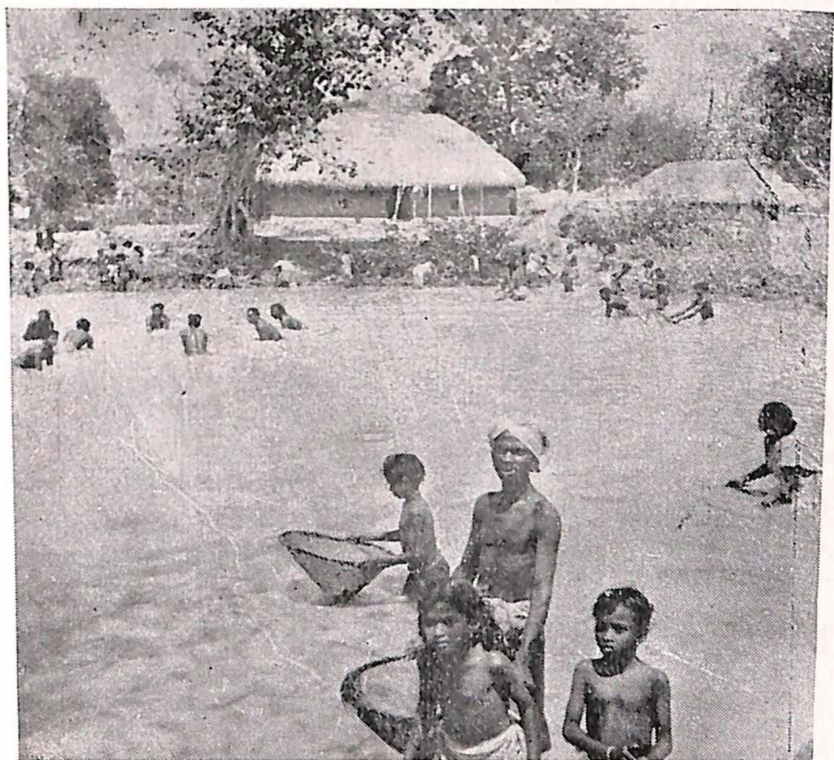
The table 23 indicates that out of 102 families, belonging to 'below-subsistence' level, 12 families have income between Rs. 600/- and Rs. 700/-. The average labour unit is 2.0. The income increases in the families where the labour unit increases. Similarly, in other two economic levels, the income also increases with steady increase of labour units in the families concerned. Thus when we come to maximum income level between Rs. 1,301-1,400 and Rs. 1,401-1,500, in the 'above-subsistence' level, the labour unit also goes upto 5.6 and 5.8 persons per family, belonging both to labour force and non-labour force categories. Thus it may be concluded that higher income in their society is dependent on the number of labour units. These labour units are all family members.

The data on consumers' economics that have been collected from the Mahali families, will reveal their family budgets i.e. the relation between income and expenditure. The average income and expenditure patterns of the Mahali families on different items, based on family budgets of 1966 of a total of 200 families representing the three levels of living stated above, will indicate in the table 24, their income and expenditure patterns and consumption norms on average percentage basis.

From the table 24 it is clear that in each successive lower level, the percentage of income from bamboo-work increases with gradual decrease of income from agricultural pursuits, which indicates that in agricultural season the families of "above-subsistence level" remain engaged in agricultural productions, more than the families of other two economic levels. In "above subsistence level" income from cultivation of own land is much greater due to their possession of such lands in larger quantity than the families of other two successive levels. So they have to resort to agricultural pursuits more than the other two levels. As a result their income from basketry in the season of agriculture, decreases which is the cause of lesser percentage of income in basketry than the other two levels.

But income from share-cropping and contract cultivation in 'subsistence level' is the highest. The reason is that they look for more land on these two systems as their personal possession is small. But this percentage again falls in the 'below subsist-





Fishing together.



**TABLE—24**  
Income of Mahali families on average (Total family 200).

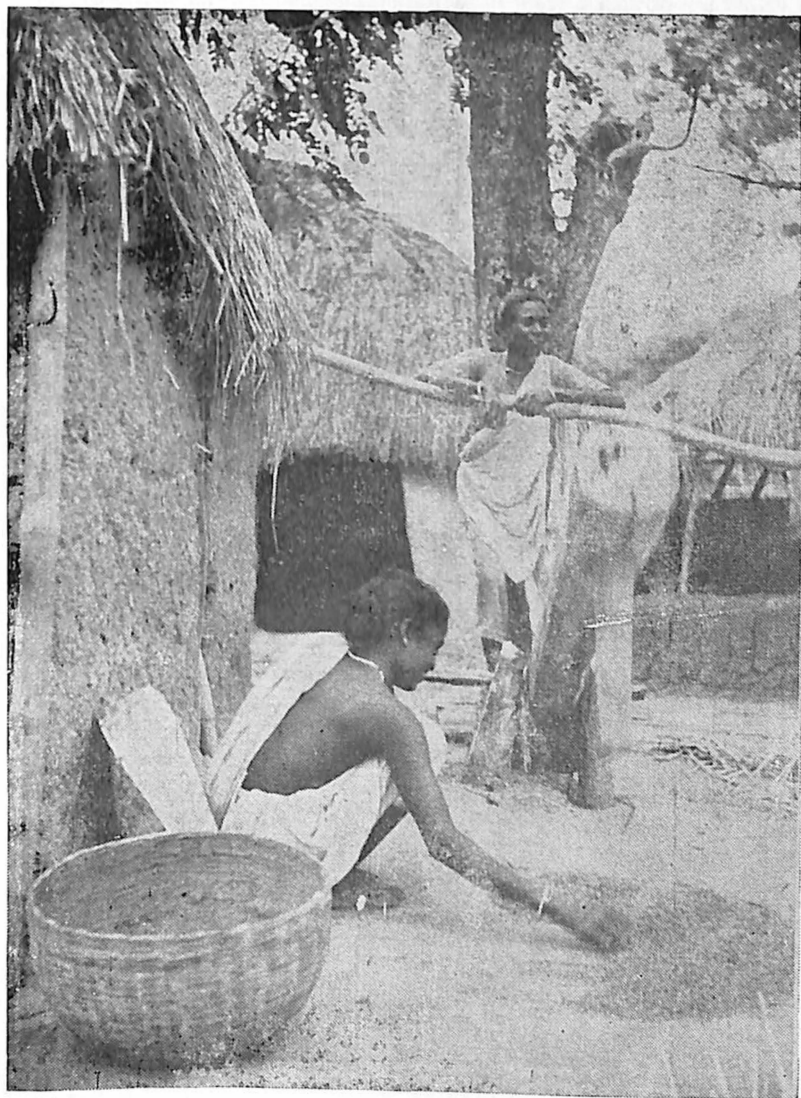
Economic level	Income from bamboo-work	Income from agriculture	Income from share-cropping and working as contract cultivator	Income from the job of day-labourer and seasonal labourer	Wage earner	Income from livestock	Income from fishing	Income from hunting	Income from collection of wild products	Total income
1. Above subsistence level (total number of families 33) Percentage	Rs. 837.00 56.00	Rs. 224.00 15.00	Rs. 209.30 14.00	Rs. 44.95 3.00	—	Rs. 87.70 6.00	Rs. 74.75 4.00	Rs. 14.95 1.00	Rs. 14.95 1.00	Rs. 1495.00 100.00
2. Subsistence level (total number of families 65) Percentage	Rs. 822.00 60.00	Rs. 82.20 6.00	Rs. 246.60 18.00	Rs. 54.80 4.00	—	Rs. 68.50 5.00	Rs. 56.00 4.09	Rs. 21.00 1.53	Rs. 23.00 1.68	Rs. 1370.00 100.00
3. Below subsistence level (total number of families 102) percentage	Rs. 828.75 65.00	Rs. 26.52 2.08	Rs. 63.75 5.00	Rs. 120.36 9.44	Rs. 38.25 3.00	Rs. 39.65 3.11	Rs. 87.13 6.05	Rs. 26.52 2.08	Rs. 52.02 4.08	Rs. 1275.00 100.00

ence' level, because the families of this level do not want to take the risk of expenses, incurred in share-cropping and contract cultivation, in which cases, they have to bear the expenses of seed-grains and the land-owners as such, do not take the risk of giving them land on that basis, lest they should fail to collect their due. So they resort to the job of agricultural day-labourer or seasonal labour, and we find that the percentage of income from these sources in 'below subsistence level' is greater than that of other two levels. However, it is apparent from the table 24 that the families of 'lower economic level' cling more to the bamboo-work than agriculture, as they possess very little or no land of their own or cannot cultivate on share-cropping and on contract basis for lack of means, and as a result, percentage of income from bamboo-work increases in successive lower economic levels (56% to 60% to 65%) with gradual fall in income from cultivation of own land and khas land (15% to 6% to 2.08%).

It is seen that in 'below subsistence level', the families mostly participate as day-labourers and very few of them cultivate land on share-cropping and contract cultivation. But in 'above subsistence' and 'subsistence' levels, quite a good number of them earn from share-cropping and contract cultivation, representing 14% and 18% respectively. Income from working as wage earners is only found in "below subsistence level" (3%). Similarly, income from livestock decreases in lower economic levels (6% to 5% to 3.11%), while income from fishing increases in the successive lower levels (4% to 4.09% to 6.05%) like the income from hunting (1% to 1.53% to 2.09%). Income from collection and sale of wild products increases in successive lower economic levels (1% to 1.68% to 4.08%).

In respect of livestock, it can be said that on account of economic surplus, families of "above subsistence level" have more money to secure livestock and due to their possession of livestock in good number, income from this source is greater than that of other two levels. As regards other sources like, fishing and hunting and collection of wild products, the families of lower economic level devote more time and interest for these pursuits as their income goes down to "below subsistence". This may be regarded as acceptance of shifting to other professions according to necessities.

The items of expenditure show that in each successive



Husking of paddy is solely Women's job.



lower level, the percentage of expenditure on food, that is on rice, pulses, vegetables, meat, fish, salt, spices and fats increases steadily (vide table 25).

TABLE 25  
(Total family 200)  
Items of expenditure on average

Items	Above subsistence (No. of family 33)		Subsistence (No. of family 65)		Below subsistence (No. of family 102)	
	Rs.	%	Rs.	%	Rs.	%
1. Food	894.82	61.50	890.50	65.00	891.00	66.00
2. Dress, ornaments and footwear etc.	210.99	14.50	178.10	13.00	162.00	12.00
3. Narcotics and drinks	58.20	4.00	61.65	4.50	67.50	5.00
4. Fuel	29.10	2.00	20.55	1.50	13.50	1.00
5. Medical	29.10	2.00	20.55	1.50	12.15	.90
6. Education	7.27	.50	5.48	.40	4.05	.30
7. Repair of huts	29.10	2.00	27.40	2.00	21.60	1.60
8. Repair of agricultural, fishing and hunting implements	29.10	2.00	41.10	3.00	16.20	1.20
9. Expenditure on livestock	43.65	3.00	34.25	2.50	21.60	1.60
10. Purchase of domestic utensils	29.10	2.00	20.55	1.50	14.85	1.10
11. Social entertainment	58.20	4.00	47.95	3.50	36.45	2.70
12. Miscellaneous	21.82	1.50	20.55	1.50	8.10	.60
13. Payment of loans	—	—	—	—	81.00	6.00
14. Saving for land purchase	14.55	1.00	1.37	.10	—	—
Total	1455.00	100.00	1370.00	100.00	1350.00	100.00

These percentages show that the families of "above subsistence level" almost equally spread their expenses to nutritive wants and other types of wants of daily life. But in other two levels, most of the money are spent to meet the nutritive wants. When measuring "sufficiency of means" with regard to primary

necessities of life, the author measured not only the ability to reach an adequate level of production and consumption of food, but also ability to produce and meet other rigid demands. Normally every family in the 'above subsistence level' can afford and maintain at least the necessary minimum requirements, which could be easily done due to possession of land, land cultivated on share or contract basis and having a good number of livestock in most cases, but it is impossible for the families which keep close to the margin or below that level.

The families belonging to "above subsistence level" spend more on clothes, ornaments, footwear (15%), than the other two levels (10%). Expenditure on narcotics are proportionately less in the 'above subsistence level' than in the other two groups (4% to 4.50% to 5%). The expenditure on fuel in 'above subsistence level' is higher than that of other two levels. The families of 'below subsistence level' spend only 1% of the income for fuel, because large amount of faggots are collected by these families from the neighbouring areas. But in the 'above subsistence level' such collection of faggots is proportionately lesser in quantity than the families of other two levels. So they purchase fuel from their neighbours, usually from the poorer castes and the Lcdhas of the locality, who sell these. For this reason, their expenses in this respect are higher than the families of other two levels.

Educational expenses are very nominal in all economic levels; firstly because zeal for education is yet to be developed among them, secondly—being member of the Scheduled Tribe, they receive educational expenses from the Government of West Bengal and thirdly, due to pressing financial needs, even the children have to participate in productive activities with the elder members of the family, in preference to attending school. Similarly, expenses for medicine decreases successively in lower level. The families of 'above subsistence level' spend 2% of their income on medicine, not because they suffer much from diseases, but because they avail of the modern treatment processes and use commercial medicines, having surplus in their family budgets, whereas the families of the other two levels, still cling to the indigenous system of treatment of diseases, specially on the Shamans, sooth-sayers and their medicinal herbs, these being cheaper and as they have meagre means.

Investment for hut repair is almost similar in the families



of different levels. Maintenance and repair of the agricultural implements, fishing and hunting tools, necessitate spending a higher percentage in the 'subsistence level' because they possess considerable number of fishing nets, hunting and agricultural tools, which have got to be maintained and repaired properly. Expenditure on livestock and purchase of domestic utensils are greater in the 'above subsistence level', which successively decrease in other two levels. The expenses for the livestock are larger for them on account of their possession of a large number of cattle. Expense for purchase of domestic utensils is circumstantial and depends on surplus funds in the 'above subsistence level'. Finally, under social entertainment and miscellaneous heads, the families of above subsistence level spend more than the families of subsistence and below subsistence levels. This greater expense is incurred on entertainment of guests for achieving a higher status and prestige. The families of 'below subsistence level' have to take loans from others to balance their deficit in budgets. So taking of loans and its partial repayment is a regular feature of their economic life. At least 6% of their annual income is spent to repay loans.

Income and expenditure pattern in the 'above subsistence level' represents in varying degrees, a surplus that can be diverted to various cultural demands and expenditure for the sake of prestige or the purchase of luxuries. These vary with individual predilection, with the composition of the family (number of sons who are or have to be married), or with urgency of certain irregular and unpredictable demands for making sacrifices because of illness, funeral feasts, etc. or for acquiring land by purchase.

## II

Food habits incorporated in the standard of living are judged from the availability, quantity and quality of food taken by the family members. The menu of the food varies according to

- (1) economic condition of the people,
- (2) on the seasonal availability of the food items,
- (3) on the taste of the people and
- (4) also on some conventional patterns of observances.

The fauna and flora native to the vicinity, i.e. games, fishes, wild-growing fruits and vegetables and other food producing plants are important factors in moulding food habits. Certain

foods are preferred to others. Certain potential foods are ignored or used only sparingly. Therefore, it is very difficult to ascertain the exact types of food taken by the Mahalis. The staple food of the Mahalis is rice and the basic diet includes rice, lentils, meat, fish and vegetables of various kinds. The levels of living are judged by the kinds and quantity of rice eaten, use of protein diets and spices, fats and mustard oil, etc. Usually the Mahalis do not like spices. Only paste of red chillies and smaller quantities of turmeric paste are used by them during cooking. Green chillies and raw onions are used in considerable quantity by the Mahalis, irrespective of their economic levels. During the rainy season, leafy vegetables are collected and consumed in plenty. When these are not available, they scarcely buy other vegetables from the market for household consumption. Tender leaves of Sajna (*Moringa pterosperma*), Kalmi (*Ipomeu reptens*), and tamarind, when available, are fried with a little oil and taken with stale rice in the morning. People of 'above subsistence level' buy brinjals, potatoes and green bannana from the market and the families of other two levels buy less vegetables for daily consumption. They mostly try to live on collection of wild roots. Those who have urban contact and are educated take tea occasionally.

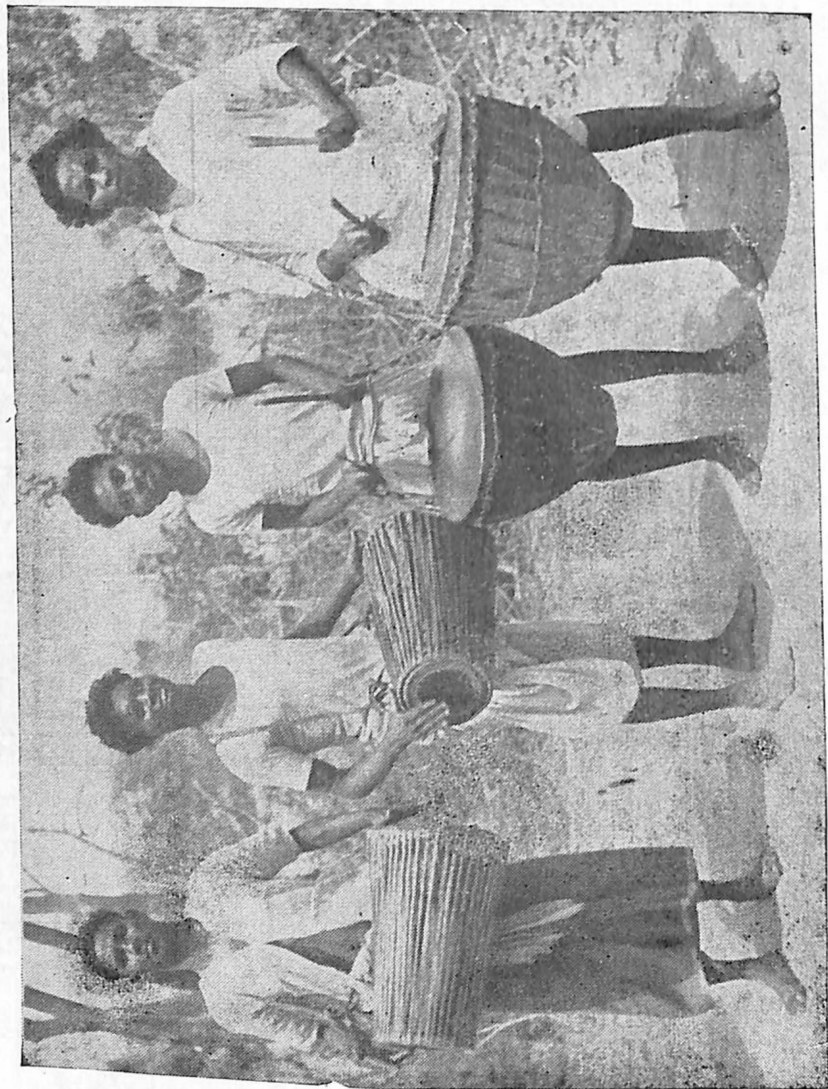
The Mahalis scarcely eat fruits purchasing from the market. Mango (*Mangifera indica*) guava, jamkul (*Eugenia jambolana*) kadh bel (*Feronia elephantum*), ata (*Anona squamosa*), wild plums, tamarind etc. are eaten in plenty by the Mahali children, when these grow during the season, in the village, plucking these in groups or alone. Generally they take these in unripe condition. Bananas and green-coconuts are purchased from the market mostly on ceremonial occasions. Milk is scarcely used and purchased to feed the children. Of course, occasional inclusion of milk in the diet is found only in a few families of the "above subsistence level", but is consumed by most people in such small quantities, as may be considered as insignificant in the dietary habits.

They usually take three to four meals a day at the following hours as was observed by the writer.

*Early morning meal*—Between 6 a.m. and 6.30 a.m. is taken only by those who go out to the fields or for other works.

*Late morning meal*—Between 8 a.m. and 8.30 a.m. is taken by those who remain at home at that time.





The common musical drums to beat in ceremonial dance.

TABLE—26  
Average food pattern

Economic levels	Early morning 6 a.m. to 6-30 a.m.	Late morning 8 a.m. to 8-30 a.m.	Midday 1 p.m. to 1-30 p.m.	Night 7-30 p.m. to 8 p.m.
Below subsistence	Pantha (stale rice), vegetable curry retained from last night (curry includes gourd, green banana, brinjal, kundri, etc.) or sajna or kalmi leaves fried in oil, or parched rice and molasses.	Boiled rice and vegetable curry or Puisak boiled in water with turmeric and red chillies.	Boiled rice, fishes fried in oil or boiled in water with turmeric and red chillies, vegetable curry, etc.	Boiled rice with boiled vegetables and occasionally pulses and meat curry or dried fish and vegetable curry.
Subsistence	-do-	-do-	Boiled rice, fish curry, vegetable curry, pulses.	Boiled rice with pulses, fish curry, vegetable curry, sometimes meat curry, occasionally egg.
Above subsistence	-do-	-do- Occasionally milk	-do-	-do- More meat.

*Mid-day meal*—Between 1 p.m. and 1.30 p.m. is taken by those who remain at home at that time.

*Night meal*—Between 7.30 p.m. and 8 p.m. is taken by all.

In the following table the types of food taken by the Mahalis, at different meals in a day, have been stated. From this it would be seen that most common items of food have been included, though these food habits vary from season to season. The table 26 will give the average picture only.

The above facts represent average items of diet of the three types of families. Seasonal changes are of course important here and at certain times of the year, certain items are partially or entirely replaced by others. In February, dried fishes are taken in plenty and meat is rarely bought or taken. From the month of March, green mango plays an important part in their diet.

From the above, it is seen that the food items are not very variable in respect of their standards of living. But the variations do occur in the per unit daily consumption of different food ingredients. The table 27 show the per unit daily consumption of different types of food ingredients by the Mahalis. Ingredients in all the items of food among the families of 'above subsistence level', and consumption are larger than other families belonging to 'subsistence' and 'below subsistence' levels, respectively.

TABLE 27  
Daily per unit consumption of different food ingredients.

Types of ingredients	Above subsistence		Subsistence		Below subsistence	
	Total wt. in chatak*	Total wt. in grams	Total wt. in chatak	Total wt. in grams	Total wt. in chatak	Total wt. in grams
1. Carbohydrate	16.91	980.78	14.16	821.28	13.79	799.82
2. Protein	2.15	124.70	1.43	82.94	1.18	68.44
3. Fat	.874	50.69	.546	31.66	.345	20.01
4. Vegetables	2.84	164.72	2.46	142.68	1.86	107.88
5. Spices	.492	28.53	.259	15.02	.172	9.97
6. Fruits	.129	7.48	.109	6.32	.073	4.23
Total	23.395	1356.90	18.964	1099.68	17.420	1010.35

\* 1 Chatak = 58 grams.

The table 27 clearly indicates that there exist differences in daily per unit consumption of food ingredients. The reason of these differences are not due to availability or non-availability, but due to the economic capacity of the families of each level. The families belonging to marginal sufficiency level, take almost equal quantities of food like that of the families of 'below subsistence level'. But differences in consumption of each item of food ingredients are great when the families of 'above and below subsistence' are compared. Thus, at least on the basis of food consumption, we can establish an economic stratification and assess the standard of individuals and families.

Carbohydrate is mainly derived from rice, pulses, potato, tubers and wheat (in negligible quantity). Protein diet is supplied mainly by fowl, goat and local fishes. The main sources of fats are vegetable fats, fat of meat and mustard oil.

As regards sources of procurement of these food ingredients, no difference can be made excepting in the way of procurement, e.g. when the families of 'above-subsistence level' and 'subsistence level' mostly procure their paddy or rice (carbohydrate) from cultivation of their own lands or by share-cropping the families of 'below subsistence level' procure it by working as labourers in the fields of others.

### III

As common in human society, the assets of the Mahali families are the main index of their standards of living. The items of assets of the Mahalis are house and household possessions, like domestic utensils, furniture, dresses and ornaments, some agricultural implements, a few tools of basketry, a few fish-nets and traps, hunting implements, musical instruments, livestock, land and some money kept as family reserve.

Here some clarification of domestic utensils, furniture, dresses, ornaments and musical instruments possessed by Mahali families are necessary. As regards furniture, rope-stools, string-cot, wooden-seat and palm-leaf mats are the average possession.

There domestic utensils mostly consist of earthen pitchers and other types of earthen vessels, wooden ladders and a few pots of bell-metal, brass and aluminium. They have only a few musical instruments, e.g. *Tamak* or conical drums, *Tumda* or

flattened drum, *Regra* or small flattened drum, *Buang* (instrument made of hollowed gourd) bamboo flute etc. Details of the tools of basketry and agricultural appliances have discussed in early pages.

Regarding their dress, it can be said that they are now much fastidious about fashion and varieties and are using garments, as are worn by the local advanced groups. The male persons use shirts of various types, *genji*, *dhuti*, *panjabi*, *pajama*, *lungi* etc. and *sari*, *blouse*, *petticoat*, *frock* etc. are the female dress. Mahali women now wear bordered-saries, not less than ten cubits in length. Mill-made clothes are also used by them, which are sold in the market. They possess very few ornaments: Mostly the womenfolk possess a few silver and glass-studded bangles, ear-ring of German silver, etc. Wearing of cheap shoes by the Mahali male members are occasional. Cheap varieties of chappols have found place among the women. In the table 28 the average assets of the Mahali families, in terms of their present market value, have been shown. The nature of assets indicate the standard of living of the Mahali families in three successive levels.

TABLE 28  
Average assets of Mahali families (in 1966)

Assets (Total No. of families 200)	Above subsistence (33) Rs. P.	Subsistence (65) Rs. P.	Below subsistence (102) Rs. P.
1. Livestock	105.00	62.00	35.00
2. House	508.50	447.00	400.00
3. Land	600.00	300.00	130.00
4. Domestic utensils	50.00	30.25	25.00
5. Furniture	30.00	20.25	15.00
6. Dress and ornaments	65.00	50.25	45.00
7. Agricultural implements	45.00	40.00	25.00
8. Tools of basketry	25.00	30.00	31.00
9. Hunting and fishing implements	30.00	35.00	33.00
10. Musical instruments	20.50	25.00	15.00
11. Family deposit money or reserve	14.50	1.37	—
Total	1493.50	1041.12	754.00

Livestock, land and house are the main assets in Mahali families. The assets of 'above subsistence families' are largest



due to their possession of land, a good number of livestock and a comparatively better house. In respect of other assets, the distinction between the different economic levels is moderate.

Ornaments of silver, good clothes and good diet are regarded as a mark of higher standard of living. On the other hand, possession of personal land, cash and larger number of livestock are only found in 'above subsistence level'. Types of dwelling houses and deposit money towards the family reserve funds are other yardsticks to measure the standard of living in the Mahali society, as elsewhere.

In examining income and expenditure patterns, the per unit consumption of food and assets of the Mahali families, we find that in these essential requirements, they represent varying standards of living and possession of means. In other words, we find poverty, i.e. insufficiency of means, a degree of 'marginal sufficiency' and 'surplus means or sufficiency'—the three non-institutionalised stratification based on economy.

Let us now consider the demand embodied in cultural requirements and standards of living. These demands may be categorised under three headings, e.g.

- (1) demands implied in kinship duties ;
- (2) demands implied in duties towards the community—religious, political and social and
- (3) certain personal requirements, which are regarded by convention, as essential and even indispensable to show personal status and prestige.

Under the first heading expenses for feasts, e.g. the 'Name-giving Ceremony' for a new-born child, wedding feasts and feast in funeral ceremonies etc. have been included. These expenses are mainly borne by the family head in whose house the ceremony is performed. But the Mahalis usually expect contributions from various relations and friends on these occasions, who attend these ceremonies as guests. These contributions may be either in kind or in cash—sometimes it is conventional and sometimes it is compensatory. The expenses of the ceremony vary according to economic capacity of the family concerned. The records of the name-giving ceremonies and purification ceremonies connected with birth, marriage and funeral, show that on average the Mahali families incur an expense of about Rs. 50/- to Rs. 75/- during purification ceremony connected with birth, whereas in negotiation for marriage

and funeral ceremonies, the expenses are as much as Rs. 130/- to Rs. 200/-. The largest item of the expenses in marriage is the payment of bride-price. The bride-price is always reckoned in money, although it may be paid partly in kind, as the gifts in kind which may form part of the bride-price, such as, clothes and ornaments, have a definite money value and must be bought in cash.

The economic demands under the second heading—demands implied in duties towards the community—are comparatively lighter. In village life, they are obliged to pay regular subscriptions to village rituals in money or kind, which also vary among them according to economic capacity and it is generally settled by village panchayats, of their own.

The last heading of 'cultural requirements'—which are a type of personal wants—are most fluid and difficult to outline. It follows very closely the economic stratifications and the varying standards of living. Every family member is expected to possess, in addition to his single working cloth, at least one good dress, which he would wear while attending meetings in the house of the headman and at various ceremonial occasions. They are also seen to use footwears. Women generally wear a heavy glass-bangle, finger-rings and various other ornaments sold in the market. Failure to achieve these standards of personal requirements is regarded as a sign of poverty and disgrace. In a few villages, some Mahalis have changed their professions and have taken the job of school teacher, or accepted other services and are trying to secure new means of livelihood, to better their standard of living.

However, this multitudinous forms of expenditure which fall under the heading of 'cultural requirements' are impossible to represent in terms of money. It is seen, even among the Mahalis of the 'above subsistence level,' the surplus which is derived from the several sources of income, is not large enough to cover all the expenses of cultural requirements. So the Mahalis attempt to reduce or curtail or avoid expenditure on many items or to discover additional sources of income other than from bamboo-work. Thus the most essential requirement is the selection and preference of expenses on which the hard-pressed families try to economise for balancing their means and expenditure.

Various requirements of the Mahalis are met by earning

from bamboo-work and other agricultural pursuits. But certain essential commodities like, salt, clothes, spices, domestic utensils and furniture have to be secured from outside sources. The Mahalis procure all these articles either from the weekly markets (Hats), which are held in some larger villages in the neighbourhood. On the market day, the Mahalis assemble from far-off villages (within the radius of 2—10 miles) for the purchases of vegetables, rice, and other necessary commodities. Thus they are habituated to cross a distance of 10 miles for the marketing purposes. Silver ornaments are also available in the market and these are purchased by them when necessary. Sometimes livestock are bought and sold at such markets. The market is a venue of social intercourse. When a Mahali wants to buy anything or dispose of the products of his bamboo-work, or agricultural products for need of cash, he goes to a nearby market. For instance, the people of Kotai, Bhadrakali, Bankatala villages generally go to Narayangarh market at a distance of about 7 miles for purchase of earthen cooking pots and rice or to get their iron cutter or axes or plough-shares, etc. sharpened or tempered. They also purchase clothes, liquor and livestock. Here the Mahalis come in contact with many outsiders for meeting their demands of basketry and also for purchasing the required commodities from the shop and the businessmen. In course of time a permanent customer-seller relationship develops when shopkeepers or businessman also extend their co-operation by supplying commodities on credit, as such a quasi-friend relationship is established between the seller and purchaser.<sup>1</sup>

Attending fair is another exciting pastime of the Mahalis. Usually a large variety of entertainments are held there, and it is not only the business site, but also a meeting place for the villagers. The Mahalis along with other visitors gossip, drink liquor or country made rice beer and meet their friends and relatives who live in other villages. The boys and girls also meet here and choose their partners and pick up acquaintance and friendship. Many cases of elopment have occurred due to such meetings and even normal marriage alliances have been settled here by the elders from different villages, through gossips and personal chats. Thus the market serves many purposes other than economic.

A considerable extent of indebtedness is also found among the Mahalis. It is higher among the families of 'below subsistence level.' From the present condition of bamboo-work and agriculture it is seen that the Mahalis are not able to produce as much as they consume throughout the year, in terms of money. There is usually a period of three to four months in a year, when they are constrained to stop partially their bamboo-work and engage themselves in agricultural operations. They are forced to depend on the basket-traders and the money-lenders for their subsistence and procurement of Paddy seeds, specially before the harvest, due to their general poor condition. The usual rate of interest charged varies from 10% to 50%, which is generally repaid after the harvest. Thus a bulk of paddy after the harvest goes away from them to the Mahajans and money-lenders, by way of repayment of the loans taken by them. So they have to take loan from them again. Many Mahalis try to repay the loans in cash from the earnings from sale of their bamboo-works. But once a Mahali borrows money from the money-lender he could scarcely come out of it. Such debts generally go on mounting with the time and they have to give free-labour in the fields of the money-lenders in case of failure, in lieu of repayment in cash, and their wages are adjusted against the outstanding loans. A type of loan is made within the kin-group. People borrow in particular from mother's brother or from their wife's father or brother. These are loans made without interest. These matters have been discussed in much greater detail by Mayer although for different area.<sup>2</sup> Occasionally a tenant gets loan from the land-owner in kind either free of interest or at preferential rates. If a man raises money or gets help in kind either free of interest or at preferential rates it will be usually because there is more than the purely economic relationship between the borrower and the lender.<sup>3</sup>

Coming to the causes of taking loans, the author found that, most of the families incurred debts to meet expenses for food, social needs, expenses for construction of huts, expenses for treatment of diseases, to repay debts, etc. On analysing the data on the causes of indebtedness it would be seen that the percentage of running into debt on account of food and social needs are much higher in comparison to other expenses.

The income and expenditure patterns based on 200 families have already been discussed. Out of these 200 families, 102 families belong to the 'below subsistence level.' The causes of indebtedness and the amounts of loan taken by these 102 families are enumerated below, which will give an average picture of the Mahali society.

The figures in the table 29 show that nearly 34.31% become indebted to meet expenses for food, 27.45% for social expenses, 12.74% for disease, 11.76% for construction of huts and only 9.80% for repayment of debts. The people who become indebted for these causes have naturally borrowed the money from more richer people, such as, land-owners, basket-traders, money-lenders, shop-owners and the local doctors, these being the local sources. Borrowing of money or paddy from relatives is rarely done, because most of the Mahali families belong to 'marginal sufficiency level' of production.

The table 29 gives the details of the causes of debt only of those families which have deficit budgets. There are also some families which do not run on deficit budgets, but borrow money to bear large expenses in some cases, during marriage or

TABLE 29  
Causes of indebtedness in 1966

Income group in rupees	No. of families indebted	Cause of indebtedness					
		Social *expen- ses	Cons- truction of huts	Disease	To meet expenses for food	To repay debts	Cause not reported
600-700	12	5	-	-	7	-	-
701-800	15	7	3	2	3	-	-
801-900	13	2	1	1	5	3	1
901-1000	12	3	2	5	2	-	-
1001-1050	14	2	3	2	3	2	2
1051-1100	13	4	1	-	6	2	-
1101-1200	12	2	2	1	4	2	1
1201-1300	11	3	-	2	5	1	-
Total	102	28	12	13	35	10	4
Percentage	100%	27.45	11.76	12.74	34.31	9.80	3.97

\* Child-birth, name-giving ceremony, marriage, funeral, religious festivals, etc.

funeral ceremonies. But these causes are only occasional and not a regular feature of the Mahali society.

The amounts of last year's (1966) loan varied from Rs. 10/- to more than Rs. 100/- in individual cases, if calculated in terms of money. The range of variations has been divided into six groups, (1) upto Rs. 15/-, (2) Rs. 16/- to Rs. 25/-, (3) Rs. 26/- to Rs. 35/-, (4) Rs. 36/- to Rs. 45/-, (5) Rs. 46/- to Rs. 75/- and (6) Rs. 76/- to upwards, as shown in the table 30.

TABLE 30  
Amount of loans on family basis.

Income group in rupees	Upto Rs. 15	Rs. 16 to Rs. 25	Rs. 26 to Rs. 35	Rs. 36 to Rs. 45	Rs. 46 to Rs. 75	Rs. 76 and upwards	Total
600-700	1	2	7	2	-	-	12
701-800	2	3	5	4	1	-	15
801-900	1	4	6	2	-	-	13
901-1000	-	-	9	3	-	-	12
1001-1050	-	-	5	6	3	-	14
1051-1100	-	-	7	4	1	1	13
1101-1200	1	2	-	-	7	2	12
1201-1300	-	-	3	2	5	1	11
Total	5	11	42	23	17	4	102
Percentage	4.90	10.78	41.17	22.55	16.67	3.93	100.00

The figures indicate that the highest amount of loans vary from Rs. 26/- to Rs. 45/-. Nearly 41.17% and 23.55% families had taken loans between Rs. 26/- and Rs. 35/- and Rs. 36/- and Rs. 45/- respectively. Only 4.90% families had taken minimal loans upto Rs. 15/- and 10.78% families taken between Rs. 16/- and Rs. 25/-. Loans between Rs. 46/- and Rs. 75/- were taken by 16.67% families and only 3.93% had taken loans of more than Rs. 76/-.

The table 30 also indicates that the amount of loans varies in different income groups. In small income group the amount of loans is more or less small. This is because the smaller income groups have mostly smaller family size and smaller economic burden as seen. To bear their expenses, they do not require much beyond their actual income. This is confined within the limit of excess expenditure of rupees 10/- to 45/-. In larger income groups, the loan taken is higher because of their larger

family size and greater demand to meet the expenses for which they occasionally need excess money of more than Rs. 100/- or so.

## VI

Thus it is seen that the components of the Mahali economic system consist of group of individuals, organised in a family. These individuals of the family fall into two classes, e.g. production unit and consumption unit. The Mahali production unit is the family members engaged in productive activities. These family members in some cases, belong to simple or intermediate families, or to polygynous or extended families, who co-operate in basketry work, agriculture, hunting, fishing or in collection of jungle products.<sup>1</sup>

Similarly, consumption unit consists of individuals of the families, who pool their income for consumption purposes without demanding a greater share or facilities on the basis of production considerations. Thus simple, intermediate, polygynous or joint family are the usual consuming units in the Mahali society.

The main categories of output of the Mahalis may be specified as follows :

Food production or procurement is the most important activity in terms of the amount of time spent on it and in return it yields. It includes bamboo-work, agriculture or agricultural operations, rearing of livestock, hunting and fishing, garden cropping and collection of wild growing roots, tubers and leafy vegetables.

Material culture is strictly limited and goes very little beyond the requirement for survival.

Non-utilitarian production and activity are almost absent in their mode of living.

Time is often spent in idleness, although a large percentage of total available productive effort is required simply for their survival.

Primarily total output is distributed to the consuming unit, i.e. family members, who produce the goods, as well as, who depend on the producer as non-productive members of the family.<sup>2</sup> The system of giving presents amongst relatives and entertaining them on ceremonial occasions are also common features of their economy.

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## ECONOMIC PORTRAIT : SUMMARY

## I

Bocke<sup>1</sup> distinguishes between "economic" and "social" needs. His concept on fundamentals of economic dualism subscribes that 'social' needs are main where economy is largely guided by precapitalistic relationships. The Mahali society is guided fundamentally by social needs and their economy is largely ruled by precapitalistic relationships. There are a very few Mahalis who engage themselves in capitalistic enterprise as basket-trader. There is an unbridgeable gap between the Mahali basket-traders who are clinged towards capitalistic enterprise and the rural Mahalis in general. The latter mainly engage themselves to supply baskets to these traders and also to sell their labour to the neighbouring landowning Hindu castes.<sup>2</sup> These rural basket-makers are still living in a precapitalistic economy. Thus there occurs no economic development. Only in the concept of Bocke's "static expansion"<sup>3</sup>, the spread of existing patterns of basketry trade and economic relationships over an ever-widening areas are found. The concept of "static expansion" may be extended in the sense of "basketry involution" which means extension of social relationships between the basket-trader and the Mahalis. This becomes more cohesive and extra-economic. This has turned into patron-client relation from the relationship of supplier-purchaser owing to mutual advantage for reciprocal demands.<sup>4</sup> Thus dull-market for the seller is brighten up by the buyers to keep the sellers oblige and to retain steady source of supply even in the lean period of production. Hence the sales and purchases do not only run on the principle of supply-demand dichotomy, it also goes on seller-buyer relationships.<sup>5</sup> The concept of "static expansion" has been elaborated by Geertz in much more details in the sense of phenomenon of "agricultural involution", which ensures inherent elaboration of basic social patterns.<sup>6</sup> As for Mahalis the landowner-tenant, labour-capital, master-servant relationships grow more intricate and complicated, cooperation and reciprocity of labour become more complex for living in the overall system.

The Mahali social system is a "shared poverty" which retards efficiency and economic progress. Living amidst the increasing population, the endeavour of the Mahalis to earn livelihood to live hand to mouth with their minimum resources and by steady intensification of traditional bamboo-work and all pervading progress of crude agricultural process is an elaboration of the repetitive basic patterns. This is mere "treading water" in Geertz's terminology. However, the Mahali economy is not dualistic, though dynamic interactions between the basket traders and basket makers, between the landowners and labourers, the agriculturists and the bamboo-workers do not able to push their society out of the "sustained growth."

## II

The Mahalis are bamboo-worker and cultivators of paddy. It is probable that their meagre possession and landlessness force them to cultivate lands either as tenants or agricultural labourers though each family principally weave baskets for its subsistence. Paddy is the main crop of cultivation. Hence ownership of land is taken as a measure of social status which can be earned by wealth. Whenever a Mahali gets surplus he tries to invest in lands. Yet because of factors inherent in the physical environment and partly due to condition set-up by the ascribed and tradition oriented economic structure, they are principally dependent on basketry and cultivation is only an avocation.

There are two conditions which force them to be dependent more on bamboo-work rather than agriculture. Firstly, they own very small amount of land and unsuitable for their subsistence; even the production is not upto their minimum satisfaction; further agriculture requires not only capital but also "concerted labour" for its development which is absent in their society as they have been suffering from structural atomism. Secondly, the Mahalis have not mastered the agronomical and technological requirements for the cultivation of improved paddy seeds. Nevertheless, the Mahalis cultivate lands. Rice is the staple food. It is even the mainstay of the poor. Rice supply is inadequate even when a Mahali owns lands and it rarely lasts from harvest to harvest. So the Mahalis participate in agriculture in all possible ways as owner-cultivator, share-cropper, contract-cultivator, and agricultural labourers of every kinds. In return they receive some

amount of paddy which only substantiate their more certain income from basketry. Paddy fields when owned or taken in tenancy are cultivated by the joint effort of men and women of the family. Women try to perform lighter-works. The division of labour between the sexes dictates to do in principle, the hardest work by men. Women are adhered to less strainous jobs. The men prepare the dikes, plough the fields, level the grounds, sow the seeds, contrive the channels to trickle water in the field and spread manures. The Mahali method of heaping up the kitchen refuse, cowdung, and other filthy things in a manure pit adjacent to each hut serves to maintain the fertility of the soil. Women perform the job of transplanting, weeding, harvesting, threshing, winnowing, together with men. They carefully transplant the young rice-shoots, spurn the shoots, pick the weeds. It is a back straining work in the scorching sun-heat. Women in groups are seen to work in the fields of one and then of another in terms of reciprocity. The most important operation is harvesting when men, women and children work together to complete the operation as early as possible. All the agricultural works are arduous ; in limited range the Mahalis help one another and cooperate to do work of one and later another. This reciprocity not only quickens the progress but also lightens the strain, working together by singing. The owner cultivator Hindu castes who employ the Mahalis or hire them to render their services for cultivation, also work side by side with them. Thus masters-servants, employers-employees land-owners-tenants diligently reap the paddy by sickle posing towards cooperation being guided by physical environments. Vegetables are grown in kitchen garden both by men and women, though women raise vegetables more often than men. Several varieties of vegetables are grown. These range from brinjal, ladies finger, cauliflower, cabbage, radish, gourd, pumkin, lemon, puisak (*Basella rubra*), and others. Entire family takes care of the kitchen garden.

Fowls, pigs, chickens, ducks and goats are important primarily for religious sacrifices and secondarily for entertainment of guest and food. Sacrifice plays a very important role in Mahali life. It requires for appeasement of deities and *Bongas* or spirits who occasionally send diseases in the form of epidemic when are hurt by the offending acts of its believer. They greatly feared these *Bongas*, the *Dains* or witches and the *Gunnis*

or sorcerors. The *Dains* and the sorcerors indulge in antisocial activities and take delight in nefarious practices. To neutralise the wrath of the *Bongas* and the injury of the nefarious-practitioners, the Mahali sooth-sayers or *Ojhas* prescribe sacrifices of animals, the amount and type of which depend on the intensity of the wrath of the *Bongas* and the efficacy of the *Dain* and the sorceror. Hence the animals are in great demand and highly valued. Besides, livestock is also used as currency. The diviners and the medicinemen are paid through livestock. Sometimes commodities from the potter, weaver and some articles of consumers goods are purchased by livestock. In elaborate system of lending, borrowing and sale, the animals are used by the Mahalis, and other tribal and non-tribal lower castes, as a chief negotiable property.

After harvesting and threshing which end in January-February, the Mahalis again resort to bamboo-work and invest whole time for the production of basketry. Occasionally young adult persons in groups go to hunting. The game is scarce in the alluvial tract and in jungle areas it scarce too, as the forests of the region are reserved and all kinds of tres-passing are penalised. As a result they remain satisfied with fowling in and around the village. Small birds and games of native varieties such as dove, wild-goose, crane, squirrels, rabbits, rats and several other varieties are the main kill. The games are distributed among the participants. There are individualistic ways of catching games. Nets are spread across the trees to ensnare bats.

Fishes are abundant in the local ponds and streams and in the flooded paddy fields, during rainy season. Fishes are caught both individually and collectively. In collective fishing shares are distributed on the basis of nubmer of participants. Men, women and children catch fishes in small handnets and traps. Anyone may go to any paddy fields and pick as many as he can. The wealthy and poor equally catch fishes from the paddy fields. Catches are mainly for family consumption and are scarcely sold.

The Mahali families are more or less self-contained unit and manufacture many of their items for their own uses. Though in village India occupation is ascriptive and traditionally ordained, and high amount of functional specificity is observed, yet certain amount of functional diffuseness is found among the Mahalis. They manufacture their huts, spears, arrows, bolts, fishing nets,

traps, bird snares, fit up plough shares, prepare musical instruments, basketry of domestic use etc.

Barter has a large place in the economic system. Paddy or rice is paid for labour in the agricultural fields. Baskets are sold to the villagers in exchange of paddy, rice or commodities and to the shop owner in exchange of salt, pulses, sugar, wheat etc. Appropriateness of just 'equivalence' depends on the two parties involved in the barter.

The adjustment of the Mahalis to the environmental demands involved in their struggle for subsistence can be derived from certain principles, running through the entire range of social relationship. The organisation of bamboo-work and agriculture or paddy-culture which principally lie on the family labour reveals clearly the essential atomistic structure of Mahali society. Structural atomism retards interfamilial cooperation and ensures interfamilial competition<sup>8</sup>. Competition is the act of seeking or endeavouring to gain what another is endeavouring to gain at the same time.<sup>9</sup> The cooperating group is limited to family. Occasionally where 'concerted labour' is required environmentally, it runs across the family group. Each family works hard to produce baskets for the basket-traders and basketry of domestic use for the villagers; each family participates in agriculture to earn paddy as much as possible and thus pursues its own individualistic ends with a view to maintain a steady income of money and to keep steady source of paddy supply at the expense of even impoverishing the neighbours. For instance, a Mahali never spares a bamboo for future use lest it is taken by somebody else, he never leaves to bargain much with a landowner lest he is deprived of it, even an owner of small plots of land takes land in tenancy when his friend hopefully awaits for it. Individual interest and misfortune are faced by an individual family.

The same pattern of cooperation for individualistic ends is manifested in bamboo-work, hunting and fishing. In sum, individual in Mahali society cooperates within his family group. Family groups on the other hand are competitive among themselves for maximisation of productive ends. Interfamilial co-operation is occurred when necessity demands though co-operation is directed towards individualistic ends. Excepting for a limited range of cooperation the behavioural characteristic of Mahali economic relation is competitive. Each family competes with

another in processing the basketry and for participation in agriculture and the like.

The Mahali economic system is influenced by environmental as well as cultural factors. Land is limited. Those who possess land are scarcely enough to yield barest subsistence. Hence they are forced to borrow from the local landowners, money-lenders, basket-traders in exorbitant interest. The rate of interest varies from 10% to 50%. The amount of loan goes on mounting every year. Hence most of the families are indebted. Besides, there are many other causes which bring shortage in their budget. Apart from small holding and landlessness, crop failure due to draught affects them and it affects most badly those who cultivate in contract system (*Sanja*). Injudicial use of paddy and over expenses during feast and festivities, illness, marriage ceremony, etc. also affect their subsistence.

### III

In considering technology of production it may be concluded that the Mahalis are non-cooperative. For instance, in bamboo-work they are non-cooperative to the extent that joint effort required to prepare baskets for the basket traders to minimise the gap between the demand and the supply, is limited to men and women of a single family. Most of the families are nuclear in size with two to three labour units.<sup>10</sup> More extended group labour may result in greater productivity and may balance the demand and supply. Bamboo work has three steps: (a) procuring of bamboo and its sizing and splitting (b) scraping and weaving of the baskets and (c) disposal of the products. Though environmentally bamboo work requires "concerted action" for greater productivity yet structural atomism dictates them to limit their cooperation within the family. As such interfamilial relation turns into interfamilial rivalry and antagonism<sup>11</sup>. Similarly the construction of dikes, ploughing of lands and sowing i.e. preparing of lands for paddy cultivation are limited to the men of a single family. Likewise, transplanting, weeding, harvesting and threshing are also limited to men and women of a single family. The earning of paddy by cultivation of more land may be possible through extended group labour. Collective effort is utilised to plough or prepare the land and during harvesting in terms of reciprocity. This cooperative venture is directed towards indivi-

dualistic ends in that the outturn is shared only by the members of the family rather than the members collectively cooperate. When transplanting, weeding and harvesting are done by men and women of certain families together these are done with pre-conceived ideas of reciprocity. The cooperating group do the operations in the field of one and later of another.

In some families during harvesting the labour units of an individual family work together with additional assistance of hired labourers of the same community or other community as well. Participation in hunting is considered more as sports than as a livelihood. Cooperation in hunting is noticed with the individualistic end. The division of game is made on the basis of investment and effort. Use of snares and nets are entirely individualistic, catching of fishes from the paddy fields is done individually. Vegetable production in kitchen garden is individualistic. The men or women of the family do all the works by themselves. Women do more than men often with some assistance from the little girls. Production is consumed within the family.

Tools of basketry, agricultural implements, lands are owned by an individual family. Ownership of livestock is also on family basis. Linear extension of the family is included in the ownership. The property is only shared by the family members and some very near kins of collateral lines. Even the cooperation, ownership, on the basis of clan membership are absent.<sup>12</sup> Interfamilial competition for accumulations of wealth is pronounced. This interfamilial competition produces interfamilial rivalry.

In technological and property relations family members are cooperative. Interfamilial disputes are cooperatively settled by the village as a whole. Members of different families cooperate one another, when it is necessary environmentally, though essentially they are competitive.

Marriage unites two families and thus limits the competition between two families. The nature and extent of interfamilial competition are toned down by conceptualisation of marriage alliances where the spouses owe principally allegiance to their respective family.<sup>13</sup> They try to raise their status in regional hierarchy by process of exclusion of certain cultural traits of their own and by inclusion of some cultural traits of the upper

caste Hindus of the locality. This effort is collective under the leadership of some social reformers.<sup>14</sup> But Mahali society is predominantly oriented towards competitiveness. There are two sets of conflicting behaviour patterns exist in every act : they are cooperative towards family members and colateral near kins i.e. non-competitive, but outside the family circle they are competitive i.e. non-cooperative excepting when it is not required by the environment. Hence the cohesive and coherent cooperative family group is constructed to effectuate more interfamilial competition or non-cooperation.

#### IV

Exchange and transaction of Mahali community always take place in the market. There are markets both for the baskets of the traders and villagers, markets for labour, consumers goods, services for capital and investment of funds. A market exists in the village or locality when there are many suppliers of goods or services and many persons are seeking that goods and services. Thus there exists competition between the suppliers or sellers and the purchasers of goods or buyers. This competition of buyers and sellers tends to maintain a kind of equilibrium with respect to prices, quality and other terms of contracts in the market in question. As for Mahali baskets the and purchaser-seller relationships. The pressure falls on the sellers when there is abundant supply of baskets and a few number of basket-buyers or low purchasing capacity of the basket-traders. In contrast pressure falls on the buyers when there is scanty supply of baskets or large number of buyers in comparison to supply. Thus the price and competition among the buyers and sellers fluctuate in accordance with supply and demand. On the other hand in dull market of the sellers, and brighter market for the buyers and vice versa, the sale and purchases are run on the extra economic relationships of sellers and buyers. This also limits the sellers' (Mahalis) loss and buyers' (basket-traders and the villagers) heavy gain. Again price of the baskets fluctuates in accordance with the consumers' preferences (bétel-leaf dealers and the villagers).



In a situation of perfect competitiveness, no seller (Mahali) is strong enough in relation to another seller or competitor to affect the price of basket. There is sufficient competition among the buyers and sellers so that the settlement of price is not possible towards the advantage of particular buyers or sellers. This means equality of power among the buyers and among the sellers. This equality of power is protected by competition. Again there are variables which govern market. The strength of the individual buyers and sellers, the number of buyers and sellers, the quality of product in the field of competition and the fluctuation of demands for the particular product.

Obviously a basket-trader who is financially strong enough can force down the price by threatening to produce for himself or to give large orders to a more cooperative basket-makers. Similarly a Mahali who belongs to above subsistence level and draws good amount of subsistence from paddy cultivation can afford to undersell his competitors. This factor of financial power is also relative to number of sellers (Mahalis) and buyers (basket-traders) in the market. For instance a single Mahali seller has a great advantage over basket-traders, whereas one seller among many can exert little control over price. Again financial power and number of competitors also govern the variability of production. But this factor is not countable in case of Mahalis, because the products are made on the consumers' preferences and dexterity of basketry is of little use.

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- account of saving and investment, 29
- accumulation of wealth, 70
- action patterns, 29; technological-ly non-complex, 29
- achieving higher status, 99; prestige, 99
- activities of adult, 40
- Adidravida, 76, 79
- adult's job, 58
- age group analysis, 16; categories, 16; predominance of females, 17
- age and sex composition, 16
- agrarian class structure, 79
- Agrahayan, 66, 84
- agriculture, 33
- agricultural; activities, 44, 45, 66, 73, 74; categories, 44; class, 78; labourers, 73, 77, 114; operations, 24, 33, 34, 74, 79, 85; day-labourers, 33; seasonal labourers, 33; implements, 76, 79, 119; pursuits, 33, 34, 44, 45; productions, 94; season, 88; involution, 113; work, 67
- agriculturists, 40
- agronomical, 114
- agnatic families, 86
- allocation of resources, 11; scarce resources, 12
- Aman crop, 82
- analysis of marital status, 19
- annual disposal of basketry, 64, 65, 66
- ancestral spirit, 88
- antagonism, 118
- appropriateness, 117
- arable land, 33, 73
- Ardli, 62
- art of basketry, 59
- arrows, 89
- ascription, 31
- ascriptive, 32; economic roles, 32; norms, 32
- Ateth, 61
- atomistic structure, 117
- attractive competition, 63
- Aus crop, 82
- avocation, 33, 34
- Bada, 54, 61, 62
- Baghnan, 55
- Baidya, 78
- Bailey, 63, 75, 76
- Baisak, 65
- banana, 100
- bamboo; basket, 2, 82; poles, 48; products, 49, 51, 56; makers, 2, 40, 54, 63, 73, 113, 121; work, 2, 24, 33, 34, 36, 41, 43, 49, 51, 52, 53, 58, 60, 68, 73, 96, 114, 116, 117; intricacy, 24; time, 69; skill, 24; worker, 41, 48, 54, 114; barchart, 43; strips, 58; flute, 104
- baramasi majur, 73
- barber, 71
- barter, 70; aid, 70; characteristic, 70; goods for goods, 70; goods for services, 70; services for services, 70
- basket; local terms, 54; type, 54; size, 54, 68; buyers, 120; traders, 2, 3, 54, 55, 56, 68, 113, 121; intermediaries, 28; traps, 90; of domestic use, 25; work, 58; initial ritual, 58; supernatural agency, 59; supernatural power, 59; bestowing skill, 59; special skill, 59; dexterity, 59
- basketry; involution, 113; products, 56; list, 56; market price, 56; technique, 58; work, 34, 43, 44, 51, 57, 63, 67; tools and accessories, 57, 58
- belief in mysterious power, 6; Bongas, 6, 28, 115, 116; classification of Bongas, 6; benevolent Bongas, 6; Basumata, 6; Dharam, 6; Garam, 6; Sitla, 6; Chandi, 6; Mansa, 6; Haramko, 6
- Beteille, 76, 78, 79
- betel leaf dealers, 11, 54, 55, 58, 68
- betel leaves, 54, 55
- Bhadra, 66, 84
- bhagchas, 33, 73
- Bhumija, 78, 79, 88
- bichar sava, 5-6; constituent members, 6
- big baskets, 54, 61, 63, 71; technology, 61-63; technique, 58; fixation of price, 71
- Bisipara, 63, 75, 76, 77
- Bis sera, 54, 63, 64, 65
- blacksmith, 71, 82
- Boeke on economic dualism, 113
- bolts, 89
- bows, 89
- boys assist, 36; collect faggots, 36-37; catch fishes, 37

- Brahman, 51, 52, 78, 79  
 bride price, 92, 106  
 bridegroom, 92  
 broadcasting, 83, 85  
 Buang, 104  
 bulk-production, 58  
 bulk-sale, 55  
 bullock cart, 82, 88  
 Buria, 57  
 business site, 107  
 buyer seller relationship, 71  
  
 calves, 88  
 capital, 13; provision of capital, 14; form of capital, 14; goods, 28  
 capital formation, 29  
 capitalisation, 10  
 capitalistic enterprise, 113  
 carry baskets, 52, 53  
 carry palanquins, 2  
 cash payment, 74  
 caste; adrift, 12; custom, 79; inclusion and exclusion, 29; groups, 54, 88; Brahman, 54; Solanki, 54; Tambuli, 54; people, 43, 48, 49, 51, 52, 78; Karan, 51; Kayastha, 51; Mahisya, 43, 51, 52; Tambuli, 43, 51, 52; Sadgop, 51  
 casual labour, 77  
 categories of output, 111  
 catch fishes, 50, 51, 52, 53  
 ceremonial friendship, 87  
 ceremonial occasion, 88  
 chabijal, 90  
 Chaitra, 64, 65, 83  
 chaknijal, 90  
 change, 26; in economy, 26; article of production, 29; peripheral economic-life, 29; role of corporate kin group, 29  
 characterisation of Mahali society, 10  
 chanch, 31, 58, 63, 64, 65  
 chhata, 56, 58, 59  
 chira, 71  
 choice, 10  
 chhipti, 61  
 circuits of exchange, 27  
 circulation of personnel, 78  
 clan name, 3; Baske, 3; Kanti, 3; Besra, 3; Hansda, 3; Hembrom, 3; Kisku, 3; Mandi, 3; Murmu, 3; Soren, 3; Tudu, 3; Chore, 3; Samah, 3; Pirhi, 3; Khangar, 3  
 classes of demands, 92  
 classes of lands, 77  
 clothes from weaver, 3  
 cock fight, 87  
 collateral kins, 119  
 collection of; edible roots, 34; faggots, 34, 90; fire wood, 34, 90; tubers, 34; vegetables, 94; cohesion, 32  
 cohesive, 113, 120  
 common system of exchange, 27  
 commodities on credit, 107  
 communal festival, 92  
 compactness, 32  
 competition, 71, 117  
 components of economic system, 34, 111  
 concepts in economic production, 68  
 concerted labour, 114, 117  
 conservation of natural resources, 70  
 conservatives, 31  
 consumers, 68; goods, 120; preferences, 120, 121; economics, 94  
 consumption of goods, 10; of food, 98; of out put, 69; unit, 111  
 contract; cultivator, 44, 73, 78, 114; rate, 75; system, 118  
 cooking pot, 107  
 cooperation, 58, 113, 115, 119  
 cooperative venture, 118  
 correct share, 28  
 cost of; production, 63; baskets, 63; output, 69  
 crude agricultural method, 83  
 cultivate, 3, 44, 48, 51; own land, 44; Khasland, 44; on share cropping, 3, 44; on contract system, 3, 48, 51; as hired labourers, 44  
 cultivators, 2, 47; of Khas land, 47  
 cultivation, 24, 33, 45, 47, 48, 52, 53, 76, 77; on contract basis, 33, 45, 47, 76, 77; own land, 45, 47, 94; Khas land, 45, 48, 53; on share cropping, 48, 76, 77; on contract land, 47, 52; personal land, 48; cost of, 83; by transplantation, 84-85  
 cultural factors, 117; requirements, 105, 106; traits, 119  
 customary expenses, 92  
 customer-seller relationship, 107  
  
 daily wage, 44  
 Dain, 115, 116  
 Dalton on Mahalis, 2  
 Das-sera, 54, 55, 65  
 deficit budget, 110  
 demand; of basketry, 12; of betel

- leaf dealers, 68, 69; of basket trader, 69; of land owners, 75; in kinship duties, 105; towards community, 105; 106; religious, 105; political, 105
- demography, 1, 14, 16-22
- depend, 3; on blacksmiths, 3; on weaver, 3; on potter, 3
- derivatives, 1, 2
- dexterity of basketry, 121
- diameter of wants, 9
- different activities, 36-39: of boys, 36, 37; of girls, 36-37; of old-men, 38; of old women, 38; of men, 38-39; of women, 38-39
- Diku, 24
- din majur, 74
- disposal; of dead, 5; sasan, 5; purification, 5; of products, 61; of basketry, 64, 65, 66
- disposing of weekly production, 58
- distribution of; age, sex and marital status, 17; income, 69
- division of game, 119
- divorce, 5; causes, 5
- dobka, 56
- dole, 56
- Dom, 88
- domestic budget, 93
- domestic servant, 33, 37
- domestic utensils, 103, 107
- Dravidian, 1
- dress, 104; males, 104; females, 104
- dried fishes, 102
- dry land, 79
- dull market, 113
- early economic theory, 10
- early riser, 59
- economic; action, 9, 12, 13; rational, 12; particularistic norms, 31; activity, 9, 58; rationale, 9; overlapping, 44; activity of Mahalis, 11, 36; burden, 33; capacity, 103, 105; change, 30; choice, 28; demands, 92, 106; expenses, 92; interdependence, 79; levels, 40, 92, 94, 96; below subsistence, 92, 93, 94, 105, 108; subsistence, 92, 93, 94, 96-105; above subsistence, 92, 93, 94, 96-106; performance, 30; position, 62; pursuits, 44; women, 44; roles, 3, 31, 32; stratification, 93, 103; system, 11, 12, 117; fusion, 12; ties, 30; unit, 10, 25
- economics, 8; primitive, 8
- economising, 9; implicit economising, 12
- economy, 8-9, 12; fluctuating, 10; man's economy, 10
- effort and production of basketry, 25
- egg, 87
- employer, 115
- employee, 115
- embeddedness, 12
- emergence of entrepreneur, 13
- entrepreneurial function, 11
- equality of power, 120
- equivalence, 117
- erotion, 85
- essential commodities, 107
- exchange, 11, 27, 68; of goods, 11; in monetary medium, 27; in village market, 27; form, 28; standard, 27; of basketry of domestic use, 70; of money, 71
- expert, 69
- expenditure, 98-99; on food, 97; on narcotics, 98; on fuel, 98; on education, 98; for medicine, 98; on livestock, 99; for domestic utensils, 99; for entertainments, 99; miscellaneous, 99
- expenses, 96, 105-106; of seed grains, 96; for feast, 105; for name giving ceremony, 105, 106; for wedding feast, 105, 106; for funeral ceremony, 105, 106
- extra-economic relationships, 27, 72, 113, 120
- extra-prices, 71
- face to face relationship, 30
- factors of educational backwardness, 21-22
- factors of production, 13, 68; land, 13; capital, 13; labour, 13; entrepreneur, 13; physical resources of production, 13; flexibility, 14
- fair, 107
- family, 4; size, 4; types on percentage basis, 4; nuclearisation of families, 4; descent, 4; residence, 4; budget, 94, 98; unit, 93
- female live longer, 17; predominate, 16
- fencing, 48, 52
- free labour, 108
- festivals, 7, 49, 51, 52, 53; Magh-sim, 7; date of performance, 7; offerings, 7; objectives, 7; deity, 7; Baha, 7; date, 7; offerings, 7; Asaria, 7; date, 7; Dasai, 7; date, 7; objectives, 7; deity, 7; Nalsakrat, 7; date, 7; deity, 7;

- Akhan, 7; date, 7; objective, 7;  
 deity, 7; Sakrat, 7; date, 7;  
 Karam, 7; date, 7  
 fishes, 84; sundried, 90; catching,  
 89-90; varieties of catch, 90  
 fishing, 34, 49, 51, 52, 53, 67;  
 barehand, 90  
 fishnets, 90; handnet, 90; castnet,  
 90  
 fixed basket trader, 71  
 flexible nature, 26; of economics,  
 26  
 fluctuation, 68; of consumer wants,  
 68; in demands, 68  
 folk-society, 29  
 formality of contract, 14  
 forest resources, 90  
 food consumption, 102, 103; per  
 unit daily, 102, 103; carbo-  
 hydrate, 103; protein, 103; fat,  
 103; sources of procurement,  
 103  
 food growers, 40  
 food habits, 99-103; menu, 99;  
 staple food, 100; food types,  
 102; food items, 102, 103; food  
 ingredients, 102  
 food producer, 40; processor, 40;  
 provider, 40; production, 111  
 foot wear, 106; women, 106  
 fowls, 87; in festival and ritual, 87;  
 in honour of guest, 87; in cele-  
 bration, 87; in entertainment, 87  
 fruit bearing trees, 91  
 function of economy, 29  
 functional, 3, 31-32, 116; diffuse-  
 ness, 3, 31, 32, 116; specificity,  
 3, 31, 116  
 functionally; diffuse, 32; inter-  
 dependent, 28  
 furniture, 107  
 future provision, 70  
  
 garden crops, 86  
 gardenspade, 79, 90  
 Ganrah, 58  
 Geertz on agricultural involution,  
 113  
 Geertz's terminology, 114  
 ghost, 6; Chirghuni, 6; Baghot, 6;  
 Gomua, 6  
 Ghuni, 90  
 Ghura, 58  
 goals, 88  
 godown, 55  
 good dress, 106  
 goods and services, 68  
 government owned land, 33  
 grain payments, 73, 74  
 green; bamboo, 67; cocoanut, 100;  
 figs, 91  
 Grierson on Mahali dialect, 2  
 Gunnis, 40, 115  
 Hadi, 71  
 habitat of Mahalis, 1  
 harvest, 84, 115, 118  
 hat, 52  
 helping hands, 77  
 herder, 37  
 herding cattle, 33  
 herd keeping, 43  
 herd swine, 33  
 Hindu castes, 3, 25, 113, 115;  
 Brahman, 3; Mahisya, 3; Raju,  
 3; Sadgop, 3; Tambuli, 3  
 Hindu religious pantheon, 7; Tusu,  
 7; Lord Hari, 7; Lord Satya-  
 narayan, 7; Viswakarma, 7;  
 Kali, 7  
 higher caste, 79  
 hired labourers, 40, 73, 74  
 Ho, 2  
 hoc, 79, 90  
 household utensils, 3  
 household work, 61  
 hunters, 3  
 hunting, 34, 67, 89  
 hunting implements, 89; bows, 3;  
 arrow, 3; traps, 3  
 hut, 52, 53  
 Hutton on Mahalis, 2; affinities  
 with Santal, Ho, Munda, 2  
  
 income account, 29  
 income; from basketry, 67, 94, 95;  
 livestock, 33; from Chanch, 64;  
 from Pachhi, 64; Kula, 64; big  
 basket, 64; agriculture, 76, 94,  
 95; bamboo-work, 94, 95; share  
 cropping, 94, 95, 96; contract  
 cultivation, 94, 95, 96; Khas land,  
 96; own land, 96; as wage earn-  
 ers, 96; from livestock, 95, 96;  
 fishing, 95, 96; hunting, 95, 96;  
 collection, 95, 96  
 income and expenditure, 93, 94,  
 99  
 income pooling unit, 34  
 income spent, 99  
 inclusion of cultural traits, 119  
 increase in demands, 68  
 indebtedness, 108; causes, 109  
 indigenous treatment, 98  
 indoor activity, 40  
 individualistic end, 118  
 Indian countrymen, 74  
 infants and children, 17  
 innovator, 13  
 interfamilial, 117-119;

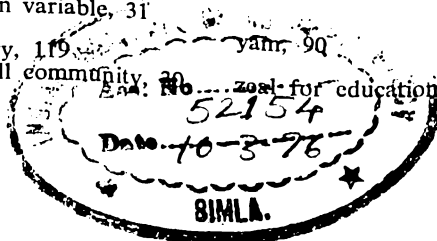
- cooperation, 117; competition, 117, 119; rivalry, 118, 119; antagonism, 118; disputes, 119  
 intermediaries, 54, 68  
 interest, 108; preferential rates, 108  
 intervening period, 55  
 investment, 98, 99  
 invest of surplus, 70; in lands, 114  
 inviolable norm, 30  
 item disposed of, 65  
 items of diet, 102; seasonal change, 102
- Jaistha, 65  
 Jambati, 57, 62  
 Jele, 78, 79  
 Jhakijal, 90  
 Jhilinga, 51  
 jhuri, 11, 25, 31, 54, 58, 53  
 jhuri Mahajan, 24  
 job, 3, 24, 43, 45, 47, 52; of agriculture, 24; of tenants, 24; of domestic servant, 43; of day-labour, 45, 47; of Mahali children, 3, 34; of basketry, 52  
 just equivalence, 70, 71
- Kaibartta, 71, 78  
 Kaktia, 55  
 Kalmi, 90  
 Katan, 57  
 Katu, 57  
 Kartick, 64, 66  
 Karan caste, 78  
 Kayastha, 78  
 kerocene lamp, 59  
 Keynes on concept of economic data, 29  
 Khas, 33, 76, 77  
 khaloi, 56, 58, 59, 65  
 kind of work, 36  
 kin-group, 108  
 kitchen garden, 52, 86, 115, 119  
 Knight on function of economy, 67; classification, 67; output composition, 67; organisation of production, 67; distribution of production, 67; provision for future, 67  
 Kols, 33  
 Kora, 79  
 Kota, 74  
 Kumhar, 78, 79, 88
- labour force group, 35, 36, 44, 47; charge falls, 74; unit, 94, 118, 119; labour-capital, 113  
 land, 13, 26, 33, 75, 76, 79, 80-81, 82, 108, 113, 114, 115; components, 13; landholding caste, 26; local, 26; landowners, 33, 108; on contract basis, 75, 76, 79; personal, 76; on share cropping, 76, 79  
 landholding, 80-81; graph, 82  
 landlessness, 114  
 landowner-tenant, 113, 115  
 largest buyers, 54; largest purchaser, 56  
 Lasher dhiri, 58  
 leafy vegetables, 90-91, 100  
 levels of living, 100  
 level of: price, 67; employment, 67; production, 98  
 leveller, 79  
 literates, 19-22; number of literates, 19-20; literacy, 21; males predominate, 21; boys, 21; men, 21; percentage of literacy, 21; literates left studies, 21; primary school teacher, 22  
 livelihood, 2; bamboo work, 2; adoption of bamboo-work, 2; labourers, 2  
 livestock, 87, 104, 116  
 loans, 108-111; causes, 108-109; sources, 109; amount, 110; in small income group, 110-111; in large income group, 110-111  
 lumpsum, 55  
 local people, 57  
 lodha, 98  
 longevity of Mahalis, 16
- Magh, 60, 64, 65  
 Mahali: traditional bamboo-worker, 1; concentration, 1; population, 1; villages, 1, 15, 16; matrix of culture, 1-7; sub groups, 2; baskets, 68  
 Mahali economy, 1, 10, 26, 78, basis of economy, 7-8; field procedure, 8; economic data, 29; theoretical premises, 7-14  
 Mahisya, 78  
 mahajans, 108  
 main profession, 43  
 maid servant, 43  
 maintenance of basketry, 70; of agricultural implements, 99; fishing tools, 99; hunting tools, 99  
 malevolent, 6; Bongas, 6; practices, 6: Ban, 6; Singer, 6  
 male child mortality, 17
- labour, 1, 13, 14, 35, 36, 41, 44, 47, 69, 74, 94, 113, 118-119; class, 1; part of land, 14; labour force, 41, 44, 94

- mamu, 54
- manpower, 28
- manure pit, 115
- marginal comfort, 63
- marginal sufficiency, 103, 105
- market, 49, 51, 52, 53, 56, 88; in rudimentary form, 11
- market system, 27, 68
- marital condition, 19; widow re-marriage, 19; polygyny, 19
- marital status, 17
- marriage, 4-5; type 4; age, 4; child marriage, 4; prohibition of marriage, 4-5; tribal endogamy, 5; marriage of wife's relation, 5; cross-cousin union, 5; bride-price, 5; fixation, 5; approach, 5; Salishbapla, 5; Dutamdar, 5; Indigosha, 5; Duarlebet, 5; Gharamechrano, 5; Angir, 5; Aur-apar, 5; Sanga, 5; Rajikhusi, 5; Nirboloona, 5; Gharjowic, 5
- marriage alliances, 107
- master-servant, 113, 115
- material culture, 111
- maximum activity, 53
- maximisation, 8-9; of production, 69
- Mayer, 78, 108
- meal hours, 100-102
- Mecheda, 55
- medicinemmen, 40, 116; medicinal herbs, 98
- media of exchange, 27, 67; appropriateness, 27
- meeting place, 107
- midday meal, 59
- Midnapur, 12, 55
- milk, 100
- minimum requirements, 98
- minimum satisfaction, 114
- minimisation, 69; of cost of production, 86
- modernistic action, 31; inclusion, 31
- Moir, 78, 79, 88
- money, 27, 69, 74; moneylender, 108, 117
- monopolised technology, 31
- moonlit night, 59
- month-wise production, 64, 65, 66
- monsoon, 82
- Mugar, 58
- multi-dimensionality, 29, 32
- multiple interest action, 29
- Munda, 2
- muri, 71
- Murimara, 62
- musical instrument, 103, 104
- mutual adjustment, 58
- nature of demands, 68
- near equivalence, 71
- necessary commodities, 107
- nefarious practices, 115
- neighbours, 33
- neighbouring caste, 50
- neighbouring people, 78
- nett, cost of production, 63
- nett, profit, 55, 63
- night school, 20
- non-Brahman, 79
- non-cooperative, 118, 119
- non-industrial society, 31
- non-leafy vegetables, 90
- non-labour force, 34, 35, 43, 44, 45, 94
- non-participants, 35
- non-productive hours, 60, 61
- non-utilitarian productions, 111
- norms and values, 28
- nursing bed, 84
- nutritive wants, 97
- obligatory expenses, 92
- occupation, 47; ascriptive, 69, 116; supplementary, 66-67; tradition-ordained, 116
- occupational patterns, 41
- ojhas, 40, 116
- organisational innovation, 26
- origin of Mahalis, 1-2
- ornaments, 104
- outdoor work, 40
- owner-cultivator, 114
- Pachhi, 56, 58-59, 63-65
- Pachissera, 55, 63-65
- Pakha, 65, 66
- palanquin bearers, 1
- Panerasera, 54, 55, 65
- Parsons model, 31
- particularism, 31
- participation, 35, 36, 52; of labour force, 35; of non-labour force, 35, 36
- Pataardli, 61, 62
- patterns of basketry, 12
- patterns of production, 68
- patron-client, 27, 113
- Paus, 65, 66, 84
- Paulme's statement, 10
- payment, 74, 75; of seasonal labourers, 75; of wages, 74
- pecuniary media, 11
- Penda, 62
- Pendarli, 61, 62
- peripheral margin, 26
- personal requirements, 105
- personal status, 44
- Phalgun, 64, 65



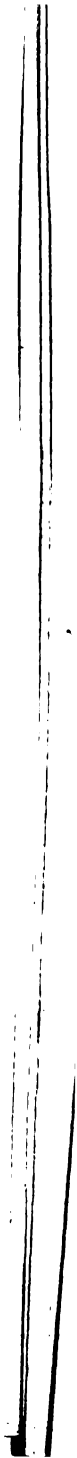
- native manure, 83
- physical environment, 114, 115
- physical infirmity, 47
- pig, 87-89
- plough, 79
- plough service, 77
- political goals, 29
- political structure, 25
- potter, 31
- precapitalistic economy, 113
- precapitalistic relationship, 113
- preconceived idea of production, 69
- present study, 14-15; sample villages, 14; plan of settlement, 15; communicable link, 15; sanitary arrangement, 15; sources of drinking water, 15; public places, 15
- price; of baskets, 68; level, 67; rise and fall, 68
- primary necessities, 92
- processes of production, 13
- procurement, 61, 67; of bamboos, 61; of wild products, 67, 90
- producers' output, 68
- production of basketry, 64-66, 68, 69; of bamboo work, 26, 66
- productive; activities, 34, 35, 60-61; act, 24; age, 16; hours, 59-60; process, 10; skill, 25; unit, 25-26, 34, 86, 111
- progressives, 31
- profane specialists, 6; Dain, 6
- profit, 68
- Purao, 62
- Puraardli, 61, 62
- purchasing power, 69
- purchaser-seller, 120
- purely dependents, 34
- purification ceremonies, 65
- psychic attitude, 30
- quasi-friend relationship, 107
- Raju, 78
- Ramkheri, 73, 74
- Rampur, 74
- random samples, 15-16; list of villages, 15-16
- rationalising of production, 12
- ratio; between workers and non-workers, 34; worker in labour and non-labour force group, 35-36
- rate of basket, 55; piece-rate, 55; wholesale, 55
- rate of interest, 108, 118
- ready sale, 71
- reciprocal; demands, 113; exchange, 28; aid, 86
- reciprocity, 28, 115
- Regra, 104
- recruitment of labourers, 26
- Redfield's concept on folk society, 29
- relation with deities, 30
- Regun, 55, 63, 64, 65
- repair; of agricultural implements, 99; fishing tools, 99; hunting tools, 99
- resident strangers, 26; role, 26
- resources, 10-11, 28; natural, 69; ultimate resources, 10
- resource allocation, 67
- rice beer, 107
- risk of expenses; in share cropping, 96; in contract cultivation, 96
- Risley on Mahalis, 1-2
- rivalry, 118
- rotation of personnel, 44
- Russel on Mahalis, 2
- sacred specialist, 6
- sacrifice, 115
- Sadgop, 78
- sales of basketry, 64-66; peak sale, 64-66; minimum sale, 64-66
- saleable baskets, 51
- Sanja, 33, 73, 118
- Santal, 2-3, 71, 78, 79, 88; clan names, 3
- sanskritisation, 30
- saving, 70
- Schedule tribe, 98
- seasonal labourers, 45, 47, 48, 73, 75, 78, 96; women, 75; payment, 75
- seasons; agricultural, 48, 50-53, 60; non-agricultural, 48, 49, 51-53, 59, 66
- secondary occupation, 44
- seed bed, 85
- segregated community, 2
- seller-buyer, 71, 113
- selling price, 63, 64
- service, 43
- service holders, 33, 40, 48
- servicemen, 48
- scarcity, 10
- Shamans, 98
- share-cropper, 33, 44, 45, 47, 48, 51, 73, 75, 76, 77, 78
- shared poverty, 114
- Sherring on Mahalis, 2
- shift from bamboo work, 43, 44
- sick, 49, 51-53
- silver ornaments, 107
- single interest action, 29
- small baskets, 63, 64
- small group, 30

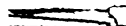
- smith, 31  
 snares, 89  
 soaked rice, 59  
 social; action, 31; unidimensional, 30; cohesion, 29, 30; custom, 87; division of labour, 32; distance, 26; hierarchy, 3; intercourse, 107; mobility, 31; needs, 113; position, 26; reformers, 119; unit, 25  
 socio-economic; change, 31; ties, 30  
 soil wash, 85  
 Solanki, 78  
 sooth-sayer, 98  
 sowing, 83  
 specialist, 28, 40  
 specialisation, 40, 68, 69  
 specialised activity, 40  
 specific wants, 11  
 spices, 100  
 splinter, 58, 61, 62  
 spread of monetisation, 29  
 Sravana, 64, 66, 84  
 Sripuram, 76, 78, 79  
 Srinivas on Mysore basket makers, 73  
 staple; crop, 86; food, 100  
 standard of living, 93, 102-106  
 static expansion, 113  
 status; of clan, 4; elevation, 29; of Mahalis, 30  
 strips, 61  
 structural atomism, 12, 114, 117  
 sufficiency of means, 97  
 supply-demand dichotomy, 71, 120  
 supplier-purchaser, 113  
 sustained growth, 114  
 surplus agriculturist, 27-28  
 taboo for women, 86; Mahali belief, 86  
 Talcott Parsons, 31  
 Tamak, 103  
 Tambuli, 78, 79  
 Tamluk, 55  
 Tanti, 78, 88  
 Tator, 56, 63  
 task structure, 24  
 tea, 100  
 technology; advancement, 26; innovation, 30; of production, 118  
 technological, 114, 119  
 territorial bonds, 25  
 Thaka, 65  
 theory of pattern variable, 31  
 totem, 3  
 tools of basketry, 119  
 Tonnie on small community, 20  
 traditional, 29, 54; action and behaviour, 54; orthodoxy, 29  
 tradition-oriented, 30, 114  
 traditionalistic action, 30, 31  
 traps, 89  
 transaction, 70  
 transplation, 83, 115, 118  
 treading water, 114  
 tribal groups, 88  
 tubers, 90  
 Tumda, 103  
 twin occupational group, 33  
 ugalchas, 83  
 umbrella, 65  
 unattached labour, 79  
 unloading expenses, 56  
 unpaid labourers, 63  
 University Grants Commission, 1  
 unit of production, 11, 88  
 utilisation, 26, 69; of capital, 26; of bamboo, 69; labour, 69; time, 69; money, 69  
 use of money, 12  
 Vaisak, 64  
 Vaisnab, 78  
 varieties of bamboo, 57  
 village, 15, 88; name, 80, 81; festivals, 92; rituals, 106  
 village India, 116  
 vocation, 61  
 vocational occupation, 33  
 voluntary expenses, 92  
 wage earners, 44, 45, 47, 48, 51, 53, 67  
 wage of labour, 74  
 warp, 54  
 wants of daily life, 97  
 weakening of kin groups and kin relations, 12  
 weavers, 31  
 weaving of bamboo, 52  
 Weber's; concept, 30; work, 31  
 weeding, 84, 115, 118  
 week's product, 55  
 weekly market, 55, 73, 107  
 wet; land, 79; ploughing, 85  
 wild; goose, 116; roots, 100  
 winnowing fan, 63-65  
 Yam, 90  
 zeal for education, 21



# ERRATA

<i>Page</i>	<i>Line</i>	<i>Read</i>	<i>instead of</i>
2	6th	Bansphor	Bansphar
7	9th	deity	diety
11	4th	available	availtble
24	12th	requires	require
27	28th	systems	system
29	1st	peripheral	pheripheral
34	35th	77.56%	77.56
37	6th	carrying of	carrying,
39	5th	splitting	splitting
54	12th	section	sectioin
61	40th	employed	emplyed
68	13th	directs	direct
69	11th	maximisation	maximation
70	30th	contingencies	contingences
75	38th	loss	loose
76	39th	average	overage
77	18th	cultivators	cultivator
78	4th	Mahalis are engaged	Mahalis who are engaged
78	5th	agricultural	agriculture
79	15th	has	mas
88	25th	6.81%	6.31%
89	4th	3.10	3.10%
89	10th	livestocks	livestocks
103	35th	their	there
107	4th	articles from	articles either from
107	25th	businessmen	businessman
108	10th	paddy	Paddy





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Dr. Syamalkanti Sengupta, is one of the promising young anthropologists of India. He has been carrying researches in anthropology since 1964. At present he is a *Research Associate to Professor of Anthropology at the University of Calcutta*.

Secured his M.Sc. degree in Anthropology from the University of Calcutta in 1963 and stood first in first class. In 1968 obtained the D.Phil. degree in Anthropology from the same University for his research among the *Mahalis*. In the same year he was awarded Premchand Raychand Scholarship in letters on the thesis entitled "The Social System of a Bengal Village". The book is, of course, the first outcome of his pen, a witness of strong logic and research skill in addition to his many papers in learned journals.

# SOCIAL ORGANIZATION AMONG THE SANTAL

By

Vijay Kochar, M.A. (V.B.), M.A. (LUCK.)

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Extract from the Foreword by  
Dr. Surajit Sinha

*Deputy Director*

Anthropological Survey of India

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By

Dr. Kanti Pakrasi, M.SC. (Anth.), D.PHIL. (Cal.)

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