POVERTY AND SOCIAL RELATIONSHIP

In the previous chapter we described how the Hill Kharia find themselves in a precarious economic situation where neither their traditional occupation of hunting and gathering nor their effort to extract a living wage from the agricultural system has been able to meet the desired amount of their basic requirements. In this chapter we will delineate the consequence of the economic strain and deprivation on the social institutions of the Hill Kharia. In doing this we will not go into the ethnographic detail of the Hill Kharia society. We will deal with the salient aspects of the social institutions that appear to be affected by economic deprivation.
However, it may be pointed out at the very outset that it is very difficult to pin-point how far deprivation has affected the social institutions among the hunting and gathering Hill Kharia mainly because of the nature of the hunting and gathering societies in mainland India. The "secondarily primitivized" state of hunting and gathering societies of the Indian mainland precludes a straightforward comparative approach. The effect of secondary primitivization on the social structure of the hunting and gathering tribes of Indian mainland has not been studied. And research on the social structure of the Indian hunting and gathering societies has not reached a stage where useful generalization about their way of life can be safely made. The problem is made all the more difficult by long period of acculturation that must have taken place due to prolonged contact with caste societies.

The ethnographic data on the Hill Kharia found in Roy's monograph (1957) is not exhaustive. In any case, it was primarily gathered from Mayurbhanj. Present evidence suggests that the Hill Kharia of Mayurbhanj differs in some important respect from the Hill Kharia of Purulia. Therefore, comparison with Roy's data was not feasible.

In studying the effect of poverty on the Hill Kharia of Purulia first of all data on the institutional aspects were collected by narrative method (ideal pattern). Those were then studied in the process of actualization. Any deviation noticed between the ideal and the operational pattern was then further pursued. The reason for deviation was noted down. Minor variation between the ideal and
operational pattern was omitted because of the legitimate fluctuation in the process of actualization noted by anthropologist (Bhattacharya 1967). But we assume that when there is a significant omission of certain aspect of a ritual it may be due to causes other than the usual gap noticed between ideal and operational pattern.

Obviously, the method described above is not at all applicable when dealing with interpersonal relationship. We tried to document the interpersonal relationship found within family and between certain other observable categories of kin. In describing the human societies some anthropologists (Mauss 1954, Levi-Strauss 1963) noted that the fundamental basis of all societies, especially preliterate communities, has been "reciprocal relationship". We followed this guide line and examined how far in an impoverished situation reciprocal relationships within the community as well as outside the community have been affected.

Kinship

We pointed out in chapter 2 that in Kulabahal the Hill Kharia live in two separate hamlets. The inhabitants of these hamlets who trace their descent patrilineally, belong to a single clan, Bhuia mach, but are divided into three separate bangsha or lineages (see Fig.1). Thus, the clans among the Hill Kharia are divided into numerous bangsha. These are only three generational in depth. Marriage between these affinally or consanguineally related bangsha is prohibited. S.C.Roy (1937) pointed out that although marriage within one's own clan was
Fig. 1. Kinship relationship of Hill Kharjas living in Kulabahal Village.
(Only members who are living in the village have been shown)
stated to be prohibited, that remained a notion only. In Purulia it is
found that while negotiating for marriage alliance care is taken to
eliminate the possibility of the prospective groom or bride being
direct descendant of one's own bangsha (patriline) or that of the FS,
MS, MB, and PMB bangsha.

To obviate the possibility of an undesirable match which might
draw the wrath of the supernatural deity, the Hill Kharia have a unique
custom called khatabara. The day after marriage is over and when the
bride and the groom start for the village of the groom, both of them are
made to stand facing each other. The bride's hand is placed on the groom's
hand, both their palms facing upward and fingers spread apart. The fathers
of the bride and the groom bring out two arrow shafts and pass them
through the gap of middle and fourth fingers of the bride and the groom
from below. Then the two arrows are exchanged. After this the superna-
tural deity is invoked to witness the union and if the match is not
lawful, the deity is enjoined to show its disapproval by breaking a
tree's branch.

There seems to be a great deal of controversy regarding the
number of clans among the Hill Kharia. S.C.Roy (ibid.) found only two
clans among the Hill Kharia of Mayurbhanj. He also noted that in an
earlier work T.C.Das (1931) recorded the presence of six clans. We
recorded as many as eighteen clan names*. Of these ten clans have as
1. Bhuia jat (?) 2. Bhuia tensa (kind of bird) 3. Ran bhuia (?)
4. Sal bhuia (sal leave or fruit) 5. Baddya bhuia (a kind of fish)
6. Bir bhuia (?) 7. Dhar bhuia (?) 8. Tiring bhuia (a kind of bird)
9. Pichla bhuia (?) 10. Bhuia mach (a kind of fish called bhuia)
Dondra (leaf cup) 14. Khela kamar (?) 15. Gorai mach (gorai fish)

*
their prefix or suffix the term Bhuia which suggests that these clans might have originated by a process of drift (Fox 1967). But it could not be found out as to which were the parent clans. Unlike the other tribes of the region such as the Santal, the Hill Kharia have no clear idea about the structural features of their own society. Even some of the names of the clan totems are not known.

S. C. Roy described the kinship terminology of the Hill Kharia as classificatory (1937: 147). He was of the opinion that along with Dudh and Dheki Kharia the Hill Kharia too practised cross-cousin marriage. The Hill Kharia of Purulia and the contiguous districts of Bankura, Midnapur and Singhbhum nowadays use Bengali kinship terms and give an impression of having descriptive rather than classificatory terminology. The only classificatory term that they now use is the term *mama* for MB and FSH. This practice is also gradually becoming obsolete and nowadays more and more young people use the term *pisa* for FSH. Junior levirate and sororate marriage although optional, is present among the tribe. These latter features are thought to be associated with classificatory kinship terminology (Fortes 1969: 52).

It has already been pointed out that marriage between the true cross-cousins is prohibited. Behaviour prevalent between the MB and his sister's son prohibit such a relationship. Among the Hill Kharia mother's brother's relationship with sister's son is respectful. The sister's son is thought to be a *guru*, he should not be given the part of the food which one has already eaten (*anto*). Obeisance is also done to him. The role that the sister's sons play in mortuary rite of MBF and MBM may be one of the reasons for such behaviour.
During mortuary rite the sister's son is required to accept one and half kilograms of rice and rupees 1.25 from the mother's brother. This is thought to be an essential part of the mortuary ritual.

It may be stated that there is no prohibition today on marrying classificatory cross-cousins although pronounced evidence in favour of its preference is lacking. The Hill Kharia have been subjected to various extraneous forces for nearly a century which might have left permanent imprint on their social structure. Whether some of the peculiar kinship behaviours still prevalent among the tribe are remnant of the past require much more detail discussion which we are postponing for the present.

Relationship between kin

Among the relatives direct interaction with husband's elder brother and wife's elder sister is avoided. It may be pointed out that levirate marriage with husband's elder brother and sororate marriage with wife's elder sister is prohibited. Children address the elder sister of mother as jethi, a term also applied to the father's elder brother's wife. Conversely, with relatives of FF's generation there is joking relationship. Free abuse and jokes with sexual overtones are exchanged between grandfathers and grandchildren.

Elder brothers and sisters are distinguished and addressed by the Bengali terms dada and didi. Behaviour towards elder brother in particular is respectful. The Hill Kharia have also adopted the regional custom of allowing the elder brother to have larger share of property,
even if the amount has no other than symbolic significance. Young
siblings often cooperate and help each other when they go out in search of
food. But as they grow up and set up their own families cooperation becomes
less. Sharing food, or, supporting one's own brother in case of quarrel with
another person becomes less and less with the process of growing up. The
socio-economic factor behind this kind of behaviour will be discussed later
on.

The relationship and interaction with distantly situated kin
is infrequent. Even the interaction with close affines may be broken for
a variety of reasons. Apart from the factors of distance and the burden
of procuring food, such other factors as participation in criminal activi-
ties by relations may be given as reason for not maintaining relations
with affines. Arjun Sabar pointed out that his father forbade them to
visit his maternal uncle's village Magura because of their involvement
in crimes. The families of father-in-law, MB, MS, FS are generally
invited to participate in marriage and mortuary rituals. With them the
affines of daughters and sons are also invited. But nowadays economic
situation does not permit the luxury of extending invitation to so many
guests. Six cases of marriages within the hamlet were observed. Of the
four kin groups mentioned above only two families of various combinations
were invited in four cases. In two cases one kin family was invited only.
It may be stated here that it is customary to invite all the clan members
living in the hamlet. But it was done in only one case. Apart from
the obvious reasons of economic constraints the reason mentioned
above, that is, of relations' participation in criminal activities
and the constant anxiety of the possibility of being accosted, or,
chased by police while in relative's village, hamper regular contact with kin and affines located in distant villages. In discussing relations with the kin the elderly informants pointed out that in the past many people used to entertain guests with only mahul drinks (mohul biha) but now the proximity of village society has made the people feel that without offering rice for food guests could not be properly entertained.

Summing up it may be pointed out that among the Hill Kharia beyond the lineage the larger kin groups remain a notion only. In marriage and other spheres it is the lineage which acts as the structural unit. But due to the socio-economic conditions relationships within this minimal unit are becoming restricted.

Family

Family among the Hill Kharia is mainly formed through three kinds of method of acquiring mate, namely, 1) marriage by negotiation (seje biha) 2) forcible marriage or sikar biha and 3) sanga or second marriage. Of these the second kind of mate acquiring occurs less frequently.

Whatever be the form of marriage, the structure of family among the Hill Kharia is predominantly nuclear. The adult sons establish their own separate establishments in their natal village after marriage. Nowadays there is also some evidence of uxorilocal residence. In Kulabahal two families have set up their household in
The decision regarding choice of residence mainly depends on the husband's assessment of availability of food. Two stem families where old parents live with their married sons occur in Kulabahal. Sometimes it is found that old parents are rotated among the brothers living in a village. Generally speaking, the old parents, try to provide for themselves as far as possible. When they become incapable of moving around they try to help their sons in fashioning broomsticks and fish-traps from bamboo. But it was found that sons, always hard pressed with critical food supply, neglect to look after their parents. In one instance, it was found that one old widow had to beg from door to door for a little mar (rice-water). She used to frequently complain that her grandchildren rob her of the things that she gathered by begging.

There are also two broken families having widows and their children. The sons of these widows work as bagal and the widows themselves maintain their existence by selling sal leaves to the shop owners as well as by other methods mentioned earlier (Chapter 2).

Ideally, the role of wives among the Hill Kharia is subordinate to that of husbands. Men assert this and women readily admit (Sinha 1978). Even in the case of levirate marriage where the wife may be senior to the husband in age, she continues to play a subservient role. In fact, in comparison to the urban slum and rural poor (Sinha 1972) the relationship between Hill Kharia husband and wife seems to be most balanced and less prone to conflict.
Even in the maladjusted cases recorded it was found that the system of separation was less given to conflict. The two parties concerned make it known to each other about their intention to part ways. The village people play no role, either in reconciliation or separation. Divorce occurs on the grounds of adultery, failure to cooperate in economic activities due to laziness, sexual maladjustment, barrenness, etc. But nowadays the ground of denial of food to the wife often leads to separation. In Kulabahal two women separated from their husbands because of this reason. However, divorce seems to occur only among couples without child.

The harmonious relationship between husband and wife among the Hill Kharia is most evident in economic cooperation. One of the allegation levelled against the Hill Kharia bagal by the local peasants is that they refuse to be employed as bagal after their marriage. In view of the critical food supply this behaviour appears to be highly irrational. When confronted with this question the former bagal replies that now that he is married he cannot think of himself only. If he works as bagal, he will be forced to spend most of the day in his employer's house leaving his wife companionless. Shorn of assistance from her husband, the wife will also be forced to take recourse/finding food for herself.

The division of labour between husband and wife is equitable. Although women play a subordinate role, men frequently perform some of the jobs usually assigned to women. The traditional role of gathering is shared equally. Both men and women take part
in collecting roots and tubers. But collection of indur dhan is done exclusively by men. Hunting is another domain where women have no role to play. But in agricultural operations women perform the major function. It has already been pointed out that the Hill Kharia are called upon to participate in two kinds of agricultural operations, namely, transplantation and harvesting. In both these operations women share the major task. In transplantation men do not take part at all. However, in harvesting while women reap the paddy men tie bundles of paddy into sheaves and carry them to the threshing floor. It may be pointed out that while women are engaged in agricultural operations men perform the household chores like bringing water from wells and also looking after the minor children. This is particularly true of young husbands and wives. Older couples are relieved of this drudgery by their grown up children.

Child Rearing and Socialization

It has been pointed out above that both husband and wife take part in child rearing. But toilet training is provided by the mother. Once a child passes the toddler’s stage and starts playing with the peer group, or follows his older siblings, he remains with them for most of the time. No segregation is made regarding the sex of young children. Girls are slowly inducted into household chores depending upon the presence or absence of her elder sisters. Burdened with their responsibility the girls are less free to explore the surroundings. They, however, accompany their mothers to
the forest and thus learn the technique of food gathering. Boys, in contrast, are free to roam about and explore the surroundings and are even encouraged to find food for themselves. In this they receive instructions from their fathers. In their quest for birds, or birds' eggs, squirrel, etc., they receive a spontaneous training and gather valuable knowledge about the economic aspect of their life. But one aspect of life which is receiving less and less attention is acquiring detailed knowledge about the forest. Informants pointed out that almost all of the valuable plants have disappeared from the locality they find it difficult to transmit even the meagre knowledge that they now possess about the forest to their children. Nowadays after attaining the age of 8-10 years another phase of socialization begins for boys. This phase of adapting to the agricultural activities last till they get married. Girls of about the same age also start earning for the family as agricultural labourers. They take part in transplanting and harvesting paddy.

Another aspect of children's socialization that needs particular emphasis is "learning to live with hunger". Children are allowed to suckle their mothers' breast as long as possible. But once they stop suckling their mothers lest they are ridiculed, they are taught to endure hunger. They are encouraged to gather food for themselves so that they learn the value of food and difficulty involved in gathering food. I found quite often children frustrated in finding food for themselves and remaining unfed by
their parents sitting before their door steps and crying silently from the pain of hunger. Sometimes they fall asleep while crying for food. This early training to endure hunger and to depend on themselves, at least partially, for acquiring food leads to the development of individuality among the Hill Kharia. From 8 years boys are sent to peasants' households, first as cow and goat herders and then as domestic-cum-agricultural servants (bagal). Therefore, development of peer group relation and learning to experiment with group life ceases from this time. This is, perhaps, another reason why individuality develops among the Hill Kharia.

Association between parents and children occurs for a very restricted period. Because all able-bodied persons have to work for procuring food rarely can a free person be found in the hamlet who can look after children when their parents are away for work. Therefore, as soon as children reach a stage when they can play about themselves they are left alone in the company of older siblings. This situation places additional burden on older siblings who must look after their younger siblings. But as has been pointed out earlier, anxiety for food and hunger keeps them busy in procuring whatever little food they can for themselves. This leaves little respite or leisure time to them to devote special attention to their younger siblings. Consequently, the Hill Kharia child/follow their older siblings and by imitating their siblings learn to forage for food since much of their play time is consumed by quest for food (see Chapter 3).

Adult males or females on the other hand do not show any interest for other people's children. On a hot summer afternoon in the year 1976. I was talking with Bathu Sabar, 5 boys aged between
3 - 6 of the hamlet came running to him. Among them was his youngest son, Baja, who asked him to mend his broken bow. Bathu immediately set about the task. It took him nearly 15 minutes to mend the bow. Other boys gathered round him watching him with interest. Among them Nabin, Bathu's elder brother's grandson asked him to make a new bow for him because his bow was broken beyond repair. Bathu brusquely shoved him off saying that he had no time.

From the above description it is apparent that the Hill Kharia place great emphasis on the future members' ability to look after themselves and endure hunger as far as possible. Experience to confront hunger and the realities of life around them from an early age perhaps makes the Hill Kharia aware of the value of individuality and withdrawing from group life as far as possible.

Life Crisis Rituals

Marriage

To a Hill Kharia to die before marriage and without a family means to die without attaining the full stature of manhood. Of all their rituals the marriage rituals are most elaborate. It has two clearly delineable parts, the social-ceremonial aspect and the ritual aspect. The ceremonial aspect begins right from the process of mate selection. The mate selection procedure points out the value the Hill Kharia place on the role of women. Among them it is customary for the groom's relatives to make the first move. After preliminary contact
has been established through a go-between (raibaysha) the groom's party would come to the bride's place. The negotiation is conducted in an indirect way. For instance the bridal party's spokesman would ask of the groom's party in the following manner. "So many decades have elapsed but we have not seen so many people coming together. What for have you come?" The groom's party answers, "One bird has been causing great deal of destruction our hamlet, killing fowl spoiling bajra and maize. We have news that the bird has come to your hamlet". The bride's party would then say "Yes there are some birds in the trees yonder. But what kind of bird are you looking for - mayurchanda, bheladagi or banshtia?" The three birds named represent three different age groups. Mayurchanda refers to a bride whose age falls between 18 - 22, bheladagi 14 - 18 and banshtia 10 - 14. The groom's party would answer according to the age of the bride they are looking for. The bride's party then would point out that the bird has been reared by them and that they cannot accede to their request of taking the bird away without any price. The groom's party would then ask them to state the price. The bride's party would give hundred maize seeds as their price. This transaction occurs through raibaysha. After hearing the price the two parties would then come closer and the groom's party would take out a few maize seeds and place 10 seeds as their price. After the seeds pass hands for three times and the amount of seeds increases to 50 it would stop and the groom's party would ask of the bride's party whether they are satisfied. They will answer in the negative. Then the negotiation is carried out in terms of rupees instead of in a symbolic manner and an agreed price is reached. Nowadays the usual bride price is from rupees 20 to 40. After this is done, the bride's
party place a small quantity of rice, oil, etc., on a sal plate and request the groom's party stating that they have collected a few fruits which they may kindly cook and eat. The groom's party would say, "No, we are tired. We will eat whatever you prepare". The bride's party would say that they have not taken bath for days on end and therefore the food may not be to their liking. The groom's party would reply that no they would not mind. Whatever and in however way they would cook food they would eat.

After this it is customary for the groom to undergo a test of ability to demonstrate whether he is capable of looking after his wife by taking the prospective bride with him in the jungle accompanied by a few relatives from each side. There a big tree with a honeycomb in it is selected. The prospective groom then climbs up the tree carrying along with him the bride and also the instruments for breaking the comb. If he can successfully negotiate the tree and break the honeycomb then only his claim is accepted.

It may be pointed out here that this standard procedure has changed altogether in recent times. The ceremony of panr baas, or bride selection has become less elaborate. The groom's party nowadays does not consist more than two men primarily because of the desire to avoid the expenditure that they would entail for the bride's parents. The ceremony of proving the groom's competence has also been dispensed with.

On the appointed day the groom's party accompanied by the groom's maternal uncle, either real or classificatory, arrive at the bride's village and are given a place to stay well away from the bride's
hut. In an open space, preferably near the tulsi pinra, a sacred shrine is established where various ritual elements symbolising the deity called Marua are placed. This deity is placed under a construction called chowra which looks like a kind of sun-shade having four upright poles on which rests a mahul and sal leaves covered roof. Underneath this roof a few articles, sundried rice, sacred grass (durba), paddy, a betel nut or haritaki, a copper coin and vermillion, are tied together in a sal leaf and then placed in a hole and then covered with earth. Two branches, one of mahul and the other of sidha trees are planted by the side of this. Two earthen pots filled with water of natural ponds are then placed between these branches. Below the earthen pots a little paddy, a few blades of durba grass are placed. Inside the pot one branch of mango or mahul is placed. The earthen pots are filled by the bride's grandmother, or, in her absence, some other relatives who are of the same generation. The grandmother accompanied by other women of the hamlet, goes to a natural pool singing marriage songs (bihar geet). At the pool the two pots are worshipped by applying vermillion, and sundried rice. Then one pot is carried by the grandmother and another pot by any woman of the hamlet not directly related to the bride. They bring the pots to the Marua and demand some paisa from the parents of the bride. They are offered some eatables usually chira (flattened paddy) and gur (molasses).

By the side of the Marua the brother-in-law (bahanai) of the bride digs up a long furrow, the length of the furrow being spread in east-west direction. On the right hand side of the furrow a banana
tree is planted. On the left hand side an arrow is placed and three small wooden planks are then placed horizontally to the furrow.

In the evening of the day when the groom's party arrives, the bride is made to sit on a brass plate and is carried to the Marua by a few people of the groom's party. She is then made to sit by the side of the Marua facing the east. The groom, carried by his maternal uncle, circumambulates the Marua and the bride thrice, facing the west. After this the presiding deities of the Marua, the Dharam and Kandri-randhni are worshipped. She is then taken to a natural pool by her maternal uncle for bathing. After this she comes back to the Marua where she embraces the banana plant thrice.

She then sits on a mat and her brother-in-law (bahanai) encircles five or seven strands of thread around the little toe of her left leg and left ear. After taking it out betel nut and a bangle are tied to this thread. This is the sacred thread of the Hill Kharia. The bride's body is in the meantime anointed with mustard oil and turmeric paste. After this the bride's brother-in-law or grandfather slips the sacred thread on her neck and the bangle to her right forearm. Then the brother-in-law takes out some hair of her forehead and twists it into a lock. Through this fore-lock two drops of turmeric-mixed-oil is made to drip down to her leg. The third drop of oil then is applied on her head. After this is over, the brother-in-law carries her inside the hut. The groom's party then again carry her back to the Marua where she is given a leaf smeared with vermillion and oil.
The groom snatches this off from her hand and keeps it by his side. He then removes the veil off his bride and applies the vermilion on her forehead. When this is over, both the groom and bride stand up and sprinkle water on each other from the pot kept under the chamra by means of a mango twig.

The groom's party then take the bride and the groom inside a hut from where the bridal party again take them back to the chamra. This is done thrice. Then the younger sisters of the bride wash the feet of their sister and brother-in-law. For this they are given a token payment. The people accompanying the groom's party are similarly treated by the bride's brother.

The bride and the groom are then entertained with chira and gur separately. The groom at first refuses to partake of the food till his father-in-law promises to give him some presents. In the past it was customary to make a symbolic presentation of a mountain. The presiding deity of mountain was supposed to provide the couple with food and protection from evils. But nowadays a dhuti is given as present or a symbolic payment is made in lieu of it.

Next day a sal leaf smeared with vermilion is kept on the tulsi-pinra. All the hamlet's inhabitants who are invited to participate touch this leaf. This signifies a pledge to work together in this ceremony. After this the people from bride's home request the groom's party to cook food for themselves which they decline saying that they will rather eat food cooked by them. Then all the items procured for the
feast are placed before the groom’s party for formal permission to prepare the food by the bridal party. The groom’s party is then entertained with some handia (rice beer).

Next day the bride and groom leave for groom’s village. Before departing two important ceremonies are held. In the one the bride is made to sit on a plank on the threshold of the door on her mother’s lap flanked by on her left and right side by her father and husband. There her father pours a little quantity (one pua) of rice on her anchal (one end of her sari). She is then asked by her mother, "where are you going my darling?" She answers, "kamin khatte" (to work as labourer). Then she throws back the rice which are collected by groom’s party. The ceremony of getting the supernatural sanction for the match called khatabara has already been described before. This is held just after the party come out of the but on their way to groom’s village.

After they arrive at the groom’s hamlet they are made to stand under a similarly constructed chamra like that of the bride’s village. There the groom’s mother ceremonially hugs her and ushers her inside the hut. At this time the women of the hamlet sing marriage songs (bihar geet). Next day the groom takes the bride along with a bow and an arrow for a ceremonial bath. Other women of the hamlet accompany them to the pond. After having their bath the groom takes up the bow and shoots the arrow at dummy figures of animals in symbolic action of hunting. The bride walks up to the point where the arrow has fallen, washes the arrow-head by pouring water of a pot she carries and then again dips it into the pot and hands it over to her husband. She also places a little gur
(molasses) in his month. This way they reach the chamra. Here the groom slips an iron bangle in her left forearm. After this ceremony the bride washes the feet of the people of her husband's parental generation. The relatives of the groom is then entertained with feast.

Next day the bride and groom come back to the bride's village where he puts an end to the marriage ceremony by breaking the chamra and throwing it in the pond. His brother-in-law offers a mock resistance and yields after he is placated on being paid a token amount of money. As soon as the groom comes back to bride's village he sits under the chamra and the maternal uncle of the bride touches his forehead with a betel nut and gives it to the groom. The groom returns it to him. The maternal uncle then touches his forehead with mango leaves. After this the women accompanying the groom anoint the bride with turmeric and present the bride and her mother with a sari each and a dhuti to the bride's maternal uncle. They then place a plate and spread a dhuti over it. The bride then sits on it and carried out of the hut. The couple then start for the groom's village.

It may be pointed out that changes in the ceremony like in the panr basa or procedure to test the capability of the groom, etc., are striking. This reduction in the elaborate cultural practices may be due to the impact of poverty. The procedure of bride selection has been curtailed because this elaborate procedure necessitated a great deal of expenditure. But perhaps the ceremony to test the groom's
capability has been given up because people no longer place any emphasis on hunting. One noticeable but still not so statistically significant social aspect of marriage is the occurrence of divorce for denial of food. In Kulubahal itself two daughters, belonging to Sambhu and Sanatan respectively, deserted their husbands because their husbands took the larger share of food leaving them very little to satisfy their hunger. But according to the people themselves the most noticeable abbreviation that has taken place in marriage ceremony is in the ceremonial feast. As has been pointed out earlier even the circle of kin taking part in marriage has become restricted.

Birth

The Hill Kharia believe that successful birth of a child depends on the grace of the spirits, Paina-burhi and Paina-burha. Sometimes the malevolent spirit called Panchua bhut causes the death of a child either in the womb or after the birth. At least five kinds of Panchuhbhut are distinguished: 1) Damra Panchua, who causes death when the child grows to two or three years old. 2) Kachi Khaa Panchua, who kills the full grown child in the womb. 3) Bahurupa Panchua who causes difficulty in delivery of the child and the child is born with unnatural colour. 4) Tarpa Panchua - who causes the child to fret too much, and 5) Barma Panchua who attacks the child all on a sudden. For appeasing these spirits prayer is offered at the crossing of two roads (dopohta) with sundried rice, vermilion, red cloth, red fowl, a small platform of Vela wood (Semaocarpus anacardium), a small
When a woman stops menstruating (dangua), it is taken as symptom of conception. She is then placed under seven kinds of restrictions: 1) Should not eat from the end of her sari or khari chenga (anchar pati khas nak), 2) Should not eat rat, 3) Should not eat dhamma snake, 4) Should not go to a hut where death has occurred, 5) Should not cross any stream or drain by leaping over it, 6) Should not eat fishes caught by trap, net or rod and line, 7) Should not wear new clothes and buy new pots from the potter’s hut.

The umbilical cord is cut by means of an arrowhead by any elderly woman. If the woman is a non-relative she will have to be paid ten kilograms of paddy. The placenta is disposed off by depositing it in a hole dug underneath the eaves of the hut. The pollution period is observed for three, five, seven, or, nine days. The length of the period depends on the ability of the new mother. On the appointed day the new born child’s father gets up early in the morning when nobody in the hamlet gets up and goes to a natural pond and brings a potful of water and keeps it on the tulsi pinra. His wife collects the ritual dust of the pollution floor along with sundried rice, vermillion, a little earthen pot and some branches of vela (Semocarpus anacardium) and throws these under a thicket. With this it is thought that the Painsa-burhi and Painsa-burha are conducted out of the hut. In the morning the tulsi pinra is smeared with mud water and then one or two kg. of paddy is poured on the tulsi pinra and the pot is placed on it. Then in the water of the pot three, five, or, seven pairs of
boiled and sundried grains of rice are deposited for sometime. These are taken out after a while and smeared with turmeric paste and left to dry. A little of this turmeric is also diluted in the water of the pot and three vermillion and black (kajal) dots are applied outside the pot. Then one dried grain of rice is carefully placed in the pot's water. If the grain subsides in the water then it is taken as a tale-tell mark of an omen that the child will not live. If the rice floats then it is regarded as a sign that the child will live and grow up. After this one fowl is sacrificed in the name of Painsha-burhi and Painsharburha. The child is bathed in the water of the pot and its mother takes her bath in the pond. The lineage members as well as all the members of the hamlet take bath. The ceremony held to observe the pollution period's end is called as naata. In the past it was customary to host a feast but nowadays this is not followed.

Death

Although the world of the dead is regarded as a separate domain the Hill Kharia maintain and regard it as obligatory on their part to keep contact with their dead ancestors. The mortuary rituals amply demonstrate this. After a person dies the dead body is carried to the burial place. There the dead body is placed in a grave with its head resting on the southern side. The Hill Kharia point out that the Kurmi Mahato place their dead body's head in northerly direction. Then a torch made up of branches of bel (Aegle marmelus) tree is lit
and touched on the mouth of the dead body. The eldest or youngest son usually does this job. In the absence of sons, daughters may also perform this job. Previously it was customary to deposit with the dead body food, new clothes and one or two implements. But now this custom is no longer adhered to. After this the grave is filled up.

While coming back to the hamlet the laya performs a ritual called kantaduari at a junction of two roads. Here laya places a big stone in the middle of the junction and covers it with a few thorny twigs. All the persons accompanying the dead leap over the thorn. On reaching the hamlet they take bath. The idea behind the ritual of kantaduari is to prevent the spirit of the dead from coming back to the hamlet. Ten days after the burial ghatradha is performed. During this ceremony the laya applies vermillion and sundried rice on the shoulders of the four persons who carried the dead body to the burial ground. Two small fowls are then allowed to feed on the rice and after that these are killed by striking with branch of Kend. This procedure is called as khand katya namano or procedure to dispel the spirit of the dead from the shoulders of the four persons who carried it. Then all the inhabitants of the hamlet take bath after smearing their body with turmeric and oil. The son of the dead person then comes back to the hamlet and offers his sister's son a few roots and tubers, rupees 1.25 and one and a half kg. of rice. This offer is made at the tulsi pinra. The laya is also presented with a new dhuti.
After a year of the first burial the second part of the mortuary rite takes place. This is termed as dothupa or second burial. On the appointed day the laya brings one unused stone slab at the nisangarah, or muragarah or ossuary and worships it by applying vermilion and sundried rice. Then he goes to the first burial ground and sacrifices one red fowl after making it to peck a few grains of sundried rice. Then it is struck by means of a kend (Melanoxylon) stick at its neck. If it does not die it is killed by twisting its neck. This is done to appease the spirit of the dead. Then the laya collects the little toe of the left leg and any bone of the skeletal remains of the dead body in a new earthen pot and covers it with a new piece of cloth. This is then carried to the nisangarah and placed in a hole and a new stone slab (dolmen) is horizontally placed over it. The sons of the dead person then return to their hamlet where their wives wash the feet of their husbands and other elderly persons. On the same night sons go to the nisanagarah with fresh cooked rice and place it in five sal leaf plates. By bringing their mouths close to the pot in which rice was cooked they pray to their parent to come and take the food. This ceremony is called naba daka. In the case of unmarried person this ceremony is naturally not performed and the grave stone slab (mehhir), in contrast to the married persons, is also placed perpendicular to the earthen pot containing mortal remains of the dead.

It may be pointed out here that the second part of the mortuary ritual is now rarely observed by the Hill Kharia of Purulia. This has given rise to a new term turukthupa Kharia or the Kharia who do not practise the second mortuary ritual. Not only is the ritual of second burial skipped but also the customary feast usually hosted at the end of this ceremony.
is avoided.

Thus we find that even at the level of preliterate tribal communities the economic constraint hampers the optimal operation of some institutions of the society. In all the three life crisis rituals the most affected part of the institutions is social participation of the kin. In both the ceremonies connected with death and birth the customary feasts are avoided. In marriage we find that the elaborate procedure of marriage negotiation has undergone marked abbreviation and participation of the kin is less.

The Supernatural World

The Hill Kharia describe the earth as a square table resting on the shoulders of four big turtles. Below the earth there is an interminable stream of water. Above, the earth is covered by air in which different spirits, both benevolent and malevolent (Nada, Churgin, etc.) float about. In the air there are also various bodies like the sun (bera), the moon (chando) and the star (tarai) which are responsible for the division of day and night. There are six stars which are particularly identified and greatly relied upon for gauging the length of the night at different seasons (bhurka tarai, chor kheda, juha khata, sanjha tarai, dhudi bhaira and sat bhaira).

The supernatural world is conceived of as divided into various spheres, social and natural, each of which is controlled by a particular spirit. Thus, each family has its own ancestral spirits, Burha and Burhi, and the locality where a particular group lives has its own spirit too.
This spirit varies in name and characters from locality to locality. When a man is away from the village for a long time or when a kin comes to the hamlet after a long interval a ritual called satra (when an anointed sal leaf is torn apart by two men holding it simultaneously from one end) is performed. If this is not performed the two guardian spirits of the place as well as the ancestral spirits might get annoyed and cause sickness or other harms to the host. The forest is ruled by a host of spirits but the supply of food is governed by the female spirit called Bankumari. The honey production is looked after by another spirit called Sikari. The formation of cloud is assigned to another spirit called Lagbir, storms to Uran bir, etc. The well-being of a child is looked after by Kandni-randbni. The Painsa-burhi and Painsa-burha influence the safety of the human embryo's full gestation in the womb.

Although the supernatural world is thus segmented the chief of all spirits is thought to be dharam which is conceived to be very powerful and permeates every corner of the earth. Apart from this, all the hills are thought to be symbols of particular spirits and the chief of all the hill spirits is thought to be Barpahari. Other deities and spirits particularly worshipped by the Hill Kharia are Baghut, Vimli kanya (the deity of lightning), Rangahari and Bisaichandi. Nowadays some Hill Kharia also worship the Hindu goddess Kali particularly on the eve of dacoity or such other criminal activities.
Festivals

Although the supernatural world of the Hill Kharia is full of spirits the paucity of the festivals when these spirits are invoked for various reasons is striking. In contrast the peasant's life is punctuated by as many as 11 festivals in a year. In Mayurbhanj Roy (1937) recorded various festivals in connection with shifting cultivation. The Hill Kharia of Purulia have two major festivals Magh puja and sarul. On the first day of Magh the Hill Kharia worship all their deities and spirits. Because this festival coincides with peasants' festival akhan jatra, or, first ploughing ceremony this is also called akhan jatra. On this occasion each family calls its ancestral spirits who are thought to reside at the chulah sal (oven) to come and partake of the food offered to them. A few coins are also offered to them which must not be spent for personal end but should be kept aside and given away at the end of the year to any outsider not belonging to the tribe. Besides at the tulsi pinra all the spirits and deities are worshipped. Each family, according to its ability, offers fowl to the spirits. It was said that previously each spirit was offered one fowl. The laya also performs puja on behalf of the families residing at the hamlet.

Besides Magh puja, another puja observed by the Hill Kharia is sarul or ceremonial offering of new fruits to the supernatural spirits. This is performed by individual families in the month of Baisakh (April-May) just after gajan. During sarul the deities are worshipped with boiled mahul (Basion latifolia), green mango, kul (Zizyphus), five kind of flowers, such as sal, mango, palas (Butea frondosa), jamun (Eugenia sp.), mahul,
etc., offering them on a plate made from new sal leaves at the tulsi pinra.

The Community Life

Much of the Hill Kharia's community life is led without any reference to the multi-ethnic village of which they are a part. They have their own village deity. They have their own laya (priest). This post is hereditary. No artisan caste or other functional caste groups like the Napit, Dom and the Kamar, serve them. Indeed the peasants do not regard the Hill Kharia as part of the normal village moral community. They were allowed to settle in the village because the peasants were hopeful of utilizing their labour at low cost to further their own economic gains. The rich peasant households who allowed them the privilege to settle on their fallow lands (tanr jami) were quick to realize that by keeping them under surveillance and strict control they could be utilized for gaining dominance in the faction-ridden village community. We will focus on this aspect when we describe the participation of the Hill Kharia in criminal activities.

The Hill Kharia's economic status relative to that of the peasants is marginal. They have been trying to increase their participation in the village economy. But from the description given in Chapter 3 it will be evident that the Hill Kharia have so far failed to get themselves totally incorporated into the village economy in a position of strength. They are, as it were, standing apart from the
Although the Hill Kharia realize that the forest resources are more or less exhausted and hope that if they can get adequate cultivable land they can improve their economic condition, their experiences of participation in the village economy have made them aware that this is a difficult goal to attend. Economically, the Hill Kharia are still trying to adjust between two economic domains, that is, agriculture and forest. Emotionally, they find the forest more easier to adjust with because the supernatural power which reigns over the domain of availability of food can easily be comprehended with the help of their cultural idioms. They also feel traditionally more knowledgeable about the plants and animals of the forest compared to the peasants. On the other hand they find it difficult to adjust with and understand the mode of economic transactions that the peasants drive with its overtone of profit and exploitation. It was observed that when talking with the peasantry, the Hill Kharia refrain from all overt actions which can give the alter-ego some idea of what is going on in his mind. In Burdwan district and parts of West Bengal the lower castes are organically related to the hierarchically divided village society and their pattern of behaviour with the members of the higher castes is more or less defined. But interactional patterns between the Hill Kharia and the peasants are yet to crystallize. The impression one gets about their attitude and interaction with the peasants, perhaps, cannot be termed as respectful, but it is one of indifference and has a great deal of similarity with withdrawing into a cell. Peasants complain that paucity of overt reaction on the part of the Hill Kharia makes it very difficult to interact with ease with them. In explaining the various aspects of an assigned work
to the Hill Kharia they find that their effort is being rewarded
by an inscrutable stare only or just a few answers in monosyllables.
The reason for this kind of behaviour lies in the attitude of the
Hill Kharia towards peasants, particularly, to the dominant ethnic
groups, the Kurmi Mahato. The Hill Kharia have the notion of the peasants
being deceitful. In the last chapter we have already described the norm
of economic interaction with the peasants and listed on what counts
the Hill Kharia find the peasants deceitful. Their experience as so-
called "criminal" may also contribute to their mode of acting with
the peasants. We will have occasion to discuss this aspect later on.

Socially also they remain a marginal group among all the
regional communities. They are ranked lowest because of their unorthodox
food habit. None of the communities take cooked food or drinking water
from them. They regard the peasants as their "reference group" and have
been trying to orient themselves culturally by following some broad
features of the regional culture. Thus, they have given up dancing with
their women in festive occasions. In the village communal festivals like
bandhua ang gajan they participate enthusiastically. But their reputation
as criminals and low social position as well as the peasants' heightened
sense of ethnic identity remain a barrier in admitting them within the
village society's fold.

The context of marginal situation is important here not
because of the notion of status inconsistency inherent in it but so
far as it creates a conflict situation where people participating in
the interacting situation with the peasants define it as not wholly
According to Dicike-clark (1966) for a marginal situation to develop following important conditions are necessary: 1) contact situation, 2) hierarchical interaction where the higher group acts as a reference group of the lowly placed community, 3) social barrier which prevents the lowly placed group from participating fully in the life of the reference group; and 4) status inconsistency, or, ambiguity in defining the interaction situation properly, giving scope to the dilemma in choosing proper mode of behaviour. In the region the Hill Kharia occupy the lowest position in the inter-ethnic hierarchy. But the Hill Kharia themselves strongly believe that they used to hold the highest rank till the Bramhin stole their sacred thread during marriage (Banerjee 1959). The dilemma in choosing norm of interaction while acting with the dominant peasants, that is, the Kurmi Mahato is evident in their mode of behaviour with them as well as their effort to emulate some of their cultural norms in their anxiety to conform to the dominant section's cultural pattern. But failure to get entry into the ethnic groups' fold has produced the concept of marginality, namely, the feeling of not being part of the larger socio-economic system, among the tribe which accentuates the notion of deprivation.

The community life of the Hill Kharia is characterized by lack of any institutional leadership. For hunting and gathering each of the families depends on the skill and the equipments that they possess. As such there are even no such persons among the Hill Kharia who are esteemed as the most knowledgeable who could be relied upon for such enterprise. From the inventory of animals that are hunted
it will be evident (Chapter 3) that the Hill Kharia depend mainly on small games. Hunting is organized from the family level, that is, father and unmarried sons or between married brothers. Hunting hare by means of net which necessitates organizing a group of at least ten people is nowadays not considered as feasible. Therefore, hare when hunted is done mainly through snares. Fox (hunted not from open field but from the hole), snakes, lizard, rats, birds, etc., all are hunted individually or in small groups, members of which are consanguinely related. Therefore, the village as an unitary group in opposition to the outside world remains a far cry. Considering the small size of the hamlet this seems very striking. In work situation, two or three families, usually siblings, collaborate. It was reported that previously with quarrel families used to severe their connections with the village and establish new households elsewhere. But nowadays the principle of fission and fusion (Turnbull 1968) operates rarely because finding work in a new village is difficult and forest wealth everywhere has become scarce. The three main lineages living within the village are sharply divided into three groups. There is much ill-feeling and mutual recrimination between the lineages. The issues with which they recriminate against each other are denial of information regarding work situation available and practice of sorcery (lasam). When work situation demands participation of two or more men, members of one's own lineage are always preferred. If lineage members are not available no effort is made to draft non-lineage members. The Hill Kharia are greatly afraid of sorcery and any nagging ailments they suffer from is attributed to it. Usually non-lineage members are
blamed for lasan. Because the lineages are constantly fighting against each other, grounds for such suspicion are always there.

Each Hill Kharia family tries to keep itself aloof from other's affair. They are never found to gossip together, or, otherwise spend their leisure time in a group. Even when a great deal of shouting or abusing occurs between two quarrelling individuals the other people do not show any interest in the matter and make no moves to arbitrate or separate the quarrelling individuals. When two groups are embroiled in dispute after an initial phase of recrimination the two contestants just withdraw from all interaction with each other. Indeed, avoidance of confrontation forms the keystone of their social life (Sinha 1978a). While playing football match with young boys, it was found, that even if any individual adopted unfair tactics none would protest. They would just ignore and go on playing the game. In the absence of formal social control mechanism this method of avoidance and withdrawal is adopted by the people to resolve dispute. For example, Arjun and Sambhu had a long standing dispute over a demarcation of a plot of garden land. Although Arjun had the majority of people's support, so far as the question who was in the right and who was in the wrong is concerned, it never took a serious turn because apart from giving verbal support in private people desisted from being divided into two overt warring factions. Another instance witnessed by me was when Sambhu went staff in hand and challenged his son-in-law and his father, Bhim to fight with him. The immediate cause of the dispute was alleged denial food to Sambhu's daughter Rani. Both Sambhu's son-in-law and Bhim sat nonchalantly and, therefore, diffused the tension.
Poverty and Reciprocity

One of the fundamental characteristics of primitive society is the pervasive relationship of reciprocity between its members. Gouldner (1960) pointed out that the need to reciprocate the benefits received earlier so that this process is continued serve as a "starting mechanism" of social relationship. According to Blau (1967) social exchange differs from economic exchange in entailing "unspecified obligation" and trust in other to discharge their obligation. Sahlins' (1968) three fold division of reciprocity, namely, generalized, balanced and negative reciprocity is an attempt to formulate the principles of economic exchange among the primitive communities.

It may be asked that given the mode of production of "primitive" societies, especially the hunting and gathering societies, can the theory of reciprocal transaction be applicable to it? In two articles Sahlins (1972), himself characterizes the "primitive" economy as "domestic mode of production". He points out that not only such an economy underutilizes the natural resources but each of the domestic units also functions without any relation to other such units and is prevented from developing anarchic tendency by kinship relationship which binds the discrete economic units of households into a close knit community. Therefore, even though the "primitive" economy has in it a tendency to work against the collective behaviour it is, as if, coerced into submission by kinship relationship and various redistributive mechanism that it entails. But in a situation of stress this economic unit falls apart and the value of sociability and altruistic behaviour is suspended. Thus, Laughlin (1974) by utilizing Sahlins' model demonstrates that in a situation of stress reciprocal
relationship is put off. Laughlin notices that among the So agriculturist of east Africa as the situation of stress eases and production returns to normal phase the orbit of reciprocal relationship gets wider and encloses both kin and non-kin. During stress period, however, reciprocal relationship tends to become negative. Thus with the fluctuation of production intensity from minimal to maximal there is also corresponding fluctuation in reciprocity from negative to generalized.

Unlike the So, the Hill Kharia are passing through a situation of continuous economic strain. It was already pointed out before in what way social institutions have been affected by poverty among the Hill Kharia. Below we will examine the norms of reciprocity in the context of intra and inter-community interaction.

**Generalized reciprocity**

In the section on community life it has been pointed out the Hill Kharia's marginal social situation vis-à-vis the larger village society and lack of cooperation and avoidance of overt conflict within themselves. Here we shall analyse the pattern of inter-relationships within the community in greater detail and show how the norms of generalized reciprocity govern their day to day existence. Sahlins defines generalized reciprocity as "transactions that are putatively altruistic, transactions on the line of assistance given and, if possible and necessary, assistance returned". (1965 : 147). Besides purely altruistic gift Sahlins lists such components of social relationship as sharing food, hospitality, free gift, help and generosity. Giving and receiving good form an important
component of social relationship of hunting and gathering society. It was pointed out that hunting among the Hill Kharia is practically restricted to small games like hares, snakes, birds, etc. It is generally said that one hare can be shared among twenty people and this is actually done when hare is hunted in groups. But when individually hunted hare is bartered for food grain rather than shared among close kin. It was found that sometimes a man would bring snakes more than he or his family members were able to consume. The excess meat is preserved with salt and taken next day. The feeling that motivates this behaviour is that as food supply is finite and there is no likelihood of getting the same next day, it is better to hold it back so that one is ensured of it, at least, for the next day.

The only exception recorded was regarding sharing of meat of carcass. It was pointed out before that Hill Kharia eat flesh of carcass. When a carcass of domestic cattle is discovered the information is passed on to co-villagers. But in case of carcass of animals that die in jungle like jackals, wolf, etc., the animal is first taken to one's hut and the best meat is gathered for family's use as much as possible and then other kin are given the opportunity to gather meat.

When food is in short supply and the people are intensely aware of the poverty of their kinsmen, it is but natural that generalized reciprocity will be inoperative. It was noticed that exchange of visit and hospitality among distantly related kin had also been affected. That married daughters should come to visit their parents is obvious. This type of visit between core familial relations occurs. But with the passage of time even these exchanges of visits have become rare. As
Kala Sabar's sister who lives in Dandudih village, only six miles away from Kulabahal said, "I have come here after seven long years. Yesterday afternoon we had some food. Today even though evening is approaching there is no hope of getting food".

If perennial shortage of food supply affects exchange of food between kin, hospitality, mutual help, and generosity become even more restricted. In 1975 in the month of May six persons of the hamlet were arbitrarily arrested by the police due to the instigation of the villagers of the adjacent village Hullung for alleged participation in a dacoity. Of the six persons only one was unmarried. Three married persons left behind young wives with minor children. Of these two wives soon left for their natal villages thinking that as their husbands were absent, helps needed would not be forthcoming. One housewife, however, decided to stay back because her parents were old and brothers were encumbered by familial obligations. She had two young daughters, 5 and 2 years old. She found that although she was living among her in-laws she had to starve quite often because her in-laws turned a blind eye to her plight. Because work was not always available and she found gathering a difficult job with two small children, she had to beg from door to door for a little mar (rice water) from the peasants.

If any death occurs in the hamlet normally all able-bodied persons come forward to take part in digging grave and carrying the dead body. But Kala Sabar pointed out that these days people refuse to take part:

When my father died there were only two able-bodied persons present in the hamlet (Dhadkidih). We went to the other dih (hamlet) and broke the news of my father's death and asked people there to help in disposing the dead
body. Sambhu and Arjun asked for rupees twenty for buying liquor*. They bluntly told me that if they did not get the amount they would not go. I had no money then so I could not give. I came back to my dih and with the help of Mangal took the dead body to the nearby stream Fatloi and left it there.

In other crisis situations also people seldom come forward to help. Sanatan Sabar’s second son got himself badly burnt in 1971. At that time harvesting was going on and Sanatan Sabar was away from the village. Nobody was willing to leave their day’s earning and help to carry the boy to the doctor staying in a village a few miles away. The boy ultimately died.

Gouldner (1960) singles out two minimal conditions for reciprocity: 1) People should help those who help them. 2) People should not injure those who have helped them. Among the Hill Kharia people recognise the futility of helping others because they do not have "trust" in the other’s ability to return the favour in the foreseeable future. Among the Hill Kharia the economic system itself is under severe attack. The institution of kinship operates at the level of lineage. It was pointed out that even this level, beyond regulating marriage hardly operated as a binding social force. Under such circumstances family has become the only effective institution for survival.

*During the second mortuary ritual (dothupa) the mortal remains of the deceased are placed under a stone slab. On this occasion all the persons who accompanied the deceased to the grave as well as relatives, are invited to a feast. Nowadays there is an increasing tendency to postpone this dothupa ritual indefinitely. Sambhu and Arjun apparently had this in mind when they asked for money.
This has resulted in "atomisation" of family. Each family holding on dearly to the meagre resources available to themselves. The self interest of their own family makes them operate within this narrow limit. The norms of generosity, hospitality, etc., are not unknown but these are inoperative under the circumstance.

Relationship with the Peasants

The second kind of interaction encompasses the relationship between the peasants and the Hill Kharia. The Hill Kharia recognise that the peasants control a domain to which they are seeking entry and have no illusion that the interaction occurs from the same plane. The Hill Kharia view their relationship with the peasants as contractual and it never endures beyond certain time period. Each work situation is judged entirely by the prospect of immediate return that it would bring. For example, in 1975 I persuaded the superintendent of the village school hostel to give four Hill Kharia women the job of plastering the walls of the school building with mud. The job used to be done by two Bauri women of Hullung village. I was also able to persuade the superintendent to pay them a wage higher than that was normally offered to the Bauri women. To the great satisfaction of the superintendent of the school, the Hill Kharia women did their job admirably well. It was compared with the performance of the Bauri women and found that the performance of the tribal women was better than that of the Bauri women although they took much longer time to finish the work. But unfortunately they refused to do the job next year saying that the
wage offered was inadequate compared to the task. The Bauri women returned to the job and accomplished the task in accordance with the wage offered. In contrast to the Bauri women who assessed the job in terms of market principle the Hill Kharia evaluated the job in absolute terms and demanded that wage should be commensurate with it.

This situation may be counterposed against various patron-client situations that the Hill Kharia enter into. Here, too, the Hill Kharia try to fulfil their part of duty honestly but nurture a notion that they ought to be paid an amount commensurate with the work that they think they have performed.

As has already been pointed out the Hill Kharia work as wage labourers and as bagal in peasants' homes. Although peasants pay at the local rate for work rendered by the Hill Kharia, the latter think that they are being cheated by the peasants. Peasants, on the other hand, regard them as a source of cheap labour waiting for them to be exploited. The Hill Kharia frequently complain that peasants are deceitful and cheat them at the slightest opportunity. Thus they point out that paddy given at the end of contract are half mixed with chaff and measure less than the promised quantity. Frequently, instead of paddy some part of the wage is given in kodo (cultivated grass seed) which is less costly and regarded as much inferior to paddy as a cereal. During lean months many bagal take advance a part of their wage. A 50% interest is charged by employees for this. It results in a condition where Hill Kharia bagal find that they are left with little of their wage at the end of their contract in which they have laboured hard but found the remuneration not proportionate to it.
From the above description it is evident that the contractual relationship between the peasants and the tribe operates in an atmosphere of distrust. The marginal situation of the tribe vis-a-vis the peasant and exclusion from the moral order of the village society facilitate this kind of transaction. According to Sahlins’ terminology, interactional pattern between the peasants and the Hill Kharia may be termed as balanced reciprocity (Sahlins 1968). But because of the hierarchical inter-ethnic relations the Hill Kharia have a feeling that in most of the interactional situation they have to carry all the burden of disadvantages where the loss outweighs the gain. The Hill Kharia are trying to gain entry into the village society through their participation in two village festivals, the gajan and bandana. Analysis of their participation show that they participate because at these times peasants freely distribute food which they naturally avidly seek. But so far as their social articulation is concerned it may be stated that they have been allowed to take up the marginal and arduous roles only which/ethnic groups themselves are giving up.

In Purulia and adjoining regions of West Bengal, Orissa and Bihar states there is a unique institution of ceremonial friendship (phul-saya) through which kinship relation is extended to non-kinsmen belonging both within and outside of a community. Through this relationship not only the circle of kin is enlarged but also a network of economic cooperation and other opportunities are increased. Phul (ceremonial friends) participate in each other’s social ceremonies and are treated as a member of the family. Phul’s kinsmen are addressed by the same term as the phul uses. Banerjee (1959) mentions occurrence of six cases of ceremonial friendships with Hill Kharia and Bhumij of Madhupur village.
In Kulabahal too seven such relationships were recorded. The castes and community of the phul of Hill Kharias of Kulabahal were following: two Muslim itinerant traders of Bhabanipur village, two Muchi men of Dapang, one Santal of Chargali, and two Kurni Mahato of Kulabahal. But when the motive behind entering into such relationship with a controversial community like the Hill Kharia was enquired into the nature and purpose of the ceremonial friendship became clear. The Muslim and Muchi men thought that by entering into phul relationship with the Hill Kharia they could carry out their business in snake skins in an atmosphere of trust. It may be pointed out that the benefits of such trust were enjoyed by these business men because the Hill Kharia depended on them for knowing the trend of market price. These men also have excluded all other competitors and cornered the produce of snake skin of Kulabahal. The Kurni Mahato and Santal men were landless labourers and phul relationships were entered into when they were bagal. The Hill Kharia thought that by entering into phul relationship with these men they could take part in the festivals and get mahul drinks as bonanza. It is worthwhile to mention that in case of the Hill Kharia these ceremonial friendships do not extend beyond the economic level of interaction and become an all-encompassing kin relationship.