In Chapter 4 we examined the impact of poverty on social institutions and interpersonal relationship among the Hill Kharia of Purulia. Poverty has greatly affected the reciprocal relationship, people being more concerned for their own family rather than group life. Atomisation of social life, marginal situation vis-a-vis the village society and a general distrust of the peasants and the human world around them govern their life. In this Chapter we will examine the reason for the Hill Kharias' participation in criminal activities. The question we tried to examine was: given the low level of organized group life and marginal situation of the tribe relative to the peasants what draws them to criminal activities? In eastern India participation of a hunting and gathering tribe in criminal activities is not unknown. In
West Bengal itself the Lodha of Midnapur, a food-gathering tribe, is noted for their criminal activities. Bhowmick (1961) is of the opinion that the past predatory habit of the tribe born of their traditional food-gathering occupation coupled with their economic displacement from the forest are the reasons for their participation in criminal activities.

The immediate cause that suggests itself is that this was due to the large scale economic displacement. They are mainly food-gathering people and earned their livelihood by collection of wild roots, medicinal herbs, hunting and selling other forest produce. Gradual deforestation of the areas inhabited by them, brought in a rapid economic rout, the shock of which, they could not absorb. While some amongst them could just take to agriculture, somehow, and became settled, others could find no staying mode of livelihood and therefore, no apparent source of earning being available to them, took to the more primitive ways of subsistence, of possessing by force, or burglary. As the majority were thus deprived, in the interest of their own survival they organized gangs and established an ingenuous modus operandi, to escape detection. The criminal propensity of the Lodhas, can therefore, be said to have been born of their habit of food-gathering, an urge for survival of every living creatures. (Emphases added) (ibid : 158).

But in Midnapur and Purulia the Lodha and Hill Kharia are numerically minor and surrounded by powerful landowning peasantry. Even if the predatory habit of the tribe is admitted this habit cannot be employed with impunity on human societies. Unlike the forest domain human societies, have their own value system and their method of aggressive reaction against threats to their properties, especially when the latter comes from a marginal group who is in so vulnerable situation so far as numerical strength and lack of control of coercive institutions
is concerned. The same strategies applied to gather food from forest
cannot be employed on the human societies. However, economic displacement
and consequent poverty as one of the causes seems to have some validity
because poverty generates a sense of deprivation which may goad people
to take to the deviant means to achieve their desire. But poverty as
the sole cause of crime has been consistently refuted by sociologists
(Clinard 1974: 115-118). Poverty as a reason of an individual's participa-
tion in crime may be justified. But when a whole community or a
large section of it is involved in it as a group it may be due to reasons
other than just poverty.

From the previous description it is evident that despite
poverty the Hill Kharia have been successful in keeping intact the
family as an institution. The role-relationships within the family are
by and large satisfying. Therefore, social disorganization as the
driving force of criminal activities seems also untenable. We assume
that for a proper understanding of "criminal tendencies" and activities
of the Hill Kharia we shall have to examine the adaptive strategies that
the people employ in a situation of deprivation. We also presume that
these adaptive strategies will largely be determined by the people's
perception of the situation and the social condition that prevails in
the "arena". The arena in this case, it may be noted, is situated
outside the Hill Kharia's own society. It may be pointed out that we
are not discounting any occurrence of individual deviance among the
Hill Kharia. Although we could not find any instance of crime having
been perpetrated within their own community; deviance perhaps also
occurs in Hill Kharia society. We are here, however, concerned only with the group as whole and not with individual deviance.

It was pointed out before in chapter 1 that Coupland (1911) mentioned participation of the Hill Kharia in criminal activities at the beginning of the twentieth century. But what precisely was the reason, for their participation in criminal activities at that time when food resources did not become as acute as it is now, was not known. Historical record of that period does not throw any light. Coupland himself was silent about the cause of Hill Kharia's participation in crime.

From the vantage point of having hindsight it is tempting to postulate whether it has got anything to do with the confrontation with the peasants or not. For, the peasants harbour a strong suspicion about the forest world, having no knowledge about that domain. They usually associate all the evils with the forest domain. The Hill Kharias' natural association with the forest might have made them believe that they are capable of robbing them of their property even if the association of the Hill Kharia with the crime could not be demonstrated. The Hill Kharias' alleged participation in criminal activities is all the more perplexing when we consider that another similar hunting and gathering group, the Pahira, were not considered as criminal. Although the Pahira, are not numerically as strong as the Hill Kharia they, nevertheless, occupy the same ecological habitat, having similar relationship with the peasants.

Resolution of this question requires detail investigation. But it may be surmised that because of Pahira's numerical insignificance they perhaps were less in contact with the peasants than the Hill Kharias.
There is widespread "generalized belief" (Smelser 1962) among the peasants of Purulia that the Hill Kharias are associated with every theft or dacoity that occurs in the locality. In Kulabahal out of the total 25 males who are above the age of 20, as many as 19 males (76% of the total males) were arrested at one time or the other. Of these, five persons were convicted and sentenced to rigorous imprisonment (26.3%). Another six persons were arrested for their alleged involvement in a dacoity in Hullung village. The rest were arrested singly or in groups for various criminal cases. The district police authority of Purulia provided the following figures (Table 8) of total number of Hill Kharias arrested from the district during the period 1963-1973 in connection with different criminal activities.

Table - 8

Hill Kharia arrested by Police and Convicted during 1963 - 1973

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Kind of criminal activity</th>
<th>Persons arrested</th>
<th>Persons convicted</th>
<th>Percentage of conviction</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Dacoity</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>14.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Burglary</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>12.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Robbery</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>33.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. House theft</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>13.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Rioting</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>nil</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Miscellaneous charges</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>12.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td>203</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>12.8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Although the list given by the district police authority is by no means exhaustive, this shows the extent to which the Hill Kharia are involved in so-called criminal activities and their encounter with the police.

Two reasons are generally advocated to account for the alleged participation of the Hill Kharia in criminal activities:

1) They are by nature criminal. This is the widely held belief among the police and other ethnic groups living in Purulia and the adjacent police stations of Bankura district and that

2) the Hill Kharia through these deeds build up hostile image about themselves so as to ensure their isolation from the peasants (S.C. Sinha personal communication).

Goffman pointed out, "we believe the person with stigma is not quite human. On this assumption we exercise varieties of discrimination, through which we effectively if often unthinkingly reduce his life chances" (1963: 5). Among the peasants there are various kinds of stories current about the amazing quality of the Hill Kharia which enable them to perform crimes. Thus they are believed to be capable of moving to far off places to commit dacoity and come back the same night depending on nothing else than their two legs. Another story holds out the belief that they have elaborate network of underground tunnels which enable them to move from one place to another with impunity. But the most significant aspect of the social relevance of stigma is that it often coerces people into social performance which creates a vicious circle. Often the stigmatized person has no other recourse but to play the social game with cards stacked against him. The Hill Kharia of Purulia too frequently find that
they have no other alternative but to act the way other people want him to act. The following discussion will reveal the general socio-economic condition which leads the Hill Kharia to participate in crimes.

The Hill Kharia of Kulabahal, it is alleged, habitually steal paddy from agricultural fields when the crop is still unharvested. They are also thought to be expert in organizing dacoity in peasants' houses and decamp with food grains, goats, and valuable movable properties. During the past ten years the Hill Kharia of Kulabahal are thought to have organized and committed five dacoities in the locality. Of these three are said to be within Kulabahal village and one each in Bullung and Ladhurka village.

Interestingly enough, the Hill Kharia admitted that they did take part directly in one dacoity only, i.e., in Ladhurka village, but denied that they committed dacoity in any other village. In two dacoities committed in Kulabahal, it was emphatically said, they were indirectly associated having played the role of contact between villagers and Hill Kharia of other villages. It was pointed out by the informants that, numerically and economically insignificant as they were, it would be impossible for them to commit or organize dacoity in the village if they were not directly helped and instigated by the villagers. Only a few years back they have been given the ownership right over the homestead land by the government. But previously they were at the mercy of the landlords (3 Mahato families) who could drive them off if they dared to go against their wish.
From the analysis of the three cases (two in Kulabahal and one in Hullung) of dacoities that occurred during the past ten years it will be apparent that factionalism and traditional rivalry between peasants are mainly responsible for drawing the Hill Kharia in the dacoities. The Hill Kharia are used by the peasants similar to the way they use their labour for cultivation. The decisions and the strategy for the dacoities are chalked out by the peasants themselves. The Hill Kharia's labour and their marginal position is utilized to accomplish the task. But in contradistinction to the agricultural enterprise the risk involved, i.e., the confrontation with law lies squarely on the shoulder of the Hill Kharia. The district of Purulia because of its geography and soil condition is frequently affected by drought and consequent economic scarcity. Most of the people have no other source of income other than agricultural land. Barring a few big landlords, most of the middle peasants do a sort of tight rope walking for survival. In this situation anyone who wants to attain comparative affluence must skimp, save, and practise usury. By judicious management of household economy and blessed by good fortune of not facing any sudden crisis one can build up a modest surplus. If one is backed by a modest land holding, practises parsimony and can usury, one/raise his economic status and place oneself among the influential people of the village. The obverse of this also happens frequently, that is, thriftlessness and injudicious management of household economy leading to gradual decline of fortune of a relatively well-placed family. This dynamic process gives rise to factionalism in the village. In recent years schools, government's relief operation and various welfare activities made people aware of the importance of power. Thus in Kulabahal there are
three factional groups. One group is led by the former Gram Pradhan of the village. He comes of a rich Kurmi Mahato family and through wreckless spending has squandered off most of his land holding. He and his followers have cornered most of the jobs of the local high school. His leadership is now being challenged by another Kurmi Mahato (M. Mahato) who built a good fortune through share cropping and usury. In this effort, it was alleged, he was given support by the village's small but rich Tumbuli caste. The third group is led by the former Pradhan's cousin. He has considerably improved upon his father's middle peasant status by combining usury with petty business (grocery). The former Pradhan considers him to be the greatest challenge to his position. He made several unsuccessful attempts to lure the Hill Kharia to commit dacoity in his house so that his economic backbone can be effectively crippled. Incidentally, in order to remove a person from challenging the established group, dacoity is considered as an excellent means. To accomplish this the leaders lie in wait for appropriate moment when certain action or cumulative effect of several such actions of the person who has been singled out for destruction happens to agitate the majority of people's mind. (see Fig. 2).

Thus of the two households in Kulabahal in which dacoities were committed one belongs to Kurmi Mahato ethnic group and the other Tambuli. It may be pointed out that both the households were at loggerhead with the dominant faction that controlled the village affair. In the case of Tambuli caste they were represented in the village by only six families having settled in the village only a few decades before the Hill Kharia. Although they are numerically insignificant, they are economically regarded as prosperous. It is said that they came in the village
Fig. 2. Diagramatic representation of the various factions and the process by which dacoities were committed in Kulabahal village and the communication channel in which the Pill Kharias of Kulabahal got entangled. (The solid boundary line represents the moral community of Kulabahal to which the village Pill Kharias are tenously linked.)
practically as pauper but gradually through itinerant trade in lac, grocery as well as usury they accumulated enough surplus to buy land in the village. Until very recently the concrete house built by G. Tambuli was the solitary example of its kind. The Tambuli have also accumulated much resentment against themselves because of the relentless zeal with which they practise usury. S. Kar in whose house a dacoity was committed in 1968, was one of such men who through perseverance rose to be one of the prosperous men of the village. He was also accused to have committed several sexual improprieties. All these irritated the influential Kurmi Mahato who decided to wreck vengeance upon the man by ruining him economically. One of them contacted Arjun Sabar and paid him rupees twenty as earnest money. Arjun contacted Hill Kharia inhabitants of a village in Indpur police station. On the appointed day the dacoity was committed. A few months after the dacoity was committed S. Kar shifted his residence from the village.

Another dacoity was committed in Chakradhar Mahato's house in 1972. He was said to have refused to pay one maund of paddy as subscription that village dance organisers levied against him. Chakradhar Mahato who had a reputation of being stingy, refused to pay the "exorbitant" amount of subscription. The organizers knew that Chakradhar had large stock of paddy and rice. Hence his refusal to give the paddy seemed to them unjustified. The organizers, therefore, contacted Judhisthir Sabar and asked him to organize a dacoity in Chakradhar's house. Judhisthir was paid rupees thirty and a bottle of liquor for this. He contacted the Hill Kharia inhabitants of Balakdih, his wife's natal village. Judhisthir was promised help by Chakradhar's own close relatives
who agreed to keep the loot in their house if any difficulty arose.
That there was collusion between the dacoits and the rest of the
villagers was evident from Chakradhar’s own statement. His wife said
that she managed to escape from the house during the dacoity and ran
down the village road shouting for help. But no one came to her help.
The dacoits made good their escape with a few maunds of rice and paddy.

In 1975 one dacoity was committed in Hullung village in
G. Mahato’s house. He had a long standing rivalry with N. Mahato from
whose father his father V. Mahato took rupees 180/= as loan by mortga-
ging a 39.3 decimal plot of agricultural field. N. Mahato’s father
permanently took possession of the land by removing its boundary and
amalgamating it with his own field but refused to give it a stamp of
permanency by paying V. Mahato the value of the land after deducting the
loan and registering it with the land and revenue department. G. Mahato
then wanted to return the money to N. Mahato who refused on the plea
that G. Mahato’s father has bequeathed the land on their family. G. Mahato
then brought a surveyor and took out the 39.3 decimal plot in possession
with N. Mahato’s family. N. Mahato retaliated by forcibly removing the
boundary stone demarcating G. Mahato’s land. The latter then took the
matter to the court and obtained a decree in favour of himself. N. Mahato,
thus defeated, manipulated the village Panchayat to excommunicate G.
Mahato. And finally brought the Hill Kharia from a village in Puncha
police station to commit dacoity in his house. It was also alleged that
he made other people give statement to the police that they saw the Hill
Kharia of Kulabahal participating in the dacoity to shield the Hill
Kharia of the village of Puncha police station.
On the evening of March 29, 1975 six persons (Binode, Rakhal, Kunja, Nakul, Judhisthir and Sukumar Sabar) were arrested for their presumed connection with dacoity in Hullung village from their hamlet when Sanatan's eldest son, Daman Sabar's marriage was taking place. When a police swept down on the hamlet, assisted by few villagers of Hullung, most of the males fled the hamlet. But these persons could not do so because they were taking meals at Sanatan's hut. They were arrested under 395 and 514 I.P.C regulations. Although the Hill Kharia were arrested after the dacoity in Hullung village five cases were framed against them (G.H. case no. 546 of 74, 547 of 75, 443 of 75, 78 of 75 and 2290 of 74). Besides their alleged dacoity in Hullung village they were also charged to have committed dacoity in villages, Kaitordih near Hullung, Rangamatiya (20 miles away from Kulabahal in P.S. Hura), Panchara (25 miles away in P.S. Pucha), Dakakendu (30 miles away in P.S. Manbazar). Again of the six men two were framed with two charges and the rest with four dacoities. The nature of the dacoities were as follows:

1. On 10.1.75 committed dacoity in the household of Anandamohan Goswami of Dakakendu village in Manbazar police station and decamping with bicycle, utensils and paddy worth of rupees two thousand.

2. On 9.2.75 committed two dacoities in the households of Guiram Mahato and Khandu Paramanik of Panchara village and decamping with properties worth about rupees five thousand.

3. On 26.2.75 committed dacoity in the household of Kartick Majhi of Kaitordih village and decamping with paddy, goat and other properties worth rupees seven hundred.

4. On 23.3.75 committed dacoities in the household of Gati Nandi of Rangamatiya village and looting properties worth of rupees five hundred.
5. On 25.3.75 committed dacoity in the household of Gobardhan Mahato of Hullung and looting properties worth five hundred rupees.

The Hill Kharias of Kulabahal pointed out that on the day the dacoity in Hullung village was committed at least three persons charged with dacoity went to a village in Barabazar police station in connection with Daman's marriage. Moreover, at the time of arrest no house search was made or no warrant was issued. They were kept in Purulia jail till November 1975. On 10.11.75 they were exonerated of the two charges (Hullung and Kaitordih) by the district court but were detained under rule 3 of MISA. They were released only after the expiry of MISA on 1.6.77.

From the above it is evident how the Hill Kharia are implicated, sometimes falsely, in various criminal cases. Some informants pointed out that sometimes they are arrested for having committed dacoity in far flung places which let alone visiting they have not heard the names even. Arjun Sabar, who was arrested twice for alleged connection with dacoities, pointed out that when police torture them mercilessly in jail in order to extort confession and names of the accomplice they give the names of inhabitants of villages situated far away or persons with whom they got acquainted in the jail. Acting on this information police arrest them putting themselves and their families in unspeakable trouble. Arjun pointed out that they were needlessly arrested in connection with dacoity in Hullung. Four men arrested in connection with dacoity in Hullung were away to Barabazar from the locality on the day because of Daman's marriage and Rakhal was in his golab (employer) house as bagal. But that there was something in the offing became clear to them when M. Mahato came to Mangal Sabar and gave a proposal of committing dacoity in Kaitordih. M. Mahato
also offered him ten mounds of paddy and one goat. Mangal refused because he was afflicted with leprosy. From the same village, the Chowkidar Purna Mahato contacted Binode with the proposal to commit dacoity in Gobardhan Mahato’s household. But Binode too refused. To my question as to whether they have gained substantially from dacoities Arjun said only a few mounds of paddy but it never surpassed their own collection from indur dhan. Dacoities are, however, mostly committed during the period starting from the end of winter to end of niran (dry season) when food scarcity becomes acute. Arjun pointed out that there are a few villages (Ramaigarh, Magura) where the Hill Kharias are known for their notoriety. But notorious persons are there among all communities. In jail they found Bramhin and Mahato criminals. But the police is always after them; notorious or not. Whenever any crime is committed they are harassed. Police even searched their hamlets in connection with a bus hold-up near Ladhurka village and beat up Bharat and Satrughna and took away six eggs. Because of police raids they do not stay in their hamlets during night and sleep in the thickets. When I asked Arjun whether they had told the police all these he dejectedly said, "who is going to listen to us?"

The Hill Kharia also pointed out that stealing standing paddy crops from villagers’ field in spite of constant round-the-clock watch kept by the villagers would not be possible without instigation and help from the villagers. Thus in 1974 Bhim Mahato engaged B. Sabar to steal standing paddy from his cousin’s one bigha plot. The Hill Kharia were also engaged in the past by the peasants individually or collectively to steal paddy from the paddy fields of their enemies.
Now the question may be raised as to why the Hill Kharia at all participate in criminal activities? Of the two reasons mentioned above the theory that the criminal trait is inherent in the tribe is untenable because no evidence in their behaviour, except certain amount of individuality, was found which could explain the endemic presence of criminality in their character. Large number of Hill Kharia who were jailed may be taken as the tell-tale evidence of their criminal nature. But this may be explained as due to the arbitrary nature of the arrests made by the police. The police seem to be under the impression that arresting any Hill Kharia from a particular hamlet situated in the locality where theft or dacoity occurred would serve the purpose. For instance on March 27, 1975, as already has been described, only those who were caught unaware were arrested. No house search was made nor any warrant issued.

The theory that by these deeds the Hill Kharia project a hostile image so as to ensure isolation also seem untenable. We have already pointed out that, encysted as they are, the Hill Kharia have little scope to remain isolated. Besides, the Hill Kharia themselves are nowadays trying to get integrated, however marginal it may be, with the peasants through economic activities and also through active participation in bandha parab (cattle worship festival) and gajan festivals, etc. The god Siva which is worshipped during gajan festival is described as their own god. Every able-bodied adult male Kharia participates in it as bhakta (devotee). They are especially fond of performing the arduous physical penance of kanta phumra feat by piercing one’s skin on the last day of gajan. (See Bhowmick 1961 for kanta fura and Chattopadhyay 1961 for general description of gajan or charak).
Although the Hill Kharia have no cattle wealth, they are participating in bandhna parab with great enthusiasm. The bandhna parab starts a day before the Hindu festival of Kalipuja and continues for two days after it. As the Hill Kharia lack any cattle they do not observe the rituals that are performed in connection with it (gohal puja or garaiya puja). But they are now increasingly taking part in bandhna parab as jhangar which is being given up by the peasants. The role of jhangar consists of moving from door to door of the village households on the night of the second day during bandhna for the purpose of keeping awake the cattle by singing ahira jhumur. They also take part in ritual mock play with the bullocks and buffaloes on the second and third day of the bandhna parab (garu and kara khunta) (For detail discussion of bandhna parab see Bankim Mahato 1978). These activities cannot be construed as congenial to projecting a hostile image of themselves among the peasants. Therefore, the reasons for the Hill Kharias' participation in criminal activities may lie elsewhere. The image that they still carry about their past life - abundant food, leisure and furti or riz (merriment) - make them pine for such a life. They have a notion that they are deprived of the good life the peasants enjoy. They think that their social life is monotonous and lacks any furti. In contrast, the peasants' life is punctuated by various parabs or festivals through which peasants enjoy their life. Part of the reasons of their participation in bandhna parab is that the Mahato who are otherwise very frugal in habit, provide ample scope to the Hill Kharia to enjoy themselves.
The reason why the Hill Kharia are ready to interact with the peasants, of whom they have a notion of being deceitful, is that unlike other contractual relation the peasants on these occasions readily fulfil their part of obligation. As it might be expected this kind of interaction does not take place all on a sudden but is protracted. The peasants who drive them hard in normal work situation and do not mix freely with the tribe behave, as it were, they are interacting from the same plane. They also conjure up in the minds of the Hill Kharia an image of abundant reservoir of food that would be available to them if they are successful in the act of dacoity. The Hill Kharia’s inability to defer gratification and his conception of what a man should possess to lead a happy life, in other words, poverty and its consequence drive the Hill Kharia to participate in dacoities and other criminal activities. Through their long knowledge of peasant’s way of life they know that they lack many things that peasants have. Also the past way of life of their forefathers, which was characterized by abundant food and leisure is no longer possible. The lure that the peasants’ promise hold to them is precisely which their forefathers were fortunate to have at least some days’ relief from the anxiety of food supply and happy abandonment. Peasants not only promise these but also assure them safe conduct from the village after the dacoity has been committed.

Therefore, it is apparent that the Hill Kharia’s stigmatized status as criminals and their awfully low level of economic base put them in such a situation that they have no other alternatives but to interact with the peasants from that plane. Their status as landless poor agricultural
labourers is accepted and primarily they were given land to build their huts in the village for that purpose. But much as the Hill Kharia would like to underplay their stigmatized status of being criminals, in a situation where peasants or a faction of them is sorely pressed to utilize this role, they find that to realize some of their life's cherished desires (a few days uninterrupted food supply) they have no other alternatives but to accept this stigmatized role and act accordingly. It is also true that in such a transaction (in the sense defined by F. Barth 1971) the Hill Kharia are aware of the danger associated with it and in comparison the rewards are less. But it must be considered that in a poverty-stricken condition whatever they hoped to rope in by obliging the peasants in their factional fights must be considered as windfall. They also know it that they cannot refuse to participate or otherwise wriggle out of such interaction because they have to contend with combined might of a village faction and beyond it the ominous power of the police. Therefore, strategically the best course open to them is to indirectly participate in criminal activities in so far as the villages where they live are concerned and participate in dacoities directly in villages beyond their immediate surroundings. This lessens the chance of the danger of getting implicated directly. Marginally situated as they are from village society; after a dacoity has occurred in the village they behave as if they have no knowledge of the occurrence. If police make search of their huts they cannot be implicated on the basis of it because the looted articles will be on its way to some distant village. In petty crimes like stealing standing paddy crops from field they participate directly. But in such
cases the danger of being caught is less and the amount of the stolen articles never reaches a proportion which cannot be effectively hidden or immediately consumed.

Ironically, their stigmatized image and participation in criminal activities are bearing fruits. In Kulabahal, the peasants, from their apprehension of lurking danger of dacoities through them and witness the perseverance of a generation to better its economic condition fritted away; are employing the Hill Kharia as night guards. All the 24 families of Hill Kharia of the village have also been employed to guard peasants' standing crops in novel attempt to insure the safety of the crops.