INTERNALIZATION OF DEPRIVATION

In the previous three chapters (3, 4 and 5) we have described the deprived economic life and its repercussion on the interactional pattern in the Hill Kharia society. It has been demonstrated how the Hill Kharia are trying to eke out an existence by combining agricultural labour and other locally available means open for earning an wage with their traditional occupation of hunting and gathering. People concede that they are living in a deprived economic condition and trace this as due to having fallen down from the supernatural grace.

In social life there is evidence of indefinite postponement of the second part of mortuary ritual (dojhupa). Reciprocity is marred by economic strain. Their participation in criminal activities was traced as partly due to their deprived condition.

However, the effect of deprivation among the Hill Kharia is not confined only to these spheres. There is a distinct trend towards internalization of deprivation by rationalizing the process
of deprivation through myths. That this stage of deprivation is not a passing phase is also evident from people's attitude to the surrounding environment. In this chapter we will discuss the process of internalization of deprivation.

Unlike the peasants and the Santal tribe: the Hill Kharia have no jan-kahani, sun-kahani or binti (Santals') which act as a storehouse of knowledge of these communities regarding the world around them. However, a few myths that the Hill Kharia have, show an overriding concern for the deprived state in which they are living. Even the myths about the origin of the ethnic group demonstrate their confrontation with deprivation. Roy's monograph (1937) contains a description of a myth which purports to describe the way by which the Hill Kharia originated from the egg of a pea fowl. But the Hill Kharia of Purulia have no knowledge of such myth. Instead they trace their origin from the mythical figures such as Jara Savar, the killer of Krishna, Ekalabya or simply from the couple, the Savar and the Savari of the Ramayana. According to the last story which is the most current among/tribe the Savar and the Savari were very virtuous people and used to live by gathering fruits and tubers and hunting animals. It so happened that when one day Ram lost his way in the jungle in search of Sita and became weak with hunger and thirst he came across the Savar and told him of his plight. The Savar gave him food and water and told him of the direction in which Sita had gone. The supreme deity himself was very pleased with his behaviour and wished that they should worship him. The Savar was hesitant and told the deity
that he was very dirty and seldom took bath. The deity refused to hear such plea. Therefore, the Savar made a little kumba deep inside the jungle for the deity and started worshipping him. One day a Bramhin boy came into the jungle and saw the daughter of the Savar and wanted to marry her. As the daughter was willing the Savar and the Savari gave their consent. The Bramhin boy married the daughter and started living in the jungle. Seeing the virtuous, simple, and happy life that the Savar and the Savari led the Bramhin boy was curious and wanted to know the key to their happiness. One day in course of searching for food he suddenly came across the kumba where the Savar kept his supreme deity. Seeing the special way in which the Sabar kept the place, the boy thought that this might be the reason behind the Savar's happiness. One day when no one was around he stole the supreme deity and fled from the jungle. Thus the Savar and the Savari lost their deity.

But not content with stealing the deity, one day the Bramhin stole even the sacred thread that the Savar was wearing. It so happened that one day before climbing up a tree for collecting fruits the Savar left the sacred thread at the foot of the tree lest it was torn. The Bramhin who was looking for such an opportunity and was hiding nearby made it into a rat snake (dhaman). When the Savar got down from the tree he could not find the thread. Instead he saw only a rat snake moving away at his approach. He, therefore, left it alone thinking that he perhaps was mistaken and left the place. The Bramhin boy then came out and stole the thread. On his return to the hut the Savar once
again began searching for the thread. But after sometime he realized what had happened and went out to catch hold of the rat snake. That is why even to this day the Hill Kharia run after the snake.

The above story describes how the Hill Kharia were leading a happy life in the jungle until they came into contact with the outside world. The Bramhin as the representative of the outside world robbed the Hill Kharia first of their daughter then the supreme deity and lastly the symbol of their nearness to the supernatural being, the sacred thread. Thus deprived of their cherished possessions, the Hill Kharia were reduced to relentless chase to get back the blissful state of existence. But this is a kind of deprivation which today we will term as "social deprivation". Two other myths explain the reason of the material deprivation of the Hill Kharia. One myth narrated by the Hill Kharia of Binpur area of Midnapur district describes the process of material deprivation thus:

When the supreme deity created the world he allotted each ethnic group certain portion of the land and resources. But he did not give the Kharia anything although he was near at hand. This made the Kharia very unhappy and he went away into the jungle. There he built an image of the supreme deity and started worshipping him under a sal tree. Thus appeased the supreme deity asked the Kharia to name what he wanted. At first the Kharia got puzzled. And begun to look all around for the source of the voice. Then he found that indeed it was the image of the god through which the supreme deity was speaking. The Kharia then asked for some time so that he could consult his kinsmen. But his kinsmen could not decide on anything. The Kharia then came back to the deity and reported the result of his consultation with kinsmen. The supreme deity then gave the Kharia a bow and an arrow and a kanti (digging stick) and bid him to search for his food in the jungle with the help of these tools.
Another myth narrated by the Hill Kharia of Purulia blame the Santal for dislodging them from the supernatural grace. From the myth (described in Chapter 2) it is apparent that the Santal might have interfered in their smooth process of economic progression. It may not be unlikely that the Santal who have widely dispersed from their original homeland in search of virgin land to different parts of eastern India came into confrontation with the Hill Kharia who were then already practising shifting cultivation. It is noteworthy that in some of the regions inhabited by the Hill Kharia the Santal are found in large numbers (in Mayurbhanj, Dhalbhum and Midnapur). In Purulia it is also possible that the Santal were the first people that the Hill Kharia encountered.

The internalization of deprivation among the Hill Kharia also finds expression in marriage songs. The marriage of the Hill Kharia has become the only platform for conviviality, when they dance danr natch and sing jhumur songs. In Purulia and adjoining regions the Hill Kharia have given up danr natch because the free mixing of males and females is considered derogatory. But jhumur songs are still sung. During various phases of marriage ceremony women sing numerous jhumur songs which are not only expressive of social relations but also eloquently portray the state of deprivation they are living in. For example, consider the song sung during the time of departure of the groom to bride's village for marriage:

*Sasural je jacho babu
Kotha pabe jama*
Kotha pabe juta
Tor baako to janamer kangal.
(You are going to father-in-law's house. But where from shall you get shirt? And where from shall you get shoes? Your father is a born destitute.)

Or when ushering in the new daughter-in-law after the bride and the groom have reached the groom's village from that of the bride.

Khaite anna nai ma
Makhite telo nai
Suite go ma
Tempero bichana
Tempero bichana
Du-din dinachari
Baburo bichanay
Janamo katibe go ma
(We have no food to eat
No oil to anoint our body
For bed my daughter we have only the end of the sari
Thus my daughter you will have to lead
Your life with my son.)

On the occasion of going for bath during the ceremony of bringing new water to the hut by the bride and the groom.

Vanre to tel nai
Tel o to furalo go
Mayer antar khalo khalo kare go
Nano babu kande dio
Mayer antar khalo khalo kare go.
(The oil pot has no oil
We have no oil either
Mother's heart is full of sorrow
Do not cry my son
Mother's heart is full of sorrow.)

The three songs given as example above are songs sung by the womenfolk during various phases of marriage ritual. But songs used to be sung also during danr natch after marriage ceremony both in the bride's and the groom's villages. These jhumur songs used to be mainly sung by the males accompanied by dhamsa (kettle drum) and madal (drum). To the rhythm of the jhumur songs women used to dance danr natch forming a single file. Analysis of the songs sung both during danr natch and marriage ritual shows that these touch on various aspects of the tribe's life including the economic conditions. Taken together the proportions of songs depicting poverty may not be high. Nevertheless, the very presence of the songs depicting material deprivation during such a happy occasion as marriage, shows how far the scarcity condition has affected the consciousness of the Hill Kharia.

The Feeling of Powerlessness and Anxiety

Not only do the Hill Kharia have a feeling that the food resources once available in the jungle in plenty have now become scarce, they also feel that the affective relationship they once had with jungle has been snapped. Informants told me that in the past on their proper worship of the spirits of the jungle the peace of the villagers depended. Particularly the animal spirits of the tigers (Baghut) and elephants
(Hathithakur) used to be worshipped. Thus propitiated these animals did not destroy the property of the peasants or kill the inhabitants of the villages. But nowadays though the Hill Kharia still worship these spirits during akham jatra instances are not rare when tigers or elephants have killed a Hill Kharia.

The tribe feel equally at a loss when confronted with the social world beyond their own. We have already described the attitude of the Hill Kharia towards the peasants. Beyond the peasants the power of the police, whose sudden and arbitrary arrests make them helpless, appears to be even more beyond control. The police are symbolised as "tiger". As has been mentioned above the Hill Kharia tried to gain control over this spirit by supernatural means. Just as this control has become dysfunctional the control over the modern "tiger" has also remained beyond their reach. To obviate the possibility of being caught unaware by the "tiger", i.e., the police, people stay away from their huts during night and sleep in the bushes nearby so that they, are not literally caught unaware by this "animal". Even during day time if they see any unknown stranger approaching their hamlet they would flee to the field. It has already been described (chapter 1) their flight during my first meeting with them. Thus it seems that finding that the nature and society that surround them are inimical the Hill Kharia have decided that being away from/direct confrontation with the outside world, is the best method open to them. It is argued here that behind such behaviour of withdrawal there is a notion of powerlessness or helplessness. Because they feel that the world in which they live in cannot be controlled either through supernatural or socio-political means,
they suffer from a sense of powerlessness and anxiety. Mandler (1972) theorizes that when an adequate behaviour pattern or a substitute behaviour to the behaviour one is accustomed to previously is not available, it leads to a state of powerlessness or helplessness and anxiety.

One of the conditions that leads frequently to states of helplessness is interruption of plans or behaviour. Thus, when an organized sequence of behaviour or an organized plan is interrupted, that is, the organism may not complete the plan either behaviourally or cognitively, he is in a state of arousal. When interruption leads to arousal and no appropriate behaviour is available either to substitute for the original plan or to find alternate ways to the original goal, etc., then we have what I think is one typical state of anxiety......... Furthermore, it will lead to helplessness if and only if no adequate continuation behaviour or substitute behaviour is available.(ibid : 370)

According to McReynolds (1956) inability to integrate the data of the world into meaningful schemata, whether in terms of self-concept, or a predictive model of the environment is a basic source of anxiety.

The Hill Kharias, we found, were accustomed to hunting and gathering economy and later on also began practising shifting cultivation. But their mode of economy was interrupted and they had to fall back on hunting and gathering exclusively. Later, with the depletion of forest, they began to search for new mode of existence and had to remain content with the role of agricultural labourers. Even agricultural labour provided them with only partial employment. Their participation in criminal activities, under circumstances described before, and subsequent prosecution as criminals make them believe that they cannot hope to get support and help either from the surrounding peasantry or from the institutions of the
State. All these generated a condition conducive to the growth of a feeling of hopelessness in the Hill Kharia mind. It was pointed out that their failure to cope with sudden police raids on their hamlets made them adopt the only avenue open to them, that is, fleeing and keeping themselves aloof from direct social contact with other people as far as possible. Their helplessness was evident when I asked some informants why they did not disclose the name of their provocators to the police. They instantly pointed out, "What is the use? We are tortured by police, why invite the same from the peasants also?"

Prof. T.C. Das studied the Hill Kharia for a short period in 1931 and described them in the following words:

Extremely morose in disposition, the wild Kharias look on life as a burden which they are forced to carry on throughout the long tenure of existence. Life does not seem to have anything good to offer to them nor do they struggle to extract a few moments of happiness from it. Tacit submission to the freaks of fate forms the keynote of their character (1931: 7)

Although prof. Das observed them 47 years ago, the present day impression about the Hill Kharia's adjustment to economic strain remains substantially true. Nevertheless, it is significant to note that the privation of the Hill Kharia is now more intense and they suffer from a feeling of despondency on occasion. But even within this limiting condition the Hill Kharia find certain features which make their life less burdensome. During the first few months of field work I found that due to the drought condition that prevailed in the district, landless peasants along with the Hill Kharia were starving. Information reached us that one such landless peasant of an adjacent village committed suicide because he could not bear the sufferings of starvation.
After a few days another landless peasant, Patal Dom, of Kukabahal also died of hunger. At that time the situation in Khariadih was very grim. The people had no certainty of getting food. A few families were reduced to begging. From the ethnographer's point of view the situation looked desperate. But when the subject of suicide due to hunger was broached, one informant startled me by saying, "Sabars are made of tougher element. They do not die of hunger. In the month of Magh we will have indur dhan. We can even invite you to a meal at that time". This condition may be compared with the situation that prevails in the slums of Calcutta. Here the people not only suffer from poverty but also do not harbour any hope that the monotony of their life may be broken by some favourable condition in future. They have resigned themselves to the situation that they have been forced to live in (Sinha 1972). The Hill Kharia, on the other hand, are aware of the total situation, but their past hunting and gathering mode of economy have provided them with unique experience of coping with the uncertainties of life and help them to confront the situation they find themselves presently in. It is true that they do not think that their past point of economic anchorage and the present economic system with which they are trying to adjust are of the same nature. Their concept of "good life" too has changed and has as its reference the peasants' way of life. But their past life has provided them an inner strength enabling them to cope with the scarcity better than other people. But the Hill Kharia are aware that their last (indur dhan) exclusive source of food which give them a short respite from the anxiety of getting food is no longer their exclusive domain. Other ethnic groups sorely pressed by want of food are also trying to collect as much indur dhan as possible. The Hill Kharia's only consolation is their technical
superiority over other ethnic groups where the Khanti or digging stick gives them added advantage and their much longer experience in gathering indur dhan stands them in good stead. The Hill Kharia lament that other ethnic groups have shortened their easy period of comparative plenty by quite a few days.

Therefore, it is being argued here that the Hill Kharia have adjusted to the cyclical phases of lean and less lean periods. They know that the scarcity with which they struggle is intense and cannot easily be overcome. The forest wealth has touched its nether. But they are aware that the wasted forest will produce land which can be used for agricultural purpose. Indeed some of the ethnic groups living in the adjacent villages, e.g., Dapang and Chargali, people, notably the Santal and the Kurmi Mahato, have successfully managed to convert the forest land to agricultural field and retain possession of it. The history of the Hill Kharia of Kulabahal shows that they too tried to convert some of the forest land or high infertile land (tanr jami) to agricultural field. But each time they had to part with the land. The forest regulations stipulate that the waste forest lands are government's property. But sometimes they also found that the Kurmi Mahato managed to get the converted land as their own through forcible possession or simply claiming that the converted lands is recorded against their names. The tribe's numerical insignificance and marginal situation do not give them any leverage in realizing their dreams. The Hill Kharia still think that their salvage lies in acquiring agricultural land. They hope that changes in the circumstances will give them the land the forest will yield.