SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

From the foregoing descriptions (Chapters 2 - 6) it will be evident that in this purposive ethnography our major concern has been to demonstrate the impact of poverty on the society and culture of the Hill Kharia of Purulia. Anthropologists engaged in discovering the nature of societal structure of the hunting and gathering tribes point out that due to the adaptation to the specialized mode of economy these societies have a loose-knit segmentary social organization. In a homogenous unstratified society like that of the Hill Kharia there was not much scope for adopting the method of controlled intra-group comparison to probe into the nature of variation due to the impact of poverty. We, therefore, confined ourselves to showing how different institutions of the Hill Kharia society functioned within the economic constraint of a disintegrating hunting and gathering economy where the
ecological base for the primary means of production had been severely eroded. We also tried to find out the reasons for the Hill Kharia's widespread participation in criminal activities and how far this was related to poverty.

In Chapter 2 it has been pointed out that the Hill Kharia now live in isolated hamlets close to the peasant villages. Their choice of peasant villages was not guided by availability of work or any such rational considerations but by proximity of the village to forest. In case of Kulabahal it was the last camp where the forefathers of the present day Hill Kharia inhabitants stopped on its look out for food in the forest. Although the Hill Kharia participate in the village economy, their articulation with the social, religious and political organizations of the village is at the best, tenuous.

In Chapter 3 the economic life of the Hill Kharia has been described. It has been pointed out that with the gradual depletion of forest the Hill Kharia are participating more and more in agriculture as labourers. With this they still persist in their traditional occupation of hunting and gathering although the dwindling forest hardly meets their minimum requirements. This cannot be construed as a force of habit. It is more due to their inability to get the basic requirements from the village agricultural system. Various jungle products, namely, medicinal plants, sal, kend leaves and fire-woods are sold to the villagers. They also sell objects fashioned from bamboo. But combination of these activities fail to provide them with their minimum requirements of food. This is evident from the unusually long periods of seven lean months from Magh to Jaistha (Feb. - June) and from Bhadra to Aswin (Sept. - Oct.) when the supply of food remains critical causing periodic
starvation for days on end. Their serious economic plight is evident from their extent of indebtedness and the way they split their wage for sowing season into two halves. One half of the wage is consumed in advance during April-May and the other half is preserved for the actual sowing season.

Some anthropologists (Lee 1968, Sahlins 1972) have pointed out that abundant leisure is the singular characteristic of the hunting and gathering societies. It has been shown that among the Hill Kharia the gap between work and leisure has become considerably short. They have to work continuously and work hard during lean seasons, there being practically very little leisure time.

But the most noticeable aspect of their economic life is their perception of their growing poverty-stricken condition that they suffer from and their changing conception of want. The Hill Kharia perceive that compared to the situation that prevailed thirty or forty years ago their economic condition has distinctly deteriorated. Once they could depend on the forest to provide good fruits, tubers and meat... By collecting lac and silk cocoons and exchanging these in the market they could also earn cash money. But now they not only are deprived of these food items but also they cannot hope to get dhela bhat (rice) which peasants have in plenty. Not only the peasants possess all the qualities of good life but they have all riz (merriment) while their life is dull and devoid of any merriment. They see the peasant's life as full of leisure. The peasants work for one season in a year but after that they can roam about and go for various kinds of festivities in search of riz.
In Chapter 4 the functioning of institutions of family, kinship and community under the impact of poverty has been described. How far the interpersonal relationship is being affected by economic strain has been pointed out. It has been found that there is little effect of poverty on the role relationship in the family. Although with the participation in agricultural activities the wife's share of work has outstripped that of the husband's, the relationship between husband and wife remains harmonious. Poverty and the tradition to set up new household after marriage have, however, brought great deal of hardship for the aged parents. For the infirm parents the only recourse open is begging. The Hill Kharia families socialize their children in such a way so as to enable them to confront hunger and endure it.

Beyond family, the relationship between kin is circumscribed by poverty and by the stereotype notion of the outside world about the whole tribe being "criminal." The effective relationship between kin is restricted between one's own siblings and immediate affines. Even this relationship has been severely affected by their constant anxiety of being hunted by the police. The community life is characterized by individuality and withdrawal from overt conflict.

Analysis of the three life crisis rituals shows that there is less elaboration in these than it used to be in the past. In marriage, the attractive method of marriage negotiation; the feast celebrating the end of pollution period in connection with birth, and the second burial (dothupa) and customary feast after it; in connection with death have become obsolete.
By utilizing Marshal Sahlins' model of reciprocity we have tried to examine the intra and inter-community relationships of the Hill Kharia. It has been found that in the situation of continuous economic strain that prevails, generalized reciprocity occurs in a very restricted scale. Generosity, hospitality and other altruistic behaviour are seldom found.

Relationship with the peasants occurs in superordinate and subordinate form of hierarchical interaction. While the Hill Kharia try to interact in accordance with the idioms of generalized reciprocity that governs human relationship, the peasants see their relationship with the Hill Kharia as wholly contractual.

About their participation in criminal activities it has been pointed out that the Hill Kharia are primarily drawn into criminal activities by the dominant peasants who use them in their village factional fights (Chapter 5). In this Hill Kharia's perception of their own situation of poverty and assessment of the peasants' life provide the rationales for participating in criminal activities.

In Chapter 6 we have described the manner in which poverty has been internalized through myths, stories, etc. The myths regarding the origin of the tribe describe their ancestors as cursed by ill fate. Thus, one story traces the descent of the tribe from Jara Sabar, the killer of Krishna. Another story describes the tribe's origin from Ekalabya, the character depicted in the Mahabharata as hunter. Still another story, which is most current, traces the descent of the tribe from the Sabar and the Sabari of the Ramayana who led a virtuous life of hunting and gathering but fell
to bad times due to manoeuvres made by the caste people. The cause of being poverty-stricken is most commonly explained as due to having been fallen from the grace of supernatural power. The impact of poverty is even noticeable in their marriage songs.

The negative environment — dwindling forest, village economy, the nature of lowly social relationship with the peasants, relationship with the supernatural world and the overarching political institutions, etc., — gives rise to a feeling of powerlessness and helplessness to the Hill Kharia. All these generate a sense of worthlessness and despondency.

Although from the ethnographer's point of view the Hill Kharia's economic situation is desperate, they themselves still perceive of some islands of comparative plenty amidst general scarcity, such as, the short period when they collect indur dhan. Their conception of good life today centres around secure food from cultivable land owned by themselves. They pine for cultivable land and hope that with attaining this goal their days of scarcity and poverty will be over.

II

We have approached the problem with four hypotheses (Chapter 7). From the above summary it is evident that all the hypotheses have been proved. It has been pointed out that the concept of "original affluent society" rests on the assumption that despite low turn-out of hunting and gathering mode of economy the people have no conception of want because they have abundant resources from which to select their life's necessities.
Their easy going life is reflected in the way they squander food and enjoy large amount of leisure time. The hunters escape from poverty by organizing their life within the limiting ecology and by wanting little more than they already have. It has been argued that this situation can only be found where the world's most 'primitive' societies remain in isolation and their ecology is left undisturbed. Perhaps, another way by which the hunters can escape from felt economic deprivation is by withdrawing as far as possible from the village societies and clinging to the views that their own mode of life is much more satisfying. In an interesting study Adhikary (1978) has shown that the Birhor, another hunting and gathering tribe of eastern India, although living in close symbiosis with the peasant societies and pressed to be an appendage of it, have chosen nomadic life instead. Like the Hill Kharia they also suffer from scarcity of material goods but have managed to hold on to their own way of life. The dynamics of adopting to the limiting condition is reflected in their way of dividing their world of interaction into two worlds, digum and muluk. The former representing the world of the jungle, the interaction with which they find satisfying and the latter the world of man, or, more appropriately, the village societies inhabited by peasants; the interaction with whom they restrict to the utmost minimum. Adhikary has demonstrated how the Birhor maintain a satisfying social relationship keeping within the bounds of the ecology that surrounds them. In this they have been greatly helped by their own views of the world as well as the nomadic way of life.

But unlike the Birhor, the Hill Kharia have not adapted to nomadism. Instead, they find themselves in a situation where their anchorage
to the forest economic base has been rudely uprooted and they have been thrown at the door-step of the peasant societies as landless dependent communities. Pressed by want of food they have tried to find their defined minimum requirements from the village societies. But here too, they have become frustrated. Continuous living in close contact with the peasants has changed their conception of want and life situation. We have already outlined the Hill Kharia's definition of felt economic deprivation and how this is even reflected in some of their myths. We have analysed how this deprivation has led to constraining the optimal operation of some aspects of their cultural life and interpersonal relationship.

It has been pointed out that the Hill Kharia and other hunting and food gathering tribes of the mainland represent a stage which has been designated as "secondarily primitivized" by Sinha (1969). This entailed not only reverting back to preexisting economic stage but sometimes may also have left its mark on the culture of the community concerned. Levi-Strauss (1963) showed how secondary primitivization could be proved through controlled comparison. He showed that it could be demonstrated that some of the culture traits which had no functional utility were actually remnants of the past cultural practice of the community concerned. Apart from this important evolutionary consequences secondary primitivization may also generate the notion of deprivation. This may happen particularly when secondary primitivization occurs due to confrontation with ethnic group(s) which possesses superior cultural tools. In case of the Hill Kharia they perhaps had to face not one but successive confrontations with the Santal, Bhumij and the Kurmi Mahato
communities. Each time they lost to the numerically strong and more cohesively organized social order than they themselves could muster. Unlike the caste stratified societies these societies excluded all outsiders from their activities and thus created a situation where the vanquished group, thus deprived and driven out, found no other alternative than to revert back to their former mode of production. The concept of evolution has inherent in it the notion of evaluation. Obviously, any community when it chooses another mode of life, does it after proper assessment of the relative merit of the life that it used to practise and the life that it opts for. Therefore, it may be argued from the above line of reasoning that secondary primitivization when it happens due to other than natural condition the situation of deprivation is immanent in it.

Another concept that has obvious implication for any sociological study of poverty is Oscar Lewis' concept of culture of poverty. Lewis defined culture of poverty as "a way of life handed down from generation to generation along family lines .... a culture in the traditional anthropological sense that it provides human beings with a design for living with ready sets of solutions for human problems." (Lewis 1966 : 19). Lewis also pointed out that this sub-culture of poverty, "represents an effort to cope with the feeling of hopelessness and despair which develop from realization of the improbability of achieving success in terms of values and goals of larger society" (ibid. XLiv). Lewis' concept was designed with a view to explaining the sociological implication of poverty in stratified capitalistic society. The concept of culture of poverty was tested in a Calcutta slum. It was found that due to the impact of poverty the core institutional structure of the slum life (family, kinship and community) has been altered or attenuated. What is most significant is the
people's total hopelessness (Sinha 1972, 1972a).

In the plural community structure of Purulia district the situation is different. The Hill Kharia have their own distinctive culture and values relative to the other communities. Their only aspiration is to emulate the economic life of the dominant peasant societies. But, to my mind, the moot point is not whether the concept of culture of poverty is applicable or not. The moot point is whether a hunting and gathering community having a "genuine culture" and which has been characterized as "original affluent society" can be affected by poverty or not. Following Marx we can argue that the most damaging effect that poverty renders is to effectively curtail and prevent optimization of cultural practices of any society. Analysis of the Hill Kharia society has shown that indeed this happens.

It has been posited that apart from felt economic deprivation, the marginal situation of the tribe relative to the village society and a feeling of powerlessness to meaningfully control the external world, contribute to the make up of the total configuration of the poverty situation of the Hill Kharia. It has been described how the marginal position of the tribe has effectively excluded them from inter-group relationship. It thus strengthens the superordinate and subordinate relationship between the Hill Kharia and the peasants. This trait has obvious analogues with the relationship that prevails between the higher and the lowly placed groups in stratified societies (Runciman 1972, Sinha and Bhattacharya 1969). Poverty does not have implications only in economic and social relationships. It also means a mental attitude
towards life as Sahlins implicitly argued and Adhikary's study on Birhor world view demonstrates. Lewis had this in mind when he held that in Communist countries poverty does not exist, because people of the lower strata are meaningfully integrated with the state's political and economic structure and are made to feel a sense of power and worthiness. The negative environment in which the Hill Kharia live generates just the opposite kind of feelings.

Every discipline has its own dominant paradigm which governs its research activities. Anthropology is no exception to this truism. We have been taught to view the preliterate communities' life as more satisfying than the civilized societies. Holmberg (1950) shocked the academic world of anthropology by delineating the problematic living of the Sirinio of Bolivia. Recently Gardner (1966) demonstrated the individualistic cultural life of the Paliyan of south India as governed by, what he termed as, "memorate knowledge" (knowledge held at the idiosyncratic level) and "symmetric respect" (avoidance of competition and cooperation). The atomistic social life of the Paliyan has even been affected by violation of incest rules (Gardner 1972). Although the Paliyan live as a refugee from the encroaching caste societies in an inhospitable terrain, their life is not affected by poverty (ibid: 414). The Hill Kharia show/great deal of individuality and participate in criminal activities but have preserved the basic fabric of social structure, namely, role relationship in the family. As outlined above poverty does have an impact on the society and culture of the tribe. But the most significant aspect of the impact of poverty is the resilience shown by the tribe in adapting
to the inimical environment. Perhaps this has been possible due
to their phasing of experience whereby they have already learnt
the art of living with scarcity and periodic hunger in their
life.