CHAPTER VII

MONEY AND TRADE NETWORK

Marine fishing, for commercial purposes, has to be operated on a larger scale than can be managed by individual fisherfolk families. The fisherfolk, who are the primary producers in this economic project, cannot be treated as self-sufficient isolates. They are just a part of a larger interdependent network of economic relationship. For their productive activity, they have to depend on a large number of people, each having a specific function in the organisation. The basic needs of the productive unit are capital and raw materials. For these the fisherfolk have to depend on many non-fishing castes or communities, distributed over a wide area. Their finished products again, are distributed to different market centres through a series of intermediaries which often include non-fishing castes.

In the following pages an attempt has been made to delineate the market relations of the fisherfolk with regard to capital, raw material, transport and distribution of their finished products. The organization of linked chain of operations from the catch by the primary producers to the ultimate sale by financiers and their agents
in the different markets have been described in detail. The method of procuring their food stuff and of maintaining contacts with their families through the markets during the fishing season have also been discussed.

A. Sources of capital

The dry fish trade received a new impetus in West Bengal after the partition when a large number of refugee fisherfolk came from Chittagong and Noakhali to settle down in India.

Prior to the coming in of the East Bengal fishermen the local fisherfolks like the Rajbansi, the Dhibar and the Bagdi used to do marine fishing on a small scale. Of these three castes, the Dhibar were mainly engaged in drying their catch which was mainly of a single variety, viz, rangi-chingri (red shrimps). The Rajbansis used to operate the dara jal (a type of gill net) to catch shole fish (a type of large bhetki) which was sold fresh. Generally the Bagdis accompanied the Rajbansis as crewmen.

All these fishing units were small in size (about 10 individuals per unit) and they used to return to their natal villages, located not far from the sea coast, once in a fortnight. So, their requirement of cash was limited. They used to meet their requirements from local sources, mainly from their friends and relatives, either on mortgage of movable and immovable properties, or on high rates of interest.

In the beginning of 1950 there were hardly one or two aratdars (agents of fish merchants) at Phuleswar or Uluberia (Howrah),
the biggest dry fish trade and collection centre in West Bengal. These *aratdars* were Rajbansis by caste and they were floating some money on a small scale, to the marine fishermen of the locality.

But within two or three years of their settlement in West Bengal (around 1952 or 1953) the East Bengal refugee fisherfolk, who were Kaibartta by caste, were gradually entering in the field of marine fishing in pursuance of their traditional occupation. Gradually they were bringing more and more dry fish to Phuleswar and Uluberia. But the local Rajbansi *aratdars* had not sufficient ready cash in hand to procure the increased supply of dry fish. As a result due to excess of the supply in relation to its demand, the price of dry fish suddenly fell below the cost of production in that year resulting in heavy loss to many of the *bahardars*. So some of them had to wind up their business.

But it soon led to a new fillip to the fishing trade. The money lenders of this trade, the large-scale Muslim dealers in dry fish appreciated the skill of the East Pakistan refugee fisherfolk and came forward to take the opportunity to invest their capital in the fishing trade. One of them, a Muslim of Kerala has been visiting the city of Calcutta for the last fifteen years or so to collect dry fish from Digha and Jumput in Midnapur and Phuleswar in Howrah from small traders. He has his head office at Terreti Bazar in Calcutta. He came forward with financial assistance and the refugee fisherfolk of East Pakistan welcomed it to their substantial relief.
It may be noted here that Chittagong town was the main dry fish trade centre in East Pakistan. Dry fish from this centre were exported to Rangoon and the far East. In Chittagong the main money lenders in this trade were the local Muslims and also a few local Hindus. It is interesting to note that not a single Marwari, who have captured nearly all the other trades and industries of India, has come in the field of dry fish trade. It may be that their religious and customary aversion to fish is the reason for their avoidance of this trade.

A few Muslims of Kerala used to pay their visit to Phuleswar and Uluberia from Territi Bazar in Calcutta to collect dry fish for their business from a few local Rajbansi aratdars who in their turn procured them from the actual fish catchers. So these Rajbansis became known to the Kerala Muslims. But the bahardars and their crewmen were practically unknown to them. So Kerala Muslim financiers evolved a system, known as dadan, through the known local Rajbansis who knew the bahadar quite well.

B. Dadan system (money lending system)

All the bahardars operate under the dadan system. Under this system the mahajans or dadandars (money lenders) advance money through their agents to different bahardars "free of interest" (Roychoudhuri, 1969 : 244). But the bahardars have to supply the catch of the whole season to the agents of their respective mahajans (Appendix H), who manage to extract exorbitant profit out of it as follows:
i) The **bahardars** shall sell fish at Rs.6.00 to Rs.20.00 less than the then market rate per maund.

ii) In addition, the **bahardars** would have to give 42 kg. or sometimes even more as measure for a maund of dry fish as against the official measure of 37.5 kg. to a maund. This excess weight of about 5 kg. is known as **dhalta**.

For their remuneration the agents get Rs.5.00 per maund from their **mahajan**.

Often it is found that the **mahajans** do not realise the whole amount of floated as **dadan**, nor do they insist on the **bahardars** to repay the whole amount. It is customary for the **mahajans** to let the **bahardars** carry over the balance to the next year. The **bahardars** and the fishing crews under him are their source of income. As such, the **mahajans** cannot afford to allow them to go out of their stranglehold. The unrealised amount of the **dadan** keeps the **bahardars** perpetually dependent on the **mahajan**.

Now, let me present the actual position of the source of **dadan** of the 17 fishing units of Jambudwip during the fishing season 1967-68. The chain relation of the **dadandar**, agent, sub-agent and the **bahardars** of the different fishing units may diagrammatically be represented as follows in Fig. 32.

From the above diagram it is seen that the **mahajans** (A to H) are mainly the Moplas of Kerala who have their head quarters at Territi Bazar in Calcutta. These **mahajans** have hardly any direct
contact with the bahardars of the different fishing units. They advance money to the bahardars through their agents or sub-agents who have their arat (go-down) in Phuleswar or Uluberia, where the dried fish are collected from their respective bahardars. These agents or sub-agents are mainly the local Rajbansis who get their commission from their respective mahajans. But the agents of Sheoraphuli are Rajbansis of East Bengal origin. Besides working as agents of the Moplas of Territi Bazar, they also have their own money to float as dadan either directly or through their agents at Phuleswar. The whole responsibility of realising the money, floated as dadan, is on those who are directly in contact with the bahardars, i.e., the agents.

What seems to be important here is that in this field also a trend in caste monopoly is noticed. Being a fishing caste, the Rajbansis can very well keep regular contact with their brethren fisherfolk and realise the money from them. Moreover, it has been noted earlier that some of the local Rajbansis were already in this field prior to the advent of the refugee fisherfolk. So they had already gained some experience in that field and were known to the mahajans of Territi Bazar.

Another feature is noticed from the diagram, that not a single bahadar has taken dadan from more than one dadandar in a given season. If the dadan is taken from more than one source, many complications may crop up, most important of which is to decide the proportion of the supply of dry fish of the season to be made to different financiers. These mahajans have also a sort of convention
by which one mahajan abstains from advancing any money to any bahardar till he repays the whole amount which he had borrowed last year from another mahajan. Under this system the mahajans can very well keep the bahardars under their stranglehold. They cannot go away without repaying the amount as no other mahajan would advance any money to them so long they have not cleared his due to his brother in the trade.

Now, let me examine the actual loan position of the seventeen fishing units of Jambudwip. Here, only that amount has been taken into consideration which has been borrowed from different sources for fishing operation for the season 1967-68.

Table 2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of loan</th>
<th>Amount (in Rupees)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Serial No.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. On Dadan</td>
<td>42350.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. On Interest</td>
<td>17050.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Without Interest (from friends and relatives)</td>
<td>1250.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. On land mortgage</td>
<td>1200.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>61,850.00</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*For detail see Table 23.
Thus it is seen that a little over two-third of the total amount taken as loan is on dadan followed by the amount on interest. The rest of the amount is taken from friends and relatives without any interest and on land mortgage. The system of taking the money on mortgaging a piece of land is that the mortgagor would cultivate the land at his own cost and enjoy the yield for at least one year. When the money is repaid, he has to return the piece of land. Here although the 'direct interest' is not involved, the output of the said land may be treated as an 'indirect interest'.

It is worth mentioning here that the refugee marine fisherfolk, as are found at present in West Bengal, are practically landless except for about 3½ kathas of homestead land per family allotted by Rehabilitation Department. Those again who have settled outside West Bengal, e.g., in Bihar, were also given about 3½ bighas of land per family. Thus it seems that they have very little scope for mortgaging their land. A few families have, in course of time, acquired some land, but it also scarcely exceeds 5 bighas.

From the Table 23 on the Source of Money taken as loan, the following salient features are observed.

1) For fishing and other connected affairs, the fisherfolk depend on sixteen castes or communities. Thus a symbiotic economic relation develops between them and the general peasantry. On further scrutiny, it is seen that only 4 of them (Kaibarta, Dhibar, Rajbansi and Malo) are the fishing castes and the rest, 12 are non fishing castes who are either function, artisan, or agriculturist castes.
REFERENCES

Dadondars - A - H
Agents Or Aratdars I - 10
Roman Figure - Unit No

DADAN DARS
OFCHAIN
Direction Of Money Flow - Fig.-32
2) Loan with interest may, however, be taken from castes of all social ranks - 'high', 'intermediate' and 'low'. In this sphere they are maintaining economic relationship with as many as eleven castes and pay an exorbitantly high average rate of interest of \(0.76\%\) per annum within a range of \(125.00\% - 144.00\%\) (Table 24).

The incidence of taking loan is highest from the Kaibartta (12), but the proportionate amount is not high. The average amount of loan taken from the Kaibartta is a little above Rs.300.00; whereas that in the case of the Brahman and Kayastha may come to over Rs.1000.00.

It is worth mentioning here that practically the whole of the amount taken as loan on interest is from the local sources*. This is because that unless the bahardar is known to the money lender, he does not like to take the risk of investing money in this type of "gambling" profession of marine fishing.

In Fig. 32 it has been shown that all the agents or aratdars at Phuleswar, Uluberia and Sheoraphuli get the (major) amount of money which is floated as dadan from the Muslim Mopla traders of Kerala, who have their head quarter at Territi Bazar in Calcutta. In the field of dadan system, some caste restrictions are noticed.

*Local source means the natal villages of the bahardars and the villages within about five miles radius where they are intimately known to the money lenders.
By and large, the actual money lenders are the Mopla and the agents are the Rajbansi. These agents also have their own money which are also invested as dadan.

It may also sometimes happen that the money lender, instead of giving the money to a particular bahardar, due to some reason or other, may hand over the money or interest to other bahardar or any other fisherman who is known to him. The latter, in his turn, invests the amount on special terms and conditions - usually on consideration in kind and not in cash, viz., the borrowers give the investor one maund of dried fish per hundred rupee of the money borrowed in every challan for the whole fishing season, even if the principal amount is repaid. This system of taking loan is known as machher-upar.

Thus this system of machher-upar may be regarded as a sub-type of dadan. Here only the middleman runs the whole risk. He has to repay to the actual money lender according to the agreed terms and conditions even if he is deprived of the amount of dry fish agreed up. This type of risk is so uncertain that no non fishing caste would venture to enter into the arrangement as such. As a matter of fact, it is taken to only by the bahardars or by others who are actually engaged in the fishing profession.

On the other hand, in dadan system the dadandar or the mahajan runs no risk. The aratdar or the agent, who acts as middleman, is responsible to realise the money floated as dadan from the bahardar for which he gets a commission from the mahajan.
C. Procurement of raw materials for fishing operations

Marine fishing operation on a large scale requires various kinds of raw materials. From a reference to Table 25, it will be evident that the fisherfolk have to depend on many villages beside their own and on urban or semi-urban market centres for the above purpose.

Markets crop up where there is demand for such raw material. Thus in Kakdwip (24 Parganas), because of its nearness to the fishing centre, a market grew up where the marine fisherfolk can get all the raw materials for their operation. Other such important centres are Phuleswar and Uluberia (District Howrah). The bahardars regularly go there from different fishing camps to dispose off their output. Again, with the influence of their mahajans at Phuleswar, or Uluberia, they get the necessary raw materials from these shops on credit basis, of course, at higher rates.

Now, let me go into the details of the requirements of raw materials for marine fishing operation. Here I shall only deal with the net proper with its accessories and food stuff.

(1) The net The nets are generally knit in the villages of the bahardars under their direct supervision. Different parts of the net may be allotted to different persons, for they are knitted separately and then joined together. The fisherfolk themselves, both men and women, knit them. It is a specialised job. No other castes are involved in knitting the net. It is not always possible to prepare all the nets in the villages of the bahardars. In that case they depute their respective manjhis, to prepare the nets in their villages under their direct supervision.
Generally ready made nets are not purchased by the bahardar, nor are they easily available. It is said that such nets might have some defects in the attachment of the different parts or in the number of meshes in the different parts (Chapter V). In case of emergency, of course, a readymade net is also purchased, but there are very few places where they are available. The main sources are the villages of Kalinagar, Aukshaynagar and Ganeshpur near the Kakdwip town. In these three adjacent villages there are many fisherfolk families, originally from Chittagong. They are expert in marine fishing and obviously in knitting nets for the purpose.

Thus it is seen that the nets are knitted in the villages of the bahardar or in the villages of the manjhi where regular checking can be done. In case of necessity, the nets are also procured from some limited number of villages and these villages are invariably inhabited by a large number of marine fisherfolk who can prepare some surplus nets.

(2) Hemp thread Sometimes small quantities of threads are twisted by the fisherfolk themselves in their indigenous way in their own village as noted earlier. The hemp (san) is purchased from local market, as most of the fisherfolk do not have any land and whatever little they have, are utilised for paddy cultivation or they are not suitable for the cultivation of hemp. Thus they have to depend on others for this.

The thread is mostly purchased from wholesale dealers at Burrabazar (Calcutta), Barrackpur (24 Parganas), Sheoraphuli (Hooghly),
Chandannagar (Hooghly), and Uluberia (Howrah).

(3) Bamboo and wooden post  The bamboos are generally collected from the groves of the different villages (Table 25). The bahardars are always in search for such groves. When the price is finalised he pays some advance money and reserves it for the coming fishing season. Just prior to their departure for the fishing ground, they collect them from the groves with the help of some of the unit members. Sometimes arrangement is made with the owner to deliver the goods at a fixed place on a particular day. Thus a bahardar who purchased bamboos from a village about fifteen miles from Achipur (p.s. Budge Budge) arranged with the owner of the grove to supply the articles by bullock cart near Budge. In that case, of course, the bahardar sent one of his members to be sure about the supply of the bamboos.

It has been noted earlier (Chapter V) that two types of bamboos are required for fishing operation. The lighter variety is known as bom bans. It is used as float and to keep the mouth of the net open. Its source is very limited. So the bahardars try to keep it secret lest others raise its price.

The other variety of the bamboo is known as tañar bans. Besides purchasing from the groves of the different villages, bamboos are also collected from the godown at Uluberia and Kakdwip.

The wooden posts are mainly purchased from the godown at Kakdwip. A few, however, purchase the posts from a village named Pujali (Howrah) directly from the owner. They are collected from the said village just before they start for the fishing operation.
(4) The boat

There are 29 boats (rented 25, own 4) in Jambudwip fishing ground. The 25 rented boats are procured from different sources as shown in Table 25.

Table 25

Sources of boat

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Serial No.</th>
<th>Locality</th>
<th>Caste/Community</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Muslim Rajbansi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>Uluberia (Dist. Howrah)</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>Phuleswar (Dist. Howrah)</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>Tribeni (Dist. Hooghly)</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>Charsiddhi (Dist. Nadia)</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td>Achipur (Dist. 24-Parganas)</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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From Table 25 it is seen that

1) Majority of the boats are rented from Uluberia and Phuleswar, the biggest dry fish trade centres of West Bengal. The mahajans or their agents have their centres there. Now, these agents do their best to secure boats from different places for their
clients. Many of the boat owners also harbour their boats there. The agents keep information on their own interest.

2) The Muslims and the Rajbansis are mainly the boat owners. No "high" castes are involved in it. It may be noted here that Rajbansis have a large concentration around Uluberia and Phuleswar. They practise inland fishing in the Ganga. So many of them have their boats for the purpose. In winter river fishing is not much profitable to them, while the marine fisherfolk need boats only for about five months from October to February. So the Rajbansis can easily spare their boats during their off season (October to February) and can get it back again in March-April and can carry on their inland fishing during summer or rain. Thus the marine fisherfolk are maintaining a symbiotic relation with the inland fisherfolk.

(5) Food stuff During their stay in the fishing camps the marine fisherfolk are in need of regular supply of food stuff. Their staple food is rice, which is consumed in large quantity. Per head consumption of rice is about 1 kg. per day. Thus with a total population of 243, in the fishing season of 1967-68 they required about 29160 kg. of rice for the whole fishing period of about four months.

The arrangements for the regular supply of food are made by the bahardar. So he has to make arrangement in advance so that regular supply of food is maintained.

The bahardars pay some advance, varying from Rs. 500.00 - Rs. 600.00 each to their respective reliable rice suppliers in the month of Sravan-Bhadra (July-August). For securing advance money the
rice suppliers often visit the villages of the bahardars and collect the money. With this advance the rice dealers store the required amount of rice or paddy for the fishing season. The paddy thus stored for the fisherfolk, is locally husked by the neighbouring peasants.

There are three such rice suppliers* for the marine fisherfolk of Jambudwip as will be seen in Table 26.

Table 26

Source of food stuff

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Serial No.</th>
<th>Rice supplier</th>
<th>Caste</th>
<th>Locality</th>
<th>Rice buyer or bahardar</th>
<th>No.</th>
<th>Locality</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>Sardar</td>
<td>Laksipur (near Bakkhali)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Baikunthapur (near Tribeni Dist.Hooghly)</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Bangmohan (Dist.Champaran)</td>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Majherchar (Dist.Nadia)</td>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>Paundra</td>
<td>Frasergunj Kshatriya</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Basudevpur (near Tribeni Dist.Hooghly)</td>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>Mahishya</td>
<td>Kaylaghata (near Frasergunj)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Bangmohan</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Total 3 17

*Of late another rice supplier has come in the field which has been noted later.
From Table 2, it is seen that in most cases the bahardars of a particular area arrange for their rice supply with a particular rice merchant. These merchants belong to three different castes, viz., Sardar, (Oraon), Paundra Kshatriya and Mahishya.

It is worth mentioning here that as the rice merchants belong to Frasergunj and they locally procure rice for the bahardars as arranged, the local people find it difficult to get sufficient supply of their staple food and the price rises particularly during the fishing season. This creates a feeling of tension between the local people and the fisherfolk who are regarded as outsiders.

The tension of the local people of Frasergunj rose to its climax in the beginning of the month of Kartik (October-November) in 1967-68. Some of the local young men organised an agitation, so that rice may not be exported from Frasergunj to Jambudwip. It went to such an extent that they threatened the rice merchants not to supply a grain of rice to the bahardars and tried to snatch away the rice from the boats of some of the bahardars. But the bahardars with their crewmen resisted it and forcibly took the rice. In a joint petition the matter was brought to the notice of the then Fishery Minister and the B.D.O. of Kakdwip, and the O.C. of Namkhana Police Station was also alerted. The O.C. of the Fishery Department, Government of West Bengal, at Frasergunj, supported the case of the fisherfolk. He was asked to give the names of those who were involved in this case. But later on the bahardars held a meeting amongst themselves and decided not to proceed any further; for, if they got involved in a Police case, their business would be largely hampered. Then gradually the tension subsided.
In 1966-67 fishing season also, due to the rice cordoning policy of the Government, the fisherfolk had to face much difficulties. Some of the bahardars who were then at Frasergunj thought of shifting their khunti (fishing camps) to Jambudwip due to shortage of fish in Frasergunj. But they could not do so for they were afraid that they might not get their supply of rice. Of course, after about two or three months of the fishing season some of them made a desperate attempt and established their camps at Jambudwip. They secretly used to bring rice and store it under sand.

In the 1967-68 fishing season, the fisherfolk of Jambudwip were much relieved. They found another source of rice supply. A Muslim from Dhaballat with three other co-workers, belonging to the same community, regularly supplied rice, some vegetables and kerosene oil in Jambudwip on cash payment. He used to procure the articles from Dhaballat. Unfortunately like the people of Frasergunj the people of Dhaballat also gradually took exception to this. Once it so happened that when the Muslim trader was secretly taking rice from Dhaballat to supply to Jambudwip, the local people took a stern attitude and chased them by boats. But when the fisherfolk of Jambudwip came to know of this, they jointly challenged the chasers with axes, daos etc. Then they retreated. I had the occasion to witness the situation and it was felt that if they could catch hold of the chasers from Dhaballat, the situation would have taken a serious turn.

D. Disposal of fish in the camp

(1) Dried fish: It has been noted earlier that according
to the terms and conditions of dadan, the borrowers have to supply the whole catch of the season to the agent of the dadandar at a rate lower than the market rate. But they always require some ready money to meet their day-to-day contingent expenses. In this some petty traders, who may be termed as flying parties, come to their relief. They pay flying visits to the fishing camps and purchase some amount of dry fish on cash payment. They have no connection with the dadandars or their agents. Such disposal of fish in the fishing camp is known as charbecha. After collecting the fish from the fishing camps, they directly sell them to the arats at Phuleshwar and Uluberia and in different retail markets.

As a matter of fact, these flying parties give better price and weight to the bahardars than those of the agents or artdars of the dadandars. Moreover, the bahardars do not have to pay the transport cost to these flying parties. But due to their moral obligation and economic dependence, they have to satisfy the dadandars with the supply of better quality and major amount of fish even at an economic loss. Moreover these flying parties with their limited capital cannot collect huge quantities at a time. Their boats again are also smaller in size.

Usually three or four persons jointly form one such flying party. Sometimes a single individual may also be the owner. In such parties the owner always accompanies the boatmen. These parties are mainly from Phuleshwar and Uluberia of Howrah and Digha and Junput of Midnapur, the two dry fish trade centres. Those who are from Howrah belong to the fishing castes, Rajbanshi and Dhibar; but the Midnapur
ones are mainly Mahishya peasants who dominate in that area. Members of a team generally belong to one caste and they are mostly related as kins. Some of these flying parties have their own boats, while others take boats either on daily rent at a rate of rupees three per day or on contract basis for a longer period.

The agents of Phuleswar also sometimes keep contact with such parties and hand over some money to collect some fish on their behalf. In that case they get some commission as remuneration. Some of the flying party owners happen to be relatives of these agents. If boat capacity permits, they take dry fish on their behalf from the bahardars who took dadan from them.

The collections of these parties are not much. The estimate of one such party in a single trip is as follows:

Table 27

Collection of a petty trader

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Serial No.</th>
<th>Area of collection</th>
<th>Amount of collection</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>Jambudwip</td>
<td>12 maunds</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>Bakkhal</td>
<td>18 maunds</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>Junput</td>
<td>30 maunds</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>Solo</td>
<td>12 maunds</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td></td>
<td>72 maunds</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Many such flying parties visit different fishing camps during the fishing season. In Jambudwip itself, during 1967-68 season, there came five such parties - 2 from Phuleshwar, 2 from Junput, and 1 from Calcutta.

The party from Calcutta was formed by two friends (Kayastha by caste), who worked as clerks in an office. They took leave and started this business on an experimental basis as a supplementary source of income with Rs.4,000.00 as their capital. Originally they started an arat for collecting fresh fish at Jambudwip and advanced some money to seven bahardars, ranging from Rs.100.00 - Rs.265.00. But when the fresh fish collection was not satisfactory, they wound up their arat. So, at the close of the fishing season they started collecting dry fish, so that, they could realise the money, they had already floated.

The boatmen of the said party were one Dhibar and one Malo both belonging to the fishing castes. It also collected fresh fish from hook and line fishing units composed mainly of Rajbansis and Malos. The challan of the fresh fish collection was made in the name of the Malo boatman, so that, if the actual fish catchers are challenged by their dadandars, they might say that 'we are just helping our relatives (which is actually so) with some meagre catches'. Thus with the plea of kinship relation the actual dadandars are deceived of their terms and conditions.

The above example in which the educated "high caste" Hindus are directly in the field of dry fish trade by establishing contacts with the bahardars, seems to be an exceptional case.
Each of these parties have a few more or less fixed clients in different fishing grounds from whom they collect the catch. The bahardars rationalise these irregular deals as follows: "these parties are banking on us and are facing many hazards ...... so they should also have some return". Besides getting economic benefit from such parties, the relationship of the bahardars with the flying parties is also guided by an underlying idea of getting their goodwill and avoiding curse lest they (fisherfolk) face any ill luck (amangal) in the isolated island.

As the forest is owned by the Government Forest Department, they have to secure forest pass at the rate of 0.25 paise per head per week to collect fuel during their stay in the fishing ground.

The 17 fishing units of Jambudwip have also to secure such forest pass. Under the rules of the Forest Department, they can use only the dry fuel of the forest. But, if any green tree is felled by them, they are liable to prosecution. As a matter of fact, they are in great need of fuel for cooking and preparing preservative for their net. The supply of dry fuel in the forest is not always sufficient for them. So, on many occasions they are found to fell green trees.

In Southern Sundarban, 'forest passes' are issued from three different Forest Ranges under which there are different stations. These are as follows:

1) Namkhana Forest Range -
Namkhana, Sikarpur, Patharpratima, Nalgara, Kultali, etc.

2) Basirhat Forest Range -
Rampura, Bagna, Sajnakhali, etc.
3) Matla Forest Range (Canning) -
Matla, etc.

The forest pass may be secured from any of these stations. Besides this, a boat pass also to be secured by each party who collects dry fish from the fishing camps. The amount varies from 0.20 paise to Rs.2.25 according to the capacity of the boat, e.g., upto 10 quintal the rate is 0.20 paise, 20-40 quintal it is 0.40 paise, over 400 quintal it is Rs.2.25 paise. Besides that, they have also to pay sales tax @ 6%.

Normally, the bahardars send their catch by hired boats to their respective aratdars, the representatives of the mahajans at Phuleswar at their own cost. But the aratdars also know that sometimes the bahardars secretly dispose of some of their catch in the fishing grounds to different flying parties. So sometimes the aratdars also send their boats to their respective bahardars to collect the catch at their own cost. During their visit there, they also act as flying parties, i.e., in addition to their clients they also collect as much they can from others too on cash payment. Under the circumstances, due to rivalry on economic issue, conflict may develop between the two aratdars when other bahardars together with their members try to settle it on the spot.

The aratdars generally send their boats to their bahardars when the demand for fish is expected to be high and if the bahardars fail to send their supply for a considerable period. Thus expecting a heavy demand during a fair in Jangalbilas (about 4 miles from

*Normally the bahardars send supply after every twenty or twentytwo days.
Uluberia held in the Paus-sankranti (December-January) and continues for the whole of Magh (January-February), two of the aratdars of Phuleshwar sent their boats to Jambudwip to collect fish about a week before the last day of the month.

Besides these, one or two individuals may be met with in some fishing units. They are not members of the fishing units, although quite often they stay with the fishing units. They trace some kinship relation with one or other of the members. Such an individual is provided with free feeding and lodging and in return he does some light work, for instance sorting of the fish and the like. On closer enquiry it transpired that such persons had usually given some loan to some bahardars on condition that they would supply them some dry fish. They, thus, make a profit by selling them direct to retail shops in different market centres, like Phuleswar, Uluberia, Uttarpara, Tribeni, Sheoraphuli, Magra etc.

In Jambudwip one such individual was met with. He was a Kaibarta and was staying in one of the fishing camps, the bahadar of which was his distant relative. He had given Rs.1200.00 to five bahardars (Rs.200.00 each to four bahardars and Rs.400.00 to one). The money so advanced, included about Rs.300.00 he had taken from his sister and the rest was his own. At the end of the fishing season he received about 20 maunds of fish, and planned to dispose it off in different retail shops.

(2) Fresh fish: The fishing units of Jambudwip are mainly involved in dry fish trade. Due to their isolated set-up, lack of modern
transport facilities and absence of fresh fish market centres in the locality, the fisherfolk of Jambudwip do not depend on the sale of fresh fish. But when a huge quantity is hauled, they generally bring them to Frasergunj or Namkhana and dispose them off on cash payment to fresh fish aratdars. At Frasergunj there are five such arats (Muslim - 2, Mahishya - 1, Paundra Kshatriya -1 and Rajbansi - 1).

In Jambudwip there is one arat for collecting fresh fish from the fisherfolk of Jambudwip. Four friends (Malo - 2, Rajbansi: -1, Vaidya -1) are running it on partnership basis. One of them, a Malo, who is actually the agent of a Kayastha mahajan has his head office at Calcutta (Chhagal Hata, a whole sale market at Sealdah).

It has been noted earlier that the fisherfolk of Jambudwip are not much involved in fresh fish trade. They supply only a little quantity of fresh fish to their local aratdars (Appendix D). The latter, however, collect as much as they can from other fishing units and store them with ice, brought from Namkhana. When a substantial collection is made, they transport it by country boat to Namkhana, from where it is sent in trucks to their mahajans at the Sealdah whole sale market.

The owner of the country boat, which is used for transporting the fish from Jambudwip to Namkhana is a Mahishya residing in Namkhana. The boat is plied by three men, all residents of Namkhana,—the owner himself, one of his relatives and another man belonging to the Paundra Kshatriya caste. The rent of the boat is Rs.25.00 per day inclusive of everything (fooding, forest pass, etc.). When the boat returns from Namkhana to Jambudwip it carries ice blocks (about 3 maunds) @ Rs.6.00 each, which are supplied from Calcutta by the mahajans.

The particular fresh fish aratdar of Jambudwip has contact with 4 lorry owners, who carry the collection from Namkhana to Calcutta @ Rs.3.00 per maund. The lorry owners belong to the Muslim, Mahishya, Brahman and the Rajbanshi communities. The porters at Namkhana are mainly the local Paundra Kshatriyas and Mahishyas, their
charge being Rs.1.25 per box (weighing about four maunds). A representative of the aratdars accompanies the lorry to hand over the collection to the mahaian at Sealdah wholesale fresh fish market.

In short the function of the aratdar at Jambudwip is that he collects the fresh fish on cash payment. He temporarily preserves his collection with ice and transports them by boat to Namkhana. From there it is transported to the mahaian at Sealdah by lorries. It is then auctioned there by the mahaian and a commission of 4% is taken by him. The rest of the amount is sent to the aratdar. Besides these a sum of Rs.1.00 per box of fish is deducted from the account of the aratdar for the welfare and maintenance of the market. This amount is known as bazar dan (gift for the market).

E. Transporting the dried fish

(1) From fishing camp to Uluberia or Phuleswar collection centre: The dry fish are transported from the fishing camps to the dry fish trade centres of Phuleswar and Uluberia by country boats, and handed over to the respective aratdars of the different bahardars. The carrying capacity of these boats is between 275 to 300 maunds. The cargo boats reach Kakdwip via Satamukhi Ganga. From there they go to Uluberia via Diamond Harbour following the upstream of the river Ganga. During the fishing season, every month, between 60 to 70 cargo boats come to Phuleswar and Uluberia from different fishing camps.

There are altogether 12 cargo boats to carry dry fish from Jambudwip, Frasergunj and Bakkhali. Of these 7 mainly carry the collection from Jambudwip. All the owners of the seven boats, originally immigrants from Midnapur, are now settled at Frasergunj.
They belong to Paundra Kshatriya (4) and Mahishya (3) castes. The
manjhis of the boats also belong to the same castes (Paundra
Kshatriya - 3, Mahishya - 4). Besides the manji there are 3 crewmen
in each boat. Thus 4 men constitute a unit in a cargo boat. One of
these 4 members, who is generally the manji, is directly responsible
to the owner of the boat. Under his guidance and instructions, the
other three work. They are taken either on partnership basis or on
daily wages @ Rs.3.00 per day plus fooding.

The owner may hand over his boat to the manji on either of
the two conditions, viz.,

(i) He will get 25% of the total amount collected from the
bahardars @ Rs.1.50 per maund.
(ii) He will get 36% of the total amount collected from the
bahardars provided he stands for the fooding cost of
the cargo boat.

The maintenance cost of the boat is borne by the owner.

It is the responsibility of the manji to hand over the
collection to the respective mahajan or aratdar of the different
bahardars. After loading goods the bahardars, of course, go straight
by land to save time to the aratdar at Uluberia to whom the collections
have to be handed over.

On their return the manji brings the necessary articles, like
kerosene, hemp thread for net knitting or repairing etc. for his
clients. The bahardars who are from different villages of West
Bengal pay short visits to their natal villages. Thereby they keep
contacts with their families and also with those of their crewmen.
On their return to the camps, they give the message so collected, to their crewmen. Thus contact with the families are maintained.

So long the crewmen are in the boat they lead a special way of life till they return to their respective houses. They are supplied with fish, etc. On their way, it has become a convention that they will take the dry fish which are being carried over in their boats.

The bahardars, who want to transport their catch by such cargo boats, have to pay Rs.1.50 per maund. They may as well reserve the boat for Rs.250.00 to Rs.300.00 per trip, inclusive of everything.

Generally 4 or 5 bahardars jointly transport their catch in the same boat. Separate compartments are made for that purpose. But when 1 or 2 bahardars have huge collection, they jointly or individually reserve the whole boat. It is considered to have a prestige value. One or two bahardars of Bakkhali were quite often found to reserve a cargo boat individually during the fishing season of 1967-68. They were always held as reference models of prestige by the fisherfolk of Jambudwip.

(2) From Uluberia or Phuleswar collection centre to the market

In the previous section it has been described how the collection of the fisherfolk reaches Uluberia and Phuleswar collection centre. When it reaches the hands of the aratdars or their agents at the collection centre, it is their responsibility to send them to their respective mahajans in trucks or trains, whichever is more convenient. The mahajans also take active interest in transporting the goods from the arata. They also send their managers to assess the collection in their respective arat and accordingly necessary arrangements are
made for the transport of the goods.

The major amount of the dry fish is sent to the Teritibazar in Calcutta (the headquarters of the mahajang) from where it is sent to different parts of India, like Orissa, Madras, Bombay, Assam and even upto Nepal and Bhutan. Sheoraphuli, being an important centre, also attracts a substantial portion. Orissa has a great demand for the dry shrimp (chingri) and these are sent directly from Phuleswar. Incidentally, it may be noted here that the Dhibar have practically monopolised in drying shrimp. A large portion of it comes from Sagar Island.

Some of the market centres where the dry fish are sent from Phuleswar or Uluberia are given in Table 28.

Table 28*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Serial No.</th>
<th>Localities</th>
<th>Religious affiliation of the traders who receive the supply</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>Teritibazar (Calcutta)</td>
<td>Muslim (Mopla)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>Sheoraphuli (Hooghly)</td>
<td>Hindu (Rajbanshi)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>Chaibasa (Singhbhum)</td>
<td>Muslim, Hindu</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>Chakradharpur (Singhbhum)</td>
<td>Muslim</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td>Tatanagar (Singhbhum)</td>
<td>Muslim</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.</td>
<td>Matigara (Darjeeling)</td>
<td>Hindu (Malo, Kaibarta)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.</td>
<td>Airangpur (Singhbhum)</td>
<td>Hindu</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.</td>
<td>Siliguri (Jalpaiguri)</td>
<td>Hindu</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9.</td>
<td>Jalpaiguri</td>
<td>Hindu</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10.</td>
<td>Bisknupur</td>
<td>Hindu, Muslim</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Please see the Map 4.
It is worth mentioning here that the major amount of the dry fish trade is in the hands of the Muslims, besides the money lender Moplas, who virtually control the whole dry fish trade in West Bengal. As whole salers, some Hindus have moved into this field in the recent years. By and large, they belong to the fishing castes like Rajbanshi, Dhibar, Kaibarta, Bagdi, etc. It has already been mentioned that not a single businessman of the Marwari community, who have practically captured many other trades of India, has come in this field. Thus, it appears that the dry fish trade is by and large limited to specific caste or community groups. Certain upper caste Hindus, particularly the Marwaris have avoided investment in this trade.

F. Weekly market

Due to their isolated set-up the fisherfolk of Jambudwip do not have constant and regular contacts with the peasants around Frasergunj area. They, however, occasionally visit the weekly market at Frasergunj which is held twice a week. From there they purchase rice, spices, mustard oil, soap, kerosene oil, molasses, vegetables, etc. Thus a symbiotic relation is maintained with the local peasantry. Except rice, their other necessities are very limited.

As the fisherfolk have cash money in their hands, the price of all the commodities, particularly vegetables, rice, etc. go up in the weekly market during the fishing season. As a result, the actual producers of the locality reap a good profit. But the local poor buyers cannot compete with the high prices offered by the fisherfolk. Thus a conflict is always noticed in the weekly market between the local buyers and the fisherfolk.
The weekly market at Frasergunj is also a sort of meeting place of the fisherfolk who have their temporary camps in the vicinity, like Frasergunj, Bakkhali, Kalisthan, Jambudwip etc. Practically in all these fishing camps they have their friends and relatives. So all the fisherfolk of Jambudwip are willing to attend the market regularly to break the monotony of their isolated life and to meet their friends and relatives. Besides that, by attending market they expect to get information about their families from any one of other camps who might have visited the place in the mean time. Postal letters are also distributed in the market. It is also another attraction to the fisherfolk. Thus the market seems to be a very important place to keep their contact with their families. The bahardars also meet in the market to discuss many of their problems.

The bahardars, however, do not like that their members should visit the market regularly, for their work at the camps would suffer. Some difference was observed between the shared and the salaried units in this regard. It was noted that one or two members of every shared unit pay their visits to the weekly market in turn on mutual arrangement. But in salaried units the bahardars depute one or two members to purchase the necessaries from the weekly market.

As regards the arrangement of the boat for the trip, the bahardars have come to a mutual arrangement amongst themselves. One or two boats are shared alternately by the bahardars for the intending visitors. Thus the pressure on the limited number of boats is minimised without hampering anybody's interest.
DISCUSSION

From what has been said above it will be obvious that the marine fisherfolk cannot be treated as self-sufficient economic isolates. Not only do they sell the major part of their catch to outsiders through a long chain of intermediaries involved in the marketing operation, the procurement of their basic tools and food involve them in varied symbiotic relationship with the general peasantry of the region. In other words, they are an integral part of the peasantry although a large part of their income is from the sea, which is outside the ecological domain of the peasant society.

In the economy of the fishing trade and regular supply of fish to profitable market centres various types of middlemen have emerged and they have a great chain organisation. What seems to be important here is that in an undeveloped country like India where the opportunities for occupation are limited and further circumscribed by caste monopoly such middlemen naturally crop up for their subsistence, provided it does not disturb their caste hierarchy for taking to such non-caste occupations. The distance of the producing centre from the real consumers also seem to be a factor which contributes to the emergence of a number of middlemen, i.e., greater the distance, greater is the possibility of emergence of more middlemen.
The whole fishing economy is finally controlled by only a few mahajans of Calcutta who are actually the Moplas of Kerala. A substantial amount is, of course, controlled locally by a wide range of castes on high rates of interest. The Moplas who are the dadandars have hardly any direct contact with the primary producers or their bahardars. These mahajans have various types of agents or sub-agents (aratdars, etc.) - some are in direct contact with the bahardars, while some others are engaged in different stages of its operation, like transporting, supplying of rice, etc.

For transporting the dry fish by boat from the fishing camp in southern Sunderban area to Phuleswar or Uluberia, the main centre of dry fish trade in West Bengal, the Paundra Kshatriyas and the Mahishyas who are numerically and economically dominant in the area, play the most important role. Some of the agents or aratdars are the owners of the modern means of transport, like lorries, etc. But the actual driving operation is done by the non-Bengalee Hindus.

In short the whole organisational system of the trade operates as an organic whole. Each one has a specific function to perform, the breakdown of which is bound to disturb the whole chain.

The primary producers in the chain, i.e., the fishermen themselves gain only just above subsistence level in the bargain. Unlike even the poor cultivators, they (except the bahardar) do not even own the primary tools of production and are more firmly under the stranglehold of the financiers than the farmers who are under the village money lenders.
It is seen, while the production end of the chain is virtually limited to the traditional fishing castes, the rest of the chain is manned by people belonging to a wide range of castes and communities. There are of course, some tendencies towards monopolistic specialisation by some particular communities or groups even in this sphere.