In this chapter I attempt to outline the parameters of subsistence systems in the forested areas of the Central Provinces. At the outset it is important to point out that cultivation is seen as only one of the activities that took place in the forest. The 'forest' is a 'field' of activity which houses different subsistence forms and communities. Thus the 'forest' is seen not only as a system of vegetation but also as a zone of overlapping subsistence spaces. Some of the important subsistence activities recorded in the forests of the Central Provinces, (in the 19th and early 20th centuries), are hunting-gathering, grazing and forms of cultivation such as bewar, burra and marhan. These subsistence practices also include gathering of produce by village craftsmen. The focus of the first three chapters will be on studying the intrinsic nature of and the relationship between these activities. The transformations in these subsistence forms will also be discussed.

Keeping these general themes in mind, this chapter will concentrate on the nature of bewar cultivation and its changing relationship with the dhaiya subsistence system. Here a distinction has been made between bewar and dhaiya. The term bewar connotes a specific set of cultivation practices and attitudes, while the term dhaiya is used for a loosely structured system of multiple subsistence forms that make up the subsistence system. For a study of these practices this chapter has been divided into four parts. The first part will attempt to locate dhaiya regions in a wider social and political context. The second part will concentrate on analyzing the inner dynamics of a dhaiya system in terms of its topographical, social and ecological characteristics. The third and fourth parts will study the transformations in dhaiya and will also evaluate the role of dispositions in the reproduction of a dhaiya system.

In the 1970s and 80s many scholars have suggested that the peasant economy is a way of life rather than just a form of cultivation. Works like James Scott's *Moral Economy of the Peasant* show that the 'subsistence ethic' of peasant life
consists not only of economic needs but also moral and behavioural codes that
govern their community. In this sense the question of needs and lifestyle is
determined by set communitarian norms. Hence a study of subsistence is also
an inquiry into those aspects of life that reproduce these norms and patterns of
habitual responses.¹

Since the 1970s, peasant histories have also focused on the penetration of
capital into pre-colonial subsistence economies. While pre-colonial societies were
considered 'traditional subsistence economies' cash cropping came to be
considered a sign of modernity. The distinction between a 'traditional' or adivasi
and 'modern' or peasant economy was visualized in terms of ownership of
property, production of surplus, the use of money in exchange of labour and
commodities, and specialized production processes. The polar opposition
between the commercial economy and the subsistence economy is subsumed in
the dichotomy of the 'primitive' and the 'modern'. Forms of 'shifting cultivation'
like bewar, jhum and marhan were seen as expressions of the 'primitiveness' of
the community.²

Any effort to understand the process of the marginalization of the forest
community's subsistence has led to the construction of ideal types. Images of the
systemic nature of 'traditional shifting cultivation' systems have always led to
blue prints for their transformation. Therefore the inner dynamics of a shifting
cultivation system becomes important to study. One of the first methods of

¹ Scott, Moral economy of the peasant. In India, the problem of subsistence has been conceptualized in terms
of the dispersed power of the state. The importance of patterns of behaviour has been seen in explanations of
peasant resistance which is seen in terms of forms of everyday life. In that sense the conceptualization of a
'moral economy' has informed the history of peasant resistance, which has been under greater focus than the
dynamics of the subsistence system. Writings like Ramchandra Guha, The Unquiet Woods: Peasant Protest
in a Himalayan State, (1990, Delhi); and Neeladri Bhattacharya's 'The colonial state and agrarian society' in S.
Bhattacharya and R. Thapar eds., Situating Indian History, (1985, Delhi) are representative of this.
² In this sense the study of cultivation practices has implications for the assertion of 'cultural superiority' by one
society over the other. For example certain forms of cultivation were termed as 'inferior, traditional and
uneological' practices, while others are termed as 'superior, modern and ecologically viable' practices. Early
anthropologists draw the contrast between a peasant economy and a 'tribal' economy in these terms. Thus the
term 'cultivation practices' can have both economic and cultural connotations.
SONG OF THE TRIBAL ECONOMIST:
The primitive farmer says cash,   My liquor comes free
Is unsatisfactory trash;   And my Mary makes cups from
It won't keep off rain   the nuts;
And it gives me pain   Cash cropping is all very well
If I use it to flavor my hash.   If you've got something to sell
So why should I work my guts   But tell me sir why,
From coconut trees   If there's nothing to buy;
For these government mutts;   Should I bother? You can all go to

5

From this song it is possible to detect two different perceptions of needs. First, the Papuan government perceives the need to modernize these economies. Secondly, the farmer sees cash as "trash" as his subsistence needs can be fulfilled outside the monetary network. Due to differences in experience, the government and the farmer consider relationship between 'needs' and the capitalist market in different ways. Any effort to determine the needs of a community has to take this into account.

With the penetration of the commercial market the coexistence of both types of behaviour in a single market situation is seen quite often. This can be seen in the case of a hat in a forest village of contemporary Madhya Pradesh. Narainpur (Bastar District) is one of the oldest hats of the area. Narainpur was earlier (i.e before the setting up of a tahsil there) a small village of Gonds and Marias. The hat was held every Sunday, its main feature being a cock fight and the sharing of mhowa liquor with people from other villages. Though these continue to be main attractions in a present day hat a notable change has been the increase in the size of the market and the types of products entering it. In a place where just salt and clothes were sold earlier, Ponds powder and lipstick are also sold now. The sellers of these new commodities are banias and other trading castes who come into these markets. The aggressiveness with which adivasis deal with non-adivasis reasserts their identities.

5 Free translation of Papuan tribal song, Frisco, in Economic Record, 1964. This was found quoted in Cohn, Clarke and Haswell eds., The Economy of Subsistence Agriculture, (1970, Macmillan Press).
The significance of such a scenario is that the hat coexists with a permanent market and caters to only Gonds and Marias. Though the hat becomes a field for limited capitalist penetration, it remains outside a uniform capitalist system. This is made possible by the process of socialization of both the adivasis and the traders. In the beginning the traders may have found adivasi behaviour bizarre, but gradually they had to get used to it. Though the adivasis start using 'modern' products gradually, they still remain at the fringes of the process of modernization because of the coexistence of the hat with the permanent market. Either outside influences get structured into the systemic cohesion, or these influences enter only at the fringes of the system. In both senses a case can be made for the existence of shared and common experiences of two systems.

**Locating Dhaiya Regions:**

The region is the context within which subsistence activities take place. A combination of geographic, ethnographic and political factors interact together to articulate a region's identity. The individuality and uniqueness of a region gets accentuated in a comparative perspective. In this context geographical factors acquire special import as they can either facilitate or hinder the impact of social and political forces. Here I am concerned with two regions: the Baiga region at the tip of the Maikal range (on the Satpura plateau) in Mandla district and Abujhmarh on the Bastar plateau south of the Mahanadi basin.

According to H.T Colebrooke, Vindhya constituted the limit between Hindustan and the Deccan. The term 'Vindhya' was derived from two sounds - 'vi' denoting opposition 'dhyai' to think. Thus the term 'Vindhya' was an expression used to denote a barrier. In mythological terms the progress of the Sun was said to be arrested by the Vindhyas. For this reason the most ancient Hindus described it as the southern limit of the 'Aryabhuma' or as the distinguishing mark of the
Northern regions from the Southern ones. Due to its undulating and 'rugged' territory, the Vindhyas have been described as an apt abode of four Gond Kingdoms at Garh Mandla, Deogarh, Chanda and Kherla. The district of Mandla formed a part of the Kingdom of Garh stretching from the low lying wheat lands of Mandla and Niwas to the tip of the Maikals which houses Amarkantak - the source of the Narmada.

Much has been written about the emergence of the topography of the Gondwanas. Rambharose Aggarwal (a local historian in Mandla) suggested that the Gondwanas originated in the Glacial period. In that period Australia, South Africa and Gondwana formed one contiguous land mass. The composition of the Gondwanas had changed little since then. Even during the time of the formation of the Himalayas the Gondwana region underwent no topographic changes. Aggarwal traced the history of Mandla and its rulers to the pre-historic times. The notion of the antiquity of the region was to serve as the basis for the recognition of zamindari power in later years.

In a second myth concerning the emergence of the Gondwana, Colebrooke wrote that the birth of the region took place after the submergence of the Himalayas. About the formation of the Deccan he writes:

The vast extent of this mountain tract (the Vindhyas) as contrasted with the small elevation of hills when viewed from the Hindustan has furnished grounds for the legend ...Vindhya having prostrate (sic) himself before his spiritual guide, Agasthya, still remains in that posture by the command of holy personage. This humiliation is a punishment of his presumption in emulating the lofty heights of the Himalaya and Meria.

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6 Survey of India records, DDN volumes, National Archives of India (hereafter SOI-Vols.), S.No: 21 of 1790-1800, pp.8-9.
8 SOI-Vols., S.No:21 of 1790-1800, pp.11-12.
MAP 1.1  CONTOUR MAP OF THE BAIGA REGION.
MAP 1.2  DRAINAGE MAP OF THE BAIGA REGION.

The Narmada river demarcating the West from the East.
For Colebrooke the position and elevation of the Vindhyanchal and Satpuranchal could be explained in both legendary and religious terms. In comparison with the Himalayas, the Vindhyas and Satpuras were seen as 'inferior' mountains. This has some crucial implications for his perception of the region. In the first place we might conclude that the Gondwana was constituted as a region which was more 'backward' than Northern India. Secondly the Gondwanas were not given the same political and economic importance as the Northern Indian Plains and the Himalayas. Perhaps that is the reason why the question of heights is given so much importance by Colebrooke.

The two plateaus of Vindhyanchal and Satpuranchal were linked together by the Maikal Range on which the Baiga region is located. The range was crescent shaped, forming a plateau of about 7000 square miles. On the east of it lies Amarkantak, the source of the Narmada and Son rivers. Amarkantak itself represented a curious geological formation - a deep gorge of volcanic rocks (mainly Gondwana series intercepted by deccan trap) lay exposed because of the soil denudation. The presence of this gorge diverted the course of the Son river eastward towards Murwara in Chhattisgarh (which it overlooks). The course of the Narmada was towards the west. The drainage map of the Baiga region (Map 1.2) shows the formation of the Narmada basin. The contour map (Map 1.1) shows the direction of the rise in the hills. While the eastern side had elevations of 800-900 feet, the elevations of the western side were between 1000-1118 feet. By correlating the two maps it becomes clear that the course of the Narmada was dictated by the rise in the ranges and its tributaries drained the Baiga region which was primarily on the east. The direction of the principal Vindhyan hills was indicated by the course of this river. Of the Narmada's course Colebrooke wrote:

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9 Forsyth, Highlands of Central India, p.371.
MAP 1.3 AGARIA BELT AND POLITICAL MAP OF THE CENTRAL PROVINCES.
The channel of the Narmada is confined by a range of hills...through which numerous rivers take their rise and subsequent course, towards Sone and Yamuna on one side and Taphati and Godaveri on the other, sufficiently indicates the superior deviation through which the Narmada has forced its way.\(^{11}\)

This superior deviation made Narmada a dividing river. Thus the Maikals were demarcated from the western part of Central India (undoubtedly a more prosperous part) by the course of the river. They were separated from the far east by the course of the Son, which unites this part with the Gangetic Plain. In this sense the Maikals stood isolated topographically.

Though the trough of the Son - Narmada elevation demarcated the Baiga region from the Malwa plateau, the topography of the Maikals united it partially with the Chhatisgarh plateau. While on the one side the apex of the Maikals touched the trough, from the other side of the ascent of these hills began from the zamindaris of Bilaspur, Raigarh and Rajnandgaon. The shaded part of Map 1.3 shows this region. Today this entire area along with Kawardha forms a part of the Baiga Chak. This unity provided the people of the Maikals access to markets and trade routes of the eastern region.

The 'lines of communications' between Maikal and other regions were the two main trade routes that linked Northern India (i.e Banaras and Mirzapur) to Central India (mainly Nagpur). The nature of the two routes was described by Colebrooke, one of the earliest travellers in Central India. The first route was between Banaras and Berar, through Mirzapur and the territories of Rewa. This was the shortest route to Nagpur and through this route alone "cotton was imported from Nagpur to the British territories". The second route was through Chhatisgarh and Surguja. This route was mainly used by "native travellers and merchants" who had been the target of 'bandits' operating in this area.\(^{12}\)

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\(^{11}\) SOI-Vols., S.No:21 of 1790-1800, p.10.

\(^{12}\) Ibid., pp.7-8.
1.3 also points out the direction of the trade routes. While the first route linked the Maikals to the Malwa hinterland, the spurs of the hills (the highest points on the East) had little contact with this region because of many factors. In the first place the Narmada became navigable only from the plains of Mandla and Jabalpur. Secondly there were interceptions of gorges and ravines (at an elevation of about 1200 feet) between the eastern and the western extremes. Thirdly this hinterland was dominated by the Europeans who had neither the interest in nor the knowledge of this region till the late 19th century. Their interest here was mainly in opium and cotton and the interest in wheat developed later.

The links of this region with Chhatisgarh were manifold. The association was marked by the fact that east Maikal was an intrinsic part of the Agaria belt. Verrier Elwin has shown that the movement of Agarias, an iron-smelting and trading caste, was along the Mirzapur - Raigarh route which included the southeastern tip of the Maikals, North Raigarh, Bilaspur, Rajnandgaon and the Kawardha princely state. There was ample salai forest and crude iron ore deposit along this route. The Agaria's presence in this region was justified by the large deposit of iron ore due to the existence of laterite soil cover. According to Prescott and Pedleton the laterite soil had a thick upper crust of ironstone and continuous weathering made access to iron ore easier. The ecological and technical implications of this soil type will be seen later in this section. The long standing relationship between Chhatisgarh and Maikal is evident even today. The Baigas of the Maikals still walk 200 km. to this region to get employment in Chhatisgarh.

The potential importance of the Baiga area for the British arose from the nature of its forests. Forsyth has shown that the Maikals of Mandla were the only place in the world where teak and sal grow together. The forest was thick and regeneration good. It yielded enough forest products like dhok, lac and tussar. Yet the region was made a 'sanctuary' for Baigas. The main reason for this was its inaccessibility and the shortage of willing labour to work for the forest department.

Unlike the Maikals there is very little information on the topography and of the Bastar State. Being a princely territory till the independence of India this region was rather inaccessible and uncared for - a fact that is to some degree true even today. Perhaps this was the reason for its isolation. The Bastar plateau was bound to the north by Kanker Feudatory State, to the east by the zamindari areas of Sambalpur, to the west by the Ahiri zamindari of Chanda and to the south by hills and plains of the Northern Circars.

The Bastar State was divided at the centre by the Indrawati river which nourishes a fertile culturable tract near Jagdalpur. To the north of this river is the plateau of Abhujmarh - the region where the Marias practice penda and marhan cultivation even today. The region was covered with thick sal forest, and a thick growth of mhowa and bamboo. Of the terrain in Abhujmarh Grigson wrote:

Roughly speaking this (terrain) is composed of all the wild country bounded on the south by the Indrawati river, on the north by the Antagarh plains, on the east by the Jhoria country...and on the west Kotri river in Pratabpur to its junction with Indrawati in Bhamragarh in the Ahiri zamindari of Chanda district....The hill mass is so cracked

15 Forsyth, Highlands of Central India, Chapters on teak and sal.
16 Ibid., p.385.
and seamed with valleys running in all directions that it is not possible to point out any main hill systems.\(^1\)

The elevations were around 2050-3000 feet especially on the western border around Ahiri. The hills were of sandstone and the ranges ran parallel to each other from about 5-15 metres. The slopes were gentle but the soil was shallow and there was no water.\(^1\)

Given this terrain, there were hardly any 'lines of communication' of Abhujmarh with other regions. The only association we can possibly visualize was that between the marh and the Ahiri zamindari, which for all practical purposes formed a part of the same geo-ecological zone. The last accessible point is Orchha, 60 km. from the centre. It was also the last market where non-Marias made their presence felt once a week. The other market was held every Sunday at Narainpur 10 km. from the first village inside the south eastern portion of the Marh. In both these markets the Marias hardly sold anything. They only came to buy cloth, oil, and salt. The routes to the market were through the Marh and these were inaccessible for 4 months a year (from June to October when the rains come). This part of Bastar can be contrasted with the southern part which is connected to Vizag by train and Raipur by road. It forms an integral part of the Banjara trading circuit.

The purpose of this exercise has been to draw out the potentiality of the region as a field for inter-systemic contact. In this context it can be inferred (from the above exposition) that in all respects the Maikals were more conducive to 'intrusions' than Abhujmarh. The reasons for this were many. First, they belonged to khalsa areas over which the British had full control. Second, they were isolated from the west, but formed an integral part of the eastern lines of communication and pilgrimage routes. This is not true of the marh which was

\(^1\) Grigson, Maria Gonds of Bastar, p.27.
\(^{19}\) Glasfurd Report, p.6.
completely isolated from any main line of communication. Lastly, the Maikals were commercially a more viable proposition as they had some of the best forests in the Provinces. All these factors together, brought it more under colonial focus than Abhujmarh.

**Bewar and the Problem of Adaptation:**

Many types of cultivation were practised in the forested areas of Central Provinces. They have all been given the name of 'shifting cultivation'. It has been argued that varied forms of cultivation in 'primitive' societies have been united under this term by certain common practices such as burning of the forest, long fallow cycles, and use of the axe and the hoe. These cultivation practices necessitate migratory habits of cultivators. Because of this the term is used primarily, in opposition to 'permanent sedentary' cultivation where little movement takes place.

In his study of shifting cultivation Harold Conklin contended that in order to make a holistic study of these cultivation types the following factors need to be taken into account: a) principal crops raised, b) crop fallow's time ratio, c) crop associations and successions, d) tools and techniques, e) dispersal of swiddens, f) treatment of soils, g) regional flora of land cleared, and h) climatic conditions.

Distinguishing the system from peasant cultivation he says:

> In Philippenes as elsewhere the study of swidden cultivation (in time and space) - more than sedentary field agriculture is necessarily a study of farming practices over extended periods of continuous and significant environmental change.

Conklin saw shifting cultivation as a system which was essentially dependent upon farming practices. The act of growing crops led to particular kinds of

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20 Most of the literature on this is based on African field research and has been sponsored by the FAO or the Commonwealth.

21 Conklin, *Hanunoo Agriculture*, p.3

settlements and cultural dispositions. The seasonal rhythm of fallows was the only sense of time these systems possess. Thus like other systems, this system was also characterized by one homogenous activity.

Conklin’s work shifted the focus from purely socio-cultural studies to the importance of ecology in the study of subsistence. It provided a simplistic explanation for a complex system whose dynamism was based on a correlation of many seasonal activities. Audrey Richards has classified “hunger months” and “plentiful months” in terms of the seasonal rhythm of cultivation and gathering activities. The definition of work groups, the seasonality of festivals, and other activities are structured by this. Bemba cultivation, as Richards sees it, not merely a way of feeding hungry stomachs, but is a manifestation of an ideology that reproduces kinship relations.

In this section an attempt is made to see the relationship between seasonal activities, technology, and the assertion of collective identities. Through a study of penda and bewar cultivation an effort will be made to show that the correlation is not as direct as it seems. The role of the 'non-economic' in the process of adaptation will thus become apparent.

Bewar cultivation is practised by the Baigas of Mandla and Balaghat districts of the Central Provinces. The cultivation form is prevalent mainly on the southeastern portion of the Maikal hills. There are four factors that must be taken into account while studying bewar cultivation: 1) the undulating character of the region; 2) the soil types and vegetation pattern 3) the cultivation system and 4) the seasonal rhythm of subsistence activities.

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23 See Audrey Richards, Land, labour and diet in Northern Rhodesia, (1939, London).
24 For an elaboration of this point see Audrey Richards' earlier work on nutrition, Hunger and Work in a Savage Tribe, (1932, London).
The undulating character of the region: The undulating character of the region is important because it explains the choice of the location of bewar villages and fields. Bewar took place on gentle slopes. The broadcast method it used to sow seeds could not be successful on either steep slopes or flat fields. On steep slopes the rain water drained off the field washing the seeds away. For this reason the location of village and fields on hillsides was important in the practice of bewar.

The cultivation tract focused upon covers the present day Dhaba and Bijora forest ranges in Mandla. It was intrinsically linked to the Daldali, Ranidhara and Banjari ranges bordering Mandla in Balaghat district. This tract was divided by the spurs of ranges which gradually gain height from east to west culminating in the Chauradar plateau which overlooks the Raigarh-Bicchea lowlands. The gradient of the plateau was about 1 km: 42.10. metres. This means that the incline was quite steep, the plateau rising at an average of 42.10. metres at a vertical cross section of every 1 km. taken from village Rajnisarai to Chauradar, covering nearly the all tablelands which were formed by the tributaries of the Narmada - Seoni and Tan (see Map 1.2). The streams flowing out of the Seoni and Tan were the source of irrigation in the North Eastern part of the plateau. In the south western part the Burhner river was a major source of irrigation. The course of this river was through the Dhaba forest reserve and is a tributary of the Narmada flowing into Rajnandgaon district, a princely state during the period of study (see Map 1.1).

In this context the topography of one village, Rajnisarai, is used to show the kind of undulating regions that shifting cultivation can be practised. Rajnisarai was situated on the banks of the Burnher river. It was in the Dhaba forest reserve where the Baiga Chak was formed in the 1870s. This area housed some of the oldest bewar villages of which the Chak comprised. Ajgar was 0.25 km, Silpiri was 1 km, Dhurkota was 1 km, Jhamul was 2 km, Dhaba was 1 km and Tantar was 2.5 km from Rajnisarai. The village was almost at the centre of the
Chak at the time of its formation and an area of 25 sq.km. around the village can give us a sufficient idea of where the fields of the villagers were located. Map 1.4 of the roads surrounding Rajnisarai can show this.

**TABLE 1.1 A**

**WENTWORTH TABLE SHOWING THE SLOPE VARIATION**

**VILLAGE RAJNISARAI, DHABA FOREST RESERVE, MANDLA**

(CROSS SECTION 25, SQ.KM.)

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**TABLE 1.1 B**

**WENTWORTH TABLE SHOWING THE SLOPE VARIATION**

**VILLAGE RAJNISARAI, DHABA FOREST RESERVE, MANDLA**

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<td></td>
<td>1.1</td>
<td>0.8</td>
<td>1.4</td>
<td>0.91</td>
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<td>1.23</td>
<td>0.91</td>
<td>0.91</td>
<td>1.1</td>
<td>0.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SERIES 4</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
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<td>1.4</td>
<td>0.91</td>
<td>0.91</td>
<td>1.23</td>
<td>0.91</td>
<td>0.91</td>
<td>1.1</td>
<td>0.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SERIES 5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>0.8</td>
<td>0.8</td>
<td>2.4</td>
<td>1.23</td>
<td>0.61</td>
<td>1.1</td>
<td>0.2</td>
<td>1.1</td>
<td>0.61</td>
<td>0.91</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**EXPLANATORY NOTE:**

The Wentworth method is used by geographers to represent undulating slopes around a chosen area. Here village Rajnisarai at 81 degree 15' East latitude and 22 degree 30' North longitude is taken as the centre point. The village is marked on the table by the point - * . Then 5 cm. cross sections are taken from all four sides of this point. This table is drawn from a map of the scale 1:50,000 metres. Therefore 1 cm. = 0.5 km. In order to cover the entire area around the 2.5 km. radius a square of 2.5 cms. is made on each quarter. The entire table represents an area of 25 sq.km. - i.e 5.75 sq.km. in all four directions. Here it has been divided into two horizontal cross sections for the purposes of graphical presentation. Table A represents 12.5 sq.km. north of the village and Table B 12.5 sq.km. south of the village. Each series consists of two rows. The first row of figures in each grid show the
VILLAGE RAJNI SARAI
CONTOUR MAP

[MAP of Village Rajnisarai with contour lines and reserved forest boundary]

CONTOUR
RESERVED FOREST BOUNDARY

0 -- 5 KMS
number of contour intersections that have taken place in each grid. The contour map of Rajnisarai village (Map 1.5) has been used for this. The second row of figures shows the slope of each grid in degrees. The slope has been worked out with the formula: \( N/L \) multiplied by \( V.I/3660 \). Here \( N \) = number of contour intersections; \( L \) = parametre of total grid in this case 2 km.; \( V.I \) = contour interval in this case 20 and 3660 is constant. This gives the natural tangent value. For the degree value the log of the tangent value is taken out. For example if \( N = 4 \), then the tangent will be 0.01092 and \( \log \tan 0.01092 \) is approximately 0.61 degrees.

The tables are better represented by visual area graphs which are plotted in terms of series. Each horizontal row has been converted into a series. The first figure on each row is taken as the starting point of the series.

![Graph 1.1 A of Table 1.1 A](image)

![Graph 1.1 B of Table 1.1 B](image)

From the following exercise it is easy to show that the area around the village has sharp slope deviations. The slopes on the southern and the western parts of the region were steeper than those in the north and the east. The slope map (Map 1.6) of the region shows that the general slope of the north eastern region varied between 0.5-1.5 degrees, whereas the slopes between 1-2 degrees increased towards south westwards. Patches with slopes above 2 degrees were few and far between in the north-eastern region, but in the south and south-
VILLAGE RAJNISSARAI
SLOPE MAP

INDEX SLOPE IN DEGREES

- < 0.5
- 0.5 - 1.0
- 1.0 - 1.5
- 1.5 - 2.0
- 2.0 - 2.5
- > 2.5

0 5 Kms.
western parts of the region slopes above two degrees were not difficult to find. It is significant that most villages were located on the north-eastern slopes. This means that these villages settled on moderate or gentle slopes, only a few villages like Silpiri and Tantar selecting slopes above 1.2 degrees. This becomes evident if we compare the location of these villages in Map 1.4 with the Slope Map 1.6. The concentration of villages in the north-east shows that most of the bewar cultivation in the Mandla and Balaghat districts took place on slopes of 0.5-1.5 degrees. It is significant to note that villages situated on slopes of 1-1.5 degrees were in the neighbourhood of areas with slopes up to 1 degree. Villages such as Ajgar and Dhurukota were on the edge of the incline between 1 and 1.5 degrees. This suggests a possibility that the villagers preferred to cut bewar on lower slopes of 0.5-1 degrees. Inhabitants of villages like Jhamul and Khapripani (based on 2 degrees or above slope) probably went downhill for cultivation (refer to Maps 1.4 and 1.6).

Soil types and vegetation patterns: The relationship between bewar and laterite soils is integral to the study of adivasi subsistence forms. The classification of soils formed an inseparable part of the agrarian perception of British administrators and reflected their bias against bewar cultivation. While the bewar region comprised 'inferior' soil types, cash crop regions consisted of 'superior soils'. An analysis of the classification of soils shows us how the bewar region was constituted in relation to surrounding agrarian societies. The classification of soils of Mandla is the following:
Table 1.2: Soil Types of Mandla District:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Characteristics</th>
<th>Position</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Kabar 1</td>
<td>Black Cotton soil of great depth and moisture; can do without rain. Has no stones</td>
<td>Wheat grows in the haveli and pathar tract of Mandla for export. In Mandla the land with this type of soil is considered 'superior' to land on which bewar is cut.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kabar 2</td>
<td>Inferior quality Black soil; less depth; some kankars</td>
<td>Wheat or rice is grown on this for peasant subsistence. It is found in haveli and pathar tracts of Mandla. Pockets of this type of soil are found in the areas where Marias do Marhan.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mund 1</td>
<td>A third class of Black soil; gritty and friable breaking into clods and roughish surface</td>
<td>Suitable for all crops especially pulses; found mixed with kabar in haveli tracts. In the tracts of this soil tur is grown.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mund 2</td>
<td>Black soil shallower and lighter than Mund 1 and more sandy in out turn; has a great limestone content having low productivity</td>
<td>Suitable for all crops in low-lying or irrigated tracts. Found in east Dindori in yellowish and reddish colour. In the lower reaches of the Maikals this soil is primarily used for light wheat cultivation and also gives a good kodon and kutki crop. Is found more when the Maikals reach Chhatisgarh.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kaiti Sahra</td>
<td>Locally known as domantia and is a very sandy variety of Mund. Good for rice and production of inferior crops.</td>
<td>Only found in the Mandla rice tract. Not found in Dindori or north of Mandla. Is sometimes double cropped with pulses.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Khisa Sahra</td>
<td>Pure sand friable and easily workable; gives good out turns for rice and food grains</td>
<td>Found in low-lying plains or well irrigated regions. Not suited for rabi or light kharif crops. This soil is hardly found in this regions. Pockets of it may be found in the southern tip which neighbours Chhattisgarh.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mutbarra</td>
<td>Not a specific soil but term used for poorer qualities of red and yellow soil; is stone free.</td>
<td>Only suited for kharif crop. Muttabarra and Barra are the two soils which are dominant in our region. Give good crops of kodon and kutki.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Barra</td>
<td>Similarly comprehensible term used for red gravel soil with underlying rocks of 12'-18'.</td>
<td>Not capable of rabi or rice. Is the best soil for kodon and kutki given good rains. In this and the last soil iron deposits are found.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Source Mandla DG, 1912 p107-109).

The classification above shows that there were two categories in the official discourse on soils. The first four types of soil belonged to 'superior' classes which could grow commercially viable crops especially wheat in Mandla. The last four type of soils belonged to the category of 'inferior' soils which were suited for growing crops that were not commercially viable. These were soils with varying contents of ferruginous and limestone deposits. Most of the bewar cultivation
took place on the Muttubarra and Barra soils. These soils had some lateric content whose existence depended upon the basic rock structure and the post-tertiary deposits to which the rock is exposed. The basic rock structure of the eastern end of the Satpura range (consisting of the Maikals) was the Deccan trap series consisting of a hard and solid basaltic base. These rocks were responsible for the black soil content in Mund 2 - the dominant soil type in the eastern Maikal ranges. These rocks were interspersed with beds of Denwa and were greenish yellow beds with bright mottled reddish particles forming stratified and discontinuous beds of sandstone. Overlapping these rocks were the Bagra group of rocks with a deep red and sandy matrix resulting in limestone and ferruginous deposits. It was the last two that result in the reddish-yellowish appearance of Mund 2. Together these geological formations create a lateric base which was characterized by a rock hard bottom.

In the diagram above the layers of the lateric formations are shown. The top layer is of a thick iron crust that has solidified due to the process of weathering. The second layer is of the mottel zone of ferruginous deposits and the third of dallied clay deposits. The last layer is that of the parent rock over which the lateric accumulation has taken place.

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26 Ibid., pp. 137-38.
According to Newbold, the hardest rocks are the most ferruginous ones and have a vitrified and barren surface. He also notes that enormous amounts of laterite exists due to the process of denudation and erosion that has taken place because of weathering. This also results in the cliff like appearance of the lateric plains and the undulating surfaces. Lateric surfaces of the Mund 2 type were prevalent at the height of 800ft - 3000ft. These formations were not affected by current climatic conditions but by processes that had taken place in the Pleistocene age. The hardened iron base and the tendency of weathering made bewar the most ecologically viable cultivation form in this region. Since the upper crust of the soil was prone to weathering, the Baigas could only cut bewars on moderate or gentle slopes. In the last sub-section I have shown that they preferred to cultivate on land that has a slope up to 1 degree. The iron crust and the hard rock below the surface of the soil made ploughing an unviable proposition.

The nature of the soil and the surface structure was also affected by the kind of vegetation in the region. Most bewar villages were situated in dense mixed (mainly sal and bamboo) forest. For a bewar system to survive and reproduce itself it was essential that the forest regeneration is at the same pace as the cycle of cultivation. For example if one field was left fallow for 9 years the land was to have sufficient under growth in 9 years. For this reason trees and forest with a high rate of regeneration were essential to ensure the success of a bewar crop.

Mixed forests flourished in the sandy soils of the Maikals. The typical conditions for the regeneration of the sal tree was a rainfall between 40 and 80 inches and good sub-soil drainage. This was possible on a surface with permeable rocks and on an elevation. In places where the drainage of the soil is

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not very good, a slope would ensure that water would drain through the surface soil. But where the soil drainage was good, the best sal would grow on low lying plains. Throughout the Mandla district good sal was found on gentle slopes of undulating formations. The rainfall in this region was about 56 inches. The western Maikals have good sal which grows with drought resisting trees like saj, salai and aoula. It was also surrounded by a variety of grasses like mosaic and khel (the principal grazing grasses) and sukra (the medicinal grass). These grasses were lush and help to retain some moisture in a ground that was hardened by the thick canopy of the sal. These properties of the forest supported the system of cultivation. While trees like bamboo and sal had a high rate of natural regeneration, the grasses helped to retain the moisture in the soil which was hardened by the roots of the sal. They also protected the soil from denudation due to weathering.

The system of cultivation: In the discussion above I have described the topographical and geographical features which characterized a bewar tract on the Maikal ranges. Here I will describe the methods by which the Baigas practised this form of cultivation. This description will involve a consideration of four factors: a) the settlement pattern b) crop types and cropping patterns c) the division of labour and d) the techniques of cultivation. Together they form the cultivation system.

Bewar was been commonly described as a 'shifting cultivation' system. Like all such systems it involved the burning of the forest and the shifting of fields (as different from the shifting of villages). It was practised by Baigas of Mandla and Balaghat, the Khonds of the feudatory states around Bastar and in Orissa and Marias of Chanda and Bastar. In each of these regions it had different names,

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29 Mandla DG, Chapter on forests.
30 Ostmarton, Sal regeneration, p.554.
different techniques were used and different crops grown. For example the Marias of Bastar called it penda and used the plough to grow rice. Like the Baigas they shifted fields but not villages. The Khonds shifted both fields and villages. A comparison between the nature of these practices will become essential to show the distinctive nature of Baiga cultivation as well as illustrate points on cropping patterns and techniques (for lack of sources solely on Baiga cultivation).

In the choice of their field sites the Baigas took into account two considerations. First that the fields were to be at a downward slant so that the broadcasting of seeds became easy. Secondly the field were to be situated amongst thick forests and undergrowth so that burning acts as an effective manure for the soil. Accordingly the settlement of villages also took place in these areas and the fields are near the houses. This facilitates the guarding of fields during harvest time. The location of the villages has already been explained in the first subsection on undulating plains.

The settlement patterns of the villages were generally as follows:

In the diagram above, the big rectangular space represents the compound of the village. The smaller rectangles are the compounds of the household clusters. The black squares inside these represent houses and the light coloured squares, granary or cattle sheds. The circular demarcations represent fields whereas the

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31 Ibid., p.238. It has been shown in the last two sections why these factors are important in this region.
rest of the land was usually dense forest or grassland. Within the cluster, houses generally belonged to the same family, related to each other by marriage or by birth.\textsuperscript{32} The granary however could be shared by more than one family and served not only as a storehouse for grains but also as a shed for hen earlier and cattle now. The phenomenon of sharing granaries was especially true for the Maria villages in Abhujmarh.\textsuperscript{33}

Like all other identities, the identity of the family also got articulated contextually. The family consisted of the father and his sons sharing the same cluster compound. The patriarch was the head of the family and a \textit{siyan} of the village. Under his supervision all family disputes were resolved and marriages fixed. Relations between joint families were conducted through him. Once the father died the eldest son attained this position. The identity of the patriarch got articulated only in times of ritual performance and in the case of disputes with other families. In routine life the family identity was constituted through the formation of work groups. The father, who was the head of the family led his sons to clear the fields. The sons, who lived and dined with their father, did not have separate fields. According to community norms when the son got married he continued to work in the same field as his father and partake of the produce from the family land. As long as the son lived in the same compound he belonged to the family work group. Before marriage even his axe belonged to his father whereas after marriage he was gifted an axe by his father. However in his personal life, he enjoyed the privilege of having a hut different from his father. If the son separated there was no community sanction for the allotment of a separate field. At best he could hope for the partition of his father’s field.\textsuperscript{34} This was quite unlike the Khond system where sons are entitled to separate

\textsuperscript{32} Though this diagram belongs to a present day Baiga village, Elwin’s diagram of 1939 is not very different. See Elwin, \textit{The Baiga}, p.32.

\textsuperscript{33} Grigson, \textit{Maria Gonds of Bastar}, p.117.

\textsuperscript{34} Elwin, \textit{The Baiga}, pp.78-79. Also see p.273.
fields once they got married. In their dealing with the outside world, the married son formed a part of the joint family headed by a Khond patriarch. But in routine life the term 'family' implied a 'nuclear' family. In this sense the work groups of the Baigas were bigger than those of the Khonds.

Though the family was the organizing principle of work groups, the definition of these groups depended upon the time of the year and the agricultural activity involved. The family worked as a group and its tasks were differentiated on a gender basis. Two kinds of work groups existed in Baiga society. The first type of work group consisted of male members and was formed in periods of clearing and guarding of fields, and threshing crops. In May - June or the Indian month of jeth the Baiga men went to prepare the fields for cultivation while women picked leaves. This task entailed the clearing of trees and undergrowth. The second group consisted of the whole family which worked in the fields during periods of sowing, fencing, harvesting and threshing. In periods where only the male members work in the fields, women stayed at home and brew pej (rice beer), gathered fruits or leaves or dug roots.

A special problem that arose in determining work groups was with respect to women and lamsena labour. In both these cases the main characteristic was the movement of people from one family to another. Once a woman was married her labour and property belonged to her father-in-law. Her own family thus lost her labour but gained a bride-price or sukh of about Rs.18 or Rs.25. They did the same for a son whose wife’s labour belonged to her father-in-law who in turn paid sukh. The same was the case with lamsena labour. The lamsena was a youth who served for a wife in her home before marriage. It was like a period of probation where a girl’s family could test the abilities of the boy she sought to

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35 Notes on the Khonds, Verrier Elwin Papers, Nehru Memorial Museum and Library, Delhi (hereafter Khond Notes), No 165 1935.
marry. During this period (which lasts between 2 to 5 years) he received food and clothing from the family. In return his labour and earnings belonged to his father-in-law. He returned to his home after the marriage is fixed.\textsuperscript{37} The composition of the work group in the field was thus affected. Where as the woman’s labour shifted more or less permanently the same was not true of lamsema labour.

So far I have hinted upon the seasonal formation of work groups which depends upon the social, cultural and ecological factors. Here I elaborate upon the last of these factors. The main crops grown by the Baigas are kodon and kutki. The kodon millet is a long duration crop that grows well in shallow as well as deep soils. Both kodon and kutki mix well with cereals and are drought resisting crops.\textsuperscript{38} In the Chak area kodon and kutki were sown with a species of rice called Baygana.

The yearly agricultural cycle began with the preparation of fields before the coming of the rains. First, trees and bushes or jharh were cut. Both the axe and the sickle were used. The men burnt the field or bewar and spread the ashes evenly over the field so that they soaked into the soil during the rainy season. In these ashes the seeds were broadcast during the rains. Baigas stood on the side of the hills and waited for the seeds to be washed away in the rain water and consequently scatter in the field. The Baigas noted that their crops have dwindled ever since they started using the wooden plough or bakhar on their fields. This was so because the successful application of the plough it was necessary that the soil was exposed to the atmosphere frequently. It also required the soil to be sufficiently soft so that the plough could open it to air,

\textsuperscript{37} ibid., p.288.
dew and rain. On a hard laterite base this was not possible. The hardness of
the rock, the undulating slopes and the thick forest cover were responsible for
this. Thus the method of burning and broadcasting was quite suitable for this
soil. In other areas where axe cultivation took place, hoes were used inside the
forests to break the clods in the earth. Amongst the Khonds of Orissa the hoe or
the korki was used. The crops sown were also more varied like arhar, barbatti,
and castor. The Marias, in order to facilitate the germination of the seed, also
use the hoe which they call kudari. Apart from kodon and kutki the Maria also
grow arhar, kosra and bajra.

Once the seeds were sown the fencing of the bewar took place. The fences were
made of bamboo and bough. There were three traps in the fences to catch deer,
hare or peacocks. Once the crops started sprouting the Baiga families moved to
the fields to weed the crop. Kuar or the time when the seeds started sprouting
was the most difficult time in the field. In Sawan the weeding was done. And it
was finally Phagun or February-March when harvesting time arrives.

Threshing of the crop was done by a very simple method. The crop was spread
on the floor and women and children stamp their feet on it. Threshing floors
had often been the measure of the wealth of a person. For example in the
"Legend of the Lingo" the Gond was said to have 18 threshing floors while the
had Baiga only 12. These numbers probably represented the out turn of crop
and thus the wealth.

Each of these bewars lasted the Baiga for a maximum of three years. After this
the field had to be left fallow for at least 6-7 years before the old trees could

39 Major. Alexander Walker, 'Indian agriculture, 1820' in Dharmapal ed., Indian Science and Technology in the
40 Khond Notes, pp.226-227.
41 Grigson, Maria Gonds of Bastar, p.127. The differences in cropping patterns are mainly because of the
differing climate, soil surface and thus different diet patterns and technologies.
42 Hislop, Papers Regarding Aboriginal Tribes. Hislop has recorded the whole legend down in 7 parts and
shows how one legend can form the basis of all Gond subsistence activities.
grow again. In the first year Baigas did not cut the entire under growth. They
left some for the second year's burning. If in the third year the bewar had to be
burnt again it required a lot of labour and the out turn of the crop decreased
each year. This was because kodon was an exhausting crop, which enriched the
soil with few nutrients.\textsuperscript{43} The Khonds got a better crop than the Baigas. In the
first year they grew arhar and barbatti together. Locally, barbatti was called
the husband and arhar the wife. When the creeper grew over arhar they
believed the crop would be good. Then they sowed kutki with the digging stick.
In between these they planted tilli and castor. They spread semi-beans over
kutki.\textsuperscript{44} By sowing the land in this manner they were able to carry out the
maximum utilization of the soil. Arhar was a deep rooted crop that restored the
nitrogen in the soil and responded well to mixed cropping. Besides offering an
insurance against pests, frosts, and drought it offered the Khonds many
harvests. It was thus grown with shallow rooted crops.\textsuperscript{45}

The pattern of cropping depended on the nature of the soil and the drainage of
land. Within the Chak (which was a drought prone area) hardly any deep
rooted crops were found. The lateric base was possibly responsible for this and
distinguished Baiga cultivation from others. For in other areas, (like the Maria
and Khond areas), many kinds of cropping took place. In both cases a digging
stick was used to sow deep rooted crops and to turn the earth over the fields. In
the Baiga case these practices were not possible.

**Seasonal rhythm of subsistence activities** : Like any other agricultural activity
the seasonal rhythm of bewar cultivation was crucial for its survival and
reproduction. The agricultural cycle in each year of cultivation was different in
bewar and other forms of shifting cultivation. This distinguished these

\textsuperscript{43} Hegde and Gowda, 'Small millets in India', p.220.
\textsuperscript{44} Khond Notes, p.22 and pp.83-85.
\textsuperscript{45} Indian Council of Agricultural Research (ICAR): *Pulse Crops in India*, (1970, ICAR Delhi), pp.35-41.
cultivation forms from sedentary cultivation. In the periods when no cultivation took place other subsistence forms like hunting and gathering became the basis of Baiga subsistence. In other periods a combination of all these activities helped the Baiga to survive. This was also true of Khond subsistence. Thus bewar and penda became a part of the multiple subsistence strategy of these communities. In this sense bewar and penda were only one of the subsistence activities within the dhaiya system.

In the introduction to this chapter I have defined dhaiya as a system which comprises many subsistence forms. All these forms of livelihood were interlinked with each other through a seasonal rhythm which differed from one year to another. For example if the bewar was cut in the first year of cultivation, the dependence of the community on hunting and gathering was likely to be more than in the second year when the fruits of the first crop were obtained. In either case the relationship between activities were partly determined by the out turn of the crop in the previous year. The gathering and hunting activities were also seasonal. The relationship between the seasonal rhythm of bewar and dhaiya has been described in the following Saila, a seasonal song sung by the Gonds and Pradhan of the Maikals.
Oh friend in Chait my son was born
The chowk was littered with sandal paste
The pitcher was of gold
But if my brother had been here
He would have lit his golden lamp
And with joy brought my baby gifts.

Friend the month of Chait is done
Now Baisakh is here
The heat rains down
The body is as hot as iron
Yet even in this heat my brother has gone
to bring his wife.

Baisakh descends, Jeth rises up
the wind comes.
As though the heat itself were blowing

The rain comes down in little drops
Yet farmers are wet
Now comes Bhadon it is always midnight
The darkness is greater for flashing lights
No one is sure whether her husband will return or not
Tell me will my love return or no!

Kuar is surrounded by the sun
I said to my husband sleep away from me
It is too hot for it
Give up for the time the work for the mattress
Lie down my Raja and I will fan you
Don't plough anymore, lean the plough share against the wall
And I will fan you
If you plough great clods of earth will be upturned
At such a time the women take Pej
In two pots to their husbands and mad husband gulps it down
Yet he is thinner than before
Oh! friends their ribs show through the skin
And their skin is loose

Though this song concentrates on the cultivation practices, the periods when the 'husbands are home' and when 'they are away' indicate the seasons when other subsistence forms may be practised. These activities were mainly hunting and gathering. The song also shows the correlation between the changes in weather,

Then comes Asad
The clouds appear with thunder
The first rains fall
The birds sing again
The peacock cries in the forest
The old bullocks are afraid
For there will be work to do
And the poor farm laborers are more frightened than bullocks
The farmers throw their seeds madly about the fields
The doves and the pigeons
Break the seeds and eat them

In Sawan it is easier to plough
The tiny fish invade the field
And jump about in water
Yet they eat everything we give them

Kartik brings diwali and we have two lamps for it
We touch lanterns feet
Oh! Laxmi stay with us always
And may our husbands live forever

Aghan and Pus come now
Rain drizzles down on the pitcher
It looks as if it were trembling
In these months beds also tremble
And the bed with no husbands, how her liver burns

Magh is a religious month
These five Sundays we keep a fast
And at night if Shiva comes all men are happy

Then comes Phagun
The colour sprouts everywhere
And great Bazars
But in all these there is no fun
Without a husband

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46 Elwin, and Shamrao Hivale, *Songs of the Maikals*, (1947, Delhi), pp.82-84. Though this is a Gond song it can give us some idea of the relationship between forms of shifting cultivation and multiple subsistence strategies.
the amount of work done, and the periods of 'rest'. Seasons like Kuar, Magh and Phagun were treated by the women as periods of 'rest'. This was the time when the 'husbands were home'. While Kuar was the hot month, Phagun and Magh were the festival seasons. The seasons when the men were away from their homes were Chait, Baisakh, Aghan and Pus. Since Asad was the sowing season, Aghan and Pus were probably spent guarding the field. Chait and Baisakh were the times when hunting and gathering became the occupation of that season. This was the cycle of the full agricultural year in a Gond society. Since the fallow cycle of burra cultivation, which the Gonds practised, was longer than that of bewar, periods of sustained agricultural activity could form the basis of subsistence. Because the plough was used on the field and the trees were weaned away from their roots, the Gonds could cultivate the land for longer periods of time than the Baigas. It was for this reason that the burra cultivation cycle remained relatively independent from the seasonal rhythm of other dhaiya activities. This was not true of the subsistence system of the Khonds and Baigas. In contrast the relationship between the cultivation practices of bewar and penda and the seasonal rhythm of dhaiya was far more intimate because of shorter fallow cycles.

The Khond strategies of subsistence provide the best example of this. In Chait women went to clearings to pick castor and cut stalks that were already reaped; men cut large trees and go for their ritual hunt. The hunt began at full moon from the east. Traps of bamboo were used for hunting. The women gathered fruits like sago, tamarinds and mushrooms. Baiga women can only gather roots or kanda and mahua seeds. Of all the adivasis in Central India, the Baigas were known as the best hunters. They used bamboo bows arrows and spears. The spears were made of iron and sometime consisted of a bamboo shaft with an iron head. The bows and

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47 Khond Notes, p.89.
arrows were generally made of the dhamin wood. Traps were only used by them to protect the fields.\textsuperscript{48} In Baisakh the firing of the forest took place, the women gathered unburnt wood to burn. Men continued to hunt, but nearer their villages. In Jeth sowing took place and hunting still went on. From Asadh to Bhadon the men worked in the fields. In Kuar the first fruits of beans were ripened and in Kartik kutki became ripe In Aghan every crop was ready and in pus winnowing took place. Pus was also the time for dances and marriages. In Magh shifts were made to new bewars and hunting-gathering was the main subsistence activity. The cycle described above took place in the first year. In the second year there was more time for hunting as only a few crops had to be sown and harvested. But since there was enough food the men lived in the bewars. It was only in the third year that the diet had to be supplemented with the forest products.\textsuperscript{49} For every community this cycle was different depending on the techniques used and the places they lived in.

But from the Khond cycle a few generalizations can be made with regard to the relationship of cultivation cycle with the dhaiya cycle. First the dependence of the subsistence community on forms of subsistence other than cultivation was maximized in the first year. In the first year of cultivation the bewar had to be prepared for the first time. The clearing of the field took most of the cultivators time and the dependence on hunting and gathering activities was almost total. The only food grains that the family had were the ones that were left over from the third year. Secondly, it is possible to conclude that the interaction between bewar and other dhaiya activities was minimized during the second year. This was primarily so because the community had the crop of the first year to depend upon.

\textsuperscript{48} Elwin, \textit{The Baiga}, p.87.
\textsuperscript{49} Khond Notes, p.109.
This does not mean that hunting and gathering were completely stopped during this period. The products from hunting and gathering were used both for ritual purposes as well as for supplementing their diet. But the basis of survival remained the crop from the first year. Only in the event of the failure of the first year crop the community depended solely on hunting-gathering. Lastly, in the third year a combination of both cultivation and hunting-gathering were the basis of survival. The communities depend upon the crops of the second year and fruits, roots etc. from the forest.

The success of the dhaiya cycle in all three years depended on the success of the bewar crop in the first year. If that crop failed the entire cycle was altered. Thus the dhaiya cycle was intrinsically dependent upon the success of the cultivation season which was in turn dependent on natural climatic conditions. The coming of the winter rains marked the beginning of the new year. The lunar calendar of the Baigas was said to be the same as that of the other non-adivasi cultivators. Since most of the agricultural operations started after these rains a special effort was always made to invoke the rain goddess. According to Elwin there were many recognized methods of making rains and controlling hailstorm and the Baiga was adept at all of them. A common method of calling the rain was by making a pile of cowdung and attacking each other with it. The Ahir was beaten up as the last resort to invoke rain. But more important than any other rite is the bidri ceremony for the control over fertility. Elwin who participated in a bidri ceremony described the ceremony as one of the most important ones in Baiga society. The dewar of the village performed the ceremony outside the village at the abode of Thakur Deo which was generally the palas tree. The dewar took out the stones of Thakur Deo and makes a square of cow dung around it. All villagers came and put their seeds in the middle of the square which was then smoldered. The dewar then performs puja and sacrificed a chicken. All this time the villagers were making birds and
animals out of dry leaves. The *dewar* furrowed the ground and blessed the village seeds. As a contribution towards village duties he got three bottles of *mahua tadi*.\(^{50}\)

Thus the Baigas believed that they had special powers to make the seasonal cycle successful. The *dewar* played a crucial role in this. He had the knowledge to make the calendar of the year starting with the monsoons. He was in direct communication with the gods and thus enjoyed the privilege of unprecedented authority amongst all *adivasis*. The office itself was hereditary and this determined the pattern of dissemination of the *dewar*’s knowledge. His kin group obviously acquired a special status. In this way the prevalence of a complex seasonal cycle in *adivasi* societies also implied a decisive role of power and knowledge in the reproduction of the apparently ‘egalitarian’ systems. This was true in the case of other systemic elements also but in the case of the seasonal cycles it became marked because the seasons themselves were demarcated through ritual performances which marked a break in routine life. This point will be made more explicit in a later section on identity formations.

So far I have argued that the parameters of Baiga subsistence were determined by the relationship between a combination of cultivation and hunting-gathering activities. All these activities were bound together by the *dhaiya* cycle which was in turn dependent upon the success of the yearly agricultural cycle. The three yearly *dhaiya* cycle on a single *bewar* was the product of the relationship between the cultivation and hunting-gathering activities. The internal logic of each of these subsistence forms was affected by the changes that took place in the other. This has been demonstrated in the case of the Khond subsistence.

\(^{50}\) Elwin, *The Baiga*, pp. 338-59.
Official Perceptions of 'Primitive' Economies:

The first attempts to change the Baiga's system of *bewar* were made in the late 19th century. Due to these attempts the seasonal link between cultivation and hunting-gathering activities was broken. British officials hoped that European agrarian societies would provide a developmental paradigm on which colonial actions would be based. Thus hunting-gathering, 'shifting cultivation' and sedentary cultivation were to form a part of the linear process of development towards a 'modern' agrarian economy. It is with this perspective that Thurnwald has wrote:

Definite progress is shown by a comparison of a pastoralist with hunters life and of respective activities called out by hunting and food gathering. The change from the one to the other in the acquisition of new facilities for obtaining food, which implies the accumulating of skill and knowledge amounting to the increase in communal resources.51

In order to develop an exemplary agrarian system, it was essential to learn the methods of working the plough, double cropping, and the ways of the modern market. The perception of an 'ideal' agrarian economy coloured the colonial attitude towards *bewar* cultivation.

The first impressions of *dhaiya* cultivation can be identified in early forest surveys.52 In the forest report of 1862-63. Richard Temple wrote:

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51 Thurnwald, *Principles of Primitive Economics*, (1926, Bombay), p.7. These ideas of 'progress and change' are also characteristic of Marshall Sahlins' earlier writings especially *Tribesmen*.

52 Please note the change in terminology over here. In colonial terminology the terms 'dhaiya' is used for the Baiga cultivation. The term *bewar* is used for the field that the Baigas prepare for cultivation. The British did not see the link between the cultivation system and other subsistence forms. Hence the term *dhaiya* denotes a system that is 'primitive', and isolated from other subsistence strategies. In the context of British policy I will use the word 'dhaiya' in this sense. The spellings of the words 'dhaiya' and 'bewar' are different in each document. Here I have done a transliteration of the words from the local dialect used today.
One great cause of the wastage and destruction of the forest is called Dhya cultivation. This Dhya cultivation is practically a substitute for ploughing and a device for saving trouble of that operation. It is resorted to by the hill people who are averse to labour and have practically no agricultural capital.53

In Temple's view, dhaiya represented development options that were ecologically, socially and commercially unviable. Its traits were 'laziness' and 'wastefulness', both dispositions that refuted the virtues of 'hardwork' and 'thrift' that informed behavioural patterns of capitalist societies.

Temple's opinions on dhaiya were expressed just before the formation of the forest department whose main aim was to discover the best and the most scientific ways of timber utilization and regeneration. Mandla had large trees of sal and in these sal forests dhaiya was practised. In this context the first settlement report of Mandla pointed out the need to control dhaiya. In many cases administrators felt that the forest people wanted to use the plough but did not have the requisite knowledge or means to do so. In 1869 the settlement officer of Chanda reported that the Marias wanted to use the plough but did not know how to operate it. The settlement officer also highlighted the nexus between the moneylender who lent the plough and the Maria desire to use the plough. He thus expressed the need for the "improvement and the protection" of Marias.54

The need to protect the advasis from moneylenders arose from the British desire to bring the adivasis and their land under direct control. The moneylender was only one of the hurdles that the officials faced. The other impediment was the mobility of the adivasis. The term 'migratory' was used to highlight the distinctive feature of their cultivation. On the one hand it denoted the desertion of villages and on the

53 Report of Forest Administration, Central Provinces, 1863-64, Imperial Press Calcutta, (hereafter FRCP) p.84.
54 Ibid.
other the abandonment of fields after one dhaiya cycle was over. Of the Maria habits the settlement officer said: "The Marias have very little affection for one spot...the village becomes unhealthy or if the crop fails they move away."55

It did not occur to him that a cholera was common in Chanda and areas of habitation were abandoned if the infectious disease struck. Further there was enough land around the village to shift fields in cases (like Baiga's) where ploughing was not possible. The need to tie the adivasi down to one plot of land on a permanent basis was based on the desire to expand the forest and land revenue base of the colonial administration. It was only in the 1920s and 1930s that the discussion of the ecological viability of dhaiya assumed significant proportions.

In the mid 20th century colonial views on dhaiya were reassessed. Answering 19th century officials like Temple, Grigson wrote that:

in most of this area (penda area) the forests have been to remote and inaccessible to be exploited, and that, even though some fine timber has been sacrificed much that has gone is over mature. Vast areas of forest have been reserved by the State, and it is not possible to work half these reserves. The Maria does not rage through the forest clearing patches for cultivation at random; he has more or less definite rotations, and a field of two to three years' they may have a twelve or fourteen years' rest, and a dense forest at the end of it....The axe and fire have let the light of civilization penetrate slowly but surely into the Bison-horn country as nothing would have done for centuries; they alone have prevented the Abujhmarh tract from remaining a trackless wilderness.56

Grigson summed up the dominant views of that period. Writing after the Maria revolt of 1910, he thought that if the Bastar forests were to come under British

55 Ibid., p.46.
56 Grigson, Maria Gonds of Bastar, p.128.
control, the Marias had to be induced to come into the British fold. Like Grigson, Elwin too argued for the ecological viability of dhaiya, understood its value in mythological basis, and stressed the necessity of dhaiya in Baiga society. As in the case of the late 19th century officials, Elwin and Grigson also had a benevolent attitude towards the forest dwellers. As early as 1898 Fuller alluded to the innocence and ignorance of the Maria and Baiga:

With these people there are, moreover, sentimental reasons for kind treatment. They are relics of old time; they live in places which no one other than them could dare to inhabit; and it seems hard to deny them their customary food in order to lengthen the life of some valueless jungle.

The quote above helps us to pin point the conflicting aspects of the Baiga policy in the late 19th century - the desire to control the forest, and the urge to be benevolent towards their tradition. The desire to 'preserve a tradition', acquired an overstated importance in the 20th century. The 'tradition' was identified in the characteristics of the 'primitive'. The policy of 'protection' was aimed to modernize the Baiga economy while 'preserving its traditions'.

The Making of the Baiga Chak:

The first serious attempts to 'improve' Baiga agricultural methods were made after Ward's note of 1868-69. The main thrust of these 'improvements' was to: a) wean the Baiga away from the axe and b) to help them give up their 'migratory' habits so that they would settle down like ordinary peasants and contribute towards government revenue. As regards his progress Ward reported:

I had many a talk with the village panchayat as regards the manner of their cultivation, and was

57 Elwin, The Baiga, pp.128-29.
58 Quoted in Ibid., p.129.
rather put in to reply to some of the pertinent questions of the shrewd old men occasionally. My efforts to persuade them to take to the plough were quite unsuccessful and after hard pleading I could only induce them to confine their depredations on the forest and take up land accorded to them in regular rotation.\(^5\)

After the initial failure of inducing the Baigas to take up the plough a plan was made whereby the bewar cultivators could be slowly introduced to a sedentary lifestyle. The dangers of sudden changes were realized. In 1867-68 the Conservator reported:

> I am more convinced than ever of the impossibility of putting an immediate stop to this practice forcibly: it would not only be of great hardship to the Baigas who would be reduced to starvation but it would possibly drive a peaceful and orderly community to resort to crime as a means of livelihood.\(^6\)

It was due to this that the first experiments to curtail bewar were undertaken in Balaghat (in 1878). Bewar was to be allowed in a few chosen villages in the Baihar tahsil of this district. These villages were within the limits of the reserved forest. The Commissioner of Balaghat reported that 18 Baiga families had given up bewar cultivation and settled with Gonds in the upland villages. By inducing such a settlement, the government hoped that the Baigas would be introduced to a 'civilized' life and the use of the plough. For this the government was willing to provide the Baigas cattle, seeds and a plough in every village.\(^6\)

The first results reported by Commissioner Newmarch from Balaghat stated that:

> These families are not recognizable from respectable Gonds and the headmen viz. Mubud and Runjar are well dressed men as the best Gonds I have seen. Besides the above several patels in Beihar uplands at

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60 FRCP 1867-68, p.9.
the instance of the tehsildar, have reclaimed individual Bygas and settled them as cultivators...Dhya cultivation is exclusive to some government protected villages and the zamindaris. The Baigas had obliged the government by making attempts to give up cultivation of bewar and pursue other subsistence activities like rope making, fruit gathering and labour for Gonds. Provoked by this the administrators evolved more stringent and exacting measures to keep them away from the axe. In the same year the Commissioner issued instructions under which a) the Baigas were to be only settled on leased land; b) new clearings were to be discouraged and if bewar was discovered crops were to be destroyed; c) all cultivators would have to pay a rent of Rs 2/- per plough in addition to the forest and grazing dues. Under this system the government retained the prerogative to enhance the rent by Rs 4/- Each strip cultivated was to be equivalent to one plough. The tehsildar of Baihar suggested that all other methods were fine except for burning of the bewar crop.

By 1880 however the scheme had faced certain reverses. All the siyan Baigas appealed to the government to lift restrictions on bewars. They said that they would cut bewar at all costs. The Commissioner of Nagpur, commenting on this petition said:

If bewar is completely withdrawn the Baigas will do one of the two things- either they will cut bewar at all costs or they will emigrate to other areas like Kawardha or elsewhere.

The officials realized that the Baigas were unlikely to settle down to sedentary cultivation. Therefore the objective of the policy shifted from inducing the Baigas to use the plough, to restricting bewar cultivation within a limited area.

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62 Central Provinces Secretariat Records, Madhya Pradesh Central Record Room, Nagpur (hereafter CPSR), Forest Department, Compilation No: 178 of 1878, pp.4-5.
63 Ibid., pp.47-48
64 CPSR Forest Department, Compilation No: 178 of 1881, p.7.
Efforts to introduce the plough in Balaghat broke the linkages between different subsistence activities that made up the cultivation system. It induced a substantial number of Baiga to rely on just one subsistence activity. Either it was labour or rope-making or else dependence on hunting-gathering. For some Baigas *dhaiya* had ceased to be a loosely defined structure of complementary subsistence forms.

The situation in Mandla was slightly different: here the Baigas had refused even to consider plough cultivation. In 1878 the Baigas told the Deputy Commissioner of Mandla, Miller that:

> they were 'Baigas', their fathers had been born 'Baigas' before them; that they had for generations cut bewars and would continue to so. Let the 'sirkar' do whatever it pleases to try and prevent it.\(^{65}\)

The Baiga threat to break the law prompted the Chief Commissioner of the Provinces, Crosswaithe, to take a hard line on the issue. He ordered that the Baigas should not be allowed to take "the law into their hands". In such a situation the Baiga (as Miller put it) had only two choices: 1) that they take up plough cultivation and 2) that the area be made "too hot to hold them". The import here was that it should be made impossible for the Baigas to cut *bewars* in "valuable jungles".\(^{66}\)

There was also another body of opinion, led by Miller, which favoured the establishment of a separate Baiga settlement. Within this settlement the Baigas were to be induced to take up the plough. But if this failed, at least their *bewar* cutting could be controlled. In July 1878 Miller reported that 200 Baiga families were willing to settle under such a scheme.\(^{67}\) In 1890 two villages and four *tolas* or

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\(^{65}\) CPSR Forest Department, Compilation No:178 of 1878, p.47.

\(^{66}\) Ibid., pp.17-18.

\(^{67}\) Ibid.
settlements of houses were chosen to form the 'Baiga reserve'. Originally comprising 362 families, these villages were in the Dindori and Karanjiya forest reserves. Tracts were to be allotted only to Baigas and were to be available for further colonization by them. Thus began the process of the formation of the Baiga Chak.

The Chak consisted of 22858 acres of land that was reserved for bewar cutting for the Baigas. It consisted of 5 villages and 9 tolas (cluster of houses). These villages were Silpiri and Dhurukota in Karanjiya range and Dhaba, Ajgar and Rajnisarai in Dindori range. The tolas were Silpiri, Tantar, Dhurukota and Kandwani in Karanjiya range and Dhaba, Ajgar, Rajnisarai, Lamotha and Jhamul in Dindori range. They were put under the jurisdiction of the District Collector and the tahsildar. There is little information about how many bewars were granted during this period. But there is a record of the Baiga protest at the insufficient allocation of land for their bewars and the displacement that they suffered due to the formation of the Chak. Dharmu Baiga of Mouza Oudhar wrote to the tahsildar about the 60 Baiga families that were to be removed to Dhurukota:

I am residing in Mouza Oudhar and I am cutting bewar in this village for the past 3 years. Sixty families of the Baigas inhabit these villages and they all live upon Dhya cultivation. We have now been ordered to leave this village and remove to Dhurukota....It has very little jungle and most of it was cut down by old Baiga settlers; and consequently it cannot support other Baigas of different village....We therefore pray that we may be allowed bewar cutting in adjoining villages.

The 'policy of colonization' (within the Chak) was important for the success of this plan. The contraction of the land available for bewars and increasing population

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69 CPSR Forest Department, Compilation No:178 of 1890-92, pp.11-12.
density were the only factors that were likely to push the Baigas to take to the plough. In the beginning the reservation of forests was used as an excuse to move people. By 1891-92 it was reported that in Ramgarh tahsil only 80 families were living outside the reserve. In these 80 villages permanent cultivation was taken up willingly. For those Baigas who did not either want to go to the Chak or take up the plough the government decided that 4 villages would be set up at Karadih, Udhan, Pandpur and Duldul for the supply of labour to the forest department. These villages were not to be solely Baiga villages but Gonds and Agarias were also to be settled here. In 1895 Gonds and Agarias were allowed to take up land inside the Chak, furthering the 'policy of acculturation' that was first started in Balaghat.

At the turn of the century the efforts to intrude into the dhaiya domain were only partially successful. Within the Chak no Baigas had started depending singularly on plough cultivation for their living. At the same time the Baigas had acquired some sympathy from officials like B. Fuller, the Commissioner of Jabalpur Division (1901). Reviewing the policy in 1937 the Divisional Forest Officer of Mandla said of Fuller's role in saving bewars:

Apparently there were two sets of opinions in force amongst the Baigas, those who were willing to take to cultivation and those who definitely resented it. I gather that those who resented it were becoming fewer and fewer, until such time that Sir. B. Fuller appeared on the scene as Commissioner of Jubbulpore, when the policy to wean Baigas away from the axe were definitely relaxed...had not Sir. B. Fuller interfered, Bewar would have been a thing of the past and the Hitlerite drive against Bewar would have been a definite success....

To the foresters then and later, Fuller seems to have been responsible for the failure of their efforts to eradicate bewars. But the real reason lay elsewhere.

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70 Ibid., pp.22-23.
Economic and material change could be affected in the short term, but change in behavioural patterns could not be so sudden. The effect of the formation of the Chak on the Baigas was seen by the mid 20th century.

**The Baigas and the Chak in the 20th Century:**

The formation of the Chak proved to have far reaching effects on Baiga history. It forced the Baigas to acquire habits that were new and unfamiliar to them. It also inspired the Baigas to react in ways that were an exaggerated form of their own behaviour and uncomfortable for their colonists. Here I attempt to elaborate on both these aspects.

**Movement of population and social dislocation:** The policy makers considered the 'migratory' behaviour of the Baigas as one of the greatest barriers to their modernization. The Baigas accentuated the British problem further by resorting to migration to evade official measures. Verrier Elwin showed that the Baigas found it very difficult to follow the rules of the Chak, as bewar plots were strictly delimited. The restrictions on their mobility resulted in extreme resentment and the Baigas started deserting the Chak even if they could not then carry on bewar. If we look at and analyze the population chart below we can see this.
From the illustration it can be seen that the Baiga population of the Province rose by 27.7 per cent (approx.) in the first twenty years after the formation of the Chak (1891-1911) and in the next twenty years (1911-1931) by 36 per cent (approx.). The overall increase in population of the Province between 1891-1931 was by 74 per cent (approx.). The Baiga population of Mandla went up by 63 per cent (approx) till 1911 and by 6.5 per cent in the next twenty years (i.e till 1931). The figures for 1891 in Mandla are not available because of the formation of the Chak and the constant movement of the population. But the Baiga population of the district increased by 74 per cent in fifty years (1881-1931). In contrast with these trends the population of the Chak declined by more than 50 per cent in the first twenty years (1891-1911) and remained constant thereafter. Compared with the provincial decline of 4 per cent in fifty years (1881-1931), there was a decline in the Chak population of almost 150 per cent in forty years (1891-1931).72

The Baiga population in the Province as a whole had little correlation with the population fluctuations in Mandla and still less with that of the Chak. The fact

72 These figures have been compiled from Census Reports 1881-1931.
that Mandla has the largest Baiga population is apparent when its overall figures (1881-1931) are compared with the provincial figures of the same period. The provincial decline (4 per cent) of the population can be attributed to the sudden fall in Baiga population between 1881-91. But the rate of increase in the Baiga population in forty years after the formation of the Chak is higher in the Province (almost 36 per cent) than that of Mandla (i.e just about 6.5 per cent) Though reasons for this can be manifold, only one explanation sounds plausible in the following context. In 1901 there was a season of scarcity in Mandla, but there is little evidence of any great loss of life. Nor is there evidence of any epidemic that may have caused loss of Baiga life during this period. The most likely explanation for this is the movement of Baiga population which is corroborated by the evidence we have on the Chak. The population figures of the Chak show that the Baiga population between 1891 and 1930 had dwindled from 1,551 people or 362 families in 1901 to 700 or 132 families in 1930.73

The response of the Baigas to British efforts was quite varied. Some Baigas migrated to zamindari areas in order to cut bewars while others decided to stay on in the Chak and do plough cultivation. There was also a section of the Baigas who gave up cultivation and started depending primarily on labour opportunities for their existence. Of these options migration was the preferred one. The population figures of the Chak show this. Further, if the movement of population between some of the neighbouring zamindaris and the khalsa areas is considered the scenario becomes clearer. As early as 1883, Bloomfield reported that some 24 Baiga and 57 Gond houses had deserted their villages in south Balaghat and gone to the Saletkri zamindari to cut bewars. He said that the Baigas had resorted to 'flight' because of the restrictions on bewar and the exploitation of their labor by the forest

department. He further added that the Baigas were unlikely to take to the plough as long as they could find *bewar* land in the zamindaris. Bloomfield's prognosis about the Baiga response proved correct. In 1891 when the Chak was formed all Baigas living outside it were asked either to move to the Chak or to take up plough cultivation. Elwin notes that there was practically no migration into the Chak though the neighbouring states especially Kawardha were flooded with Baigas from *khalsa* areas. Further migration took place after a few years. In 1891 the village of Rajnisarai was reported to be deserted for one whole year. In 1903 Baigas fled from the area to avoid doing forced labour in the Banjar Sleeper Works. One of the villages, Udhar (in the vicinity of the Chak) had to be closed for lack of population and Rajnisarai was later only inhabited by Gonds.

It would be too simplistic to see all 'migration' as protest against colonial measures. The contingencies of survival also influenced the decision to move. An earlier section has shown that the topographical factors like the lateric base did not allow the use of the plough unless levelling of the ground was done and efforts were made to change the soil composition. The *adivasis* did not have the capital and the government the will to do this. It is for this reason that most Baigas who took to plough cultivation lived in the neighbourhood of the *haveli* tract where the soil was more fertile. Those who had no option but to subsist on *bewar* had to move residence permanently or resist the measures.

Both the movement of population and the changes in techniques of cultivation (i.e taking up the use of the plough) resulted in social dislocation of the Baigas. First, in the tracts where the Baigas started ploughing their fields, they became dependent on their Gond brethren and moneylenders. The power equations

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74 CPSR Forest Department, Compilation No. 178 of 1883, p.133.
between a section of the Baigas and other communities was altered. While the Baigas still considered themselves a 'superior caste', their economic and social position within the society changed considerably. They relied on the Gond cultivators for learning the techniques of plough cultivation. In seasons when crops failed, they also depended on moneylenders to provide them seeds for the next season. Secondly, the Baigas who moved to other places (mainly other Baiga areas in the zamindaris) faced economic deprivation of a different kind. In a new place they had no land and their access to forests was limited by the government's control over zamindari forests. The problem of settling in a new place was further accentuated by the possibility of facing resistance from people already settled in zamindari areas. Thus the phenomenon of 'desertion' and of 'flight' led to a differentiation of the Baiga community.

The Baiga Chak meant the social displacement of Baigas in more than one way. On the one hand it led to the changes in the relationship between the Baigas and other communities. On the other hand it affected changes within the Baiga community. These changes brought about a wide spectrum of responses from the Baigas. In some cases the Baiga identity and disposition changed. Baigag migration into zamindari areas obstructed British plans to settle them; but in many ways also forced them to adopt new ways of living.

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76 The Baiga performed the duties of a priest in Maria and Gond society. In this sense the Baigas were a 'ritually superior' to the Gonds and the Marias.
77 For this point see Pierre Bourdieu, Algeria 1960, (1979, London), pp.1-2. Bourdieu writes: "Nor does cultural anthropology escape abstraction when it sees a simple effect of cultural contact in the transformation of precapitalist economies which it ascribes as "cultural change" or "acculturation". It tends to ignore the fact that...this transformation takes place only through the mediation of individuals differently situated with respect to the economic system...unequal rhythms (between one individual or a group or another) in the transformation of economic attitudes are primarily a reflection of economic and social inequalities." Thus he shows that the responses to any change are determined by both community and individual attitudes.
Changes in Baiga dispositions\textsuperscript{78}: By 1930 plough cultivation was practised amongst a considerable section of the Baiga population in Mandla. This was a significant change from the late 19\textsuperscript{th} century when Bloomfield reported that not a single Baiga family within the 'reserve' was using the plough.\textsuperscript{79} The changes in cultivation patterns were evident during the first survey of the Chak in 1937. According to this survey the Chak region consisted of two ranges, Dindori and Karanjya. The report filed was only partially complete and had a detailed analysis only of one range (i.e Karanjya).\textsuperscript{80}

For example in the case of Karanjya 100 *bewars* were granted at the time of the formation of the Chak (i.e 1891). In 1931 the situation was as follows:

\textbf{TABLE 1.3: NUMBER OF BEWARS GRANTED IN CHAK VILLAGES OF KARANJYA:}

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>NAME OF TOLA</th>
<th>NAME OF VILLAGE</th>
<th>NAME OF RANGE</th>
<th>NUMBER OF BEWARS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>TANTAR</td>
<td>SILPIRI</td>
<td>KARANJYA</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SILPIRI</td>
<td>SILPIRI</td>
<td>DO</td>
<td>9.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>KANDAWANI</td>
<td>DHURUKUTA</td>
<td>DO</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DHURUKUTA</td>
<td>DHURUKUTA</td>
<td>DO</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(source: mdr., forests, File No: 37 of 1937 p.48)

The total number of *bewars* granted had come down to 39.5. The distribution of the population in the two villages was as follows:

\textbf{TABLE 1.4: POPULATION DISTRIBUTION OF CHAK VILLAGES IN KARANJYA:}

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>COMMUNITY</th>
<th>SILPIRI</th>
<th>DHURUKUTA</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>BAIGA</td>
<td>211</td>
<td>159</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GOND</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>NONE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AGARIA</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AHIR</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(source: mdr., forests, File No: 37 of 1937 p.48)

\textsuperscript{78} The term 'disposition' is borrowed from the writings of Pierre Bourdeiu and refers to the pool of knowledge from which influences the attitudes and perspective of every individual member of the community.

\textsuperscript{79} CPSR, Forest Compilation No:178 of 1883, p.67.

\textsuperscript{80} MDR Forests No:37 of 1937, p.49.
The tables above show the extent to which the changes in Baiga dispositions may have occurred. The reduction of *bewars*, implies that there may have been an increase in plough cultivation. In the Chak there was 4375 acres of culturable or *kabil kasht* land and 158 acres of new *bewar* land originally classified as 'forest'. This was 'unoccupied' land. Of the 'occupied' land the Baigas lived in about 230 acres and the non-Baigas in 730 acres. This evidence of colonization (of what were earlier *bewar* land) by non-Baigas is further supported by the figures in the population table which suggests that the Baigas came under the influence of plough cultivating groups like the Gonds. But this influence only led to a partial use of the plough. In Silpiri and Dhurukota there were 26 Baigas who depended singularly on *bewar* for their livelihood. There were 14 Baigas who did both axe and plough cultivation. Only 9 Baigas in Silpiri had taken to plough cultivation and there were no plough cultivators in Dhurukota. There were no Baigas who were entitled to cut *bewars* and did not cut them. This showed the importance of coercion in the transformation of *bewar*. It also highlighted the importance of the *bewar* in the articulation of the Baiga identity. For this reason Elwin said that the control of *bewars* was one of the major reasons for the Baiga's *Loss of Nerve*. By the use of this term he meant that the Baigas had lost their individuality as a community. In this sense *bewar* cultivation was as much a part of their identity as of their 'material reality'.

The control over *bewars* led to some changes in Baiga disposition. The most obvious change occurred in their subsistence strategies. The systemic nature of *dhaiya* was altered and its seasonal rhythm disrupted. The dependence of Baiga subsistence on the *dhaiya* cycle lessened as they began to depend on only one type of subsistence.

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81 Ibid., pp.55-77.
82 Elwin, *Loss of Nerve: A Comparative study of the contact of peoples of the aboriginal areas of Bastar State and the Central Provinces of India*, (date/publisher unknown).
activity - either cultivation, labour or selling of forest products - for their livelihood. Further the relationship between cultivation practices and forest economies was altered as the fallow periods became short. In the last section I have shown that the nature of the link between *dhaiya* and *bewar* depended upon the time spent on cultivation and the out turn of the crop in the previous year. It also depended on the rate of the regeneration of the forest. Since the fallow cycles were shorter under plough cultivation, the forest was given little chance to regenerate. As trees were weaned away from their roots, the forest ecology had little role in this cultivation.

Though a substantial number of Baigas (mostly in the *khalsa* area) gave up *bewar* cultivation altogether, their food habits and 'ritual' life did not change much. After all they were all Baigas, different from the Gonds, the Hindus and others. They still recounted the same legends as before and used them to defend *bewar*. All calamities that they faced were explained in terms of Nanga Baigas displeasure. The continual belief of the Baigas in their originator (Nanga Baiga) was expressed in their routine life. They still wore the *langoti* and ate *kodon* because Nanga Baiga would not allow them to wear or eat anything else. The need to conform to the Baiga belief system may have forced the Baigas to enter the 'subsistence market'.

Between 1933 and 1935 the Baigas got the following prices for their crops:

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83 The term is used to for market organizations that are distinct from 'capitalist' and 'commercial' markets. They mostly cater to the needs of the neighbouring villages and has little large scale trade from the point of view of consumption of elite social groups. It is possible to show that in some cases 'subsistence' and capitalist markets are spatially overlapping.
TABLE 1.5: THE PRICES OF CROPS IN CHAK

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CROPS/YEAR</th>
<th>1933 (kuros per rupee)</th>
<th>1934 (kuros per rupee)</th>
<th>1935 (kuros per rupee)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Rai</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ramtila</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rahar Dal</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kodon</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kutki</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paddy</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(SOURCE: M.D.R., FORESTS, NO:37, 1937, P51)

Of these crops rai, rahar dal or arhar and ramtila were sold to grain dealers of Bajag outside the Chak and the remaining were sold within the Chak. This produce was not taken to the market. Nor did traders or non-Baigas act as middlemen. The money got was used to buy oil, salt and clothes. According to the surveyor of the range the owners sold their own produce and reap the benefit of the profits.84 It is clear from the linkages between the Baigas, non-Baigas and the traders that the Baigas had very little to do with the market. Most Baigas were indebted to non-Baigas within the Chak from 5 kuros up to 3 khandies of kodon and kutki. From shopkeepers they took loans of up to Rs 2/- worth of salt and oil and pay them after harvesting rai and ramtila. Most Baigas remained in debt.85 The surveyor does not give us any indication or proof of how many Baigas actually went to sell ramtila and rai. Even today, in a hat the Baigas are buyers of essentials like oil and salt. The sellers are non-Baigas who come into the Chak once a week. The surveyor only mentions that two Baigas are lent money and were not indebted. Thus we can conclude that for the Baigas marketing was confined to the selling of kodon and kutki inside the Chak. These crops were possibly sold to both Baigas and Gonds who were not cultivators or who did not produce enough to meet the requirements of their family. It is also possible that the Baigas who had

84 MDR Forests, No:37 of 1937, p.53
85 Ibid., p.55.
migrated from the khalsa into zamindari areas bought these crops from other cultivators of that region. Given the circumstances of the early 20th century, it appears that by living together in the Chak the Gonds, Baigas and the Ahirs developed mutual relations where the exchange of goods was need-based. The Gonds helped Baigas out when his crop failed, and the Baigas did the same when Gonds were faced with adverse circumstances. Thus there was a possibility of some limited cash transactions, where exchange was mediated by community relations. Here too Baiga dispositions changed considerably. The Ahirs Agarias and others, who were earlier considered outcasts, were now included in the system of community exchanges.

In terms of production, the Baigas were related to the capitalist market in an indirect way. But when they depended on activities other than agriculture, they faced the problems of the capitalist economy more directly. The main problem faced was in adjusting to new labour conditions. Though the state had managed to integrate forests into the capitalist market, the working of the forests was still seasonally determined. This meant that labour opportunities were not available throughout the year. Further employment was handed out on a contract basis and often all family members could not get access to the forest. I have already shown earlier that dhaiya labour organization was based upon familial association. The difficulty in obtaining employment and the reality of working outside the kinship fold led to the breakdown of familial labour organization. How the Baigas reacted to such situations will be discussed in the next section.

**Identities and the Subsistence System:**

The Baiga 'identity' was constituted by a common belief system which was structured around the myth of Nanga Baiga. These stories about Nanga Baiga and
his actions, which form an intrinsic part of the Baiga 'oral tradition', sought to explain why an individual should behave in ways specific to the Baiga community. This code formed the basis of community action and laws. The Baiga disposition also consisted of several patterns of habitual responses which were articulated contextually. Thus the behaviour of individual groups (within the community) will varied according to differences in their personal experiences. But this did not necessarily imply a change in the basic identity of the community. In order to preserve the identity of their community, the Baigas had to change their economic and social behaviour. Here I explore the nature of the Baiga identity and its relationship with the changing Baiga behaviour.

There is a famous saying amongst the Baigas: *kodon, kutki, bewar, Baiga ke ye sab zewar.* (kodon, kutki and bewar are like ornaments for the Baigas and they adorn Baiga existence) Romantic ideas of Baiga existence are based on sayings such as these. For the Baigas bewar was a 'jewel of nature' which signified the qualities of freedom and adventure. These were the essential attributes for which the Baigas had become famous in ethnographic circles. The importance of bewar as a peculiarity of Baiga existence was one of the main reasons for the spirit of protest against the Chak. The limitation on bewar was a restriction of the freedom their forefathers had enjoyed. The belief that the Baiga was born to live in the forest and cut bewars was derived from their duty to protect *Mati Dharti* from the plough.

The story as told by Verrier Elwin is the following:

The Baigas were established in the practice of bewar by Bhagwan himself, who when he called the tribes of the world to make a king first chose the Baiga. But Nanga Baiga begged that the

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87 Ethnographers such as Elwin and Ward, as well as Temple in Panjab Notes and Queries, (hereafter PNQ) emphasized this. The tiger stories of the Baigas were responsible for this image.
Gond his brother be made king instead. Bhagwan was pleased, and as a mark of favour, took Nanga Baiga by the hand and placed him on his throne by his side. He granted his prayer to make the Gond King, but gave him a greater blessing.

'All kingdoms of the world' he said 'may fall to pieces but, he who is made of the earth and is Bhumiraja, lord of the earth shall never forsake it. You will make your living from the earth. You will dig roots and eat them. You will cut wood and carry it on your shoulders. Your wife will pick leaves and sell them. You must not tear the breast of your Mother the Earth with the plough like the Gond and the Hindu. You will cut down trees and burn them and sow the seeds in their ashes. But never become rich, for if you did you would forsake the earth and there will be no one to guard it and keep its nail in place.\(^8\)

This 'origin myth' or 'creation story' as some choose to call it, tells us something about the way the Baigas looked at themselves. The Baigas identified themselves as a part of a wider power hierarchy within the *adivasi* community. They were superior to other *adivasis* in that they were the custodians of the earth which other people exploited. And this gave them the authority to act as priests for other communities. *Bewars* were a vindication of this power. Hence *bewar* was a 'zewar' that embellished Baiga existence. The methods of cultivation and the knowledge of the forest were also derived from this. The use of the axe was the consequence of the duty entrusted to them and the refusal to use the plough a fulfilment of this duty. Several beliefs like these formed the core of the Baiga responses to intrusions into *bewar* areas. This made *bewar* the central focus of the process of articulation of the Baiga identity.

In this context the 'flight' from the Chak and the 'desertion' of labour sites makes sense. The cutting of each *bewar* is an event in the exercise of power against hostile

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forces. It was an act in emotional sustainence, an act of 'joy' and the movement associated with it, the movement of life. Thus we see that in the personal life of many Baigas events and people are linked to bewars. Take the case of Mhatu, Elwin's informant:

I was born in Dutirawar in Kawardha State. When I was five I took my sickle and axe and went with my father to his bewar. At that time we also went to Ajnu and cut bewar there also. We lived seven years there and then came to Kapripani where we cut bewar at two rupees an axe. In those days there was a Raja at Ramgarh. Then came the English when I was twelve years old and robbed us and beat us. So we went to Damin Tola and lived there for 3 yrs. In Damin Tola lived a witch Maniaro. She and my father were friends. But when she tried to marry my father he sent her away. So she was angry and made a snake and sent it to bite my father. The snake came in the bewar and bit him and after two and a half days he died.

After my father's death we lived six years in Damin Tola, then we shifted to Karadih. My mother took a new husband. In Karadih I cut bewar for 7 yrs. Then came Utrana Sahib with his wife and children. He called all Baiga to him. I went with the others. We met in a bewar where trees had just been felled. There were trees everywhere and some were so big that the Sahibs wife couldn't climb over them. When she saw them lying there she wept and embraced them calling them her children. Then she said to us 'from today your bewar is stopped; you are never to cut it again'. The Sahib tried very hard to let us continue bewar but his wife prevented him.

So then I went to Chauradadar and lived there five years. When bewar was first stopped we had a very hard time. In Karadih in the bewar days twenty five drums used to come out for the Karma dance. Afterwards there would be only two or three and there would be no joy. We were all broken up, some ran to one place and some to another place. We had little food for we didn't know how to plough and we believed it to be a sin. So what do we do? We go to the Gonds and they hold our hands and teach us how to plough.
But they rob us in every way. By the time we had paid them for their work we had hardly a khandi of grain left....

Mhatu’s life story is very long and there are several other stories like his where the *bewar* formed the central reference point for personal histories. All history was thus epitomized in the 'self' constituted around *bewar*. The events of Baiga history, as Mhatu’s life shows, could be divided into two periods: the time of 'joy' i.e was the period of unrestricted *bewar* and the period of 'no joy' when the restriction on *bewar* cutting started. The first period was packed with accounts of the great deeds of the Baigas who were meant to be experts at hunting tigers and as medicine-men. The second period had instances of disease and famines as their major hallmarks. Though none of the Baiga remembers dates of events the coming of the British was an important event for all of them. Thus even in Mhatu’s account we find that the coming of the British was seen as the end of prosperity. In most of the personal accounts the fulfilment of needs became a problem with the coming of the British. The British were described as 'robbers'. The restrictions on *bewars* were described as nothing more than a subjective problem of the 'sahib'. Yet this attitude expressed the general attitude of the Baigas. For in the 1930s they demanded that the government grant them *bewar swaraj*, if the Congress was to be given *hind swaraj*.

What happened to the Baiga who Ward had once described as 'soft spoken and ever obliging'? That the Baigas were defiant towards the British is evident from the following statement:

> Send us if you will to jail, for now the jungle is closed all the world is a jail to us. Take back your bullocks for we don't need them.

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This quote and the personal account of Mhatu suggests that Baiga behaviour became aggressively anti-British in defence of their identity. The Baigas started holding the British responsible for the colonization by the "Hindu, Musalmaan and the Panka" who were earlier far away from Baiga land.91 The Baiga identity was getting constituted vis-à-vis the British, the other communities. And by stressing their individuality the Baigas remained together as one community, despite occupational changes - at least in the first decade of the 20th century. In the context of subsistence this was quite important because the Baiga identity formed the basis of their ideas of what their needs were. These needs were expressed in terms of actions of gods and goddesses. The Baigas would emulate Nanga Baiga's actions as the Marias emulated Lingo. Similarly beliefs concerning the origin of the *kodon*, *kutki* and *mandia* crops may help to explain why Baiga habits did not change.92

The spirit of defiance was only one of the Baiga responses to the changes in their society. The other was despair. A Baiga song recorded by Hivale in the 1940s suggests this:

In this land of the English  
how hard it is to live  
In the village sits the landlord  
how hard it is to live  
In the gate sits the Kotwar  
In the garden sits the Patwari  
In the field sits the government  
In this land of the English how hard it is to live  

91 Ibid., p.150.
92 Ibid., p.320-322. Elwin has recorded four myths concerning the origins of *kodon*, *kutki* and *mandia*. According to him they exhibit the "ancient powers of the Baiga in the modern world". The myth has a functional characteristic of keeping the community together.
93 Elwin and Hivale, *Songs from the Maikals*, p.316.
This song shows that at least a section of the Baigas had come to grips with their situation, and understood the authority and power structure. These Baigas probably lived in the khalsa areas where the control over bewar was stricter than in zamindari areas. Where earlier the Baigas would lie about their bullocks\(^94\), now at least some of them started lamenting its existence. With the bullock came the demand for the removal of restrictions on bewar and reduction of taxes, for more employment and more food. The differentiation between Baigas also increased. For example it was held in 1937 that there was one Baiga within the Chak who was lending money to others.\(^95\) Within the Baiga identity a class identity developed. There was now a 'rich' Baiga like the moneylender, a Baiga cultivator with the plough, and a 'poor' Baiga labourer. Though both of them still believed in Nanga Baiga, the Baiga identity implied different things to different people. As some of the Baigas adjusted to plough cultivation, bewar ceased to be the central focus of the articulation of their identity. They expressed their despair and indifference to the dominant regime through songs, such as the one quoted above. And ritual performances started playing a greater role in the assertion of the Baiga identity.

From the discussion above it is evident that there could be two types of relationships between changes in social and economic behaviour and the Baiga identity. In the first case I have shown that the Baiga economic and social behaviour changed to maintain their identity. In this case the Baigas were forced to enter the subsistence market and purchase the things that were required to live a 'typically Baiga life'. Along with this, they also developed a spirit of defiance against the British government. For this reason the central focus of the process of articulation of the Baiga identity was bewar. In the second case the Baiga identity

\(^{94}\) Elwin, *The Baiga*, p.151. The Baigas often lied that their bullocks had died or run away if they did not want to use the plough.

\(^{95}\) MDR Forests, File No:37 of 1937, p.53.
changed with changes in social and economic behaviour. As some Baigas reconciled to plough cultivation, Nanga Baiga's actions especially with respect to *bewar* stopped being the basis of the articulation of Baiga identity. Instead, this identity was articulated in ritual performances. The attitude towards the British also changed. Aggressive defiance of British rule gave away to despair.

**The Contextualization of Identities** : The articulation of identities in its most exaggerated forms is common to both cases described above. Here I use the term 'exaggerated' to show that this type of articulation was not considered 'normal' in their own society. The example of both Baiga and Maria society show that the *adivasi* identity is articulated in heterogeneous ways. The complexity of the identity formation is shown in the operation markets and the celebration of festivals. For lack of much evidence about the Baigas, I discuss the case of the Marias to show this.

Amongst the Baigas and the Marias the articulation of the village and community identity was a dual process. Membership of a village was affirmed during festival time. The best example of this was the *kaksar* or the festival to bless the crops in Abhujmarh. The festival which took place just before sowing of the seed is also called *deo bandhna* or *gao bandhna*. It was a festival that was celebrated annually and takes place in every village about the time of *Jeth* or *Pus* when ever the rains were due, the headmen or the *dogras* and the *permas* or the *pujaris* of five or six neighbouring villages got together and decided when each village should celebrate the festival. No two neighbouring villages celebrated the festival on the same day as representatives of one village go to the others to share their apprehensions for the future. The night before the festival was to be celebrated,

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96 Bastar State Records, Jagdalpur Collectorate, Bastar district, (hereafter BSR), Ethnography No:31 of 1894. The description of festivals is based on the material from this file.
groups from neighbouring villages (generally of young boys and girls) started arriving at the ghotul. They carried their own pej, kodon and kutki. They cooked for themselves, but they borrowed utensils from the villagers. In the morning of the festival the youths of the village collected some dhan and money to get the Puja items ready. The perma kept a fast. The articles used in puja generally consist of a hen, a goat or a pig and some liquor. He then took four iron nails and went at midnight to the village boundary and pitched these nails in all four directions. He then prayed to tular mate or gaon dei to bless his village and send down rains at the right time and protect their lands. After this the entire village started singing and dancing and the village drums came out in the compound of the ghotul. The women from different villages held hands and sung and danced together to Railo-kaksar song. Meanwhile the perma and other men were busy constructing the symbol of the god or the Pen with bamboo and wood. The perma, usually a Baiga, applied turmeric on the forehead of the Pen and the leskes who were going to get the god under control. The leskes ran out with the Pen and the drums beat louder. The women danced faster, as if they were unconcerned. The leskes ran around with the Pen as though they were possessed by it. They carried with them steel chains with iron thorns and start hitting themselves with it to bring the Pen under control. Dancing by the villagers went on till dusk.

The Maria ceremony can be divided into two phases - the ceremony in the morning performed only by men and the ceremonies at midnight to which the whole village and its locality was a party. The act of going to the boundaries reinforced the village identity in the eyes of the rest of the community. The first ceremony then reasserted the village authority over its own members. In the second phase the community identity was articulated by the coming together of the representatives of many villages.
That village identities were stronger was highlighted by the system of feasts after the ceremony was over. The sacrifice of the cock was done by the perma and all the villagers ate together. It has already been noted that the Marias from other villages were not given food in the village. The village identities also got accentuated in the market situation. Men and women from different villages met at the weekly market whose major feature was the cock-fight. Grigson hints at the nature of the cockfight where all the Marias get together and motivate cocks of either their own villages or their kin groups (if two cocks from the same village were in the fight). The cocks have knives tied around their necks and the cock that got hurt first won the fight. The cock that lost belonged to the victor.97

The performance of ceremonies and the display of village identities brought to fore many distinctive groups that made up that identity. The men were considered the guardians of the village, but there was no bar to women attending any functions. In terms of significance however the men had a higher social status. All the ceremonies of invoking the gods were performed by the men. The perma and the dogra asserted themselves as the elders of the village. Age and sex both played an important part in the assertion of authority. Through the medium of the perma the authority between communities was also asserted. The Baigas were given a privileged position in this society. It was significant that within the Baiga community these Baigas were given the status of Maria-Baigas. Similarly women stressed their status through activities like the dancing and ceremonies during times of birth.98

The problem of interpreting the adivasi 'mythological reality' as a phenomenon that is both politically viable and flexible, leads us to look at their daily life more

97 Grigson, Maria Gonds of Bastar, p.168.
98 Elwin, The Baiga, Chapters 7, 9 and 10.
closely. From the study of dhaiya it is clear that none of these divisions were apparent in the realization of subsistence functions. Customs regarding property and marriage were the organizing principles that generate potential conflicts that get hidden in the 'normal' course of existence. It was only in special times that they got accentuated into enacted 'performances' of the display of power equations and social status. Elwin's 'great crisis' of birth and death became great crisis not only of the mind (as he describes it), but also of managing the differences in social positions that rituals connected with these. In this sense all moments of 'abnormality' (such as the ones mentioned above) had disintegrating tendency. And it was possibly this intent that makes them essential to the subsistence system. By making the hidden conflicts appear in an atmosphere of the 'supernatural' the power relations of the society were both reproduced and legitimized. By incorporating the conflicts in this manner they were institutionalized. In times of stress the breakdown of the systemic coherence was probably reflected in the exaggerated identity articulation to save the system. As we see in the case of the Baigas, this made identities a crucial factor in transformation of subsistence forms.

**Conclusion:**

The main attempt of this chapter has been to point out the elements of a subsistence system. In the context of both dhaiya and bewar, it has been seen that the definition of 'needs' was influenced by economic imperatives as well as the way people have been taught to lead their lives. This in turn determined what was

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99 The event of birth, marriage or death are termed as 'Great Crisis' by Elwin because they are beyond the Baiga comprehension - a period where the individuals are faced with unfamiliar situations which they are incapable of dealing with. I use this term in a very different sense. It is used to denote those 'moments' in history where the systemic cohesion is in the danger of potential disintegration.
essential for their survival. In short we arrive at a theory of subsistence which forces us to look at the process of dissemination of 'indigenous' knowledge. Keeping this in mind, the fulfilment of subsistence in a Baiga society in the late 19th century was dependent upon the following factors: a) the nature of region which was quite isolated from the outside world. It was only the Agaria belt which kept alive the Baiga contact with the trading circuit and thus the outside world to which they had ready access before the Europeans came. Once the British came the same terrain played an important part in the relative isolation of the region, b) the nature of and the knowledge of the natural resources and characteristics of the region in which bewar was located gave rise to certain patterns and techniques of resource use. But ecology was not the only determining factor. There were certain community norms and cultural forms that was linked to the problem of the sustaining of the systemic coherence, c) the gist of this coherence lay in the seasonal rhythm of subsistence. This in turn governed the relationship of dhaiya with bewar, and d) that the reproduction of the Baiga disposition was as much a part of subsistence as the reproduction of its survival strategies. This is because the Baiga identity and behaviour formed the basis of all subsistence activity.

The first effects of the British policy on Baiga subsistence were first felt in 1878 with the formation of the Baiga Chak. Initially most Baigas resisted the idea of plough cultivation by simply migrating from the area. But gradually the effects of the formation of the Chak were felt in the following ways: a) the link between dhaiya and bewar was broken by the reservation of forests and the control of the use of axe; b) the introduction of the plough led to technical transformations of subsistence activities which in turn affected the social and economic behaviour of the Baigas and c) the nature of Baiga disposition changed due to the accentuation of the disparities between Baigas and the colonization of tracts within the vicinity of the Chak. In most cases the changes in economic behaviour did not necessarily
lead to the changes in Baiga identity. But there were some cases where the transformation in identity took place along with changes in patterns of Baiga behaviour. The varied Baiga response showed that the relationship between Baiga disposition and transformation of subsistence forms was both intimate and complex in nature.