CHAPTER VII

(c) PATTERNS OF ECONOMIC ACTIVITY

1. Economic activity and personality

In every society, whether primitive or literate, economic activity is the axis around which revolves the life cycle of an individual. It forms an integral part of the social and cultural life of the people, for it satisfies the basic need of survival. The economic organisation of society determines the mode of life of its people. In pre-literate societies food gathering activity is the primary activity in the social and individual life of the people. The availability of food, the resources of food, the nature and kinds of other means of subsistence etc. are potent factors determining the inter-personal and inter-social relations. They develop certain typical attitudes and prejudices among the people. The phenomenon of acquiring wealth cannot be explained away merely by assuming it as a basic human drive. In order to grasp and understand the differences in the economic motivations of the people, we must study the economic institutions and the values stressed by them. "It is sometimes imagined that the main drive to the economic activity of a tribal people is their immediate desire to satisfy their material wants .... But it would be untrue to interpret their economic organisation as a simple response to their requirements of food, clothing, shelter and
In the first place it is a socialized and not an individual response. The values which they put upon their food do not consist simply in its capacity to satisfy hunger, but in the use they can make of it to express their obligations to their relatives, in-laws, their chiefs, their ancestors; to show their hospitality; to display their wealth, to initiate or marry off their sons. The whole economic system of the people is run with this complex set of values in mind. This behaviour of the Kharwas and its relation to their social and cultural life are described in this chapter in order to bring out their influence on the personality structure of the Kharwas.

II. The Nature of the economy of Kharwas

In an oceanic island every man is normally a cultivator and a fisherman, and has some competence in woodworking, manufacture of thatch and cordage, and all other crafts practised in the community. There is division of labour, particularly between the sexes, but no one is expected to gain his livelihood by the exercise of one special skill alone. An obvious result of this is the absence of seasonal unemployment, and of floating labour supply which depends upon capitalist initiative for its subsistence. The Kharwas are a sea faring tribe and as such

1 Raymond Firth: Human Types; London Thomson Nelson
and Sons Ltd., P. 74-75.
2 Ibid P. 77.
their's is a sea economy. Their economic organisation is of subsistence type. Navigation and fishing are the two principal sources of earning livelihood, and all of them are daring navigators with traditions of overseas voyaging. They are not agriculturists. Like any other tribals, a Kharwa is also subject to the powers of nature, especially the forces of the sea and the wind. Adverse wind or no wind at all, rough weather, currents and reefs are always liable to upset his best plans and most careful calculations. They go on fishing expeditions, accidents and the good or bad luck may turn aside his hopes and aspirations. In trading, whether overseas or with near neighbours, chance may favour or thwart his ends and desires. His material equipments are comparatively simple and his tools are those which can be shaped from the material available.

As with all preliterate societies, so with Kharwas, the economic considerations play a restricted part in their social life. Their social behaviour is seldom governed by pure economic considerations. The economic factors have to function in a cultural Matrix. As Raymond Firth put it: "In every primitive group there is a problem of food supply in relation to population, and this problem is not one realized by single individuals in isolation, but is dealt with as a collective question by some planned system of production and

3 Op Cit, P. 73.
distribution. It is important for us to understand from the outset that family ties, wider obligations to kinsfolk and to neighbours, loyalty to chiefs and elders, respect for clan taboos and beliefs in control of food and other things by spirits, ancestors and gods can all play their part in this system. The economic behaviour of a Kharwa is not entirely covered by the idea that the maximization of the material satisfactions is the economic goal. Again, there is a close association between the technical and ritual activities of the Kharwas. The resuming of sea voyages at the end of Akhar (Period of rough weather - 15th May to 15th Sept.), resumption of fishing enterprises, building a new canoe, putting a new canoe into operation etc. are sanctified by the rituals. These rituals are meant for guaranteeing safe return from voyage, abundant realisation of fish and control of the forces of nature. These rituals have deep psychological significance also. They bring the people closer, bind them together, give them confidence and courage against the fear of the unknown and unaccountable.

III. The Attitude Towards Work

The Kharwas are a hardworking people. They would scarcely shirk work or would show dislike for it. But his interest in the work and in his environment is that of 'survival in health'. There is no motive of profit or gain behind it. He looks upon his tools as a means to an end,
i.e., means to the realization of his needs. He is not the slave of his tools. Attraction of money or material gain does not serve as an incentive for work. Participation in work is often undertaken as a duty towards the person who wants the work done, rather than for the material gain which can be expected from him. But work for its own sake is not regarded as a duty. There are no sayings like, "Satan finds mischief for idle hands to do". Time is not such an important element in the economic process as it is with us. The calculation of payment for work is not made on the basis of the quantity of work done or the amount of energy spent. A Kharwa individual will accompany you for hours together to help you or would take you for boating in the sea, and still would expect nothing from you. They are very liberal and obliging. This does not mean that the Kharwas have no sense of exigencies or are indifferent to the demands of the work. When the work itself calls for industry, or even haste, they respond, but this response is always within the sphere of the needs of the task. Again, they frequently find other occupations for their spare time and especially during the period of Akhar. They repair or build new canoes or crafts, knit the fishing nets, weave the coir ropes and sometimes go in for labour too. The responsibility of employed to employer and the fear of loss of wages or job are not the prime forces which keep them at work.
More important are the connections of convention about industry and the reproof which laziness is likely to draw from a man's fellows. Thus diligence and hard work are appreciated while laziness and shirking from work are met with reproof.

IV. The Means of Subsistence

The main occupation of the Kharwas is navigation and fishing. Those who are engaged in navigation do not all own their ship. The ships are owned by rich businessmen who employ the Kharwas on payment of fixed emoluments. The Kharwas go on trading expeditions to distant countries of Europe, Africa and Asia in their country crafts. These expeditions continue for about eight months in a year from 15th Sept, to 15th May after which the period of rough sea sets in. This period is known as Akhar. During this period they engage themselves in repairing and building the ships, weaving the nets, weaving the coir ropes etc., to make both ends meet. Many of the Kharwas indulge in the trade of smuggled foreign articles. While returning from trade expeditions they bring with them gold, wrist watches and other items of luxury secretly and sell them here at an exorbitant price—sometimes three to four times the original price of the article.
The Kharwas who are principally engaged in fishing are known as 'Lodhi'. It is a sub-group recognised on the basis of its occupation. It is in no other way different from the main community. These Kharwas either possess their own canoes or hire the canoes from some rich man. Now the government advances sufficient loans for the building of fishing boats as part of its programme for the development of fisheries. Most of the boats have been equipped with machines. They sell the fish caught by them either to the firms carrying on the business of exporting fish to the interior parts of the country or to their cooperative societies. With the mechanisation of boats and the improved methods of fishing, the yield per fishing expedition is considerably good and they can earn sufficiently for the maintenance of their families. Fishing is now an all-weather occupation. Of course, during the days of Akhar, they do not go very far from the sea-shore and as such they have to supplement their income by other means such as weaving coir ropes, nets, and labour.

In addition to navigation and fishing, the Kharwas are now gradually resorting to business and service. With the invention of huge steamers for carrying cargo from one country to another, the importance of country crafts as the means of inter-communication between one country and another has been considerably diminished. It appears that they are aware of the grim future of their occupation and as such they have
started educating their children. We find many educated Kharwas occupying such positions of prestige as the President of a Municipality, a lawyer and a businessman. Some others have taken up service in Government offices, schools, Local Bodies and business firms. The uneducated individuals are engaged as industrial labourers and their wives and grown-up daughters work as maid servants in the upper class families. Anyway, they find out one or the other means of earning their livelihood and they are content if they can make both ends meet. The Kharwas do not worry about tomorrow. They are happy if they can feed themselves and their families today. They are fatalists and believe that God gives them what is written in their fate.

V. Trade

The Kharwas sell their yield of fishing generally to export agencies or co-operative societies. In rare cases they indulge in retail sale of the fish. Some of the Kharwas own their shops of grossery. They purchase the commodities from the wholesale dealers and sell the same to their customers with reasonable margin of profit. I came across a few well to do individuals having large firms dealing in iron, hardware and teakwood. Some poor individuals have cabins of betel leaves and bidis. These are some of the items of merchandise, dealt in by the Kharwas. Lastly, as stated earlier, some of the
individuals indulge in smuggling wine, wrist watches and other articles of luxury. They sell these smuggled articles secretly to their known customers. With the exception of a few enlightened individuals having well established firms of teakwood, hardware etc, others have no business tactics and can hardly earn their necessities.

VI. The part of Women and Children

In the Economic Activities

A Kharwa female is as hardworking and industrious as the male. She manages the household and if needed supplements her husband's income by working as maid servant or by collecting and selling firewood. She also goes in for menial labour. She earns cash by crushing the chillies, grinding food grains, and by her skill in tailoring and embroidery. In fact she tries to be helpful to her husband in all possible ways. However, as in other tribal societies, a wife is not regarded as an economic asset. Marriage is not contracted from economic point of view. The Kharwas adore the women in a true spirit of Hinduism. They do not like that their wives should be required to earn. It is only under the pressure of adverse circumstances that they reluctantly allow their wives to work.

The children are not regarded as a liability to the family. If the circumstances of the family demands, children of nine years and above actively help their parents in supple-
meriting the income of the family. Male children go collecting firewood and sell it. They may go on fishing. The boys work as hotel boys, shop assistants and hawkers. The girls work as maid servants. They take over the responsibility of the management of household from the mother and makes her free for outside work. Thus, the children become an economic asset in times of necessity.

VII. The Economic Prosperity

The Kharwas lead a very strenuous life. They have to struggle hard to earn their livelihood. An average Kharwa family lives from hand to mouth. Whatever he earns is barely sufficient to meet his primary needs. He is content if he can feed his family twice in a day.

The following table shows the average income of 125 families. The figures are not exact but only approximate and in round figures. Those individuals who are illiterate do not even know what their exact income is. They do not also know the amount of expenditure on various necessities of life. They merely guess and depend largely on their judgements. I have tried to be as near as possible to accuracy by cross-examining the individuals and by cross-checking the information given by them with that given by his friends and neighbours.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Income in Rupees Per Year</th>
<th>Number of families</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Less than Rs.1200/-</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>8.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rs.1200/- to Rs.1500/-</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>10.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rs.1500/- to Rs.1800/-</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>9.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rs.1800/- to Rs.2100/-</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>12.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rs.2100/- to Rs.2400/-</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>18.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rs.2400/- to Rs.2700/-</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>12.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rs.2700/- to Rs.3000/-</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>9.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rs.3000/- to Rs.3300/-</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>6.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rs.3300/- to Rs.3600/-</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>5.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rs.3600/- to Rs.4000/-</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Above Rs.4000/-</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1.6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The average Kharwa family consists of six to seven members. It would be evident how difficult it is to maintain a family of seven members with what they earn in these hard days. Those individuals earning Rs.3000/- and above are either businessmen or well placed educated ones.

VIII. Patterns of Income and Expenditure

The main sources of income are navigation, fishing, service and labour. Few people are engaged in trade and other occupations.
The items of expenditure are food stuffs, clothing, tobacco, wine, social ceremonies like marriage etc. The major part of the income of a Kharwa is spent on food stuffs. About 65 to 70 per cent of his total income is consumed by food stuffs and things like oil, chillies, spices, etc. Another expensive item is clothing. 12 to 14 per cent of the total income is spent on clothing. The Kharwas being sea faring people, perform certain ceremonies like worship of the sea, Barapuja, Ramapir’s Dhajagaro etc., collectively. They also participate in certain Melas. In addition to this, they have to celebrate the occasions like the marriage of a son or a daughter, and the first pregnancy of the wife. All these ceremonies are costly and consume 6 to 8 per cent of his income. The Kharwas are addicted to smoking and drinking. They also take the tea regularly. He spends the rest of his income on such habits. The Kharwas do not have to spend anything on education of the children and medical aid, as these are provided free of cost by the Government. Of course, the educated individuals send their children to High Schools and Colleges and they have to spend substantial amount for that. But these individuals belong to higher income group and therefore can afford to spend substantially good amount on education of their children without upsetting the balance of their income and expenditure. The following is the summary of the expenditure incurred on various items:
Majority of the Kharwas live from hand to mouth and cannot make any saving. Only the literate and educated individuals plan their budget and save something.

IX. **Summary and Conclusions**

The economy of the Kharwas is mainly dependent upon the sea. Navigation and fishing are the primary sources of their income. Labour, trade and service are the secondary means of earning subsistence. Their attitude towards work is practical, that is, 'work for work's sake has no appeal to them.'

Their mode of living and the patterns of income and expenditure suggest that they live a very hard life. They have to struggle to make both ends meet. They live from hand to mouth. Economically they are backward and are happy if they can feed their families twice in a day. No wonder, therefore, that they should be addicted to intoxication. Scarcity of adequate means of subsistence gives rise to food anxiety which has coloured their attitudes and relations with other people and objects.
The Khartus are Hindus and therefore observe all religious rites and formalities, as the other Hindu castes. But a close observation reveals that their social and religious life, celebration of the festivals, their gods and rituals are connected with their economic activities. For instance, it can be seen that the initiation and resumption of sea voyage, putting a new vessel into operation or building a new vessel are all sanctified by some ritual. The festivals observed by them are also connected with their economic activity. The nature of their economy, the attitudes towards work, the method and technique of fishing, the cycle of yearly activities etc. are important factors which influence the personality of a Kharwa individual.