

Chapter - 4.

In this chapter we shall present certain case studies of the Meches in our area of investigation. We have only taken twelve case studies as prototypes of the Mech households of our study. Our purpose is to present certain typical families which will serve as a background to the study of the problem of the Mech community. We consider that in order to understand the present divisions in the Mech society, we should present in details a personal profile of some of the typical Mech families. In the twelve case studies that follow, we have presented the following types:

1. A 'rich', farmer who was a 'big' landowner in the pre-ceiling period.
2. A farmer who belonged to a big landowning family in the pre-ceiling period but does not possess enough land now. Nevertheless his economic condition has been found to be better than most of the farmers in that category.
3. A small landowner of the pre-ceiling period remaining small farmer.
4. A marginal landowner of the pre-ceiling period who has become a landless agricultural labour.
5. At present a share-cropper but the family was holding land during pre-ceiling period.
6. A 'new entrant' to our area of enquiry who possesses land.
7. A daily worker, who cannot state definitely about the pre-ceiling land possession of his family -- a category of "Miscellaneous" of our analysis.
8. A 'big' landowner of the pre-ceiling period who does not own any land but operates on land.
9. A 'big' landowner of the pre-ceiling period owing no land at present, and has become a day labourer.

10. A share-cropper of the pre-ceiling period who possessed land in the post-ceiling period but had to lose land subsequently, and has become day labour -- a member of the category of 'Miscellaneous' of our study.
11. A share-cropper of the pre-ceiling period losing land subsequently, but has been vested with land.
12. A 'new entrant' to our area of enquiry who was formerly a share-cropper but has become a landowner subsequently.

C A S E S T U D I E S.

1. BAIRENDRANATH BRAHMA (MONDOL) of Satali Mondol Para is mainly an ownercultivator, cultivating 24.58 acres of land. He reports that his grandfather, Motiram, was a very big landholder, although he cannot say exactly the amount of land owned by his grandfather. But his father Bankanath, also a big landowner, used to own, according to the estimation of ^{Bair-}~~Bair-~~endra, 150 hals, i.e. 750 acres of land. (The settlement record of Mukherjee [1935] shows that in Bankanath's name there was 368.15 acres of land and in the name of his sons there was 313.37 acres. Therefore, the family of Bankanath used to own 681.52 acres of land).

Sri Bairen reports that during the life time of his father, all the sons lived jointly and this family pattern lasted even after the death of his father in 1941, and all the brothers lived jointly upto 1956. In 1950, Bairen says, as the family became large, the brothers were separated.

Bairen says that his father had seven wives. He has

nine brothers including himself. One of his brothers is a medical practitioner, another brother is an administrative officer. Five brothers including himself are cultivators. Two other brothers are dead and their sons are cultivators.

Bairen reports that during the life-time of his father, his father had sold 420 acres. After the death of his father, 330 acres were distributed among the nine sons and he got 106.58 acres as his share. He says that his father had sold major portion of his land to Oroan Community as they used to pay good price for the land. The record of 1953, however, shows that Bairen owns 99.31 acres.

He reports that the main source of income of his father was from cultivation. In addition to cultivation, his father was also a collecting panchayat.

Bairen has one wife, six sons— one of them died at the age of 2 and four others are adults and one minor, and one daughter who is married and lives with her husband in Assam. His second and third sons are clerks, fourth son is a college student, fifth son is a primary school student and the first son helps Bairen in cultivation.

He says that after the introduction of ceiling on land, a landowner is able to hold only 25 acres as maximum. He reports that for the education of his family he had to sell about eight acres of land in various years after the imposi-

tion of ceiling when he was allowed to retain only 25 acres of land. He has only 17.58 acres of land now. He says that after his death these 17 acres of land would be distributed among his five sons and each would get slightly more than 3 acres of land. Thus, according to him, if his sons depend solely on land, they would not be able to maintain their family, whereas if they are educated they would be able to seek non-agricultural employment elsewhere which would supplement their agricultural incomes. He instanced the case of his officer and doctor brothers. He says that as his brothers are away from the village for their non-agricultural occupation, he cultivates their land, taking the full-share of the paddy grown in his brothers' field. But he pays to them entire amount of money by selling the areca-nuts and pine-apples grown in their fields. Thus, his two brothers are drawing income from both non-agricultural and agricultural sources. He also thinks that education is needed not only for economic reasons but also for broadening one's own outlook.

He reports that he cultivates 3 acres of land of his brothers and their brothers themselves have introduced the plantation of cash crops like areca-nuts and pine-apples in about one acre of land. He only supervises the cultivation. As already reported, for this supervision he takes the full-share of paddy grown in the land of his brothers. In addition to this cultivation and supervision, he also grows paddy in 6 acres of land of his own and another 6 acres are given to four share-croppers (two of them are Oroans and two others are Meches). The average yield of crop is 18 maunds per acre. But he says that the total crop of his field is too meagre to maintain his family. As he has not provided

any plough and bullocks to his share-croppers, he is required to pay twelve maunds of paddy yearly to each of them as the cost of the same (which he calls "Pana") and the share-croppers pay 1/3rd of the paddy net of the cost of plough and bullocks to him. So, from his leased-out land, he gets only 20 maunds of paddy. From his own cultivation of 9 acres of land, he gets 162 maunds. He says that in comparison to his expenses of the family 182 maunds of paddy are insufficient. Hence, in addition to cultivation of paddy, he has started plantation of areca-nuts and pine-apples in 0.58 acres of land, and from the year 1971, he has converted another 0.3 acres of land into areca-nut plantation, which, according to his expectation, would start yielding fruit from 1974. Moreover, he maintains a kitchen garden for self-consumption and an orchard-grove, the fruits of which like gouva, lichee and banana are marketed.

He reports that he does not like to sacrifice cultivation of paddy; but he always tries to increase his income from his land through diversification. His income from the sale of pine-apples ^{is} Rs. 300-325/- ^{from areca-nuts Rs. 2,500-3,000/-} and from the sale of other fruits is Rs. 150/- approximately per year. Moreover, he possesses a bamboo-grove which he utilizes mainly for domestic purposes.

He says that those who do not get required amount of fertilizers like cow-dung for their production should apply chemical fertilizers in their lands for getting a good yield. But he himself does not feel the necessity of applying

chemical fertilizers as the supply of fertilizers (cow-dung) is sufficient for his purpose of cultivation. He has kept three milche cows, two bullocks and one heifer in his house. Moreover, he has also kept one pig and four hens. He says that the eggs of the hen are sometimes sold in the market, and earns roughly Rs. 50-60/- in this way in a year.

He reports that in 1971 he collected insecticides from the Block Development Office and utilized them for the protection of his paddy.

He thinks that his land requires proper irrigation and says that if he gets some financial help from the government he would install a pump-set in his field.

He borrows money from a local money-lender. He says that he had to borrow from him for the first time in his life in the year 1962. At that time he borrowed Rs. 3,000/-. This he did for maintaining the consumption expenditure of his family and for meeting the educational expenses of his sons. The borrowed money was repaid through the sale of areca-nuts to the money-lender who purchased the nuts at a price lower than the market-price (for instance, he says that the market-price of 1 Bhari of areca-nuts is Rs. 50/-, but his money-lender pays him only Rs. 30/-). In 1969, for meeting the marriage-expenses of his daughter, he again borrowed Rs. 3,500/- from the same money-lender. In 1970, in order to sink a well for irrigation, he borrowed again a sum of Rs. 1,500/- from him. In 1972, he borrowed Rs. 2,000/- fo

cleaning the areca-nut groves and in 1973, too, he would be required to borrow a further sum of Rs. 1,500/- for the same. In order to repay a part of the loan, he sold away a tin-sheet house at Rs. 4,000/- in the year 1971; and in every year through the sale of a part of areca-nuts at lower price than the prevailing rate to the money-lender, he clears a part of his debt.

He tries, to justify ^{his} ~~his~~ not taking any loan from the government agencies. He thinks that one has to face many difficulties for getting loans from the government. Firstly, one has to pass through an elaborate official procedure in submitting one's application form for getting a loan; secondly, sanctioning of loan from government takes a lot of time, and may not serve the need in time.

But although he pointed out such difficulties for getting a loan from the government, he actually got a loan from it. He reported that in the year 1966, he prayed for a loan of Rs. 400/- from the government for converting an uncultivated land, full of hedges, into a cultivable one. He was sanctioned the loan in 1967 @ 6 $\frac{1}{4}$ % p.a. and his land had to be kept ^{as} collateral. Bairen considers the land to be kept a security is another reason for not going to the governmental agency for the purpose of borrowing, for he always fears that if he is unable to pay back the loan in due time, government would forfeit him of the land. And hence he prefers ~~to take loans from~~ local money lenders to the government.

He expects that after five or six years he will not be required to borrow from any where any more, for his income come from the sale of areca-nuts would rise every year by Rs. 1,000 - 1,200/- and ultimately when all of his debts would be paid back fully, he would be able to re-invest a part of the income earned from areca-nuts for its development and another part for the improvement of his house, and for education of the children and a higher standard of consumption at home.

He is not a member of the co-operative society. But he holds three insurance policies of Rs. 3,000/- each, for which he pays a quarterly premium of Rs. 90/-.

He reports that his father had paid bride-price (Modom Taka) to his father-in-law during Bairen's marriage. But when Bairen gave ~~marriage~~ his only daughter in marriage, he did not demand any bride-price. On the contrary, he paid groom's price for which he ran into debts.

He reports that he purchased two daughters of a Mech daily labour in 1960 by paying ~~the~~ Rs. 140/- for each of the girls. Both of them look after the domestic works. Moreover, one of them has been given in marriage in 1973 to a youngman who also lives in Bairen's family as servant. He says that for the marriage with the maid-servant, purchased, that youngman is required to give his labour freely to Bairen for at least seven years after which if the youngman wants to live seperately with his wife, he is allowed to leave Bairen's house. He also reports that the system of purchasing girls of poormen is prevalent in

Mech society from very old days and is considered, he thinks, as a status-symbol.

His family consumes generally rice, pulses, potatoes and vegetables. Tea is seldom taken. They also take pork, chicken and mutton. He reports that almost 80% of the items of consumption are purchased from the local market. None of the family members takes the country-brewn jou or any other alcoholic beverages. Jou is not prepared for the purpose of puza even.

He says that his family does not observe traditional form of puzas where the sacrifice of animals and birds like pig, pigeons, hens, and of Jou, was essential. Instead of it, they now perform 'vedic' rituals where, according to him, no sacrifice of animals or offering of wine is required. The adoption of this 'new form of religion', he says, has also simplified their marriage ceremony, which in olden days required a lengthy process as well as sacrifice of animals and birds.

He gives a rough estimate of the required expenditure of his family. For the yearly consumption of rice for his family, he is required to spend Rs. 1,000/- to Rs. 1,200/- of which a negligible portion is met from his house production and hence a major part of the required rice, according to him, is purchased from the local market. The family consumes roughly 1 kg. of tea in a month and 2 kgs of sugar in a week. He purchases fuel to the amount

of Rs. 15/- in a year. For the purpose of light, he utilizes kerosine, worth Rs. 16/- per month and consumes tobacco of Rs. 0.50 weekly. His house is primarily built of bricks and bamboos with tin-roof, but he has also some thatched cottages. For the house-repairing purpose, he spends roughly Rs. 400-450/- per annum. He has altogether 10 rooms of the first kind and two thatched cottages, covering three rooms.

He is a literate person who read upto I.A. standard. During illness, he always consults a local doctor. Although he has not adopted any family planning device, he thinks that family should always be limited. He regards the multiplicity of family members ^{as} one of the main reasons for the poverty of a large section of the Mech community. He refers to an old proverb, prevalent in the Mech society, "Jouni Pukri, Mikhamni Ali" which he explains as "lake of wine and boundary of rice." He remarks that in the days of his father and grandfather, land was plentiful and thus they were all rich and could prepare as much country-brewn jou as possible and could even use rice as the fence of their fields; and thus they could marry as many wives as possible and they did feel no necessity of limiting their family members. But now-a-days, according to him, most of the Meches are not so fortunate and hence for survival, they must limit their family through the adoption of family planning. As he is now 54 years of age, he says that he can no longer give birth to any child and hence has not adopted family planning method.

He says that disputes should in most of the cases

be settled by the elderly members of the village. If they fail to settle the dispute, only in that case the matter should be referred to the Anchal panchayat for settlement.

He reports that the female members of his family rear endi-worms and ^{weave} ~~prepare~~ endi-cloth. According to him, rearing of endiworms and ^{weaving of} ~~preparing~~ endi-cloth were once one of the main occupations of some of the Meches, and in almost every Mech house these were done. But now-a-days, because of the competition from mill-made cloth, rearing of endi-worms and ^{weaving of} ~~preparing~~ endi-cloth have become rare in Mech houses. He says that in his house endi-cloth is ~~not~~ ^{woven} very infrequently and that too for domestic purpose.

Bairen encourages folk songs and dance among the members of his community. At the end of our interview with him, he entertained us with a folk-song on our request.

2. KATHIRAM NARJINARI of Madhya Satali is an owner-cultivator, cultivating only 6 acres of land. He reports that his fore-fathers were owners of big landed property, the exact amount of which is not known to him. He says that Meches, specially those who were affluent because of owning a vast amount of land, used to marry more than one wife and consequently the landed property after the death of the owner split up among the inheritors in small parcels. Thus, he, being the descendent of a big landowner of the by-gone days, now owns only 6 acres of land. (Immediately before the imposition of ceiling on land in 1953, it is evident from the

records, that the father of Kathiram had 125.29 acres of land. We could not, however, ascertain as to how these 125.29 acres of land were distributed among the descendants after the death of his father. But Kathiram reports that a part of the land was vested by the government as excess land and perhaps his father was left with only 25 acres). Kathiram says that after the death of his father in 1965, the property was distributed among his three brothers and he got 6 acres as his share.

He raises paddy and jute in his land. In the year 1972 he could grow 36 maunds of aman paddy in 3 acres, 6 maunds of jute in 3 bighas and 10 maunds of aus paddy in 1.5 acres of lands. In year 1973 (the year of investigation), he has grown aman paddy in only 1.5 acres of land and he expects that yield per acre would be 3 maunds. He expects an improvement in productivity of land for he has administered chemical fertilizers, which he has purchased from a dealer in Hashimara and has utilized improved variety of seeds supplied to him by the B.D.O.

But Kathiram has decreased the amount of land under paddy cultivation intentionally. He thinks that if the crop is large enough to maintain his family, it is alright. He expects that the production of aman and aus paddy would be sufficient to provide yearly food to three adult members including himself and two minors. And hence he has converted a large portion of land into areca-nut plantation. He reports that upto 1972 he utilized 3 acres of land for the plantation of areca-nuts, and in year 1973 he will bring

another 1.5 acres of land for the same. Thus, 4.5 acres out of 6 acres of land will be brought under areca-nut plantation. According to him the income per annum from areca-nut plantation, is Rs. 3,600/-.

He also earns from areca-nut in another way. He acts as an "agent" of a well-to-do Mech land-owner, dealing in areca-nut business. This well-to-do Mech landowner invests his money in areca-nut business through him. This businessman cannot move ^{to} each and every corner of the village as he is required to devote his whole time for the purpose of cultivation, and Kathiram gives information about the availability of areca-nuts in the area which the businessman in question purchases through him and in this way he also gets some commission. His yearly income in this fashion is roughly Rs. 2,000/-.

He reports that his yearly income is sufficient to meet his annual consumption expenditure as well as to meet the expenses connected with agricultural activities.

In addition to paddy and jute, he also raised 10 maunds of maize for self-consumption in 1 acre of land and also maintained a kitchen garden in 1972. He has also planned to raise maize in one bighas of land in 1973 and to maintain a kitchen garden for self-consumption.

He is literate and has close contact with the developing agencies under the Block Development Office. His source

of information is not only his Village-folk but also other persons with whom he comes into contact on account of his frequent visit to distant market places.

He is quite aware of the need of raising productivity of the soil and hence is always willing to utilize chemical fertilizers in addition to cow-dung and improved variety of seeds.

He consults a doctor during ailment and is always ready to visit the Primary Health Centre, if required.

He has one pair of bullocks for ploughing the field and often gives them as loan to a Santhal Cultivator who in turn pays 15 maunds of paddy as yearly rent. The pair of bullocks is lent only after the completion of his own cultivation work.

He has paid Rs. 105 as bride price at his marriage, but opines that women should not be purchased in this way. Rather he has decided to pay groom-price during the marriage ceremony of his only one daughter who is now about 3 years old.

He takes all kinds of meat, excepting beef and buffalo. His income can procure 'two square meals' all the year round.

He ~~purchased~~ has purchased the daughter of a Mech, working as a domestic servant in the house of another Mech landowner, some two years ago. This girl is about 9 years old. On enquiry,

Kathiram reports that when the girl would attain maturity she would be given ⁱⁿ marriage and all the expenses in connection with the marriage would be borne by him.

Kathiram reports that he has never run into debts and does not think of borrowing from anywhere.

He has sent two sons to the local primary school. On enquiry, he reports that he wants to give proper education to his sons, for he likes to see them prosper in life. This, he thinks, is possible only when his 'would be-educated' sons get good employment elsewhere. He further states that mere dependence on land by a family would be too meagre to earn a subsistence. So, his 'would be-educated' sons would cultivate lands with the help of labours and they themselves would be engaged in some white-collar jobs. He also intends to send his only daughter to the local primary school for education from the next session.

Kathiram thinks that one can improve his lot by one's hard labour. He believes that family should be as small as possible. He has undergone vasectomy operation in the last year along with seven other Meches of his village.

3. GARSATH MOCHARI (110 years) of Dakshin Baniapara is an owner cultivator, whose youngest son on his behalf cultivates the land. He has six sons of the ages of 70, 65, 60, 55, 50 and 35 years and two daughters who are married and live with their husbands. The youngest son, Biren Mochari,

now lives with his father and all the other five sons live separately after their marriage. But all the sons used to live together in the same house before 1956. Biren reports that due to economic pressure, the joint family has broken.

The record shows that Garsath had only 3.41 acres of land in the pre-ceiling period. He still owns 3.41 acres of land.

Biren has to maintain three adults and one minor members of his family. And hence, in addition to cultivation of his own land, he also cultivates 2 acres of land of a Nepali landowner as a share-cropper. He reports that previously his leased-in land was owned by a Mech (Mongolsing Mech). After the death of Mongolsing, his wife had sold the land to a Nepali.

Biren says that his five other brothers were cultivating lands as share-croppers. But subsequently, they got the possession of those lands, as the government declared those lands as "vested" after the introduction of land ceiling laws in the area.

Biren mainly cultivates paddy (both aman and aush), maize and jute. He also grows chilly, and maintains a kitchen garden. A major part of these products are meant for self-consumption. He reports that in the year 1972, he could produce 3 maunds of rice and 4 maunds of jute per bigha. In the year of investigation (i.e. 1973) he has sown paddy in 2.5 acres of his own land and in 2 acres of his leased-in land. He contem-

plates to grow jute in one bigha only. He never keeps his land fallow.

He owns a pair of bullocks for cultivation. He applies cow-dung. He is quite aware that utilization of chemical fertilizers and improved varieties of seed would increase the yield per acre. But he complains that he does not get any financial help from any quarters - public or private. He reports that in the year 1970 he went to the Block Development Office for fertilizer, but he was told to come on some other day again. And hence, he did not go.

Biren says that if he works as daily labour in the construction of road for example, he can earn at least Rs. 3/- per day. Judging from this stand point, he thinks that the act of cultivation is unprofitable. But he says that as ~~various~~ other works are purely temporary in nature and are not always available, he has no other alternative but to devote his entire time and energy ^{to} ~~in~~ cultivation.

He reports that wild animals like elephants, monkeys, hares, rats and birds like swallows often do much harm to crops in every year, but he cannot give an exact amount of loss of crops due to this.

He often borrows in kind from his Nepali landowner. He cannot tell us how much he will be required to borrow in 1973. But he says that as the family lives from hand to mouth, he has to borrow for meeting the minimum needs of his family. He

often borrows cash from a local money lender, but repays him in kind. For instance, in the year 1969 he took loan of Rs. 40 from a local money lender to meet his own marriage expenses and repaid the loan in 1970 by paying 2 maunds of paddy. For reasons not very clear to him, he prefers to borrow from the local money lenders than from the government.

He often goes to the near-by market (Hamilton-gonj) for selling some of the products produced in his kitchen garden. He reports that although he has no marketable surplus, he is sometimes required to sell paddy under hard economic pressure (the exact amount could not be ascertained by us).

Biren reports that on the whole he can manage to have "two square meals" per day for his family for the entire year. The family produces home-brewn jou and takes tea occasionally.

Biren says that he rarely purchases the main items of food from the market.

Biren is illiterate and so also his father. He has not sent his son to any school. He says that the local primary school is situated two miles away from his house. In answering our question as to whether he would have sent his son to any school if it was situated very near to his house, he maintains that if the son gets education he may not be interested in cultivation.

He says that during disease he consults the physician of the Primary Health Centre or a physician at Hamilton-

ganj. But if the disease prolongs he would seek the advice of an "ojha" in order to dispel the evil spirit which he considers to be the main reason for the prolonged illness.

He likes to settle all disputes through the village panchayats.

He does not feel any necessity of limiting his family members as he is married not a long time ago and has only one son.

To
~~Two~~ upgrade economic conditions of persons like him, he maintains that government should help the farmers generously and at liberal terms.

4. MAHENDRA NATH SAIBA of Dakshin Satali is a landless agricultural labour. He has five brothers, and they live seperately. He is married and has paid bride price of Rs.147/- (he says "Satkuri Sat taaka") for which he was required to give labour in his father-in-law's house for two years before marriage.

He reports that his father used to cultivate about 3 acres of land. He thinks that his father might have sold his land due to his addiction to country-liquor (jou). His father is a pretty oldman of 86 years of age.

Mahendra has to maintain three adults and two minors, and the adults include his wife and his aged father. His wife looks after the household work and hence he is the only earning member of his family.

He works in the land of an Oroan landowner who provides him with a mid-day meal during the period of cultivation. For the maintenance of his family he borrows from the landowner which he repays by giving his labour on land. In the year 1972, he borrowed 12 maunds of paddy from his Oroan landowner. He repaid the loan in full by his labour in the field. The landowner himself decided the labour equivalent of a loan of 12 maunds of paddy. Mahendra reports that for his work in the land of his landowner, he gets roughly 20 maunds of paddy in a year. Out of the 20 maunds earned in the year 1972, he had to pay for his loan 18 maunds and thus was left with 2 maunds. In the year of investigation, he would be required to borrow 12 maunds of paddy which he would repay from the earnings of labour. He says that he is in need of borrowing always for meeting the needs of his family.

He maintains that he cannot even manage to provide the family with only one meal a day. Very often his wife collects Kachu, wild Kanda and Dehki leaves for which no money is required to be paid. The family, for a substantial part of the year, subsists on them.

He is illiterate. He has not sent his children to school, nor has he any desire to send them. He expects that when his two children (both are sons) would attain the working age, they would help him by earning either as agricultural labours or as daily labours.

He believes in "ojha" and consults him during illness.

He has no knowledge about family planning and thinks that his fate is responsible for his sufferings, otherwise how can he become landless when his father was a landowner.

5. JAYSING BARGAONARI of Paschim Satali is a share-cropper. He cultivates 4.5 acres of land, given to him by Shri Biren Mondol, a Mech land-owner of Satali Mondalpara, on a share-cropping basis. Jaysing cannot say what his age is, but he seems to be 45 year old. He has married twice and both of the wives are living. Two other brothers of Jaysing live with him. Hence the family is a joint family. His family consists of six adult members including himself and five minor members. He reports that as his first wife is suffering from long illness, he has married a second wife in the previous year (i.e. 1972). The second wife is a widow who has come to Jaysing's family with her three minor sons. The second wife before her second marriage served in the house of Shri Biren Mondal, a Mech landowner of Satali Mondolpara, as maid-servant where she could meet Jaysing who is a share-cropper of Shri Biren. After her marriage with him, she is still employed in the house of Shri Biren as maid-servant.

Jaysing reports that his two other brothers cultivate Jaysing's leased-in land with him. Thus the two brothers are truly speaking landless agricultural labours. But Jaysing reports that all, including himself, had lands of their own. His father used to cultivate his own land of ^{about 32-20} ~~2~~ acres at Paschim Satali. (From the records of right it is however found by us that his father

Ramansing in 1953 used to hold 68.38 acres of land. Thus, for reasons unknown to Jaysing, 36.18 acres of land were sold during the life-time^{of} his father). After the death of his father in 1961, the landed property was divided into four among three sons and wife. Jaysing along with his two brothers could own roughly 22 acres of land. But the entire land of his two brothers were acquired by the MES of Hashimara after 1962. So, the family was left with only four acres of land. But this he could not retain on account of the following reasons. To meet the funeral expenses of his father, he had to sell 1.5 acres of land to one Oroan of Madhya Satali. The remaining land was sold in different years to a Mech as well as to a Nepali and Oroan for meeting the consumption expenditures of his family. Thus, his entire family became landless in the 70's, and he has become a share-cropper.

Jaysing raises paddy, maize, jute, sweet-potato and chilly. In 1972, he had grown jute in 1 bigha of land and the yield was 2.5 maunds. In the year of our enquiry, he has grown jute in 0.5 bigha and thinks that 1.5 maunds will be raised. He raises sweet-potato and chilly only for home consumption. He has also grown aman paddy of 36 maunds in 5 acres of land in 1973 but he reports that in the previous year he could grow 84 maunds. This sharp fall in productivity of land could not be accounted for by him. He had also grown aush paddy in 3 bighas, the yield of which was 12 maunds in 1972. In the year 1973, too, he would grow aush paddy in 3 bighas of land.

In the year 1972, he borrowed 12 maunds of paddy from Shri Dhiren Narjinary, a Mech landowner of Madhya Satali to whom he had sold a portion of land for meeting consumption expenditure of his family sometimes in the year 1968. On enquiry it was found that the land was converted into areca-nut plantation by Shri Dhiren. For the loan of 12 maunds from Shri Dhiren, Jaysing will have to repay 18 maunds during the harvesting season of 1973. He has also taken loan of Rs. 100 from Shri Dhiren and of Rs. 60 from an Oraon in 1972 for the marriage ceremony of his younger brother. He will be required to pay 5 maunds of paddy to Shri Dhiren in the harvesting season of 1973 for the loan of Rs. 100, and for Rs. 60 he will have to pay Rs. 75/- in cash to the Oraon, in 1973.

Jaysing is illiterate and so also his two brothers. One of his sons (5 year old) goes to the school and reads in class II in the local primary school. In 1974, he intends to send another son to the local primary school. But he reports that although education of his children would permit him at a later period to overcome his economic hardships, the labour of his children will be required for assisting him in cultivation when they are grown up, and hence he is very much skeptic about the continuance of the education of his sons beyond primary level.

Jaysing administers cow-dung in his field. He thinks that cow-dung is superior to chemical fertilizers. He is reluctant to use chemical fertilizers in his land, for he considers that the application of chemical fertilizer would probably affect

adversely the legs and also the natural productivity of the soil. Moreover, he thinks that if chemical fertilizer is once applied in the soil, it must be applied continuously every year; otherwise, the non-application in any year would destroy the productivity of the soil. Poor as he is, he reports, his economic condition would not enable him to purchase chemical fertilizers and hence he would not be able to utilize them in every year.

Jaysing and his family take pork, hen and pigeon, if available but do not take buffalo. He takes bidi and country-made liquor. He reports that about 25% of rice produced by him is devoted towards the preparation of home-brewn liquor, called "jou". He himself admits that too much addition to 'jou' sometimes is responsible for not giving proper care to the field for cultivation. He thinks that the small plot of land cultivated by him as a share-cropper, can hardly support his family. And hence, he cannot manage 'two-square meals' throughout the year. In rainy days, the entire family is even required to sacrifice mid-day meal for a month or two. Barring the share of crop to be handed over to the land-owner, the entire crop raised in the field is devoted to self-consumption of the family and there is no marketable surplus.

He thinks that disease of human beings is due to the evil eyes of god (Modai) and hence one is required to consult 'ojha' to overcome the evil spirit. It is his firm conviction that prolonged illness of his wife is due to the evil spirit of Modai. In every year he is required to spend a substantial part of

his income to propitiate different gods and goddesses (like Mainou, Batho, Hagra, Modai, etc.).

In addition to assisting him in his cultivation, one of his two other brothers also gives labour in the forest as a casual labourer earning Rs. 2.50 per day during the months from January to April, and another brother in the tea-garden for plucking tea-leaves in the months of June-July. But these are purely casual in nature. Jaysing reports that there is no certainty of getting these casual jobs in every year.

Jaysing likes to see that the disputes are settled by the elderly members of his community.

He resigns to his fate for his poor economic condition and does not believe that family planning is at all necessary.

He also believes that bride-price is to be paid for marriage in order to compensate the father-in-law the expenditure incurred on the bride before marriage. He himself has paid bride price twice during his first and second marriages.

His only source of information is his co-villagers. He has not gone anywhere in the district, excepting his casual visit to the near-by hāt at Hamiltonganj on foot.

6. GAPIRAM MECH of Barajhar (Satali) is a new comer to the village and is a marginal farmer, cultivating 1.5 acres of leased-in land. He came to this place in the year

1968. (As he is a new comer, we have not enquired anything about the amount of land held by his father. In our dissertation, he has been categorised as "New entrant".)

He is an illiterate, having one wife, one adult son and three minor children, one of them being a girl. He reports that both of his parents (dead now) were much addicted to 'jou' and hence paid little attention to the education of their children. Gapiram remarks that he never takes wine for this reason and is very much eager to send his sons to schools, although he could not send his first son to the school as his service is very much required for his cultivation. This boy also sometimes works as daily labour. Gapiram says that his son cannot earn in this way throughout the year, but the economic need of his family is met to some extent from this source. He reports that his son hands over roughly Rs. 100-150/- to him in a year. Although he is very much conscious about the education of his children, he doubts whether his extreme poverty would enable him to keep his children at school for long even if he sends them to school.

In 1972, he had grown 38 maunds of paddy. His expectation for 1973 is also the same. Moreover, he cultivates jute and maize in his land. He has sown jute in three bighas and expects to get 8 maunds but has not sown maize in 1973. He says that as he has no plough and bullock, he is required to hire them from a Madesia landowner who charges him 12 maunds of paddy as rental. Because of the non-availability of plough and bullock in

due time, Gapiram says that he cannot properly cultivate his land.

He says that if he ^{could} ~~can~~ get financial help from the government, he ^{would} ~~will~~ start the plantation of areca-nuts. He, for the maintenance of his family's consumption expenditure, has taken loan in 1972 from a Madesia who hires out plough and bullock to him. The amount of loan taken was in kind. It was 12 maunds of paddy, for which he would be required to pay 18 maunds. But he could not pay back the loan, but still expects to get loan from the same man in 1973. He says that without borrowing he cannot maintain his family. (It is interesting to note that during our interview with this man, he enquired whether we were the representative of the government).

He can hardly provide the family with 'two-square meals' even for three months, he says. For the major portion of a year, his family remains satisfied with one meal a day. His wife sometimes collects vegetables from the jungles. These are used for domestic consumption.

He has no knowledge about chemical fertilizers. He uses cow-dung as fertilizers.

He thinks that all his problems will be solved by his god "Bathou" whom he worships every day.

During illness he goes to the ojha first, but he says that he is also prepared to consult physician if it does not cost him such money.

7. BAKUNDA CHAMPARAMARI, an illiterate daily worker of Satali Nakadala, is a youngman of 20 who at first did not want to answer our questions. Being persuaded by a villager of his own community he at last agreed to talk, but wanted to know whether we would pay him anything for answering ■ our questions.

He does anything to make ■ both ends meet. Sometimes he works in the forest as a casual labour and sometimes works in the house of a landowner. He says that if he can procure 'two meals' at anytime, he considers the day to be a "day of feast".

Enquired about his income, he says that he cannot tell us exactly the amount of income earned by him in any year, but he asks us to take his income roughly at Rs. 100/- p.a.

He says that he cannot tell us the amount of land owned by his father, for his father died when he was only 1 year old. But as far as he has heard, he can say that his father, too, was a daily labour like him. [We could not find the name of his father either in the land records of 1953 or in the assessment list of 1973-74. He is thus categorised by us as "MISCELLANEOUS"]

He says that the question of taking loan does not arise at all in his case, for nobody will give him loan.

He likes to marry, but is unable to do so as he cannot pay "Modam taka". He expects that some body would keep him in his house and in lieu of his labour in that house he would be able to marry.

He resigns completely to his fate for the amelioration of his poverty.

8. UZIRSING of Madhya Satali was an owner - cultivator, having 110.39 acres of land in different places of the area of our enquiry before the imposition of ceiling on land. As reported by him, he kept only 25 acres of land as 'retained' land, but between the years 1953-56, he sold about 50.00 acres out of 110.39 acres and surrendered about 35.39 acres to the state. But as the sale of 50 acres of land was done within the period, 1953-56, the transfer of land, according to the regulation of the Government of West Bengal, was declared as 'malafide transfer'. And accordingly, the amount of land retained by him was vested in 1956 as a penalty. Thus, Uzir has become landless now.

Although Uzir does not own any land legally, still two of his sons are cultivating his 'vested' land which has not yet been redistributed. Thus, in fact, the family which had more than 100 acres of land in the pre-ceiling period, does not own any land now, but operates on about 7 acres of land.

Uzir has one wife and twelve sons, all adults. Four of the sons are married and they have six minor children. Thus, the family of Uzir consists of 18 adult members including himself and 6 minor children. The family is a joint one. Of the twelve sons of Uzir, two are engaged in cultivation, one is a Primary School teacher and another son is a clerk. One of his sons is a student of class VIII and two of his grand daughters are primary school students.

Uzir's family raises paddy, jute, occasionally maize and tenders a kitchen garden. As a head of the family, he supplied us the information regarding the yearly income of his family, the usual yearly consumption expenditure and his attitude towards adoption of improved farm technique, family planning, borrowing agencies, education, religious practices, village organisations etc. He could also relate the amount of loan taken by him and his plan of repayment.

During our conversation with this man, we have found him to be always complaining against governmental authority for rendering him to the status of a 'landless'.

9. BANGATU MECH is a day labourer of Dakshin Satali. As per record of 1953, it was seen that he used to hold 55.39 acres of land, but between 1953-56 he transferred by way of sale-deeds 39.91 acres of land to his son and kept the remaining amount for himself. But the transfer of land of the periods 1953-56 was declared illegal by the government and Bangatu had to surrender the land possessed by him to the government as a penalty.

Bangatu lives with his wife and two adult sons. He reports that for the most part of a year he remains the main earning member of his family. He reports that the to unsympathetic attitude of the government, he has to surrender the land owned by him and has become a day labourer for which he rarely can manage the minimum subsistence for the family throughout a year.

He often recapitulates his olden days when he had land to cultivate. He says that he has heard that he may get back some land on account of redistribution of surplus land by the government, but at the sametime doubts very much about his possibility of getting back his land. For he says that it is the government which has taken away his land from him.

Being conscious of his poverty, Bangatu does not like to give marriage to his sons although they have, according to him, attained marriageable age. He thinks that in the case of the marriage of his sons, the family would be put into further economic troubles due to enlargement of the mouths to be fed.

Bangatu is ■ literate without any education level. One of his sons ■ read upto class VI and another upto class IV. Both of them had to discontinue their education in the year 1958.

He reports that he has to give hard labour in order to provide his family with food. He says that for a civilised family certain minimum expenditure on clothing and bedding is also necessary, and for this he requires atleast Rs. 100 per annum which he cannot always manage. As an instance, he has told us that during the last winter his family has felt the necessity of purchasing two cotton-made 'Chaddar'. But he has not purchased as his earnings have not allowed him to do after meeting the food expenditure of his family.

He is not addicted to jou . He is a Christian,

but his wife before her marriage was a Hindu. The marriage has been made by negotiation. Bangatu says that taking of bride-price is not tolerated by the Christians, but as he has married a Hindu-girl, he has to pay 'Modom taka' to his father-in-law.

He consults the physician of the Primary Health Centre during illness, and very much likes that internal disputes should be settled by the elderly men of the village.

His source of information is the village-folks.

Bangatu also says that he has two other sons who live seperately in their own families. They cultivate the land which has been sold to them by Bangatu during the period 1953-56. He says that although his sons are landowners, he does not get any help from them since he is not in good terms with them.

His family cannot afford to take rice throughout the year. Rice is often taken with vegetables mainly procured by his wife. He purchases salt from the nearby market, oil is seldom bought. His sons sometimes gather fish from the nearby streams and 'nalas' (drains).

He desires that at least one of his sons should get a job either in the nearby tea garden or MES. Recently the elder of the two has appeared before a selection committee for the job of a peon in a tea garden. Bangatu expects that his

son may get the job; if so, he may be relieved from his economic burden to some extent.

10. DARBARU MECH of Satali Nakadala was a share-cropper of Ketarsing of Satali Mondolpara upto 1958. He used to cultivate along with his four sons about 11 acres of land. But when the surplus land of Ketar was vested in the year 1958 (as reported by Darbaru), the land cultivated by Darbaru was also vested.

Darbaru said that after the land was taken, he could cultivate about 3 acres only along with his sons. The family of Darbaru remained ~~joint~~^{joint} upto 1960. He reported that when the members of the family began to increase, they had to mortgage their land due to financial reason. The entire land of 3 acres was mortgaged to an Ooran in 1961. Since then Darbaru together with his four sons had become day labourers.

∟ As Darbaru was a share-cropper and did not own any land, we had designated him as belonging to the category of 'MISCELLANEOUS' ∟

Darbaru now lives with his wife, and all the four sons live seperately.

He can hardly manage his minimum subsistence even for six months. In the peak agricultural season, his wife also does work in the field. But he reports that both of them get jobs often of a casual nature. But the family expenses are beyond his means.

As instances, he says that he has to perform at least two worships in a year for which he is required to purchase fowls and pigeons. Moreover, in the case of prolonged illness, he must even be prepared to sacrifice goat to ward off the evil eyes of his 'Modai'. He does not like to go to any physician but prefers to consult an ajha during illness.

He is illiterate and so also his sons who are not living with him now.

Darbaru and his wife are very much addicted to jou. He says that sometimes they spend the entire day on jou only and do not take any other food. They prepare the jou at home and for this, Darbaru says that he is required to keep at least 12-15 seers of rice per annum.

11. DOL NARJINARY of Uttar Satali was a share-cropper of Nazir Sing of Madhya Satali. He used to cultivate 3 acres of land upto 1961. In 1962 when the major portion of Nazir's land was acquired by the Hashimara Air field, Dol was dispossessed of his land. He became a day labourer.

But Dol has recently got 5 bighas (about 1.67 acres) of vested land from the government.

Although a marginal landowner, Dol tries to get maximum return from his land. He reports that as some of the Meches are getting very large profits from areca plantation he has converted

nearly $\frac{1}{4}$ of his land into areca-nut plantation in the year 1972. He hopes to improve his economic condition by it. He is yet to earn income from areca-nut.

He is a literate cultivator of 45 years of age, having six family members. All are adults which include his wife, one daughter, three sons and himself.

He reports that he wants to improve his economic lot, but as his sons cannot get job any where, he cannot properly maintain his family. All of the three sons, however, help him in his income-generating activities.

Dol, an optimist Mech cultivator, has been found to reiterate his hope of improving the economic lot of his family within a very short period.

At present, he reports, he can hardly manage the entire consumption needs of his family. He has not been able to give marriage to his only daughter due to lack of necessary funds. He says that unlike the days of his forefathers he is not to charge any bride price. On the contrary, he hopes to give dowry during the marriage ceremony of his daughter.

He does not think that in matters of illness etc. ojha has got anything to do. On the otherhand, he thinks that their activities should be confined to the areas of worshipping gods and goddesses.

12. JALBIR KABI of Paschim Satali is an owner-cultivator, cultivating 2.14 acres of land. Jalbir came to the Satali villages in the year 1956 from Bara Salkumar of the Western Duars.

He says that due to flood at Barasal Kumar, his land was fully covered with sands and thus he came to Satali for his brother Ongbir who was a share-cropper of Shyamacharan of Satali Mondolpara, advised him to come to the place.

[Jalbir has been categorised as 'New Entrant' in our study].

Jalbir says that he also has cultivated along with Ongbir, the land of Shyamacharan as share-cropper. But recently he has got 2.14 acres of land as 'patta' (lease) from the government.

He is illiterate, living with his wife and one minor son.

He cultivates paddy and occasionally jute in his field. He administers only cow-dung in his field and has never tried for getting either seed or fertilizer from any source.

He reports that the average yield of paddy is 12 maunds per acre. In 1972, he got nearly 3 maunds of jute from his 1 bigha of land. In the year of our investigation, he has not been seen to grow jute in his field. He has advanced his bad health as the reason for not growing the same.

He reports further that if he can cultivate his land properly he will be in a position to maintain his family somehow. But due to ill health, he cannot do it.

He often goes to the Primary Health Centre, but at the same time puts his faith on ojha. He says that ojha requires large amount of money for appeasing the evil spirits which he considers to be the main reason for his prolonged illness and bad health. He thinks that his wife will also fall prey to the evil eyes soon. But his financial position does not allow him to sought the benevolent activities of ojha, and hence he is to go to the Primary Health Centre most unwillingly.

Jalbir further says that for meeting the family expenditure, he often borrows. For instance, he has borrowed 8 maunds of rice from a fellow Mech of his area in the previous year for which he is required to repay 12 maunds, but has not fully repaid. He expects to borrow again from that lender in this year too (i.e. 1973) which seems to be inevitable for him.

His wife has reared two hens. The eggs are sometimes sold in the market. The family earns Rs. 60-75 from the sale of eggs per year.

Jalbir's only son goes to the nearby primary school and reads in class II. But he doubts that he will be able to continue his studies. For his ill health he requires a helping hand in cultivation and hopes that his son will be able to help him in that respect in due time.

Jalbir is quite aware of the fact that improved seeds and fertilizers improve the quality of land. But he thinks that it is useless for him to think of applying them in his land as his pecuniary condition will never allow him to do so.

He has heard that banks advance loans to cultivators, but he reports that he does not dare to go to the government (as is described by him) for if he fails to repay their loans in due time he might lose his land.

He thinks that small disputes among co-villagers should be settled by 'gaon-budas' (village elderly men). He has no idea about family planning method and does not think that man should go against the wishes of the god.

Moreover, he does not think any necessity of altering their old customs and practices with regard to marriage, religious ceremonies etc.

For his poverty, he thinks that his bad luck is solely responsible.
