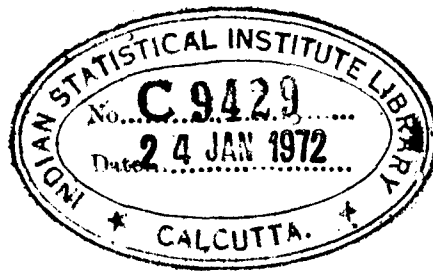


Indian Statistical Series No. 15

THE BENGAL PEASANT FROM TIME TO TIME



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INDIAN STATISTICAL INSTITUTE

THE BENGAL PEASANT FROM TIME TO TIME

TARA KRISHNA BASU

ASSISTED BY

HASHIM AMIR ALI

AND

JITEN TALUKDAR

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FOREWORD

THIS is the third and last of a series of sociological studies of rural life in West Bengal. The first, entitled *The Environs of Tagore*, and the second, *Then and Now*, were published last year and the year before.

It is to Sri Tara Krishna Basu that the chief credit for the present study goes. It is he who has spent his time in the village and has gathered the data and the notes depicting the life of 'Kanchanpur' so vividly. He has naturally worked in close cooperation with his senior colleague, Dr. Ali, who had steered him to the village of Lal Behari Day thirty years ago and again persuaded him to study it in more detail a generation later.

The publication of this third study completes a project which has extended over the past three years. The first was a study in rural ecology showing how social phenomena are related to geographical factors. This relationship is seldom obvious and requires to be brought out by appropriate analytic studies. The second was a study of the time factor with an analysis of the changes that had taken place in twenty five years, between 1933 and 1958. This one takes into consideration and deals with the human factor playing its role in both space and time. Some chapters are particularly revealing of the village mind as it has reacted to changing circumstances. The urge to change as well as the inertia against change in the context of the institutional patterns are brought out in simple and effective narrative form.

We have so far imagined our rural society to be organized according to a vertical stratification. The concept of a concentric organization, with the high castes serving as a nucleus and the lower castes forming the periphery, is one which might be more helpful in appreciating the organic nature of our rural society. This may prove to be a distinct contribution to the expanding data in the field of rural sociology.

The elaborate social pattern of eating together and yet separately, the highly 'pragmatic procedure for selecting a bride, the annual 'miracle' in the village, and the detailed description of the village festivals are all phases of our village life which need to be taken into account in forecasting and outlining the future.

The reprinting of Dr. Ali's article from *Samvadadhvam*, the house journal of the Indian Statistical Institute at the end of the book gives a summing up of 'the entire project in which he and his two co-workers started out thirty years ago and which brought them together again in their mature age to produce these three studies.'

It has been a great pleasure for me to have been associated with this small group in the thirties, when I was working in *Visva-bharati*, and again in the sixties, in the Indian Statistical Institute.

Calcutta: 12 June, 1962.

P. C. MAHALANOBIS

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INTRODUCTION

In the year 1872 the Reverend Lal Behari Day wrote a novel in English under the caption "*Govinda Samanta*" to illustrate the social and domestic life of the rural population and working classes of Bengal. The story attempted only to delineate the everyday life of an actual *raiyat* of Bengal in the middle decades of the nineteenth century. It is proper to state also that this book of the Rev. Day was written in response to an offer of a prize of £ 50 made by the late Sri Joy Kissen Mookerjea of Uttarpasa, a benevolent and illustrious *zamindar* of Bengal. The book of the Rev. Day was adjudicated as the best among the essays submitted, and its worthy author obtained the aforesaid prize. In the opening chapter of his book the Rev. Day, remembering that brevity is the soul of wit, pithily explained that the reader was to expect there only a plain and unvarnished tale of a plain peasant living in the plain country of Bengal, told in a very plain manner.

Now the days of the Rev. Day were not the days of social surveys or studies of the pattern with which we are at present familiar. He had little problem in selecting his village or in collecting or analysing the primary data, or expressing his findings in terms of statistical constants and formulae. Moreover, he was neither a statistician, nor an economist nor a sociologist presenting his report according to an accepted scientific pattern. He described the social life of the rural Bengal of his times, and in so doing provided also a work of some literary merit. The author simply took his readers to his native village *Shona Palashi* to which he gave the pseudonym of *Kanchanpur*, and with this village as a setting he wrote out the biography of a real *raiyat*, a Bengal peasant of the *Ugra-Kshatriya* caste. But, chapter by chapter, as the author was unfolding the career of his hero, he was also engaged in giving a detailed interwoven picture of the culture and problems of the rural Bengal of his days. It was not a quantitative study at all, but there is much to commend in the method of describing social and domestic life of a people in this way. The business of life with its network of relationships of a complex social structure, is perhaps more intelligibly understood through such biographical studies. They perhaps give us more insight in the

understanding of the intimate human attitudes, values and problems that arise in a complex living situation, than collecting and heaping up of data on the basis of questionnaires and schedules.

The *Bengal Peasant Life*—for that was the title of the Rev. Day's book in subsequent editions—was prescribed for general reading in the schools for many years. The last of its many editions was published in 1926. Being still available in the second-hand book-market it stands as a classic in the village-life studies of Bengal.

In the years 1931 to 1934 the present writer was assisting Dr. Hashim Amir Ali in his research into the socio-economic conditions of the villages around Tagore's Sriniketan. There one day in 1933, as he was discussing the place of *Bengal Peasant Life* in rural literature with Dr. Ali, the latter suggested that it might be worthwhile to locate and make a re-study of Kanchanpur that might throw a great deal of light on our present rural problems. Accordingly, the village was traced out with considerable difficulty and was actually visited in August 1933. Thereafter, the present writer again spent some three weeks there from the end of December 1933 to the middle of January 1934. To get glimpses of life of the village of the Rev. Day, as it was sixty years later, was indeed a pleasant adventure.

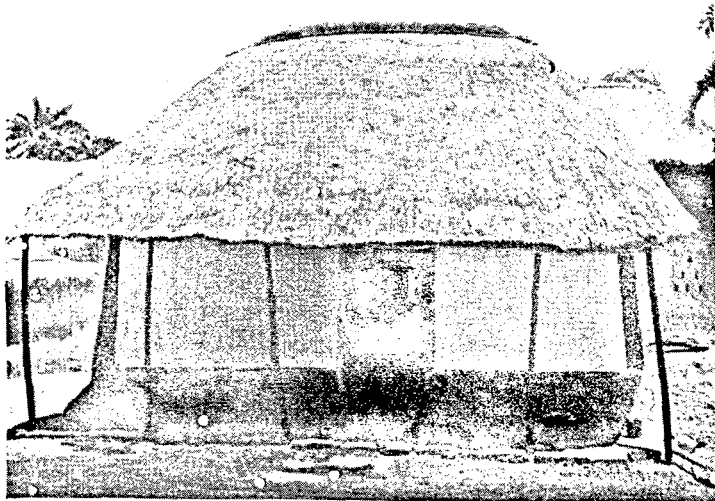
During these two visits this writer did not make any routine survey, but simply entered some notes in his diary, which were later typed out and handed over to his teacher and chief. That was 25 years ago; both the teacher and the student left Sriniketan—one for Hyderabad and the other for Bihar—and proceeded in different walks of life.

Years passed by and Kanchanpur became a forgotten village, so far as that old student was concerned.

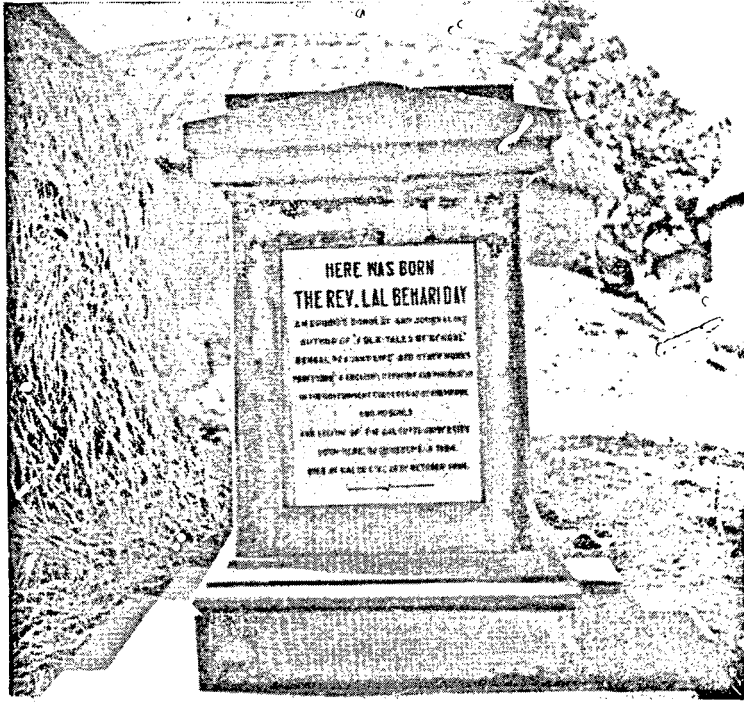
After a full cycle of 25 years the teacher and the student met again. The latter old pupil was invited by the old teacher to make a re-study of Kanchanpur on a one-year project to be sponsored by the I.S.I., and much to his surprise he also learnt that his old notes on Kanchanpur had been sent to the world of publication—under the title '*Kanchanpur Revisited*'. The teacher's forecast of twenty-five years ago was fulfilled overnight: the pupil found himself to be an author.



The Writer (sitting third from the left) and his Village Friends



Rev. Lal Behari Day's Library where the Writer lived



Rev. Day's Memorial in the Village Environs



Rev. Day's House in Ruins

Kanchanpur Revisited presented a picture of that village as it was in 1933 and this present investigation deals with it in 1958. That had been a year of the 'Great Depression', and this was a year of rising prices. That had been a year of bondage and fear, and this was a year of freedom and hope. There was a psychology of courage and progress in the atmosphere of 1958. Then the people had been deep in gloom and chaos and now they were planning their future with confidence and strength. What then have been the specific changes effected in the pattern of rural life as represented by Kanchanpur?

In other words, the question arises as to how much the village has actually altered under the impact of these changing years? The mid-nineteenth century pattern of a culture gradually declining in prosperity was nicely outlined in the Rev. Day's book, *Bengal Peasant Life*. The notes presented in *Kanchanpur Revisited* gave a somewhat different picture of the village in the early thirties of this century. There the first few lines under the caption, 'Distant Footsteps', read as follows:

"Kanchanpur sleeps on. But when some government representative or exciting piece of news comes to disturb it, it gets up and attempts to get a view of what is happening inside its own arena as well as outside in the world beyond. Its torpor is broken but only for a while".

Evidently the footfalls approached nearer and nearer and in the India of 1958 the village is now involved in and dependent on relations of the wider social environment. Has the basic texture of Kanchanpur's cultural individuality proved to be sufficiently tough to resist the changes and to remain undisturbed? What are the noticeable changes in different sectors of living? Are the old values and faiths still clinging to men, or is the village moving out to embrace new ways of thoughts and forms? If some light is thrown on the present situation and on the above questions, this survey, I hope, will justify itself.

CHAPTER ONE

THE ENVIRONMENT

1.1 LOCATION:

As already mentioned, Kanchanpur, meaning Golden Habitation, was the pseudonym which the Reverend Lal Behari Day had given to the village of his birth when writing *Bengal Peasant Life* in 1912. The official name of the village is Palashi.

Partly to distinguish it from another village of the same name, located some twenty miles north-east, partly because of its erstwhile wealth and prosperity and perhaps also because it was for long the abode of many families of the gold-merchant (Subarna Banik) caste, this village has come to have *Shona*, meaning 'golden', affixed to its name—even officially it is generally referred to even now as Shona Palashi, Golden Palashi. So Lal Behari Day's name for the village was both a veil and an indication.

In 1933 the village had actually to be traced out through pointers given in *Bengal Peasant Life*. *Kanchanpur Revisited* mentions how even people who had searched for Kanchanpur had failed to locate its identity. But that brief inquiry about Govinda Samanta's (hero of *Bengal Peasant Life*) surviving descendents had sown the seed of curiosity in the mind of the village people and had enhanced the pride and self-esteem of the family that still claims to be at least a branch of the Day family. Anyway, the pseudonym no longer serves as a veil of anonymity for the village and, thanks to the fame which has begun to be attached to Reverend Day and his book, *Bengal Peasant Life*, the present inhabitants would accept the name Kanchanpur as readily as Shona Palashi; that is why we have used two names indiscriminately for the same village throughout the present study.

This Kanchanpur or Shona Palashi then is a middle-sized village of the Gangetic delta area in that part of Eastern India which is now known as West Bengal with Calcutta as its metropolitan city. From Calcutta if one wants to pay a visit to Kanchanpur, the first step is to reach *Vardhamana* which, in its Anglicized form is known as Burdwan. The railway station adjoining the town of Burdwan

lies on the Eastern Railway and is 66 miles north-west of Calcutta. An express or mail train takes about one hour and a half for the journey, and now-a-days even the slower local electric trains take the traveller from Calcutta to Burdwan in about two and half hours. The village lies to the north-east of Burdwan, and in dry seasons there runs a bus on the Burdwan-Kusumgram road which passes by Kanchanpur on the north at a distance of less than a mile from the village proper. If there is a heavy shower the road becomes muddy even in other-than-rainy seasons, and the bus service is temporarily discontinued. In the rainy season and early autumn, the road is in such a condition that even ox-cart treks become hazardous. The distance from Burdwan to Kanchanpur via this road is about 9 miles and presents the most formidable part of the journey when the rains have set in.

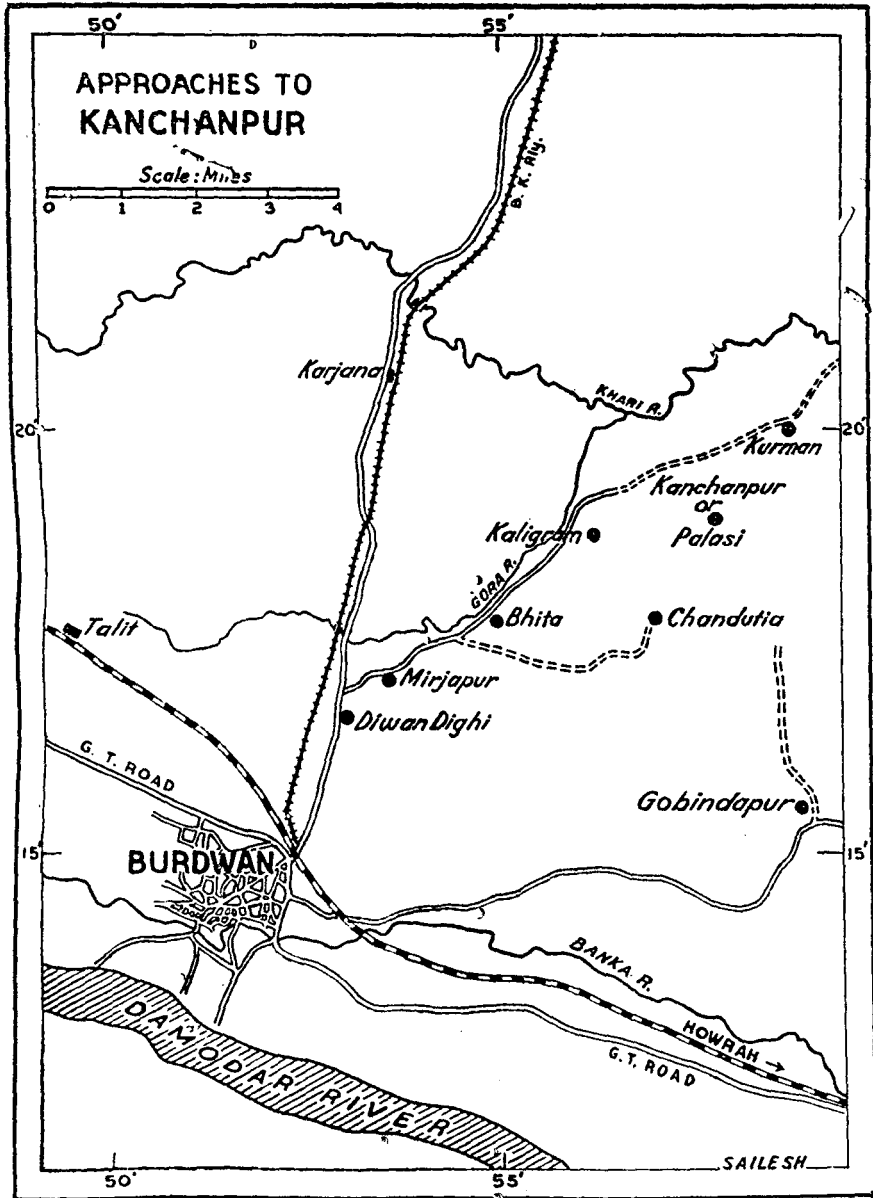
1.2 THE ROAD TO KANCHANPUR

When it was decided that a re-study of Kanchanpur was to be made, the present writer made several attempts to pay a visit to Kanchanpur during the rainy season in 1958. But the roads were bad and he was discouraged at the Burdwan station from proceeding towards the village. To get across these 9 miles he had to wait for three months: the rains kept Kanchanpur inaccessible till the end of September. The problem which he had faced 25 years ago confronted him again. A trek on foot was the only solution as it had been in 1933.

Below are extracted the lines from *Kanchanpur Revisited*, which described the situation at the time of this author's first visit in August 1933. This might well have been written in September 1958:

"There then on the map was Kanchanpur, six miles from Burdwan in a straight line, but almost double the distance by road. Upto Kolgaon (Kaligram) village, eight miles from Burdwan, I learnt there was a metalled road and that then it became Kachha. During other seasons horse carriages and motor cars can go as far as Palashi; but now, in the rainy season, they cannot go because the road is too muddy even for bullock carts. I tried to engage a cart and found that even so far as Kolgaon the minimum fare asked was three rupees. The rest of the way, I would have to walk, because there, as one carter said, "we won't go on the cart; the cart will ride on our shoulders". The counsel of perfection was not

to go to Palashi during this season at all. But I did not heed their advice, and started on foot next morning for the village, which I had had so much difficulty in locating.



Map No. 1

It was raining hard when I left Burdwan. Upto Kolgaon, which lies on the metalled road, it was not very difficult. But from there the Kachha

road was but a stretch of quagmire where one sank in upto the knees. It was hard exercise to walk even for a hundred yards. I overtook a villager who was carrying a seven-year old boy on his shoulders. It was impossible for the child to walk, and the father almost wept for the road. I could not but pity his position; but, realizing that mine would be no better if I were to walk upon the remainder of this unmetalled road, I hit upon another plan. There was Palashi hidden in a thicket. Between me and the village stretched a vast expanse of watery paddy fields barely separated from each other by the raised embankments. I abandoned the road—if it could be so called—and walked zig-zag along the narrow bunds between the rice fields.”

But this time, having grown 25 years older, I had not the youthful zest to face the task on foot and there was also a miscellany of equipment to be carried to the village where I would have to stay for several months.

“Go there even on a *duli* (litter) if you can get one”—such were the instructions of Alida when we parted at Santiniketan this time. But the days of *duli* are gone in the villages. Decades ago it was in vogue, a kind of indigenous litter for carrying women of the less wealthy classes, while *palki* (palanquin) was the only vehicle available to the well-to-do when the roads were in such a state that not even two-wheeled carts could pass on them. Journeys by palanquin have also fallen into disuse, and at Kanchanpur, I found out later, its existence is noted only on nuptial occasions or when a man in a sick bed has to be sent to the town for medical treatment.

At the end of September the visit could be delayed no longer. By then things were only slightly better, but no bus had begun to ply. The only recourse for me in such circumstances was to chance the bullock-cart, and I set out to hire one for getting across those nine miles. The condition of the road even now demanded certain precautions. There must be strong and fresh bullocks with no heavy load to carry. The carter should be an expert in his job, and he should also take one or two assistants with him to help him in case of difficulties, as it would be often necessary to lead the bullocks by hand through stretches of sticky mud and also put human muscles to the wheels simultaneously.

I agreed to pay Rs. 12/- as cart-fare and settled the matter with a carter. Next morning we were to start. But the road was in a horrible mess. I came to understand that the road was to be macada-

mized under the Second Five Year Plan and as a prelude to construction a good quantity of earth had been thrown and spread over it. Then the rains set in and made the road a stretch of quagmire. In some spots within the villages through which we had to pass portions of the road were submerged in water, and they served as so many merry pools for the village ducks to swim and dive. There was also an endless number of undulations in the road that not only caused painful jerks but also threatened to make the cart turn turtle in some cases.

The bullocks apparently did not like the idea of moving through such a road, and the carter was doing his best to make a headway towards the goal. The poor creatures were alternately scolded or coaxed, beaten or caressed. From inside the *chhai* (mat roof) of the cart, I could hear the goading address of the carter to his animals.

"You, *sala* (wife's brother), are you so fond of your feet that you can not step in the mud?" or

"You, brother-in-law of a brute, why don't you like to move or get down in the mud?" or

"These *salas* are only making intermittent efforts...."

Off and on the voice of the carter turned soft and persuasive. I heard him shower flatteries on his animals, and such appealing words also came to my ears:

"*Babas*, you know that we have to go on, then why are you refusing, my children?" or

"My jewels, this is but an empty cart, then why are you finding it difficult to go? Proceed, my treasures, proceed without any stop anywhere."

Occasionally it appeared that the cart would remain stuck in the mud; often the carter submitted that he did not know what was in God's mind and whether he would be allowed to carry his *Babu* safe to Palashi. But his prayers were answered, and having left Burdwan at seven in the morning I eventually found myself safe in Kanchanpur at 2 in the afternoon: my friends were anxiously awaiting my arrival.

Here I should thankfully refer to the kindness shown to me by Dr. Khan, a medical practitioner, and Sri P. R. Paul, a rice-mill

owner, both carrying on their respective business in the northern suburbs of Burdwan. This time, along with the problem of access to the village, I had the question of securing friendly introductions as well. A relative of mine, my nephew's cousin and a resident of Burdwan, took me to his friend, the said Dr. Khan, as he used to get occasional calls from many villages of this area. He, in his turn, took us to Sri Paul, a native of Kurman, a sister village of Palashi. If Sri Paul was rich and influential, he was no less kind. He helped me to arrange the cart, and got a chance of speaking of me to the president, 'Sakti-Sangha' (a young men's association) of Kanchanpur. On his way back from Burdwan where he had come on some business, Sri P. M., the president of Kanchanpur's 'Sakti-Sangha' met Sri Paul just after our visit to him in the day. While getting up on the cart next morning, for the memorable trek described above, it was a pleasant surprise to me to learn from Sri Paul, that he had already arranged for my stay at Palashi, and a hearty reception would cheer me as soon as the difficulties of the journey were over.

The first impression that I had on entering the village was to feel that I was in a besieged town. It was difficult either to come in or go out until the roads had dried up. The people here make requisite arrangements in advance for this period of isolation so that they can tide over minor difficulties. But cases of emergency arise, such as the need of bringing a doctor from the town or taking of paddy stocks for sale at the rice-mills of Burdwan; it is then that the magnitude of the problem is brought home. Easy communication with the town is the most keenly felt need here; and the people are looking hopefully for the days when macadamization of the main road will be completed at least up to the spot where their village cart-track branches off.

In this connection it may be noted that growing in comparative isolation, Kanchanpur seems to have retained a high degree of hospitality. I was forced to notice this trait 25 years ago, and have to do so here again. When greetings were over, my new friends at once declared that I should be treated as a guest of the village at least for the first few days. Visitors from outside are welcome as food does not require cash and is plentiful in the village household. The villagers living in areas where communications from town are poor

love to hear news of the outside world. Religion also lays down an injunction that one should treat his guests as gods. Our rural culture continues, therefore, to reserve an amount of hospitality declining in city conditions.

1.3 LAYOUT OF THE VILLAGE

Now that, Kanchanpur has been reached, I intend to take my readers through the village and present a sketch of it in the lines given below:

The Rev. Day in his book spoke of two distinct parts of Kanchanpur—first the village itself or the cluster of homesteads inhabited by the members of the community, and second, the 'arable mark', consisting of some thousands of bighas of land and forming a circle of cultivation of a radius of about half a mile.

Human habitation indeed forms the nucleus of the village, but the surrounding area is oval—two miles north to south and one mile east to west, and covers approximately two square miles. To be more exact, the *mouza* consists of 1461 acres. Roughly speaking, only one-fourth of this area forms the human habitation.

On the south through the fields of the village, runs the main canal from the Damodar river. There was no canal in the days of the Rev. Day. In *Kanchanpur Revisited* (1933), it was noted:

"A projected distribution of the Damodar Canal would run through the fields of Kanchanpur. The peasants see nothing but the disadvantages of the new scheme of things. The free passage of their carts from one village to another would be obstructed. The water-tax amounting to as much as Rs. 3/- per acre would be an additional item on their already overburdened shoulders. True, they would get a supply of water, but they doubt whether they would get it when the demand of the crops is most urgent, and they definitely know that famine is not unknown even where canals have been constructed. Malaria will be less—this they doubt. The stagnant water of the canal—stagnant because the sluice gates will not allow a free flow from the river—and the jungles that will flourish profusely on both sides of the canal will become additional breeding places for mosquitoes....

The canal did come, but the jungles, as apprehended, did not flourish. Paths on the embankments of the canal make a trek on foot easier, and the distance from Burdwan to Kanchanpur is less when the village is approached direct from the south-western side



instead of the round-about way via Dewan Dighi, i.e. the main road to Kusumgram running north of the village. Even in the rains, if the weather is dry for a couple of days, one can ride on a bicycle on these embankments and there are at present no less than 50 cycles in the village of Kanchanpur: This has brought the village in closer contact with Vardhamana.

Branching out from the main canal two distributory channels run northwards. One of these flows through the eastern fields of Kanchanpur, while the other passes through Kaligram just west of the village. The main canal has separated the southernmost fields of Kanchanpur and there is no bridge over the canal at this place. As a result a Kanchanpur raiyat who has any land on the southern side of the canal has to make a circuitous round in order to attend to the agricultural operations on those lands. The inconvenience is caused to a good many cultivators, and the inhabitants are making repeated applications to the authorities for construction of a bridge over the canal at this point. But hitherto no action has been taken.

The village has a natural decline from the south to the north. On the north-side again, the east-west run of the land shows an undulating picture, and the waters of the fields flow down in ditches that run north-wards and take the surplus water to the river Khori (or as it is sometimes called Khargeswari). This river flows in a north-eastern direction and passing by the neighbouring villages of Parui and Kurman carries the waters of the valley down to the Ganges.

The village is situated between 50 to 100 ft. above sea level and has a fertile soil. Like other villages of Bengal, Kanchanpur also is a stage for the six seasons that come and play their respective roles year after year. The callously rude and indifferent summer, the drunk and hilarious rains, the serene fore-autumn with its clear blue sky, the golden after-autumn with its basket of corn and ripe fruits, the dry bitter winter with cold north-winds, and the season of transition, the ever-fickle queen of the seasons, the prodigal spring, all pass by casting sunshine and shadow on the round of human life that flows on at Kanchanpur.

A few common specimens of the flora and fauna of Kanchanpur may be named here, before we come to the geography of the village proper. When approached from the road on the north, Kanchan-

pur stands completely camouflaged by the green foliage of its stately trees. Its houses and temples are screened from the eyes of the approaching visitor until he has actually entered their precincts. Numerous kingly trees give shade and beauty to the village—the big *batas* (*Ficus indica*) with scores of downward branches, the heavy, trunked *asvathvas* (*Ficus religiosa*), the mango (*Mangifera indica*) topes and bamboo (*Bambos*) clusters, the bael (*Aegle marmelos*), the *kathbael* (*Feronia elephantam*), the tamarind (*Tamarindus indica*), the *ngem* (*Melia azadirachta*), the palm (*Borassus flabelliformis*), the *bakul* (*Mimusops elangi*), the *palash* (*Butea frondosa*) and various other glories of vegetable creation. The smaller fruit trees like the plum (*Prunum*), guava (*Psidium guayaba*), lime (*Citrus medica acida*), papaya (*Carica papaya*), plantain (*Plantoginem*) and various shrubs are scattered throughout the village. The villagers take pride that such richness of vegetable creation is not to be found in all the neighbouring villages of Kanchanpur.

Of the domestic animals, buffaloes, bullocks and cows, goats and sheep, ducks and hens, and pigs belonging to the extraneous castes are quite common. Pea-cocks, pigeons, hares, kittens, pups and various singing birds are also kept as pets in several households. The kittens and pups are not, however, cared for when they grow into cats and dogs; they have then to make their living by their own efforts. Of the non-domestic animals, there may be seen in the village a good number of jackals and wild cats after evening. The monkeys that had been so troublesome in 1933 have been scared away by repeated massacres organized by the villagers with the help of the monkey-killers. Many birds, rats, mice, snakes, flies, mosquitoes and various insects refuse to abandon human company.

Besides the glories of vegetation and the ruins of old buildings, the things that strike a visitor when strolling in the village are its temples. Some of the temples, like that of Dayanath of the Pauls are completely dilapidated, but several are still standing. Some of them appear to have been made nearly 200 years ago and in one the date of establishment is given as 1489 B.S. or 1783 A.D. In some, the outer walls have pictures in relief on the bricks depicting religious stories of the epics. These are mainly *Siva* temples and number about twentyfive in all.

There are no less than forty tanks some of which are amongst the finest and most picturesque ones in the district. The roads of the village are also very well-laid and compare favourably with any other village in this respect although the straight road running through the centre of the village which Rev. Day had so proudly mentioned has become somewhat undulating as will be seen in the maps on pages 33, 37 and 64.

As these maps indicate, the village is divided into two main wards—the *Uttarpara* (North-side) and the *Dakshinpara* (South-side). The South-side again has three parts known as *Purabpara* (east-end), *Dakshinpara* (south-end) and *Paschimpara* (west-end). Apart from these regional divisions, there are several caste-wise *paras* such as the *Banerjeepara*, *Mashaipara*, *Kotalpara*, *Goalapara* and so on, but the subject of dispersion of the castes may be reserved for a later discussion.

The central road of the village runs from north to south and small streets from the eastern and western divisions come and merge in it. The central road which goes to meet the Burdwan-Kusumgram main road about three quarters of a mile north of the village is called the feeder road in village terminology. Lately, at the request of the villagers, the improvement of this feeder road has been taken up by the District Board. The condition of this road in the winter is good, but it needs some dressing if cars are to be driven upto the heart of the village even then. In the dry season, jeeps bring visitors and goods are brought in trucks. After harvest is over, bags of paddy and stacks of straw are also sometimes carried away in lorries. The days when such vehicles enter the village offer great jubilation for the village children. Excited and hilarious, they run with the moving vehicles, through dust and noise while the driver and the august passengers shout their utmost to caution the village urchins.

1.4. NEIGHBOURHOOD OF KANCHANPUR:

A village community is bound to be affected by its neighbourhood. Mention has already been made in the beginning of the chapter

of the Burdwan-Kusumgram road which links the village with the nearest city which is Burdwan. The geographical position of the village in relation to Burdwan and the surrounding area is illustrated in Map No. 1 at page 7.

There is another bus-route—the Burdwan-Kalna road which runs a few miles south of Kanchanpur and passes through Gobindapur, an important village in the locality. It is convenient for travellers coming from the southern or the south-eastern sides to approach Kanchanpur through Gobindapur. It is interesting to note that this Gobindapur has acquired an adjective, namely, *Hat* (market) and is generally referred to as Hat Gobindapur, possibly because of the market relations that it has developed with the surrounding villages. On Mondays and Thursdays vegetable *hats* are held at Gobindapur, and on all days there are some *aratdars* (commission agents) ready to buy, store or sell paddy; Gobindapur has also a cinema house, the only one in the neighbouring area. On *Asharnabami*, during the *puja* of the god *Panchanan*, a fair is held at Gobindapur which is fairly attended by the villages of the neighbourhood.

Though connected with ties of economics and rituals, Hat Gobindapur is five miles away to the south and on the west-east pucca road from Burdwan to Kalna. The surrounding villages whose fields meet those of Kanchanpur are Kaligram, in the west, Parui in the north, Kurman in the north-west, Debagram in the east, and Belgona, Malkita and Chandrahati in the south. Of these surrounding villages Kanchanpur (Palashi) has special relations with Debagram, as these two villages taken together constitute one *gram sabha*, and therefore have one and the same *gram panchayat*. Besides this Shona Palashi *gram sabha*, there are five other constituent *gram sabhas* that go to form the *anchal* of the region in which Kanchanpur is situated. It is to be noted that the adjoining villages of Parui, Kaligram and Chandrahati do not fall in this particular *anchal*. Kaligram, however, especially its *hattala* (market place) as a centre of different services to the local people, affects the life of Palashi in several ways. After passing from the F. P. School of the village, many students of Palashi go to read in the classes of the Junior High School at Kaligram *hattala*. There is also an *arat* there for buying, storing and selling

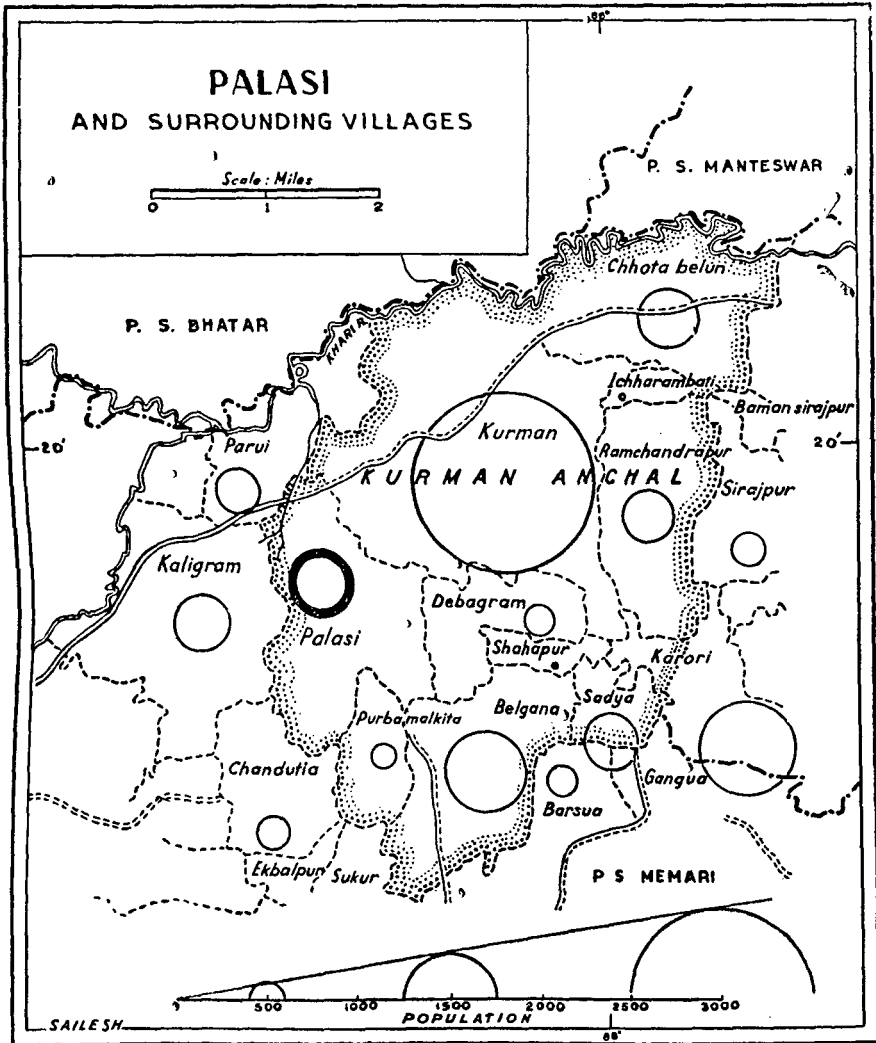
of paddy. There is a rice-husking machine where many householders, including those of Palashi, send their boiled paddy for hulling. The buses plying on the Burdwan—Kusumgram road stop for a few minutes at this *hattala* where there are a few sweetmeat and tea shops. Formerly the place was the terminus of the bus traffic, but in recent years the service has been extended to Bhanderdih. The passengers love to get down here a few minutes for some conversation and refreshment. Many passengers of Kanchanpur get in or out of the bus-stop of Kaligram and make their way through the fields instead of going more than 2 miles further towards the north-east where the feeder road from the village joins the main road.

Beyond the main road to the north lies 'Parui', the nearest river-bank village in the area. The Khori river, rising somewhere from the high lands of Chhotonagpur flows down to the Ganges. A few decades ago, I am told by some elders of the village, people used to bring their goods down from Calcutta up this river, and natives of Kanchanpur used to get their merchandise transported from the banks of the Khori at Parui to their own respective places.

On the first of *Magh* of the Bengali year when according to the Hindu almanac the sun just begins to take its path towards the north, the villagers of Kanchanpur and the neighbouring area observe a river-bathing ceremony. Men, women and children of Kanchanpur go to Parui that day for their baths and there they also participate in a fair that gathers on the occasion. The *Vaishnabs* of the village also hold a *mahotsab* (great festival) at this time, on the banks of the river at the fair where *kirtans* (mass prayers) are sung for hours and people are fed with *khitchuri* (hotchpotch of rice and dal) and *tarkari* (hotchpotch of various vegetables).

Parui, Kurman and Palashi are three villages that have close ties in the rituals that are practised at the great festival of *Siva's gajan* celebrated at the end of *Chaitra* each year. The *sannyasis* from Parui as well as from Kurman have to visit Palashi with their god of *gajan*. They march in a dancing procession through the village and are warmly received in embrace by the Kanchanpur *sannyasis*. They make due obeisance to the old Siva, and thereafter return to

their own villages. Next day the *sannyasis* of Kanchanpur make their return visits both to Kurman and Parui.



Map No II

Kurman, to the north-east, has various other ties with Palashi. It is the seat of the *anchal panchayat*, in which Kanchanpur is represented by four of its members. On Wednesdays and Sundays,

it holds vegetable *hats* which are attended by a considerable number of men from Kanchanpur as the latter has no longer any such *hat*. The hats on Tuesdays and Saturdays that used to be held at Kanchanpur were shifted to Belgona, another neighbouring village, long before 1933, and Kanchanpur had lost its position in this respect.

At Kurman there is a High School which prepares students for the School Final. No less than thirteen students from Palashi daily attend the classes at Kurman. There are also a rice-hulling machine and a paddy *arat*, which have developed the economic relations already existing between the villages.

The *anchal* of the locality consists of the following nine villages :—
(see Map No. II)

- | | | |
|-----------------|-------------|------------------------|
| 1. Kurman | 4. Palashi | 7. Singhapara (part of |
| 2. Chhota Belun | 5. Devagram | Karori mouza) |
| 3. Burar (Ram- | 6. Sadya | 8. Belgona |
| chandrapur) | | 9. Malkita |

Of these, Kurman, Chhota Belun and Burar (Ramchandrapur), each constitutes a *gram sabha* (village assembly) and consequently has a *gram panchayat* as well. Devagram, Singhapara and Malkita are not viable units to compose a *gram sabha* independently, and have therefore been merged respectively with the adjoining bigger villages of Palashi, Sadya and Belgona for formation of the *gram sabhas*. Thus there are 6 *gram sabhas* each represented by a *gram panchayat* in the *anchal*, and over the entire area functions the *anchal panchayat*.

As regards number of households and population, Kurman is the biggest amongst the *anchal* villages. Belgona stands second while Kanchanpur occupies the third position. The Ugra-kshatriyas are the predominating caste in the area. Both in wealth and number they are in majority in six villages out of nine. Of the other three Chhota Belun and Burar are *Sadgop* villages while the Brahmins predominate at Kanchanpur. There is however a considerable number of influential *Subarnabaniks* both at Kanchanpur and its sister village Belgona.

The relative position of Kanchanpur as regards population and area amidst the surrounding villages is illustrated in Table No. 1(A) and Map No. III.

TABLE 1(A) : 1951 CENSUS DATA FOR VILLAGES UNDER P.S. BURDWAN
IN THE VICINITY OF PALASHI

J.L. no.	name	area (acres)	no. of houses	popula- tion	literate		acreage per house- hold	no of persons per house
					number	number per hundred		
(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)
1. 102	Chandutia	685	117	523	131	25	5.9	4.5
2. 103	Kaligram	1724	216	955	312	33	8.0	4.4
3. 104	Parui	853	275	713	148	21	3.1	2.6
4. 105	Palashi	1461	264	1101	370	34	5.5	4.2
5. 106	Kurman	3176	665	2930	889	30	4.8	4.4
6. 107	Chhota Belun	1378	223	981	132	13	6.2	4.4
7. 108	Ichharambati	132	6	20	—	—	22.0	3.3
8. 109	Ramchandrapur	1077	181	807	293	36	6.0	4.5
9. 129	Karori	808	327	1541	506	33	2.5	4.7
10. 130	Sadya	321	204	901	114	13	1.6	4.4
11. 131	Sahapur	186	2	11	2	18	93.0	5.5
12. 132	Debagram	647	118	529	166	31	5.5	4.5
13. 133	Belgona	1319	385	1339	429	32	3.4	3.5
14. 134	Purba Malkita	414	87	396	134	34	4.8	4.6

TABLE 1(B) : PERCENTAGE DISTRIBUTIONS OF OCCUPATIONAL GROUPS
(AS PER CENSUS 1951)

J.L. no.	village	I	II	III	IV	V	VI	VII	VIII	total
(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)	(10)	(11)
1. 102	Chandutia	82	5	10	—	1	—	—	2	100
2. 103	Kaligram	51	10	10	—	3	2	—	24	100
3. 104	Parui	73	7	16	3	—	—	—	1	100
4. 105	Palashi	55	4	40	—	1	—	—	—	100
5. 106	Kurman	45	21	19	—	4	2	—	9	100
6. 107	Chhoto Belun	76	7	16	—	—	—	—	1	100
7. 108	Ichharambati	—	80	20	—	—	—	—	—	100
8. 109	Ramchandrapur	70	16	5	2	—	1	—	6	100
9. 129	Karori	52	8	15	—	1	2	—	22	100
10. 130	Sadya	63	5	17	—	2	5	1	7	100
11. 131	Sahapur	—	—	27	—	—	—	—	73	100
12. 132	Debagram	51	5	20	—	10	5	2	7	100
13. 133	Belgona	32	26	4	8	5	7	1	17	100
14. 134	Purba Malkita	65	6	2	—	5	3	1	18	100

The eight columns in Table 1(B) represent the following occupational classification of the village population:—

- I. Cultivators of owned land.
- II. Cultivators of unowned land.
- III. Cultivating labourers.
- IV Non-cultivating owners.
- V Producers other than cultivators.
- VI Commerce.
- VII Transport.
- VIII Service and Miscellaneous.

In order to show clearly the preponderance of one or more categories, the actual figures found in the 1951 Census are here presented as percentages of the total population given under col. 5 in Table 1(A).

CHAPTER TWO

THE HERITAGE OF CASTE : A SOCIOLOGICAL ANALYSIS

Caste plays such an important place in Kanchanpur and permeates so effectively the every-day life of its people that we shall first try to obtain a bird's eye view of this social phenomenon before going on to a demographic or economic analysis of the village population.

2.1 CONCENTRIC GRADATION AND GROUPINGS OF CASTE

Many attempts have been made to delineate the patterns of caste on the basis of status. The concepts emerging from such efforts have always assumed a vertical structure with the Brahmins at the 'top' and the untouchables at the 'lowest' rung of the ladder.

But a close examination of the relations between different castes as they live in Kanchanpur has suggested that a more realistic way of presenting the pattern of caste, and one that would make the inherent significance of caste more comprehensible, would be to represent the different caste groups in concentric circles with the Brahmins occupying a place not at the top but in the very centre of the village society.

Similarly attempts have been made by sociologists to devise a scale for measuring the social distance between the different caste groups. And these attempts have succeeded in giving names to existing sociological phenomena such as 'consanguinity', 'commensality', etc. etc. But each of these phenomena is found to be interwoven with another presenting in each region a different pattern too intricate to be seen or understood clearly.

Long conversations with peoples of different castes, however, have suggested that to the village people themselves this problem defining social distance between caste groups presents no complexity. They simply place each caste in one or another of four concentric circles. The Brahmins, as explained above, occupy the centre; those from whom Brahmins can accept water to drink, or the '*Jal-chal*' ('jal' means water), fall in the immediately outer ring; the '*Jal-achal*', or those from whom Brahmins do not take water, are placed in the next outer ring but they are still within the fort-walls of caste, the so-

called Sudras. Then come the segregated and the servile castes—those outside the pale of decent society, the 'mlechhas' among the Hindus. It is a paradox of Hindu social development that these groups have been absorbed and exteriorized at the same time. The epithet 'low' has been attributed to them, but here they have been classed as 'exterior castes', though the concept of the latter term has been questioned by many sociologists. Muslims, Christians and in fact all those who resist the tendency to become absorbed in the Hindu fold are not regarded as 'low' castes—they are the non-Hindu 'mlechhas' and the distance at which they are kept from the central circle is no less.

The hierarchical importance of different social groups may be noted as early as the institution of the *Varnashram Dharma* of the ancient Hindus, which lies at the background of the present complex caste-system. In fact it is mentioned even in the 'śrutis' that from the body of Manu were born all human beings: the Brahmins from the face, the Kshatriyas from the breast, the Vaishyas from the thighs and the Sudras from the feet.*

Each of these four rings or circles is allotted to the four groups of castes; each individual caste and religion occupies a different segment in one or another of these four rings.

Let us examine each of these four circles in turn.

2.11 *The High Castes :*

Among the high castes, the Brahmins as a rule stand at the very centre. They are the men of 'great birth' (*mahajanam*). They are the *gurus*, the teachers of all the *varnas*.

The majority of the Brahmins at Kanchanpur, as was observed by the Rev. Day in the last century, are of the *Srotriya* order, better known in this area as the *Radhi* Brahmins. There is only one Brahmin householder of the *Vedic* order. Strictly speaking he

**śruti*—The literature regarded as revelation of deity, as the Vedas and parts of Upanishads.

Manu—The mythological ancestor of mankind according to the Hindus.

The text ascribed to the Rg Veda is famous : brāhmaṇo'sya mukhamāsīd vāhū rājanyah krtah urū tadasya yadvaiśyah padbhyām sūdra ajāyata.

There is a text in the Rāmāyaṇa : mukhataḥ brāhmaṇā jātāḥ urasah kṣatriyāstathā urūbhyām jajñire vaiśyah padbhyām sūdrā iti śrutiḥ. (Āraṇyakaṇḍa, canto 14 sl. 30).

belongs to another village, but is a resident of Kanchanpur for many years and is settled here as the head master of the local Primary School. There are 4 families of the *Goswami* Brahmins. They are followers of Sri Chaitanya, and are therefore *Vaishnabs*. The *Srotriya* and the Vedic Brahmins claim to be followers of *Sakti* and are therefore *Saktas*. They consider themselves nearer to the centre of the circle than the Goswamis because they offer ministrations only to clean castes, while the Goswamis have many disciples even amongst the jal-achal castes. A Radhi Brahmin will not give his girl-child in marriage to a Goswami boy, though Goswami girls may be accepted in a Brahmin household. However, now-a-days, this rule is often violated, and Radhi brides are often married to Goswami young men but chiefly because in such cases suitable bridegrooms may be found at a lower price. As a result the Goswamis are coming to be considered almost equal to the Radhi Brahmins, and there is seen to be no strict restriction as to commensality and marriage between the two groups at Kanchanpur.

The *Vaidyas* and the *Kayasthas* also occupy the inner circle but come next to the Brahmins, but the Subarnabanik Brahmins are not accorded the high respect due to the true Brahmins. Even the *Vaidyas* and the *Kayasthas* consider themselves superior to the Subarnabanik Brahmins—who are derogatorily termed, in the village parlance as the *Bene-Bamun* (i.e., Brahmins of the *Banias*). They are considered to be degraded because they officiate at the ceremonial functions of the Subarnabaniks, who fall amongst the jal-achal castes of the Hindu society. Thus the *Goalas* have their *Goala* Brahmins, and the *Kotals* their *Kotal* Brahmins, the *Bagdis* their *Bagdi* Brahmins, and so on. Even the exterior caste *sannyasis* of the Old Siva, have their *Gajan Brahmin*, and the unclean dead at the crematory have their *Maha-Brahman* to minister in the prescribed rituals. Except the Subarnabanik Brahmins, the degraded Brahmins catering to other low castes do not live in Kanchanpur but come from other villages to help their clients in the performance of their ritual ceremonies.

2.12 *Jal-chal Castes* :

Now let us look at the castes of the jal-chal group, i.e., the castes from whose hands the Brahmins occupying the *sanctum sanctorum* may accept water to drink. They occupy a circle outside that of the

high castes, but as they form a group of non-polluting status, they occupy distinct segments in this next-to-the-inner circle and are traditionally known as the 'Nabasakhs' (i.e., the nine branches). Amongst them fall the *Sadgop*, the *Gandhabanik*, the *Napit*, the *Modak*, the *Karmakar*, the *Tanti* and the *Tili*. The last mentioned caste, i.e., the Tili as merchants in oil seeds, are accepted within the respectable class of the Nabasakhs, but the *Teli*, i.e., the extractors of oil are looked down upon as following a degrading occupation of destroying life by crushing the seed. The Teli is therefore considered inferior in status and from his hands no water can be taken by a Brahmin. There are only three Ugra-Kshatriya families at Kanchanpur at present. But the Ugra-Kshatriyas were an influential class in the village and, as we have seen earlier, they are at present a predominant caste in the neighbourhood of Kanchanpur. Though not in the traditional group of the Nabasakhs, their status was considered equivalent to the Jal-chal group in 1931 and much earlier. This caste chiefly abounds in this part of Bengal, and forms a strong, courageous community. The men of this class are now trying to improve their social position further. Claiming their origin from a Kshatriya father, they are now claiming themselves to be Kshatriyas and are trying to acquire the status of the twice-born themselves. In fact they already perform rites and ceremonies reserved for those of the innermost citadel only.

In Bengal, the *Pallav Gops** are not amongst the traditional Nabasakhs and in 1931 they were classed in the third group of castes having doubtful status. Since then the Gops have improved their positions in this area, and in common behaviour they are more or less accepted as a jal-chal caste. Manu gave them a degraded status, as they used to geld their male calves but as a class of milkmen, they are in a position of vantage and who is there so bold as to say that not a drop of water has been accepted by him from the milkman? The result, however, is that people seldom refuse to take water from the Gops, and many even class them amongst the Nabasakhs. But

* According to tradition the 'Sadgops' and the ordinary 'Gops' originally belonged to the same stock. Among them those who took to cultivation were ranked as 'Sadgops' i.e., the clean Gops; and those who took to cattle-breeding were given a lower status because of the reasons stated above. The latter are colloquially known as the 'Goalas', but they love to call themselves as 'Pallava Gops' in our Kanchanpur.

the conservatives among the Brahmmins still reject the Gops as polluting and they specially behave in that manner in all ceremonial and ritual situations.

2.13 *Jal-achal Castes:*

Neither treated as outside the pale of caste nor accepted within the respectable circle of the jal-chals, there is a group of castes termed in the village parlance as jal-achal, i.e., from whose hand water is not acceptable.

The Subarnabaniks, the *Sunris*, the *Chunaris*, the *Kaibartas* and the *Sutradhars* are amongst them. At present there is one Vaishnab household in the village. He is a refugee settler and before joining the Vaishnab sect, was a *Namasudra* by caste. A great majority of the present Vaishnabs of the mendicant order come from low and lost castes.

They simply take the *bhek*, that is, put on the garb of a mendicant and become *Vairagis*. The Vairagi order is more or less becoming a caste but from them water is not usually acceptable to a high caste villager. As one of these remarked: "I am not prepared to accept water from a Vaishnab who has turned so on losing his caste." ('Jat hariye Bostom'—as they say in village parlance.)

The Subarnabaniks claim to be descendants of traders from Rajputana, who belonged to the *Vaishya* caste, i.e., the third estate of the Vedic Aryan society. It is said that at one time these Baniks were held in high esteem in our society, but owing to their refusal to finance king Vallal Sen of Bengal (1158–1179 A.D.), they were degraded in status by a royal fiat. They were supposed to pursue an occupation of greed, and hence came to be looked down upon. Indeed even in these days their social position is considered to be so inferior that in the marriage of a Vaidya boy of our village in recent years, the vessels and plates used by his Subarnabanik friends in the dinner became of no further use to the owner, and they were, thereafter, given away to some low-caste neighbours. During my stay in the village I personally saw an elderly Brahmin widow refuse treatment from our Subarnabanik Doctor on the ground that she could not accept water from a Banik—as medicine is usually mixed in water for service. In serious crises, however, I found on enquiry, such scruples do not come in the way.

The Subarnabaniks of this village are noted for their wealth and with education and culture they are trying to raise their caste position in the society. But this seems not very easy to achieve against the thwarting attitude of superiority of the higher castes in the village. But, as individuals, many Subarnabaniks are held in consideration and esteem in the village, and their contributions to the community festivals and rituals are accepted with grace.

The Sunris, the caste of liquor-sellers, have also got an inferior social status as a caste community. None of them has at present any liquor-shop, and they have turned into an agricultural caste in the village. The Kaibartas* are a class of fishermen. Their occupation of fishing bore a stigma and consequently water would not be accepted from them. At Kanchanpur they have acquired, like the Sunris, land for cultivation which is their main occupation at present. Fishing is still the subsidiary occupation for all the Kaibarta households at Kanchanpur.

The Chunaris are a class of lime-makers. The name of the caste has been derived from the Bengali word *chun* which means lime and Chunari therefore means 'a manufacturer of lime'. Most of them have taken to share-cropping at present though some of them still make lime from shells by an indigenous process which they practise as a subsidiary occupation. The Chunaris of the village consider their place in the social hierarchy at least as high as the Subarnabaniks, Sunris and Kaibartas, but their complaint is that they are not given the esteem due to them because of their comparative poverty. They also state that they are the *Varnakar* (colour-maker) *Tamulis*, and perhaps by this claim they expect their status to be raised to that of the clean castes to which the Tamulis undoubtedly belong. It is a familiar method of raising the status of a caste—that of adopting the name of a much higher caste and qualifying it by a suitable adjective. It is hoped that in the course of time, the adjective will have less significance than the caste name chosen and thus the status of the group will be raised in the estimation of others.

* The 'Kaibartas' are of two broad classes: (i) the 'Hele' i.e., the ploughing 'Kaibartas' and (ii) the 'Jele' i.e., the fishermen 'Kaibartas'. As cultivators the former have a socially favourable position, and are otherwise known as 'Mahishyas' in Bengal. They are not however represented in Kanchanpur where the 'Kaibartas' are of the 'Jele' group.

There is now only one Sutradhar household in the village, and the man there is living in single blessedness. He is the village carpenter, as well as an idol maker, as he has acquired some skill in the making of the earthen images of the Hindu deities. The villagers do not like to lose the services of this Sutradhar, so much so that they are quite lenient with him even when he does not follow the correct behaviour-pattern approved by the society.

2.14 *The Exterior Castes:*

The fourth group in Kanchanpur, is what might be called the Exterior Group which consists of the Out-castes, the Santhals and the Muslims. Theoretically the Santhals and the Muslims belong to other groups than the Hindu castes. The former are a tribe, but apparently on their way to becoming a caste; the latter as represented in Kanchanpur profess to practise a different faith, but apparently consist of converts from the low castes and have much in common with them. Paradoxically enough, the Out-castes too are a part of the caste system and yet excluded from the inner circle of Hinduism. Many have called them the 'Exterior Castes' as opposed to what may be called the 'Interior Castes'. Some have labelled them as 'Depressed Classes'; the British Government has listed them as 'Scheduled Castes'. Gandhiji classed them as *Harijans* i.e., 'the beloved of God', but none of these euphemisms helped to raise their position materially, each becoming only another synonym for the others.

Examining this fourth group in our village community more closely, we find that they are 'below the sort', they are the *chhota-loks* (i.e., the debased or small men) of the village society. There is a traditional social barrier which prevents them from moving upwards. They hang around and move on the periphery, neither allowed to come within nor allowed to detach themselves from Hindu village society.

It has already been noted that while *jal-chal* and *jal-achal* classification is a useful line of describing the caste society, it is not of much use as a test for exterior castes. Thus the Subarnabaniks and some others, as discussed earlier, are amongst the *jal-achal* group but they are not considered 'exterior' in our village.

The psychology of social gradation imposed upon the exterior castes has introduced caste distinctions within the exterior castes

also. In Kanchanpur, the Bagdis occupy the highest place among the exterior castes. They love to call themselves *Byagra-Kshatriyas*, thereby persuading themselves and trying to persuade others to regard them of a Kshatriya origin. But among themselves there are four sub-castes three of which are represented in Kanchanpur—the *Tentule*, the *Kush-Mete* and the *Dule*. Of these the Tentule Bagdis consider themselves of superior status and do not intermarry with their own sub-castes.

The distinctive status of the Bagdis amongst the exterior castes is borne out by the fact that they are privileged to have the services of the village barbers and the *dais* (midwives), while other exterior castes do not receive such services. The *Dhawa* Muslims of the village, however, are entitled to these privileges, though they are outside Hindu society. It is surmised by the villagers that the Muslim families got these privileges at the time when the Nawabs ruled, and the tradition is still continuing.

Among the exterior castes, the Kotals of the village are an influential class and have taken to agriculture as their occupation. The term Kotal, it is understood, is an adopted name in the place of the word *Chandal* to which tradition has attached a terrible stigma. The first Chandala, it is said, was the offspring of a *pratiloma* (hypogamous) marriage between a Brahmin woman and a Sudra man. Such marriages were highly disfavoured by the Aryan invaders, and tradition gave its offsprings the lowest place in the Hindu society. In some places these people go by the name of *Namasudra*, and possibly they originally belonged to an aboriginal tribe. In fact it seems that all the exterior castes at one time were such tribes, and were in course of time transformed into castes and admitted in the Hindu society but not allowed within the respectable social pale.

At Kanchanpur, the Kotals are more advanced in wealth and education in comparison with the other exterior castes and are consequently trying to raise their social status.

The three *Kora* families for example have been settled here only for the last two generations but are claiming to be Hindus. Originally a Kolarian tribe, they have grown into a caste here, but they have not yet been able to appoint a Brahmin priest to minister at their rituals. The village barbers do not render them service,

and the *dais* do not visit their houses overtly. But they have accepted the gods of the village and cast derogatory looks on the new Kora immigrants who come from their native districts to seek work in Kanchanpur.

2.15 *Ulterior Groups:*

Eight *Santhal* families are now settled in the village. They claim that they are kins to the Hindus and have begun to adopt the Hindu customs and practices like the Koras. It was noted in *Kanchanpur Revisited* that there was only periodical immigration of the Santhals and there was not a single Santhal settler in the village at that time. Besides these eight settled families there is of course a regular ebb and tide in the flow of Santhal labour in the village, and, especially in the harvest season, a large number of temporary settlements of the Santhals still spring up at Kanchanpur.

In 1874 there were no Muslim families in Kanchanpur; in 1931 there were no less than eleven: their number has dwindled again into only two in 1958. The increase in the number of Hindu field labourers put them into difficulty, and many of them also liked to migrate to neighbouring Muslim villages to live there with their co-religionists. The remaining two householders prefer to stay on in the village where, in the ties of master and servant, they are almost members of Hindu households, and living in an Hinduized atmosphere they appear more like Hindus than Muslims. It is true that they worship Allah, and follow the ritual of the Muslim life-cycle. But the great gods of the Hindus—the old Siva, the Great *Kali*, Mother *Manasa* and so on, all command respect from them and they promise sacrifices to them in times of difficulties. They observe and participate in the village *parvans* and festivals—such as the *Navanna* and the *Pitha-sankranti*. They share in the joys and the merriments during the pujas and though they are not supposed to worship the earthen gods, they have no objection to lend their help in shouldering the earthen images in the processions round the village.

2.2 PATTERN OF PARTICIPATION

All that has been said above regarding the inter-caste and intra-caste relations will be borne out by the following description of a

festival meal in which all the people of the village participate annually.

Sri N. Chakravarti, a rich, childless householder celebrates the Basanti Puja honouring the Goddess Annapurna each year and gives a banquet to the villagers on the occasion coinciding with March-April. The host is a Brahmin and all food is also prepared by authentic Brahmins. Moreover, it is Devi Annapurna's *prasad* (leavings of food partaken of by a deity). There are therefore, no inhibitions to participating and all are glad to come. Formerly hundred per cent of the villagers were invited, but in recent years the proportion of the villagers participating in it has been reduced. Still, all relatives and intimate friends and representatives from all Hindu households of the village are invited to the feast.

In the morning of the day of the feast, a Brahmin was deputed by the householder to invite the high castes; a Nاپit was similarly asked to go round the village for inviting the jal-chal, the jal-achal and the exterior castes. According to custom, the invitees were to be again called to the feast at the proper time, by a Brahmin and a Nاپit respectively; a person who is not thus reminded again would not come to the feast.

The villagers attach great significance to the caste status of the person who is deputed for conveying the invitations. The deputy, I understand, may be a person of higher caste status than the person invited; he must be at least of equal status. His position cannot be lower, and if it be so it is an affront. The system of delegating a Brahmin for the high castes and a Nاپit for the rest, has taken almost the force of a custom.

What happened once in the times of an influential zaminder of the village has left behind an imprint in the form of a jocular phrase—"the barber as the mean"—still current in the village. On the occasion of a feast in his house, the said zamindar sent his *Nagdi* (peon) for conveying the invitations to the middle and the lower castes. As it happened the Nagdi was a *Hari*, and the middle castes, and especially the Sadgops felt insulted and there was great dissatisfaction and agitation. The zamindar was made aware of the situation and he understood that his procedure for invitation had not been proper. But it was then time for the dinner, and what could

be done? A shrewd Brahmin, a friend to the zamindar, suggested that the situation might be remedied if a Brahmin instead of a Napit could be deputed to make the second call for dinner. The zamindar requested the adviser himself to do that 'honourable' task—and a zamindar's request could not be refused in those days. The Hari and the Brahmin deputies, taken together, must have produced the "barber as the mean", and the zamindar came out of the situation with good grace.

Let us now attend the feast at the house of the Chakravartis. The dinner starts after 1 o'clock in the day and ends at sun-set. In the first batch, the high castes are seated—the Brahmins, the Subarna, banik Brahmins, the Goswamis, the Vaidyas and the Kayasthas. They are, no doubt, grouped in different rows according to their castes, but all the dishes are served to them at the same time.

In the other villages of the region the Kayasthas, I understand, have a little lower social position, and in such feasts they have to wait till the Brahmins have practically finished their eating. In other words it is not the custom to distribute rice (the first item) to Kayasthas until *tak* (soury relish served at the end of dinner) is served to the Brahmins. The Kayasthas of this village, therefore, avoid all outside inter-village social dinners. Their social position in this village was raised possibly in the regime of the Kayastha zamindars, and their influence is still continuing in the traditions of this village.

When the first batch has finished, the upper caste women, and the middle caste men come for their seats. The women of the high castes take their seats in the rooms as well as the raised verandahs of the houses. The men of the middle castes, including the jal-chal and the jal-achal groups, usually sit on the lower verandahs or the *uthan* (courtyard) below. Needless to say that all the castes sit in different groups in different rows.

An adjoining house was, also requisitioned for the arrangement of the seats. Service started and all these groups began to eat at the same time. When this batch also finished their meals, the third group sat for theirs. This consisted of the women of the middle castes and the men of the exterior castes. These women did not go inside the rooms, but took their seats in the verandahs, while the low-

caste men all sat on the *uthan*, i.e., the earth-yard of the two houses. In the fourth batch the women of the exterior castes came to eat when their men-folk had finished, and took their seats on the same *uthans*.

Lastly, when evening was drawing near the Santhals came and took their seats and when their eating was over the feast had come to an end.

2.3 THE RESIDENTIAL DISPERSION OF THE CASTES

Map No. III illustrates the residential dispersion of the castes in the village of Kanchanpur.

Generally speaking, the interior of the village is inhabited by the upper castes, while the exterior castes are scattered on the outskirts. The local saying is : "The Haris must be kept in segregation, and the *Doms* on the fringe". That is to say there must be respectable distance between the dwelling places of the 'clean castes' and the polluting ones. The middle castes in the village, including both the *jal-chal* and the *jal-achal* groups, are marked in blue.

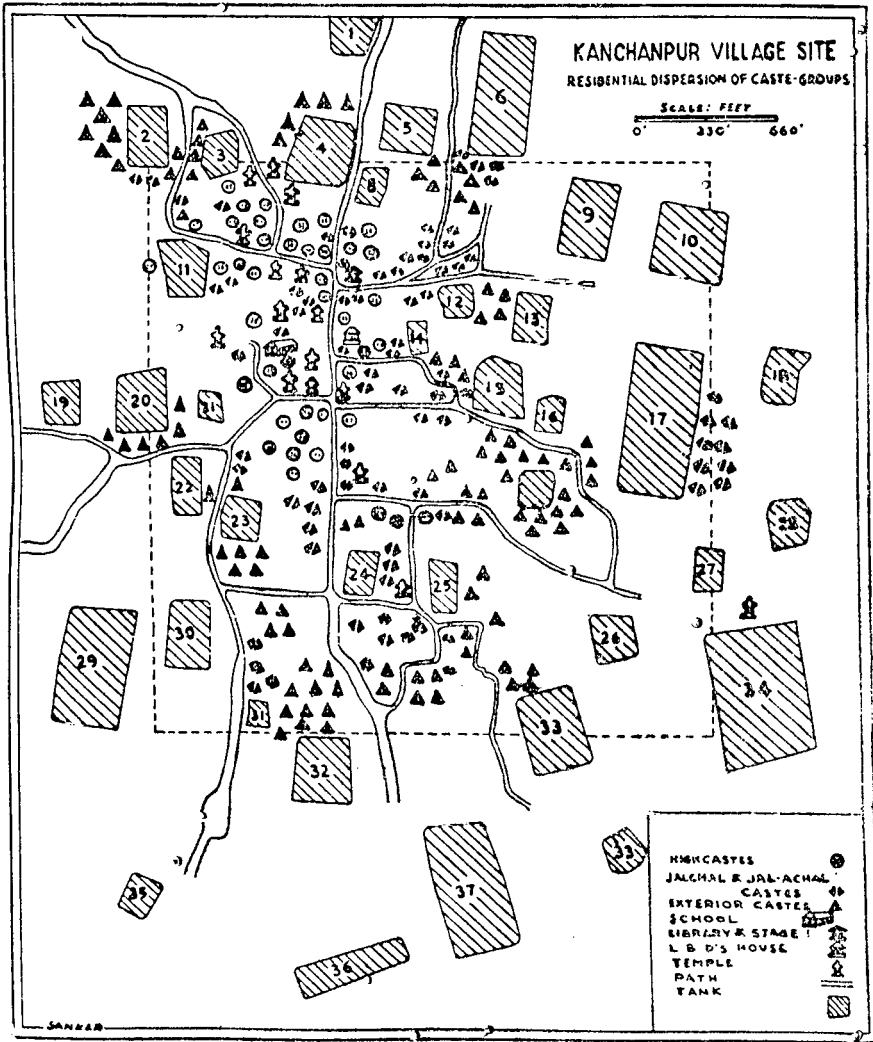
Map No. IV further clarifies the aggregation of castes within each of the three main groups. A majority of the Brahmins and all the Kayastha households are in the *Uttarpara* or northside of the village. The rest of the Brahmins including the Goswamis, the Subarnabanik Brahmins and the Vaidyas are in the *Dakshinpara*—the southside.

The Sadgops mainly live in the north-side, while the Subarnabaniks, excepting two households, belong to *Dakshinpara*. Five Gop families live in the *Goylapara* in the north-east, and six of them are in the *Ayapara* in the south-west. The other four Gop families are sprinkled in the centre and the south.

The Sunris reside beyond the Dutta's tank in the east, in an isolated compact group—and their ward is known as the *Sunripara*. The Chunaris live in one block, known as *Chunaripara* near the *Dighi* tank of the village.

The 49 households of the Bagdis are scattered in four clusters in all the four directions—north and south, east and west. The Kotals,

excepting the family of their *Sardars* in the north-side, all live in the south-side in two clusters of homesteads. One of these just borders on the north-side and the other is to be found in the extreme south. At a little distance away to the west from the village there is a settlement of the *Kotal's* in the area known as *Barabagan*, but as it is not an integral part of the village proper, and falls in *Kaligram* mouza, it has not been taken into account in this survey.



Map No. III

The Haris are found to live in three groups—beyond the *Patkel* tank on the north, near *Poddar* tank in the south-east and also in the

south-west on the embankments of the Nanda's tank. The *Bauris* however are concentrated in one group—the *Bauripara* of the village which lies at the southern end of Kanchanpur.

The *Muchis* live to the east of the village near the *Bagdipara* of that area. The *Koras* are in the south-east, and further to the end of that side are the two families of the Dhawa Muslims—living in the area known as the '*Dhawapara*' in the village. The settlement of the Santhals is to the north-west on the embankments of the *Bene*-tank, and has come to be known as the *Santhalpara*.

LIST OF TANKS IN PALASHI VILLAGE, BURDWAN DISTRICT

(Maps No. III and IV)

1. Narayan Sila	20. Roy Sinha's Tank
2. Bene Pukur	21. Jom Gore
3. Banerjee Pukur	22. Karal tank
4. Patkel Pukur	23. Nanda's Tank
5. Chhoto Dutta's Pukur	24. Chandra's Tank
6. Dighi Pukur	25. Am Pukur (Dhawapara)
7. Kangra Gore	26. Buri Pukur
8. Chalda Gore	27. Saran Ghosh's Tank
9. Mandal tank	28. Gopal Ghosh's Ber
10. Day tank	29. Paul's Tank
11. Singhas' Tank	30. Path's Tank
12. Jani Pukur	31. Sila Pukur (Bauripara)
13. Mayra Pukur	32. Purana Pukur
14. Seal Pukur	33. Poddar's Tank
15. Chand Dutta's Tank	34. Anddy's Tank
16. Am Pukur (Dharmatala)	35. Bhargosh Tank (Smasan)
17. Boro Dutta's Tank	36. Siker Dighi
18. Khan Pukur	37. Saha's Tank
19. Amla Pukur	38. Lal Das's Tank

The rest of the smaller castes are sprinkled here and there.

2.4 TRADITIONAL CASTE CHARACTERS

Living together generation after generation and continuing to play the roles assigned to them by society, most castes have come to possess some peculiar qualities of their own. This has resulted in the fixation of a traditional character-type for many of the castes. There have also come into currency many sayings and proverbs in our rural society to illustrate such popular 'caste' characters.

For example, of the men of great birth, the Brahmins, it is said:—

“Bamun, Badal, Baan
Dakhina pelei jan.”

That is, the Brahmins, the rains and the flood all three go away as soon as they get the *dakhina*. Here is a pun on the word *dakhina* in the couplet; it means the 'southern wind' in case of the rains and the flood, but 'fees' in the case of the Brahmins. The Brahmins render important services to the community by offering ministrations in all ritual situations. But they think more of the fees that are given to them at the end of the functions and lose interest in the occasion after being duly paid. According to another saying, "a Brahmin is a beggar even when he owns a lac of rupees". Apart from greed the Brahmins are also said to be very fond of feasts and are proverbially great smokers. A *kalki* (a small earthen pot containing tobacco for puffing through a *hookah*) which has been puffed away by a Brahmin is said to leave no tobacco in that pot, and the next smoker who takes the *kalki* gets nothing, and this has given rise to the phrase: 'like a *kalki* puffed away by a Brahmin!'

The Goswami Brahmins, known in the village parlance as the *Gosain Thakurs*, are Vaishnab in religion. There are many other Vaishnabs in the village and they belong to various castes—such as the Sadgops, the Gops, the Bagdis, the Kotals and so on. In fact, the Vaishnabs do not form a caste. On the other hand they cut across the divisions of caste. Sri Chaitanya, the great religious reformer of Bengal of the 16th century, spread Vaishnavism to save the then Hindu society from the corroding forces of 'casteism'. The Bengal Vaishnabs are followers of Shri Chaitanya, and the region around Kanchanpur is a stronghold of Vaishnavism.

The Vaishnab group is not a caste: but there is a Vaishnab character and the people well know what traits of character they should seek in a Vaishnab. "I had a great desire in my mind" runs a popular saying "to lead the life of a Vaishnab; but I failed to cross the very first hurdle: Lowlier than the leaves of grass". This refers to the neatly defined creed of the Vaishnabs: "Lowlier than the leaves of grass, more patient than the standing tree, honouring the dishonoured brethren, the Vaishnab should ever sing the glories of the Lord".

The Kayastha and the Napit are said to be very quick-witted and shrewd and are often referred to as the jackal and the crow of village society. One sometimes hears such remarks from other castes: "Oh

you son of a Napit, you are very clever. When your mouth says 'brother, brother', something else moves your bones at the same time". Or a villager, while referring to the cunning behaviour of a Kayastha, may be heard to cite an oft-quoted saying:

The dead body of a Kayastha
 Floats still on water;
 But the crow says, what is he feigning for?
 (Kayeth more jale bhase
 Kak bale kon chhale achhe).

Of the agricultural castes in the middle group, the Sadgops are noted for their submissive attitude and are said to have no capacity to imbibe culture. According to a village saying a *chasa* (a cultivator) cannot be made to imbibe culture!

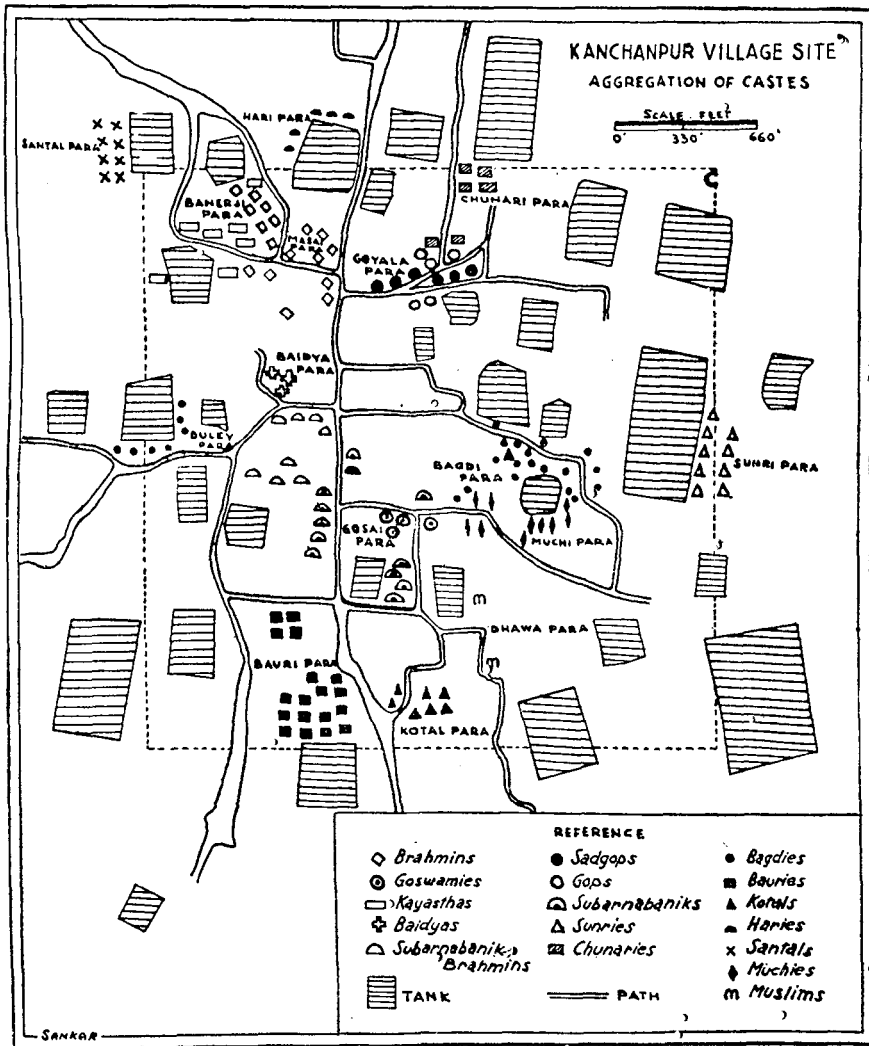
The Ugra-kshatriyas, on the other hand, are noted for their courage and independence. The Rev. Day in his book gives a delineation of their character which corresponds well with the popular estimation in our villages. He writes, "They are known to be a bold and somewhat fierce race, and less patient of any injustice or oppression than the ordinary Bengali raiyat.... The phrase 'Aguri *gonar*, or the 'Aguri bully', which has passed into a proverb, indicates that the Aguris are, in the estimation of their countrymen, a hot-blooded class; that they are fearless and determined in their character, and that they resent the slightest insult that is offered them".

The Tanti (weaver) and the Gop (milkman) are said to be the dolts of the society. The Bengali word *boka* (stupid) is an adjective which is proverbially associated with a Tanti, and a popular saying fixes eighty years as the age of maturity for a Goala (i.e. Gop). As regards the traditional character of the Tanti, I again quote the following from the book of the Rev. Day.

"Lancashire weavers are, we believe, very sharp—some say a little too sharp in their dealings; but we know not how it is that the Bengal weaver has, from time out of mind, been noted for his stupidity. In point of mental acuteness he is the very antipodes of the barber. *Bokaram* did no discredit to his caste, as he possessed no ordinary degree of stupidity. His friends used to say that providence had meant to make him an ass, but through inadvertence made him into a man".

“Thak Tamli, bhisan, Tili
 Sonar Bener sathe path na chali
 Jadi chalbi pathe, paysa nibi gnete”.

The Tamulis (a trading class absent at Kanchanpur) are cheats and dangerously so are the Tilis. You should never walk in company with a *Sonar Bene* (i.e. Subarnabanik) on the road. If you happen to do so, you should keep your purse safe in the waist-knot of the cloth you wear.



Map No. IV

The Sunris as seller of country-wine come in contact mainly with the low caste men addicted to drinking. Not only is the Sunris' occupation considered degrading, but his character too is deemed to be void of any honour and integrity. "The drunkard as a witness to the Sunri" is a phrase that has passed into a proverb, and indicates the low estimation in which a Sunri is held in village society. But now that the Sunris of Kanchanpur have turned into an agricultural caste, the stigma on their character is slowly vanishing.

Among the exterior castes, the Bagdis, who style themselves as Byagra-Kshatriyas, are known to be a bold and fierce race like the Ugra-Kshatriyas. Possibly at one time the Bagdis formed a martial tribe and their racial ferocity has given birth to such saying as

"Bagh, Bagdi, Mos,
Lathi thanga cchara, kachh na hos"

This is, "You should not come near a tiger, a Bagdi or a buffalo, without a club or a weapon in hand!"

All the exterior castes are summarily termed *chhoto-loks*, i.e. the 'small or debased men'. As '*chhoto-loks*', they are necessarily devoid of all good qualities. Unclean in mind and body, they pollute the respectable castes by their touch, and so they must go to live in segregated wards. As their services are useful, they must be settled on the village borders, but kept under constant discipline. As regards these castes, a village proverb says

"Keep them by the side of the village.
And show them the clenched fists every now and then".

2.5 LIVING TOGETHER

The people of Kanchanpur have been described above on the basis of the caste system, as it still determines to a very large extent the behaviour pattern of our village community. Each caste has its social status in regard to other castes, and a person in our village world is invariably seen as a member of a particular caste. The birth of a person in a caste, therefore, is still a potent factor in the villager's life.

But the villagers do not see the caste as a menace to their life. On the other hand they have accepted it as the very basis of their life, and their pattern of living is moulded accordingly.

On the caste system, the Rev. Day wrote as follows:

“The system of caste prevents the different classes of Hindus from full social intercourse with one another. *Aguris* will not eat and intermarry with any that do not belong to that caste; and the same is true of the thirty-six castes in which the whole Hindu community in Bengal is said to be divided; but short of eating, drinking and intermarrying, there is a good deal of intercourse and kindly feeling between members of different castes” And again, : “Though the system of caste does not allow a blacksmith to dine with a carpenter, it does not seem to us to impede the flow of brotherly kindness between members of the two different guilds. There is no country in the world where the spirit of caste is not to be found in some shape or other. In India, caste is practically based on occupations, people who pursue the same trade forming one caste by themselves; in England, it is based chiefly on money, the richer class forming the *Brahmins* and the poorer, the *chandals* of English society. In its practical working, though not in its theory, the Indian system of caste is hardly worse than the English system. In England, though a rich goldsmith dines with a rich cotton spinner, he does not admit to his table a very poor member of his own guild; in India, a rich goldsmith does not dine in the company of a rich cotton-spinner, but cheerfully admits to his a very poor goldsmith. In our opinion, this particular phase of the English system of caste is a great deal worse than that of the Hindu system”.

The fact is that in spite of the restrictions on commensality and intermarriage, and in spite of the order of precedence and graded hierarchy amongst the different castes, the villagers live together more with a sense of community than of cleavage. The villagers do not see the caste as an outsider does. They are born in the caste system which provides them a fixed social milieu, and they live there as freely as fish grow and move in water. They accept the distinctions which birth in a particular caste has brought for them, and live and work for themselves and others as well. The priests, the *baniks*, the smiths, the barbers, the cultivators, the *gops*, the *dais* and all other occupationists do not work exclusively for their castes but for others as well. The relations of masters and servants, or creditors and debtors, patrons and clients cut across the divisions of castes. And the castes join the community festivals and rituals, and they belong to the village community, as much as an individual as a member of a caste.

The village schism, that was observed in 1933, is still there, but the group conflict then as now is more regional between the north side and the south side, and even this has softened down to a great extent in these years. It may be that 'the spirit of caste' sometimes rises to spoil human relationships, but on the whole Kanchanpur lives, as said above, more with a sense of solidarity than of split.

CHAPTER THREE

THE CONTOURS OF CASTE : A DEMOGRAPHIC SURVEY

The preceding chapter presented the cultural pattern as inherited from the past. In this chapter we shall try to present the same pattern in terms of existing contours based on numbers and proportions which appear to change from time to time.

3.1 INCREASING POPULATION AND CHANGING RATIOS

The numerous large tanks and decorated temples, some even bearing the dates of their construction, indicate the prosperity of Kanchanpur in the eighteenth century. Even the picture of rural life in the mid-nineteenth century, as given by Lal Behari Day, depicts a fairly high degree of prosperous living at that period.

In the seventies of the last century, the Rev. Day had written that Kanchanpur had "a population of about fifteen hundred souls belonging to most of the thirty-six castes into which the Hindus of Bengal are generally divided, the predominating caste in the village was the Sadgops of the agricultural class". The Ugra-Kshatriyas, or Aguris, were also engaged in agricultural pursuits, and, though less numerous than the Sadgops, were an influential class in the village. It appears therefore that in the socio-economic structure of the mid-nineteenth century the Zamindar dominated the scene while the agricultural castes, the Sadgops and the Aguris, formed the economic backbone of the village. There was also a considerable Brahmin population. The Kayasthas were few in number while there was the usual complement of Vaidyas (the medical caste), of Blacksmiths, Barbers, Weavers, Spice-sellers, Oil-men, and castes such as Bagdis, Doms, Haris, and so on. "Strange to say", remarked the Reverend Day, "there is hardly a single Muhamedan family in the village, the votaries of that faith being less numerous in western than in eastern Bengal."

In *Kanchanpur Revisited* (1933), the present writer had indicated the group composition of the village population from certain census data for 1931 obtained from the Supervisor's copy in the village. That data showed the total population of the village to consist of only

872 persons distributed among 270 households comprising different castes and caste-groups. Unfortunately the number of people in each caste group was not ascertainable at that time. Dividing the figure for the total population with the number of households the average number of persons per household worked out to only 3.2. Evidently the decay, begun in the 1870's, had continued over the next sixty years and the population of Kanchanpur had been reduced to half of what it was when the Rev. Day had written about the village.

The next point of time at which we can get any information about the population of Kanchanpur is the Census year of 1951. The Census Handbook for Burdwan District gives some data for each mouza (see Table 1) from which one gathers that the total population of Shona Palasi in that year was 1101. This figure, compared with that for 1931, indicates an increase of 21 per cent over the preceding twenty years, or, roughly, one per cent per year.

In our present survey, however, some of the village young men themselves prepared a house to house list (summary in Table 2) which showed the total population of Kanchanpur in 1959 to be no less than 1466—an increase of 33 per cent in eight years, or 4 per cent per year. In other words what Kanchanpur had lost by way of population in six decades, 1874 to 1933, it has regained in one decade of Independence. The opening of the canal and more facilities of cultivating land serve as partial explanation, but it needs to be noted that this rate of increase is double that of what we found in the neighbouring District of Birbhum, where the steady increase of population was two per cent over the past thirty years. Perhaps Kanchanpur's having lagged behind until recently accounts for the more sudden spurt.

And yet the net change in the number of households over the past three decades is not conspicuous. The number of Brahmin households has decreased from 60 to 50 representing a loss of nearly 20 per cent. The number of Bagdi households has increased from

The division of the social groups as high castes, the Nabasakhs, the castes of doubtful status, and the depressed or untouchable castes of 1933 are basically the same as the high, jal-chal, jal-achal and exterior castes of this study. A little change has, however, been made as follows: In 1934, the Gops (Goalas) were placed in the third group (corresponding to the present jal-achal category), while the Baishnab was placed along with the high castes. Here the former caste is raised to the 'jal-chal' and the 'Baishnab' degraded to the 'jal-achal' group for reasons discussed on pp. 24-25.

TABLE 2 : DISTRIBUTION OF POPULATION 1931-1959

caste group	number of households		caste group	number of households		
	1931	1959		1931	1959	
(1)	(2)	(3)	(1)	(2)	(3)	
A. high castes			C. jal-achal			
1. Brahmin	62	37	1. Subarna Banik	25	23	
2. Goswami		4	2. Chunari	4	5	
3. S. Banik Brahmin		9	3. Sutradhar	3	1	
4. Vaidya	5	4	4. Sunri	4	9	
5. Kayastha	6	7	5. Kaibarta	3	5	
total	73	61	6. Baishnab	2	1	
6. percentage of total	27	21	7. Garai	1	-	
7. number of persons	-	362	8. Swarnakar	2	-	
8. number per household	-	5.9	total	44	45	
B. jal-chal			9. percentage of total			
1. Sadgop	22	19	10. number of persons	-	272	
2. Ugra-Kshatriya	3	3	11. number per household	-	6.0	
3. Gop	16	15	D. exterior caste			
4. Gandhabanik	4	5	1. Bagdi	27	49	
5. Napit	3	2	2. Hari	17	22	
6. Karmakar	1	1	3. Kotal	16	15	
7. Tanti	2	1	4. Bauri	15	22	
8. Modok	2	1	5. Muchi	7	6	
9. Teli	1	-	6. Kora	3	6	
10. Tili	-	1	7. Ghatwal	2	-	
11. Malakar	1	-	8. Dom] §	-	1	
total	55	48	total	87	121	
12. percentage of total	20	17	9. percentage of total	34	43	
13. number of persons	-	265	10. number of persons	-	537	
14. number per household	-	5.5	11. number per household	-	4.4	
E. exterior group			1. Santal			
			2. Muslim			
			total			
			3. percentage of total			
			4. number of persons			
			5. number per household			
			total			
			number of persons			
			number per household			
grand total			1931	1959	1931	1959
			270	285	872	1466
					3.2	5.1

TABLE 2(A) : CASTE-WISE VARIATION IN THE NUMBER OF HOUSEHOLDS AT KANCHANPUR, 1931-1959

caste	number of households		caste	number of households	
	1931	1959		1931	1959
(2)	(2)	(3)	(1)	(2)	(3)
<i>high castes</i>			<i>jal-achal</i>		
1. Brahmin	62	37	1. Subarnabanik	25	23
2. Goswami		4	2. Chunari	4	6
3. S.B. Brahmin		9	3. Sutradhar	3	1
4. Vaidya	5	4	4. Sunri	4	9
5. Kayastha	6	7	5. Kaibarta	3	5
<i>jal-chal</i>			6. Baishnab	2	1
1. Sagop	22	19	7. Garai	1	-
2. Ugra-Kshatriya	3	3	8. Swarnakar	2	-
3. Gops	16	15	<i>exterior caste</i>		
4. Gandha-banik	4	5	1. Bagdi	27	49
5. Napit	3	2	2. Hari	17	22
6. Karmakar	1	1	3. Kotal	16	15
7. Tanti	2	1	4. Bauri	15	22
8. Modak	2	1	5. Muchi	7	6
9. Teli	1	-	6. Kora	3	6
10. Tili	-	1	7. Ghatwal	2	-
11. Malakar	1	-	8. Dom	-	1
			<i>exterior group</i>		
			1. Santal	-	8
			2. Muslim	11	2

TABLE 2(B) : NUMBER AND VARIATION OF HOUSEHOLDS ACCORDING TO CASTE-GROUPS 1931-1959

caste-group	actual number		percent to total	
	1931	1959	1931	1959
(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
1. high caste	73	61	27	21
2. jalchal caste	55	48	20	17
3. jal-achal caste	44	45	16	16
4. exterior caste	87	121	34	43
5. exterior group				
Santhal	-	8	3	3
Muslim	11	2		
all castes	270	285	100	100

TABLE 2(C) : POPULATION AND MEAN SIZE OF FAMILIES ACCORDING TO CASTE-GROUPS

caste-group	no. of people	no. of households	no. per household
(1)	(2)	(3)	(5)
1959			
high caste	362	61	5.9
jal-chal caste	265	48	5.5
jal-achal caste	272	45	6.0
exterior caste	537	121	4.4
exterior group	30	10	3.0
1959 all	1466	285	5.1
1931 all	872	270	3.2

27 to 49, an addition of 40 per cent, while the increase in the total number of exterior caste households amounts to 25 per cent.

One is led to surmise that the Brahmins, now getting more income from the land cultivated by tenants have a tendency to move over

CHART-1

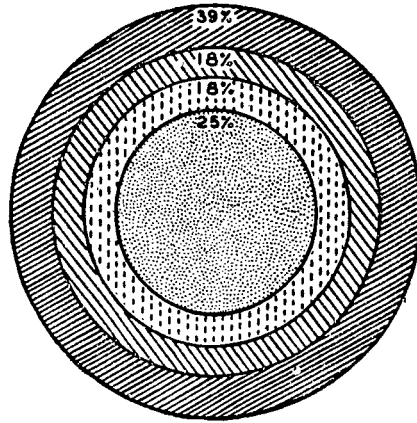






DIAGRAM No.-1

CONTOURS OF CASTE

REFERENCE

-  HIGH CASTES
-  JAL-CHAL
-  JAL-ACHAL
-  EXTERIOR

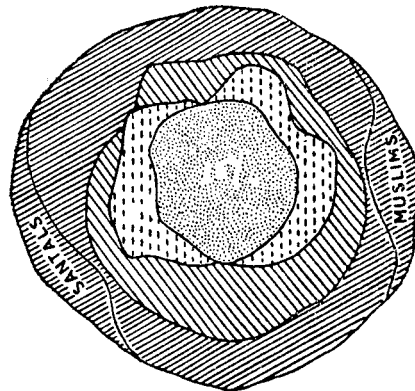


DIAGRAM No.-2

to the town and the city while more intensive agriculture is drawing more and more of the landless labouring castes to the village to cultivate the land either on wage or share basis. But this is a mere sunrise suggested by the population figures. A special study devoted to emigration and immigration during the last nine years would have to be instituted for getting a clear picture of such movements and this is beyond the scope of our present general analysis.

3.2 PROPORTIONAL REPRESENTATION OF GROUP

In the preceding chapter it was suggested that the most significant method of classifying the village population would be to divide them into four groups, the High Castes, the Jal-Chals, the Jai-Achals, and the Exterior Castes. It was also there suggested that their respective positions in the village can best be pictured in the form of concentric circles. Let us here see how these suggestion can be translated into numbers and whether we can get an adequately clear picture of the relations through graphic presentation.

In the table below, column 2 gives the number of people in each of the four groups as found in 1959; in column 3 the figures represent percentages of the total village population.

TABLE 3. THE FOUR GROUPS OF KANCHANPUR
POPULATION—1959

group	actual number	percent
(1)	(2)	(3)
1. high caste	362	25
2. jal-chal castes	265	18
3. jal-achal „	272	18
4. exterior „	567	39
total	1,466	100

Social lay-out and topography, like physical topography, can be best represented not by perfect circles but by irregular contours with bulges and depressions, intersections and overlappings, which give individuality to the social structure of each village. The irregular and elastic nature of the concentric divisions representing social stratification of castes-groups in Kanchanpur, for example, conform more realistically, perhaps to the pattern shown in the third part of the above mentioned figure. Contrary to the exact concentric rings whose boundaries would never intermingle, this pattern suggests

certain contacts between the three inner caste-groups but hardly any between these three and the outer or exterior castes. The only exception to this rule is perhaps that of the negligible number of Muslims even in Kanchanpur: for all practical purposes they are a part of the exterior castes, but in one or two minor aspects their status touches that of the jal-achals—not beyond.

3.3 AGE AND SEX DISTRIBUTION ACCORDING TO CASTE GROUPS

Some light can be thrown on the distinguishing characteristics of the five groups of the population by the per cent proportions representing the different age-groups as seen in Table 4 and the sex-ratios given in Table 5.

TABLE 4. AGE DISTRIBUTION ACCORDING TO CASTE GROUP

group	infants below 6 years	children 6-12	adolescents 13-21	adults 22 & above	total
(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
1. high caste	90	37	70	165	362
2. jal-chal caste	69	30	52	114	265
3. jal-achal caste	58	44	49	121	272
4. exterior caste	149	62	87	269	567
5. ulterior group					
total	366	173	258	669	1466
percentage					
1. high caste	25	10	19	46	100
2. jal-chal caste	26	11	20	43	100
3. jal-achal caste	21	16	18	45	100
4. exterior caste	26	11	15	48	100
5. ulterior group					
all	25	12	17	46	100

TABLE 5. SEX RATIOS (FEMALES PER 100 MALES) ACCORDING TO AGE AND CASTE GROUP

group	infants below 6 years	children 6-12	adolescent 13-21	adults 22 & above	all
(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
1. high castes	88	68	106	106	97
2. jal-chal castes	123	109	117	84	101
3. jal-achal castes	115	175	104	78	101
4. exterior castes	144	63	142	83	101
5. ulterior group					
total	119	90	119	87	100

The first of these shows that the different groups show no striking deviation from the normals of the village as a whole. Kanchanpur as a whole contains 25 per cent toddlers below the age of 6 years; 12 per cent of children between 6 and 12 years age; 17 per cent adolescents between 13 and 21 years while the remaining 46 per cent are adults above the age of 21. Even the deviations from this norm, which are noticeable, are only in cases where the actual numbers they represent are comparatively small.

The sex ratios too as shown in Table 5 present a few abnormalities. Out of the total population of 1466, exactly half the number, 733 are males and 733 are females. In the first and third age group there are 119 females to every 100 males; in the second and fourth age-groups this relation is reversed and there are only 90 and 87 females respectively for every 100 males. The two figures representing extremes are those for the 6 to 12 age-group of children in the jalachal and the exterior castes; in the one it is 175 to 100 and in the other only 63 females to every 100 males; but it must be noted that the actual figures consist of only 44 children in the first and only 62 children in the second sub-group.

A numerical preponderance of one sex as against the other denotes certain characteristics of a given population. An excess of males suggests comparatively recent immigration, an adequacy of labour and a greater expectancy of change. Kanchanpur, evidently, is not conspicuous for any of these situations one way or the other.

3.4 MARITAL CONDITION ACCORDING TO CASTE GROUPS

The actual data for unmarried, married and widowed in the different age groups are represented in Figures 1 to 4 in Chart No. 2. And in Table 6 the data are given on a per cent basis. A perusal of this Table will show that, taking the village population as a whole, 57 per cent of the males and 44 per cent of the females are unmarried; the proportions of the married are more or less equal—39 per cent of the males and 38 per cent of the females falling in that category. In the widowed class, females preponderate; while among males only 4 out of every hundred are widowers, the proportion of widows in the female population is no less than 18 per cent. In 1933 a survey in the neighbouring District of Birbhum had shown that one out of every four females was a widow; the figures

of Kanchanpur today show that the proportion here is now one widow out of every five females.

A more careful perusal of this Table reveals the differences existing between the four groups with regard to this item.

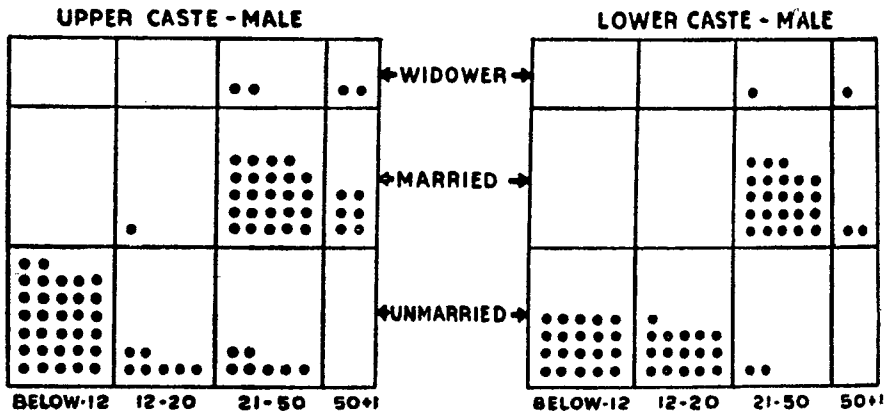
TABLE 6. PERCENTAGE OF THE UNMARRIED, MARRIED AND WIDOWED TO THE TOTAL NUMBER OF PERSONS IN THE GROUP

caste group	all males			adolescent females age : 12-21			all females		
	un- ma- rried	mar- ried	wido- wers	un- mar- ried	mar- ried	widow	un- ma- rried	ma- rried	widow
(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)	(10)
high caste	64	33	3	58	42	-	44	34	22
jal-achal caste	58	37	5	25	71	4	45	37	18
jal-achal caste	59	35	6	44	52	4	51	35	14
exterior caste, santhal, muslim	51	45	4	10	88	2	40	43	17
all castes	57	39	4	31	67	2	44	38	18

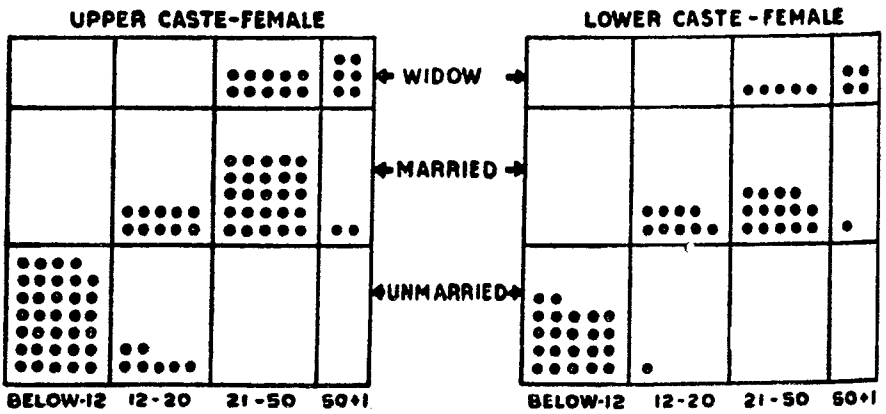
It is apparent that the high castes marry late, while the exterior castes go for early marriage. This is true for both males and females. 64 per cent of the high caste males against 51 per cent of the exterior caste males are found to be unmarried. Similarly 44 per cent of the high caste females as against 40 per cent of the exterior caste women are found to be unmarried. A good number of Subarnabanik men and girls, like the high caste group, are still unmarried. This condition has raised the per cent figures for the unmarried in the jal-achal group, as may be seen from column 8 of Table 6.

Six amongst the boys of 12 to 21 age group are married, the adolescent girls for the corresponding age are mostly married. Still there are 44 amongst the 140 girls of this age-group who are yet to be married. Here again the number of the unmarried is higher in case of the upper castes, and smaller for the exterior castes. The Subarnabaniks' conditions in this respect are similar to the high castes. Of the 11 unmarried adolescent girls in the jal-achal group, ten belong to the Subarnabaniks. The more advanced a community is in education and culture, the higher, it seems, is the age of marriage. Consequently, in such a community there is a greater percentage of unmarried girls. In column 5 of Table 6, it will be seen that of the growing young women 58 per cent of the high castes as against only 10 per cent of exterior castes have not yet been provided with their mates in life.

CHART-2
MARITAL CONDITIONS
OF UPPER AND LOWER CASTES ACCORDING TO AGE-GROUPS



(EACH DOT REPRESENTS 5 PERSONS)



3.5 LITERACY

How Kanchanpur, trains up the young is a subject to which will be given more attention later; but in the meantime it is desirable to get an idea of the extent of literacy and education in our community in general.

Table 7 presents the actual number of literates in the population of Kanchanpur according to caste-groups. The last three columns show the percentage of the literates amongst males, females and total population. Table 8 illustrates the position of the major castes in this respect.

The Subarnabanik community is seen to have got the lead with 73 per cent and 61 per cent of literacy for its males and females respectively. These figures exceed even those for the high castes. The position of the exterior castes in this respect, is still very unhappy and the lack of progress in spite of governmental efforts for the group is remarkable.

Even in this exterior group, however, the Kotals or Namasudras are somewhat advanced. As owners of land they are better off than the other castes of this group and are taking interest in the matter of education as well. Against these the position of the Gops may be contrasted; they remain educationally behind the Kotals although the Gops have a superior caste status and a higher average of land ownership in Kanchanpur.

From the figures given in the body of Tables 7 and 8 it will be seen that of the total 33 per cent of literates in the village, 21 per cent have completed only the primary classes; 11 per cent have completed the secondary school and only 1 per cent of the persons have received college education. The actual number of the persons who have gone upto the college standard, is only ten. Five amongst them belong to the Subarnabanik community, and the other five come from the high castes—3 Brahmins and 2 Kayasthas. All these persons are males. Amongst the females, few have read even upto the secondary classes. In fact the girls of the village do not go even for secondary education. There is only one Brahmin girl of the village who is reading in a secondary school at Burdwan. Eight more females in the village are found to have gone higher than the primary standard—and they are the daughters-in-law of the high castes brought to the village through marriage. These nine girls constitute roughly 1 per cent of the total female population.

CHAPTER FOUR
LAND AND LIVELIHOOD

4.1 WHO OWNS THE LAND AT KANCHANPUR?

Now and then a villager is heard to say that all his life is spent in running after "ghee, salt and rice". In fact, getting the material necessities of food, clothing and shelter occupies a major aspect of living at Kanchanpur, as elsewhere. In the round of life's activities, economic pursuits, therefore, deserve our first attention.

As agriculture is the mainstay of the village, land is seen to be the chief and almost only means of production. It is highly prized, and all savings are invested in land. In our village, the size of a person's agricultural holding is a true index of his economic status. There is only one exception. A Subarnabanik householder has a good income from service, but his surplus after expenses goes to increase his deposits in the banks. He holds no agricultural land, and is the only person in the village whose status does not depend on land-ownership. He is one of the well-to-do families of the village, but excepting this person, it is land-ownership that determines class in our village.

TABLE 9 : CASTE-GROUPS AND LANDHOLDING PATTERN AT KANCHANPUR

caste group	number of households					total
	no land	below 5 bighas	5-20 bighas	21-50 bighas	above 50 bighas	
(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)
1. high caste	6	14	25	14	4	63
2. jal-chal caste	5	14	24	4	1	48
3. jal-achal „	9	7	21	8	—	45
4. exterior caste, santhal & muslim	111	12	7	1	—	131
all castes	131	47	77	27	5	287

According to village standards the families which own no land or less than 5 bighas of land are considered poor. Households that

have 5 to 20 bighas of land are deemed to form lower middle class group; those owning 21–50 bighas are the upper middle class of the village society and those who possess 50 bighas and more are classed as rich. Taking the above criteria as the basis of our class groupings, and taking note of the economic position of our non-cultivating Subarnabanik householder mentioned earlier, we can arrange the socio-economic groups in our village community according to castes and classes as follows:—

TABLE 10 : DISTRIBUTION OF FAMILIES IN DIFFERENT SOCIO-ECONOMIC GROUPS

(a) actual number						
caste group	number of families				total	per cent to total
	rich class	upper middle class	lower middle class	poor class		
(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)
high caste	4	14	25	20	63	22
jal-chal caste	1	4	24	19	48	17
jal-achal caste	—	9	21	15	45	16
exterior caste, santhal and muslim	—	1	7	123	131	45
all castes	5	28	77	177	287	100

(b) per cent distribution					
caste group	rich class	upper middle class	lower middle class	poor class	all
(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
high caste	6.3	22.2	39.8	31.7	100
jal-chal caste	2.1	8.3	50.0	39.6	100
jal-achal caste	—	20.0	46.7	33.3	100
exterior caste	—	0.8	5.3	93.9	100
all castes	1.7	9.8	26.8	61.7	100

Generally speaking, the high castes are the rich class, and the exterior castes form the poor class. But not all high castes are rich nor all exterior castes poor. No less than 31.7 per cent of the high castes are classed as poor, while only 6.3 per cent are said to be rich. That is to say, speaking on the averages amongst the four caste-groups, the high castes may be the richest, but a majority amongst the high caste themselves form the poor or the lower middle class. The jal-achal castes, though they are inferior in social position to the jal-chal castes, have better economic status as a group. It is because of the Subarnabaniks and the Sunris who are economically (and educationally as well) much better off than others in our village community. But it may be noted that only 10% of the families in the group are landless, while the corresponding figure for the group is 20%.*

The interrelations between the economic classes and our social groups may be pictorially represented as in charts 3 and 4.

* In 1933-34, a rough and ready attempt was made to show the economic divisions of the village. It was done on the basis of the assessment list (Vide Table C, p. 27, *Kanchanpur Revisited*) without an actual survey. If we bring those figures here, an apparently comparative table could then be produced.

ECONOMIC GROUPINGS			
1933-34		1958-59	
class	no. of households	class	no. of households
in poverty	72	poor	177
above poverty	152	lower middle	77
below comfort	34	upper middle	28
in comfort	12	rich	5
	270		287

From the above it would seem that the number of rich and fairly well-to-do households has decreased from 46 to 33 whereas the number of poor households has increased from 72 to 177 with also a proportionate decrease in the lower middle class. But it should be noted that actually the figures are not comparable at all. The criteria for the economic standards in 1933-34 were the amounts of U.B. rates payable by the different households. It is unfortunate that the amount of tax which served as a criterion for grouping a household in one or other class is not recorded. This much however is clear that in the 1933-34 standard, if a family was exempted from payment of U.B. tax it was considered to be 'in poverty' level. That year there were 72 such families, but in 1958-59, it was found that less than 40 families were exempted from such payments. The total assessment of the village was found to be on an upward curve. On the whole I am inclined to believe—and this is also the feeling of the villagers themselves—that the general economic conditions of the village have improved since 1934.

CHART-3
CLASSES & CASTE GROUPS

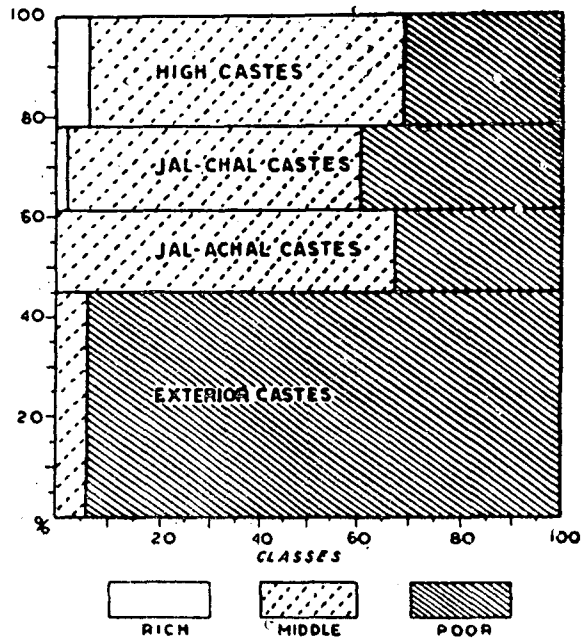
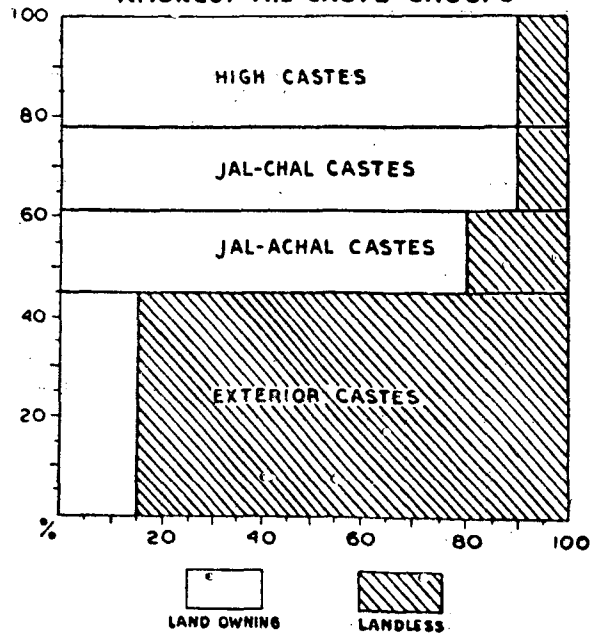


CHART-4

LAND OWNERS AND LANDLESS AMONGST THE CASTE GROUPS



Three more tables given below indicate in more details who own the lands of Kancharpur. Table 11 shows the areas in bighas held by the different castes arranged according to their importance in the economy. Approximately speaking, forty per cent of the village lands are held by the Brahmins and twenty per cent are in the hands of the Subarnabaniks. Next come the Sadgops who hold only 10% of the lands. The rest of the land consisting of about 30% of the arable area is distributed among all the other castes.

TABLE 11 : AREA OF LAND (BIGHAS) HELD BY THE DIFFERENT CASTES AND NUMBER OF LAND-OWNING FAMILIES IN EACH

castes	number of households	holdings			households	
		bighas	percentage	per household	owning land	per cent
(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)
1. Brahmin, Goswami & S.B. Brahmin	52*	761.50	38.5	14.64	47	90
2. Subarnabanik	23	373.25	18.5	16.23	20	87
3. Sadgop	19	185.00	9.5	9.60	18	95
4. Pallav Gop	15	144.00	7.0	9.60	13	87
5. Sunri	9	103.00	5.0	11.40	8	89
6. Kotal (Namasudra)	15	102.00	5.0	6.80	12	80
7. Kayastha	7	88.50	4.5	12.68	6	86
8. Vaidya	4	78.00	4.0	19.50	4	100
9. Gandhabanik	5	50.00	2.5	10.00	5	100
10. Kaibarta	5	29.50	1.5	5.90	4	80
11. Napit	2	23.00	1.0	11.50	2	100
12. Modak	1	10.00	—	10.00	1	100
13. Ugra Kshatriya	3	9.50	—	3.17	2	67
14. Bagdi	49	9.00	—	0.18	4	8
15. Karmakar	1	8.00	—	8.00	1	100
16. Tili	1	6.00	3	6.00	1	100
17. Hari	22	4.00	—	0.18	1	5
18. Bauri	22	3.00	—	0.14	1	5
19. Chunari	6	3.00	—	0.50	4	67
20. Muchi	6	2.00	—	0.33	1	17
21. Kora	6	2.00	—	0.33	1	17
22. Tanti	1	—	—	—	—	—
23. Sutradhar	1	—	—	—	—	—
24. Dom	1	—	—	—	—	—
25. Santhal	8	—	—	—	—	—
26. Vaishnab	1	—	—	—	—	—
27. Muslim	2	—	—	—	—	—
	287	1994.25	100.0	6.94	156	54

* 2 of these families own land but do not reside in the villages, the difference between total number of households—285 and 287.

The high castes and the Baniks—i.e., the priestly learned and the merchant classes of the society, constituting 31% of the village population, are prevented by social custom from engaging in agricultural operation with their own hands. But, as seen in Table 12, it is these 31% who together hold 68% of the total lands.

TABLE 12 : LAND OWNED BY THE DOMINANT CASTES

group	no. of households	percent to total no. of households	area of land in bighas	percent to total villages lands
(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
1. Brahmin	52	18.1	761.50	38.5
2. Vaidya	4	1.4	78.00	4.0
3. Kayastha	7	2.4	88.50	4.5
4. Subarnabanik	23	8.0	373.25	18.5
5. Gandhabanik	5	1.7	50.00	2.5
total	91	31.6	1351.25	68.0

Now-a-days, ownership of land pays good dividend to villagers. A person simply by owning land gets his fifty per cent share of produce from his *bargadar*.

In 1933 and the preceding years, when price of paddy was low and agriculture was a 'gamble in rain', investment in land was not attractive. It had been difficult to meet the rents due to the Zamindars. Since those days, there is a negligible increase in rent, but the price of paddy has gone up higher and higher. The coming of the canal in our area, has also made agriculture no longer a gamble in rain in these days. So land gets gradually concentrated in the hands of the investors, and the prices demanded for land phenomenally increase. In 1933 it was difficult to get a purchaser for land or a cultivating tenant to till the lands on share or rent. The tenants found it hard to meet the rental dues of the Zamindars who had often to excuse them from payment of dues instead of accepting their surrender of land. Speaking of those days, an old peasant told me the origin of the name of a few bighas of land in the south-western part of our village. That land is known in the locality as the 'ear-puller's field', (*kanmalar math*). The cultivator of those lands,

in the times of the Zamindar, approached him and submitted that it would not be possible for him to pay the arrear plus current rents and he would like to surrender those lands to the Zamindar. The Zamindar excused him from payment of the rents but as a chastisement caused the cultivator's ears to be pulled by his men. Without accepting the surrender, the Zamindar sent the cultivator back to till those lands. Since then those fields came to be known to the people of Kanchanpur as the *kanmalar math*, as they came in lieu of a pull of the ears!

The Rev. Day observed that the Sadgops were the predominating caste and the Ugra-Kshatriyas were also influential in those times. These two cultivating classes, therefore, practically formed the bulk of Kanchanpur peasantry in his time. After the lapse of a century or so there is a changed picture. These two classes now hold only 10% of the land. The number of Sadgop households has fallen to only 19, while the Ugra Kshatriyas have all but vanished. There are only three of their families in this village, and of them one is landless; the other two households jointly own less than 10 bighas of land for cultivation.

Not the agricultural castes, but the priestly-learned and the merchant classes constituting 31.6% of the families, hold 68% of the village lands. As a consequence, there is a large growth in the population of the *Harijan* class—who are mainly field labourers in our village community, and during the last 25 years, the high caste men have encouraged the settlement of several Bagdi and Santhal families on the village outskirts.

In addition to the above 68% owned by non-cultivating castes, another 21% is held by caste groups for whom cultivation is not a traditional occupation but who have taken to it instead of, or in addition to, their caste occupation. The distribution of this 21% is given in Table 13.

Members of even labour castes are sometimes debarred from cultivation by the dignity of a subsidiary occupation they may have taken up. For example, a *Karmakar* owns 8 bighas of land. He is a teacher in a primary school in the neighbouring village. He has given up his traditional occupation, and does not even help his hired labourers in his own land.

In Table 11, col. (5) gives the average holding of the castes, and col. (6) indicates the number of households in each caste that own land for cultivation. To be considered as landowning, a caste should have at least two-thirds of its households as land-owning, and should also hold at least 5 bighas of land for its average cultivator. On the basis of this test, the castes of Kanchanpur may be grouped as landowning and landless, and in this view the Ugra-Kshatriyas are no longer a land-owning caste so far as Kanchanpur is concerned.

TABLE 13 : LAND HELD BY NON-CULTIVATING MIDDLE CASTES AND THE KOTALS

caste	no. of households	percent of total households	area in bighas	percent of total land
(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
1. Pallav Gop (milk-man)	15	5.2	144	7.2
2. Sunri (liquor seller)	9	3.2	103	5.2
3. Kotal (constabulary)	15	5.2	102	5.1
4. Kaibarta (fisherman)	5	1.7	29.5	1.5
5. Napit (barber)	2	0.7	23	1.2
6. Modak (confectioner)	1	0.4	10	0.5
7. Tili (oil dealer)	1	0.4	6	0.3
total	48	16.8	417.5	21.0

Table 14 shows area of land held by different caste groups and number of landowning families in each and Chart 4 illustrates the extent of landlessness in each of the groups.

TABLE 14 : AREA OF LAND AS HELD BY DIFFERENT CASTE-GROUPS AND NUMBER OF LANDOWNING FAMILIES IN EACH

castes	number of households	holdings			households	
		bigas	percentage	per household	owning land	per cent
(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)
high caste	63	928.00	47	14.73	57	90
jal-chal caste	48	435.50	22	9.07	43	90
jal-achal caste	45	508.75	25	11.31	36	80
exterior caste	131	122.00	6	0.93	20	15
total	287	1994.25	100	6.94	156	54

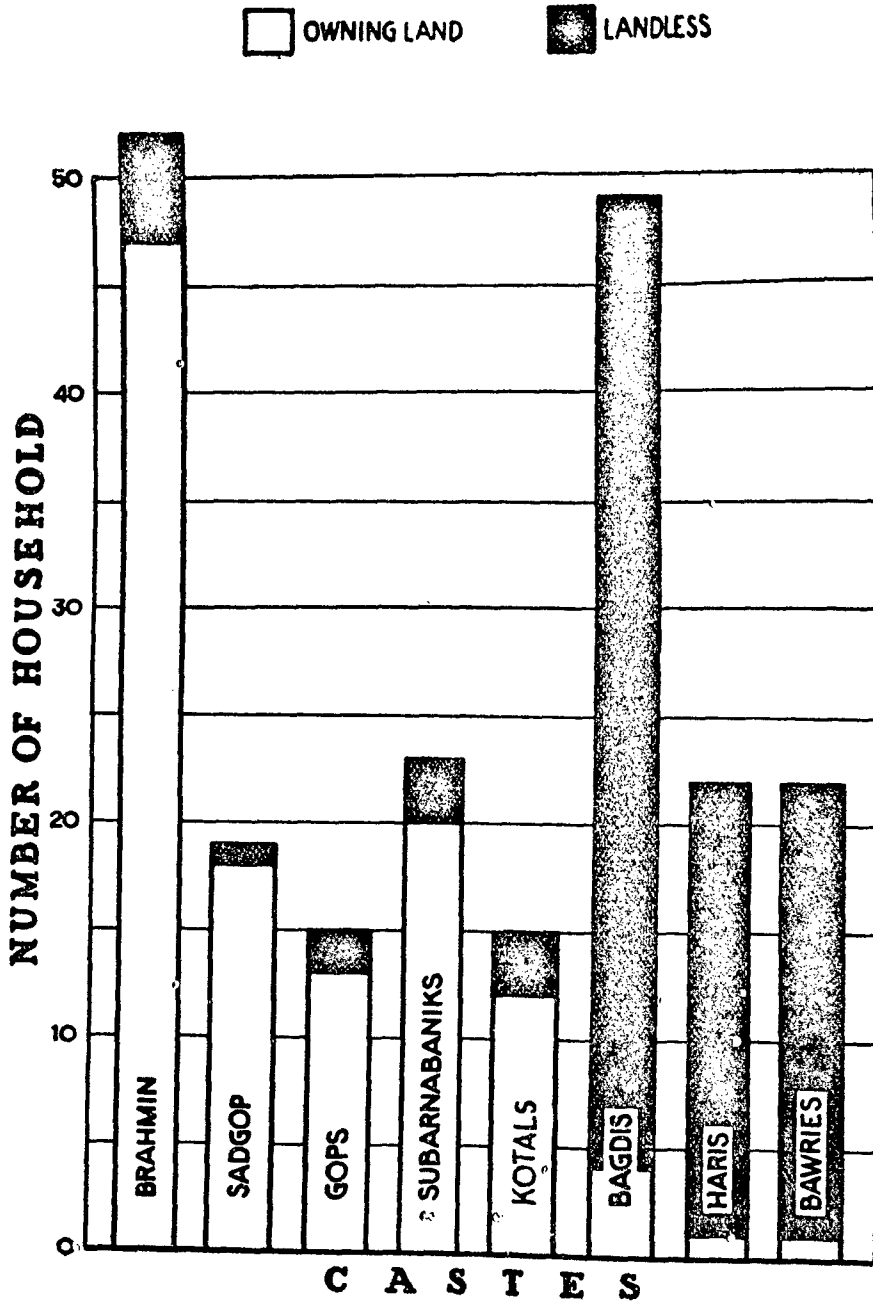
Table 15 shows the percent distribution of the households of the major castes into economic classes of land-holding groups. These castes have 15 or more households in their communities and are therefore considered as major. Among them the Subarnabaniks show the greatest average holding per household (Table 11) and only 22% amongst them own less than 5 bighas or no land at all. Next to them is the position of the Brahmins, and the Sadgops come third. The Gops and Kotals may be considered as land-holding communities, but it should be noted that 53% of each are in the poor class group, that is, they are landless or hold less than 5 bighas of land. Of these two castes, the position of the Gops is comparatively good, as their average holding is higher than that of the Kotals, and only 13% of them are landless as against 20% among the Kotals. The Kotals, however, are an exterior caste, and it should be pointed out that it is the only caste amongst the exterior group, which may be classed with the land-owning castes. There is only one Bagdi family which owns more than 5 bighas of land; 2 Bagdi, one Hari and 1 Bauri household have lands less than 5 bighas each. The rest of them are landless.

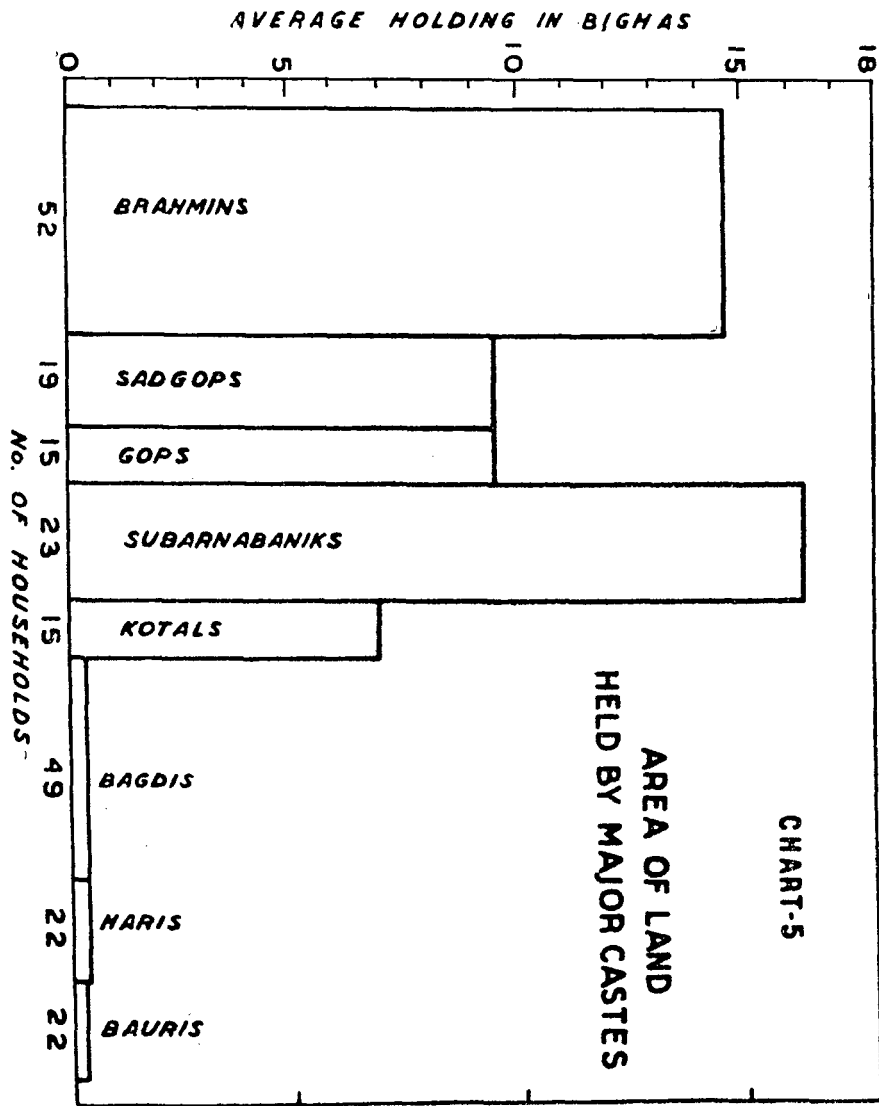
TABLE 15 : PER CENT DISTRIBUTION OF HOUSEHOLDS OF MAJOR CASTES INTO ECONOMIC CLASSES (OF LANDHOLDING GROUP)

caste	rich class	middle class		poor class		total
	owning 50 bighas and above	upper	lower	owning less than 5 bighas of land	owning no land	
		owning 20 to 49 bighas	owning 5 to 20 bighas			
(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)
Brahmin	8	17	44	21	10	100
Sadgop	—	11 ^b	58	26	5	100
Gop	7	7	33	40	13	100
Subarnabanik	—	35	43	9	13	100
Kotal	—	7	40	33	20	100
Bagdi	—	—	2	6	92	100
Hari	—	—	—	5	95	100
Bauri	—	—	—	5	59	100

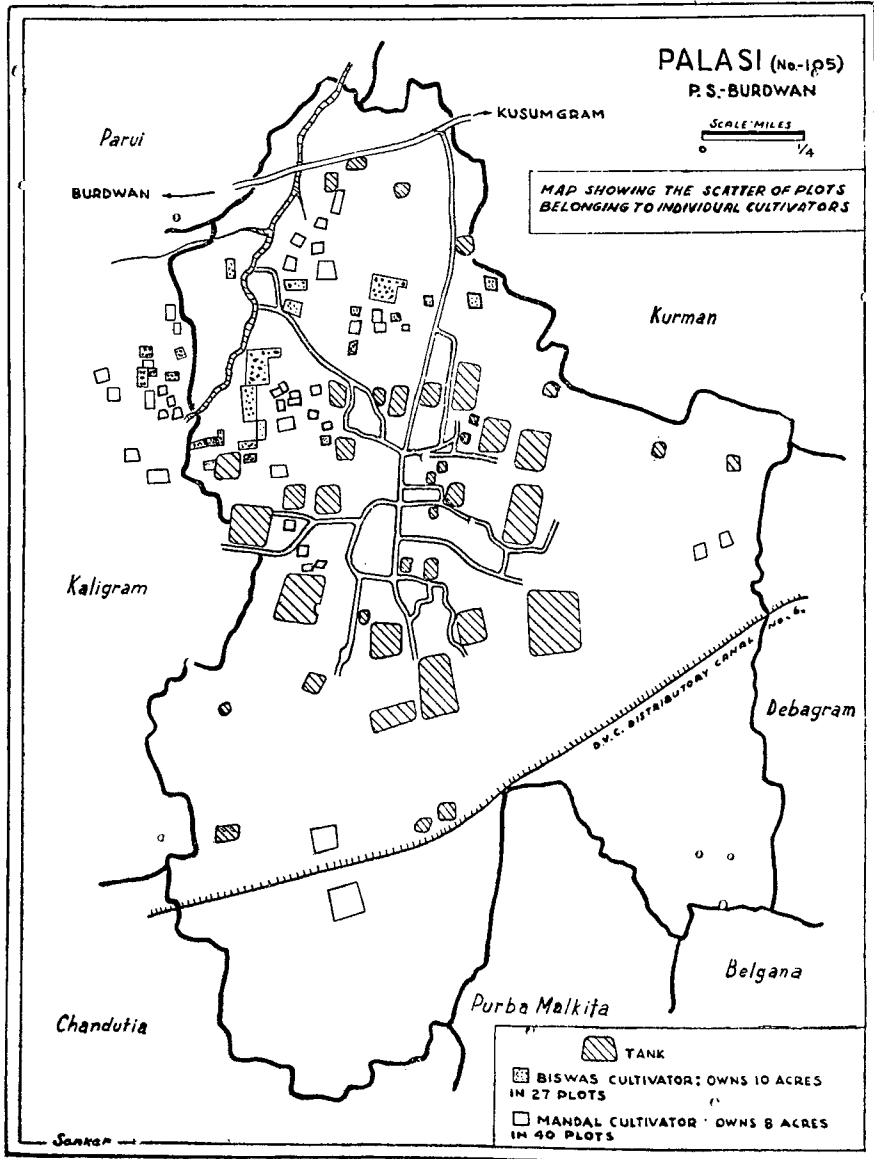
The extent of landlessness amongst the major castes, and the area of land owned by each of these, are illustrated in the bar chart given below.

LANDOWNERS & LANDLESS AMONG MAJOR CASTES





Hitherto we have been trying to answer the question as to who owns how much land in our village community. But whatever land an individual owns is not held in a compact block, and this is a feature that is quite familiar to our rural economists. Map No. V illustrates how lands belonging to two cultivating families of our village are



Map No. V

scattered and fragmented. Both these families reside in the north-western part of the village, and it will be seen that most of their lands, though scattered, fall in that part of the mouza. The raiyats prefer to hold lands near to their homestead. Also, lands by the sides of the canal are prized. But the above two cultivators, who helped us with necessary information, explained that they would prefer the 'near-village' lands close to their habitation in the north-west, rather than hold a 'canal-side' plot in the extreme south or east of the village. Of course the canal-lands have improved because of the proximity of water, but since their own lands near the village also do not remain unirrigated, they would prefer those closer to their homes if they have any choice in the matter.

Be that as it may, let us look at the present position of their lands. One of the households, Biswas, owns 10 acres of land consisting of 27 plots. These plots range from 2 cottas to 2 bighas, and 5 of these fall within the adjoining mouza Kaligram. The other cultivator Mandal owns 8 acres of land consisting of 40 plots varying from 1 cotta to 2 bighas and 12 of these plots fall in mouza Kaligram. It may be noted that cultivator (B) has two isolated plots in the north-east of the village and the cultivator (M) has 4 plots by the canal in the south and east. The rest of their lands, though not consolidated, fall in a compact area close to their houses marked (B) and (M) on the map.

4.2 WHAT KANCHANPUR DOES FOR ITS LIVING

The productive efforts and the aspirations of the people of Kanchanpur are centred over the arable area spread round their village. Eighty two per cent of the households spend their working hours on the fields of Kanchanpur and another four per cent depend on agriculture as their subsidiary source of living. The function of the rest of the workers of the village, (excepting a lawyer who practises as a *mukhtar* at Burdwan, a teacher who goes to work in a neighbouring village, and a few salary earners who live in Burdwan or Calcutta) is to serve directly these 86% constituting the agricultural community of Kanchanpur.

For purposes of comparison the broad occupational patterns for 1933 and 1959 are given in Table 16.

TABLE 16 : OCCUPATIONAL PATTERN 1933-1959

occupational pattern	number of households		percentage	
	1933	1959	1933	1959
(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
A. depending on agriculture	217	235	80	82
1. rent receiving class	20	—	7	—
2. non-cultivating owner	16	18	6	6
3. peasant proprietor and farmer	57	94	21	33
4. (field) labourer	124	123	46	43
B. depending on other occupations	53	52	20	18
1. doctor and kaviraj	9	1	—	—
2. trade	8	6	—	—
3. artisan and profession	5	5	—	—
4. service	31	15	—	—
5. <i>brittibhogi</i>	—	7	—	—
6. beggar	—	7	—	—
7. milk-man	—	5	—	—
8. paddy husker	—	5	—	—
9. chowkidar	—	1	—	—
all	270	287	100	100

It will be noticed that in 1959 even more people depended on agriculture than in 1933 (80 and 82%)¹, but there is a socially favourable increase in the proprietors and managing farmers (21 to 33%). The 20 rent-receiving families have disappeared probably accounting for the growth of the cultivating families. It may well be that as agriculture grew to be profitable, the owners took over the lands from the tenants for their own cultivation, and later the programme of estates acquisition by the State threatening abolition of all intermediary interests might have accelerated the process.

Again it seems from the above table that there is a slight decrease in field labourers (46 to 43%): But we have noted earlier that there

¹ The 1951 census data (Table 1 part B, p. 15) indicate that 99% of the people of Palasani are depending on agriculture.

has been a comparative growth in, the landless working class in our village society. Here is then an anomaly that needs to be explained. In 1933 no house to house enquiry was made, and the occupational distribution of families was roughly worked out from the U.B. Assessment, list for 1940 B.S. There were 72 families that were then exempted from payment of U.B. rates, and they were presumed to be labourers and grouped in that class². But this presumption can not be justified. Herein lies the apparent contradiction in the fact that, although the village seems wealthier now, there are no fewer than seven beggar families. In the 1933 Table no beggar was shown to live in the village. Nor are we justified in holding that other occupationists such as brittibhogis, milkmen, paddy-huskers and chowkidars were not present on the village scene at that point of time. As to the decline in the number of services (31 to 15%), it is not now possible, without any detailed information for 1933, to indicate what services have been abolished and what are still being rendered.

Before we close this section, we should mention here a very significant change in the disappearance of the Kaviraj from the village scene. The Kaviraj, it is said, derives his medical knowledge and insight from Sanskrit treatises that are believed to have been composed by divine inspiration—indeed to have been written by the finger of the great god Mahadeva himself. The Kaviraja usually belongs to the Vaidya i.e., the physician caste of Bengal. In Kanchanpur there were several families of this caste, “the male members of which” wrote the Rev. Day, “had in succession been practising medicine, from time out of mind”.

It was noted in *Kanchanpur Revisited* (1933-34):

“The *Kavirajs* (indigenous doctors) of the village have fallen on evil days. One part of the village is known as *Kaviraj para*, or the ward of the *Kaviraj*. But most of the families have now given up their hereditary occupations and only two still practise *Kaviraji*. One of them again has been trained in Ayurvedic science in a Calcutta institution but the other has inherited his profession from his father who, be it noticed, was one of the greatest *Kavirajs* in this locality”

² See *Kanchanpur Revisited* p. 28, Table. D.

Now, in 1959, there is none in the village to practise 'Kaviraji'. In the long-drawn battle with Western medicine, the latter completely triumphed. In the last century the Rev. Day wrote:

"For modern medicine, and especially European medicine, he (the village *Kaviraj*) had a perfect contempt and it was one of his constant sayings that European doctors did not at all understand the treatment of Indian fever. He admitted the superiority of English to native doctors in surgery, but then it was his opinion that surgery formed no part of the functions of a medical man, as surgical operations belonged, properly speaking, to the province of the Barber"

The present descendants of the Kavirajs have all taken to other occupations, but they cherish in their memory the proud traditions of their forebears. The grandson of "the greatest Kaviraj of the locality", of two generations ago, still relates many stories of the wonderful medical insight of his grandfather. He has carefully preserved a manuscript of medical writings left by his said grandfather as a valuable treasure in his family. The writing is in Sanskrit and is endorsed on '*tulot*' (a kind of indigenous yellowish paper). The book is crumbling into pieces, and the meaning of the writings could not be properly understood. He had shown it to many Sanskrit knowing Kavirajs—but none could properly grasp the formulas of medicine noted there and discovered by his grandfather in the vast medical experience of his life. "Woe to us that we have lost that science!" regretted the grandson of the great Vaidya physician, whenever he used to relate such stories of his illustrious grandfather.

It appears that the caste system has been shaken by the forces of modernization primarily in its occupational aspects. Table 17 following indicates the changes from traditional caste occupations, and though the figures are very small as they pertain to Kanchanpur only, the table is illustrative of the general situation. Table 18 shows the main and subsidiary occupations of the 287 households of the village according to different caste-groups.

TABLE 17 : CHANGES FROM TRADITIONAL CASTE OCCUPATIONS AT KANCHANPUR.

caste	traditional occupation of the castes	no. of households	number of households		
			following caste-occupations		exclusively following pursuits other than the caste occupations
			main	subsi- diary	
(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
1. Brahmin	priest	52	6	9	37
2. Vaidya	physician	4	-	-	4
3. Kayastha	writer/clerk	7	3	4	
4. Sadgop	cultivator	19	15	1	3
5. Gandhabanik	spice dealer	5	1	2	2
6. Napit	barber	2	-	2	-
7. Modak	confectioner	1	-	1	-
8. Karmakar	black-smith	1	-	-	1
9. Tanti	weaver	1	-	-	1
10. Tili	oil merchant	1	-	-	1
11. Ugra-Kshatriya	cultivator	3	2	-	1
12. Gop	milkman	15	2	10	3
13. Subarnabanik	banker	23	2	-	21
14. Sunri	liquor-seller	9	-	-	9
15. Kaibarta	fisherman	5	-	5	-
16. Chunari	lime-maker	6	-	4	2
17. Sutradhar	carpenter	1	1	-	-
18. Baishnab	mendicant	1	1	-	-
19. Kotal	constabulary	15	-	-	15
20. Bagdi	field labourer	49	44	-	5
21. Hari	„ „	22	22	-	-
22. Bauri	„ „	22	22	-	-
23. Muchi	dealer in hide, cobbler, drummer	6	-	2	4
24. Kora	earth-cutter	6	-	-	6
25. Dom	basket maker	1	-	-	1
26. Santhal	field labourer	8	8	-	-
27. Muslim		2	2	-	-
		287	131	40	116

TABLE 18^c: MAIN AND SUBSIDIARY OCCUPATIONS OF THE DIFFERENT SOCIAL GROUPS OF KANCHANPUR HOUSEHOLDS

occupation	number of households engaged in occupations									
	high caste		jal-chal caste		jal-achal caste		exterior caste		all castes	
	main subs.		main subs.		main subs.		main subs.		main subs.	
(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)	(10)	(11)
1. cultivating owner	29	1	30	1	20	1	15	-	94	3
2. field labourer	-	-	2	-	1	-	71	-	74	-
3. share-cropper	1	-	6	-	5	-	18	-	30	-
4. <i>krishan</i>	-	-	-	-	-	-	19	-	19	-
5. non-cultivating owner	9	6	2	-	7	2	-	-	18	8
6. service holder	12	13	-	-	3	7	-	-	15	20
7. <i>brittibhogi</i>	7	2	-	-	-	-	-	-	7	2
8. beggar	1	-	2	-	2	-	2	-	7	-
9. shop-keeper	1	2	3	4	2	-	-	-	6	6
10. milk-man	1	1	2	10	-	-	2	-	5	11
11. paddy-husker	-	-	-	-	2	-	3	1	5	1
12. teacher	1	-	1	-	1	-	-	-	3	-
13. doctor	-	-	1	-	1	2	-	-	1	2
14. lawyer	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	-
15. chowkidar	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	1	1	1
16. carpenter	-	-	-	1	1	-	-	-	1	1
17. fisherman	-	-	-	-	-	5	-	-	-	5
18. lime maker	-	-	-	-	-	4	-	-	-	4
19. barber	-	-	-	2	-	-	-	-	-	2
20. drummer	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	2	-	2
all occupations	63	25	48	18	45	21	131	4	237	68

4.3 PADDY

The Rev. Day, in narrating the authentic history of a Bengal peasant had realized the importance of rice for the life of the people he was portraying and had, therefore, thought it proper to tell his readers all about it. From philology and history, the learned author sought justification for his inference that rice used to be grown in India before its conquest by the Aryans. But the author himself remarked "What has the petty trader in ginger to do with the news of ships?" Leaving philology, therefore, to the learned men, he spoke of paddy as it grew in the plains of Bengal.

How paddy came to be grown in this region may not be clearly known to the learned, but the villagers, specially the women of Kanchanpur, know quite well that the Goddess *Lakshmi* herself brought it down on earth for cultivation. In fact, paddy represents *Lakshmi* herself and the *katha*—a corn-measure filled with paddy—is the Bengal raiyat's sacred symbol for the Goddess.

In the good old times there lived a very poor cow-herd in this land of *Bharata* (India). As it happened one day, the lamentations of the boy reached the ears of *Lakshmi* and *Narayan* while they were making a journey through the sky overhead. Mother *Lakshmi*'s soft heart melted in pity, and she requested *Narayan* to remove the sufferings of the cow-herd. God *Narayan* smilingly replied: "*Lakshmi*, I have nothing to do in the matter, and it is you who have the power to help him." Thus permitted by *Narayan*, *Lakshmi* came down on the earth, and handed over the seeds of paddy to the poor cow-boy. "Take these", said *Lakshmi* to him, "and poverty and sorrow will remain away from you. When the rains set in, go and sow these seeds in your fields. The plants will grow up and bear numerous fruits. When they take on the colour of gold like that of my body, and a sweet-smelling odour, as if of my person, comes out of them, you reap the fruits and bring them home".

The poor cow-boy did as instructed, and one day in the early winter in the month of *Pous*, he was delighted to see his fields filled up with a heavenly fragrance and lit with the colour of gold, as if *Lakshmi* herself made her presence felt there in her person.

The above folk-story illustrates the importance given to paddy in the prosperity and culture of the villages of Bengal, which mainly depend on rice-economy. But leaving folk-stories to our village people, let us add a few words more about how paddy is now grown in our village,

Viewed from the standpoint of the seasons in which it is grown, paddy is of three kinds—*aus*, *aman*, and *boro*. Correspondingly, one for each kind, there are three harvest months—the *Bhadra*, (August-September), the *Pous*, (December-January), and the *Chaitra* (March-April), of the Bengali year. These three months are also known in popular parlance as the months of *Lakshmi* and she is worshipped during these months by every peasant householder with due rites.

At Kanchanpur, and in the district of Vardhamana, little of *boro dhan* is grown because the lands are, for the most part, high and dry. The cultivation of *aus* paddy, too, has diminished due to the coming of the canal. As most of the lands can now be irrigated, the peasants now prefer the *aman* crop which gives a much higher yield per bigha than *aus*. The *aman* has become, therefore, the most important crop in the village.

The canal has benefited the peasants in three principal ways. First, it is a safeguard against failure of the annual harvest as agriculture is no longer a gamble in rain. The heavens may be shut up, but cusecs of water are released from the great reservoir, a part of it eventually reaching the fields of Palashi. If "the sky is brass" and "the earth is flint", still there is hope that some harvest may yet be reaped.

Second, as the canal waters flow through the fields, the ponds and tanks which usually become dried up in the summer are filled up with water. Third, as irrigation is assured, the peasants apply a larger quantity of manure than they formerly did, and consequently the yield per bigha has also been appreciably increased.

Use of fertilizers (chiefly ammonium sulphate) and bone-dust is a significant introduction in the present-day cultivation of paddy, as compared to former times, when only cow-dung, earth of crumbling walls, mud from tanks and mustard oil-cakes were used as manure. But so far as the agricultural processes and the use of implements are concerned there appears to be little change in the practices; the traditional methods of ploughing, sowing, transplanting, weeding, hoeing and harvesting still prevail and the good old wooden plough and harrow, spade and sickle are still the peasants' valued tools.

But there is a remarkable change in the varieties of *aman* rice that are produced in the fields of Kanchanpur. The old kinds, except one or two mentioned by the Rev. Day, are no longer grown in our village.

"Round about Kanchanpur, and in the district of Vardhamana generally", wrote the Rev. Day, "the following varieties are usually cultivated: (1) Nono; (2) Bangota; (3) Kalia; (4) Benapuli; (5) Ramshali; (6) Chini Sarkara; (7) Suryamukhi; (8) Dadkhani; (9) Alam-Badshali; and (10) Radhuni-Pagal; and the last one (Radhuni-Pagal, that is, cook-maddening) is so fine and fragrant that, while boiling it, the cook becomes mad with joy".

These names are met with no longer—except perhaps for Ramsali and Badshabhog which may be a transformation for Alam Badshahi—both being fine varieties, the latter being used for *pilau*. Other names now common are as follow:—

- (a) Superfine .. Kanakchur (used for puffed rice).
- (b) Fine .. Sitalal; Gobindabhog (used for payesh); Chatuinakhi (small as the nail of the sparrow); Nagra; Bakchur.
- (c) Medium .. Jhingashal
- (d) Red .. Sindur topor (vermillion topped), a red and coarse variety.
- (e) Coarse .. Bansnagra, Dudkalma, Dhali Kalma, Shūyo Kalma Ghorasal & Hatisal.

Whether these names represent newly introduced varieties or mere changes in nomenclature brought about by time it was not possible to ascertain.

4.4 SUGARCANE

Next in importance to the cultivation of paddy was the sugarcane plantation in the economy of Kanchailpur of the nineteenth century. It was at that time such a valuable crop to the Bengal raiyat that the Rev. Day devoted a separate chapter to the description of this crop also.

Now-a-days paddy forms not merely the staple produce of Kanchanpur; it is practically its only product. The cultivation of potato or winter vegetables or any other crops is on such small scale as scarcely to deserve mention. As regards the one time important sugarcane cultivation, there is hardly more than one acre of land under it at present. But since the coming of the canal is likely to bring the cultivation of this crop into prominence again and the acreage is likely to increase, it may not be out of place to add a few words on sugarcane as well.

Pandasur, the mighty demon, thus runs the village fable, started the plantation of sugarcane on this land of fair Bengal. The *asura* had been newly married, and naturally desired to spend a few days with his new bride then staying in her father's place. But as he had to prepare his land for sugarcane, he deferred his visit to the in-law's house. Now the mode of cultivating sugarcane is not only laborious, it is also continuous throughout the year. Lest his fields go un-

attended, *Pandasur*, time after time, deferred his visit to the in-law's place.

When, however, the sugarcane was cut, there was hardly any time for planting the next crop. The tops had been cut and preserved in nurseries which were to be again transplanted in the field, when the soil should be made ready to receive them. The process of tending the plants started again. Thus entangled in the plantation of the sugarcane, *Pandasur* could never manage to go to his father-in-law's place.

This village fable jocularly points to the continuous labour and pains with which the cultivation of sugarcane is attended. There is another village saying which states: "when the soil for sugarcane is ready for preparation, there is no time to eat even the served dinner". The Rev. Day had described in some details the processes in the cultivation of sugarcane in the village. There appears little change in them excepting the introduction of the chemical fertilizers.

As lands came into the hands of the non-cultivating castes like the Brahmins and the Subarnabaniks who have to depend on hired labour for cultivation, sugarcane plantation, involving a great amount of labour, was found to be commercially unattractive. This is perhaps the main reason why acreage under sugarcane fell. As the area under it diminished, the setting up of the sugarcane press also became a vexed problem. The Rev. Day described the sugarcane house and press as an affair of a joint stock company of the husbandmen of *Kanchanpur*. Such houses were set up—one for those who grew sugarcane in the northern and the eastern divisions, and the other for the benefit of the cane-growers of the southern and western divisions. In 1959 there was only one plot, less than 3 cottas, under sugarcane in the northern side of the village, and the cut sugarcane of the field had to be carried by carts to the southern outskirts at a distance of nearly a mile, where the only press was set up for the village this year.

Like paddy, *Kanchanpur* has changed the kinds of sugarcane to be produced, and is paying attention to cultivation of other varieties, however little the area for plantation may be. The Rev. Day mentioned that in the village there were three varieties of sugarcane, namely, the *Puri*, the *Kajule*, and the *Bombai*. But these are no longer grown in the village. The two kinds that are now found are the

'*Fati-Java*' and the Government variety No. 2222. It is claimed for the *Fati-Java* that it is a stout variety, and has a tough cover. The jackal and the children, both very fond of chewing the cane, find it hard to crack, and the plantation is thus saved from being robbed. For the Govt. 2222, it is claimed that it has the above quality of *Fati-Java* to some extent, and at the same time contains more saccharine matter. It should give, therefore, a higher yield in gur, but the villagers who have been cultivating the variety, are not yet satisfied with the result.

A technological improvement in the sugarcane-press, used to crush the cane, may be noted. The Rev. Day described the machine as consisting of two massive wooden cylinders, cut into notches all over, and furnished at both ends with wheels or rather simple spokes without a felloe. Two persons sitting opposite to each other inserted the cane between the cylinders which were kept in perpetual motion by four persons who worked at the spokes. Strong men were required to turn this mill, and describing one such working the machine, the Rev. Day said:

"There he was now, with his long legs placed firmly on opposite sides of the trench tugging away at the spokes with almost superhuman strength, now pressing his lips together when making a grand pull and now hallooing his associates to excite them to get on briskly".

The press now consists of three closely set and grooved iron cylinders with teethed wheels on the top. A horizontal pole is fixed with the machine which is driven by a pair of bullocks or buffaloes. Even for the animals, it is not an easy task and they are changed for another fresh pair almost every hour.

With diminution in the acreage of plantation the village *auksala* (sugarcane house) has lost its importance, but has not yet ceased to be a scene of rural joy. When the sugarcane house is established, it is still duly consecrated with offerings to *Brahma*, the god of fire, and *Viswakarma*, the maker of the universe. But the Goddess *Lakshmi* is no longer associated there. Perhaps she has left the press of sugarcane, and has fixed her abode in the barryard of paddy. The earthen image of the plahter *Pandasura*, however, must invariably be installed at the *auksala*.

The press then moves, and the fire burns, and the *auksala* begins to operate. The little boys and girls still run to the place for obtaining

cut pieces of sugarcane, which they get as a matter of course, as the belief and customs enjoin that they should not be turned away empty-handed. But the sugarcane house has lost its past glories, and no longer threatens the village primary school in the matter of attendance of the children.

4.5 LEVELS OF LIVING

Table 10 on page 54 has shown the class and caste grouping in our village community. It seems desirable to make a little more inquiry into the actual conditions of living of these socio-economic groups. An attempt has, therefore, been made below to ascertain the levels of living of these groups in terms of actual consumption of food, clothing and other necessities of life, their use of semi-durable goods and conditions of housing.

4.51 *The Rich Households:*

At the outset it may be noted that the jal-achal and the exterior castes have no rich family amongst them. Of the five rich households in the village, four belong to the high castes and the fifth is a Gop family. While the four high caste families follow a similar pattern of living, the Gop household exhibits some significant differences.

Let us first take a Goswami Brahmin family, as representing the high caste rich group. The family holds about 53 bighas, i.e. about 18 acres of land and the head of the household is a pensioner receiving Rs. 150/- p.m. The family consists of 13 members—3 male adults, 2 female adults, 4 male children and 4 female children.

Housing:

These members live in nine rooms which are inside an enclosed compound. Three of the rooms are made of mud wall and thatches of straw; the other six are semipucca.

Food:

The daily food taken by the family is usually as follows:—

Morning (7-8 a.m.)	.. Tea (for adults and the old only).
Breakfast (9-10 a.m.)	.. <i>Muri</i> (puffed rice), milk, <i>gur</i> , and occasionally fried vegetables covered with powdered pulses.
Mid-day meals (1-2 p.m.)	.. Rice, <i>dāl</i> , fish, hodge-podge of vegetables, <i>tak</i> (chutney) and milk.
Evening tiffin (5-6 p.m.)	.. Tea (for adults & the old), <i>muri</i> and biscuit.
Night-meal (9-10 p.m.)	.. Items as in mid-day lunch, <i>luchi</i> or <i>parata</i> (bread fried in ghee) for the house-head and his eldest son.

It may be noted that the Goṣwamis are Vaisnabas and, therefore eat only fish but do not touch meat or eggs. Other well-to-do families, however, occasionally enrich their diet with such food.

Clothing :

The adult males wear *dhutis*, *genjis* (guernseys), *fatuas* and *punjabis*. They also use either shoes or slippers. The family also possesses a coat, 3 *chaddars*, 2 pair of socks and 4 umbrellas. *Gamchas* are indispensable for males, females and children alike.

The female members wear *saris*, chemises, petticoats and blouses, and consume a greater yardage of cloth per head. The boys have pants (pantaloons), shirts and *genjis* to put on. For infants and smaller girls, pinnies* and frocks are used.

The adult females do not use shoes, slippers or socks. There is, however, one lady's umbrella in the house. The children get shoes to cover their feet.

Domestic animals :

The family has 10 cows, 4 buffaloes and 5 bullocks. There are three pet peacocks in the family.

Expenses :

The family's expenses on items other than food and clothing stood in 1958 as follows:

1. Education	..	..	Rs. 436/-
(a) School fee	..	..	Rs. 96/-
(b) Private tuition	..	..	Rs. 240/-
(c) Others	..	..	Rs. 100/-
4. House repair	..	..	Rs. 200/-
2. Medical	..	..	Rs. 300/-
3. Taxes and rates	..	..	Rs. 225/-
5. Social functions and ceremonies	..	..	Rs. 60/-
6. Toilet	..	..	Rs. 50/-
7. Amusement	..	..	Rs. 50/-
8. Miscellaneous	..	..	Rs. 179/-
		Total ..	Rs. 1500/- excluding food & clothing.

*The term 'pinny' in Bengali is used to mean children's plain frocks. Apparently it is the English word 'pinny'—a childish abbreviation of 'pinafore'. Here it may be of interest to point out that the terms coat, pantaloons, genji (for guernsey), shirt, bodice, blouse, chemise, petticoat (saia), pinny and frock are all English words or have passed through the English language before they came to enrich the vocabulary of Bengali as and when the very costumes came in fashion under the English influence. 'Saia', which is the same as petticoat, is a word of Portuguese origin.

Possessions :

The family's inventory of semi-durable goods in 1959, showed the following articles in its possession:—

	No.		No.		No.
Wooden cots	3	Wall-clock	1	Hurricane (lanterns)	6
Table	1	Time-piece	1	Crockery	1 set
Chair	1	Watch	1	Bell-metal <i>thalas</i>	10
Almirah	4	Bicycle	1	„ <i>batis</i>	10
<i>Alna</i> (a wooden frame for hanging clothes)	1	Torch	2	Aluminium <i>handis</i>	5
		Petromax	1	Brass pitchers	6
		Shelves	5		

The rich Gop household consists of 6 members—3 males, 2 females and 1 child. They have 4 cottas of enclosed compound as their living space, on which stand 4 semi-pucca tin-thatched rooms and 1 mud-walled straw-thatched hut.

So far as food habits are concerned, this household is not accustomed to any wheat diet—and *luchis*, *paratas* or biscuits are not at all consumed by this family. The adult males have no coats or socks, and the adult females do not use any foot-wear or umbrella.

The family owns 10 cows, 4 buffaloes and 2 bullocks. It may be noted that like the other rich family in the high caste group, there is no pea-cock or any other domestic pet in the household.

In 1958 these Gops incurred expenditures of approximately Rs. 200/- on taxes and rates, Rs. 175/- on medicine, Rs. 40/- on social function and ceremonies, Rs. 10/₶ on toilet articles and Rs. 20/- on amusement—say Rs. 500/- in all. As the family has no school-going children, it spent nothing on education. Of course, most of the food comes from the land and cattle.

As regards the household goods, the Gop family has 1 wooden cot, 2 bicycles, 1 gun, 1 torch, 3 lanterns, 1 crockery set, 10 *thalas*, 12 *batis* and 5 *handis*. It may be noted that there is no table, chair, almirah, nor any clock, time-piece or watches in the family. The family can easily afford to own these things but there is no need felt for them. The household is situated a little towards the outskirts in the south-west, and last year it fell victim to a raid by dacoits. Thereafter the family purchased the gun which cost them nearly Rs. 2000/-.

4.52 *The Upper Middle-Class Households:*

As compared to rich households, these families take less quantity of milk. Fish, meat or eggs are not taken daily, but only 3 or 4 days a week. Products made of ghee are seldom consumed.

Kinds of food in different caste groups are substantially alike. But in the diet of the Kotal household, the single one in this class amongst the exterior castes, there is practically no element of wheat.

In the consumption pattern of clothing, the differences are not striking. Indeed, our rural households, whether rich or of the upper middle class, do not use any great quantity of clothings. On the average, 3 pieces of *dhotis* (each of 5 yds. length), a couple of *punjabis* or shirts, a *gamcha*, and sometimes a coat and a *chaddar* are all the apparels required by a male adult. The women's attire consists, in the average, of 4 *saris* (5 yds. each), 4 blouses and 4 petticoats and a *gamcha*. The boys wear *pants* (pantaloons), shirt and *genjis* (guernsey), and the girls and infants use pinnies and frocks. The adult males use foot-wear and umbrellas, but the adult females excepting a few high caste and Subarnabanik women are not used to them.

Generally speaking, the houses of this group, like those of the rich ones, are usually either mud-made or semi-pucca. There are however six pucca buildings belonging to the Subarnabanik caste. As compared to the rich, this group as a whole spends less on education, house-repair, medicine, taxes and rates, social functions, toilet and amusement.

The inventory of the semi-durable goods for the Kotal family reads as follows: 1 wooden cot, 1 chair, 1 shelf, 1 watch, 1 bicycle, 1 torch, 1 petromax, 3 lanterns, 1 crockery set, 8 *thalas*, 10 *batis*, 5 *handis*, 5 brass pitchers. A Brahmin, or a Subarnabanik family, may own a table or a chair more, but substantially they have the same kinds of articles in their houses.

4.53 *Lower Middle Class:*

In our village community there are seventy-seven families of this category spread in the different caste groups. The upper caste families and some among the exterior castes in this class are used to tea both morning and evening. For breakfast there is *miri* and

gur for all the groups. Occasionally, for breakfast there is hand-made bread for the high caste group, and hot boiled rice for the exterior castes. Ordinary *bhat*, *dal*, *tarkari*, '*posta*', (poppy seeds), *baris*, (a 'dainty prepared from dal, pasted, spiced and sunned), *tak*, (chutney) etc., form the big meals of the day. For them, fish is a rare dish, and unless there is a milch cow at home, milk also does not form any part in the regular diet. The Kaibartas, however (as fishermen in the village) regularly take good quantities of fish with rice. The exterior castes also usually have fish in their meals, as their womenfolk go out in the morning to get a catch of fish with their homeky nets.

As compared with higher groups, there is seen a shrinkage in the yardage of cloth consumed, and especially so in the lower caste groups. A male adult or a widow of the latter group, has only 2 pieces of *dhutis* per head. The female adult has three or four saris and as undergarments she may have 2 blouses and a couple of petticoats. The adult males wear sandals and there may be 1 or 2 umbrellas in the upper caste families. For the females, there are neither sandals nor umbrellas in any of the groups.

All the families of the exterior castes and most of the families of the other groups in their lower middle class category spend practically nothing for the education of their children. They cannot afford to keep private tutors for them, and so far as institutional education upto the upper primary is concerned the Government now provides it free. Only the fees of their boys who are studying in the Kaligram or Kurman schools are to be paid. The exterior castes do not send any such pupil, and therefore, do not have to incur any sum at all as school fees for their children. Miscellaneous expenses spent on education are too insignificant an amount to be recorded.

Compared to the upper two economic classes, this group shows considerably less expenditure on other items: the ratio of expenditure between the rich and this class being approximately 4 to 1. The exterior castes show practically no expenditure on toilets and amusements.

The conditions of housing and the pattern of holding of semi-durable goods in the families of the different caste groups are illustrated below:—

TABLE 19 : HOUSING CONDITIONS AND HOLDING OF SEMI-DURABLE GOODS AMONGST THE LOWER MIDDLE CLASS AT KANCHANPUR

type of house	I	II	III	IV
	high caste	jal-chal caste	jal-achal caste	exterior caste
	represented by households			
	Brahmin (9 members)	Tili (5 members)	Kaibarta (2 members)	Bagdi (5 members)
	mud-walled, straw-thatched, in good condition	mud-walled, straw-thatched	mud-walled, straw-thatched	mud-walled, straw-thatched
number of rooms	5	3	2	5
approximate value	Rs. 2000/-	Rs. 400/-	Rs. 600/-	Rs. 500/-
1. crockery set	1	-	-	-
2. bicycle	1	-	-	-
3. wooden cot	2	-	1	-
4. <i>alna</i>	2	-	3	-
5. torch	1	-	1	-
6. <i>handi</i>	3	2	-	1
7. pitcher	1	1	-	-
8. <i>thala</i>	8	5	2	4
9. <i>bati</i>	8	5	4	6
10. lantern	3	2	2	2

4.54 *Poor Households:*

An aged Brahmin widow is found to live on begging. She has one mud-walled straw-thatched room as her shelter. *Muri* and *gur* form her breakfast and night meal as well. Rice, dal, and a hodge podge of vegetables constitute her day meals. She has two pieces of cloth to wear, and owns a heifer valued at Rs. 25/- only. Her expenses on education, taxes, social functions, toilet and amusement are nil. In 1958, she spent Rs. 25/- on house repair and, Rs. 5/- for medical treatment. She owns one wooden cot, 1 *alna*, 1 shelf, 2 lanterns, 3 *thalas*, 3 *batis*, 1 *handi* and 1 pitcher.

A Gop family of two members has no land and maintains itself on animal husbandry. It lives in a mud-walled room. Tea is taken in the morning. Fish is rarely taken with rice. *Muri*, *gur*, and milk usually serve as breakfast. As producers of milk, they retain a certain quantity of this valuable food for their own consumption. Excepting these Gops, there is little milk in the poor men's diet. But most of the households have a fish diet, as the women of the exterior castes who form the bulk of the poor class and the *Kaibartas* are of piscatorial habits, and they supplement the diet with their catches.

Few of the exterior caste people take tea in the morning. As morning breakfast they usually take cold rice soaked overnight in water, with salt, chillies and onions. There is no element of wheat in their diet. Most of the men of this group are accustomed to take country-made liquor. For them, a jar of wine and meat are essential on occasions of banquets and feasts. The *Bauris*, the *Haris* and the *Santhals* keep pigs and eat pork occasionally. For all other castes and the Muslims, the pigs are considered unclean and their meat is detested.

The men and women of this class use a minimum of clothing, and the children have no clothing of any sort. In addition to *dhutis* and *gamchas* (napkins), the men now use a *punjabi* or a shirt, a pair of shoes or a piece of *chaddar* if, of course, their means permit. The women are also seen to use blouses, and petticoats as well, if there is some surplus money for such purchases. But none of the men has any coat nor any women a pair of shoes.

This class has nothing to spend on education, and little on house-repairs and medicine. Few of the families have to pay any land tax as most of them are landless. There are families who are also exempted from payment of even the few annas of the *anchal* rates. Little sums are spent on social functions and amusements. No expenses were said to have been incurred on toilet by any of these poor families in 1958.

Though our village community has been grouped into 4 economic classes, it should be remembered that there are always variations within each group. Such are to be found in the poor class as well. Thus the share-cultivators, or able-bodied workers, may live

TABLE 20 : POOR HOUSEHOLDS OF KANCHANPUR

	I high caste	II jal-chal caste	III jal-achal caste	IV exterior caste	V exterior caste
	represented by				
	9 Brahmin widow 1 (begging)	Gop 2 members (animal husbandry)	Subarna- banik teacher (3 members)	Kora share- cultivator owning 3 bighas of land (12 members)	delinquent Hari—a beggar (the poorest man)
housing conditions :					
types of houses	mud-made straw- thatched	mud-made straw- thatched	mud-made straw- thatched	mud-made straw- thatched	mud-made straw- thatched
number of rooms	1	1	2	5	1
approximate value	Rs. 200/-	Rs. 200/-	Rs. 250/-	Rs. 400/-	Rs. 20/-
livestock with approximate value :					
cows	1 (Rs. 25/-)	3 (Rs. 80/-)	—	3 (Rs. 180/-)	—
bullocks	—	—	—	4 (Rs. 300/-)	—
goats	—	4 (Rs. 30/-)	—	—	—
birds	—	—	—	8 (Rs. 16/-)	—
inventory of semi- durable goods :					
wooden cot	1	—	—	—	—
<i>alna</i>	1	—	1	—	—
shelf	1	—	—	—	—
lantern	2	1	1	3	—
<i>thala</i>	3	4	3	4	2
<i>bati</i>	3	3	4	4	2
<i>handi</i>	—	—	—	—	—
pitcher	1	—	—	—	—
torch	—	—	1	—	—

in better houses or have a better share of food and clothings etc., whereas an old forlorn decrepit woman or a delinquent half-cracked lonely young man may be found to go hungry without rice on many days and live in rejected rags and tottering shelters.

Table 20 gives an account of the kinds of houses, livestock and semi-durable goods which are usually to be found in poor households of Kanchanpur. A last column has been added there to depict the condition of the "lowliest and the lost" man of the village.

CHAPTER FIVE

MARRIAGE AND HOME

5.1 THE HOUSES IN WHICH KANCHANPUR LIVES

In discussing the levels of living of the different classes of our village community we have described to some extent its housing conditions as well. Coming from the bus stop on the main road, you enter the village with your face to the south; and just at the entrance on the right side of the road, a cluster of huts will come to your sight. If you are acquainted with a few Bengal villages, no body need tell you that it is one of the Harijan pallis of the village—a Bagdipara, a Bayenpara, a Bauripara or the like. As it is, it is one of the Hariparas of the village of Kanchanpur. The mud cottages stand there all exposed to the visitor's eyes, their privacy is not guarded by any enclosure or walls. There are a few better looking huts, but a majority of them have a ragged appearance. Some of the huts stand without repairs, and their thatches are quite inadequate to prevent cold and rains from coming in. Perhaps you may find that there is no door in a hut, and in its stead is hung a cheap frame made of cut pieces of bamboo. If it is winter, that frame may be seen to be covered with torn gunny bags so as to oppose as best as they can the entry of the unkind cold wind.

In 1872 the Rev. Day wrote: "The bulk of the houses are mud cottages thatched with the straw of paddy, though there is considerable number of brick houses owned for the most part by the Kayasthas and the Banker caste". But no Kayastha has a brick-built house at present; and besides the ex-zamindar's house, there are only six brick-built houses all belonging to the middle class Subarnabaniks. The rest of the houses are all built of mud.

Here you see is a rich household consisting of mud huts. It has a compound enclosed with mud walls over which there is a running thatch to protect the mud walls from damages of rain. You enter the inner yard through a door facing the south. On the right stands a newly built south-facing two-storied mud-building. The ground floor is cemented, while the first floor is made of wooden planks. The roof is thatched with corrugated tins.

The first floor room is occupied by the owner of the house. At right angles to this structure, there stand in a line three big rooms of mud walls and straw thatch, with their faces to the east. Beyond these rooms to the north is the kitchen, and further beyond the dug-well latrine which is used only by the old Karta (head) of the family. Persuaded by the Community Development people, some of the rich and upper class households had made such latrines in their houses, but in no time their use was abandoned and the inmates of the house returned to their habit of using the fields which they consider as more healthy and clean. Only the aged may require latrines at home. The only sanitary privy of the village has recently been constructed by the ex-zamindar, mainly because of his sufferings from gout which made his walks to the fields painful, and as the ex-zamindar commented, if latrines are to be constructed on the homestead, they should be of the sanitary type.

You will find in the inner court-yard of any rich household, as in this particular one, a row of *marais*, that is, thatched rice granaries made of ropes of twisted straw and cylindrical in shape. These contain hundreds of maunds of paddy and where paddy is stored, so it is said, *Sri* (i.e., Goddess Lakshmi) herself resides. Outside this residential area, there is another enclosed area where stand two sheds and a couple of big *paluis* i.e., straw stacks. In one of the sheds the cows are tied, the other is meant for the bullocks and buffaloes of the household.

After you have glimpsed through the poor and the rich cottage, you may feel curious to have a cursory look into a house in which a middle class family resides. Haply you may be invited there say for a dinner with the family. You enter the front-room, where on the mud floor is spread a *sitalpati* (a cane woven mat), and you are requested to sit down. This room is a part of a long shed which is partitioned in the middle by a wall. The front portion serves as the room where visitors are accepted, and the inner portion is used as a bed room. The floor and the walls are of mud; and the room is supported on a structure of palmyra beams and rafters. The interstices of the framework are filled with alternate plain and coloured *sara* reeds and the roof is thatched with a thick layer of straw. Inside the room, there is no furniture but an old wooden shelf which contains some old school text books that once formed the subjects

of study of the now grown-up sons of the family. On the walls are hung some photographs of the family members, and some cheap pictures of Hindu gods and goddesses. A relief map of India prepared by the second son of the family while he had been a student of the primary teachers' training institute at Burdwan along with a group photo of his class-mates and teachers of the year are also hung on the walls there. There too appears a handiwork of a female member of the house which exhibited two devotional lines woven in wool on a carpet and runs as follows: "Thou art the hope in despair. The anchor in a shoreless ocean."

Knowing that you are interested to have a look at the house, your new friend takes you inside. The *bara-ghar* (the big hut), of which the visitors' room is a part, faces to the east and has an open verandah in front of it. Beyond to the east is the inner court-yard where the *marais* of the house stand neat and graceful. To the south of the yard, is the tube-well of the household in a little enclosure. To the north stands another big hut with its face to the south, and it is used by the householder as his bed room. To the west there are also a small sleeping room and the kitchen, both of which face east.

It may be pointed out that, in our villages, the people invariably build their best rooms to face either south or east, as this is the saying of Khana (a great astrologer-woman of traditional fame): "dakshin dwari gharer raja, pub-duari tar praja", i.e., south facing room is the king of huts, and the east facing one is his tenant. Construction of huts facing otherwise is not worth any consideration.

You enter the sleeping room of your friend, that is, the inside portion of the big hut. The space there is almost entirely occupied by a big wooden cot. There are several trunks of the family. These are all tied together in an iron chain and by a knot with a foot of the big *taktaposh* (wooden cot) on which the elder son and his wife and children go for sleep. In a corner you find spears and a bow with a set of steel-headed arrows. As it is difficult for a villager to own a gun, these country weapons are kept for purposes of resisting the robbers, if such need arises. There are a couple of cycle which are used by the two elder sons of the family. A nice little dome of glass in the wall shelf may attract your notice, and on enquiry you learn that it is a table lamp with a bed switch, and is worked by electrically charged cells.

TABLE 21 : TYPES OF KANCHANPUR HOUSEHOLDS

caste groups	no. of households	incomplete				conjugal				extended			
		bachelor	widow	widower	deserted spouse	childless married couples	married couples with children	compound	linear	collateral	joint with married daughter's or sister's family	irregular	
(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)	(10)	(11)	(12)	(13)	
high castes	61	6	7	-	2	2	11	1	25	4	2	1	
jal-chal castes	48	7	-	1	1	-	13	1	20	3	1	1	
jal-achal castes	45	4	3	3	-	-	17	2	12	4	-	-	
exterior castes	131	5	15	3	1	9	57	-	28	12	-	1	
all	285	22	25	7	4	11	98	4	85	23	3	3	
		actual number											
		percent to total											
high castes	100	10	11	-	3	3	18	2	41	7	3	2	
jal-chal castes	100	15	-	2	2	-	27	2	42	6	2	2	
jal-achal castes	100	9	7	7	-	-	37	4	27	9	-	-	
exterior castes	100	4	11	2	1	7	44	-	21	9	-	1	
all	100	8	9	2	1	4	35	1	30	8	1	1	

5.2 THE KINS OF THE KANCHANPUR HOUSEHOLDS

The two hundred and eighty-five families living at Kanchanpur have been classified as incomplete, conjugal, extended and irregular, and the pattern is illustrated in Table 21. A household uninhabited by any married couple has been classed as 'incomplete'. A family of husband and wife with or without children belonging to the 'conjugal' type. When two or more conjugal families, related lineally, collaterally or otherwise, live in the same household it makes 'extended' or 'joint' family. A household inhabited by a man and woman, not in wedlock, is described here as 'irregular'.

It will be seen from the figures that there are 58 households at Kanchanpur which are found to belong to the incomplete type. The householder in these is either a bachelor, a widow, a widower or a deserted spouse. Column 13 of the Table shows three households as irregular in the sense that the man and the woman here live together out of wedlock. All these incomplete or irregular households cannot be considered to present any family life in the proper sense of the term.

The rest of the households of Kanchanpur, numbering 224, have been classed as of two main types—(i) the conjugal and (ii) the joint. In our village community there are altogether 113 conjugal and 111 joint households. But it may be noted that there is a higher proportion of joint families in the high castes, and a larger number of conjugal families in the exterior castes. The per cent proportion of each of these three types of households in the four caste groups are summarized in Table 22.

TABLE 22

caste groups	types of households			total
	incomplete or irregular	conjugal	joint	
(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
high castes	26	23	51	100
jal-chal castes	21	29	50	100
jal-achal castes	23	41	36	100
exterior castes	19	51	30	100
all	22	36	42	100

The extended (or joint) families are seen to be mainly of the linear type i.e., the parents and the sons' families living together. It is still considered a breach of filial duty to leave one's parents in their old days, and social opinion also discourages break-up of the family so long as the parents are alive. The father's ownership of the family lands also works as a deterrent to the splitting up of the family. All these factors are seen to work more strongly in the high caste groups. Amongst the exterior castes the sons do not feel obligations to the parents so binding, and as they mainly depend on their income from labour and have no expectation of property from their fathers in the future, the joint family type has lost much of its sanctity and young married couples go off to live separately. But such behaviour is not possible for a high caste couple living in the group environment of Kanchanpur. "A son who separates himself from his mother in order to live with his wife, does not deserve to live; and when he dies the *durva* grass will sprout in his bones, and his soul will go to hell." Again, D.C., a son of a well-to-do Brahmin family, is a partner in some business firm at Calcutta, and lives there singly as he has kept his wife and children in the village with his aged parents. He does not even think of taking his wife and children to the city as that means his parents would be left alone in the village without proper care and attention. To quote his words: "I was brought up to my manhood by my parents, and now if they have to burn their hands for cooking their own food at their old age, it will be a great dereliction of my duty, and I shall have no place even in hell."

But the attitudes and values for joint families extended through collateral relationship are different. The accepted social code is that brothers should and do separate. If they are bound to live together for a long time, they become the subject of discussion, and instead of the family being praised some one or the other amongst the brothers is regarded a fool and as one being cheated of his legitimate share by the other more clever brothers. However, as column 11 of Table 21 indicates that a certain percentage of such collaterally joint families exists in all the caste groups in the village.

There are four compound families in the sense that a householder has a second or third wife who is living with her step-children born of the earlier marriage of the man. In three cases, the previous

wives had died, but in the case of M., a Kaibarta householder, both his wives are living with their husband in our village. As it happened the first wife did not come 'to take rice' into her husband's house for years. Thereupon M's father got for his son a second wife. This led his first wife to file a maintenance suit in the courts of Burdwan. M. was ever willing to give her food and clothing if she came to live with him. Ultimately, however, matters got settled, and the first wife came to take her rice in the husband's home. M.'s father on his death, gifted his property to the second wife of his son; but the first wife came to secure greater favour from the husband. It can be presumed that the relations between the co-wives are very strained and they live in separate parts of the house, but troubles frequently arise as there is only one man in the household.

Column 12 of Table 21 shows that there are three families in the village each of which is joint with another simple related family of a married couple or sister. Of these three households, two belong to the Brahmins and the third to the *Sadgops*. In one, a daughter deserted by her husband has come with her children to live under the roof of the father. In the second case, a sister gone insane, is staying with her children in her brother's house. Her husband, however, sends regular support. The third is the case of a widower and his son in whose house a widowed sister of the householder's deceased wife has come with her children to live.

The three irregular families are not recognised as proper societal units, but their existence is a fact which cannot be overlooked. A Kayastha man is living with a Dom woman, and though he is held in low esteem by his caste-brethren and others, no formal punishment has been enforced on him, and he has not been excluded from communion with his fellow caste-men. It is so because there are only a few Kayastha households in the village, and considering prudence to be the better part of valour, they did not formally excommunicate the degenerate. As one said, his services would be required by the community when the dead body of a Kayastha is to be carried to the crematory for burning. However, the man has left the Kayastha pali, and is living apart with his woman at a distance. Another such household consists of an Ugra-Kshatriya man and a Bagdi woman; and the third is a union of a Kotal man and a Gop woman. The Ugra-Kshatriyas and the Gops are supposed to possess higher social position, but in these cases their association with low-born

mates degraded their status, and the couples had to take their residence in the habitats of the exterior castes.

Apart from the above instances of man and woman living in overt illicit relations, there are in the village, so I was told, a few concubines in the keep of even "respectable" Brahmins. There are also, I heard it said, many hidden affairs as well, and the words of the Rev. Day may even now be repeated: "Of dishonourable criminal love there is no lack, but I do not intend to pollute the pages with its description".

In describing the family pattern of Kanchanpur, we have been viewing the matter from the stand point of kinship structure, and the size of the family has been so long overlooked. Table No. 23 shows the mean size of Kanchanpur households, and Table No. 24 gives modal size for the same according to the social groups in our village.

TABLE 23 : MEAN SIZE OF KANCHANPUR FAMILIES

caste groups	number of people	number of households	average number of members per household
(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
high castes	362	61	5.9
jal-chal castes	265	48	5.5
jal-achal castes	272	45	6.0
exterior castes	567	131	4.3
all	1466	285	5.1

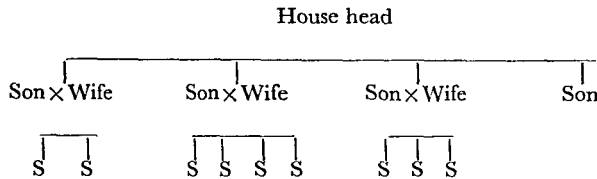
TABLE 24 : MODAL SIZE OF KANCHANPUR FAMILIES

caste groups	no. of households	number of households with members numbering																				
		1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21
high castes	61	9	7	3	4	8	10	3	4	1	4	2	1	2	-	-	1	1	-	1	-	-
jal-chal castes	48	4	4	6	6	8	6	5	-	3	2	2	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	-	-
jal-achal castes	45	6	3	5	5	4	7	2	1	3	4	-	1	1	2	-	-	-	-	-	-	1
exterior castes	131	12	22	19	24	17	14	10	5	4	2	1	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
all castes	285	31	36	33	39	37	37	20	10	11	12	5	4	3	2	-	1	1	-	2	-	1

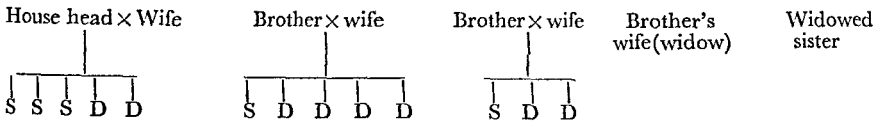
The average size of family for the exterior castes is the lowest amongst the different social groups and is 4.3 only. The modal size for them is also a 4-member household. The upper caste households, which are more extended in their relationships show, on the other hand, a higher figure as the mean size of the families, and the variation in the aggregate of members in each family ranges from 1 to 21 persons per household.

Below are given a couple of family-trees to illustrate the sets of relations that are usually to be found in the larger households of Kanchanpur.

A. THE EX-ZAMINDAR'S FAMILY OF SEVENTEEN MEMBERS (HIGH CASTE BRAHMINS)



B. A SAHA FAMILY OF 21 MEMBERS (A CULTIVATING FAMILY OF THE JAL-ACHAL CASTES)



But the household cannot be reduced to a mere aggregate of persons. It is rather a complex of human relations in which the connected persons stand to each other and behave according to certain socially recognised rules. Describing the intra-familial relationships of a family, the Rev. Day wrote:

“Alanga, forty-six years old was the grihini or mistress of the household. Her son Badan paid her boundless respect, and always agreed to every domestic arrangement she made. Nor were her other sons and her daughters-in-law less obedient, to her. Badan’s wife Sundari, might be expected according to English notions, as the wife of the head of the family, to feel aggrieved at her being deprived of her rightful authority as the mistress of the house. But such a notion is never entertained by a Bengali wife while her mother-in-law is living. And the idea never occurred to Sundari; she deemed it her duty, and esteemed it a privilege to be under

the guardianship of her husband's mother. She was thankful that all domestic affairs were under the management of one so much older, wiser and more experienced than she".

We have seen, so far as the upper castes are concerned, that the lineally extended family with the parents or any one of them as head, is the dominant type of household. The praise of filial piety in Hindu culture, and the persisting group habits of thoughts and behaviours have still retained for the mother the place of superiority and command over her sons and daughters-in-law. The components of such an extended village family are: (i) Parents, (ii) Married sons with wives and children, and (iii) Unmarried sons and unmarried daughters. The daughters go off to live with their husbands' people after marriage and they are not considered real kins of the family. They are brought up to be keepers of others' houses, and it is considered extremely unfortunate if a daughter or a sister, on widowhood or otherwise, comes back to live with her father or brother.

In purely conjugal relations, usually the male has the dominance and control. It is the husband's duty to maintain his wife—to provide her with food and clothing. The wife on her part should follow the path of her husband and be of one mind with her husband's. The man must feed, and the wife must submit—this is the broad conception of rights and duties in our rural couple. A person who tries to exercise control without rendering any good is often jeered with the saying: "Not a husband to provide rice, but a *Gosain* (master) to use cuffs." (*bhat debar bhatar nai, kil marbar gosain*)

The mother-in-law in our rural joint families still enjoy a privileged position; and the daughters-in-law are given a place of subordination. The village daughters are allowed greater liberties and are free in their movements. But a *bou* (daughter-in-law) of the family, usually from another village, has to go about her housework or elsewhere with her face completely veiled. It is indecent for her to speak with her husband's father or elder brothers. She can not even pronounce the name of her husband or his elder relations. She is not supposed to violate this rule even when adherence to it may cause inconvenience or difficulty. The taboo applies equally to the women of the exterior castes. Thus one of them was seen to come to the president of the Panchayat for a ration card but she could not tell him whose wife she was. She tried to indicate it in

various ways and finally referred to her husband as 'the bird that sings in the spring'. The president and all others who were assembled there then understood that she was the wife of the person named *Kokil* (the cuckoo), and the ration card was duly issued with the name of her husband recorded therein.

The village *bou* lives under the guardianship and control of the husband's mother. The harmony of family life is not lost so long as the silken ties of love bind the members of the family. But often there is seen less love and more dominance—as is brought out in the familiar village saying: "*dhane jabda sile, bou jabda kile*", i.e., "The coriander seeds are ground when the curry stone is used; and the daughters-in-law are held in check when the clenched fists are shown".

5.3 MARRIAGE—A THING OF FATE

The ideal of the romantic love leading to marriage is not yet to be expected in our village community. It is true that now-a-days the girls of the upper castes are seldom married off before they are twelve years old and many of them now exceed even their teens before marriages can be arranged for them by their parents. But courtship is an ideal foreign to the culture of rural Bengal. Often boys and girls grow up together in the village and it might well be that wishes of the parents and tender feelings between the playmates sometimes bring into existence a warm friendship and mutual interest between a boy and a girl. But marriages are always to be arranged in old fashioned ways and the warmth in the two adolescent hearts never inspires them to make love in the western sense with a view to marriage. It is for their elders either to make or wreck their marriage proposals.

Here is a true story from the mouth of a young man of our village: "We knew from our childhood, both she and I, that we would be life mates to each other in future. Such was our hearts' desire and the wishes of my mother and her father. She was a girl of a neighbouring family, but she was more dear to me than my sister. We were inwardly interested in each other, but we never talked of it as that would be unbecoming and indecent.

"Both of us reached our respective marriageable age, and negotiations for our marriages were started. I had lost my father in my

boyhood, and my mother was my guardian. She was fond of our neighbour's girl, and wanted to see her as a *bou* in the family. The girl's father and brother were also desirous to give her in marriage to me. But the girl's mother, for reasons best known to her, was opposed to the alliance. Theirs was one of the dominant families in the village, and they considered themselves higher in status to ours. Still, the girl's father did not give up hope, and though he did not bring any proposal to my mother for giving his daughter in marriage to me, he was wishing it and was expecting the proposal to come from my mother's side. Once my mother deputed him on her behalf to see a bride for me in another village. He came back and reported that the other party was seeking a better placed bridegroom, and the negotiations naturally fell through for the time being. But as luck would have it, the father of that girl in the neighbouring village, anxious as he was to get his daughter married, re-approached my mother, and finally we were betrothed, and an auspicious date for the marriage was fixed.

“It was then that our neighbour, the father of my beloved girl, accosted my mother and said that marriage between his daughter and me had all along been intended by both the families. My mother replied that it was not for her, as a mother of a bridegroom, to bring the formal proposal first in the matter, and then it was too late as she was promise-bound and could not back out. The family pride of my neighbour, and my mother's independence not to stoop, wrecked our adolescent dreams. I was married to the other girl, and she to another man in the village of Possibly I did not act very manly, but you see—marriage after all, like birth and death, is a thing of fate.”

5.4 KANCHANPUR CHOOSES A BRIDE

Rev. Day wrote in 1872:

“As in India young men and women do not themselves choose their partners in life, they have to depend on the good offices of this happy functionary (the match-maker), who, however, bears his commission not from the parties themselves, but from their parents and guardians. He has never been known to find any fault with any young man or young woman of marriageable age. The spinster may be as ugly as one of Shakespeare's witches, and the young man may be as deformed as deformity itself; the *ghatak* (the match-maker) sees no defect in either. There no,

in his eye, or at any rate in his mouth, is as beautiful and gentle as *Lakshmi*, and the other as handsome and accomplished as *Kartikeya*."

"But this very virtue of the *ghatak* proved to be his undoing, and disqualified him in the profession as decades passed on. The guardians and parents do no longer like to see through the eyes, or believe what they hear from the mouths of any professional match-maker. With some undesirable matches to their discredit the *ghatak* had to leave his field, and now-a-days, it is mainly the responsibilities of the parents and relations of the parties to arrange the marriages at Kanchanpur."

Now-a-days a match is usually proposed through actual friends and relatives of the parties. Thereafter, one day the young man's father in company of some close relatives or friends visits the place of the girl's father to see whether the bride will be a fit partner for their boy. The girl has to pass through a stiff examination, and the payment of dowry must be settled before the ceremony of betrothal takes place. There, to quote the Bengali couplet:

"*barer baba bose achhe panch hajarer ase*
kaner babar bhanga kapal choker jale bhase"

i.e., The bridegroom's father, expecting his five thousand, smiles, but the bride's father, with his furrowed brow, is prone to tears.

This is, of course, the monetary aspect of the marriage negotiations, but what about the choice of the bride herself?

Our village friend Sri Gnetoo Kumar Chatterjee was accompanying the father and uncle of a Kanchanpur boy on a bride-seeing visit to another village. He was requested by the present writer to bring a true description of all that took place and his experiences are related below in his own words, as follows:

... Returning from my stroll through the village, I found that both my companions were up from their noon-day siesta. Two big *sataranjis* had been spread on the outer verandah, and there in the centre two carpeted seats were placed one facing the other. In the verandah, and the open yard, there gathered about twenty to twenty-two persons, old and middle-aged men and children of the village. The old men were seated on the *sataranjis*. Some of them were smoking tobacco in *hookah*. Occasionally the middle-aged men timidly extended their hands to take the *kalki* (earthen pot containing tobacco) from their elders. They puffed the tobacco a few times and then transferred the *kalki* to others.

As I entered the place of gathering, an old man of eighty years extended his greetings to me—"Come, my friend, and be seated." I bowed to him and enquired about his health. The old man jokingly replied: "Well, my friend, very well. I am excessively well."

Just then the prospective bride or candidate dressed in everyday clothing and with hair untied was led by an old woman into the *sabha* (gathering), with slow and soft steps.

Rishikumar, the uncle of the prospective bridegroom, had already taken his seat on the first carpeted seat with his face to the east. The girl came near, made her bows to the respectables in the assembly, and then slowly sat down on the other carpeted seat in front of Rishikumar. Her head was bent low and she waited there in all modesty. Humbly the bride's father intimated that her daughter might be asked any questions thought desirable by the party.

Rishikumar had already made himself prepared for the situation, and he at once started the examination:

"Ma, (mother), what is your name?"

"My name is Prativarani Chattopadhyay", replied the girl in a rather timid voice.

"What is your father's name?"

"My father's name is Sanatan Chattopadhyay."

"Very good, very good! (Besh! Besh!)"

"Ma, do you know *lekhpāra* (to read and write)?"

"Yes, I know."

"How far and upto what class have you read?"

"I read upto class four."

"Do you know 'writing'?"

"Yes, I know", was the reply.

Then Rishikumar looked to the girl's father and found that he had already brought the requisite things for the test—paper, inkpot and pen, etc. Rishikumar took the writing materials and handed them to the girl.

"Well, mother, now you write your name on this paper."

The girl correctly wrote out her name on the paper.

"Now, mother, write down again your father's name with his address in this village".

Silently the girl complied with the direction.

Rishikumar took the paper in hand and read aloud:

“Srimati Prativarani Chattopadhyay.

Father’s name—Srijukta Sanatan Chattopadhyay.

Village—Adityapur,

Post Office—Adityapur,

District—Burdwan”.

“Good! The handwriting is also excellent”

“Well, mother, are you skilled in the art of sewing and stitching?”

“Yes, I am.

“What do you know?”

“I know to weave carpets, knit sweaters, prepare *paṇos* (door-mats) make designs etc.”

“Well, mother, do you know how to laugh? Let us see how you laugh”.

As the bride was too strained to laugh, her father told her not to feel shy. He asked her to laugh and explained to her that she was asked to laugh so that her teeth might be inspected by the examining party.

But the bride still failed to laugh. In shame and fear she bent her head still lower and it seemed that she wanted to identify herself with the mother earth.

Then the old man of eighty years began to tell a story, and full of humour it was. Along with others, the young bride broke out in laughter, and the frolicksome nature of adolescence expressed itself.

Rishikumar keenly watched the teeth and laughter of the girl, and simultaneously remarked: “The girl’s teeth are good. These are neither high nor low, neither long, nor short. But, Sirs, I did not ask her to laugh only to see her teeth. When one laughs the cheeks unmistakably show signs—good as well as bad. It is one of the sayings of Khṇa (the great female astrologer of traditional fame):

*“hasyakale gandasthale kup hay jar,
sei nari bandhya habe janibek sar.”*

That is, “If a dimple is formed in the cheeks at the time of laughing, know it for certain that the woman is going to be sterile.”

“Mother, lift the skirt your *sari* from your ankle to the knee”.

The girl blushed and grew crimson. But she must try to pass her examination as her father was being blamed for not getting her married as yet. Almost daily her father is running to distant villages

in search of a bridegroom for her and for her sake he is undergoing many humiliations and troubles. She pondered and hesitated a little and then slowly drew up the ends of sari-skirt till both of her legs from the ankles to the knees became visible to others' eyes.

Rishikumar carefully examined the naked parts, and then asked the girl to drop the skirt and walk a bit.

The bride began to walk slowly.

"Quick! more quick!" and silently the girl obeyed the order.

"Now you see there is a brass jar underneath that pumpkin creeper in the yard. Go and fetch that pot on your waist, and then come here and sit down on your seat."

The girl did as she was directed. As she was coming with the pot on her waist, Rishikumar watched her gait with a fixed gaze to find out whether the fingers and soles of the feet were having their full press on the earth. Because, if it is not so, the girl does not possess good signs and therefore would be rejected.

When the girl was seated again Rishikumar asked her to turn round, so that he could examine the growth of her hair on the head. After such inspection, the girl was asked to extend her left hand towards him, which she did gracefully and then kept her eyes closed.

Rishikumar now began to carefully examine the lines on her palm. He spent some ten minutes over it, whispering at the same time his calculations in various indistinct sounds. Then he said: "No, the girl has very good lines! She has been born in an auspicious moment (*lagna*), and she owns good signs. My choice is made in favour of the girl."

But still the grind continued.

"Well, mother, do you know how to make tea and cook food?"

"Yes, I know."

"Do you know how to prepare offering for *thakurpuja* (i.e., worship of God)?"

"Yes, I do."

"Then tell me what are the things that are required in *thakurpuja*."

"Flowers, *durva* grass, *tulsi* leaves, Ganges water, *haritaki* (myrobalan), black *til* (sesamum), sandalwood paste, incense, lamp, sun-dried rice, *sandesh* or *batasa*."

But I was becoming restive and intervened saying: "Good, good, you need not tell any further". I then turned to speak to Rishikumar: "Well, Sir, just now you carefully examined the lines of her palms and gave us your judgment that she was born in an auspicious moment and she has very good marks to indicate that she would be happy and prosperous in life and make others so. When you have read all these on her palms, and when you are confident of your predictions, what good is there in further examination?"

Then, in order to prevent any altercation between us, growing, the old man of eighty years spoke again. He thus addressed me: "No, my son, no. Allow him to go on with his questions. All these may be necessary, as you cannot see in the palm whether the girl is deaf or dumb!"

Thus stopped, I requested Rishi Babu to go on as he would like.

"Well", said Rishi Babu, I need not ask any further questions. But I want to be supplied with a copy of the girl's *thikujī* (i.e., the paper recording the moment of birth with position of the sun, the moon, the planets and stars at that time). This is needed for a comparison with the boy's horoscope and to find whether the heavenly influences of the parties will be compatible in this marriage."

The bride's father promised to hand over the said birth-moment document immediately, and inquired whether he would like to ask any further question of the girl.

Rishikumar turned to the bride and said: "Mother, I have given you much trouble, but Mother, I am your son. Now go and prepare tea with your own hands and see that you yourself serve us the cups."

The girl got up and left the place with soft steps and entered the kitchen of the house. A few minutes later she came again with ten cups of tea placed on a tray, served these to the guests one by one, and then stood still.

"Well, mother, you may go" said Rishikumar as he sipped the cup of tea. "You have prepared very good tea. It has excellent taste. Now, mother, you may go inside."

With the empty tray in hand, the bride turned towards the inner yard of the house with the same slow and soft steps with which she had entered at first,

When the bride had thus been chosen, the question of dowry arose. It was settled that the bridegroom would be presented with a cycle, a wrist-watch and a set of gold buttons. At *sampradan* (giving away ceremony) during marriage, the bride would be presented to the groom, with 25 tolas of gold ornaments on her body. Lastly, a sum of Rs. 500/- in cash was to be paid to the bridegroom's father for meeting his part of the expenses.

Thus, it seems, was an old-fashioned marriage arranged. But forces of modernisation are also having their impact on our village community, and slow changes are coming. In the above matter, though everything was settled, I was told by Rishikumar himself that the bridegroom with his brother-in-law and a friend would be sent to have a look at the girl. It was out of question that the boy might reject the choice of his father and guardians. But still he must be sent, and his visit to the girl's place would at the same time give an opportunity to the bride and her people to have a look at the boy as well.

5.5 KANCHANPUR CELEBRATES A MARRIAGE

A.O.'s sister was going to be married. "Her real age" said J.B. to me, "was twenty-two, but what could we do but give out to the bridegroom's people that she was only seventeen? It was a great relief to the girls' relatives that the marriage could be arranged after all."

The auspicious moment for celebrating the marriage was fixed on the 11th Falgun. The bridegroom with his party entered Kanchanpur in the service bus, which on receipt of an extra five rupees drove upto the central Shivatala of the village, and dropped the passengers there. The marriage-party was cordially received by the bride's people and was led to an adjoining house where arrangements for seats of the bridegroom and the party had been made. There was no *hookah* to go round. But cigarettes and *bidis* in plates, and cups of tea were served off and on.

In the enclosed yard of the bride's house, under a canopy overhead, arrangements had been made for celebration of the marriage. In one corner of the yard was the *chhatnatale* ^{ਚੁਠਾਣਾ} where the ceremony of

*'Chhatna' is an indigenous word which means 'to tie'. Chhatnatale, therefore, literally means the place where the bridegroom is to be tied. The term, however, has acquired a generic sense and means the place where the *striachar* is to be performed.

the *striachar* was to be performed. The *striachar* literally means the female customs and forms the first part of the marriage to be performed by the women. In the centre of the yard, arrangements had been made for the ceremony of *sampradan* (gift) which is performed according to Brahminic rites. There the priests and the nuptials of both the parties were waiting for the beginning of the ceremony, and the *salgram*, the oval black stone used as a symbol of God Narayana, was already placed on its throne in the central *mandap* (platform).

As the eminently auspicious hour arrived, which according to the calculations of the Hindu astrologers was the ~~great~~ moment for a man and a woman to be united as husband and wife, the uncle of the bride sought permission from the priests and the assembled gentlemen in the yard that the marriage ceremony might be started. All said: "Yes, yes, please begin the ceremony", and thereafter the bridegroom was led to the seat. As the bride had lost her father, her uncle would give her in *sampradan* (gift of the bride i.e., in marriage), and he was called upon by his priest to make the *sankalpa* (resolution before God) for the ceremony. The bridegroom was then honoured and gifts of silken cloth, gold ring, a wrist-watch and other presents were made over to him. Thereafter, he was sent to the female department for performance of what is called the *striachar*.

A married grandmother of the bride, assisted by several other married women, first gave the bridegroom the ceremonial welcome (*baran*). But thereafter the bridegroom's plight began. His hands were tied by the women and he was asked to bleat or remain in bondage. On promise of payment of a fee, however, he was allowed to be free. Next came the burning of 28 sticks. The women, assisted by some men as well, took the burning sticks round and round the bride-groom and the heat and soot that came out in the process must have caused some pain and suffering to the would-be carrier-away of the bride. It was now time for the bride to be brought forward on the scene. The ceremony of *satpak* (seven binding) was started by carrying the bride seated on a wooden stool seven times round the bridegroom, and was completed by moving her seven times up and down in front of him. Then a veil was thrown over the heads of the couple and they were asked to make the *subna-dristi* (i.e., auspicious sight). After this came the exchange of flower garlands between the parties which, according to the female custom completed the union.

During all the above processes, there were sounds of *ulu* and conch shells all around. Printed poems composed on the occasion were distributed by both the parties. When the *striachar* was declared to be over, the *napit*, who is an important functionary in all marriage ceremonies and stands next to the priest, came forward to recite some self-composed rhymes. First the *napit* of the bridegroom's party displayed his poetic skill, and then the bride's *napit* gave the reply. Both of them described in their own verses, the marriage ceremony between Ram and Sita and compared the present marriage to that of the great Hindu epic. Both of them glorified the traditional ideal of married womanhood as embodied in Sita:

“Here Sita stands, my daughter fair,
The duties of thy life to share.
Take from her father, take thy bride,
Join hand to hand, the bliss betide.
A faithful wife, most blest is she,
And, as thy shade, will follow thee.”

(Quoted by the Rev. Day from Griffith's Ramayana).

Now the couple were led to the *asar* (place for *sampradan*). Here now the marriage ceremony was to be performed according to Sanskrit rites. The bride's left hand was placed over the palm of the bridegroom's right hand and the function of *sampradan* (gift of the girl) was performed. After a brief respite the ceremony of *kusandika* began. Some sand was spread on the earth and a square was drawn on it by a straw of *kusha* grass. Inside the square of sand, a sacrificial fire was lit. After *hom* (offering in fire) of ghee and fried rice to God, such rites as *panigrahan* (i.e., taking of the bride's hand by the groom) *saptapadi* (i.e., walking seven steps together), *dhrubā darshan* (seeing the pole star—so that the wife may remain fixed and true in her husband's family like the said star), *arundhati darshan* (so that the wife may remain chaste and pure like Arundhati, now a star in heaven but really the wife of the great sage Vasistha), *sindurdan* (giving the vermilion on the head), *lajja-dan* (bestowal of modesty in which rite the bridegroom draws the veil from the face of the bride) were performed one after another with citation of the holy Sanskrit mantras by the priests. Finally came the *purnahuti* (full offering in fire) after which the sacrificial fire was extinguished.

Thus the sacramental marriage came to an end and with their skirts tied to each other's clothes the married couple retired to the *vasarghar* (i.e., bed-room of the nuptial night) while other persons were served the dinner. The night at *vasarghar*, however, was not an exclusive affair for the couple, and the place was crowded with a number of young and old women on terms of jovial relation whose only purpose was to spend the night in getting amusement and teasing the pair, and especially the bridegroom.

The next day, the bridegroom and his party were to return with the bride to their own place. J.B. on behalf of the interested groups of the village approached the *karta* (the head) of the bridegroom's party and realised some rupees sixteen as fees and subscriptions payable on such occasions. Rupees two was levied as *dagra-salami*—the same as *dhelabhangani* mentioned by the Rev. Day—as payment to the adolescent boys as purchase price for abstention from stoning the marriage party while entering the village. Another rupees two were realised for untying the bridegroom's hands during *striachar* and also a further amount of Rs. 2/- was exacted for *sayyatolan*, (i.e., allowing the bridegroom to get up from the nuptial bed). These six rupees were to be invested in sweets by the respective parties. The rest of the money was to be equally divided among the different village institutions such as the Panchayet, the Old Siva; the F.P. School, the Memorial Library, and lastly the Dakshinpara Barwari, to which locality the bride's people belonged.

After the ceremony of *asirbad* (benedictions), the bride left the village in tears, with her husband and his friends and relatives. For the married couple, a *palki* (palanquin), the only one in the village, was requisitioned to carry them upto the bus-stand. The friends and relatives, however, walked down this little distance. Before leaving the village the *palki* was twice stopped before the temple of the Old Siva, and the place of the great mother, and the couple got down to pray so that they might receive the blessings of their gods in the beginning of their new life.

5.6 HOUSEHOLD DUTIES AT KANCHANPUR

The days of Kanchanpur's women are full of work. The men of our village community do not share the burden of household duties. The old female values persist and the men are not even expected to

co-operate with their women in the house-work of the family. Rich or poor, of high or low caste, the village women have to work and attend to various domestic affairs from morn till night.

Getting out of bed early in the morning the first duty which a housewife has to perform or have it performed is to sprinkle water on the door steps, and thereafter to scatter the solution of cow-dung and water on the open yards and at the entrance of the front doors. These places are then swept by a broom and then polished by means of a piece of rag dipped in the solution of cow-dung and water. All Kanchanpur women, whatever their class or caste may be, follow the above practice, as it is known to them:

“Where water is sprinkled, and sweeping is done
before the rise of the sun,
And where the lamps are lit as the sun sets,
There I love to reside, says Mother Lakshmi.

Excepting a very limited number of rich and a few upper middle class households of the village, Kanchanpur women cannot afford to engage the service of maid-servants for their housework. But even those housewives are not very free or leisured, as there are spheres of work in which the maid-servants are not allowed to enter.

After the morning sprinkling of water and cow-dung solution, the women begin the cleaning of the house. Beddings used at night are rolled up and stocked properly; ashes from ovens are taken out and thrown on the manure-heaps. The whole house is swept by a broom, and all earthen floors and yards are polished with cow-dung solution. The maid-servants of the rich households perform the ordinary work of cleaning and washing, but they are not allowed to enter the *thakurghar* (the deity's room), the kitchen and some special rooms, and consequently those are to be cleansed by the women of the house.

For the rich the maid-servants boil paddy and dry it in the sun, but most of the housewives of the village do those duties themselves. Such boiled and sunned paddy is then usually sent to be turned into rice in the neighbouring hulling machines. But there are many families, especially amongst the poor and the exterior castes, who are still depending and working on their homely pedals.

Morning and evening the cooking pots and pans, and the dishes, glasses and saucers etc. used during meals are taken to the nearest

tank and scoured and cleansed there. In case of the rich households, it is the job of the maid-servants, but they are not allowed to enter the kitchen; women of the house should take those outside the kitchen to be handed over to the maid-servants and again arrange them inside when the cleansing has been done.

The upper-caste old ladies, especially the widows, take early baths and spend a part of their morning in regular prayers and pujas. Those who have daily worship of the deities in their houses, make arrangements for such worship, and thereafter they go to help in other domestic duties.

Drinking of tea has become a habit, especially with the upper classes. For such households, tea-making and serving have, therefore, come to be a part of the housewives' regular work. For all classes and castes, the care of the children is a necessary house-work. But children belonging to the upper sections of the society, usually get better food, clothings and home-education, while those of the lower sections appear neglected.

The cleansing of the cowsheds is also a regular task of Kanchanpur women, and most of the households have cows. The making of the cow-dung cakes and balls mixed with coal dust to be used as fuel, when dry, is also an art in which the Kanchanpur women are almost daily engaged.

When the house has been cleansed and fire has been given to the coke in the family oven, the Kanchanpur women should go to take their ablutions. After washing the used garments and clothings of the house-members, they take their bath and hurry home as the fire has been ready for the most important part of their work—i.e., cooking for the members of the family. It is their especial charge, and even the rich households of the village are not used to engaging the services of a cook. Drawing of water, cutting of vegetables, or making a paste of spices to be used in the curries are also activities usually done by the village women. The rich housewives, however, usually get the services of poor but high-caste women for bringing water from tube-wells, or frying rice, or *muri* or pasting of spices for curries, in fact any such honourable tasks as cannot be left to maid-servant of the exterior castes. The daughters and housewives of other classes do these tasks for themselves, and moreover they have to fetch their cooking and drinking water usually from the nearest

public tube-well. A lady with a pitcher on the waist and a bucket in her right hand is a familiar sight in the streets of Kanchanpur.

The exterior caste women, besides their household work, go out to catch fish with their homely nets. They and especially the poorer amongst them also collect cow-dung from streets and fields, and also dried twigs and sticks etc. to be used as their fuel.

The upper caste and the Subarnabanik women prepare *boris* and varieties of pickles. They also do a little bit of sewing and knitting after their noon-day meals. The exterior caste women do not generally know how to do such things.

Spinning has fallen into disuse and no longer the "ghhan ghanan ghanan" of the *charka* is heard in any of the houses of Kanchanpur.

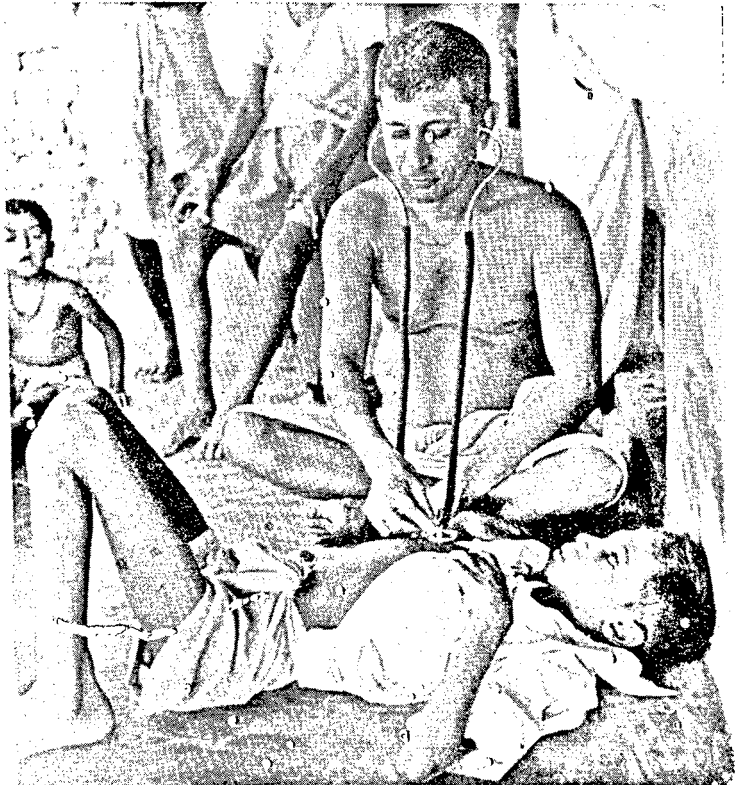
Shopping is usually done by the children of the upper castes and the women of the lower castes.

When the after-noon comes, cleansing of the house is done a second time but not so thoroughly as was done in the morning. The dried up clothes are collected and kept in order on the *alna* for inmates of the house. The upper caste, and the Subarnabanik *bous* and girls comb and tie their hair and go to the tanks for their evening washing of clothes and bodies. The low-caste women are not particular about this.

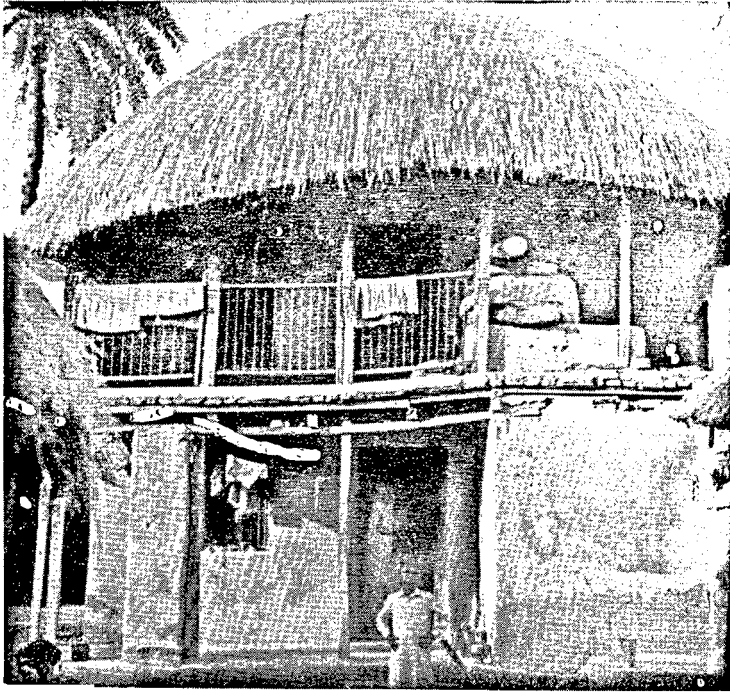
When the evening draws near, Kanchanpur's housewives light their oil lamps and sound their conchs. Then they go for preparation of the night meals for the family. When cooking is finished, it is for them to arrange the seats and plates and serve the courses of the dinner. When all others are fed, the housewives have their repast. It is already late at night and others have gone to bed. The housewives get the doors of the house properly bolted or locked, and retire for the night as they will have to rise up early next morning which brings to them the usual round of duties.



A Village Belle



The Village Doctor



House of a Middle-class Brahmin Family



Children at School

CHAPTER SIX

EDUCATION

6.1 THE SCHOOL HOUSE OF KANCHANPUR

A modest, mud-walled hall partitioned into three class rooms under a general roof of corrugated sheets is the structure which houses the present free primary school of Kanchanpur. This school-house was built in 1935, and before that our village school had no separate building of its own.

In the times of the Rev. Day, the *pathsala* had been held in the open colonnade before the central *Shivtala*, and it continued to be so held when the village was first revisited by the present writer in 1933-34. The Rev. Day had also mentioned a second village *pathsala* under a Kayastha teacher who held his school in the yard at his house, in the shade of an umbrageous *kantala* tree (Jack tree), excepting in the rainy season, when he removed it to the verandah of his cottage. But the village *pathsala*, properly so called, had all along been held at the *Shivtala*—the multi-purpose site of our village community. Besides, being the place of worship of the *Old Shiva*, and the seat of learning of the village children, it served as the venue of all community activities at Kanchanpur. The site had been requisitioned for Barwari and Panchayat sittings, for hearing complaints, and proceedings of arbitrations, for fairs and festivals, for *jatras* and theatres, for *kabis* and *tarjas*, for *thakas* and *chhabis*, for meetings and receptions and what not. A separate school-house had been a 'felt-need', and finally in 1935 Kanchanpur could boast of possessing one for its community.

The village elders selected for their school a site about a hundred yards to the west of the central-*Shivtala*, and the north of the Shiva's temple at *goyla chatar* (i.e., the milkmen's court). The hall faces to the east, with a running verandah in front and covers an area of about a thousand square feet. In front there is an unenclosed open space belonging to the school, in the north side of which is a small flower garden. A Laha family of Calcutta had kindly donated a tube-well to the school. The school owns at present 0.27 acre of land, of which 0.21 acre was made over by the then

zamindar of the village, and the rest 0.06 acre came from the local Hazra family.

The middle room of the hall is the biggest one, and accommodates the Class I students of the school. Next in size is the southern room where Classes II and III are jointly held. A fewer number of boys and girls go up to Class IV, which is run in the northern and the smallest room.

The teacher no longer sits on a mat, but has his chair, and the upper class pupils have their benches. The Class I boys and girls, however, have ~~not~~ yet been promoted to this honour. They still sit on the floor, or at best on gunny bags or woven palm leaves which served as seats for all our rural pupils even 25 years ago.

At present the school owns 4 chairs, 3 tables, 7 benches, 4 black-boards and one almirah. As there are three teachers, each of them may, therefore, use a chair and a table for himself. The fourth additional chair is presumably there for any visitor who may come to see the school. The school also has a table clock, which is daily removed to the Head master's house after school hours for safe custody. The school had also a bell-metal gong, which struck the sound as period after period was over. Unfortunately the gong has very recently been stolen, and the school now loses its periodical resonant sounds which bring such a lively stir in the classes of any of our schools.

It need not be pointed out that any of the above furniture, was unthought of in the old-fashioned orthodox village *pathsala* of the 19th century. In 1933-34, it had been noted that the only apparatus which the school possessed was its black-board which always hung on one of the columns of the verandah. But when the Rev. Day wrote, the black-boards were "as unknown in the *pathsalas* as Bablages' Calculating Machine." Outwardly, therefore, the village school has changed, but has the content of school-life changed ?

6.2 THE SCHOOL-LIFE OF KANCHANPUR

The Rev. Day's *pathsala* had four classes:—(i) the floor class, (ii) the palm-leaf class, (iii) the plantain-leaf class, and lastly (iv) the paper-class. In the lowest class the beginner used to trace the Bengali alphabet on the ground with a chalk. After a few months the pupil

exchanged the ground for the palmyra leaves, and chalk for some years on the mud-floor, as palmyra-leaves were ill-adopted for such purpose. Higher than the palm-leaf stage was the plantain-leaf class. Palm leaves and plantain leaves cost nothing in the village, and working on them, when the pupil became somewhat adept in calligraphy, arithmetic and some correspondence, he threw away the leaves for the costly paper. With practice on paper, his education at the *pathsala* came to a successful end.

In 1933-34, the village *pathsala* was an Upper Primary school with three forms. But the palm and plantain leaves, of the old days had been replaced by the more 'modern' slate and pencil.

The school was raised to the U.P. standard in 1935, and it became a free institution in 1948. At present the school is divided into 4 classes—Class I, II, III and IV. A student is supposed to read in each of the classes for one year, but formerly there was no such annual session of classes. The *pathsala* was held twice a day—first from early in the morning till about 11 o'clock, and again from three o'clock in the afternoon till candle light. At present the village school is held in the day time from 10-30 a.m. to 4-00 p.m. with a short recess at midday for lunch.

In the old fashioned village *pathsala*, the subjects to which greatest attention was paid were calligraphy, arithmetic and Bengali letter-writing. In the present day curriculum, both calligraphy and letter-writing are neglected, while the subject of arithmetic is not so diligently pursued as it was in the village *pathsala*. In those days the pupils of the *pathsala* seldom read a book, but at the end of their school career, they came out with an education quite useful to their practical life. They could write decently, calculate accurately and correspond properly. But now-a-days, a pupil leaves school usually with an awfully bad handwriting, which makes it difficult for others to follow his scribblings; he is weaker in arithmetic, and is practically incapable of making any epistolary address in the proper form. The system of the village *pathsala* aimed at the practical and the needful, and was quite sensible. The subjects it taught were few; in fact these were only arithmetic and letter-writing, but the pupils were made to learn the two subjects assiduously, and knowledge about them proved quite useful in their future lives.

The school student has now-a-days to read so many books and learn so many subjects. One really wonders at the attempt on the

part of our planners, to fill so much knowledge in the little heads. The elders of the village are of opinion that their students' standard has gone down, and the performance of the pupils of the orthodox *pathsala* was much better. Besides arithmetic and mother language, the students of our village school are now required^o under the syllabus of the Education Directorate to learn history, geography, primary science, hygiene, social science, and various miscellaneous things, such as crafts, gardening, drill and sports, national song, religious *stotras*, practical social work, and what not. The curriculum is no doubt imposing, and if mere curriculum could make men, the finished products of the present village Free Primary School would turn out to be perfect citizens of the country. But both the village teachers and the guardians are apprehensive of the result of shoving too much knowledge in the little heads of children who usually belong to the age-group of six to eleven years.

Further, the village guardians have their grievances against the teachers also. According to the present system of primary education, the teachers are paid by the District School Board out of funds raised by the State through taxation. It is said to be free primary education, as the village guardians are not required to pay any fee for their wards. The monthly salaries of the primary teachers are remitted to the village post office by the School Board, but there is practically no departmental supervision or inspection over the running of the school. True, there is an advisory committee from the village public, but it has no control over the affairs of the school, and its members complain that the teachers have slackened their efforts, as they are financially independent of the village public. Is it any wonder, they say, that the standard of village education has gone down?

Another remarkable feature in the modern primary education is the virtual abolition of the age-old system of disciplinary correction. Whether sparing of the rod is spoiling the child, or causing the standard to fall is a matter for our educationists to decide; but the old faith in the rod has vanished. The village school-master of the Rev Day was a strict disciplinarian. He constantly had by him a thin but longish twig of bamboo which often resounded, not only on the palms of his pupils' hands, but on their heads and backs ! Sometimes too with cruel ingenuity he would strike their knuckles, their

knee-joints and their ankles. He had also other ways of administering discipline. One famous mode of juvenile punishment was called *Naru-Gopal*, and another such was the application of the stinging *bichhuti* leaves to the skin. These disciplinary processes, however, were time-honoured institutions which had been handed down from generation to generation of Bengali village school masters. In '*Kanchanpur Revisited*' (1933-34) the present writer had remarked:

"Spare the rod and spoil the child, is still the principle by which a village *pathsala* is run; and all the ingenious methods of punishment are strictly followed. Oh yes, one change and that perhaps in deference to modern notions. The punishment of *Naru Gopal* (stooping in the posture of Shrikrishna with sweets in his hands, as shown in Hindu religious scriptures) has been supplanted by the 'Chair system' i.e., keeping the body in the shape of an arm chair—quite an original invention. To develop the best in the child, says the modern educationist, the child should be given liberty and approached with reverence. The village *gurumashai*, rich with the experiences of fourteen generations, would surely be staggered by such an idea."

But with the disappearance of the old-fashioned orthodox *pathsalas*, the village *gurumashai* has also left the scene. The state-wise system of primary education has been introduced, and trained teachers are now being appointed in the Upper Primary Schools. The principles of the modern educationists are being honoured by the new teachers, and though the juvenile penal code could not possibly be altogether abolished, the present teachers are no longer its advocates.

With the teachers relaxing and the rod vanishing, the school is no longer a dreadful place for our village children. They are coming to love it. If you happen to come over to their classes to see what the teachers and the pupils are engaged in doing—and as you are not a school inspector but a friendly visitor—you are sure to enjoy the lively atmosphere that prevails there. There is great jubilation in the whole school, classes are stopped, and all the three teachers come forward to welcome you. The senior boys run to find out the extra chair and place it for you. After ordinary greetings, you request the teachers to go on with their classes as usual, and yourself intend to accompany one of the teachers to his class-room. The students of other classes at once catch hold of you and try to drag you to their room. Assuring them that you would come to them by turn, you just enter one of the class rooms. The little boys

and girls surround you and pull you towards the chair. They simply ask the class teacher—be he their head master the second master or the young master—to take his leave for the period, and request you to take their lessons for the day. Or it may be that you are asked to act as their polling officer for the day as the date has been fixed for election of the health minister of the school. Instead of teaching them, you may want to learn what sort of health activities the minister will remain in charge of. You are told that the health minister is responsible for seeing that his school mates are following healthy habits and giving up the bad ones. It is his duty to see that the school-house and the individual rooms are cleansed, and the school children are using washed clothing, and maintaining clean teeth, nails, hair etc. Thus instead of giving them any lessons, you try to learn from the pupils what they learn and do in their school. Particularly you are attracted to the social service programme. On being asked what sorts of service they render to their village community, several boys and girls bring a few exercise books to you. You take up one such and read what is written on the cover-page.

Shri Paresh Kumar Daw,
Village—Shona Palashi,
Class—IV,
Upakar Khata (Social Service Book),
1365 B.S.

Inside, you may be pleased to note such entries as :—

1365 B.S. 28th Tuesday, Month of Pous

I have lifted a load of straw on the head of Biswanath Daw.

I have driven off the cow of the Jhunus from eating paddy, 29th Pous, Wednesday, 1365 B. S.

The goats of the Kesavs had been eating paddy, and I drove them out.

1st Magh—The cow of the Khukus was running away, and I got her tied.

2nd Magh—I have bought Kerosene oil for the Bishis.

So ran the daily list of benefits rendered by our school-boy servant of village society.

6.3 WHO GO TO SCHOOL

The school is meant for all the children of the village community, usually belonging to the age-group of six to eleven, irrespective of

any caste or creed. The boys and girls of *Barabagan*, a hamlet close to our village in the West also attend this (Sona Palashi) F.P. School. Exclusively inhabited by a few Kotal households, the Barabagan is not an integral part of the village. Nevertheless, it depends on Kanchanpur for various social services, as in this matter of initiating their young in to the mysteries of *lekha para*.

In the time of the Rev. Day, at the Shivtala *pathsala* sons of Brahmins, Kayasthas and wealthy bankers received instructions from a Brahmin *gurumashai*. The Kayastha pedagogue, having a far inferior social position to that of the Brahmin, obtained only a third part of the pupils of the other. Any day one might have seen in the school of the Brahmin *gurumashai* between sixty and seventy boys, whereas in the other school one seldom saw more than twenty students chiefly coming from the lower castes and poorer classes of the village.

The situation in 1933-34 is pictured in *Kanchanpur Revisited*. The then register of the Shivtala *pathsala* showed the number of students to be 48, of which ten were girls. There was no restriction as to the caste, but practically no pupil came from any of the depressed classes. At that time there was also a rival school, but three fourths of the village pupils took lessons at the Shivtala *pathsala*.

Now we come to 1948—the first year of the F.P. School. The number of students in a particular month of that year stood as follows:

TABLE 25 : FREE PRIMARY SCHOOL : ENROLMENT AND ATTENDANCE

classes	high caste		scheduled caste		total		
	boys	girls	boys	girls	boys	girls	total
(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)
1948 class I	22	15	6	2	28	17	45
class II	9	6	—	1	9	7	16
class III	9	2	3	—	12	2	14
class IV	7	2	1	—	8	2	10
total	47	25	10	3	57	28	85

In January 1959, after eleven years of free education, the roll strength of our school stood as follows:

TABLE 26 : ENROLMENT AND ATTENDANCE 1959

classes	high caste		scheduled caste		total		
	boys	girls	boys	girls	boys	girls	total
(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)
class I	20	16	11	1	31	17	48
class II	9	13	6	-	15	13	28
class III	10	3	6	2	16	5	21
class IV	7	-	2	2	9	2	11
total	46	32	25	5	71	37	108

The increase for the total number of students joining the F.P. School, during these 11 years therefore amounts to 27%, but as our rate of increase in the village population was found to be 33%, free education does not appear to have served as a special incentive for drawing a larger proportion of the children.

The present proportion of our school students of the village proper (that is excluding the number of pupils from Barabagan hamlet) to the school-age population (from six to eleven years) of the village is shown below:—

TABLE 27 : SCHOOLING ACCORDING TO CASTE GROUPS

caste groups	school-age population (6-11 yrs.)			enrolled in school register			actually attending school			children below or above 11 attending school		
	boys	girls	total	boys	girls	total	boys	girls	total	boys	girls	total
high caste	22	15	37	21	13	34	15	13	28	1	1	2
jal-chal caste	15	15	30	21	9	30	16	7	23	3	1	4
jal-achal caste	16	28	44	9	11	20	7	10	17	-	-	-
exterior caste	38	24	62	12	2	14	5	1	6	3	-	3
all	91	82	173	63	35	98	43	31	74	7	2	9

The percentages of the actually attending number of pupils between 6 and 11 years to the total school-age population of the same age work out as follows:

TABLE' 28 : PROPORTIONAL ATTENDANCE

caste groups	age-groups 6-11 years					
	boys			girls		
	total school-age population	actually going of school	percent-age of (3) to (2)	total	school going	percent-age of (6) to (5)
(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)
high caste	22	14	64	15	12	80
jal-chal caste	15	13	87	15	6	40
jal-achal caste	16	7	44	28	10	36
exterior caste	38	2	5	24	1	4
all	91	36	40	82	29	35

In the Kanchanpur of New India, primary education is said to be both free and compulsory, and yet only 40% of the boys and 35% of the girls of 6 to 11 years age-group are found to attend the school. The corresponding figures for the exterior castes are only 5% and 4% for their boys and girls respectively and indicate the slowness of progress in this respect. The Kaibartas and Chunaris of the jal-achal group, and the Hari, Bauri Muchi, Kora, Santal and the Muslim of the exterior group, are seen to have a fair number of children amongst them, but none are sent to the village school. Of 27 Bagdi boys and girls in our community, only one boy and one girl actually go to school.

It may be seen from the above that in our village community, there were in January 1959, 173 children of the age-group of 6 to 11 years. Of them only 98 were found to be enrolled in the school-register, and amongst them only 74 were found to be actually attending the school. Of these 74, again, all were not regular. What if education is free, what even if education is compulsory, most of the girls of Kanchanpur, and the boys of its labouring classes, cannot be conveniently allowed to waste their time in the school by their parents and guardians. For them life brings another education quite different from that which is given in the schools; and the girls

are drawn to assist their mother and grandmother in the work of housewifery, and the boys take charge of cows and bullocks and begin their apprenticeship in the world of labour.

An inspection of the school register showed that 98 students had been enrolled, but a house to house enquiry brought out the fact that only 74 students were actually sent to school by the householders. That is to say there were found to be 24 children in the village, whose names were in the school rolls, but who did not at all join the school. As a matter of fact, they were caused to be enrolled, but not meant to be schooled. This is what leads to extension of our primary education on paper. As grants of the School Board for teachers depend on the roll-strength of the school, and as some extension of education for the village—now within a compulsory area—is to be shown by our teachers to the higher authorities, the tendency is to send forth inflated statistics. One wonders how much is paper-extension in the work of our various newly growing welfare agencies.

Now let us look to the distribution of the pupils in the four different classes as given in the school-register.

	<i>number of students</i>
Class I	48
Class II	28
Class III	21
Class IV	11
	108

Fortyeight students are seen in the first year of the school; and in Class IV there are only eleven. The roll strength falls year after year, and only a small percentage of the admitted students passes out of the final class. For the majority of them the school-career is brought to a close much earlier. This year out of eleven students in class IV only eight sat in the U.P. Examination held in March 1959; and neither of the two girls was amongst them. Of the eight examinees, seven passed out successfully, a performance of which the village teachers felt proud.

6.4 EDUCATION ABROAD KANCHANPUR

It is desirable here to make a little enquiry in respect of the students who go outside the village for education. There are 10 boys and

3 girls of the village, who are being brought up in other places. Two of these girls are reading in the primary classes, while the third, a Brahmin is studying in a secondary school at Burdwan, and is the only girl of the village who is pursuing her studies higher than the U.P. As a matter of fact the father of the girl, a qualified doctor, although claiming to belong to the joint family consisting of his father and brother in Kanchanpur, is himself settled at Burdwan. The education of his daughter, therefore, is to be taken as an exception from the village standard. (Since our inquiry and writing of these lines the girl was placed in marriage and discontinued her studies.).

To the Kaligram Junior High School, and the Kurman High School, Kanchanpur sends 9 and 13 boys respectively. All these students, excepting one Subarnabanik boy, take their big meals before 10 a.m. and plod their way to the neighbouring villages of Kaligram or Kurman as the case may be and return home after school hours. The Subarnabanik scholar, however, is a resident of the hostel attached to the Kaligram Junior High School. It is not the distance of the school from his house, which is hardly a couple of miles, but the distance between himself and his step-mother at home that has led to his sojourn in the school hostel.

Two of the young men of Kanchanpur are undergoing regular college education in Calcutta. One of them is a Brahmin boy and the other is a Subarnabanik. I also understand that another young man of the Vaidya caste, an employee in a Calcutta firm, has also begun to take his lessons in the evening classes in a college of the City.

6.5 THE TRAINING OF A GIRL

As no girl of Kanchanpur goes for higher education, and as most of its girls are not even allowed to go up to the U.P., it behoves us to inquire a little and see what sort of training Kanchanpur imparts to its girls.

“There is the beating of a broomstick waiting for you in the in-laws’ house” is the oft-used reprimand of the village mother for her growing daughter. The most important thing in the life of a girl at Kanchanpur is to be skilled in housework so that she can render good account of herself when she goes to her in-laws’ house after marriage.

Our inquiry has shown that out of 82 girl-children of 6-11 age-group in the village, 37 were enrolled in the U.P. School although only 31 actually attended classes. The above 37 girls were distributed in the four classes as follows:

Class I-17, Class II-13, Class III-5, Class IV-2.

When the U.P. examination was held, the two girls dropped out. In the value systems of Kanchanpur's culture, the passing of the school-examinations for a girl is not of any material importance. Of greater consequence to her is the passing of the bride-selection test. Thereafter she has to take housewifery, and she is disciplined under her mother and other female guardians accordingly. If her house-keeping, her etiquette and behaviour in the in-laws' place are not upto the standard, then it is her mother and those relatives who are to be blamed, and the girl herself would have to face a life of trial with her in-laws.

Before the days of childhood are over, the girl of Kanchanpur learns to assist her mother and grandmother in fifty little things in the house. An increasing volume of work allotted to her seldom allows her to finish her four-year scholastic career in the village school. She looks after the new babies that are born in the household, goes on errands bringing from the village shops oil, salt, spices, etc. and gradually grows to a whole-time helper adept in all kinds of house-work. Thus she becomes the assistant manager of her father's household, till she is taken away as a *bou* by another.

When in school in the early days of girlhood, she is taught along with others, the Bengali alphabet, and thereafter something of the three R's., Reading, Writing and Arithmetic. But she is not supposed to keep any regular attendance, and off and on her mother asks her not to go to her classes for the day. Her services are then requisitioned for those days in the household. Any preferential interest shown by the girl for her school is sure to bring on her some gibe like this: "Do you think that you will get the honour of judgeship in future and will not have to take up house-wifery in the in-law's house?"

Simultaneously with this practical training in household work the daughter is taught submission and endurance as she has to fit herself wherever her lot places her in life. She also learns to know from the beginning of her career that the males are the lords of crea-

tion and the lesson is brought home to her by the differential treatment in the family between herself and her brothers. Ah! The boy brings wealth, but the girl deserves the hanging rope.

In her training course, a girl of Kanchanpur has to perform a set of *bratas* in each annual cycle. A *brata* means a solemn vow. In practice, it is a sort of religious discipline in worship of one or the other god, observed in expectation of some material rewards or religious merits to follow. As a matter of fact Kanchanpur's women observe a lot of *bratas*, but there are some special ones for the unmarried girls of the village.

The *bratas* exert an influence in the moulding of the girl-child's mind. When the god is worshipped, the *brata*-verses are recited which describe the kinds of things which the praying girl has to desire in her life. The community faiths and values according to which our girl has to live are expressed in those verses, which you may hear repeated by the little girls in many a yard of Kanchanpur's houses in different times and seasons. Thus in the early mornings in the month of *Baishakh*, the village virgins may be seen engaged in the familiar Shiva-puja, taken as a *brata* to be performed for the whole of the month. Simultaneously some other girls might be seen to observe the 'vow' of *punni-pukur*, i.e. the Sacred Tank. In the yard a small tank measuring about one square foot has been dug, and it has also been fitted with four *ghats* (flights of steps) on four sides. The tank is filled with water, and inside the centre is planted a twig of either the sacred *tulsi* (*Ocimum sanctum*) or the *bael* (*Aegle marmelos*). After the sacred *tulsi* or the *bael* is worshipped with due rites, you may hear the praying girl repeat such *brata* verses as:

"In the Sacred Tank, with garlands of flowers who worships Thee at this morning hour?"

"I am the girl Lilavati—the fortunate sister of seven brothers".

"What do I get in worshipping Thee?"

"I shall get the treasure of a *Yaksha*";

"I shall become pure as Savitri, and be beloved of my husband. I shall get everliving immortal sons, and the *Yama* (God of death) shall never send his sufferings to me. Leaving my sons here on earth, I shall end my life where the Ganges flows with my head on the breast of my husband".

Or you may see another group of girls engaged in the worship of *Harir-charan* (i.e., The Lord's feet), and you hear their prayers recited:

"Lord's feet! O, Lord's feet!

Who is the girl that worships Thee?

And what does she pray for?"

"She wants for herself a beautiful husband, a son as the light of the court, and a son-in-law as an ornament to any society. She likes to get for her a daughter of good qualities, and a daughter-in-law skilled in house-wifery. Bright be the clothings in her *alna*; and the utensils in her room give shine. Her cowshed will be full of cows; and her granaries will remain stocked with paddy. She will ever have the vermilion on her head, and the betel leaf in her mouth. She will not see the death of her husband, sons or friends. She will die in the waters of the Ganges, and in the end she will get to Thy feet, O Lord."

Or, in the twilight in the early winter in the month of *Agrahayan*, you may watch some little girls engaged in the *brata* of *sanjh puja* (evening worship), otherwise called *senjuti*. Lamps are lit and worship is done. Then prayers go forth and gifts are asked: "Let families of my mother and father grow in wealth and lineage. O Hara, O Sankara, O Bholanath, do not place me in the hands of a fool".

In a village home the bovines are considered to form no less a part of the household as the humans. The growing girl is also trained to love and respect the inmates of the cowshed: For her there are a few *bratas* for cow-worship as well. Thus in the *brata* of *gokal* (cow-serving period), in *Baishakh* you may see a little girl paint the hooves, horns and the forehead of a cow with vermilion and worship her with reverence. You may also hear the *brata* verses repeated: "This period of my cow-serving is my period in *gokul* (heaven). As I feed the cow with grass, so my place is assured in *Baikuntha* (The heavenly abode of Vishnu)." Or in the winter evening you may hear some girls pray with offerings of cow-dung and husk and repeat their *brata* verses: "With these flowers of cowdung, we pay our homage to our three ancestral lines".

To build up a happy home in abundance, with her husband and sons, relatives and friends, 'with cows in the shed and paddy in the granary', is all that the village girl prays for and her desires and values are still cherished in the traditional culture of Kanchanpur.

CHAPTER SEVEN

COMMUNITY ACTIVITIES

7.1 THE NEW PANCHAYAT

The governmental pattern of rural democracy in West Bengal has been set up by the West Bengal Panchayat Act, 1956. On the base are the Gram-Sabhas who elect the Gram-Panchayats. These Gram-Panchayats send their representative to the Anchal, but a member of the Anchal Panchayat cannot at the same time function as a member of the Gram-Panchayat.

An *anchal* means in English a region, and several such regions go to the formation of a 'Block'. The Development Officer at the Block, working under the Community Projects Administration, guides the activities of the Gram and Anchal Panchayats.

Kanchanpur and its neighbouring village Debagram together form a Gram-Sabha, for which there is one Gram-Panchayat. This is one of the six constituent Gram-Panchayats which go to the organisation of the Kurman Anchal Panchayat. Besides Kanchanpur, the five other Gram-Panchayats are Kurman, Belgona (with Malkita), Sadya (with Sinhapara), Choto-Belun, and Burar (Ramchandrapur). Sri Khudiram Rai, a resident of Kurman is the *Pradhan* (i.e., President) of our Anchal. The Gram-Panchayat of Kanchanpur and Debagram has returned four members to the Anchal Panchayat. Of these four *sabhyas* (members), three are Brahmins and natives of Kanchanpur, the fourth is an inhabitant of Debagram and is an Ugra-Kshatriya by caste.

At present there are thirteen members of the Gram-Panchayat, and all of them are appointed by the B.D.O. (i.e., the Block Development Officer). In 1956, it was decided by the State Government to organise the village Panchayats on an experimental basis. Accordingly on an appointed day, a general meeting of the Gram-Sabha was called for election of members of the Panchayat. This Gram-Sabha consisted of all the persons of these two villages enlisted as voters in the state. They organised themselves into two parties, and wanted

to contend for the seats in the Gram-Panchayat. But ultimately through the mediation of the polling officer, who came down from the Block, it was decided to avoid the contest and with it all those divisions and tensions and countings of hands. The compromise between the parties was to empower five elders in the village in whom all expressed confidence, and to them was entrusted the task of selecting, from amongst the candidates, a representative body of workers to sit on the Gram-Panchayat. Thus a coalition Panchayat was set up in our villages with 10 members from Kanchanpur and five from Debagram. Their caste-wise distribution was as follows:

Brahmin	7	Ugra Kshatriya	4
Vaidya	1	Sadgop	1
Kayastha	1	Bagdi	1
			15

All the four Ugra-Kshatriyas in the holy companionship of a Brahmin came from Debagram. The rest of the members belonged to Kanchanpur. Later on it was found that names of two amongst the selected had not been included in the voters' list, and thereon those persons, one a Kanchanpur Brahmin and the other Bagdi, were unseated. The remaining members of the Panchayat Board, unaware of the 'thirteen' superstition, are still functioning as the village fathers, and in 1958, instead of holding a fresh election the B.D.O. of the area got them re-appointed. The present Panchayat has a Kayastha young man as its *Adhyaksha* (President), and an elderly Brahmin as the *Upadhyaksha* (Vice-President), and both of them belong to Kanchanpur.

In the community development programme of India, it is the intention of the Government to execute all works and schemes with the help of and through the medium of the Gram-Panchayat. They have already been invested with certain powers and duties which are defined in the said West Bengal Panchayat Act. The Panchayat also receives minor complaints and tries to settle them amicably within the village. A few specimen of cases dealt with by the Panchayat may be of interest to the readers and are, therefore, translated below from the Bengali records of the Panchayat :

Case No. 1

To

The respected Adhyaksha,
Shona Palashi Gram Panchayat.

Sir,

As the culvert at the back of Sri Indra Mandal's house has subsided, the waters of the south side village which formerly used to pass through it, find no outlet at present. As a result, my tank has overflowed, and I have suffered loss to the extent of rupees three hundred. At the same time there is an apprehension that my house will collapse.

Under these circumstances, it is humbly prayed that you and your Committee be pleased to make a spot enquiry, and thereafter kindly arrange for the outlet of the waters. Please save me from this danger, or I shall become houseless.

With these humble submissions,

Yours
A. LAHA

Dated, Shona Palashi,
24-7-1958.

The matter was duly enquired into by the Adhyaksha and the members. It was decided that Sri N.G. a member of that locality be entrusted with the work of repair of the culvert, and an amount of Rs. 4/- was sanctioned from the village Road Development Fund.

Case No. 5

To

The Adhyaksha,
Shona Palashi Gram Panchayat.

Sir,

We, the inhabitants of Debagram, humbly state as follows:

That on plot no. 931 of the mouza Debagram we have been playing football and other games for the last 35 years. It is true that the field is also a pasture ground. But the cows graze there upto 3 p.m. and thereafter we play football there. It is on this ground that we were engaged in various competitive and tournament games with different football teams of different villages.

Now Sri D. K., son of late U.K., Sri K.S., son of late A.S., Sri D.S., son of late S.S., M/s. D.S. and M.S., sons of late S.S., all

of village Debagram, have combined together, and have declared that no football play could be allowed on that ground.

Under these circumstances, there is a sure apprehension of breach of peace. We, therefore, request you to enquire whether we have been all along playing games there and also to make sufficient arrangements that no breach of peace occurs.

With these submissions on this date of 28th Aswin, 1365, B.S. (Eng. 15-10-58),

On behalf of the
residents of Debagram
K.R., S.G., S.M., A.D. and sons.

The matter was enquired into and a compromise was effected between the parties so that there would not be any opposition to the playing of games.

The following is a copy of a notice issued by the Adhyaksha, Gram Panchayat and it speaks for itself.

Notice

To

The members of the Shona Palashi Gram Panchayat,
and to the resident members of the Anchal Panchayat.

Sirs,

We were elected by the public for advancing peace and development of our community, and all of us are responsible for any good or harm that may befall our village. It was usually seen that some troubles and breaches of peace happen every year on the last day of the festival of *Badhai* and such occurrences endanger our community sense and safety. My earnest request to you, therefore, is that you should realise your responsibilities and duties and remain present at the festival till the end on the last date the 3rd Aswin, Saturday, being the 20th of September 1958 of the English year. It lies on you to see that the function is performed in a disciplined manner, and that no such incidents occur as may create cleavage or embitter human relations in our village.

This is my humble request.

Yours
J. B. Adhyaksha
19-9-58

The members of the Gram-Panchayat and the Anchal '*Sabhyas*' made their presence felt, and the *Badhai* festival was peacefully performed. The concerned circles are of opinion that never in the course of the last forty years was the *Badhai* so peacefully observed.

7.2 THE OLD 'BARWARI'

The *Barwari* is the indigenous institution for the welfare of our village community. But at Kanchanpur there are two locality groups—and for each such group there is a separate *Barwari*.

The *Barwari* as an organisation for the common good is not a creature of any statute. The village community, living in comparative isolation, had to organise itself for some common purposes, and the *Barwari* grew up accordingly. It had no defined rights and obligations. The organisation took up powers and duties as the village needed it. On occasions when any question sprang up which affected the common weal, the villagers were called to an assembly for discussion and decision. Such an assembly is known in Bengal as the *Barwari* which comes from the term *Bar-O-Pakari* i.e., the institution which works for the common weal. Usually the trusted leaders of the village guide the destinies of such assemblies. For working convenience, a cabinet of the *Barwari* also grew up, consisting of leaders who were trusted.

The basis of the *Barwari* has all along been voluntary co-operation and not any law of the State. For past decades, the pervasion of State powers in our villages and the growing consciousness of legal rights of the individuals, are weakening the organisation of the *Barwari*. The Union Boards had come into existence, and now the Panchayats have been ushered in and these bodies had and have official origin and support. The Union Board, however, did not affect the functioning of the *Barwari* in its local field. The Union Board represented a group of villages, and for any particular village its working was rather formal and distant. But the *Barwari* functioned in an intimate face to face relationship, and it continued to live.

Now that the Gram-Panchayats have been brought into existence, there is at present a sort of diarchy in the village affairs. The Panchayat is set up in a legal framework, while the *Barwari* lives on traditions. Again the jurisdiction of our Panchayat is much wider.

It represents the two sister villages of Kanchanpur and Debagram. But the *Barwari* represents a smaller locality group, and Kanchanpur itself has two such—one for the North side and the other for the South side. The *Barwaris* are dominated by the traditional leaders, who, with the approval of the general *Barwari*, function as the High-Powered Committee of the public.

Various affairs affecting community life such as organisation of festivals and ceremonies on community basis, dealing out of village justice, discussion and decision on any common problem—all these come up to the *Barwari* for consideration. It is inevitable that some of the powers and duties of the *Barwaris* would be gradually taken over by the Panchayat. But the *Barwaris* are till now functioning bodies, and some recent instances are related below to illustrate their present position in the village.

P.B. is a Bauri of some means but, unfortunately he came in conflict with an influential Brahmin of the Dakshinpara. The Brahmin took up the matter in the Barwari Committee. This caste ridden body sent for the Bauri accused who could not refuse to come. After a hearing a fine was imposed on the latter and, worst of all, he was dishonoured as he was forced to rub his nose on the ground before the assembly.

P.B., infuriated with the insult, went to Burdwan, and on advice of a lawyer filed a criminal complaint against some leaders of the Dakshinpara Barwari. The O.C. (Officer-in-charge) of the Burdwan P.S. (Police station) came on enquiry, and there was a great commotion in the village, as seldom in the history of the *Barwari*, had any one from the depressed castes ventured to bring such a case against the members of the upper castes. P.B. was of course, too weak to sustain the prosecution for any length of time, and the opposite party also did not like to be dragged into the courts. As the heat of the moment subsided, the matter was soon compromised, but in the meantime the hands of the police had to be sufficiently oiled by both the parties.

Here is told another incident brought before the *Barwari* of the North side. It had been announced by beat of drums that picking of *jhoro* (falling) paddy was prohibited this season, and anybody found guilty would be punished by the *Barwari*. Now *jhoro* is a kind of spurious paddy that falls to the ground before the ears are

ripe. The *jhor* seeds remain in the cracks of the earth, and their plants again shoot up next year and get mixed with the good varieties of paddy in the fields. If the *jhor* is picked up before it falls down, the farmers are profited thereby. The poor people were used to collect *jhor* before the harvest, and this practice grew up as an accepted custom in the village. But for several years, in the process and pretext of collecting *jhor*, good paddy was being stolen, and the sympathy of the cultivators was alienated from the pickers. The matter was therefore discussed in the *Barwari*, and the services of the village drummer were requisitioned to proclaim that the picking of *jhor* would be penalised thenceforward.

But the poor, accustomed to collect *jhor* for years, did not, or could not, pay any heed to the declaration made through the drummer. As the harvest was approaching, they went on to gather the *jhor* as before. A few Santal girls were caught in the act, and the executive committee of the north *Barwari* took disciplinary measures against them. The culprits were given mild beatings and their baskets containing *jhor* were confiscated. They were further asked to pay a fine.

The above action of the *Barwari* caused great indignation amongst the Santals, and a group of them left the village with the chastised girls. At Burdwan they were advised by a friend, to lodge an application to the Tribal Welfare Officer. The said Officer, came to the village to make an enquiry and dealt some reprimands to the overbearing leaders. They were asked to settle the matter with the aggrieved Santals. Otherwise official wrath would fall on them. Needless to say that the visit and rebukes of the Welfare Officer had a sobering effect on the *Barwari* executive.

Here I relate another problem brought before the *Barwari* in a new context. It also illustrates the varied nature of questions that a *Barwari* executive may be called upon to answer. This time when I spent a few weeks in the village, and had made as many friends as I could, and had grown confident of my position in the village, I launched my schedules and questionnaires to my village world. But, never in the long history of Kanchanpur had such an enquiry been seen or heard of. Instantly the instinct of self-protection, especially of the village 'haves' was aroused. Surely, the investigation would bring them to ruin, but what could be done as the enemy

was being assisted in his inquiry by some of the young leaders of their own village? In such circumstances, the investigator could neither be deceived nor denied, and so the executive committees of the village *Barwari* sat to discuss the situation and chalk out a course of common policy in the matter.

What could be the real purpose of this inquiry? That question was vehemently discussed. As the investigator was presumably a man of the Government he should not be trusted. His assessment of their conditions was bound to lead to fresh taxation. The friendly leaders explained that the investigator was not a man of the Government, his only purpose was to make a sociological study of their village, made famous by their own Rev. Lal Behari Day, and the new study would not cause any harm, but might bring some good to them. Thus debates for and against the investigation went on, and finally the Committee expressed its view that information should not be withheld to the investigator, but the interviewees were cautioned to make very guarded statements so that those might not be used to their disadvantage in future. It may be added here that we also, on our part, revised the schedules and questionnaires and made them as innocuous as possible.

7.3 THE INTERESTS OF THE EXTERIOR CASTES

"We must work on as we have to live, and the *bhadraloks* (the gentlemen folk) do not tell us anything", remarked H.P., a Kora labourer to me, when enquiries were made of him with regard to the activities of the Panchayat in the village. K.P., a Bauri householder, said that he had no idea what was happening with it. When some Panchayat work was pointed out to be in his ken, his first attitude of ignorance was changed to apathy and then to negative criticism. Yes, he had known the existence of the Panchayat and was under the impression that it was doing something. He also knew that it had a member, a Tentule Bagdi on the Board, to represent their caste group. (This man, however, was disqualified to function as a member of the Panchayat as his name was not included in the voters' list). But still K.P. was sure that the institution of the Panchayat was not for 'their' welfare, it was meant for the 'Babus' of the upper castes. The idea of the Panchayat, its aims and objects were not clear to him at all. But his strong feeling was that it was not meant for them.

Reference was made to the night-school in the village, which had been organised as a Social Education Centre with some help from the Block. K.P. felt that the night school was being neglected—it remained practically closed. Yes, he had joined the school and there had been many students like him, but the school did not continue. But I found K.P. quite conscious of the prestige which education meant, and I heard him say in answer to a woman of the family—“I know it, Oh woman! I read in the school.”

H.P. on the other hand felt that the school was of no use to them. As for himself, he said: “Three loads of wood had already been sent (to the crematory where a Hindu is burned), and only the fourth load remains. What is the good of getting any outside information to persons like us who must work on as we have to live”. Indeed, the exterior castes, furnishing the back-bone of agricultural labour in our village community are still victims of an ‘agrestic’ and ‘social serfdom’. In spite of the constitutional rights and other benign new laws, in spite of the State—given educational facilities and benefits of representative institutions, in spite of various attempts on the part of the Government and private welfare agencies, there is but negligible change in their position, especially in villages such as Kanchanpur.

7.4 A THREE DAYS’ TRAINING CAMP

For improvement of agriculture and for making the community development programmes effective, a three days’ camp for training the village leaders was organised at Kaligram. Sri D.S., of the said village Kaligram, had been shown to be the convener, but Sri B.M., the Village Level Worker of the Anchal, appeared to be very busy. He explained to me that it was really the Block that was organising the camp, but it was their method to do things in the names of the people.

It is said that the fundamental principle of the community development work is that it should not be the Government’s programme but the ‘people’s programme’. Unfortunately it is not yet a ‘people’s programme’, and our Development Officers are merely trying to make it look like a people’s programme.

They made arrangements for fifty trainees, but on the appointed day hardly twenty turned up as there was a general apathy. The B.D.O. himself had requested the *Adhyaksha* of our village to join

the camp, but he could not possibly manage to attend. He, however, tried to send others. R.D. a younger man, was asked to join. He said that on enquiry he had found out that the matter was but a farce. It was only the Block people's stunt so that they could get their lifts and increments. Even if they took those three days' trouble, there would be no certificate for them for this training. But B.M., the Village Level Worker, repeatedly assured that the trainees would surely be granted certificates and those would be seen then to bear signatures of quite distinguished persons of the Rajbhavari.

On the evening previous to the training days, Charan Das, the village *Muchi*, came out in the streets of Kanchanpur and proclaimed by beat of his drum that there would be a meeting of the agriculturists at Kaligram *hattola* from next day. Free show of 'talkies' would be arranged. "Come and see, come and see".

R.D. and another young man joined the camp from Kanchanpur. But after a few hours R.D. was seen to be on the way back to the village. He had been sent on deputation to recruit further trainees. As highly placed officers would visit the camp during these three days, the organisers were trying their best to 'keep their face' to the honourable visitors.

R.D. returned to the camp with three more trainees from Kanchanpur and Debagram. And lo! forty-eight hours later all of them came back with the treasured certificates in their hands.

7.5 THE SUNRIPARA GETS A TUBE-WELL

The V.L.W. brought the news to our *Adhyaksha* that the Block was going to make several grants for sinking of tube-wells in the Anchal. This village too might get one, and the V.L.W. was also trying for it.

Our *Adhyaksha* was thinking of the Sunris of the village. Year after year, they had been suffering from lack of good drinking water. They lived in the eastern wing of the village in a separate *para* quite apart from the central cluster of houses of the village. It was not convenient for their women to come to such distance for taking drinking water from tube-wells situated in the middle of the village. Tank water was liable to be polluted and poisoned, and its use was often followed by breaking out of epidemic diseases. A tube-well at the Sunripara was therefore, a "felt-need",

Next morning, as our *Adhyaksha* was going to the Sunripara, I came out to accompany him. The purpose of his visit had already been communicated to the few householders of the locality on the previous day. It was harvest season, and most of them were threshing paddy in their own barn yards. A couple of householders were away to their fields on some work.

We arrived and went to the house of A.S., an elderly cultivator and the leader amongst the Sunris of the village. Common greetings were exchanged, and in the meantime a rough blanket was brought from inside and spread on the earthen floor of the verandah, when we were requested to sit.

All the Sunri householders were called to the place. They gathered there excepting one who could not come. Then an informal meeting was held and discussions were started.

The *Adhyaksha* explained that if any of them gave a few square feet of land to the public for installation of the tube-well and they together raised subscription amongst themselves towards fifty per cent of the costs, the other fifty per cent would come as a grant from the Block. They should combine to make this little joint effort, and take the opportunity now given to them by the Block; if they failed to do so, the opportunity would slip away, and it would be even more difficult for them to instal a tube-well in their ward, the need of which had all along been so keenly felt.

All the householders present agreed at once that they should take the opportunity and bring the tube-well in their ward. But details could not be so easily agreed to. Whose land should be taken? What should be the exact site of the tube-well that might bring the greatest possible convenience to the householders? How much subscription would each pay? Over all these points there arose differences, and hours passed on. As it was getting late we expressed our intention to get up. The elderly leader and his friends assured the *Adhyaksha* that they would settle these little differences between themselves and requested him to proceed in the matter with diligence. The *Adhyaksha* took his pen and brought out a piece of paper from his pocket. He then wrote out an application, on behalf of the inhabitants of Sunripara, and addressed it to the B.D.O. of the area. He handed over the application to the elderly leader and told him to get the signatures or thumb-impressions of all the householders,

and as many adults as possible.. He addressed the assembly and told them to settle the matter after mutual discussion, and he expressed the hope that he would get back the signed application in a day or two. Thereafter both of us returned.

The Sunripara of Kanchanpur got its tube-well after a couple of months.

7.6 PUBLIC DEMANDS AND PRIVATE LOANS

When the threshing of the paddy crop is over, then it is time for our village creditors to make a drive for realisation of their dues. The debtors, on the other hand, sell away their share of produce to clear those dues. The indebted agricultural labourers, however, usually pay back in kind, as they are used to take advances of paddy from their employers earlier in the year.

N.B., the Tax-collector of the Anchal, comes with his register and the receipt-book, and he requisitions the services of both the Chowkidars of the village to assist him in the collection. He takes his seat in some central part of the village and sends the Chowkidar to the defaulters in that locality for bringing money for payment of their dues both current and arrears. But the response is poor as usual and N.B. moves from one part of the village to another with both the Chowkidars accompanying him.

After the collection of this particular day is over, N.B. returns, crying that he does not come in the village for begging. He will come next on such and such a date, and if anybody still remains a defaulter, he will cause the distress warrant to be issued and take away the front door of his house for sale. Thus week after week the collection of the taxes goes on, and on each occasion, the above threat is held out, but no action is ever taken.

This is also the time when the village post-office frequently brings the demand notices to the villagers to pay their outstanding canal rates to the Government. Occasionally a court peon comes with a notice of certificate for proclaiming attachment for sale on a piece of land of some defaulting owner who had not yet paid his rents or rates due to the Government. The debtors then hurry up, sell some portions of their paddy stock, and run to Burdwan to make the necessary *tadbirs* (arrangements) and payments.

The Block loans and also the Co-operative loans are to be paid back. On appointed dates, a departmental man comes from the Block to the Anchal headquarters at Kurman and the debtors go there to pay up their outstanding loans, so that when need arises, fresh loans may be obtained next year for agricultural purposes. Often the manager of the Co-operative (Kurman Union Co-operative Agricultural Credit Society Ltd.) is seen on his bicycle come to realise the loans due to his Society. It was stipulated in the bonds that the loans would be paid up by 30th Falgun of the year. But many debtors did not pay in time. If the Manager pressed for payment, the debtors simply refused saying that they could not sell their paddy at a loss at the low price fixed by the Government. They would like to defer payment of their loans and count interest thereon rather than dispose of their stock at present. The Government would certainly fail to keep the price at that level, and it is bound to rise, and then it will be time for them to sell their stocks and pay up the loans.

7.7 ON THE ZAMINDAR'S EXIT

In the Bengal of the 19th Century the Zamindar had an influential place in the rural economy of the country. The Rev. Day devoted several chapters in describing the relation between the landlord and the tenant of those days. He presented to his readers two contrasting types of Bengal Zamindars—one an oppressor and the other a benefactor.

“The Zamindar of Kanchanpur was strictly speaking not a Zamindar, but a middle-man; for he only held a pattani Taluk under His Highness the Maharaja of Vardhamana, but though he was only a pattanidar, he was usually called the Zamindar of Kanchanpur and of scores of other villages lying round about. He paid 2,000 rupees a year to the Maharaja for the village of Kanchanpur, but it was generally believed that he himself realised in rents three times that amount. For the whole of his Zamindari or rather pattani, he gave eighty thousand rupees to the Raja, but he himself admitted that after paying the *sadar jama* his own net profit amounted to the round sum of two lakhs a year. Such immense profit could only be obtained by a system of rack-renting, of illegal extortion and of cruel oppression; and it must be admitted that Jayachand (for such was the name of the Zamindar of Kanchanpur) belonged to the class of Zamindars who were the greatest curses to their country. Un-

scrupulous in his character, he did not hesitate to have recourse to any means, however illegal or dishonourable, to screw out of his raiyats as much money as he could....”

Of the Zamindar of Durganagar he wrote :

This Zamindar was determined, according to his means and ability, to promote the welfare of his tenants. He fought against the oppression of the influential British indigo-planters for justice to the poor and ill-treated raiyats of his Zamindari:

“Nor was he unaware of the oppressive conduct of several Zamindars. He regretted this for the sake of the poor peasantry, and for the sake of the class to which he belonged, as he looked upon these Zamindars as a disgrace to their order. Nava Krishna (for such was the name of this Zamindar) was, it thus appears, one of those few Zamindars, who knew the duties attached to their station, who was actuated by public spirit, who was inspired by liberal and patriotic sentiments, who had sympathy with the down trodden raiyats, and who was honourable in all actions”.

The Zamindars of Bengal, both the oppressive and the benevolent, ceased to be Zamindars with the passing of the West Bengal Estates Acquisition Act of 1953. The well-known Permanent Settlement, equally maligned and praised, vanished and the curtain was hung down on the scene with which Bengal was familiar for the last one hundred and fifty years.

Along with his class, the Zamindar of Kanchanpur lost his official position but the person who had last occupied that position still lives. The Zamindari system was abolished peacefully with payment of compensation for the rights now acquired by the State. But the vestige of social prestige that was once enjoyed by our Zamindar of Kanchanpur is still left with the same person and he still continues to be known as the Zamindar of the village.

This Zamindar without the Zamindari, is still the biggest land-owner and the owner of the best building in the village. With an aggressive personality, he still plays a dominant role in the affairs of Kanchanpur. He is the permanent president of the village *Barwari*, the school committee and the theatre party. He is not a member of the Gram-Panchayat itself, but the Gram-Panchayat has returned him to the Anchal Board. It is his eldest son who has been appointed by the Government as the *Tahsildar*, and the peasants still visit his *Kaccheri* for payment of the rents. The *Tahsildar*, how-

ever, does not credit the receipts in the account of his father, but sends them to the big absentee landlord, the Government itself at the Rajbhavan of Calcutta. But the *Kachheri* and the house as well are still called as the Zamindar's *Kachheri* and the Zamindar's house.

When marriages are celebrated by the middle castes and the Kotals and the Bagdis of the village, they still show their honour to the Zamindar and send a *sida* (gift of rice, pulses, vegetables, etc.) to his house. When sacrifices are received at the *Manasa puja*, *Rakshakali puja*, *Kshetrapul puja* or such community *puja*, a share of the sacrifices is still sent to our Zamindar of Kanchanpur as his due. In the Old Shiva's annual *gajan*, undoubtedly the greatest ritual function of the village, the head *sannyasi* himself marches in procession amidst bell-gongs and drum-beats to bring the offerings of our Zamindar to Old Siva, and returns the same to him after worship. And when any great *puja* is finished, and time comes for the priest to put the sacrificial charrings on the foreheads of the party, it is the Zamindar who must first receive it. If he is not present at the time, he must be sent for, and until he receives the sacred charrings, others must wait for the same. Thus even with his Zamindari gone, the Zamindar still lives in the traditions of Kanchanpur.

7.8 THE IMPACT OF LAND REFORMS

The abolition of the estates and the intermediary rights is supposed to be an '*a priori*' measure that will lead to beneficial land reforms. Talks on such reforms have been loudly going on since Independence, and the legislature of West Bengal, consequent on the acquisition of the large estates and rights of the intermediaries, also passed in the sixth year of the Republic of India, the West Bengal Land Reforms Act of 1955. The Act provides that "no raiyat should be entitled to own more than 25 acres of land excluding homestead." In the whole village of Kanchanpur, none but the ex-zamindar could have come within the purview of the Act, but he had already got portion of his lands transferred in the names of his sons to avoid the coming law as regards fixation of ceiling. Barring this instance, there was not a single householder who owned more than the fixed ceiling. The village has no surplus lands and the real malady here, as in most of India's villages, is that there are too many people on too little land.

The Act also aims at consolidation by providing for acquisition of holdings and redistribution of lands thereafter. But the cultivators do not care to take advantage of these sections and consequently they are but a dead-letter till now. There is another provision to encourage consolidation. The Act has given a preferential right for purchase of lands, to a co-sharer or a continuous tenant. Such a party has been invested with the right to get the land reconveyed through court in his favour from any other purchaser provided he deposits the consideration money together with a further sum of ten per cent of the purchase price paid for the land. Usually after the harvests are reaped and before the next sowing season comes, Kanchanpur sees a few transactions of land sales every year. The rising peasant families like to add a bigha or two to their holdings, while there are families who may be pressed to sell a portion of their lands. The seller expects that he should get the best price for his land, which does not necessarily come from his co-sharer or the owner of a contiguous plot. The purchaser who pays the best price does not like to face the possibility of losing the land after purchase and as a precaution he makes the seller agree to overvalue the deed of sale, showing the passing of much higher consideration money than is actually paid. This device frustrates the policy of the legislators and acts as a deterrent to the re-transfer of the land as contemplated in the Act.

In Kanchanpur's agrarian system, there is a large number of persons who depend on *bhag-chas* i.e., cultivation of others' land on share basis. The Land Reforms Act (1955) fixed the proportions in which the produce of the land is to be shared between the owner and the cultivator. If plough, cattle, manure and seeds are supplied by the persons holding the land, the produce is to be shared on a fifty-fifty basis. In all other cases, the proportion is 60 : 40; the *bargadar* getting the major share. At Kanchanpur, the owner and the *bhag-chasi* still go on sharing the produce on a fifty-fifty basis, though the latter continues to supply the plough, cattle, manure and seeds. The owners do not voluntarily accept less share as prescribed in law; and the *bargadars* are too poor and unorganised to claim their rights under the law. If they insist on the higher proportion, they may not get any lands for cultivation at all, though the Act intends to protect the *bargadar* from unjust eviction.

It was further provided that the provisions in respect of the *bhag-chasis* will apply so long as cultivation by a *bargadar* continues. It was suggested during discussions that the system of share cultivation was to be abolished in ten years. This, however, was not incorporated in the body of the Act. The attitude of the reformers, however, had already created an apprehension in the minds of the landholders, that rights to land may ultimately be transferred to the tillers, and the rights of the non-cultivating owners may vanish like those of the Zamindars and intermediaries. As a result, many *bhag-chasis* were evicted, and lands were brought under personal cultivation. Many small land holders got together and began cultivating their lands under some kind of joint partnership. Indeed, the *bargadars* had to face a hard situation, and as a result 'land to the tillers' attitude was restrained for the time being.

Co-operative Farming: Instead of seeing the ownership and control of their lands going to the hands of the *bargadars* or actual tillers of the soil, landholders would rather get their lands vested in the co-operative to which the Government has promised so many concessions and facilities—such as reduction in land revenue, financial assistance, free technical advice, better marketing arrangement, cheap seeds and manures etc. A few years ago these considerations mainly led to the formation of a co-operative farming society at Sadya, a sister village within the Anchal. By banding themselves under the co-operative banner, the landholders not only saved themselves from the menace of the tillers of the soil, they were at the same time considered to perform a very meritorious act and became a favourite of the Government.

It is more than half a century since the co-operative movement came to be started in our country, but the peasants' desire to hold their lands in individual proprietorship is so strong that the pace of co-operation could not be forced at all. In recent days, in our political world emphasis is being laid on 'service co-operatives' and 'farming co-operatives' with new force as keys to our agrarian problem. The Congress in its Nagpur Session (1959) has given a "spurt" to the movement.

If the proprietary instinct is a strong part of peasant nature (in fact of human nature), the instinct of self-protection is stronger still. The land owners of Sadya parted with their individual right, but

through the co-operative they managed to hold joint control over their lands. This was a lesser evil to them than yielding to the legislators' demand for vesting the tillers with rights in their land.

No landless person was allowed to join the co-operative. It was quite natural that a group of land owners, who had come together for their own interests, would not like to share the management of their lands with any of the landless. Secondly, in pooling their lands and resources together, the land owners could introduce tractors and other machines. Consequently they required less labour. Thirdly, the members provided in their bye-laws that one-third of the produce of the lands would be taken as ownership dividend which would remain the first charge on the co-operative. Fourth, on winding up the co-operative, the lands would, after meeting all liabilities, be re-distributed to original owners on a pro rata basis.

Thus the co-operative organisation was used to their advantage by the Sadya land owning cultivators. But the Agricultural Income Tax people had an eye on them and demanded a portion of their profits as the proper share of the State. Now a co-operative farming society was entitled to get various concessions and facilities from the State, but nowhere did the law provide any relief or reduction in the payment of the agricultural income tax. An individual owner was allowed in law to hold land to the limit of 25 acres, and such holding was exempted from assessment of income tax; but the co-operative holding much exceeded the taxable limit, and the society became liable to payment of the income tax. The Sadya co-operative refused to pay the tax, and the members passed a resolution of dissolution rather than pay the tax. But they are at the same time hoping that the Government may change the law to give to the co-operative farming societies relief from payment of income tax. It is also significant to note that as soon as the Income Tax people have come to the scene, the co-operative management is showing lesser yields and higher costs, and therefore consequent losses in the working of the farm.

The example of the Sadya co-operative teaches several lessons:—

(i) Both as a measure of self-protection, and for sharing the advantages of better farming, the landholders may organise themselves into co-operatives;

(ii) The landless and near-landless labourer will be excluded from the co-operative organisation. Further, they will be put to additional difficulties, as with co-operatives certain amount of mechanisation will be introduced in our agriculture. A good many labourers will be weaned away from land, and to find alternative employment for them will become a more difficult problem to Government.

(iii) A greater amount of agricultural production is expected, but the State's attempt to take a share of it may be resisted.

Our 'spurt' to the co-operative movement' defeats those who want to give land to the tillers. It also defeats those who want to give land to the State. But the spectres haunt, and our 'Kulaks' may, for their own self-preservation, come forward to join the new co-operatives. It may bring for the country an era of agricultural prosperity; but the State's right to have a share of it for the general good, and the interest of the vast number of agricultural labourers must always be kept in mind whenever a reform is attempted in the rural set-up.

7.9 POLITICS AT THE SHIVTALA

Kanchanpur is growing politically conscious. It now gets more information, and speaks more freely on public affairs.

Twentyfive years ago it was written:

"Few and far between are the echoes that come to our village from the outside world, and life flows here in its narrow restricted channels. Movements may come and movements may go, but Kanchanpur goes on without change.

The Congress programmes did not affect the village. Even news of any important event that happens outside has no attraction for the people of Kanchanpur. They do not see a single newspaper or magazine even in these modern days. Only on each Friday one or two of the more interested villagers may get a newspaper, because on that day the post office receives a Bengali Weekly *Basumati*, addressed to a resident of a neighbouring village. The newspaper is kept for the day and next morning is handed over to the peon for 'delivery to the proper address'.

At present the post office receives the following newspaper and reports for the village:—

- 1) *Jugantar* (one)—a daily newspaper in Bengali published at Calcutta.

- 2) *Vardhaman* (two)—a weekly magazine published by a Congressite organisation at Burdwan.
- 3) *Nutan Patrika* (one)—a weekly organ of the Communist party—published at Burdwan.
- 4) *Shiksha-Samachar* (one)—a fortnightly educational magazine from Calcutta.
- 5) *American Reporter* (eight)—a fortnightly report published by U.S.I.S. from Calcutta.

The daily *Jugantar*, a weekly *Vardhaman* and also the *American Reporter* are subscribed by the 'Sakti-Sangha'— a young men's association in the village. Another copy of *Vardhaman* comes to the Secretary, Social Education Centre. The Free Primary School receives the *Shiksha-Samachar* and an *American Reporter*. The *Nutan Patrika* and other *American Reporters* are subscribed for by individuals.

As soon as the post office opens at about 11 a.m., a group of young men take out the *Jugantar* and for a couple of hours it is read and discussed amongst them. When they leave for their bath and meals, the newspaper finds its place either in the shop or the house of B.C., whose son generously pays up the monthly bill for the newspaper, on behalf of the Sakti-Sangha. When the afternoon comes, K.G., an old and almost sightless pensioner slowly comes with his stick in hand and takes his seat on the verandah of a shop at the tri-junctional road of the north side. Then it is the duty of B.M., the village postmaster himself to bring the newspaper out and read it aloud to his aged listener. As the reading proceeds, an audience surrounds them, and comments and discussions spring up. The weekly *Vardhaman* is also perused with interest by several persons in the village, but its reading clientele is not so wide as that of the daily *Jugantar*.

Besides the above newspaper and periodicals, three householders keep battery charged radio sets which regularly bring the entertainments and news of the broadcasting stations to our village world.

In 1933-34 when India was following Gandhi in his fight for freedom, of Kanchanpur it was written thus:

"Here are no high discussions on politics—national or international—the burning topics of the day. Kanchanpur, like so many other villages in India, is indifferent to such matters. The peasantry, and not even all of them, know that their king is some one called George V, the lord of

the whole world, and that he lives in a land called *Bilat* (England), a distant country beyond the seven seas and thirteen rivers. He has maintained here his two employees—*Baralat*, the Viceroy (literally, the greater lord) and *Chhotalat*, the Governor of Bengal (literally, the lesser lord) to rule over them. Beyond this they do not know anything of the Governmental hierarchy or of the parliamentary assemblies under the governor's tutelage. Gandhi?, They know him as the great national hero who is fighting the British raj to win Swaraj for the country. But they have only the vaguest idea as to what Swaraj may be.”

In this eleventh year of Indian Independence, with the troubling consciousness of political freedom after centuries of bondage, with adult franchise and newspapers in the village, Kanchanpur is now found to be no longer indifferent to any discussion in politics. It often participates in political meetings and does not hesitate to make adverse criticism of the Government.

The central Shivala is the rendezvous for the political meetings of Kanchanpur. There one day you may see a communist leader, the president of the Vardhaman District Krishak Samity or the like, come and address the village public on the antikrishak policy of the present Congress Government. He receives hearty commendation from his rustic audience, and he goes on in a tune such as this: The agriculturists are being deprived of the just price of their crops; and the canal rate has been unduly increased. At the present rate for paddy fixed by the Government the peasants may not find any profits after meeting the expenses of cultivation. The Government has failed to bring down the prices of all other commodities, and the peasants find it difficult to meet their costs while they have now been asked to sell their products at a 'lower-than-just' price. The Food Minister Sri Sen, with his characteristic negligence had said that only one million out of 6.2 million householders of Bengal have any surplus for sale. The Government has to think more of the other five millions and two lacs of families who are deficit or non-growing in respect of rice production. The policy of the Government is bound to prejudice agricultural production, and consequently it will affect not only the interests of the peasantry but the nation, as a whole. It is for the peasants to organise themselves and fight for an increase in the controlled rate of paddy and reduction of the canal rates, so unreasonably enhanced. At the same time the Govern-

ment should be pressed to fix the prices of other necessary goods—such as oil, oilcake, chemical manures, clothes etc.—proportionately in relation to price of paddy. The peasants must organise themselves to resist this anti-peasant and destructive policy of the Government. The Government must be made to yield. Long live revolution!....”

In these days of democracy, the people know that the Government can be freely criticised, and there is no need of secrecy in the discussions over any public affairs. Often in group discussion you may hear an aged leader exclaim : “It was right that the British said that we were not fit for independence. See what a bad administration we are living under. On the one hand they are squeezing us with taxation, and with the money thus raised, they are playing ducks and drakes. Corruption is reigning in all the Government departments, and most of the top-executives are expert thieves. Their bad deeds are being brought to light by the newspapers almost every day. What is left of a man if he is labelled a thief ! But such things are destined to happen, and irresistible is the movement of Time ! It is after all the *Kalijug* !”

CHAPTER EIGHT

BELIEFS AND RITES

8.1 THE VILLAGE GODS

Nobody can fail to observe the dominance of religious practices in the life of Kanchanpur. Persisting through an unbroken tradition, the beliefs and rites have permeated the whole social life and play an important role in the round of activities in the village.

Kanchanpur has numerous gods and goddesses. The Brahmins of the north side are said to be devotees of *Sakti*, while the Goswamis and the Subarnabanik priests of the south side worship the god Vishnu. The Subarnabaniks and most of the middle and exterior castes are also known to be Vaishnabs. There is no Saiva sect in the village in the formal sense of the term but the Old Siva is the guardian deity of the village and throughout Kanchanpur are scattered numerous Siva temples. But truly speaking, the villagers are neither Saivas, nor Vaishnabs, nor Saktas. They believe in all the gods and goddesses of the Hindu pantheon; they believe in all the especial deities that reign in their own and neighbouring villages.

The great gods of the Hindus the Vishnu, the Siva and the Sakti get their *nitya-seva* (daily service) from their votaries of the upper castes. If the votary himself is a Brahmin, it is well and good; otherwise he has to commission the services of a *pujari* Brahmin, that is professional Brahmin priest. It is said that each of the above god or goddess has one hundred and eight different names and forms. Thus Vishnu is known and worshipped as Narayan, Damodar, Janardan, Gopinath, Shyamasundar, Sridhar, Gadadhar, Bansidhar and so on. For Siva also there are so many names—old Siva, Smananeswar, Ishaneswar, Mahadeb, Kshetrapal and so on. Sakti also appears in different forms—Tarasundari, Sidheswari, Sinhabahini, Kali and so on. The usual symbol of Vishnu (more commonly called here as Narayan) is a black oval-shaped stone, (the Narayan Sila or Salagram Sila), that of Siva a black phallic stone (the Siva-linga). The mother goddess is usually represented through a brass female image, modelled according to description

given in religious books of the Hindus. Similar brass idols are used for Sridhar, Bansidhar or Gadadhar or some other forms of Vishnu. The Kshetrapal and the Yogadya of the village are symbolised in ordinary crude stones.

Besides the above mentioned Vishnu, Siva and Kali, the three great gods of Hinduism, the upper castes here have also accepted Devi Manasa who is now used to getting her *nitya-seva* (daily service). She is the queen goddess of the snakes, and is worshipped in the form of a lady with ornaments of snakes round her. An image of a snake in an earthenpot also symbolises this goddess, and it is in this shape that she is seen by the side of Lord Mahadeva in a couple of the Siva temples of Kanchanpur.

The Vaishnab Goswamis give daily service to *Gouranga* and *Nityananda* as well. Lord Gouranga or Chaitanya Mahaprabhu, was a great man of religion of the sixteenth century Bengal. Sri Nityananda was his disciple and associate.

Centering on Sri Chaitanya, there grew up in Bengal a great devotional literature of Vaishnava religion and philosophy. He was a great preacher and reformer, and his followers now worship him as a god or more strictly speaking as an *avatar* (incarnation) of Krishna. Along with him, his associate Nityananda has been raised to the status of godhead. Their images installed in a temple at Mahaprabhutaia receive the daily adorations of the Goswami Brahmins of Dakshinpara. And often you may hear at Kanchanpur—on a *sankranti* or a full-moon night or on any other special occasion, a party of devout Vaishnabs going round the streets of the village in *nagar-sankirtan*. With music of *mridanga* and *kartal*, the party sings and dances “*Haribol Haribol bole, Gour Nitai neche jai*”, i.e. Gour and Nitai go round dancing and singing the name of Hari.

The Dharmaraj of Kanchanpur also gets his daily service which is offered by a priest of the Bagdi caste who is surnamed Pundit. The god is symbolised in a tortoise shaped stone and is seated on a wooden throne. It appears that while Devi Manasa has been able to find out her way to the temple of the Hindu upper castes and now receives daily service from them, Dharmaraj is still, to a certain extent, outside their walls. He is however revered by all the villagers of whatever caste or position they may be, as one of the great gods of their village.

The Bagdi priest offers daily worship to god Panchanan also who lives symbolised in several pieces of stones under the shade of a *Krishnachuda* tree by the side of the temple of Dharmaraj. He is the five faced god whose malignant influence over village children was so nicely described by the Rev. Day. There is another god in the village—the Kal Bhairab. He is the all-destroying form of Lord Siva, and his place is under a palmyra tree, at the south end of the village, where he is worshipped in the shape of a rough black stone. He belongs especially to the Bauris, and a Bauri priest ministers to his daily worship. This god, like god Panchanan, is dreaded and respected by all the villagers as he not only destroys but also renders much good to the afflicted. Through his grace barren women become prolific, the lame children learn to walk, and the deaf and dumb regain their hearing and power of speech.

8.2. THE GODS OF RECURRENT HONOUR

Besides the above gods of daily-worship, the god Satyanaryan and the goddesses Lakshmi and Shasthi receive their periodical offerings in a regular manner. These are usually done by the village women; and are perhaps the most important of the *brata pujas* that they are known to perform.

Satya Narayan is worshipped usually on the full moon and *sankranti* days. His *puja* may be observed on any auspicious day. Satya-Narayan means that Truth and Narayana (God) are the same. It is also of interest to note that the *brata-katha* of this *puja* enjoins the votaries to bow to god *Satya Pir* (a folk god or some saint of the Muslims), and declares in course of the narrative that Pir and Narayan are the same god. Offerings of sweetmeats etc. given to Satya Narayan are known as *sirni*—a Persian word which has now passed to Bengali language and indicates the Muslim connection of this Hindu god. There is a peculiar list of articles for this *puja*, and specially there must be the ingredients of *sirni* which consists of flour, gur, and milk in fixed proportion. These materials are mixed together and often various fruits are superadded. When the *puja* is over and the Brahmin priest gets his *dakshina* (fee), *sirni* has then to be distributed to the devotees present, and also to inmates of the household and the neighbours as well.

Lakshmi, as the goddess of prosperity, is regarded with peculiar veneration by all our village householders. Out of the churning of the

ocean she arose from the depths of the seas, and Lord Vishnu himself took her for his own. It is through her auspicious influence that one becomes prosperous in life, and on her desertion one becomes *lakshmi-chhada*, i.e. wretched and poor. She is worshipped on each Thursday (which is also known in Bengal as the Lakshmi Day) almost in every household. The housewives believe that if *Lakshmi-brata* is regularly observed the goddess will remain stationary in the house, and prosperity and peace are bound to follow wherever Lakshmi resides.

Apart from such weekly worship of Lakshmi, the goddess is to be offered ceremonial *pujas*, as noted earlier in our passage of Paddy, in the three months of Bhadra, Pous and Chaitra, also known to be the months of Lakshmi. It is so said, as *asu dhanya* ripens in Bhadra, *haimanti* in Pous and *boro* in Chaitra. Paddy symbolises Lakshmi, and the three months, therefore, are considered to be fit seasons for the worship of the goddess.

Later, in our description of annual festivals and *pujas* it will be seen that Lakshmi is also worshipped on other and different occasions in the year. In the mean time let us have a look at Shasthi, who as the goddess of fecundity and as the protectress of children, is held in no less peculiar veneration than Lakshmi, the goddess of wealth and harvest.

It is said that there are thirteen Shasthis in the twelve months of the year. The goddess is contemplated as a beautiful lady with vermilion on her forehead, a conch-circlet on the wrist and turmeric toilet for the body. On the sixth lunar day of the full-moon fortnight, she comes down from heaven to this earth to receive offerings and bestow favours to her worshippers. Besides these twelve Shasthis, there is another Shasthi, which is observed on the day previous to the Chaitra-sankranti, i.e. the last day of the Bengali year. According to the Hindu almanac, the day may not be the sixth day of the moon, but is the day of *Nil-puja* which celebrated the anniversary of the marriage of *Lilavati* (Goddess Durga) with *Nilkantha* (Lord Mahadev). Goddess Shasthi is also worshipped on the day which, therefore, is known Nil-shasthi of the year. Besides the above thirteen recognised Shasthis, the goddess is also worshipped on the sixth day after the birth of a child, and also on the day when the ceremonial uncleanness of the lying-in-room is over for the mother on the 11th,

15th, or 21st day after a child is born, according to the custom of the family. At the ceremony of *annaprasan* (ceremony of giving first rice to the child commonly termed the *bhojan*), Devi Shasthi is to be worshipped before rice may be given to the child.

At Kanchanpur the goddess Shasthi has a permanent place of residence, (called Shasthitala) under the *neem* tree in the north-east side of the village. There, in sunshine and rain, without a roof overhead, lives Mother Shasthi as symbolised in a few pieces of stones, besmeared in vermilion and turmeric. Whenever there is an occasion of Shasthi *puja*, women are seen to proceed there with offerings of rice, fruits and flowers, while the bell-gongs and drum-beats usually proclaim the occasion to the village world.

8.3 EPIDEMIC GODDESSES AND THE RAKSHA KALI

These are the goddesses who are dreaded and worshipped because of their power over disease and affliction.

One of them is the *Didi-Thakrun*, the presiding deity over cholera and another is *Basanta Chandi*, the presiding deity over small pox. Having power over these great epidemics which used to spread in the country-side each and every year, these goddesses, of all the deities in the village pantheon, are very much dreaded and worshipped more in appeasement than in veneration.

The goddess Didi-Thakrun especially belongs to the Bagdis of the village, and though she, in the shape of a stone, shares the temple hut of Dharma Thakur, her worship is done in the distant village, of Bhatar. On a Saturday or a Tuesday in the month of Magh, the Bagdis of Dharmatala, accompanied by several of their women carrying basketfuls of offerings to the goddess, march out of the village in procession amidst drum-beats and bell-gongs. As the *puja* is thus announced, offerings pour forth from each household and fill up the big baskets of the women carriers. At the same time sounds of *ulu* and conch shells celebrate the ceremonial march. Similar *puja* to Didi Thakrun is sent in the month of Falgun as well.

Basanta Chandi is worshipped with proper offerings in a place in the south-west outside the village borders. No image of the goddess is made, nor is there any stone symbol. Her worshippers carry their offerings under a tree beyond the village boundary, where her presence is invoked in the *ghat* (a water jar in lieu of an idol and

worshipped as the symbolic representation of the deity) and the necessary *puja* is made to propitiate her.

Often householders, afflicted with small-pox at their house, arrange for the worship of the goddess in their own yard or cow-shed. This Basanta Chandi is also otherwise known to the people as Mother *Sitala*, and she too has no temple or abode of any sort in the village. But you may chance to see the goddess carried in a litter by some stranger on the streets of Kanchanpur. He announces with sounds of conch that the Mother herself has come down to the village to take her worship, and the inhabitants should propitiate her by their *pujas*. The man may be seen to be accompanied by an assistant whose business is to carry the load of offerings that pour in from every side. Curiosity may lead you to have a look at this mighty goddess, but your sight is obstructed by a heap of *bael* leaves which almost cover the august deity. With good care you notice however the reddish patch of vermilion paint on a stone with eruptions. You are told that the painted stone is no other than the goddess *Sitala*, and the eruptions represent the sixty four varieties of small pox over which she presides. Instantly you hear again the words ring forth "Mother *Sitala* has come to the village for her *puja*". The doors of the neighbouring houses open, and women and children flock to make their bows and pour their offerings of rice and pice in the baskets of the stranger.

For the villagers in difficulty, there is another goddess—the *Raksha-Kali*, i.e. the *Kali* who protects. Goddess *Kali* is the terrible all-destroying form of *Sakti*, but here she is worshipped and propitiated so that she may forgive and protect. Her *puja* is held at the southern end of the village, at *Khirnitāla* so called because of a pair of umbrageous *Khirni* trees standing there. In the current year 1959, the date of the *puja* of the goddess *Rakshakālī* at Kanchanpur was fixed on the twenty sixth of Falgun of 1365 B.S. (10th March 1959) and the decision was conveyed to the village community by beats of drum. An earthen image of the goddess was made, coloured, dressed, worshipped and drowned on the very day of the *puja*. The goddess was shaped in the form of a four-armed naked black lady with a garland of human heads on her neck. Her feet were placed on the body of God *Siva*. With one of her left hands she held a severed blood-dropping human head, and in the other she

held a curved sword. Her two right hands were, however, raised to bestow security and benedictions on her devotees.

The Rakshakali of Kaichanpur attracts devotees from other villages, far and near, and she is reputed to be a great 'awake' goddess. Relations of the village people, mainly of the exterior castes, are seen to come to fulfil their vows, and bring with them the animals to be sacrificed as the offerings promised. On that night of worship, on the 26th of Falgun, twenty-five goats and many birds were sacrificed at the altar of the goddess. Indeed, as a saviour in difficulties and fulfiller of human desires, great is the fame of the Rakshakali of Kanchanpur.

8.4 THE ANNUAL FESTIVALS AND PUJAS

The principal festivals of our village community are all based on its religious practices, and are generally held at the annual celebrations of the *pujas* of one or other of the village deities. Of these, two, however, are more secular in their nature, and may properly be looked at as harvest festivals. One is *navanna*—the feast of new rice in early Agrahayan and the other is *pitha sankranti*—the festival days of rice cakes, ending on the last day of Pous. But goddess Lakshmi is the presiding deity in both the festivals where she appears either as Navanna Lakshmi or Pous Lakshmi to receive the offerings from the peasantry of Bengal.

On the date fixed for the worship of Navanna Lakshmi, which usually falls early in the month of Agrahayan (late November), the villagers, especially women, boys and girls, take early baths to join the feast of new-rice. New rice is mixed in milk with all seasonal fruits and edible roots cut into small pieces. A dish of this magnificent food is sent by each householder to the Old Siva at his temple in the centre of the village. Goddess Lakshmi is worshipped at home with *navanna* prepared as above. Then all the deities of the village and forebears of the family are offered the said grand dish. The bovines of the household, the beasts of the fields, the birds of the air, the fish in the tanks, the insects of the earth, in short, all living creatures are thereafter offered a portion of the said dainty. Men and children then partake of the new rice, and finally the women of the family come in for their shares.

On the *sankranti*, i.e. the last day of the month of Pous (middle of January), is held the worship of Goddess Lakshmi. On this occasion the villagers have a three days' festival ending on the *sankranti*. This is the festival of cakes, the *pitha parvan*, after the harvesting of paddy. Like *navanna* this festival is greatly enjoyed by the people of Kanchanpur. On the evening of the first day of the festival, the harvest month is given a welcome address in a doggerel verse:—

“Pous, oh Golden Pous,
 You are welcome—you should not go.
 You should not leave us through different births;
 Stay on, please stay on.
 Pous, Pous, oh Golden Pous.”

For three days different varieties of rice cakes are prepared and eaten. On the last day Lakshmi, the goddess of harvest, especially known as Pous Lakshmi, is worshipped with due rites. Pous and Lakshmi seem to be the same. “Pous, Pous, oh Golden Pous, come and sit here on the floor of the big hut”.

It has already been observed that the days of the annual celebrations of the village gods are also days of festivals and have both religious and recreational value.

Most of them are common to all castes and are observed as community festivals. There are some, however, which are distinctly observed by individual castes or by groups of castes.

Thus the *puja* of *Gandheswari* is special to the *Gandhabanik* caste. She is none but the Goddess Durga, seated on the lion, and is worshipped on the full-moon day in the month of Baisakh, the very day on which the *gajan* of Dharmaraj is held at Kanchanpur. The votaries of *Gandheswari* offer their merchant's balance and the standard weights before the Goddess, and so far as Kanchanpur is concerned, they celebrate the *puja* in a quiet and simple manner.

Goddess *Jogadya* is the special deity of the Ugra-Kshatriyas; Haris have their special Kali, the Bauris and the Bagdis their special Lakshmi, and the Koras their special Manasa. The Kotals too have their special deities, the *grahas* of the sky. Ministrations to the gods or goddesses of the exterior castes cannot, however, be offered by true Brahmins. The services of the *patit* (fallen) Brahmins, or the

lowly esteemed *Grahacharyas* or Vaishnabs, are requisitioned for conducting the rituals of their *pujas*.

The merchant castes—the Subarnabaniks and the Gandhabaniks of the village, have their special *dingi* (a small boat) festival on the 1st of Magh of the Bengali year (February-March). A toy-ship is made of plantain leaf stalks and cut pieces of bamboos. The upper part of the ship is covered with thin red paper, and a scarlet flag is hoisted on the top. Idols prepared of thickened milk and cow-dung are placed inside the ship. Oranges, plantains, and other seasonal fruits are given as offerings to the deities *Suo* and *Duo*, i.e. Prosperity and Adversity. Both these goddesses are worshipped by the Hindu baniks—the former for securing favour and the latter perhaps for avoiding disfavour. As the evening falls, candles are lit and placed inside the toy-ships. Bells toll, conchs sound and the ships are then launched in the tanks of the village.

The principal religious festivals of the village, however, are all observed on a community basis. All of these belong to the great tradition of India and Bengal, and are held in honour of the great gods, Siva, Dharma or Krishna or the goddesses Durga, Kali, Lakshmi, Saraswati or Manasa.

With whatever castes one or other of the above festivals originated, they have slowly spread from one caste to another. It is the argument of the sociologists that there is a continuous process of assimilation in an evolving culture. Accordingly, the high-caste festivals show a tendency of gradually including the lower castes and their practices in their rituals, while the low caste festivals show a leaning for acceptance of the ritual traits of the high castes who also increasingly participate in those festivals. How this process of universalization is going on may be illustrated from the *gajans* of Old Siva and Dharmaraj, the two great folk festivals in our village community.

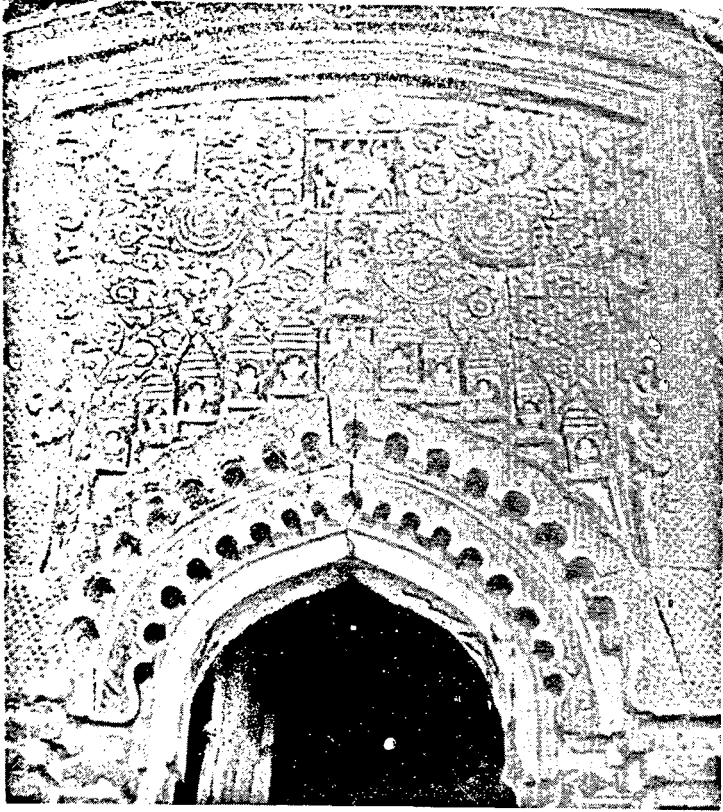
But before we come to their description, let us shortly dispose of the other annual *pujas* at Kanchanpur. Here again, compared to the festivals of Kali, Krishna and Durga, those of Lakshmi, Saraswati and Manasa are of minor importance in the village.

The annual Kali *pūja* is held both at the north side and the south side, but the north side Kali has acquired a pre-eminently superior status. She is the 'Great Mother' of the village. Her site and tin-shed temple is under a big peepal tree (said to be two hundred

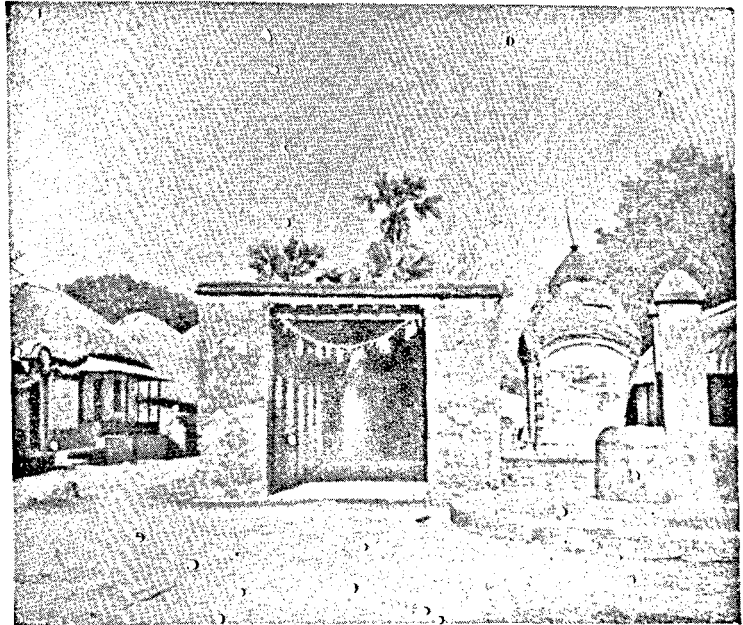
years old), near the ex-Zamindar's house at the western end of the Uttarpara (north side). There every year, an imposing image of Goddess Kali, ten cubits in height, is raised at the appointed time and duly worshipped by the village community. This Kali has obtained the name of 'Great Mother' of the village, not only because of her gigantic bodily frame, but also because she is supposed to be the most 'awake' goddess of the village. I am told by several persons of the locality that at the dead of night, they never approach the place of this Kali, as from a distance they can see a halo-light and hear an awe-inspiring sound pervading the site of their Great Mother.

The Durga *puja* days (September-October) and the festal fortnight of Krishna and Radha known in the village as *badhai* festival, apart from their recreational and religious values, have a special significance in the life of our community. The period of *badhai* festival is from *Krishnastami* (birth-day of Lord Krishna) to *Radhastami* (birth-date of Radha, the beloved of Krishna), and it usually falls in the month of Bhadra (August-September). During both of these festivals, and especially in the *badhai*, locality group-feelings between the north-side and the south-side run high as one side tries to excel the other in performance. The very word *badhai* in Bengali means creating conflict, and possibly indicates the origin of the festival in the rivalry between the two groups, though it may well be that *badhai* is the changed form of *bhadhai* or *bhadui*, i.e. the festival of the month of Bhadra, which is found in some of the districts of Bengal. When crops have been sown and seedlings are taking their roots in the month of Bhadra, it is natural that an agricultural community spend some time in festive activities and, as the period coincides with the days of birth of Krishna and Radha, the love play of this divine pair forms the subject matter of devotion and merriment in our village community. Children dressed as Radha and Krishna, or life-like images of the deities are placed in mobile revolving stages (known as *thakas*) to portray one or other scene of the *lila* (play) of the eternal lovers. Both the north and south-sides bring their *thakas* in procession and strive with each other for excellence. This competitive mood reaches its climax on the last day of the festival.

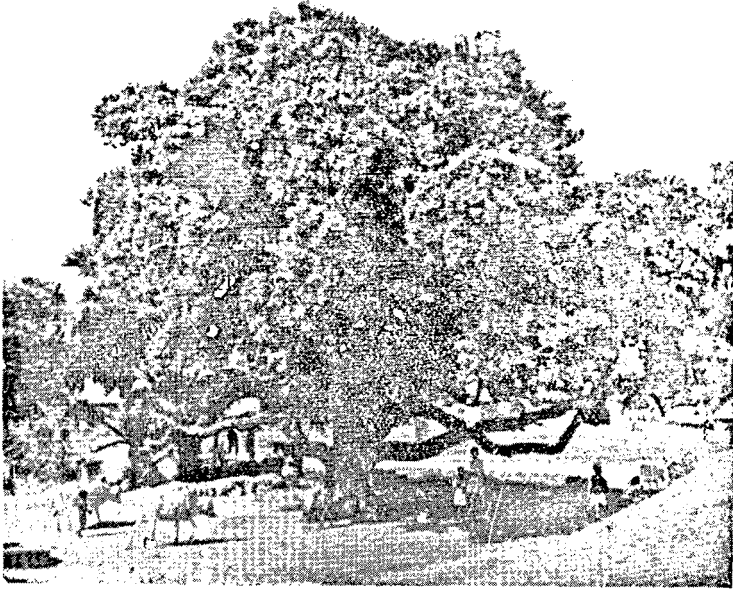
The rivalry between the two locality groups is manifest also at the time of the Durga Puja. In October, 1958, on the day of *visarjan*



A Village Temple with Relief-work in Bricks



Central Shivtala



Khirnitala



A Child dressed as Krishna

(i.e., immersion of the earthen image of the deity on the last day), the Dakshinpara people were jubilant over the fact that they had on the occasion a lighted gate and a band party from the town, to accompany the procession for *bisarjan*. Members of that hired body of musicians wore white uniforms with scarlet stripe, and their performance with their wind-instruments captivated the rustic hearts. But most hearts of the northern side felt smarted at the same sight, as the credit went to the people of Dakshinpara. It may, however, be noted here that the group tension between the two sides has considerably softened down as the present leaders of the Panchayat are working on a community basis, and are taking necessary steps to prevent the rise of any conflicting situation.

8.5 OLD SIVA'S GAJAN

Gajan festivals are held in honour of Old Siva as well as the Dharmaraj of our village. *Gajan* is derived from the Bengali word *garjan* which means "roaring". Evidently it refers to the thundering sound caused by the big gathering of persons come together to celebrate the festival in honour of their deity. *Gajan* has, therefore, come to mean the folk-festival itself held in worship of such village gods as Siva and Dharmaraj.

Old Siva's *gajan* starts with the initiation of the *mul sannyasi*, i.e. the main or head ascetic and the two *deulias*, i.e. the temple bearers, seven days before the Chaitra *sankranti* which is the last day of the Bengali year (middle of April). The head ascetic is invested with his wand of office to lead the *sannyasis* of the *gajan*, while the temple bearers get the right to carry the palanquin of the *Gajaneswar* (lord of *gajan*) in his ceremonial march through the village streets. *Gajaneswar* is the Old Siva himself. But in the temple, he is represented by a phallic symbol, a black smooth stone fixed on the floor in brick and mortar, while in the procession of the *gajan*, the deity is represented by a big egg-like, plain white stone, known as *Gajaneswar* to the votaries.

The *sannyasis* of Siva come from all castes. They have to purify their bodies by baths in the Ganges, shave themselves clean, and put on new clothes. Thereafter they are initiated to *sannyasi*-hood for the consecrated period of the *gajan* days. As an insignia of *sannyasi*-hood, the ascetics wear the *utri* (sacred threads) and all of

them are then regarded to belong to *saiva gotra* (Siva's clan) above all earthly castes. The Brahmin and the Vaidya votaries, who already wear their sacred threads, throw away the old ones, and themselves take the *utri*. But devotees of other castes cannot take the same without the ministrations of a Brahmin. For them, a *gajan* Brahmin turns up—nobody knows from where—to officiate at the ceremony of handing *utri*. As most of the votaries come from low castes, the *gajan* Brahmin is considered to be degraded in ministering to them. The visitor Brahmin, therefore, prefers to remain incognito, but the villagers are sure that he would appear out of the blue at the proper time and place every year during the time of *gajan*. In case, however, the *gajan* Brahmin does not turn up, the head *sannyasi* has the right and duty to give the *utri* to those devotees. The head *sannyasi* himself along with the two temple bearers had already been initiated to asceticism on the first day by the Brahmin *sevait* of Old Siva.

In the April 1959 *gajan*, there were fifty-nine *sannyasis*, and their numerical strength from different castes stood as follows:

Brahmin	— 4	4	Bagdi	— 8	} 33
Sadgop	— 2	} 12	Hari	— 6	
Tantj	— 2		Kotal	— 8	
Karmakar	— 1		Muchi	— 1	
Gop	— 7	Bauri	— 9		
Sunri	— 4	Kora	— 1		
Chunari	— 2	} 8			
Kaibatra	— 2				

The *mul-sannyasi* for 1959 was a Brahmin, the first in the history of Kanchanpur's *gajan*. Like all village functionaries the head *sannyasi*-hood was also a hereditary office, and a Sadgop family had hitherto held the honour. The last head *sannyasi* (supported by the *deulias*, refused to carry on the duties of their offices, unless some handsome payments were made to them. The work of the head *sannyasi* is a responsible and strenuous one, and this year he demanded a greater percentage of profits from the *sevait*s of Siva, who earn a good income from the *gajan* festival. The *sevait*s did not agree to the demand of the head *sannyasi* who consequently expressed his inability to lead the *gajan* for the year. A situation was created in which systematic celebration of the festival was threatened, and the *sevait*s

placed the matter to the sixteen annas of the village public. The Sadgops made a united stand, and no person came forward from them to accept the office of the head ascetic. Some of the lower caste members offered to lend their services, but the leaders did not like that such a dignified office should be held by a person of the exterior castes. Finally, a Brahmin rose and volunteered to hold the office and the *sevants* and a majority of the public accepted his proposal.

From the fourth day before the *sankranti*, i.e., the 26th or the 27th Chaitra of the Bengali era, the *gajan* of Kanchanpur takes its festive turn. The god Gajaneswar is carried in the palanquin with due ceremonies with beats of drums and bell-gongs. He is first taken to the *ghat* of the Dighi Tank wherefrom, it is said, Old Siva had arisen during excavation. There on a raised lime-washed earthen platform, the palanquin of the Gajaneswar is placed, and the god is duly worshipped. It is the closing date of taking *vow* and the last batch of devotees take their baths, offer prayers to the Sun-god and take the sacred *utri* from the *gajan* Brahmin.

Now it is time for the *gajan* party to start its trek with their Lord, singing and dancing through the streets of the village. The party is led by the head *sannyasi* who holds the wand of his office in one hand. With his other hand he holds on his shoulders an earthen pot which contains *snanjol* (ablution water of the lord's body) that is otherwise known as *charanamrita* (i.e. nectarine water of the Lord's feet). The *deulias* (temple bearers) carry the palanquin of the Lord, and sets of drums and bells make a deafening music. Old Siva has his own drummer who had been settled with lands by the founder of the deity, for service to be rendered during the festivals. (Similarly all the functionaries of the *gajan* had been given some lands from the *devottar* endowment to deity belonging to Old Siva for properly carrying out their duties to their god). The Pauls and Duttas of the village had also been giving annual drums to Old Siva at his *gajan* procession. People also promise to honour Old Siva with drum party, in fulfilment of their vows. The drums are covered with coloured cloths, and are decorated with white feathers and black cowries. At different hours in the festival, the musician party make their beats, to make the villagers alert about the activities of the *gajan* and children, men, and women throng to the appointed places to join the function.

Merrily goes round the *gajan*, and now it comes to stop at the household of the Biswas. The open space lying between the outer room of the family and the two Siva temples, a little to the east, has been cleansed and polished with cowdung. As the palanquin of the Lord comes, two boys of the family lie prostrate at the verandah steps, and the bearers carry the conveyance of the God over the breasts of the boys and place the deity inside the room. There it is worshipped by the head *sannyasi* with due rites and prayers. Outside, the feet of the *sannyasis* are washed with water, and off and on sandal water is sprinkled on their heads and breasts. The party sing and dance in honour of Siva and proclaim glory to the Lord and praise to his servants "Siva, Sambhunath, Mahadeb,—victory to the Biswas *barga* (group)". As the *puja* is over, the customary dues to the *gajan* are paid by the family. To the assembly then are distributed the nectarine water of the Lord's feet and the leavings of food partaken of by the deity. Now the head *sannyasi* gives the signal and the drummers start their beats and the idol is brought out from the room. Immediately the two boys of the family lie prostrate at the steps, and the Lord's palanquin rides out over their breasts as it came in a few minutes ago. The procession then moves on to the Jogadya-tala at the eastern end, to the temple of *Isaneswar* on the bank of the Auddy's tank at the South-East, to the site of Dharmaraj at the Bagdipara, to Khirnitala in the South, where a large crowd has already gathered to welcome the party. The *sannyasis* with their god stop there for a couple of hours and show various feats to the public—such as the head-dance, the 'awakening' dance, the *lathi*-dance, the pedal-dance and so on. These displays are the most attractive features in the day's *gajan* which is therefore known to the villagers as the *gajan* of Khirnitala.

After the performances at Khirnitala the procession moves on and goes to different households in a traditional order, and finally retires to the colonnade of the Shivtala. At about midnight, the *sannyasis* make their obeisances to Lord Siva, and the *gajan* of the day is then closed.

On the next date the *gajan* moves round the village in quick steps and returns to the colonnade of Siva before dusk, as the *sannyasis* have to receive there the devotees of sister villages of Parui and Kurman, who come to pay their respects to Old Siva of Palashi.

Carrying their idols in a palanquin, the *sannyasis* of the two neighbouring villages enter Palashi. Over the palanquin is a big umbrella of coloured silk on a silver stick. The party is led by the head *sannyasi*, but the priest also accompanies it, as he has to offer ministrations to the devotees at Shivatala. The entrance roads have already been watered by the villagers, and the streets have been decorated with strings of green mango or neem leaves. As the procession comes, the inmates of the households come out to wash the feet of the *sannyasis* and give their offerings to the *gajan* god. Before the shrine of Siva the ascetics of Palashi are waiting in a line. As their brethren from Parui or Kurman approach, they come forward to embrace them and offer them cheering tobacco—*bidi* or *kalki* according to one's liking. Making obeisances to Old Siva, the guest *sannyasis* return to their respective villages, while the local ascetics go home for their *maha-habisya*.

The devotees have not as yet taken any food for the day. At night they boil two grains of sun-dried rice and some vegetables together for their meals. This dinner is spoiled if there is any sound heard at the time of eating, whether it be the voice of a man, or the barking of a dog or the chirping of a lizard. In the stillness of night, closing the doors and windows of his room, the devotee offers his prayers to his god and partakes of his food—the *mahahabisya*—in the silence of night. If any sound enters his ears by chance, he has to get up. Next day he has to live on fruits and the day after he has to fast.

At mid-night the drum-beats at the Shivtala announce the time for making obeisances to the Lord. The *sannyasis* gather there and make their bows to the deity in thirty-six different forms. The priest then distributes the *nirmalya* (i.e. cast off flowers of the god) to the votaries, and closes the *gajan* for the day.

Next day brings the great ritual in the worship of Siva as Smasaneswar, i.e. the Lord of the Crematories. It starts with the flower-dropping ceremony at about mid-day, and culminates in the crematorium-dance in the dusky dawn before another day breaks.

As the drum-beats announce that the flower dropping ceremony has started, the ascetics and the villagers come in flocks to the shrine of the Old Siva. The priest presses a bunch of single-petalled *tagar* flowers, and places the same on the slightly curved head of the Siva.

The resonant drum-beats go on and on, and the priest prays and the votaries pray, and behold ! a flower has been dropped by Lord Siva as a sign of his sanction for commencing the great rite of *smasanpuja*.

Today is the day of the *smasan-bhakta sannyasi*, i.e. those ascetics who have vowed to make *puja* of the Siva of the crematoria. There is another class of devotees who are known as *bdla-bhaktas* who do not participate in the *smasanpuja* of Siva. Be that as it may, the function starts as usual with the carrying of the Gajaneswar to Dighi Tank, but he is brought back to the original shrine in a short time.

The *smasan-bhaktas* have to be dressed today. They scatter in the different households that take charge of attiring them as mimics of Siva. The householder offers his *sannyasi* a repast of fruits, and then the dressing begins. The face and body of the imitation Siva is chalked white, his beard, moustache, and eye-brows are all painted, and black and red spots are impressed on the body in oil colour. Over his head he wears a tinsel crown, and on his neck is a garland of paper flowers as also of *golancha* and *akanda* (kinds of flowers neglected by other gods and men, but greatly liked by god Siva.) The Siva's mimic puts on ornaments of flowers over different parts of his body. Round his waist he wears a string of bells, and there is a jingling anklet on his feet. He wears a dyed cloth, usually of saffron colour and the palms of his hands are tinged with lac. There is a china-rose bud in his lips, and in one of his hands there is an earthen cup. In the other hand he holds a sword and a green mango is fixed there on the pointed head. Before the *sannyasi* leaves the household of the dresser, he exchanges the green mango for another, and hands over the fruit to the mistress or the daughter-in-law of the household, and the said fruit is eaten with its cover and seed and all by the *bous* of the family in the belief that such partaking of the fruit will cause fertility in them. It is time for the mimic gods to come out of the household. He worships his Lord, and drum-beats begin. The *sannyasi* moves in the rhythm of a dance, and he dances a dance that is not his own. It is said that he is but the medium through which the *Nataraj* (i.e. the great dancer, an epithet as well as another name of Siva) is making his dance. Thus dancing he comes out and goes to the site of the great mother and then to the temple of the Smasaneswar

(the lord of the crematorium—another epithet as well as name of Siva), where all the *sannyasis* are to meet. Flocks of boys and girls, men and women stand in rows by the streets to see the party of these grotesquely dressed, *sannyasis* dancing according to the beats of the drums.

At the temple of the village Smasaneswar, the *sevait* distributes the Lord's *nirmalyas* (cast off flowers) to the *sannyasis*, on receipt of which they run out of the village for their trek to Kurman and Parui.

On the way a chosen few perform a secret ritual, and what it is all others do not know. Prohibited is the path on which the chosen few pass, and other ascetics have to follow a different route till their merits and austerities qualify them to a knowledge of the secret rite. Those who know what the rite is, have to keep the secret within themselves as the god's wrath will surely descend on them if they disclose it to others. It was told by several ascetics that they had been practising austerities for years to find out the mystery of the secret rite but as yet they are not considered qualified to know the great secret. Before entering Kurman, the *sannyasis* enter a *smasan* (crematorium) and worship the lord Siva there with proper rites. From Kurman the *sannyasis* march to Parui to pay their respects to Lord Siva there. On their return to the village about midnight, fruits are distributed to the ascetics at the *ghat* of the Dighi Tank, and then there is a recess for them for the night.

At an hour when the dawn is contending with the night for removing darkness from the face of the earth, beats of drums at the streets of Kanchanpur announce to the people that the time is come for the great crematorium dance of the *sannyasis*. The drum-beats continue to sound and the ascetics singly or in batches run to the north-end of the village on the main street, wherefrom the dance is to start. By the sides of the principal road, at the *durga-mandap* of the north-side and at the central Shivtala onlookers stand to see this outlandish, terrible and mad dance of the ascetics with heads of human corpses in one hand and swords in the other. To counteract the loathsome odour of the putrified human heads, a *dhyap-sannyasi* (an incense burning ascetic) accompanies the dancing party with a censer on his head. There are heads of all sorts, of both sexes and

different ages, and most of the heads are fresh with their eyes still glaring.

When children die in the villages their bodies are not burned. Also unclaimed bodies of the Burdwan hospital are often dumped under earth. Many of the poor exterior castes cannot afford to burn their dead, especially at a time when cholera or small-pox take a heavy toll. The ascetics have an active intelligence department. At dead of night they move in a group, dig up the dead bodies from the earth, sever the heads with their swords and steal away with the precious treasures. They visit even distant villages for this purpose.

The tune of the skull-play dance is different. Its postures and movements are also different. In quick rhythm the drum beats sound, and the ascetics' steps fall quicker. The dancing procession moves on through the street, and steps at Shivtala for the final display. Surrounding the actors is a crowd of spectators who recede backwards in loath as any dancer moves towards them. But year after year the drama is enacted, and the villagers have become accustomed to the scene. But a stranger is bewildered! Is it heroic or cowardly? Is it terrible or ludicrous? Is it beautiful or ugly? Is it attractive or disgusting? Is it holy or profane? This mimicry of the death dance of *Siva*!

As the sun glides towards the west on the day of the fast, drum-beats announce that the time is now come for the *digh pranam* (i.e. the great obeisance) to be made by the ascetics to their god. Gajaneswar is carried to the *ghat* of the Dighi-Tank where he receives the *puja* with due rites. The *sannyasis* then start their *digh pranam*, and along with them a few others may be seen who have come to make their long prostration in fulfilment of their views.

The long prostration begins from the *ghat* of the Dighi-tank at the north-east of the village, and ends at the shrine of the Old *Siva*. The distance is not less than half a mile, and the performance is an arduous and exhausting affair. With folded hands and bent head the devotee prays and calls his god—"Tarakeswar Nath Mahadeb! Hara-Gourinath Mahadeb! *Siva Sambhunath Mahadeb!*", and then makes himself prostrate on the ground. His breast and face touch the earth, and his hands are outstretched in front. At the last reach a line is drawn, and the devotee gets up and walks upto the mark. Again he folds his hands and calls his Lord, and again



Mimics of Shiva



Sannyasis at the Crematorium Dance



A dancing Sannyasi with a Child's Corpse



Digh Pranqm

he prostrates himself. Thus advancing, the whole ground is to be covered. If any one is forced to abandon this great obeisance, he remains a debtor to Lord Siva, and at one time or another in his life, he has to clear his dues to his god, lest there is no future for him in this life or in that after death.

Drum-beats continue to sound, and the prostrating devotees, singly or in batches, slowly move on. Some seem to fall from the line, but no, they take a few minutes' rest and again drag their fatigued and unwilling bodies towards their goal for the day. Silent and praying, the relatives and friends accompany the votaries, and do their best to give whatever relief they can to this toiling group. They mark the lines of advance on their behalf, they sprinkle water on their faces and fan them with the *punkhas* they carry with them. But even the longest road has its end; and the *digh pranam* too comes to its finish.

After bath the ascetic returns again, and goes through a miniature ordeal of fire. He sits in '*padmasan*' and fire kept in three earthen cups is placed over his head and palms of hands. Incense is burned there for the god. After some time, he leaves the pots of fire, prays to Siva and retires to his bed for the night. It is only after the worshipping of *Lilavati* and *Rudra* next morning that the ascetic breaks his fast.

Possessing a more modern outlook on life, you may ask a village ascetic why he observes the austerities of the *gajan*. His answer is: "Our austere living for the consecrated period—nay for the whole month of Chaitra keeps our body fit and active for the whole year. No disease can enter the body thus disciplined in the worship of the Lord. Prosperity also is bound to follow the worship of the Lord. The strict discipline, the different rites, the painstaking great *pranam*—all these have been transmitted to us from generation to generation, and who am I to break them? There must be something of value in them; otherwise why did our forebears follow them? Have not our scriptures also enjoined us to observe austerities? Have not they said that all may be accomplished by austerities. And lastly, when we make all these austerities for the sake of the Lord, His grace is bound to descend on us. How can He deny His favour when we are mortifying ourselves for Him?"

On the evening of the *Chaitra sankranti*, the last day of the Bengali year, the Gajaneswar is led in procession to the *Charaktala* at the south end of the village. But there is no erection of *charak*, no feats under penance. A portion of ground just outside the village is cleansed and polished with cowdung, by the *Kotals* of that end. The palanquin of the Lord is placed there, and after His worship, the *gajan* functionaries and the *sannyasis* settle up their accounts. Soon after the *gajan* party returns to the shrine of Old Siva.

There to the *Charaktala*, the *Kotals* come back with their newborn children and lay them on the earth where the Lord's palanquin was placed. They prostrate themselves on the ground, and scratch a little bit of the said earth and tie it carefully in a knot at the end of their cloths. After taking possession of this valuable treasure they take back the empty vessels in which offerings had been brought by them to the deity. The vessels, however, were not entirely empty as the head *sannyasi* had left there for them the nectarine water of the Lord's feet, a highly prized substance for the whole community.

The bells ring and the drum throbs in the new year of Kanchanpur and the Old Siva's *gajan* is to be officially closed on this first-day of the month of Baisakh. The *Napit* shaves the ascetics, and a *Dutta* household distributes mustard oil and turmeric paste to the party. The priest first takes some oil and a handful of turmeric paste from the lamp and touches the threshold of Old Siva. The ascetics then follow his example, and also touch the feet of the priest and the head *sannyasi* with oil and turmeric. Then the articles are freely distributed among the *sannyasis* for rubbing on their bodies. Great is the joy of the *sannyasis* who take as much oil and turmeric to

The Manu Samhita says:

Whatever is hard to be traversed,
 Whatever is hard to be attained,
 Whatever is hard to be reached,
 Whatever is hard to be performed—
 All may be accomplished by austerities.

“yad dustaram yad durāpam yad durgamam yacca duṣkaram
 sarbantu tapasā sādhyam tapo hi dṛatikramam.”

(Edited by Jogendra Chandra Vidyaratna, Chapter II)

besmear their own as others' bodies; and the floor of the colonnade of Shivatala takes the golden yellow colour of the turmeric.*

Mustard oil is then distributed to the functionaries of the *gajan*. The old Siva has his quota—which, of course, goes to the priest. The different share-holders of *sevait*-ship (office of priesthood), the *gajan* Brahmin, the head *sannyasi*, the *deulias* (temple-bearers), the *dhup-sannyasi* (censer carrying ascetic), the head *sannyasi* of Dharmaraj, the *Napit*, the Chaukidar, the cleaner of the human heads of the crematorium dance, the sweeper of Shivatala, the Modak distributor of oil and turmeric, and many others receive their quota of oil as a mark of honour for their services to the *gajan*.

After a bath the ascetics return to the Shivatala, and now the *utris* (*sannyasis*' sacred threads) are to be taken off so that the votaries may return to their normal life. The Brahmin ascetics change their *utris* for their ordinary sacred thread; and the head *sannyasi* helps the clean castes. But being a true Brahmin, he refuses to take off the threads from the ascetics of the exterior castes, and asks them to wait until the *gajan* Brahmin turns up. But as they become restive, a young Brahmin ascetic declares that he does not care for the age-long traditions and takes off the *sannyasi*'s thread from the low caste votaries who rejoice in the action.

Old Siva is worshipped and it is now the occasion to call the sixteen annas Brahmins of the village for the touch of the sacred charrings. So the *Napit* is deputed for the job and the zamindar is first to be informed. The Zamindar's son, other Brahmins and the ascetics get the touch of the sacred charrings according to priority, and with it the *gajan* rituals for the year come to a close.

Now comes at last the feast of the devotees, known as *bhaktabhajan* in the village. A Paul family of the Subarnabanik caste is the donor of the feast and it is now regarded as a necessary part of the year's *gajan* to which it gives the finishing touch. The banquet consists of ordinary courses—*bhat*, *dal*, hodge-podge of vegetables, another hodge-podge with fish-bones and oily substance of fish, and lastly *tak* mixed with fish. But, coming just after the days of scanty food and austere living of the consecrated period, the ascetics greatly

*Mustard oil and turmeric are used in various purificatory and propitious rites of the Hindus. I do not pretend to fathom the philosophy behind such use.

enjoy the feast. Many others, especially of the poorer class, freely take their lunch at the Shivtala, where the feast is held and then take platefuls of rice and curry for their home. As the feast is over, the villagers say that the *gajan* has truly ended, but you may see about a month later another *gajan*, that of Dharmaraj of the Bagdis.

8.6 THE MIRACLE OF DHARMARAJ

The *gajan* of Dharmaraj takes place on the *Baisakhi purnima* (the full moon day of the Bengali month of Baisakh—April-May). On the tenth lunar day, the initiation of the head *sannyasi* and the temple-bearers takes place. On the eleventh comes the function of the wearing of the *utri* (*sannyasi*'s sacred thread) for the general body of ascetics. It may be noted that there comes no votary to Dharmaraj from amongst the high castes. In the 1959 *gajan* there were a few ascetics from the clean castes of the Nabasakh group, and the head *sannyasi* of the Dharmaraj of Kanchanpur has all along been a Sadgop. The total number of ascetics for the year is twenty five. On the twelfth day of the lunar fortnight, the Gajaneswar is taken in procession to the neighbouring villages of Kurman and Debagram. Dharmaraj is represented as Gajaneswar in a black stone shaped like the Narayan-sila of the upper caste Hindus, and is carried in a palanquin like the 'Gajaneswar Old Siva'. On the thirteenth lunar day—the day on which the ascetics have to live on fruits—the *gajan* of Palashi treks to Chandrahati, while the Kurman party pays their return visit to Palashi. On the fourteenth, i.e. the day before the *purnima*, the ascetics have to fast, and take their god in procession through the village streets to different households which contribute their customary stipends to the Gajaneswar Dharmaraj. At nightfall, a miracle is supposed to happen—a visible manifestation of Dharma Thakur on earth. But before we come to this let us understand who this village god is.

Anukul Pandit, the Bagdi priest of Dharmaraj, cannot tell us who his *Thakur* is, and we do not expect him to be able to do so when the learned Pandits of Bengal's culture differ amongst themselves. At present the god is known as Dharmaraj or Dharma, evidently a Hindu or a Buddhist name. But originally it was one of the village gods whom the pre-Aryan inhabitants of Radh (i.e. the western part of Bengal beyond the Bhagirathi) used to worship. The Aryan

influence could not penetrate in this country of Radh before the third century B.C., and the village gods retained their original characteristics till that date. They were the presiding deities of the village, to whom the inhabitants prayed in diseases and disasters. Usually they were considered to reside in some crude stone or a tree on the village border or beyond; they were almost always worshipped with animal sacrifices. Our present Dharmaraj is pre-Aryan to the core, though outwardly there is an influence of Buddhist or Hindu religion on him.

Dharmaraj, as we have seen, is the great god of the exterior castes, who were originally the pre-Aryan tribes of this eastern part of India. Even his priests belong to the exterior castes, and if a Brahmin happens to be his priest, he is considered a 'degraded' Brahmin. When, in the reign of the Baudha (Buddhist) Pals (eighth to twelfth centuries) Buddhism was spreading in the country of Radh, this pre-Aryan god, in order to save himself, took the name of Dharma, a name from Buddhist literature and religion—Dharmaraj is also another name of Lord Buddha. From then also Dharmaraj came to be represented by a tortoise-shaped stone resembling a Buddhist *stupa*. The *gajan* festival of Dharmaraj is usually held at Baisakhi-Purnima which is otherwise known as Buddha-Purnima, as this particular day is taken to be the birth date of Lord Buddha. Further, the ascetics of Dharmaraj proclaim victory to *Adi-deb Dharmaraj Niranjan* at the time of the *gajans*. *Adi-deb* and *Niranjan* are both epithets as well as names of Lord Buddha.

On the ruins of Buddhism the Saivas raised their flags in Bengal. The old village god, already named Dharmaraj, then came to be marked with traits of Saivism and the *gajans* of both the deities were considerably influenced by each other. Later, in the sixteenth century, Raghunandan, the great juri-consult of Bengal, prescribed for Dharmaraj the code of rites of a Hindu God. Dharmaraj is now often identified as the Dharmaraj of the Hindu Pantheon, who is no other than *Yama*—the god of death. Or he is said to be the same as Vishnu—the *Adi-deb* (the original god) of the Hindu. Thus we see Dharmaraj is a many-faced god; but let us now go back to the night of the fourteenth lunar day to see his manifestation on earth to receive the annual worship from his votaries of Kanchanpur.

You enter the site of the god Dharma. His temple is a south-facing small hut built of mud walls and straw-hatched with holes through which parts of the blue sky are visible. In front there is a stretch of land on which stand three big peepal trees and one *krishna-chuda* shrub. Already an assemblage is thickening there.

With permission from the priest, and putting off your shoes, you enter the temple of the god. A strong smell of country liquor makes you look at one corner where you may find a couple of big earthen jars that you know later to be the 'treasury' of Dharma (Dharma's *bhandar*). But you first approach the throne of the god and find the tortoise shaped idol no larger than a closed human fist. Surrounding him and his throne, you see a good many of the Hindu gods and goddesses in corresponding sizes as well as the village god, *Kalu Rai* and goddess Didi Thakrun. On the throne itself, by the side of Dharma, are Jagodyá, Manasa and Kalu Rai. It is said that Kalu Rai is an old village god and is otherwise called Dharma Thakur in some parts of Bengal. Besides the throne the *pancha-devata*, i.e. the five recognised deities* of the Hindus are also to be seen. The Pandits of Bengal's culture have described these gods as *abaran-devata* (encircling gods) who have been brought to the scene to give a cover of Hinduism to the pre-Aryan stone-god. Also in the *puja* rites next day, all the reputed gods of Hinduism, and those in the village as well were called at the altar by the ascetics to receive their worship and obeisance.

Outside a group of crude stones, representing the god Panchanan, occupies the earthen altar under the *krishna chuda* tree. Two more earthen altars have been raised under two of the peepal trees. On one there has been planted an *akanda* shrub which is known to have won the favour of Lord Siva as well. This is the *Akanda-tala* where Dharmaraj is to be worshipped next morning with due rites and sacrifices. On the third altar under another peepal tree, the Dharmaraj who is going to descend on earth as a wood-pole, is to be planted and worshipped.

The fourteenth lunar night arrives and the god becomes visible in the sacrificial vessel (*koshakushi*) of the worshipping priest at the temple hut where a hairlike shadow appears on the Ganges water of the pot. It is an indication that the god has come in the form of a pole and

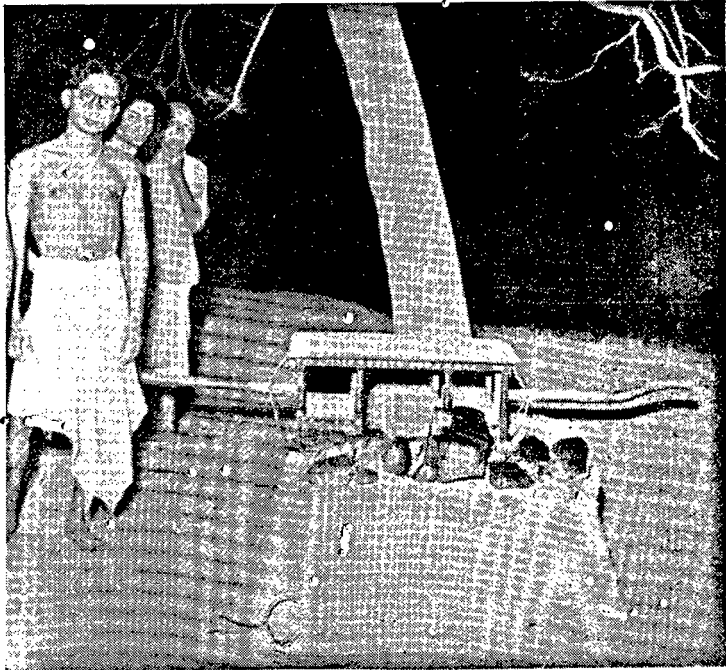
*1) Vishnu, 2) Siva, 3) Sakti, 4) Ganesh and 5) Surya.



The Drummer



God Dharmaraj amidst encircling Gods and his Bagdi Priest



Gajaneswar Dharmaraj at the Panchanantala

is to be found in the big Dutta's tank. The position of the shadow in the water-vessel at the temple informs the priest of the exact position where the pole is to be searched for in the tank. The revelation does not come to a stranger like you, nor even to the eyes of the head ascetic, but the priest sees it and announces to the votaries and others the location of the god-pole in the tank. Drum-beats throb and the flower-dropping ceremony begins. As a flower is dropped from the convex head of the god, it is understood that sanction has been obtained to begin the rites for the year's *puja*. The Gajaneswar god is carried in procession to the southern ghat (bathing place) of the big Dutta's tank, where the *ghat-puja* is done. Then the ascetics make their *digh pranam* (the long prostration) from the *ghat* of the said tank to the temple of the Dharmaraj.

Time has now come to fetch the god-pole from the tank and install him on the altar under the peepal tree.

Already men and women, boys and girls have come in flocks to the Dutta tank. There are vigilant visitors from nearby villages. All have thronged to the western embankment as the priest has said that the god is to rise at that end. Thousand eager eyes are fixed and haply the full moon is on her throne. Often the desecrating rays of electric torchlights flash,—‘Oh, there, there what is that small patch of a black shadow? Is it the head of the pole?’

The *sannyasis* headed by the priest have already jumped into the water and are swimming towards the place. Suddenly the priest is submerged, but he gets up again. Words ring forth from the audience—‘He has got it, he has got it’. The priest gets under water and gets up, as if he is wrestling with his god to make him secure. Finally he triumphs, and the god-pole floats flat on the waters of the tank, and all the ascetics lay their hands on him.

In the meantime the god has been garlanded, and the *sannyasis* pull him up to the western ghat. There, before he is lifted, *puja* is offered with due rites, and a goat is sacrificed. As the priest sprinkles the blood over the head and body of the pole, the ascetics cry: ‘Glory to Adideb Dharmaraj Niranjan’. He is then brought to the altar amidst shouts of such glories, and leans there on the trunk of the peepal tree. Thereafter the rite of *mukda-dhowa* is performed in which the brushings and washings of the temple are

ceremonially thrown into the waters of the tank. It is already past midnight and the recess for the night begins.

The *puja* on the Purnima day begins with a ceremony at the rising dawn, and ends with *bisarjan* of the god-pole at the Chand Dutta's tank in the evening. We have already seen that in course of the *puja* of the Dharma god, honour is paid to all the great gods and goddesses of Hinduism. But the great feature in the worship of the day is the slaughter of a good number of goats as offerings to the deity. Sacrificial blood flows at the altar of the *akanda* shrub, at the altar of the god-pole, at the altar of God Panchanan under the *krishnachuda* tree, in front of the temple door of Dharmaraj, and finally at the ghat when the god-pole is pushed to the tank in the act of *bisarjan*. The blood of the sacrificed animals is sprinkled over the fetish pole and stones—and all this in the name of Dharmaraj Niranjana, who is no other than Buddha, the great "Light of Asia".

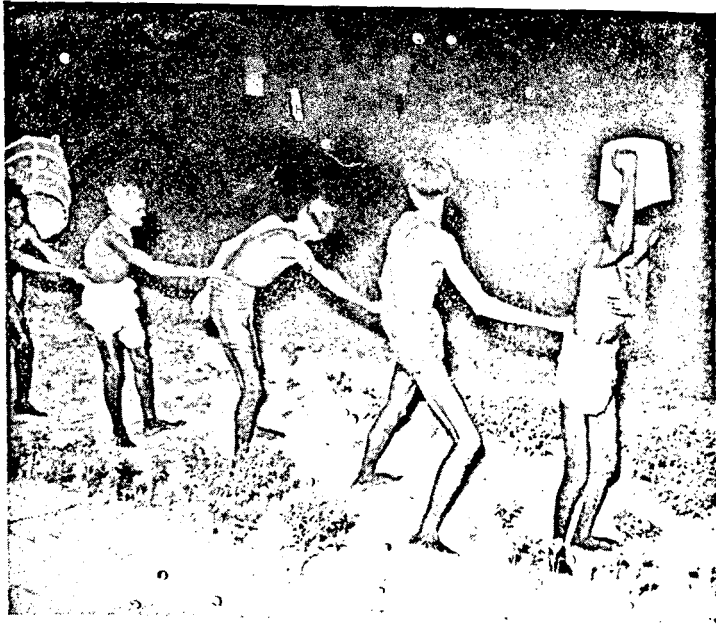
Three days after the act of *bisarjan*, the god-pole vanishes from the surface of the water in the Chand Dutta's tank. I do not know nor have I seen how it vanishes, but the villagers say that it does. In this connection what was written twenty-five years ago in "*Kanchunpur Revisited*" may also be quoted here as the attitude and belief of the people remains substantially the same.

"The people here believe that the appearances and disappearances of the pole are caused by the divine power of *Dharmaraj*. Despite repeated attempts to solve it, the mystery remains. Many traditions have now come to be associated with the incident. I have not met anyone who has himself kept watch; but they knew persons who did and who are now all dead. They once organised a strong party for the purpose, but towards the end of the night there came such a terrible storm with thunder and lightening that they were obliged to take shelter in a nearby house. But, wonder of wonders, in a minute or two the storm had subsided and returning to the sides of the tank, they no longer found any trace of the pole. I have heard this story from apparently trustworthy persons.

There are even more stories connected with the matter. How people tied the god-pole to a tree and how, in the morning, they found the knots still tied and quite unchanged, but the pole had vanished. Some again carried the pole to their home on the third night, but in the morning it was to be found neither in the room nor outside it. It is superfluous to add that those activities enraged Dharmaraj and the families of those



At the Altar at Dharamtala



The Procession of Mukta-dhōya



The last Flicker

who thus defiled the god became extinct. Some even think—but they are the illiterate peasants—that their god had given a *pratyadesh* (command given in a dream) to the first priest, that anybody who would spy on his going away would fall a victim to his anger and his family would be removed from the face of the earth. And they would point out to you the ruins of the houses of once flourishing families, like those of the Days Mandals, to whom our writer the Rev. Day belonged, who attempted the impossible and have consequently paid the price.

It is natural to doubt the authenticity of these statements; but the villagers contend that reason cannot explain the following events in this connection: (1) How does the hair-like shadow appear in the priest's sacred pot of water? (2) How is it that the pole is thrown into one tank and that it comes out in the other next year? Moreover, the people here are definite that the same pole does not appear every year; and that in all the villages in the vicinity there is not a single craftsman who is expert enough to make one like it. (3) How is it that the pole appears in a vertical position and that when thrown into the water after the puja it floats quite flat? (4) And lastly, but not least wonderful, how does it disappear always in the third night, and why has nobody ever been able to see it vanish?

If you, my gentle reader, do not believe these things, I invite you to come with me, for I too have been challenged by the people of Kanchanpur, to come to their village on the day previous to the *Baisakhi purnimā*, to stay there for some four days in order to try and find out what takes place. The people are confident that I will fail for they believe most strongly that the miracle is wrought by the divinity of their god, Dharmaraj."

Twenty-five years later I come back to the village and describe what I see and feel in the ordinary course of things. If the mystery seems unresolved to you even now, I would like you, my gentle reader, to come to the village and look into the matter personally. Your diligence may possibly rip up the mystery but till then who is there so bold as not to believe in the annual miracle of Dharmaraj? The villagers continue to show an attitude as much as to say: "There are more things in heaven and earth, Horatio."

8.7 SUPERSTITIONS AND TABOOS

My American friend writes to me in a letter: "It is stated by the Rev. Day in his book that Bengali peasants would never answer a call at night unless three times repeated because of their fear of the

goddess *Nishi*. Is that still so, now-a-days? Is it also even now usual for a married woman to wear an iron circlet around her wrist? Further, when the lizard chirps is it still regarded as a bad omen so much so that an important journey would be postponed?"

During my stay in Kanchanpur I tried to get answers to these questions.

"The belief in *Nishi* is fading", said an educated young man of the village, but his statement was immediately contradicted by others. Sri Ray, an elderly gentleman of the village, related how he had saved Patal Samanta from the clutches of a *Nishi*. N. Bauri, the village *chowkidar*, narrated his personal experience how he was deluded by a *Nishi* one night in his young days. Hearing a call at night he came out and saw a clothed and veiled female person standing at a distance of a few steps. The womanly figure moved and he followed it through the streets of the village beyond the human habitat and found himself standing in the fields of the southern end. But suddenly, through God's grace, he became aware of the situation, and turning back he made a run and did not stop till he reached his home.

Sri B.C., the head-master of the village school, then told several real stories of *Nishi-bhut* and other village ghosts of whom he had personal experience. He related how Bhim Sardar of his native village, a man of prodigious strength and the leader of his caste, had been decoyed by *Nishi*, and found missing for several days. When all attempts to trace him failed, an *ojha* (exorcist) was consulted. He uttered his formula and made his calculation, and found out that Bhim had been confined by a *Nishi-bhut* on the top of a big *simul* (silk-cotton) tree about twelve miles south-east of the village. Agreeably to his findings Bhim's person was discovered and the *ojha* recovered him from the arrest of the *Nishi*. There was a heap of fish-bones beside him on a branch of the tree, and Bhim was still then alive. But his days were numbered as a man who is touched by *Nishi* cannot live much longer. The general opinion of the assembly was that *Nishi* does exist, and the best way to foil her malign action is not to respond to the first three calls at night. It is the belief that *Nishi* imitates the human voice to decoy her victims, but she calls only three times. If the voice is repeated for the fourth time, the inmates become sure that it is not ghostly and may then

safely respond to the call. The belief is still quite strong amongst the illiterate working classes of the community.

A word may be said in this connection as to the belief in the existence of ghosts in general. The general view is that there must be a *bhut-yoni* (ghost life), though the same is not visible to us in particular forms. The *Narayan-sila*, the village crematorium is believed to be inhabited by several village ghosts, and there are many stories of how they play tricks on persons who happen to pass by the place at dead of night. Ordinarily, the people will avoid that place after night-fall. The village ghosts are very fond of exercising their influence over young women, and last year two young girls, one a Gop daughter and the other a Goswami *bou*, were taken possession of by them. The *ojhas* (ghost-doctors), however, were quite competent to treat the cases and cured the victims of the demoniacal agency of the *bhuts*.

It is believed that people who die of accidents or resort to suicide become *bhuts* and their spirits hover in the air till they receive proper funeral cakes at the *pret-sila*—a mountain at Gaya where obsequial offerings are given to those who are supposed to have become evil spirits after death. I was told by some elderly persons that formerly there had been a good many ghosts at Kanchanpur. But now with the construction of the railways, Gaya can be easily reached and *pindas* (funeral cakes) can be duly offered at the *pret-sila* for the benefit of the tortured souls of the departed. When they receive the offerings they become free from the bondage of *bhut-yoni* (life of ghosts). As a result the *bhuts* have become very rare even in a village like Kanchanpur.

The answer to the second question of my American friend is a simple affirmative, as a married woman in the village invariably wears an iron circlet around her wrist even now. A woman may part with all her ornaments, but not the iron wristlet as long as her husband is alive. "Let the iron circlet on your hand be ever-lasting" is the most precious blessing that a married woman receives from her elders.

In reply to the third question of my friend it has to be observed that even now an important journey has to be postponed if a lizard chirps at the moment of start. It is said that the lizard had eaten

up the cut-off tongue of Khana (the woman astrologer of traditional fame), and since then its chirpings reveal the past and the future of human life.

It is apparent from what has been said above that a villager's life is still hedged in by numerous restrictions and superstitions. Like the lizard's chirp, the sneezing of a human being is also considered a good or a bad omen according to the circumstances of the situation. Important journeys have also to be postponed, if, on the point of departure, one sees an empty jar, an empty boat, a beardless man, or a crying crow on a dead branch. If one has to enumerate all these things it will be a long list, but a few more superstitions and taboos are noted below as they display a peculiar aspect of the village mind.

One should not eat *neem* or anything bitter on a Sunday. One should not give or purchase cow-dung cakes on either a Saturday or a Tuesday. There is prohibition against cutting of bamboos on Saturdays, Sundays and Tuesdays. One would not sell anything hairy on a Monday, and paddy should not be sold on a Wednesday, though there is no such restriction for their purchases. On festivals and ceremonial days, one is not to boil paddy, husk it or fry it. On such days clothes are not to be sent to the washerman, nor are they to be boiled for washing at home. One is also not to take any roasted food on these days. As it happened, on the day when *puja* offerings were being sent by the villagers to the place of Didi Thakrun, our servant inadvertently purchased a few brinjals for our food. For this he was severely reprimanded by the daughters-in-law of our friend's family. All these are social injunctions that have to be strictly obeyed, and their sanction lies in the irrational fear of the unknown in the minds of our villagers. "This is an age-old custom which nobody has been seen to break. If it is broken some unusual event—something disastrous—may happen. Therefore it should not be broken." Such is the attitude of our villagers. Some even try to justify prohibitions and taboos with incomprehensible arguments based on planetary and stellar influences.

Before the topic is closed it is desirable to point out a few charms and amulets that are in fashion at Kanchanpur. To begin with, I quote a passage from "*Kanchanpur Revisited*".

“You come out early in the morning and at your door you see a naked boy of some ten years whistling to himself. He wears a string round his waist, and to the string is attached a punched pice. On his ankle there gleams an iron ring. If you ask him why he wears these things, he would wonder at your ignorance and would explain to you, that since he had been born after his two elder brothers had died in their infancy, it is the custom to wear these protective charms.”

The iron circlet round the ankle is known as (god) Dharma's shackles, and it is the general belief that *Yama* (god of death), can not take away such a child who wears god Dharma's chains. There are various other methods in which a village mother fights her battle against the god of death. A woman who brings forth children that do not usually live long, symbolically sells away her child as soon as it is born either to the midwife or any other woman of the village. By such sale, the *gotra* of the child is changed. It no longer belongs to the mother and it is hoped that Death would not, therefore, be interested to take it. Usually the sale price is one or more cowries and accordingly the child is named *Ek-kadi* (one cowrie), *Do-kadi*, *Tin-kadi*, *Panch-kadi* and so on. Sometimes the transfer is made on receipt of a *khud* (a broken bit of rice), in which case the child is named *Khudiram*. Sometimes a child may not be transferred, but he is given loathsome, repelling names, such as *Guey* (faecal), *Naruke* (hellish) or *Pacha* (putrid) in the belief that the god of death will certainly disdain to touch one so obnoxiously named. Also there is a custom of piercing the ear or nose of a new-born child in the hope that a defective infant is not fit to be taken away by any god.

Besides the above popular charms and practices, Kanchanpur has the good offices of a *Grahacharya* (astrologer) Pandit of the village of Bara Belun. He pays regular business visits to Kanchanpur. When I was first introduced to him, he greeted me with a sanskrit couplet and gave me to understand that he was no less a person than the *Darbar Acharya* (court astrologer) of the ex-Nawab of Murshidabad. He is famed for his accuracy of heavenly calculations and power of foretelling the future events of life from the horoscope of any person. He is believed to have powers to ward off the present and future evil influences working against his clients by various *yajnas* (ceremonial functions)—such as *nabagraha-jag santi-swastyajan* or

shyama-swastyayan and the like. Further, he prepares various charms and distributes effective *kabachas* (amulets) on payment of suitable fees. Thus he gives *Lakshmi-kabach* for "prosperity", *Nabagraha-kabach* for success, *Maha-Bagala-kabach* for removing distress and difficulties, and several other *kabachas* for this or that purpose." It appears that our *Grahacharya* has a good clientele in the village, and the eager welcome that is accorded to him whenever he visits the place indicates Kanchanpur's profound faith in him.

CHAPTER NINE

CONCLUSIONS

Kanchanpur presents a drama of forces that play on New India's villages. Here is a type of rural culture that is rooted in traditions but has now to face the changes and developments due to independence and a changing civilisation. Means of external contacts and relations with the outer social environment are ever increasing, and the old traditional structure of the village society is apparently quaking with the dynamism of the new age. Twentyfive years ago it appeared that Kanchanpur had not changed; now it is certainly changing. Since independence came, Government itself has become an agent of change; but, after all, it has to be admitted that the rate of change is a great deal slower than is appreciated by our reformers and city-dwellers.

Viewed from the stand-point of space, the village has been brought nearer to the town of Vardhaman and through it to the bigger outside world. In the dry season, a bus runs twice or thrice a day on the Burdwan-Kusumgram road and Jeep trucks and motor lorries come to the heart of the village. The road is being metalled under the second five year plan; and the villagers are looking ahead for the time when daily bus service will be a regular feature throughout the year.

The coming of the canal has been referred to. It has not only brought waters to the fields of Kanchanpur, but it has also caused the village itself to come closer to Vardhamana. The distance from Burdwan to Kanchanpur when the village is approached through the path on the embankment of the canal has been shortened and one can ride on a bicycle even in the rainy season, if the weather has been dry for a couple of days.

In the economic sector, the noticeable change is that land has become an object of investment in the village world, and it is coveted by all the classes—cultivating or non-cultivating. As a result land has been concentrated in the upper castes who are generally rich but do not hold the plough themselves.

In Kanchanpur at present 60% of the village lands are held by them, while only 10% of the lands are held by the agricultural castes.

In consequence, there is a proportionately large growth in the number of agricultural labourers in the population, with a non-working land-owning class on the top.

Changes from traditional caste occupations may be noted, and it seems that the caste-system has been shaken mainly in its occupational aspect by the rude forces of the economic world. But the core of the caste-system with its current esoteric background, its restrictions on intermarriage and commensality, still remains entrenched in our village world.

The sails of the Zamindar and rent-receiving class have been deflated on the surface of village life. Machine-made goods have also displaced many of the old occupationists, such as the village weaver, the blacksmith, the oil-presser, the paddy husker and so on. Western medicine has come to be introduced in the villages and the Kavirajs with their *dasamula* and *rasasindur* and other indigenous remedies have left the arena. Instead has come the allopathic physician with penicillin and streptomycin and similar such shafts in the quiver in his battle against the diseases of mankind. It may be noted that there is an unqualified homeopath in the village, but his practice thrives because he does not charge any fee, and at the same time distributes his doses of medicine very cheap. But in serious cases, the villager thinks it necessary to go to or call the allopath.

In cultivation, chemical fertilizers have come to be used. New varieties of paddy and sugarcane have been introduced, but for what particular reason and with what benefit are not exactly ascertained. Traditional agricultural processes are followed; and there is little technological improvements in the implement. The bullocks, the wooden plough, the hoe and the scythe still do their jobs. An improved pattern of sugarcane press, however, has come in use.

In the ways of living, tea has come to be used as a cheap general drink. Some families of the rich upper castes have introduced an element of wheat in their diet.

English pattern of costumes such as coats, shirts, chemise, saia, blouses, frocks and pinnies have been slowly introduced in our village, and have now become quite common. If we look to the inventory of semi-durable goods, especially of the rich upper castes, another list of English names is presented to our eyes—i.e., table,

chair, shelf, clock, watch, bicycle, torch, petromax, hurricane lantern and so on.

In the arena of marriage and home-making, what is first noticed is a rise in the age of marriage, especially amongst the upper castes. The present Indian legislators do not follow the *shastric* directive that girls are to be married before they attain the age of puberty. On the other hand, child-marriage has been prohibited in law. Still girls have to be given in marriage, as the customs of our village would still require it. Whether the parents or guardians have means or not, the girls must be married off. The difference from earlier ages only lies in the fact that the crisis is felt not at the eleventh year of the girl, but when she has passed her teens. Then it is time for the father or any other guardian, to take recourse to any means—begging, borrowing or selling properties, but the girl has to be married, as the life of an unmarried girl is incompatible with the traditions of Kanchanpur.

The match-maker has no longer his job; but all the marriages are arranged by the parents and relatives. Romantic love has not got any footing as yet in the village world; and no civil marriage has taken place in Kanchanpur. The marriage rites have not changed.

The feudal values of womanhood still prevail. The men do not share the household duties—they are not even expected to do so.

In the upper castes the joint-family is even now the dominant type, though in the exterior castes the nuclear type is more familiar. In joint families, the mother-in-law is still the mistress of the house, and the *'bou'* has a subordinate place. The male dominance cannot be overlooked in the relation between husbands and wives in our rural families.

Primary education has been made free and compulsory, but the guardians do not think it convenient to send their girls to the school. The same is true for the labouring class boys as well.

The school has got its own site and building with some modern equipment such as tables, chairs and benches. This has contributed to the creating of a salubrious climate for growth of school life at Kanchanpur. The old disciplinary method of the village *pathsala* has vanished, and the child enjoys more liberty, if not more reverence. The children no longer play the truant and they have come to love the school as their own. Most of the students expressed that they love the school more than their home. The school subjects seem

to cover in elementary lines all the studies which a student has to pursue in secondary or higher education. Formerly the mother tongue, and whatever they learnt became useful to them in future. But now-a-days the primary course attempts to be integrated to the secondary and higher subjects. But as most of the pupils drop away and do not go for the secondary course, their little knowledge in various subjects does not help them much in the future. The village guardians at least are apprehensive of the new education.

Kanchanpur, we have seen, is growing politically conscious. Here we can say that the village is moving out to embrace a new way of thought and form, that is, democratic faith and values.

A new type of leadership that acts as an intermediary between the official and the village world is also emerging. The new leaders come from the young educated group, and usually love to participate in social work and devote a substantial part of their life to such activities. They possess democratic leadership in them, and do not dictate through coercion and compulsion. At the same time they have to serve as a link between their village community and the outside official world—or various urban organisations and institutions. The new situation created by the elective Panchayat, development projects and urban connections etc. has brought them to the front. At Kanchanpur a young man of the Kayastha caste has emerged as an *Adhyaksha* at present. His relationships with the officials of the Headquarters and the Development Block, his links with the influential leaders of the District Congress, his devotion to social work in his community have placed him and his associates in the role of leadership. It is hoped that he will continue to head the community activities of Kanchanpur for the betterment of his village for the coming years.

Least change is noticed in the ritual structure of the village and the tenets and practices connected therewith. Slowness of ritual changes has been referred to in the evolution of the god Dharmaraj. There we have seen the indigenous form of worship of the original inhabitants firmly rooted within in spite of the layers spread over it by intrusive Buddhism and Hinduism. And Dharmaraj may be taken to be a symbol of the entire culture pattern of Kanchanpur. In spite of the already mentioned changes, in spite of the apparent ascendancy of the new age, Kanchanpur's culture is still ancient and medieval to the core. Its basic texture, depending on the age-old rice-economy, on the position of the exterior castes as the back-bone of agricultural labour, on its multiple society consisting of the hierarchical caste-system with its esoteric background, on the feudal values of womanhood, on old fashioned ideals of marriage and home-making, and lastly on ancient beliefs and practices of religion, appears to be sufficiently tough to resist any abrupt change and keep its major content intact against the onslaught of the so-called modern forces.

APPENDIX
QUERIES AND ANSWERS

I am grateful to Dr. J. D. N. Versluys of the UNESCO for his comments and queries made on reading the manuscript of this study. Considering that the questions asked by him may be of interest and value to the readers of this book, I take the liberty of adding them as an appendix here. I have not tried to answer some of the questions—they are either good comments which really elucidate the position or are left as pointers for future investigators.

1. *What do the higher castes do after dinner when the lower castes have taken their seats? Do they go home or do they gather somewhere?*

Usually they go home.

2. *Not the whole village is now invited. But who are, and who are not?*

All the members of families closely related and friendly, and heads of other households singly are invited.

3. *When did this change take place and why?*

Time of change not exactly known. The cause is said to be economic.

4. *Has such meal been described in 1872 and/or 1933?*

No. Here I would like to point out that the two Muslim families of the village held aloof from the traditional feast, but the Santals, as has been observed, did join it.

5. *Is there any change in the geographical situation of the castes since 1872 or 1933?*

Some Sadgop families in the south-west of the village have possibly died out. There is a growth of Santal-para by immigration in the North-West. Some Bagdi families also immigrated to settle in the village, and there is a new (Duley) Bagdi-para in the West on the embankments of the Roy Singh's tank.

6. *What was the criterion for deciding that there is now less tension between North and South than in 1933? Did Day mention it already?*

There is mention of no such tension in Day's book. Observation showed there is less tension now than in 1933. The younger boys of those days who tried to patch up the differences and make common cause are now in power and it is the same body of Panchayat that functions for both the sides.

7. *Population: The year-percentages cannot be obtained by dividing the totals by the number of years. When the number of years is small, it does not matter very much, but it may be better, in any case, to speak of about*

1 per cent or 'nearly 4%' etc. It may be worthwhile to compare the little increase in the number of households (5-6%) and the large increase of inhabitants (68%). The average per household increased from 3.0 to 5.1. This is very significant, and it would be of interest to know whether the larger average is due to greater prosperity or to a different reason.

8. Age at marriage: As the numbers are so small per sub-group, it is somewhat risky to draw definite conclusions. From the percentages I take it that there are 36 high caste females of age-group 12-21, and the chance element becomes very important when there is a split 58%-42% or 21-15 persons. This will also explain the irregularity of the range of percentages. Nevertheless, the 10% of the exterior castes is really very low.
9. Is it possible to explain the very high percentage of literacy among the Subarnabaniks? Are they mentioned in the previous studies? What is their present position in the village?

All along the Subarnabaniks of this village have held an influential and socially important position. This fact had been noted in the earlier two books.

10. From Table 11, col. 5 it appears that they are the biggest landowners (per head), and are merchants, but how did they achieve their position? How do they fit into the caste hierarchy as their economic position is so relatively strong?

Is it also known what the reason is for the decline of the Sadgops and the (Ugra) Kshatriyas since Rev. Day's description?

Is there any indication that the fragmentation of land has grown worse since 1872 or 1933?

In page 58 there is an attempt to explain why land went to the investors from the hands of the agriculturists.

11. Occupation: As you pointed out, the change in composition of the households of K. in 25 years is not striking, once we have understood the decrease in number of the land-owning Brahmins (62 to 108 households). However, the number of persons per household has increased very much. I already pointed that there seems to be an influence of the relative wealth: only 3.1 in the exterior groups, 4.3 in the exterior castes and between 5.5 and 6 in the "better" households. I wonder if the Jal-achal would not be rather lower if the wealthy Subarnabaniks were treated separately.

Table 16 shows that in 1959 even more people depend on agriculture than in 1933 (82 and 80%), but there is a socially favourable increase in proprietors (21 to 33%) and a slight decrease in field labourers (46 to 43%). The 20 rent-receiving families have disappeared (7%) probably accounting for the decrease in Brahmin families, but does that mean that there is no rent paid

to persons living outside the village? Or is a substantial part paid to outsiders, and should the increase in land-owning families largely to be accounted for by an increase in small owners, rather due to further fragmentation of land? Then there is not an improvement but a deterioration of the land situation, only alleviated by the higher yield per acre. You mentioned two instances of extreme fragmentation, but has that, in general, become worse in the last few decades?

12. In 1933 there was no beggar in the village, but, although it seems wealthier now, there are no less than 7 beggar families in 1959. Or did they come from outside, attracted by the relatively good situation at Palashi?

In 1933, no house to house enquiry was made. There were 72 families exempted from U.B. tax, which were classed as labourers. It might well be that there were some beggar households in this group.

13. How do you explain the decline in the number of 'service' households (31 to 15)? Which 'services' have been abolished and which are still being rendered?

As the criterion for 1933 grouping was not recorded, no explanation is possible.

14. From the two stories told it appears that the bride will come, in a number of cases, from some other village. McKim Marriot (in: *India's Villages*, Calcutta, 1955, p. 101) stated that in U.P. a marriage within the village would be regarded as incest. Is that in general different in Bengal?

A marriage is not regarded as incest unless it takes place within the prohibited degree of kinship—a thing really unknown in our villages.

15. Ought the initiative to marriage negotiations be taken by the father of the bride or of the groom, or could both do it? From the stories the latter seems to be the correct answer.

Yes, a marriage proposal may come from any side. But the groom's people are accustomed to show a superior attitude.

16. The very interesting story of the bride's examination apparently refers to the Brahmin caste. Would such an examination also occur in the lower castes, with perhaps somewhat different criteria? And what are the arrangements in the lowest castes (jal-achal) and the "exterior" castes?

Yes, similar examination also occurs in other castes as well.

17. The 25 tolas of gold, the wristwatch, bicycle, golden button plus Rs. 500/- would add up to about Rs. 4,000/-. What would be the position of the groom's father that he can demand such a high dowry (in terms of land, or yearly income)? Could you mention other cases of dowry belonging to various levels of wealth in the village?

The groom's father is an upper middle class cultivator, owning 30 bighas of land. The groom has recently passed the matriculation examination and is aspiring to be a typist.

18. *Would the 25 idols be regarded as personal ornaments of the bride which remain her property, or are they a real part of the dowry, to be used as and when necessary by the groom? Is land ever given as a dowry, and if so, does it become the full and official property of the young husband?*

Ornaments are regarded as personal properties of the bride and land is seldom given as dowry in our villages.

19. *The religious instructions to girls are described, but are they also extended to boys?*

No.

20. *You stress the elevated position of boys as compared to that of the girls. In recent psychological literature it has been pointed out that this has sometimes given rise, in some cases, to unhealthy competition of girls who wanted to show that they were not inferior, in any way, to boys. Did you notice anything of this nature in Kanchanpur, or do the girls fully accept their position as it is?*

The girls do accept their position as it is. They however hold mixed feelings towards the new girls of the city.

21. *The girl prays in her cow worship: "With these flowers of cowdung, we pay our homage to our three ancestral lines". Which three lines are meant?*

The three ancestral lines are those of : (1) Father's, (2) Mother's and (3) Husband's father's.

22. *It would be of great interest to know if, besides the useful work of the Gram Panchayat, there is any direct or indirect influence visible of the Community Development Projects. (Cases similar to that of the several latrines originally constructed have also been mentioned elsewhere, resulting in one or two latrine actually being used.) Is there any new technique in the field of agriculture, any greater interest in education (adult classes, perhaps), improvement of roads, greater care for health, sanitation and hygiene, effort to start co-operatives, etc.? The effect of the training camps seems to be only the certificates issued but nothing more substantial. Or did you see anything?*

The tubewell seems to be the only visible effort of the C.D. movement.

23. *Do the villagers pay any dues to the Panchayat?*

Local rates are realised by the Anchal Panchayat.

24. *It was explained that the activities of the official Panchayat and the traditional Barwari were sometimes overlapping. How is the Barwari membership recruited? Is it exclusively Brahmin? Has any effort been made to combine the 2 Barwaris and the Panchayat? The latter is, in composition, also "Brahmin ridden", at least not a true reflexion of the composition, of the village. Do the villagers feel that there is a certain field reserved for the Barwari, another for the Panchayat? Do you think that both will continue to exist side by side?*

The setting up of co-operatives which are only meant to allow the bigger farmers to enjoy the full yield of their land resulting in ousting the tenants has been reported from other states as well. I should like to ask what is the final result: do the tenants become paid workers, or is the co-operative a complete camouflage so that the tenants continue, under officialy different, but actually the same conditions, to cultivate the land? I understand that the co-operative in Sadya had really bought some agricultural machinery. Was that to replace labour or rather a symbol of their new existence as a co-operative? Do you have any figures on higher yields as a result of partial mechanization, or about savings in the cost of production?

On the whole, would you think that the Land Reforms Act in West Bengal has brought no benefit to the tenants, or what would have been, in general, the result? If an owner has more than 25 acres, is he allowed to put it into the co-operative farm and so keep indirect control?

25. *Did you notice any activities of other political parties or only of the communists? Have you heard that party politics (say, Congress-Communist control) also influenced the Panchayat or perhaps the Barwaris? Do people believe that there is more corruption now than before Independence?*

Yes, they do.

26. *Did you notice that women ever read newspapers or have amongst themselves, discussions on the news or on politics?*

I did not notice, and possibly they do not read newspapers or discuss politics.

27. *There are some radio sets in Palashi. Is it a regular feature that the villagers join the owners in listening so that the spread of the news is more or less even among owners and non-owners of radio sets?*

The radio sets are battery charged as there is no electric current in the village. They are kept more as ornaments than for listening programmes.

28. *You mentioned the Sakti-Sangha, an association of the young men of the village. What are its main activities? How many members are there approximately? How did it come into being? Does there exist a similar association of women?*

An attempt is being made to organise a 'Mahila-samiti', i.e. women's association.

29. *Beliefs and Rites: Would it be possible to trace any new rites or forms of worship since a fair number of new families have settled at Palashi? Or are the rites fixed, as it were, in the families of the various priests, independent of the number of worshippers? In other words: would a certain rite continue, even if not one family were living in the village, but would no new rites be celebrated even if 10 or more families of a new caste would have settled at*

Palashi? For instance I find that in 1934 there were representatives of the following castes: Mayra (2), Tanti (2), Malakar (1), Goala (16), Garci (1), Swarnakar (2) and Ghatwal (1), who do not live at Palashi at present. On the other hand, some families of new castes who did not live there before, namely, Modak (1), Gop (15) and Dom (1), also 8 Santal families have now settled at Palashi. The striking disappearance of no less than 16 Goala families and new settlement of 15 Gop families might have influenced the rites and worship. Or are Gop and Goala actually the same?

Mayra and Modak are the same; and so also are Gop and Goala.

30. Quite a different question is the reason why these, in the latter two cases, important changes occurred. Do you have any explanation?
31. In your lively description of the festivities of Badhai and Durga Puja, especially Bisarjan, you refer to increased rivalry between North and South Kanchanpur. This partition was also shown in the existence of two Barwari committees. Would this mean that there is an old division of the village based on its original social stricture, and to be traced, possibly, along genealogical lines? Is there any legend of common ancestors of the people of the North, who should be different from those of the South? Is there, in the festivities, also a sort of interplay between the two parts, perhaps a traditional precedence of one part over the other? This is rather an anthropological problem, and I wonder if you have been able to go in the matter. In your book "Kanchanpur Revisited", you said the rivalry was simply due to the fact that "the Brahmins have caste prestige and the Subarnabaniks economic power" (p. 32). This would explain the North (Brahmin)—South (Subarnabanik) rivalry and tension. But the Brahmins also have economic power, in total certainly more than the Subarnabaniks, and I would be inclined to think, also taking into account the numerical superiority of the Brahmins, that there may be another reason as well.

There are apparently specific functions to be fulfilled by various families in the celebration of Old Siva's Gajan. You mention the Biswas family (see p. 158) and later on state "the procession moves on and goes to different households in a traditional order." Is that an order determined by, or has it also to do with, the influence and economic power of the households? The latter seems indicated when, on p. 165 you say that "the Napit is deputed for the job, and the Zamindar is first to be informed. The Zamindar's son, other Brahmins and the ascetics get the touch of the sacred charrings according to priority and with it the Gajan rituals for the year come to a close."

32. The most interesting skull-dance (pp. 161-162) with its secret ritual for the chosen few would lead one to think of pre-Hindu rites, assimilated into Hinduism. Does this dance occur in other Bengal villages as well, or would it be special for Palashi? Has it anything to do with Goddess Kali who is always connected with death and skulls?

Skull dance in symbolic or nominal actual display is generally present in Gajan rites of nearly all the villages of Bengal. At Palashi the Sannyasis try to excel in the performance.

33. *I was naturally very much interested in the investigations you carried out at my request (although you should not refer to me as your American friend) regarding some old beliefs which appear still to exist unchanged. It would be interesting to know how far these beliefs are purely local or more general. The fact that there is a belief that one should not sell paddy on a Wednesday but is free to purchase it, seems to show that the belief is rather local, for there would be no sellers otherwise.*

APPENDIX II

REMINISCENCES : OLD AND NEW*

HASHIM AMIR ALI

[Londoners say that if you wish to meet a friend or relation with whom you have lost touch for years, you have only to stand in Piccadilly Circus and wait till he turns up. This article tells the story of such a meeting—in the I.S.I. where people meet coming from the ends of the earth. Incidentally, this article also reveals what a variety of approaches to the study of Indian life the Institute is capable of making.]

Time, they say, proceeds round and round like a spiral. Perhaps, one day, the Indian Statistical Institute will have sufficient data to prove even that statement with the help of its huge calculating machines. I cannot say, because I am not a statistician. But even in a single life-time, I have come across circumstances repeating themselves in a queer manner. One of such instances is my own association with the Institute—representing a cycle of twenty-five years!

Prosanto Babu¹ was then closely associated with Santiniketan and so was I with Sriniketan. The Indian Statistical Institute was then a one-room affair attached to the rooms of the Professor of Physics in the Presidency College. I remember Professor Mahalanobis was then engaged in some studies in phrenology, among several others. For many years, I had among my papers a black silhouette of my own profile, and its dimensions have no doubt contributed to a scientific paper by the Professor and his associates. Who would have imagined at that time that the Institute would in time assume such gigantic proportions and constitute such an important agency in India's economic planning?

And I remember Prosanto Babu in Santiniketan. Whenever he got to talking of some statistical data Gurudev² used to smile and say, "There Prosanto goes again, like fish to water".

I was at that time engaged in collecting some data on the annual yields of rice in a village near Sriniketan and Professor Mahalanobis at once saw its value as grist to his statistical mill. I was eventually

* First published in 'Samvadāhṡvam', house journal of the Indian Statistical Institute, Vol. 3, No. 2, December 1959.

¹ Professor P. C. Mahalanobis.

² Rabindra Nath Tagore,

able to hand over to him two papers, one giving rice yields over thirty-eight years in a single village and the other showing the results of crop-cutting experiments in several villages carried out by my then student and colleague, Jiten Taluqdar. When these two studies were finally published in the *Sankhyā* of May 1934, they had been subjected to such statistical polish that people almost took me for a statistician. Sir John Russell, in his report on Indian agriculture, referred to that study in connexion with the trends of yields in India.

Any way, those were still pioneering days when we worked under a canopy of frustration. Things then moved slowly, O so slowly! How wide is the horizon and scope for service which the younger generation have today! We of an earlier time feel that things are now moving almost too fast! But we must be thankful that in spite of feeling a little out of date some of us are not yet too old to play our humble part in these exciting times.

That brings me to more recent reminiscences. Some of you who have seen me off and on at the Guest House of the Institute during the past one year must have wondered as to which of the many departments of the Institute I was associated with. So let me tell you how I again found myself revolving on the wheel of time and came to be associated with the Institute.

I had retired as the Principal, Agricultural College, Osmania University, in Hyderabad and happened to be in Delhi in connexion with a private hobby of mine. Naturally I went to see Prosanto Babu and my wife renewed our old associations with Rani Devi.¹ We talked of the old days and Professor Mahalanobis suggested that I should engage myself again by taking up some study in which the Institute could provide me the necessary facilities. Frankly, I was not much interested in getting into harness again but Professor Mahalanobis offered me full freedom to work entirely independently. The next day I was surprised to receive a return air-ticket with the suggestion that I should visit the Institute and see for myself the opportunities it offered, without committing myself to taking up any project!

So I came and naturally I visited Santiniketan and my old haunts at Sriniketan. I met Jiten Taluqdar and also Tara Krishna Basu, who had been my right hand man in rural surveys in the old days.

¹ Mrs. Mahalanobis.

Both of them agreed to join the project, and the twenty-five-year old economic survey data still available in Sriniketan offered an excellent opportunity of making a fresh survey and comparing the two sets of figures to see if and to what extent things had appreciably changed in this cycle of a quarter of a century. The project seemed simple, and I thought it would not take more than three months. But I have had to continue it for over a year, and three studies are now under print.

Each of these three studies has assumed the dimensions of a book, and those of you who are interested will be able to go through these when they are ready before the end of this year. But they are of general interest to all of us in India and especially to the people of Bengal. So let me give a brief gist of each.

THE ENVIRONS OF TAGORE

The first of these three studies is a socio-economic survey of the data already available for the Community Development Block with its headquarters at Sriniketan and covers some 170 villages constituting the Bolpur Thana in Birbhum District. The Community Development programme all over India envisages a certain amount of fact-finding in each block as a preliminary to development work, and data are collected according to a set questionnaire. But the machinery for the analysis and presentation of such data is not yet sufficiently well organized. The Block Development Officer, another old colleague of mine at Sriniketan, laid all the available data at my disposal. To this we added more and tried to make it presentable and comprehensive by the preparation of numerous maps and graphical representations. Even an hour spent on the perusal of the study as it is likely to come out of the press will give a clear bird's eye view of the directions in which development work can be profitably undertaken and will also show the precise problems that need to be tackled in this particular region.

The most glaring phenomenon which we found was the rapid increase of population during the past twenty-five years. In 1953 there were roughly 400 people to the square mile; today there are more than 600! Malaria, which was the bane of Bengal villages in those days had completely disappeared and, thanks to antibiotics and the increase in the number of doctors per thousand of the popula-

tion, there were only 1.3 deaths as against 3.0 births in every 100 of the population. The difference between the two figures meant the addition of 1.7 per cent more mouths to feed every year. And the increase in food production was hardly perceptible!

The next important point which commanded attention was the poor communication and the isolation of the majority of villages during almost five months of the year. How far was development possible when the agencies could hardly reach the people in the villages which they wanted to serve?

Still another factor worthy of notice was the difference which slight differences in topography meant for development purpose. Santiniketan and Sriniketan were perched on a plateau just 200 ft. above the sea-level. The land gradually sloped to just 100 ft. above sea-level towards the south-east. By plotting various items of information on maps of the region, we found that there was a higher percentage of literacy in the higher region around Santiniketan and Sriniketan towards the north-west. Twelve villages in which the 1951 census figures had shown more than 60 per cent literacy were all in the north-west. Twelve other villages showing less than five per cent literacy were all located in the south-east!

Do these facts not show that we need to give exceptionally high priority to birth-control and increase of village roads in our Third and Fourth Five Year Plans? And does not this study indicate that instead of having a uniform plan for community development we need to give more attention to the specific needs of each region?

THEN AND NOW

Our second study, 'Then and Now', consists of comparisons of socio-economic data which Tara Krishna Basu, Jiten Taluqdar and I had collected in 1933, with similar data collected by the students of the SEOTC (Social Education Organizers Training Centre) in 1957. The summary of data collected then had been published as an article which appeared in the *Modern Review*, June 1934, under the title, *Rural Research in Tagore's Sriniketan*. It had shown that economic status was closely related to landownership in rural Bengal, and landownership in turn was closely related to groupings according to caste. And the disparity between the higher and lower castes was even more than what is generally known. For every one

rupee's worth of land possessed by the lower castes, the value of land owned by the higher castes was as much as Rs. 800!

An analysis of the 1957 data indicated that this disparity had been reduced to some extent but was still too conspicuous for us to be sanguine about the rate of change. The ratio was still 1:200.

One feature of change that we found is almost too good to be true. The proportion between the human and the bovine population appears to have been reversed. While the human population seems to have increased by nearly two percent per year, the bovine population seems to have decreased by one per cent! Perhaps this is partly true because of intervening famine, but it is a point which needs to be more carefully investigated in several regions, to find out if it holds good for some regions and not for others.

Owing to the depreciation in the value of money since the depression period of 1933, we of course found the present valuation of assets to have increased five or six times. But the increase was not uniform. The increase in the values of some items was less than the increase in the general price index.

I will leave you to examine the details in the study itself when it is published, but you may be interested to know in a general way that the economic status appears to have improved five per cent in twenty-five years. That is not a situation for us to preen our feathers about. But it must be remembered that this improvement might well be the result of only the first ten years of our independence, and the rate of change in the beginning cannot but be slow. To expect a rapid acceleration is by no means illogical.

THE BENGAL PEASANT: FROM TIME TO TIME

There is a book called *Bengal Peasant Life* by Reverend Lal Behari Dey published in the eighteen seventies. The book went into numerous editions during the next fifty years, mainly because it was prescribed reading in the high schools even until the thirties. It is still found in many Bengali homes and second-hand bookshops in Calcutta. Perhaps you have seen it, even if you haven't had to read it as a prescribed reader.

This book relates the life story of the peasant in Kanchanpur village somewhere in Burdwan and is perhaps the oldest intimate picture of Bengal peasant life written in the English Language. In

discussing the book with Tara Krishna and Jiten in 1933 it occurred to me that a survey of the village, if it could be discovered from the meagre references to its location, would give an indication of the changes that have taken place in the rural life of Bengal during the preceding half a century.

Tara Krishna's imagination being fired, the village was soon discovered, and he went and stayed in it for a fortnight and came back with notes that were soon compiled into a sort of village diary. Since my term in Sriniketan expired soon afterwards, the story of Kanchanpur was left there among the several volumes of typescript village data that we hoped would one day be published.

So when this unusual and unexpected opportunity came to us in 1958 and the three of us found ourselves working together again, this typescript was dug up and eventually published by Orient Longmans under the title of Lal Behari Dey's *Kanchanpur Revisited*. Sri Rathindranath Tagore, our Rathindra of old times, wrote an introduction, and several found it to be a charming picture of the unsophistical life of rural Bengal. Almost everyone suggested that, since twenty-five years had elapsed even after this book was written during the days of the great depression and foreign rule, it would be interesting to try and get a picture of Kanchanpur after a decade of political freedom.

This was exactly the purpose of Tara Krishna's rejoining the trio. He made several long and short stays in Kanchanpur during 1958-59 and produced a typescript which is a delightful combination between a sociological treatise and a popular novel delineating the present contours of life faced by a rural group in West Bengal. At present, September 1959, copies are under the scrutiny of several sociologists and will be rewritten with any additional data which these friends may suggest as additions. In a few months this too is expected to be available. Apart from the human interest which it will arouse, it will also show you what a variety of approaches to the study of Indian life your Institute is capable of making.

Perhaps you are wondering why I have incorporated a review of these three studies under the title of "Reminiscences". It is simply because these have already become reminiscences to me. My expected three months' stay in Bengal which has kept me here off and on for more than a year is now over. During this period I have made

delightful new contacts and renewed charming old acquaintances. As on the former occasion, I seldom felt that I was not a Bengali. I have remained stranger to the feeling of provincialism which many non-Bengalees complain of in this lovable State so full of pathos and beauty. Since the disintegration of my own State has made all of India our homeland, I shall continue to reminisce over Bengal as on Hyderabad wherever it might be my fortune to stay in this vast country.

And, who knows, after another twenty-five years a decrepit old man may come to this Institute again and meet other old men—Professor Mahalanobis and Professor and Mrs. Haldane and Nihar Babu and Tara Krishna Basu and Jiten Taluqdar.

APPENDIX III

GLOSSARY OF INDIAN TERMS

Abaran-devata	—	Encircling gods
Adi-deb	—	Original god—an epithet of Dharmā or Buḍḍha
Adhyaksha	—	President
Agrahayan	—	Bengali month corresponding to November-December.
Aguri	→	(or Ugra-Kshatriyas)—a caste engaged chiefly in husbandry.
Akanda	—	A kind of shrub (<i>Calotropis gigantea</i>)
Alna	—	A wooden frame for hanging clothes
Aman	—	The principal crop of rice; winter rice.
Anchal	—	Region
Anna	—	The sixteenth part of a rupee
Annaprasana	—	The ceremony of giving rice for food to an infant for the first time
Annapurna	—	A Hindu goddess
Arat	—	Warehouse
Arundhati	—	Name of a star; also the name of the wife of the sage Vasishtha
Asan	—	Seat
Ashar-nabami	—	The ninth lunar day in the month of Ashar (June-July)
Asirbad	—	Benediction
Asura	→	Demon
Asvatha	—	Peepal tree; <i>Ficus religiosa</i>
Auksal		A temporary hut raised for extracting juice of the sugarcane and turning it into molasses.
Aus	—	Spring rice; literally ripening in a short time
Avatar	—	Incarnation
Ayurvedic	—	Relating to the Hindu system of medicine.
Baan	—	Flood
Babu	—	Hindu gentleman
Badal	—	Rains
Badhai	—	Name of a festival
Bael	—	<i>Aegle Marmelos</i>
Bagdi	—	A low-caste Hindu
Baidya	—	A high caste Hindu
Baikuntha	—	Heavenly abode of God Vishnu
Baisakh	—	First month of Bengali year corresponding to April-May.

Baishnab	— A follower of Vishnu, especially in the form of Chaitanya
Bakchur	— A variety of rice
Bakula	— Mimusops Elengi
Bala-bhakta	— Female votaries; or those Sannyasis who do not perform crematorium rites
Bamun	— A colloquial term for Brahmin
Bansnagra	— A variety of rice
Baralat	— The Viceroy of India in British days
Baraghar	— Big hut
Baran	— Ceremonial welcome
Barga	— Class
Bargadar	— Share-cropper
Barwari	— A community organisation
Bari	— Little balls made of mashed pulse, dried in the sun, and used in curry or fried separately
Basanta-Chandi	— The name of the village goddess presiding over small-pox
Basanti	— Vernal; A Hindu goddess worshipped in spring season—another form of Durga
Bat	— Ficus indica
Batasa	— A light cake of sugar.
Bati	— Bowl
Bayen	— A low caste Hindu
Bene	— Colloquial for Banik
Bhadra	— A Bengali month (August-September)
Bhadralok	— Gentle folk
Bhakta-bhojan	— A feast to the devotees
Bhag-chasi	— Share-cropper
Bhandar	— Store or treasury
Bharat	— India
Bhat	— Rice
Bhatar	— A colloquial term for husband
Bhek	— Assuming mendicant's garb
Bhujna	— Same as annaprasan
Bhut-yoni	— Ghost-life
Bichuti	— A stinging nettle (Tragia involucrata)
Bigha	— About a third part of an acre
Bilat	— England
Biri	— A kind of cigarette
Bisarjan	— Immersion ceremony
Bombai	— A variety of sugarcane

Boro	— A variety of rice
Bostom	— A colloquial word for Baishnab
Bou	— Daughter-in-law
Brahma	— A Hindu God
Brahmin	— A Hindu caste, occupying the Sanctum Sanctorum
Brata	— Vow
Byagra-Kshatriya	— Same as Bagdi
Chadar	— A sheet worn as an upper garment
Chaitra	— Last month of the Bengali year (March-April)
Chandal	— A low-born caste
Charka	— Spinning-wheel
Charaktala	— The place where Charak (i.e. ceremony of swinging) is held
Charanamrita	— Water in which the foot of a deity or Brahmin has been washed
Chasa	— Ploughman
Chatuinukhi	— A variety of rice; bit-small as the nails of a sparrow
Chhabi	— Picture
Chhal	— Feigning
Chhai	— Mat-roof
Chhatnata	— An awning under which the marriage ceremony is performed
Chhotolat	— Literally the lesser lord; Governor of the province in British times
Chhotolok	— Smaller men or debased men
Chun	— Lime
Chunari	— Manufacturer of lime
Daghi-salami	— Fee to the village adolescents—paid for refraining from stoning any marriage party
Dai	— Midwife
Dakhina	— Fee to priests; Southern
Dal	— Pulse
Darba-acharya	— Court astrologer
Dasamula	— A kind of indigenous medicine composed of the roots of vegetables
Devottar	— Endowed for the support of an idol
Deulia	— Carrier of the temple (i.e., palanquin) of an idol.
Dhali-Kalma	— A variety of rice
Dhane	— Coriander seeds
Dharmaraj	— A village god
Dhawa	— Name of Kanchanpur's muslims

Dhelabhangani	—	Same as Dagra-Salami
Dhruba	—	Polestar
Dhup-Sannyasi	—	Censer-carrying ascetic
Dhuti	—	A piece of cloth usually five yards long
Didi-Thakrun	—	A village goddess
Dighi	—	An oblong tank
Digh-Pranam	—	Long prostration made to deity
Dingi	—	A small boat
Do-kadi	—	Two cowries
Dom	—	A low caste Hindu
Dud-kalma	—	A variety of rice
Dule	—	A low sub-caste among the Bagdis
Duli	—	A litter usually for carrying women
Duo	—	Goddess of Adversity in "Dingi" Festival
Durga	—	A Hindu Goddess
Durga-Mandap	—	An open shed where Goddess Durga is worshipped
Durva	—	A kind of grass
Ek-kadi	—	One cowrie
Fatua	—	A short-upper garment for males
Gandha-banik	—	Spice-dealer caste (jal-chal)
Gandheswari	—	A Hindu goddess, especially worshipped by the Gandhabanik caste
Gajan	—	A folk festival in honour of such village deities as Siva, Dharma or Manasa
Gajaneswar	—	The presiding deity of gajan
Gamcha	—	Bathing towel
Genji	—	Guernsey
Ghat	—	Landing place in a tank or river
Ghatak	—	Professional match-maker
Ghatwal	—	A low caste Hindu; keeper of the passes
Ghee	—	Clarified butter
Ghorasal	—	A variety of rice
Goala	—	Milkmen (a caste)
Gobindabhogh	—	A variety of rice
Gop	—	Same as gwalas
Gossain	—	A Baishnab Brahmin; a spiritual director
Goswami	—	Same as Gossain
Gokal	—	Period of cow-serving
Golancha	—	A kind of flower or shrub
Gonar	—	Bully

Gorai	— A Jal-achal caste
Gəylachatar	— Milkmen's court
Gotra	— Lineage, race
Graha	— Planets
Grahacharya	— Astrologer
Gram-sabha	— Village assembly
Grihini	— House-mother
Gur	— Molasses
Guru	— Spiritual director
Gurumashai	— A teacher in the village pathshala
Haimanti	— Relating to Hemanta season (Oct.-Dec.) for paddy, same as aman
Handi	— Pot, usually made of earth and used for cooking
Hari	— Another name for God Vishnu
Harijan	— Beloved of God, a term used by Mahatma Gandhi for the low castes
Harircharan	— Feet of (god) Hari
Haritaki	— Myrobalan tree or fruit
Hat	— Market
Hatisal	— A variety of rice
Hattala	— Market place
Hooka	— Hookah; smoking apparatus
Hom	— Sacrificial offerings to fire
Isaṅeswar	— A name of Siva
Jal-achal	— Refers to castes from whom water is not accepted by the high castes
Jalchal	— Castes from whose hands's water may be accepted
Jat	— Caste
Jatra	— Village theatre
Jhingasal	— A variety of rice
Jhoro	— Falling paddy—a spurious variety
Jnati	— Agnates; kins
Jogady.	— Another form of Goddess 'Sakti'
Kabach	— Amulet
Kabi	— A debating entertainment by village poets
Kachheri	— Cutcherry
Kaibarta	— Fishermen caste
Kajule	— A variety of sugarcane
Kak	— Crow
Kal-Bhairab	— A village god
Kali	— Hindu Goddess
Kaliyuga	— The fourth or present age according to the Hindus

Kalki	—	Tobacco bowl for the Hookah
Kanakchur	—	A variety of rice
Kantal	—	Jack fruit
Kapal	—	Forehead
Kari	—	Gowrie
Karmakar	—	The blacksmith caste
Kartikeya	—	God of war and of beauty
Karta	—	Manager; head of family
Karatal	—	Cymbals
Kathbel	—	Feronia Elephantum
Katha	—	A measure for corn; a measure of land
Kaviraj	—	Literally king of poets; A physician according to Ayurvedic system
Kayastha	—	A high caste in Bengal
Khirni	—	A kind of tree
Khitchuri	—	Hodge-podge of rice & pulses
Khud	—	A bit of broken rice
Kil	—	Fisticuff
Kirtan	—	Mass prayer with songs
Kora	—	A Kolarian tribe & caste
Kotal	—	A low caste Hindu
Krishna	—	Hindu God
Krishnachuda	—	A kind of flower-bearing tree, the flower
Kshatriya	—	One of the twice-born castes said to have been born from the arms of Brahma
Kusha	—	A kind of grass
Kush-Mete	—	A Bagdi sub-caste
Kusanūika	—	A Vedic marriage rite of the twice-born
Lagna	—	Auspicious time, astrologically speaking
Lakshmi	—	Goddess of wealth and harvests
Lakshmi-chhada	—	Deserted by Goddess Lakshmi, wretched
Lajjadan	—	Bestowing modesty—a marriage rite
Lekha-pada	—	Writing and reading
Lilavati	—	Another name of Goddess Durga
Luchi	—	A thin cake of flour fried in boiling ghee.
Magh	—	A Bengali month (January-February)
Maha-Brahman	—	A degraded Brahmin who ministers at crematorium rites
Mahadev	—	God of gods; Siva
Maha-habisya	—	The great sacred food
Mahajanaṁ	—	Great birth

Malakar	— The gardener caste; florist
Manasa	— The snake-goddess
Mandap	— An open shed
Mleccha	— Unclean; non-Hindu; out-castes; savage tribes
Modak	— Confectioner caste
Marai	— Store-house of paddy
Mashaipara	— Word of the school-masters
Mukta-dhowa	— A ceremony in Dharmapuja, in which brushings & washings of the temple are thrown in tank
Mul-Sannyasi	— Head ascetic in gajan festivals
Muri	— Parched rice
Nabasakh	— Nine branches, traditional nine castes from whose hands water is accepted
Nagar-Sankirtan	— Mass prayers and songs through city-streets
Nagdi	— Peon
Nagra	— A variety of rice
Napit	— A barber
Nama-Sudra	— A low-caste hindu
Narayan	— A Hindu God; another name of Vishnu
Nataraj	— Name of Siva, literally the king of dancers
Navanna	— Literally new rice; the festival of first fruits
Neem	— Margosa tree
Nilkantha	— Another name of Mahadeb
Nil-Shashthi	— The Shashthi goddess who is worshipped on the Nilpuja day
Niranjana	— An epithet and name of Dharma and Buddha
Nirmalya	— Cast-off flowers of god
Nishi	— Night; Personification of night in the shape of a female ghost
Nitya-seva	— Daily worship
Ojha	— Ghost doctor
Palash	— Butea frondosa
Palki	— Palanquin
Pallav-gop	— Milkmen caste
Palui	— A stack of straw
Pancha-devata	— Five deities of the Hindus, namely Vishnu, Siva, Sakti, Ganesh and Surya
Panchanan	— The five-faced god
Panchayat	— A statutory village council
Panchkari	— Five-gowries

Pani-grahan	— A marriage rite in which the bridegroom holds the bride's hands
Papos	— Door-mat
Para	— Ward
Parata	— A triangular thin cake of flour fried in ghee
Pathsala	— Orthodox village school
Patit	— Degraded
Pattani	— Intermediary right
Payesh	— A sweet preparation of rice in milk
Phalgun (Falgun)	— A Bengali month (Feb.-March)
Pinda	— Funeral cake
Pitha	— Cake made of pounded rice
Pitha-Sankranti	— The last day of the month of Pous when the festival of cake is held
Posta	— Poppy seeds
Pous	— A Bengali month (December-January)
Pradhari	— President
Pratiloma	— Hypogamous marriage; a sort of morganatic marriage
Prasad	— Leavings of food partaken of by a deity
Pratyadesh	— A command of a deity; revelation
Pret-sila	— A mountain in Gaya where obsequial offerings are made for the evil spirit
Puja	— Worship
Pujari	— A professional priest
Pundit	— A learned man; surname of god Dharma's priest
Punjabi	— A kind of upper garment for males
Punnipukur	— (The vow of) sacred tank
Puri	— A variety of sugarcane
Purnima	— Full moon
Radh	— The districts of the West of the river Bhagirathi
Radha	— The Beloved of Krishna
Raiyat	— A cultivator
Rajbhavan	— The royal palace
Rakshakali	— A village goddess
Ramsal	— A variety of rice
Radhi	— Belonging to the country of Radh
Rasasindur	— An Ayurvedic medicine
Rudra	— A form of Siva
Sabhya	— Member
Sadgop	— A cultivating caste

arjama	— Revenue payable to Government
Saha	— The wine-seller caste
Saiya	— Votary of Siva
Sakta	— Votary of Sakti
Sakti	— A female energy of Divinity
Sala	— Literally wife's brother; used as a term of abuse
Salgram	— A black oval shaped plain stone representing god Narayan
Sambhunath	— Name of Siva
Samkranti	— Last day of the Bengali month
Sampradan	— The ceremony of gift of a girl in marriage
Sandesh	— A kind of sweetmeat
Sanjpuja	— Evening worship
Sankalpa	— Resolution before god
Sannyasi	— An ascetic
Santal	— A hill tribe
Santhal	— Same as Santal
Sapta-padi	— A marriage rite in which the bride and the groom walk seven steps together
Sara	— A species of reed (Sakharum Sara)
Saraswati	— Goddess of learning
Sardars	— Chieftains, leaders
Sari	— Women's wearing cloth
Shashthi	— Goddess of fecundity and protectress of children
Satpata	— A marriage rite, seven, bindings
Satranj	— A coarse Indian cotton carpet
Satyanarayan	— Name of a god
Satyapir	— A folk god or some saint of the Muslims
Sabha	— Assembly
Sajjatofani	— Fee exacted for allowing the bridegroom to get up from vasarghar
Sevait	— The manager or priest of an endowed temple
Shastric	— Relating to Scriptures
Sida	— A gift of rice, pulses, vegetables, oil etc.
Sil	— Curry stone
Simul	— Silk-cotton
Sindur	— Vermilion
Sindur-dan	— A marriage rite in which the bridegroom paints the bride's head with vermilion
Sindurtopor	— Vermilion topped
Sinni	— Offerings of sweets etc. to God (a word from Persian language)

Sitala	— A village goddess presiding over small-pox
Sitalpati	— A finely woven cane-mat
Sitasal	— A variety of rice
Siva	— A Hindu God
Siva-linga	— The phallic symbol of god Siva
Smasan	— Crematorium
Smasaneswar	— Literally Lord of the crematorium. A name of Siva
Snanjal	— Ablution water of the body of an idol
Senjuti	— Same as Sanjpuja
Sri	— Same as Lakshmi
Srotriya	— A class of Brahmins
Stotra	— Prayer song
Stri-achar	— Female customs in marriage rites
Stupa	— A Buddhist temple
Subarnabanik	— The gold merchant caste
Sudras	— The low caste Hindus, said to have been born from the feet of Brahma
Sunri	— Same as Saha
Sutradhar	— Carpenter caste
Suo	— Goddess of prosperity in Dingi festival
Suo-Kalma	— A variety of rice
Subha-drishti	— A marriage rite; literally auspicious sight
Swarnakar	— The goldsmith caste
Swastyayan	— The performance of a solemn rite to secure prosperity or avert calamity
Tagor	— A kind of flower
Tahsildar	— Rent-collector
Tak	— Chutney
Tamuli	— A jal-chal trading caste
Tanti	— Weaver caste
Tarja	— Same as Kabi
Tarkari	— Curry
Teli	— The oil-presser caste (jal-achal)
Tentule	— A Bagdi sub-caste
Thala	— Plate, usually of bell-metal or brass
Thaka	— A row of painted idols for exhibition
Thakur	— God; deity
Thakur-ghar	— The room of the deity
Thikuji	— A short horoscope
Til	— Sesamum

Tli	— The oil-dealer caste (jal-achal)
Tin-kari	— Three cowries
Tulasi	— The sacred basil (<i>Ocimum sanctum</i>)
Tulot	— A kind of indigenous paper
Ugra-Kshatriya	— Same as Aguri
Ūlu	— An exclamation of joy made by women in marriages and other ceremonial rites
Upadhyaksha	— Vice-president
Uthan	— The open yard of a house
Utri	— Gajan Sannyasi's sacred thread
Vaidya	— Same as Baidya
Vairagi	— The mendicant order
Vaishnab	— Same as Baishnab
Vaishya	— The third of twice born castes said to be born of the torso of Brahma
Varnas	— The four traditional caste orders of the Hindu society
Varnakars	— Maker of hues
Vasarghar	— The room where the married couple spend their first night
Visvakarma	— The maker of the universe—the god of machines, the creator
Yajna	— A religious offering
Yaksha	— A demi-god that superintends wealth
Yama	— The Indian Pluto
Zamindar	— Landlord

