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THE TIYAR

A SCHEDULED CASTE IN WEST BENGAL

FIELD INVESTIGATION
AND DRAFT NIRMALENDU DUTTA

SUPPLEMENTARY
INVESTIGATION PRAMATHA RANJAN HALDAR

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FOREWORD

The Constitution lays down that “the State shall promote with special care the educational and economic interest of the weaker sections of the people and in particular of the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes and shall protect them from social injustice and all forms of exploitation.”

To assist States in fulfilling their responsibility in this regard, the 1961 Census provided a series of special tabulations of the social and economic data on Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes.

The lists of Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes are notified by the President under the Constitution and Parliament is empowered to include in or exclude from the lists, any caste or tribe. During the Census operations, the enumerators frequently face the problem of identifying the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes. In the President’s notification, though in some cases, the names of the sub-castes and sub-tribes and synonyms are given, there are many cases where such names have not been provided in the list. The Census enumerators, therefore, require guidance about the acceptance or rejection of claims that they come across during the operations of some communities to be treated as sub-castes or sub-tribes of the notified Scheduled Castes or Scheduled Tribes. For this purpose, the Census Organisation has thought it wise to undertake detailed ethnographic studies in respect of Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes of India. This is also in conformity with the past Census tradition of presenting authentic ethnographic account of Indian communities.

For conducting the ethnographic studies, a number of ancillary operations are undertaken by the

(i)

Social Studies Unit of the Office of the Registrar General, India, as well as the staff of the Superintendents of Census Operations in the various States. These ancillary operations include : (i) compilation of available information on each Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribe and preparation of bibliography in respect of them; (ii) preparation and interpretation of maps showing distribution of Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes over time and space; and (iii) special studies on cultural, technological and economic changes taking place among the various tribal communities.

Dr. B. K. Roy Burman, Deputy Registrar General, India, Social Studies Unit, assisted by Shri N. G. Nag, Officer on Special Duty and Shri H. L. Harit, Research Officer, is coordinating all these studies at the central level.

Shri Nirmalendu Datta, Investigator of the Office of the Director of Census Operations, West Bengal, conducted the field investigation and prepared the first draft under the guidance of Shri Sukumar Sinha, Deputy Director of Census Operations, West Bengal. The draft was scrutinised in the Social Studies Division of Registrar General's Office. In the light of comments from that Division supplementary investigation was conducted by Shri Pramatha Ranjan Halder of the same office. At the final stage, the draft was edited by Shri N. G. Nag and Dr. B. K. Roy Burman acted as technical consultant.

I avail of this opportunity to extend my warm thanks to all my colleagues who have undertaken various studies on different aspects of the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes of India.

*New Delhi,
November, 1972.*

A. CHANDRA SEKHAR
Registrar General, India

PREFACE

As an adjunct of 1961 Census, preparation of ethnographic monographs on a number of selected Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes and ethnic groups with special status and ethnographic glossaries on all Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes have been taken up by the Census Organisation.

In India, the Census Organisation has a long tradition of undertaking ethnographic studies. Besides, there are certain reasons why, for its own operational purposes, it is necessary for the Census Organisation to take up such studies. During census operation, the Census Organisation is required to make a complete enumeration of all the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes in the country. The ethnographic studies are required to establish the identity of the various communities including their segments. The social boundaries of various communities are not always rigid, they are in a state of flux. Ethnographic studies are required to keep track of these changes as well, otherwise comparison of consecutive census figures would give altogether wrong picture in respect of them. There is another aspect for study in respect of Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes in which the Census Organisation as well as the welfare and planning agencies are interested—it is ethno-demography. In 1961 Census, separate tables were prepared in respect of the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes on the following items :

- (i) Industrial classification of persons at work and non-workers by sex,
- (ii) age and marital status,
- (iii) education,
- (iv) religion,
- (v) persons not at work classified by sex and type of activity for Scheduled Castes,
- (vi) persons not at work classified by sex and type of activity for Scheduled Tribes,
- (vii) mother-tongue and bilingualism for Scheduled Tribes.

The data available in these tables are to be analysed in respect of each Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribe so that the historical and cultural factors responsible for the demographic pattern can be identified and the impact of the emergent demographic pattern on the social structure can be determined.

The insight gained by the Census Organisation, through ethnographic studies of the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes, will be useful for interpretation of the demographic pattern for the

country as a whole. Recent studies show that in India, even now, it is difficult to correctly appreciate the various social and economic processes without reference to caste. On the other hand, in the interest of ultimate national goal, caste is not being recorded in Census, except in case of Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes. The insight gained through ethno-demographic studies of Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes, is, therefore, of invaluable help for Census.

At the same time, such study is very much useful for planning of development activities among the castes or tribes concerned. For instance, if the Census shows that great deal of diversification of occupation has taken place among the Parayans, of Kerala, it is important for the planners to know whether the community consists of a number of disconnected segments or whether it means that a great deal of individual mobility is taking place where the main focus of community is other than traditional occupation. Again, when among the Bauris of Orissa, it is found that a very high proportion of the population is engaged in agricultural labour and next to them a high proportion is found in cultivation and also that there is considerable diversification of occupation, the following questions on sociological and practical importance arise :

(a) What is the historical relation between the agricultural labourers and the cultivators among the Bauris of Orissa ? The Census data suggest one of the two possible developments, namely, (1) bulk of the Bauris were cultivators and by a process of degeneration of their economy have become agricultural labourers, (2) on the other hand, it is also possible that the bulk of them were agricultural labourers and through a process of improvement of their economic condition, many of them have become cultivators.

(b) The fact that a considerable diversification of occupation has taken place, suggests that the economy has not remained in a stagnant condition. Here, it is to be examined whether the diversification is the result of upward mobility, or downward mobility, or even horizontal mobility, and what is the actual process by which the diversification has taken place.

(c) The social dimensions corresponding to the diversification in economic life have to be examined. It is also to be examined whether in spite of diversification of occupation, the ethos of particular occupation, for instance agriculture, continues to be dominant. In that case, diversification might have created problems of adjustment in values and attitudes.

Instances can be multiplied, but it is not necessary. What have been stated above, are enough to bring out the significance of ethno-demographic studies for planners.

The above dimensions of ethno-demographic studies have evolved through stages. In 1960, at the instance of Shri Mitra, Registrar General of India, a questionnaire for collection of ethnographic data was circulated among the Census Superintendents. In October, 1961, the Handicrafts and Social Studies Unit was set up in the Office of the Registrar General of India, to coordinate the ethnographic studies and a few other ancillary studies, like, the village surveys, handicrafts surveys. In December, 1961, a Study Camp was organised in Delhi, where the personnel engaged in ethnographic studies, handicrafts studies and other social investigations in the Office of the Census Superintendents, participated. In the Study Camp it was considered that the ethnographic notes would mainly aim at making an objective assessment of the state of development of the different Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes in the context of the changes taking place in technology, economic organisation and total culture pattern of the country. It was further suggested that the primary focus of the study should not be on the exotic elements of the cultures of the different castes and tribes. It should be on the efforts of the communities concerned, to adjust to the modern conditions of life. In the light of the above decisions of the Study Camp, rapid ethnographic studies have been carried on by the staff of the Superintendents of Census Operations as well as the Handicrafts and Social Studies Unit of the Offices of the Registrar General of India, in different parts of the country. These rapid surveys have brought out a number of methodological and operational problems. In May and June, 1966, two Ethnographic Study Camps were held at Kurseong and Hyderabad, where personnel from the Office of the Registrar General of India as well as from the Offices of the Census Superintendents participated. In the Study Camp held at Kurseong, the Secretary, Tribal Welfare West Bengal and Director, Tribal Welfare, West Bengal, also participated. In this study Camp, an integrated frame for preparation of the ethnographic notes was discussed and adopted. A copy of the same may be seen at Annexure. In addition to the studies in respect of each Scheduled Caste and Schedule Tribe separately, a number of subsidiary studies were undertaken by the Handicrafts and Social Studies Unit of the Office of the Registrar General of India, for gaining insight into a number of problems of general nature, which have bearing on the different aspects of the lives of the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes of the country. These subsidiary studies are as follows :

1. Shifting cultivation in Santal Parganas of Bihar and Garo Hills of Assam.
2. Pattern of Rehabilitation of displaced tribals of Rourkela.
3. Socio-economic survey of the Scheduled Areas of Rajasthan.

4. Socio-economic developments among the hillmen of North-East India.
5. Social structure and cultural orientation of Christians converted from Scheduled Castes.
6. Traditional rights of scavenging as claimed by scavengers in urban areas.
7. Grouping of castes and tribes with reference to occupation and inter-group and intra-group comparative study on the basis of the data available in earlier censuses.
8. Social mobility movements among the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes.

On the basis of each of the subsidiary studies indicated above, a separate monograph is under preparation. It is also proposed to prepare separate monographs on a few Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes and ethnic groups with special status in each State. Besides, ethnographic glossaries are proposed to be prepared in respect of all Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes. For this purpose about one lakh references have been indexed.

The present monograph on Tiyar of West Bengal is one of the monographs included in the series of ethnographic studies. Initially, the field investigation was undertaken by Shri Nirmalendu Datta, Investigator in West Bengal Census Office, who prepared the first draft under the guidance of Shri Sukumar Sinha, Dy. Director in the same office. This helped to bring into focus some problems which required further investigation. The supplementary investigation was undertaken by Shri Pramatha Ranjan Haldar of that office. In the light of this supplementary investigation the first draft was revised by Shri Sukumar Sinha and later Shri N. G. Nag revised it further at the stage of editing. The general guidance in the preparation of this monograph was provided by me. Shri Chinmoy Chakravorty, Investigator in Registrar General's Office helped in consolidating the material for editing.

I take this opportunity to express my thanks to all the colleagues who collaborated in this project.

Shri A. Mitra, Registrar General of India for 1961 Census, whose farsighted initiative is responsible for social investigations in a large number of fields including ethnography, deserves thanks of all students of Indology. I have been benefitted not only by his inspiration, but also by his valuable suggestions in connection with the ethnographic studies as well as the other studies, conducted by the Handicrafts and Social Studies Unit.

The tradition built by Shri Mitra, has been continued by Shri A. Chandra Sekhar, the present Registrar General of India. Under

his guidance, the scope of the Social Studies by the Census Organisation has been further expanded. In spite of his other preoccupations, he has gone through the final drafts of the ethnographic notes and given a number of valuable suggestions. I avail of this opportunity to express my gratefulness to him.

B. K. ROY BURMAN

THE TIYAR OF WEST BENGAL

Name, Origin and Affinity

The Tiyar is known as a community of traditional boatmen and fishermen. The name 'Tiyar' is supposed to be a corruption of the Sanskrit word 'Tivara', meaning a hunter (Risley, 1891, Vol. II : 328-331). But according to O'Malley, (1909), in the Sanskrit dictionaries of Mediaeval period, 'Tivara' meant fisherman. The latter version of the etymological significance of the word fits in with the traditional occupation of the community. Tiyar appears to be an ancient community, which finds a few scattered references regarding their origin in the Hindu classics. The *Brahmavaivatra Purana* refers to Tivara as an offspring born of the wedlock between a Kshtriya father and Rajputra mother, while the *Jatimala* assigns their parentage to a Bhada father and a Vaisya mother (as quoted by Mitra, 1953:53).

Though the community is notified as a Scheduled Caste in Orissa and West Bengal only (except in Purulia district and territories transferred from the Purnea district of Bihar, *vide* the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes (Modification) Order, 1956), from the account given by Risley, *op. cit.* and Gait (1872: Vol I: 274-275) it would appear, that the community has its habitat in Bihar and Assam as well. The name of the community is, however, having a few phonetic variations in different parts such as Tior, Tiar, Tiaro and Tiyoro in addition to Tiyar. In fact, the community is notified as 'Tiar or Tior' in Orissa and 'Tiyar' in West Bengal. During the local enquiries, the Tiyar informants* of West Bengal also pronounced their caste name as 'Tiyar', as recorded in the official list of the Scheduled Castes of West Bengal. Some of the educated Tiyar in Paharpur area of Malda district identified their community with the Tivara mentioned in *Brahmavaivarta Purana*. But they neither assigned their parentage to a Kshtriya father and a Brhamin mother, as indicated in the *Purana* or to a Bhada father and a Vaisya mother, as given out in *Jatimala*, nor were they aware of any such parentage being

*For the present ethnographic study field investigation on the community was carried out in a few villages in Twenty-Four Parganas, Malda and Howrah districts, where it has major concentration. These include Jabdapata of Khasmara Mauza (J. L. No. 13), in the Domjur police station of Howrah district, Kochpukur in the Bargachia Mauza (J. L. No. 84), in the Sonarpur police Station in Twenty Four Parganas district, Tiyarpara in the Neta Mauza (J. L. No. 136), in the Ratua police station and Gilabari in Paharpur Mauza (J. L. No. 149), in the Kharba police station, both in Malda district.

assigned to them in the classical literature. They are also indifferent to the Hunter's observation that they are said to be the offspring of a Pod father and Chunari mother (Hunter: 69).

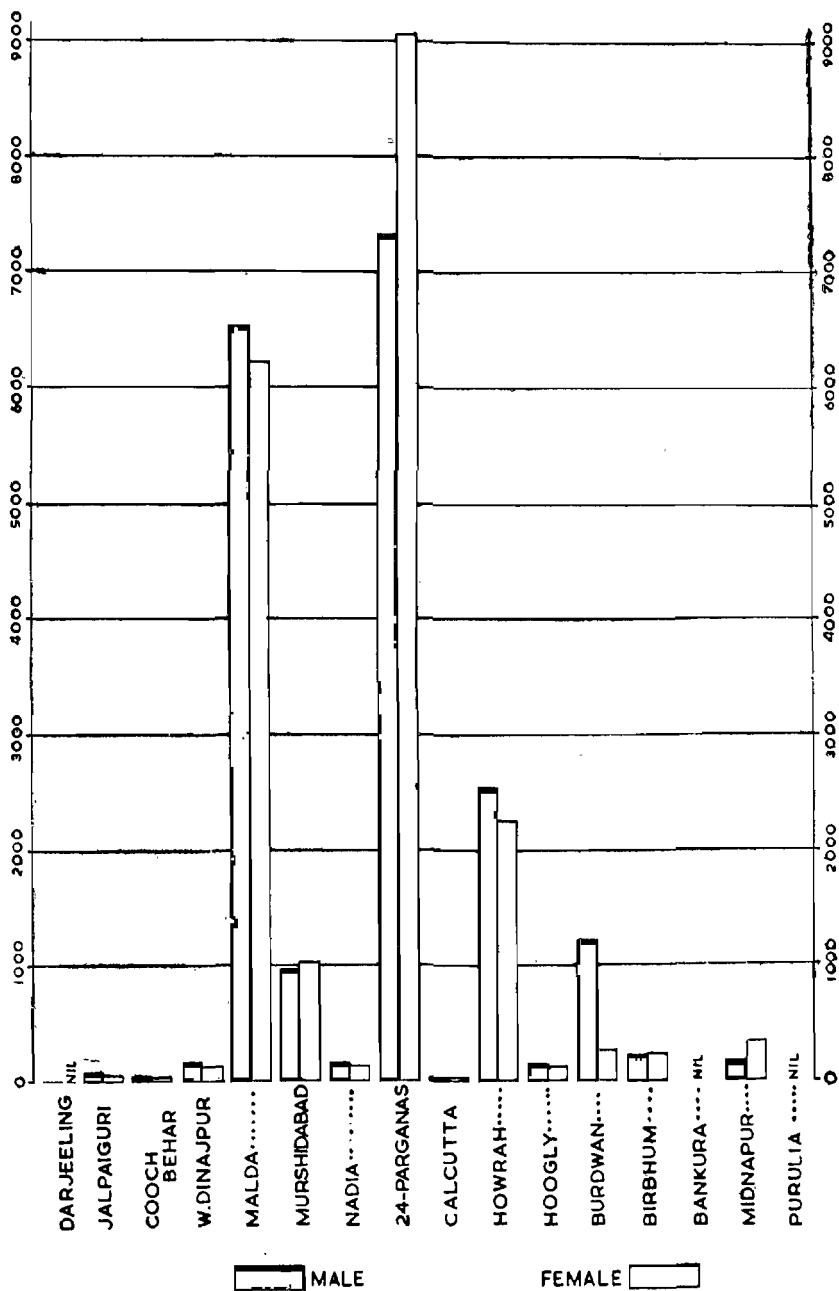
Risley has grouped Tiyar with Machhua and Rajbanshi. But on etymological and ethnic considerations he has disagreed with the suggestion of Beams, quoted by him, who was inclined to identify them with Dhimar sub-caste or the Kahar. In support of his view he has stated that the Tiyar is a corruption of the Sanskrit word 'Tivara', a hunter, while Dhimar is derived from Sanskrit word 'Dhivra', a fisherman. Moreover, the two show marked differences of complexion and physical type (Risley : *op. cit.*). Risley and some other scholars have further stated that the Tiyar also refer to themselves as Rajbanshi or Surajbanshi or Tilok Das *op. cit.* According to Porter, the Tiyar sometimes also claim to be Mahishya in addition to Rajbanshi. He has expressed the view that the decrease in their number in 1931 was probably very largely, if not entirely, due to the claim of the caste to be Rajbanshi or Mahishya (C. I., 1931, Vol. V, Part I; 1932).

From the observances of Gait, it would appear that the Tiyar have also been regarded as Jaluja in addition to Rajbanshi. He has further stated that in North Bengal it is assumed that the Rajbanshi are distinct from the Tiyar who use that appellation. But he is of the view that many of the Tiyar and Rajbanshi—if not the majority—are closely allied by origin (C. I. 1901, Vol. VI, Part I, 1902, 397). It may be clarified here that Rajbanshi is separately notified as a Scheduled Caste in West Bengal.

During the course of field investigation, conducted in connection with the present study the Tiyar informants denied that their community has any relation with Machhua. But in most parts they claimed themselves as synonymous with Surajbanshi or Rajbanshi. In fact, the Tiyar of Kochpukur and Jabdapata villages, which are located in Twenty Four Parganas and Howrah districts respectively, claimed themselves to be Rajbanshi Tiyar. They do not recognise Rajbanshi as a separate caste, distinct from the Tiyar. According to them all the Rajbanshi are actually Rajbanshi Tiyar, some of whom have opted to refer to themselves as simply Rajbanshi, altogether dropping the appellation of Tiyar. But it is of some interest to observe here that though to the outsiders they give out their caste name as Rajbanshi Tiyar or simply 'Rajbanshi' amongst themselves, they refer to their caste name as Tiyar. Thus, it is obvious that there is a tendency among certain sections of the Tiyar to identify themselves as the Rajbanshi, as the latter is indicative of a higher social status meaning literally 'of the royal lineage or of royal descent'. But the Tiyar of Tiyarpara and Gilabari villages, located in Malda district, recognise Rajbanshi to be distinct from themselves. In fact, in these two villages two

set of people, one claiming to belong to Rajbanshi caste and the other to Tiyar caste, denied having any relationship with each other. It would appear that this rather ambiguous position is largely due to the mixed composition of the Rajbanshi group which includes such distinct groups as Koch, Mahisyadas and Jaluja. In fact, according to the Goalpara District Gazetteer of Assam (1903: Vol. III : 32) the ranks of the Rajbanshi are recruited from Koch and the aboriginal tribes such as the Mech, Rabha and Kachari. But during the field investigation it could not be ascertained whether in Malda district the Rajbanshi were of Koch origin. It was however observed that they were accorded a lower status and that even the Tiyar would not recognise them as their equal. It appears from the published account that the Tiyar are divided into a number of endogamous sub-divisions, but in this matter there are regional differences. For instance, endogamous sub-division do not appear to exist among the Tiyar of East Bengal (Risley, *op. cit.*). On the other hand, in parts of West Bengal, endogamous sub-divisions including those of territorial nature have been reported from among the Tiyar. In the four villages covered during the present study the Tiyar informants mentioned Rajbanshi Tiyar, Dhaki Tiyar, Gangakuli, Jele or Halisahure, Gaurdeshi, Paloar, Ban and Ulphi as the main sub-divisions of their community. Of these, the first four have been reported by the Tiyar informants residing in Jabdapata and Kochpukur located in Howrah and Twenty Four Parganas districts respectively, while the other four have been reported by the Tiyar of Tiyarpara in Malda district. However, although eight sub-divisions have been named by the Tiyar in different parts actually only two among them were found in the four villages. The Rajbanshi division was reported, by the Tiyar of Kochpukur and Jabdapata but as discussed in the preceding account Rajbanshi is actually used as synonymous with the caste name and cannot strictly be regarded as a sub-division of Tiyar. Gaurdeshi returned by Tiyar in Malda district is not reported in the other areas visited. In fact, the Tiyar in Howrah and Twenty Four Parganas are not even aware of the division reported in the Malda district and *vice-versa*. The origin of the Gaurdeshi sub-division is rather obscure. But according to the Tiyar of Tiyarpara and Gilabari the sub-division has originated from Gaur, the common name for Malda region where Tiyar named after this sub-division are residing. Thus, this division is indicative of territorial affiliation. According to the Tiyar informants the names of the other sub-divisions have origin in the occupation followed by the members of the sub-division concerned. There does not appear to exist any consistency of opinion among the Tiyar informants regarding the social ranking of the different sub-divisions. The Rajbanshi Tiyar of Jabdapata,

DISTRICT-WISE AND SEX-WISE TIYAR POPULATION



(in Howrah district), claimed themselves as superior to the others, while their counterparts in the Kochpukur (in 24-Pargana), regarded Rajbanshi Tiyar as ranking second to the Jele or Hali-sahure Tiyar, who are given the top position on account of their being more educated and affluent. But the Tiyar of Malda, who claimed themselves as belonging to Gaurdeshi sub-division, placed themselves at the top of the hierarchy. But in view of the absence of more than one sub-divisions; it appears that there is no consensus about the ranking pattern among the different sub-divisions of the Tiyar.

It is to be mentioned here that Risley (*op. cit.*) has referred to three hypergamous groups of the Tiyar, the highest being the Pradhan or chief lineage, followed by Parmanik, the lowest in order are the Gana who constitute the bulk of the Tiyar. But during the course of field investigation the Tiyar informants denied having the above or any other hypergamous divisions in their society.

Distribution and Population Trend

As stated earlier in addition to Orissa and West Bengal, the Tiyar have their habitat in Assam and Bihar as well. But as they are notified as a Scheduled Caste only in Bihar and West Bengal, they were enumerated in these States only during the 1961 Census. Their population in the other States for that period is not available. Out of the two States where they are treated as Scheduled Castes they have the largest concentration in West Bengal, as during the 1961 Census 39,633 Tiyar were enumerated in that State and only 12,012 were enumerated in Orissa (C. I. 1961, Vol. I, Part V-A(i) 1966). The Tiyar, however, form a small part of the population of West Bengal, accounting for only 0.11 per cent of the total population of the State. They are not even a numerically major community among the Scheduled Castes of West Bengal, as they constitute only 0.57 per cent of the total Scheduled Caste population of the State.

The following table gives the district-wise population of Tiyar as per the 1961 Census (*ibid*) :

TABLE I

Table showing the district-wise and sex-wise Tiyar population in the rural and urban areas of West Bengal as per 1961 Census

Sl. No	District	Area	Males	Females	Total
1	2	3	4	5	6
1.	Darjeeling ...	Rural	—	—	—
		Urban	3	—	3
		Total	3	—	3

1	2		3	4	5	6
2.	Jalpaiguri	...	Rural	80	58	138
			Urban	—	2	2
			Total	80	60	140
3.	Cooch Behar	...	Rural	51	36	87
			Urban	—	3	3
			Total	51	39	90
4.	West Dinajpur	...	Rural	171	132	303
			Urban	5	3	8
			Total	176	135	311
5.	Malda	...	Rural	6,466	6,170	12,636
			Urban	60	54	114
			Total	6,526	6,224	12,750
6.	Murshidabad	...	Rural	945	982	1,927
			Urban	22	42	64
			Total	967	1,024	1,991
7.	Nadia	...	Rural	149	137	286
			Urban	7	—	7
			Total	156	137	293
8.	24 Parganas	...	Rural	7,164	8,932	16,096
			Urban	181	130	311
			Total	7,345	9,062	16,407
9.	Calcutta	...	Rural	—	—	—
			Urban	23	23	46
			Total	23	23	46
10.	Howrah	...	Rural	2,241	2,240	4,481
			Urban	304	34	338
			Total	2,545	2,274	4,819
11.	Hooghly	...	Rural	94	101	195
			Urban	41	27	68
			Total	135	128	263
12.	Burdwan	...	Rural	1,231	258	1,489
			Urban	8	21	29
			Total	1,239	279	1,518
13.	Birbhum	...	Rural	230	234	464
			Urban	—	—	—
			Total	230	234	464
14.	Bankura	...	Rural	—	—	—
			Urban	—	—	—
			Total	—	—	—
15.	Midnapur	...	Rural	189	349	538
			Urban	—	—	—
			Total	189	349	538
	West Bengal (Total)	...	Rural	19,011	19,629	38,640
			Urban	654	339	993
			Total	19,665	19,968	39,633

It is seen from the above table that the community has its largest concentration in 24-Parganas 16,407 followed by Malda district which accounts for 12,750 Tiyar. These two districts cover more than 2/3rd population of the community. The other districts having significant Tiyar population are Howrah (4,819), Murshidabad (1,991) and Burdwan (1,518).

In other districts their population is insignificant as in none of these it crosses the thousand mark. Bankura district did not return any Tiyar population in the 1961 Census and the community was not enumerated in Purulia district wherein it is not treated as a Scheduled Caste. Darjeeling (3), Calcutta (46) and Cooch Behar (90) districts returned only negligible Tiyar population. If the census records for the earlier decades are examined, it is found that the Tiyar population has been showing a good deal of fluctuations in its distribution pattern in the State. For instance, Cooch Behar and Darjeeling districts which have been returning from nil to negligible population from earlier decadal censuses to 1961 Census, returned as many as 54,152 and 35,896 Tiyar respectively in the 1881 Census (Mitra: 1953). Similarly, Midnapur district which returned a Tiyar population of 21,207 in 1901 and 20,056 in 1921 (*ibid*), recorded only 538 Tiyar in 1961.

Though to a certain extent such fluctuations can be attributed to internal migrations there seems to be other possible cogent reasons which have been discussed in a subsequent account on population trend.

Rural-Urban Distribution

The Tiyar are obviously concentrated in the rural areas of the State, as according to 1961 Census out of 39,633 Tiyar in the State as many as 38,640 (97.5%) are concentrated in the rural areas.

Sex Ratio

The sex ratio of the Tiyar of the State is rather high—1,015, females (19,968) outnumbering the males (19,665) by 303. Their sex ratio obviously does not follow the general pattern of the State and is considerably higher than that of the general population (878) and of the Scheduled Caste population of the State as a whole (916).

The following table gives the sex-wise break-up of the Tiyar population of West Bengal by broad age groups.

TABLE 2
The Tiyar population of West Bengal by age and sex as per 1961 Census (op. cit.)

S. No.	Age Groups	Total	Males	Females	Sex Ratio
1	0—14 ...	18,360	9,266	9,094	981
2	15—44 ...	15,379	7,542	7,837	1,039
3	45+ ...	5,870	2,835	3,035	1,071
4	15—45+ ...	21,249	10,377	10,872	1,048
5	Age not stated	24	22	2	—
	Total ...	39,633	19,665	19,968	1,015

It is seen from the above table that except in the age group 0—14 where the males slightly outnumber the females, (the sex

ratio being 981), in other two age groups the sex ratio is considerably higher. The reasons of the lower sex ratio in the age group 0—14 cannot be easily determined. It may be that many adult male Tiyar have migrated to the other States in search of employment, thereby raising the overall sex ratio. But there is no evidence to suggest that a large scale or significant migration of the adult male Tiyar population has taken place. The lower sex ratio in the 0—14 age group may also reflect a natural swing in the demographic characteristic of the Tiyar population or an oscillation in the distribution of the male and female population in the different age groups.

A noteworthy feature of the distribution of the male and female population is that while the sex ratio is as high as 1,033 in the rural areas, it drops to half of the above in cities and towns (518). This would suggest that the small population of Tiyar in the cities and towns (993) mostly consists of migrant males from rural areas who have not been accompanied by their wives and children.

If the distribution of the males and females in different regions is considered, it is found that the sex ratio is almost uniform throughout the State except in Burdwan district where it is remarkably disproportionate and low (225) against the State average of 1,015. It may be that most of the Tiyar in this district are sojourners who are employed in the industrial establishment. During the field study it was found that except in Kochpukur where the females preponderate over the males, in keeping with the general pattern, in the other villages the males slightly outnumbered the females.

Socio-demographic Trends

The following table gives the population of the Tiyar as returned in the earlier decades of the present century.

TABLE 3
*Table showing the population variation of
Tiyar since 1901 (with percentages)*

Census year	Population	Variation	Percentage of variation
1901	...	148,729	—
1911	...	157,396	+8,667 +5.83
1921	...	135,540	-21,856 -13.89
1931	...	71,620	-63,920 -47.16
1941	...	28,845	-42,775 -59.72
1951	...	41,978	+13,133 +45.53
1961	...	39,633	-2,345 -5.59

Note: Reference for 1901-51 figure Mitra: 1953; and for 1961 figure Mitra: 1966.

The foregoing table shows that the Tiyar population has shown considerable fluctuations from census to census. During the decade 1901—1911, it registered an increase of 5.83 per cent. Thereafter, it has shown a progressive decline until 1951, when there was a reversal of the past trend accompanied by a sudden increase of about 45 per cent in their number. Thereafter, in the 1951-61 decade there was again a decline to the tune of 5.59 per cent.

As stated earlier, the apparent decline in the Tiyar population does not appear to be due to actual decrease in number; it is more likely to reflect the tendency of a large number of persons belonging to the community to return themselves as Rajbanshi, so as to enhance their social status. The marginal increase in the decade 1901—1911, perhaps, represent the natural growth. But by then, it appears, aspiration to gain in social status by changing the nomenclature, took the form of an organised move and this resulted in the decline of 13.89 per cent in their population in the decade 1911—1921. There was a further decline of as much as 47.16 per cent in the next decade (1921—31). Porter (*op.cit.*), took notice of the phenomenon and hinted at its sociological rather than biological nature. The same reason appears to hold good for the significant decrease of 59.72 per cent in the decade 1931—41. In the next decade (1941—51), however, there was a sudden increase in the population to the tune of 45.53 per cent. It is quite possible that much of this increase was the result of influx of displaced persons belonging to the community from the then East Pakistan.

Another contributory factor could be that during the war conditions there was an under enumeration of the Tiyar community in 1941 Census and the decline in their population between 1931—41 was actually less than what was registered in the 1941 Census. Consequently, the actual increase in their number in the next decade (1941—51) was less than what was recorded in the 1951 Census.

That the aspiration for social status might have motivated the Tiyar to return themselves as Rajbanshi has been amply brought home in the course of the field investigation which were undertaken in connection with the present study. As hinted earlier, many Tiyar in Jabdapata and Kochpukur got themselves enumerated as Rajbanshi (regarded by them as synonymous with Tiyar) in the 1961 Census. This finds further substantiation if the population returns of the Tiyar residing in Domjur Police Station and Jabdapata, located in the aforesaid Police Station, are examined. During 1961 Census, only 761 persons returned themselves as Tiyar in this Police Station. But subsequently the field investigation revealed that as many as 1182 Tiyar resided in one village viz, Jabdapata of the same Police Station. Obviously the

number of Tiyar in the Police Station is much more than what the 1961 Census returns showed. But in view of the fact that the enumerators were required to enumerate exactly in the manner in which the persons concerned returned themselves, the correct position did not come out properly.

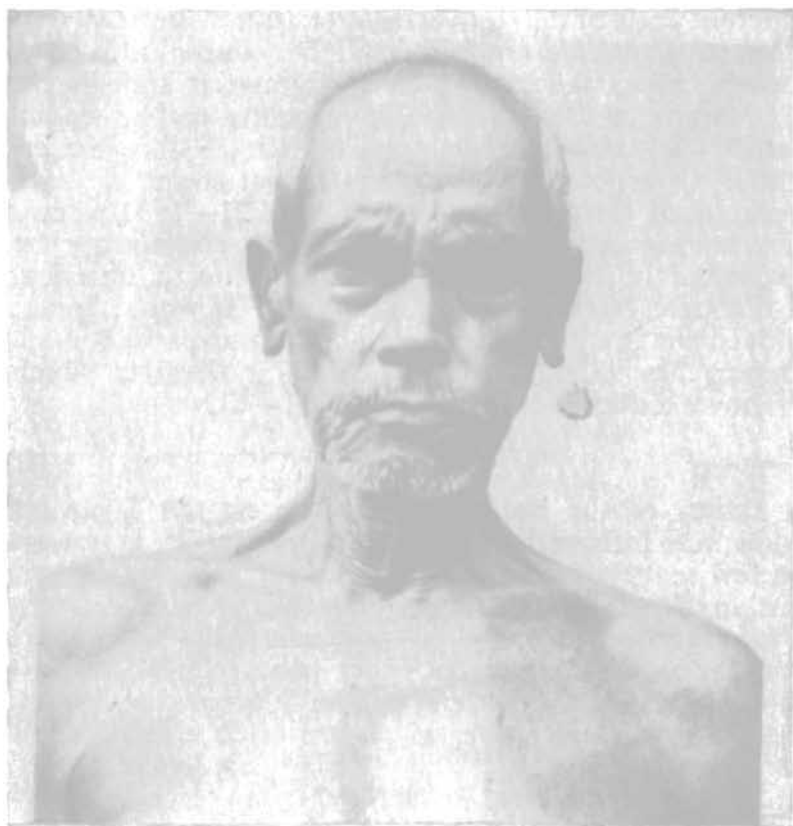
The Table 4 the district-wise variation of the Tiyar population in the successive Censuses between 1901—1961 brings to light certain interesting features:

TABLE 4

Table showing the district-wise variation with percentages in Tiwar population of West Bengal during 1901—1961

S. No.	District	1901	1911	1921	1931	1941	1951	1961
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
1.	Burdwan	2162	1761 (-18.55)	978 (-44.46)	598 (-38.85)	158 (-73.58)	1081 (+584.18)	1518 (+40.43)
2.	Birbhum	3474	4466 (+28.55)	1756 (-60.68)	420 (-76.08)	59 (-85.95)	262 (+344.07)	464 (+77.10)
3.	Bankura	124	6 (-95.16)	—	1869	—	—	—
4.	Midnapore	21207	19366 (-8.68)	20056 (+3.56)	4438 (-77.87)	1485 (-66.54)	1102 (-25.79)	538 (-51.18)
5.	Hooghly	8949	8382 (-6.34)	8118 (-3.15)	3299 (-59.36)	1850 (-43.92)	1425 (-22.97)	263 (-81.54)
6.	Howrah	21914	23,960 (+9.34)	23902 (-0.24)	11578 (-51.56)	3299 (-71.51)	3699 (+12.12)	4819 (+30.28)
7.	24-Parganas	54402	64058 (+17.75)	57492 (-10.25)	34420 (-40.13)	14345 (-58.32)	11895 (-17.08)	16407 (+37.93)

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
8. Calcutta	...		954	798	272	275	109	101	46
				(-16.35)	(-65.91)	(+1.10)	(-60.36)	(-7.34)	(-54.46)
9. Nadia	...	2057	1864	978	744	267	394	293	293
			(-9.38)	(-47.53)	(-23.93)	(-64.11)	(+47.57)	(-25.63)	
10. Murshidabad	...	19804	17975	9787	3272	1417	475	1991	1991
			(-9.24)	(-45.55)	(-66.57)	(-56.19)	(-66.48)	(+319.16)	
11. Malda	...	12948	14025	11615	10314	5484	20063	12750	12750
			(+8.32)	(-17.18)	(-11.20)	(-46.83)	(+265.85)	(-36.45)	
12. West Dinajpur	...	717	727	584	380	372	1,421	311	311
			(+1.39)	(-19.67)	(-34.93)	(-2.11)	(+281.99)	(-79.11)	
13. Jalpaiguri	...	1	3	2	13	—	3	140	140
			(+200.00)	(-33.33)	(+450.00)			(+4466.67)	
14. Darjeeling	...	2	1	—	—	—	51	3	3
			(-50.00)					(-94.12)	
15. Cooch Behar	...	14	4	—	—	—	6	90	90
			(-71.43)					(+1300.00)	
Total	...	1,48,729	157396	135540	71620	28845	41978	39633	39633
			(+5.83)	(-13.89)	(-47.16)	(-59.72)	(+45.53)	(-5.59)	



1. *A Tiyar male*

If the population variation between 1951 and 1961 decade is examined in respect to the districts having significant Tiyar population, it is seen that while in Malda, Midnapur and Hooghly districts there has been decline in their population by 36.45 per cent, 51.18 per cent and 81.51 per cent respectively in certain other districts viz. Twenty Four Parganas, Howrah, Murshidabad and Burdwan there has been an actual increase in their numbers. Though, *prima facie*, this reflects an erratic population trend it may, perhaps, be related to the differential rates at which the movement for being recognised as Rajbanshi, gained strength in the different parts of the state at different times. Besides, it appears that the movement did not follow a linear course but it had to and fro swings. From the 1961 Census figures, it appears that the trend relating to the Rajbanshi community to be recognised as Rajbanshi had set in certain parts of Bengal since the dawn of the twentieth century. But the movement seems to have been fully stabilized throughout the state by 1921—1931 when all the districts having significant population of the community showed a sharp decline in its number. This trend seems to have continued in all the areas but with unequal impetus. It would appear that the movement is still continuing in certain areas such as Malda, Midnapur, Hooghly, and West Dinajpur districts which have again shown a decline in the decade 1951—61.

Appearance

A survey of the available literature on the Tiyar indicates that adequate information on their physiognomy is not available and a few scattered references on the subject give only a broad indication of their features. Regarding their physical characteristics Risleý has quoted Wise, according to whom the Tiyar, “are short and muscular, with prominent cheek-bones, dark-brown—almost black—complexions, thick and generally projecting lips and long coarse hair, worn in a cue, which has often a reddish tinge towards the tip.....” (Risleý, *op. cit.*). But Wise’s observations, as recorded by Risleý, in respect of their skin colour does not always appear to hold good in so far as the Tiyar residing in the four villages covered during the field investigation for the present study are concerned. In these villages their skin colour was apparently of comparatively lighter shades as it was found to vary from light brown to dark brown, the latter being found amongst many Tiyar particularly in Tiyarpara. Prominent cheek-bones and slightly thicker lips were also observed among the Tiyar in Tiyarpara and, to a certain extent, in Jabdapata. Though their stature was not recorded during the field investigation in connection with the present study, the height vertex of a few male Tiyar of Bengal recorded by Majumdar indicates that they fall in the range of ‘below medium stature’, the mean height vertex of

the sample covered by him being 1630 m.m. (Majumdar and Rao : 1960 : XX)

Clan, Family and Inheritance

Clan : In the social organisation of Tiyar society, the clan apparently does not play any significant role. According to Risley (*op. cit.*), the Tiyar marriages are regulated on the basis of avoidance of near relations, up to five generations in the descending line on the male side and three on the female, without *gotra* coming into picture. This was substantiated during the field investigation as only three names were mentioned as the *gotra* names among them. These are Kashyap, Maudgalya and Alambayana. While the Tiyar of Jabdapata, Kochpukur and Tiyarpara claimed Kashyap as their *gotra* name those of Gilabari mentioned the other two as their *gotra* names. The Tiyar informants in the first three villages stated that they practised *sargotra* marriage, or marriage within the *gotra*, there being only one *gotra*, viz. Kashyap. But the Tiyar of Gilabari who claimed to have two *gotra*—Maudgalya and Alambayana—also married within the same *gotra*. Though the Tiyar informants claimed that their *gotra* had been named after certain *rishi* (saints) from whom they had descended it would appear that the institution of *gotra* or clan was a later innovation in the Tiyar society as it was non-functional. The institution of *gotra* seems to have been acquired for the purpose of serving as a tool in social climbing as is the case with many other communities accorded a low status, in the traditional society. It is found that Kashyap is the most common *gotra* name, to be adopted.

Family and Inheritance : The Tiyar society is based on strong patrilineal traditions as is the case with the other communities of the area, the descent being reckoned along the male line. They are patrynomic and partipotestal as well. As regards residence after marriage, they are patrilocal, but after a few days of marriage the couple set up a new household for themselves. It is then neolocal though patrivincinal, as the new household is usually set up by the division of the husband's parental house or establishing a new one near the latter.

Generally, most of the households are of nuclear orientation and comprise of the husband and wife and their unmarried childrens. Some households can be termed as nuclear with adhesion as in these households the widowed mother or father live with the married son and his family. It is obligatory in Tiyar society that a married or unmarried Tiyar maintains his widowed or aged mother and father. A few cases of linear extended type of households are also found. Some times, particularly if he is the only son continues to stay with parent after his marriage. These vertically extended households often span three generations. But collateral

or horizontally extended type of households are rare. At the same time, although two or more married brothers do not share the same household, in many cases they continue to carry joint economic activity, such as farming the land in common and sharing the produce equally. The worship of the family deity or the rituals connected with crucial events of life are also frequently performed jointly in the household of the eldest brother.

As stated earlier, the Tiyar being patrilineal the property is inherited by the sons. The customary law provides that after the death of a person his sons equally inherit his property, the daughters having no share in the same. But the daughters are not completely debarred from inheriting ancestral property as in certain eventualities they do acquire such property. As for instance, in case a person has no male issue his daughter or daughters equally share the property in preference to the deceased's brother or brothers or son. The later have a right to enjoy such property if the deceased has no issue, male or female. The Tiyar mostly seem to be aware of the fact that the Hindu Succession Act provides for equal distribution of property among the sons and daughters. But they do not like to deviate from their customary laws of inheritance. Sometimes, however, it is found that if a well-to-do Tiyar has large property, he bequeathes a small part of the same to the daughters.

During the field investigation a recent case of inheritance of property came to light in Kochpukur. The same is discussed below.

B. N., A Tiyar of Kochpukur, on his death left landed property comprising 20 bighas of cultivable land, three bighas of homestead and a *pucca* house and three *kaccha* houses, in addition to some moveable property comprising some household goods and utensils. On B. N.'s demise his four sons set up their own separate households, as is the usual custom in the Tiyar society. They, however, agreed to amicably distribute the property among themselves according to their convenience. The eldest son, M. S., acquired the *pucca* house which was having more value. But *in lieu* of the *pucca* house he compensated his three brothers by paying them some cash money for purchasing building materials, like tiles, bamboo and straw etc., for improving the other *kaccha* houses. The other movable and immovable property were equally apportioned among the four brothers. But though they demarcated cultivable land into four parts, they continued to carry joint cultivation as it was mutually beneficial to them.

Settlement and Dwellings

Settlement Pattern :—The residential pattern of the Tiyar does not betray any distinctive feature and more or less follows the regional pattern. The Tiyar usually live in compact villages as is the case with the other Hindu communities of the area.



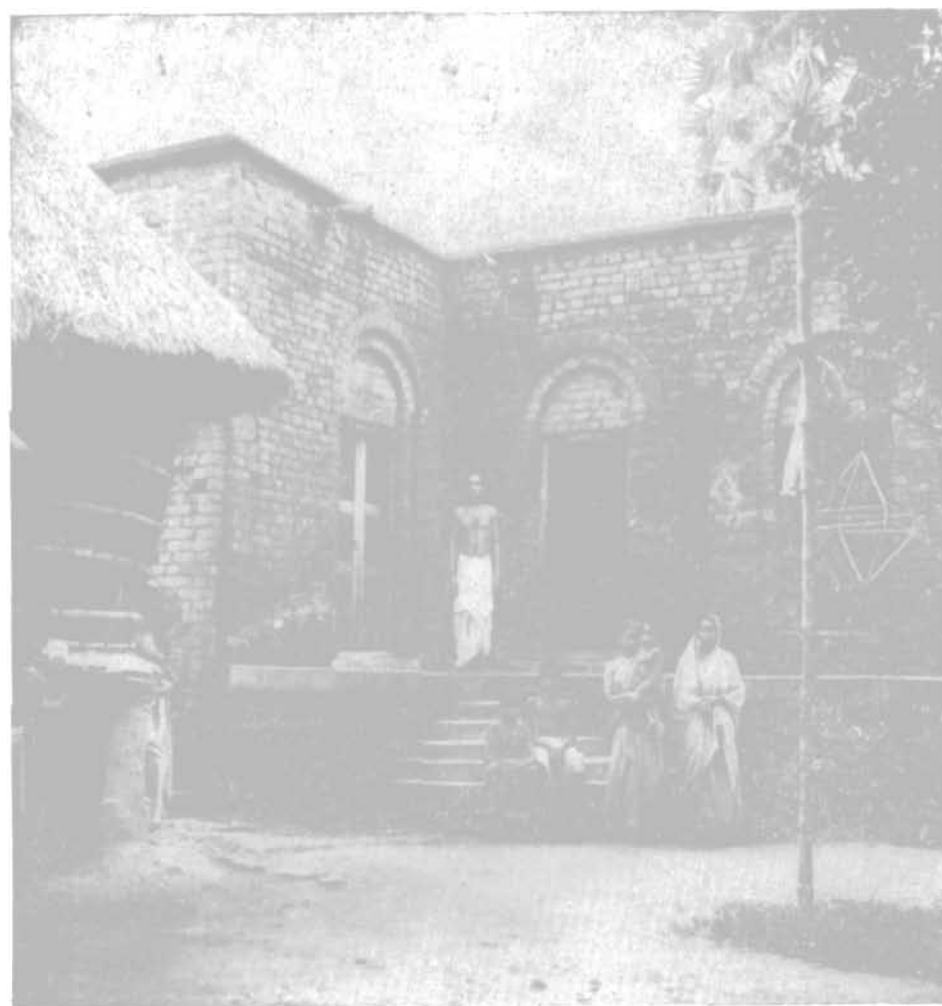
2. *A view of the Tiyar Settlements*



A kutchahouse of a Tiyar in rural area



4. *Huts of the Tiyar with tiled roof*



5. *A pucca house of a Tiyar at Jabdapata village*

Sometimes they are found in separate villages of their own as in the village Jabdapata, but they also frequently live intermingled with other communities as in the villages Kochpukur, Tiyarpara and Gilabari. At Kochpukur they live along with the Napit (barber caste) and Christians; at Gilabari they have Brahmin, Teli, Tantubaya, Kaibarta, Kumbhakara, Jele, Rajbanshi and Hari as the neighbours; each of their communities however form a hamlet of its own.

Their dwellings do not show any definite pattern in arrangement. In most of the cases their houses are built haphazardly and not arranged in linear or on any other order. Though the houses of different communities are set apart by lanes or bylanes, most of their settlements are rather congested. The congestion seems to have become more acute recently due to the construction of new houses, by a few immigrant families from other parts of Bengal.

Dwellings and House Types :—In the rural areas the Tiyar generally live in more or less well ventilated houses which are provided with wooden doors and windows and constructed on high plinth. The same pattern obtains among their neighbouring communities as well to a certain extent, this is conditioned by one fact that their habitat is mostly in a marshy area. In some cases the plinth or the floor of the hut is raised on blocks of mud or stone. The majority of the huts occupied by the Tiyar have mud walls and thatched roofs. The thatching is mostly done with locally available straw, but huts with roofs of country tiles are also not uncommon. In all the villages where field investigation were done, the majority of the huts were made of *kaccha* materials; but three well-to-do Tiyar households at Jabdapata and one at Kochpukur were having *pucca* houses. These houses were built three or four decades ago by the grandfathers of the present heads of the households. Thus there is a remarkable persistence of their traditional house-type but at the same time the Tiyar of these villages do not appear to have any particular sentimental attraction for the same. In fact, they prefer *pucca* house or house with roofs of country tiles; but the main constraint is the capacity to bear the cost and if any thing, this constraint tends to continue decade after decade, though the world all around is changing so fast. The design and construction of the dwelling of the Tiyar, however, show some slight variations, in different geo-cultural areas. At Jabdapata and Kochpukur the Tiyar huts are generally four-sloped, in keeping with the local pattern; while at Tiyarpara and Gilabari their huts are two-sloped, which again is the dominant pattern in those two villages.

The Tiyar generally construct their huts themselves; only a few well-to-do persons engage hired labourers. More frequently such hired labourers belong to their own community. The building materials, like bamboo, cane and grass are also mostly locally-

available. Only in a few cases, they are to be obtained from outside the village or nearby areas.

Like most of the other communities of the region, the Tiyar, observe certain rites and rituals in connection with the construction of their huts. Before embarking upon the construction, they worship Ma Basumati (Mother Earth) at the proposed site of the hut with offerings of flowers and water of the river Ganga. According to the Tiyar of Jabadapata the first thread for the measurement of the plinth is placed on the ground by the builder himself or his maternal uncle. In case of a *pucca* house yet another ritual is reported to be performed by the Tiyar of Jabdapata. In one corner of the site selected for the construction of the house, they hang on a bamboo pole, a bamboo basket, a broomstick and a torn shoe. It is believed that these objects divert the evil eye and ward off the evil spirits.

In case of a *kaccha* house the Tiyar of Jabdapata and Kochpukur, perform a ritual before thatching the roof. *Kari* (Cowri-shell), *haritaki* (Myrobolam), *bahera* (Beleric Myrobalan) and paddy grains, each item numbering-five are tied together in a new red coloured napkin and hung from the top of the cross-beam along with a copper coin. No such ritual is however said to be observed by the Tiyar of Gilabari.

Before entering the newly constructed house—whether a *kaccha* or *pucca*—an auspicious day fixed in consultation with the Brahmin priest, the Tiyar observe the *griha-pravesh* or house-entering ceremony. In this occasion the worship of Narayan is performed by the priest in the newly constructed house itself.

Dress and Ornaments

Dress :—The dress of the Tiyar does not appear to be materially different from that of the neighbouring Hindu communities. The Tiyar in other villages, however, appear to be better dressed than their counterparts at Tiyarpara.

Ordinarily, the adult males wear a mill-made *dhuti*, as the lower garment, but *lungi* (a piece of unsewn cloth wrapped round the loins), is also often used. When at home the upper part of the body mostly remains uncovered. A *genji* (vest) is put on as an upper garment by Tiyar males, usually when visiting relations or friends, or on ceremonial occasions. While doing work in the agricultural field the males normally wear a short *dhuti* up to the knees and also place a *gamcha* (napkin) on the shoulders for wiping of the sweat. The school or college going boys usually wear trousers. Otherwise, most of the teen age boys put on a pajama with a short shirt or bush-shirt. They put on shoes or slippers, depending on their means. This dress is also

put on by them on special or ceremonial occasions in the family or in the village.

The middle aged females wear mill-made *sari* with border while the widows, old or young—put on mill-made *dhuti* of coarse material and usually of white colour. They usually, wrap their body with the *dhuti* in such a manner that it covers the entire body and does not require a petticoat or a blouse to be worn under it. The young women are however tending to look upon the practice as unfashionable. Except at Tiyarpara where their poverty stands in the way, they are now more frequently fond to wear petticoat and blouse under the sari.

In the winter they wrap themselves in a *chadar* or a cotton blanket irrespective of the age and sex. Only a few well-to-do put on a woolen vest or warm shawl for protection from cold.

Ornaments :—The Tiyar women are observed to put on fewer ornaments of simple design and made of cheaper materials which are comparatively less expensive. The few ornaments that the Tiyar women possess are not indicative of any distinctive feature and show no speciality or variation from the regional pattern.

It is obligatory for a married woman, especially when her husband is alive, to always put on a *loha* (steel bangles) as well *sankha* (bangles made of conchshell). On ceremonial occasions, if they can afford, they also put on a pair of silver bangles, locally known as *bala* and silver ear-rings as well as a finger ring. Only a handful of women in Jabdapata are reported to possess one or two gold ornaments. By and large, gold ornaments are beyond the reach of the majority of the Tiyar. For an average Tiyar women a few *bala* of silver or synthetic polymers, like plastic and glass, earrings made of brass and finger rings of brass or silver, constitute; the main ornaments. Gilded ornaments as a substitute for gold are now in vogue. But glass and plastic bangles are also becoming increasingly popular among them due to their fanciful designs and availability at cheaper cost. These ornaments are mostly purchased from the local markets.

Food and Drink

The Tiyar are non-vegetarians. They take various varieties of meat and fish, but refrain from taking beef and sometimes, pork as well. A few Tiyar do not even take fowl or the eggs of hen. But ordinarily they cannot afford meat though fish caught by them is a popular item of their menu. Rice is the staple diet of the community. They generally take two principal meals and one or two tiffins with *muri* (fried rice), *khai* (parched rice) or *chinra* (flattened rice) daily. But the variety as well as, the number of dishes in the daily menu is determined by the means of the household.

The Tiyar in all the villages, excepting Tiyarpara, do not take any liquor which can be termed as their traditional drink. It is said that in earlier times most of the adult males used to drink fermented palmyra juice, locally called *tari*, as an intoxicant. But at present, it appears that drinking habit is not so universal among the Tiyar of these villages. Now-a-days most of them, specially those who are keen to raise their status, are said to refrain from drinking liquor. In fact, there is a movement among them which is aimed at checking and curbing drinking habit. But the Tiyar of Tiyarpara, who live in close association with certain tribal communities, such as the Kharwar are said to be fond of liquor. Their traditional drink is *pachai* (rice beer) which is brewed at home by fermenting rice. It was reported that almost all the adult males in the village drink rice beer and on special occasions, even the grown up women, unlike their counterparts in other villages, also drink. The rice beer is also widely prescribed to the mother of newly born child, especially after delivery. Tea does not appear to be very popular among the Tiyar though recently they have been taking to it more and more. In fact, in Tiyarpara many Tiyar take tea regularly.

The Tiyar usually smoke *bidi* (country made cigarettes) purchased from the local market; even the teen-aged boys of thirteen or above, appear to be habitual smokers. But the educated and well-to-do ones among them smoke cigarettes. The popular smoke of the Tiyar of Tiyarpara is however *chuti* which they have been smoking traditionally. It is prepared by them with sal leaf and tobacco also sometimes they obtain it from their neighbours belonging to the Kharwar community.

Domestic Utensils

The utensils found in a Tiyar household are more or less the same as among the neighbouring communities of similar economic status. At Tiyarpara the Tiyar mostly use earthen or aluminium utensils for cooking and storing purposes; at the other places they more frequently use brass and aluminium utensils. But for storing water they use earthen pitchers and pots. Now-a-days some well-to-do Tiyar use cups and saucers as well as tumblers made of glass or porcelain. Most of these utensils are locally available. But for purchasing brass or porcelain utensils they visit the nearby towns or marketing centres.

Environmental Sanitation, Hygienic Habits, Disease and Treatment

Environmental sanitation and hygienic habits :—The Tiyar generally live in congested localities. The children and the domesticated animals and excrete in the open space around the huts, and even in the courtyards making the surroundings unhygienic and filthy. In the rainy season the conditions further deteriorate

and the village pathways become impassable due to slush and mud. In recent years, *kaccha* dug-hole type of latrines have been introduced and are mainly used by the women; but in the other villages the males and the females go to the nearby fields for defecation.

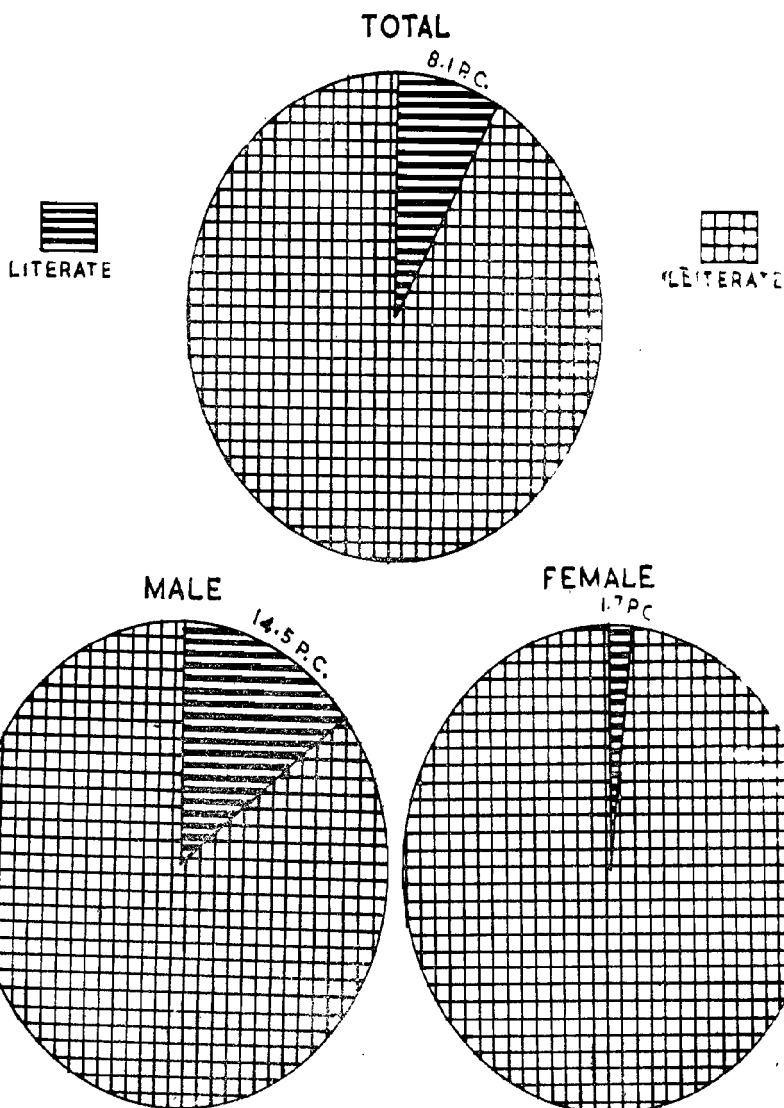
Though the environmental sanitation of the Tiyar localities leaves much to be desired, they display remarkable sense of cleanliness in respect of their household goods and utensils. Besides the floors, the inside portion of the house are also kept clean. The women folk spend considerable time in keeping the houses neat and tidy and in cleaning the household utensils and clothes. Sometimes they make use of washing soda in addition to soap for washing their clothes. Well-to-do persons among the Tiyar even employ professional washermen for the purpose.

Disease and treatment :—The Tiyar normally believe that the diseases are either caused by disorders of the vital organs of the body or are spread by certain germs. But the actual mode of treatment, depends largely on the medical facility readily available to them.

They avail of the allopathic treatment wherever available. As far as possible they consult a qualified medical practitioner for treatment during illness. But some consult homoeopathic practitioners and a few patronise the village quacks even. Sometimes, indigenous herbs and roots prescribed by the village apothecary are taken for minor ailments, like cough and cold, common fever, dysentery and diarrhoea etc. But given the option, an average Tiyar would rely on allopathic medicine in preference to homoeopathic, or ayurvedic or any other indigenous medicine prescribed by the quacks. Generally, the poor Tiyar, who cannot always afford the cost of allopathic medicine, take recourse to other means.

At Gilabari there is a registered medical practitioner who belongs to Tiyar community. The Tiyar as well as the members of other communities primarily depend on him for the treatment of their diseases. They neither visit any quack nor do they depend on any indigenous sources. The Tiyar, in other villages visit the nearby medical practitioner, failing which they visit the village quacks. The Tiyar of Jabdapata usually go for treatment to a qualified doctor practicing at Khasmara, which is situated at a distance of $1\frac{1}{2}$ kilometres from the village. Occasionally, they also visit the Primary Health Centre at Domjur. But the poorer section among the Tiyar of Jabdapata consult the quacks practising at Khasmara. So is the case with the villagers of Kochpukur, who often consult the quacks at Bargachia and Langalaberia, situated at a distance of 1 kilometre, from their village. However, in difficult cases or serious illness they send for the qualified medical practitioner at Govindpur, at a distance of 3 kilometres from their village. There is no charitable dispensary

LITERACY OF THE TIYARS



or any other medical facility in the four villages which were studied in connection with the present survey; but at the same time, it is obvious that they are positively oriented towards modern medical practices.

Language

The Tiyar of West Bengal are a Bengali speaking people. Bengali has been returned as their mother tongue in every village where field investigation has been conducted. In the absence of any census data on the languages of the Scheduled Castes, the extent of bilingualism in the community cannot be ascertained. The Bengali spoken by the Tiyar in districts of 24-Parganas and Howrah, the area of their concentration—does not show any special feature. But in Malda district the Bengali spoken by them seems to carry a good deal of influence of Hindi. This phenomenon is evidently rooted in the geo-cultural factors. In Malda the Tiyar live in an area which is adjacent to Purnea district of Bihar where the people speak a dialect of Hindi. According to some of the Tiyar informants the dialect in vogue among them in Malda district is known as Khotta or Khortta language which prevails in parts of Bihar. It is classified under the Eastern group of the outer sub-branch of Indo-Aryan sub-family (A. Mitra, C. I. 1961, Vol-I, India. Part II-C (ii), Language tables, Delhi, 1964 : CLXIX, CCIX).

Literacy and Education

The 1961 Census data on literacy and education in respect of the Tiyar of West Bengal present rather a dismal picture. As against 13.6 per cent literates among the Scheduled Caste population of the State as a whole only 8.1 per cent of the Tiyar are literate.

Table 5 provides sex-wise break-up of literacy among the Tiyar and the Scheduled Castes as a category in the rural and urban areas of West Bengal as per 1961 Census.

TABLE 5
*Table showing the sex-wise literacy among the Tiyyar and Scheduled Caste population
in the rural and urban areas of West Bengal*

Category	Literacy in the State as a whole			Urban areas			Rural areas		
	Total	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Tiyyar ...	8.1	14.5	1.7	21.3	23.4	17.4	7.7	14.2	1.5
Scheduled Castes as a whole ...	13.6	21.8	4.6	21.8	28.3	12.8	12.7	21.0	3.8

From the above table it is seen that not unexpectedly there is a marked disparity in the literacy of the males and the females, there being only 1.7 per cent literates among the females against 14.5 per cent male literates. Further, in keeping with the general trend the literacy in the urban areas is higher (21.3%) whereas it is not even (7.7%) in the rural areas.

As regards the sex-wise distribution of the literates in the urban and the rural areas, it is to be noted that against 23.4 per cent male and 17.4 per cent female literates in the cities and towns only 14.2 per cent males and 1.5 per cent females were literate in the villages. But the above literacy pattern is by no means characteristics of the Tiwar community alone. By and large, the same disparity in the distribution of literacy in the rural and urban areas as well as among the males and females are noticed in case of other Scheduled Castes as well.

The distribution of literacy in different parts of the State is also not uniform. Out of the three districts, viz., Twenty-four Parganas, Malda and Howrah, where the community has major concentrations, the largest number of literates is found in Twenty-four Parganas which has 18.4 per cent of the males and 2.4 per cent of the females as literates. In the State as a whole—irrespective of their concentration—Hooghly district accounts for the largest proportion of literates, percentage of literacy being 43 among the males and 11 among the females.

Table 6 throws some light on the levels of education achieved by the Tiwar literates as revealed by the 1961 Census data (the figures relate to the percentage of each educational level to the total number of literates).

TABLE 6
Table showing educational levels achieved by Tlyar of West Bengal
(based on 1961 Census data)

Sl. Educational No. Standard	Total			Rural			Urban		
	Persons	Males	Females	Persons	Males	Females	Persons	Males	Females
1. Total population	39633	19665	19968	38640	19011	19629	993	654	339
2. Illiterate ...	36437	16817	19620	35656	16,316	19340	781	501	280
3. Literate ...	3196 (100.00)	2848 (100.00)	348 (100.00)	2,984 (100.00)	2,695 (100.00)	289 (100.00)	212 (100.00)	153 (100.00)	59 (100.00)
4. Literate (without educational level)	2439 (76.32)	2180 (76.54)	259 (74.42)	2283 (76.51)	2062 (76.51)	221 (76.47)	156 (73.59)	118 (77.13)	38 (64.41)
5. Primary or Jrs. Basic ...	708 (22.15)	620 (21.77)	88 (25.29)	659 (22.08)	592 (21.47)	67 (23.18)	49 (23.11)	28 (18.30)	21 (35.59)
6. Matriculation or Higher Secondary	48 (1.50)	47 (1.65)	1 (0.29)	42 (1.41)	41 (1.52)	1 (0.04)	6 (2.83)	6 (3.92)	—
7. Technical diploma not equal to degree	1 (0.03)	1 (0.04)	—	—	—	—	1 (0.47)	1 (0.65)	—

It may be worth while to highlight some salient features emerging out from the analysis of the statistical data presented in the table. It is found that 76.32 per cent of the literates or, in other words, more than 3/4th of the literates have not achieved any educational level at all, while the remaining 23.68 per cent literates have achieved some level or the other. Not unexpectedly the bulk of the literates, who have achieved some educational level or the other, have only primary or junior basic standard to their credit (22.15%). Against this fairly wide base of primary education the number of persons who have achieved matriculation or higher secondary level is only 1.5 per cent, indicating thereby that most of the Tiyar children who join school discontinue their studies after achieving primary or junior basic level. The spread of education beyond matriculation is practically nil, as in the entire Tiyar population only one person has achieved a technical diploma (which too is not equal to a degree).

If the educational attainment of the females is considered, it is seen that their proportion in the different stages or levels of education follows the same pattern as in the case of the male population. It is, however, noteworthy that in Malda district against 47 males only 1 female has achieved the distinction of reaching the matriculation level. Education at the matriculation level has obviously made more headway in the urban areas as the percentage of the Tiyar who are matriculates in these areas (2.83%) is double than that in the rural areas (1.41%). The largest number of matriculates is found in Nadia district where however the community does not have a good concentration. If only the areas where the Tiyar exist in good number are considered the largest number of matriculates are found to come from Howrah district.

The field investigations show that during the last decade the community has made some attempt to achieve higher literacy and a better standard of education, especially in Howrah district. It also appears that the number of matriculates has increased during the recent years. At Gilabari, one Tiyar was found to have diploma in medicine. He was carrying on practice in the village itself.

Though the number of literates has gone up, the progress has not been uniform in all the areas. At Jabdapata of Howrah district 40 per cent of the males and 8.4 per cent of the females were found to be literate. On the other hand, at Tiyarpara (in Malda district) only 21.8 per cent of the males were literate. Among the females, all except one were illiterate.

There is a primary school each at Jabdapata and Gilabari. The Tiyar of Kochpukur send their children to the primary school at Bargachia, at a distance of only one kilometre from the village.

There are also two high schools within a distance of 2 kilometres of these two villages. The Tiyar of Tiyarpara avail of the educational facilities at Haripur at a distance of less than one kilometre where the junior high school has a primary section attached to it. The longest distance is travelled by the children of Kochpukur who have to cover 4 kilometres to attend the High School at Govindpur.

In order to gain further insight into the matter, particulars of school-going children were recorded in the four villages and the relevant statistics in this regard are presented in the Table 7.

TABLE 7
*The attendance of Tiyar children of school-going-age in
four villages in schools (with percentages in brackets)*

Sl No.	Particulars	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
		Jabda- pata	Koch- pukur	Gilabari	Tiyar- para	Total		
1.	Number of male children	310	90	51	37	488		
2.	Number of female children	234	106	34	30	404		
3.	Total no. of children	544	196	85	67	892		
4.	Male children attending Primary School	69 (22.3)	12 (13.3)	13 (25.5)	6 (16.2)	100 (20.5)		
5.	Female children attending Primary School	31 (13.2)	—	—	—	31 (7.7)		
6.	Total number of children attending Primary School	100 (18.4)	12 (6.1)	13 (15.3)	6 (9.0)	131 (14.7)		
7.	Male children attending High School	8 (2.5)	3 (3.3)	—	—	11 (2.3)		
8.	Female children attending High School	—	—	—	—	—		
9.	Total number of children attending High School	8 (1.5)	3 (1.5)	—	—	11 (1.5)		
10.	Male students in different schools	77 (24.8)	15 (16.7)	13 (25.5)	8 (21.6)	113 (23.2)		
11.	Female students in different schools	31 (13.2)	—	—	—	31 (7.7)		
12.	Total number of students in different schools	108 (19.9)	15 (7.7)	13 (15.3)	8 (11.9)	144 (16.1)		

It is thus found that out of 892 children in the school-going-age only 144 or 16.1 per cent were attending schools. These include 113 male and 31 female children. In other words, 23.2 per cent of the male children and 7.7 per cent of the female children were attending schools.

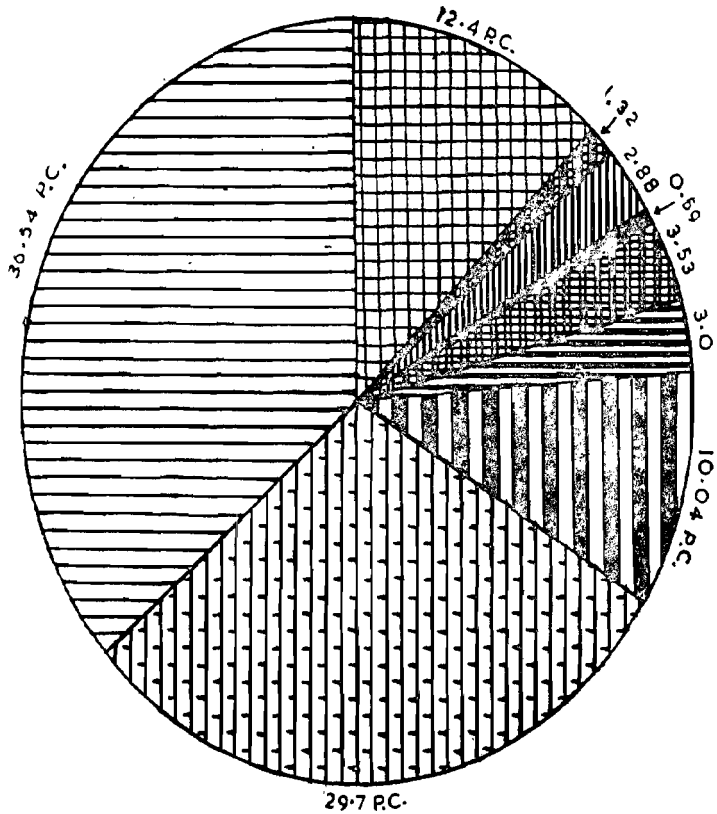
As regards the attendance pattern in different villages it is seen that the largest number of children attending schools are from Jabdapata wherein 108 or 19.9 per cent, children in the school-going-age were attending school. They were followed by those of Gilabari—13 (or 15.3 per cent), Tiyarpara—8 (or 11.9 per cent) and Kochpukur 15 (or 7.7 per cent). It may be highlighted here that except at Jabdapata, where 31, or 13.2 per cent, of the female children in the school-going-age, were attending schools, in none of the other villages any female child was enrolled in any school—primary or high. Further, the 11 children attending the high school were mostly from Jabdapata, which accounted for 8 boys, the remaining 3 being from Kochpukur. No boy or girl from Gilabari and Tiyarpara had joined any high school. In fact, even the percentage of children attending primary school was low in these villages (6.1 in Kochpukur and 9.0 in Tiyarpara).

The above statistics indicate that although 'almost equal facilities are available in all the villages, the educational attainments vary significantly. It appears that other factors have more important roles to play.










The efforts made by them at Jabdapata especially need mention. Most of them are progressive in outlook and feel the necessity of imparting education to their children for improving their lot. In fact, some of the adult male Tiyar in the village have realised the importance of education for themselves even. They have gone for adult literacy in a big way. The night school set up in the village on their own initiative is functioning very satisfactorily. It was found that a good number of adult male Tiyar between the ages of 16 and 40 or more were attending the night school regularly. At the time of the survey the strength of the Tiyar attending the night school had gone up to 65. After completing their day's work they assemble in the outer room of the house of a well-to-do Tiyar of the village and receive lessons from the teacher of the local primary school who, sensing their eagerness, does not accept any remuneration for his services. It is understood that Jabdapata is one of the few village where the institution of night school for adult literacy is functioning successfully.

On the other hand, the Tiyar of Tiyarpara and, to a certain extent of Kochpukur are not very enthusiastic about the education of their children. It appears that their social backwardness coupled with poverty has contributed in developing an antipathy or indifferent attitude towards education. They say that they cannot

CLASSIFICATION OF THE TIYAR WORKERS



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afford the education of their children, and even though they are not to pay any tuition fee, they have to spend a considerable amount for purchasing books, paper, dress and sundry items. Besides, when their children join schools they are deprived of their assistance in carrying on economic activities such as agricultural operations, etc. The Tiyar of Tiyarpara would rather take their children to the agricultural fields to teach them the techniques of cultivation than to send them to school for education which according to them, is of dubious utility. In fact, the poorer Tiyar of Jabdapata and Gilabari are also reluctant to send their wards to school on the same ground.

Occupation and Economic Life

As stated earlier, the traditional occupation of the Tiyar is fishing and rowing. O' Malley (C. I. 1911, Vol. V, Pt. I, 913 : 521) has classified them under 'fishermen, boatmen and Palki bearers'. The 1901 Census report of Calcutta city and its suburbs, had recorded 58.7 per cent of the workers belonging to the community as engaged in the traditional occupation of fishery, etc. In fact, in the suburban areas of Calcutta, two-third of their working force (64.10%) were recorded in the above category (C. I., 1901, Calcutta, Vol. VII, Part IV : 115). From the 1961 Census data it, however, appears that the Tiyar have largely shifted to agriculture and other occupations, as their primary source of livelihood. In fact, as discussed in a subsequent account, for the bulk of the Tiyar, agriculture serves as the main plank of their economy. But it seems that even in the past the Tiyar used to practise cultivation in addition to following the occupation of fishermen and boatmen. Towards the beginning of the century Risley had observed that though Tiyar in Eastern Bengal were usually fishermen, they had taken to cultivation and petty business, as fishing had become unproductive and river and other water sources had silted or dried up (*op. cit.*). During the field investigation also the Tiyar informants, particularly of Jabdapata and Kochpukur, stated that in addition to fishing they had been practising cultivation as one of their major sources of livelihood, for generations. It is, however, during the last five or six decades that the Tiyar economy has been primarily geared to agriculture, with fishing playing a subsidiary, though an important role.

Working Force and the Classification of the same in Industrial Categories

From the following table on the working force among the Tiyar and the break-up of the same into different industrial categories as per 1961 Census, it is found that 11,303 persons out of the total population of 396,633 (28.52 %), are workers. It is less than that of the Scheduled Caste population as a whole (34.06 %) as well as the general; including Scheduled Caste population of the

State (33.16%). The lower percentage of workers among the Tiyar appears to be due to low participation rate of the Tiyar females in the economic activity. Whereas more than half the male population (50.88 %) are workers. The contribution of the females is not significant. Only 6.50 per cent of them being workers. During the field investigation in the four villages, only very small percentage of women were reported as workers (6.3 % at Jabdapata, 7.1 % at Kochpukur and 1.3 % at Gilabari), only at Tiyarpara where the males and females participate equally in economic activity, they were found in sizable number (36%). Besides, it was found that even in the villages, where only insignificant number of women had active economic life as their primary activity, a good number had gainful employment as their subsidiary activity. Almost all the adult Tiyar women assisted their menfolk in cultivation by undertaking such agricultural operations as sowing, weeding and harvesting, etc. In fact, at Jabdapata and Kochpukur a few women, especially widows were having independent occupation by selling vegetable or fish.

The low return of work participation rate of the females, appears to reflect the value system of the community as well. Sometimes, they do not like to return their women as workers—particularly when they are engaged in less prestigious activity like agricultural labour, selling of fish, etc.

When the pattern of distribution of the Tiyar workers in various industrial categories is examined, it is found that 36.54 per cent of them are engaged as cultivators and 29.70 per cent as agricultural labours. In other words, 66.24 per cent or more than 2/3rd workers depend on agriculture as their primary source of livelihood. It is noteworthy that a higher percentage of workers among the females (31.15) than the males (29.51) are engaged as agricultural labourers.

TABLE 8
Table showing the working force among the Tiyar and its distribution in industrial categories, as per 1961 Census data

Industrial classification	Total						Rural						Urban					
	Persons		Males		Females		Persons		Males		Females		Persons		Males		Females	
Total Population ...	39633	19665	19668	38640	19011	19629	993	654	339									
Total Workers ...	11303 (28.52)	10006 (50.88)	1297 (650)	10901 (28.21)	9645 (50.73)	1,256 (6.40)	402 (40.48)	361 (55.20)	41 (12.09)									
I. As cultivators ...	4130 (36.54)	3958 (39.48)	180 (13.88)	4090 (37.52)	3910 (40.54)	180 (14.33)	40 (9.95)	40 (11.08)	—									
II. As Agricultural Labourers ...	3357 (29.70)	2953 (29.51)	404 (31.15)	3318 (30.44)	2914 (30.21)	404 (32.16)	39 (9.70)	39 (10.80)	—									
III. In Mining & Quarrying etc.	11135 (0.04)	998 (9.97)	137 (10.56)	1129 (10.36)	992 (10.29)	137 (10.21)	6 (1.49)	6 (1.66)	—									
IV. At Household Industry	339 (3.00)	204 (2.04)	135 (10.41)	332 (3.05)	198 (2.05)	134 (10.67)	7 (1.49)	6 (1.66)	1 (2.44)									
V. In manufacturing Other than Household industry ...	399 (2.53)	348 (3.48)	51 (3.93)	204 (1.87)	167 (1.73)	37 (2.95)	195 (48.51)	181 (50.14)	14 (34.15)									
VI. In Construction	67 (0.59)	67 (0.67)	—	33 (0.30)	33 (0.34)	—	34 (8.46)	34 (9.42)	—									
VII. In Trade & Commerce	325 (2.88)	184 (1.84)	141 (10.87)	301 (2.76)	169 (1.75)	132 (10.51)	24 (5.97)	15 (4.16)	9 (21.95)									
VIII. In transport, storage and communication	149 (1.32)	149 (1.49)	—	121 (1.11)	121 (1.26)	—	28 (6.97)	28 (7.76)	—									
IX. In other services	1402 (12.40)	1153 (11.52)	249 (19.20)	1373 (12.59)	1141 (11.83)	232 (18.47)	2 (7.21)	12 (3.32)	17 (41.46)									
Scavenging ...	112 (0.99)	67 (0.67)	45 (3.47)	—	—	—	112 (27.88)	67 (18.50)	45 (109.76)									
Tanning etc. ...	2 (0.02)	—	2 (0.15)	2 (0.02)	—	2 (0.16)	—	—	—									

Next to cultivation and agricultural labour is the industrial category of "other services" which includes peons, clerks etc., accounts for 12.40 per cent workers. This is followed by the category of "mining, quarrying, livestock, forestry, fishing and hunting". This mostly relates to the traditional sector of the Tiyar economy, viz., fishing, etc., accounting for 10.04 per cent of the workers. This would suggest that fishing, though not so important as in the past, still plays a significant role in the economy of the community. In fact, those who are primarily engaged in other sectors, often depend on fishery as their subsidiary occupation. The other sectors show an almost equal distribution of the Tiyar workers. But their number is not significant. One curious phenomenon which deserves mention here is that 112 persons (67 males and 45 females) from the urban areas have been returned as sweepers or scavengers and 2 females in the rural areas as tanners. This cannot be explained easily as the earlier accounts on the community do not indicate that they were also dependent on these 'lowly' occupations for livelihood.

In order to gain more insight in the nature of Tiyar economy and occupational trends some investigations were carried out in the villages covered during the present study. It was found that agriculture was followed by most of the Tiyar households as their main source of livelihood. The traditional occupation of fishing was however practised as a subsidiary occupation by most of them, especially at Jabdapata and Kochpukur.

Agriculture : It was found that many of the agriculturists among them were landless, while those who possessed land did not appear to have it in sufficient quantity, only a few households possessed land measuring more than 2.5 acres. This will be borne out by the fact that among the Tiyar of Jabdapata as many as 38.9 per cent were agricultural labourers against 48.1 per cent as cultivators. At Kochpukur, the agricultural labourers actually outnumbered the cultivators, there being 52.2 per cent agricultural labourers and 26.1 per cent cultivators. In other words, the number of agricultural labourers was double than that of the cultivators. But the most striking case was of Tiyarpara where they were all landless. The adult male and female workers found work as labourers in the fields of their neighbouring communities, mainly the Kharwar. During the harvesting season some of them even went to the adjoining areas of West Dinajpur district for earning their livelihood as agricultural labourers.

It was reported that in the villages where some Tiyar had land and others were landless the latter preferred to work in the fields of their caste fellows, rather than in the field of others.

The largest number of cultivators were found at Gilabari where 3/4th of the workers were cultivators, their being only 18.8 per

cent agricultural labourers. The 23 of the 30 households in this village entirely depended upon cultivation as their primary source of livelihood.

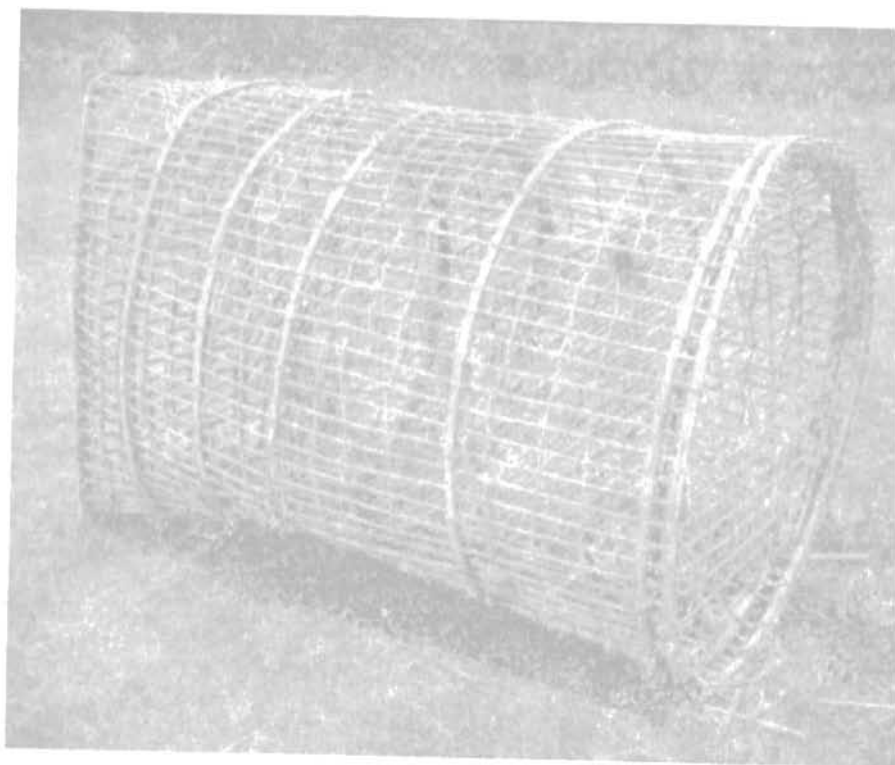
As regards the proprietary rights over the land it was found that 100 out of 226 households at Jabdapata and 37 out of 83 at Kochpukur were land owners. Most of the Tiyar cultivators who did not have lands of their own carried on cultivation with the help of the neighbouring communities on share cropping basis.

Paddy is the main crop raised by them but a major portion of the produce is spent on domestic consumption. For meeting expenses on the daily necessities of life they raise cash crops, in addition to following a few subsidiary occupations. The most important cash crop is jute which is cultivated by many of the Tiyar households at Jabdapata, either on their own lands or on the lands of others on share cropping basis. They sell the jute to the visiting brokers or agents of jute mills against cash payment. For instance, the representatives of a jute mill in Howrah district regularly visit Jabdapata for on the spot purchases. The other cash crop raised by the Tiyar in Jabdapata is betel leaf. This appears to be a recent innovation, as according to them while they have been cultivating jute since generations the cultivation of betel leaf has been taken over by them from the Barui, the traditional betel leaf growers. But the Tiyar of Kochpukur and Gilabari do not practise jute cultivation nor do they have taken to betel leaf cultivation. The question of raising these crops by those of Tiyarpara is out of question as all of them are engaged as agricultural labourers. The main source of cash income for the Tiyar of Kochpukur and Gilabari is the sale of mangoes—ripe as well as raw—which they grow in their kitchen gardens. The Tiyar households in the three villages also raise a number of winter crops, such as, *khesari*, *karai*, *arhar* pulse as well as a number of vegetables. The most important vegetable, fetching cash income is potato. The Tiyar of Kochpukur sell it in the market at Govindapur. Potatoes as well as a few green vegetables grown by those of Jabdapata are sold in the market at Domjir or to the neighbouring caste Hindu households. The Tiyar of Gilabari, however, raise only limited quantity of vegetables which are mostly consumed in home. If there is any surplus, the same is sold in the market at Chanchal. A few Tiyarpara cultivate tobacco in their kitchen gardens, which apart from meeting their own needs is sold in the market. It is said that they have learnt the technique of tobacco cultivation from Kharwar cultivators, who have been producing it in large quantities.

As stated in the preceding account the agricultural operations are shared by men and women alike. Among the poorer sections even the boys, aged eight or above, help their parents in the fields.

As stated elsewhere, the traditional occupation of fishing is practised by 10.4 per cent of the Tiyar workers in West Bengal as their primary occupation. But many more Tiyar households continue to pursue fishing as a subsidiary occupation. During the field investigation it was found that fishing still plays an important role in the economic life of Tiyar, especially at Jabdapata and Kochpukur. This is evident from the large number of fishing baskets, traps and nets found in the two villages. These have been discussed in the subsequent account. Many Tiyar in these villages, especially the agricultural labourers and petty share croppers, catch fish in the paddy fields and sell the same either in the nearby markets or in the neighbouring villages. In winter when the supply of fish is sufficient they often go to the market at Domjur and sometimes, even to the fish market at Howrah to sell their catch. According to the Tiyar of Jabdapata until a decade ago they used to earn good income by catching and selling various types of fish, including the larger ones of *rohi* and *katta*. The smaller varieties particularly, were available in the small streams and fields, which were connected with the Ganges river (through Shirishberia Rajpur No. 1 Canal). But in the recent years, recurrent over flow of water from the Damodar Valley Canal, has led to the deflection of the fish; it is responsible for the frequent damage of crops as well. The Tiyar of Tiyarpara also catch fish but they do it only in the paddy fields during the rainy season and mostly for domestic consumption. Hardly any fishing is done at Gilabari as there is no local source for the same. Whatever little fish they catch in the paddy fields in the rainy season are consumed by themselves.

In view of the importance of fishing in the economic life of the community at Jabdapata and, to a certain extent, at Kochpukur, it is worthwhile to describe a few fishing implements referred in the preceding paragraph. Almost every Tiyar household at Jabdapata possesses various types of fishing nets, baskets and traps. Some of which operate automatically. These are generally prepared by the Tiyar themselves. The fishing traps or *atol*, as they are locally called, are made of split bamboo and provided with one or more valves. Of these, four varieties, known as *dor*, *beto khadin* and *ghuni* are more important. The *dor* which is claimed to be distinctive of their own community, is a large cylindrical trap provided with two valves operating in the same direction. When placed in running water in canals or streams the fish enter into it along with the flow of water through its wide open anterior end, which serves as the mouth. The fish is taken out of the trap through an opening at the posterior end which remains closed during the operation. This contraption is, however, rarely used now and is possessed by only a few households. It is said that previously it was very important as it could be used for catching large



6. *Don*—an automatic fish trap used by the Tiyar

varieties of fish, as well. The *khadin*—a rectangular two-valved fish trap is used for catching medium-sized fish. The *beto* on the other hand, is a four-valved fish trap used for the same purpose as a *khadin*. The *ghuni* is also a rectangular fishing basket of varying size but is used for catching small varieties of fish, like *lyata*, *chingri*, *puti* and *chuno*, etc., in the paddy fields. The *ghuni* may be either two-valved or four-valved. Basically, all the fishing traps are manipulated in almost an identical manner. They are placed in the paddy fields, flooded with water, or in some canals and streams against the water current. The valves of the trap are so constructed that they allow the fish to enter into the trap with the flow of water but prevent the trapped fish from escaping through the opening.

In addition to the fishing baskets and traps, the Tiyar of Jabdapata and Kochpukur have got large fishing nets called *baontijal*. But now-a-days these are rarely used due to the scarcity of fish, though it is said that in the past these nets were put to good use for catching fish in the canals during the floods. Now only small nets called, *kheplajal*, are used by them for catching fish in the small canals and tanks.

No person was reported to be engaged in the occupations of boatmen, regarded as one of the traditional occupation of the community.

Other Services : A few Tiyar, especially at Kochpukur, eke out their livelihood by engaging themselves in service in government departments and private establishments or factories. In fact, at Kochpukur nearly 1/5th of the working force is engaged in the above occupations. In the other villages covered in connection with the present study the proportion of the male Tiyar engaged in 'other services' is below their state average in this category. A few Tiyar, especially in non-agricultural season, seek work as domestic servants or casual labourers in the houses of neighbouring well-to-do Hindus. At Tiyarpara, where their economic condition is particularly depressing, even the boys of the age of seven or eight work as domestic servants in the houses of the Kharwar neighbours.

A few engage themselves as labourers in construction work or earth-cutting or go to the urban centres, especially in Howrah and 24-Parganas, to get employment as labourer in the jute mills.

A few Tiyar at Jabdapata and Kochpukur depend on playing petty trade of selling fish and vegetables or running small grocery shops as their primary source of livelihood. But it is noteworthy that trade is mainly carried on by women, especially widows. This seems to be in keeping with the trend at the State level, as 10.87 per cent of the workers among the females against only 1.84 per cent workers among the males are engaged in this

occupation. But at Jabdapata and Kochpukur the percentage of female workers in this occupation is still higher—18.9 and 18.7 respectively.

The growth of industries and urban centres in the areas inhabited by the Tiyar have provided new employment opportunities to only a limited number of them. Due to lack of education, they do not have the requisite qualification for skilled jobs. A very small number could find employment as unskilled factory workers. It, however, appears that industrialisation of the region has created a chance conducive to change in the agricultural sector. Intensive and extensive cultivation of vegetables and changes in the cropping pattern can be related to it.

Life Cycle

Birth: The Tiyar informants claimed that irrespective of the sex, birth of a child is an occasion of rejoicing for them. They, however, prefer male children. They mentioned that they take every care of the enceinte, who is kept away from strenuous work in the advanced stage of pregnancy, and given nourishing diet. They specially prescribe her certain dry food items, such as parched rice and fried rice. But they do not allow her to take any diet having a high protein content.

They observe a few rites and rituals as well as taboos during the confinement and child birth. In advanced stage of pregnancy, generally in the eight month the female members of the household observe a ceremony called *sadh*. In this ceremony, which according to them, is performed in the same way by the neighbouring Castes Hindus the mother-in-law or some other female relation of the enceinte offers her certain delicious dishes along with a presentation of a new *sari*. But no such ceremony is said to be observed by the Tiyar at Tiyarpara.

During delivery the Tiyar avail of the services of a *dhai* (mid-wife), who usually belongs to Hari or Muchi community. Some elderly women of the community in the village also assist the *dhai* during the delivery. But, the umbilical cord is always cut by the *dhai* herself with a sharp split bamboo, as the caste norms do not permit the Tiyar women to cut the cord themselves. The placenta is also buried by her in the courtyard. She is paid in cash as well as in kind for her service. Though no fixed amount is prescribed, the remuneration is not expected to be less than two rupees in cash and four or five kilos of paddy in kind.

Now-a-days some Tiyar take complicated cases either to the maternity centre or to the nearby hospital. But those of Tiyarpara rarely resort to hospitalisation even in difficult cases of labour.

Though traditionally the pollution period is supposed to be observed for 30 days, this is not always so in actual practice. The Tiyar of Tiyarpara, observe pollution period for twenty-one days and those of Gilabari for only one week. But those of Jabdapata and Kochpukur claim that they actually observe this period for thirty days as prescribed. During this period the mother of the newly born baby and the other members of the household observe certain taboos and restrictions. The mother remains confined in her room or apartment as her touch is supposed to carry pollution to others. She is also forbidden for attending to any household chore, such as cooking and fetching water, etc. It is said that the period of confinement for the mother is so rigidly observed by the Tiyar of Tiyarpara that on no occasion during this period she comes out of her apartment till the *Sasthi Puja* is performed on the sixth day. In other villages in addition to observance of social and religious taboos certain restrictions on food are also observed.

The Tiyar of Jabdapata and Kochpukur perform *Sasthi Puja* on the sixth day after birth. On this occasion they also perform the tonsure of the child when a *napit* (barber) shaves his head. Thereafter, the mother as well as the child take a bath. Next, they install an earthen pot, called *Sasthir ghat*, in the main living room or apartment and the female members of the household daily worship the goddess *Sasthi* throughout the pollution period. They also make the offerings of sweets and flowers to the village deities. The Tiyar of Tiyarpara also perform *Sasthi Puja* on the sixth day. But unlike the Tiyar of the above two villages who invite a degraded Brahmin priest to perform the ceremony here a member of their own community officiates in the ceremony. At Gilabari the *Sasthi Puja* day, they wash the utensils in the house and a *napit* pares the nails of the mother, who along with the baby takes a bath soon after. Finally, the goddess *Sasthi* is worshipped in the house. The purification ceremony is observed in similar way by the Tiyar of Tiyarpara. But, they do not perform *Sasthi Puja* on the last day of the pollution period as is the case with their counterparts at Gilabari. The Tiyar of Jabdapata and Kochpukur observe the purification ceremony with somewhat elaborate rites and rituals as compared to those at Gilabari and Tiyarpara. In course of the purification ceremony on the 30th day, the mother, after taking her bath, worships *Gangadevi* at the bathing ghat of a tank, where the *Sasthir ghat* or the pot, installed on the day after the birth, is immersed. After that the *Sasthi Puja* is performed again by the female members of the household and thus marks the end of the pollution period.

Name-giving :—The Tiyar do not observe any formal ceremony for giving name to the children. Usually a close relation suggests a name soon after the birth. A few Tiyar at Jabdapata, however,

consult an almanac to select a lucky name on astrological reckoning.

First Eating of Rice:—The Tiyar observe the first eating of rice, or *annaprasan* ceremony as it is locally called, in the sixth month in case of a male child and in the seventh in case of a female one. They consult an almanac for selecting an auspicious day for observing the ceremony. They perform this ceremony more elaborately at Jabdapata. On the day of the ceremony the mother of the baby, after taking her bath early in the morning, worships *Gangadevi* near a bathing ghat. Then she gives a bath to her baby. Next, the mother's brother or her father puts a small quantity of *payes* (rice cooked in sweetened milk) on a silver coin and feeds the child with the same. Among the well-to-do families, the above named relations also give presents of clothes and brass utensil, usually a spoon, to the child. At Kochpukur and Gilabari they do not observe any elaborate rites and rituals and the child is simply fed with the *payes*, cooked for the purpose while those of Tiyarpara do not observe this ceremony at all.

Tonsure Ceremony:—The Tiyar observe tonsure ceremony in respect of their children. The exact age at which the tonsure ceremony is performed varies from one area to another. As stated in the preceding account, the Tiyar of Jabdapata and Kochpukur is performed. But they perform tonsure on the sixth day after the birth when *Sasthi Puja* Tiyar of Gilabari perform it in the third or sixth month and those of Tiyarpara in the seventh. In any case, they perform the ceremony before the child crosses the age of one year.

They utilize the services of a *napit* for shaving the head of the baby. The hair clippings are wrapped in a banana leaf and then thrown into water in a tank or pond in the name of *Grihadabta*. Thereafter, the members of the household pray for a long life of the child. In Tiyarpara they dispose of the hair in a slightly different manner. They first keep the hair at the foot of any one of the trees of *kul*, *neem* or mango. They believe that these trees are the seat of an evil spirit, called *chora devata*, which feels appeased by offering of hair and, therefore, does not harm the child.

Puberty Rites:—The Tiyar do not observe any puberty rites except in the case of first menstruation. Though there is no separate hut for a menstruating girl, during the period of her first menstruation she remains secluded from the other members of the house-hold and avoids non-vegetarian food, including meat and fish as well as other diet containing animal protein. Also she does not put oil in her hair during this period. When the period is over, she gets her nails cut by a *napit* and takes her bath. Thereafter, she is considered ceremonially purified.

Ear-boring :—The Tiyar girls get their ears and nose bored by their mother or any other female relative, at a tender age, to enable them to put on ornaments. There is no religious significance behind this practice and no rite—religious or otherwise—is observed on the occasion.

Marriage :—From the observations made by Mitra (*op. cit.*), it would appear that in the past the Tiyar generally married off their children at an early age, especially the females used to be married mostly as infants. The practice of marrying their daughters as infants has also been reported by Risley (*op. cit.*).

The Tiyar informants admitted that until the last two decades or so they married their children at an early age—between seven and nine—in the case of the female and ten and twelve in the case of the male children. But they claimed that now they marry their daughters only on their attaining puberty.

The present age at marriage given out by the Tiyar informants varies slightly in the different areas. The age at marriage in the case of females was reported to be between 12-16 at Gilabari, Jabdapata and Kochpukur, while at Tiyarpara, it was slightly less, between 11-14 years. As a matter of fact, the majority of the Tiyar girls were reported to have actually married between the ages 12 to 14. The claim of the Tiyar that they have abandoned the practice of infant marriage receives some support from the 1961 Census data on age and marital status. According to this source, out of 9,266 males and 9,094 females in the age group 0-14 only 22 males (0.24 per cent) and 488 females (5.3 per cent) were married.

On the other hand, out of 6,542 males and 7,837 females in the age group 15-44 as many as 1,909 males (17.1 per cent) and only 149 (1.7 per cent) females were unmarried. This would suggest that most of the females are married between the ages of 13-14, only a few remaining unmarried on reaching the age of fifteen. This is generally in conformity with the data on age at marriage gathered in the field. The larger number of unmarried males in the 15-44 age group would suggest that they generally marry after attaining the age of fifteen or more. The data collected from the Tiyar informants in the field when analysed in the context of the census data for the year 1961 indicates that though the marriages of the females still take place rather at an early age, especially in the areas like Tiyarpara, there has been a rise in the age at marriage during the last few decades and now there is hardly any case of infant marriage. In fact, the males now marry quite late, between 18-20 or even more.

The Tiyar claim that their community is strictly endogamous and the breach of the rule of caste endogamy entails ex-communication. But it would appear that in actual practice marriage outside the community does not invoke such severe punishment, particularly when they inter-marry a caste Hindu.

As stated towards the beginning of the account on the community, the position regarding the sub-divisions of the Tiyar community is not very clear. But wherever sub-divisions or territorial groups are found, each is said to be endogamous. It may be mentioned here that the Tiyar informants, denied having the three hypergamous groups mentioned by Risley (*op.cit.*).

The Tiyar are by and large monogamous. But the caste norms do not rule out polygamy altogether. It is said that in the past a few well-to-do Tiyars were having two wives, a fact also recorded by Risley (*op. cit.*). Now a person usually brings a second wife in the life time of his first wife when the latter is barren or is suffering from some incurable disease.

As stated earlier, though the Tiyar claim to have a few *gotra*, the same do not play any role in regulating marriages. Marriage within the same *gotra*, (*sagotra*) is observed among them. They claimed that they regulate marriage by simply avoiding it with relations up to four generations on the father's side and three on mother's.

The Tiyar arrange marriages by negotiation and payment of bride price. According to them the bride price has been quite high in their society even in the earlier times. It is said that two or three decades ago a prospective Tiyar groom or his father was required to pay a cash amount of a hundred rupees to the bride's father in addition to the presents of silver ornaments and clothes, etc., to the bride. It would, however, appear that, except in places like Tiyarpata, where it is still obligatory to arrange marriages with the payment of bride price, the position in this respect has been undergoing change since the last two or three decades. The practice of payment of bride price is gradually being given up. In fact, on the other hand, in some cases the bride's father pays dowry in kind to the groom's father. But this practice has come into vogue only among the affluent and educated families in Jabdapata, Gilabari and, to a certain extent, in Kochpukur. It is likely that this change has been brought about as a result of occupational mobility coupled with social mobility and spread of education in the Tiyar society. The educated Tiyar boys who have better prospects of employment are eagerly sought for by the parents of Tiyar girls. Besides, knowing their accomplishments the fathers of educated boys do not feel like paying bride

price. At the same time the well-to-do Tiyar are always eager to marry off their daughter to educated boys. When a well-to-do Tiyar finds a good match for his daughter he does not claim any bride price from the boy's father. On the other hand, as an inducement, he offers such presents as a wrist watch, golden ring or bicycle, etc., to the prospective groom. But as stated above, the Tiyar who are poverty stricken, less educated and not particularly influenced by caste Hindus—as in Tiyarpara—still arrange marriages on payment of bride price.

In negotiating for marital alliance the initiative can be taken by either party—the girl's father or boy's. Generally, the service of a professional match-maker is not sought for and instead a common relation or friend is requested to act as go-between. In case the marriage negotiations are successfully concluded they consult a *panjika* (almanac) for fixing an auspicious day, suitable to both the parties, for performance of the marriage ceremony. But usually before the final agreement, they seek the consent of the boy and, sometimes, of the girl as well.

The marriage is solemnised at night at the bride's residence, which is visited by the bridegroom in the evening in a small procession consisting of close relations and friends.

While there are a number of rituals connected with the marriage, the most important one consists of the performance of *homa* (sacrifice before fire) to the accompaniment of hymns enchanted by the Brahmin priest. This is done in a temporarily constructed square booth, with a canopy above (*chhatnatola*). During this ceremony a *Napit* is always present. When the essential rites and rituals are over, the couple retires to the bridal chamber of a separate room to spend the night. At Jabdapata before the couple leaves the *chhatnatola* and proceeds to the bridal chamber, a parasole or *rajchhatra*, as it is locally called is held over their heads. This is supposed to bring good luck to them.

The next day, the marriage party is entertained with a feast. After that it returns to the bridegroom's house accompanied by the bride. There the bride is ceremonially received by the mother of the bridegroom or, in her absence by some elderly female relation, such as the father's sister. She touches the bride's forehead with winnowing fan containing an earthen lamp and a few grains of paddy. But at Jabdapata, in the fashion of the caste Hindus, a brass plate is used in place of the winnowing fan.

Widow Remarriage :—According to Risley, while the Tiyar of Bihar allow widow remarriage those of Bengal do not. In this connection he has observed, "in Bengal, widows never marry but earn a livelihood by selling fish, by manufacturing string and such like petty industries. Those who find such an existence too monotonous, and desire a change of life, usually join one of the

mendicant orders of the *Vaishnav sect.*" (*op. cit.*). But during the field investigation the Tiyar in different areas gave conflicting information in this regard. According to the members of the community at Jabdapata and Kochpukur their caste norms do not permit the widows to remarry, though this restriction is not enforced in case of the widowers. But when pressed further they admit that now they sometimes allow young widows, of the marriageable age, to remarry. In fact, a few cases of widow remarriage came to light in these villages. But the Tiyar of Kochpukur expressed conflicting views about the practice of widow remarriage. According to them widow remarriage was a common practice in their society in the past only and the last widow remarriage in the village took place a decade or more ago. This is obviously contradictory to their statement that the caste norms do not permit widows to remarry and that only recently they have allowed young widows to remarry. A widow who has remarried, they stated, is looked down upon and more or less treated as a concubine. They contemptuously termed such a union as *nika*. At Tiyarpara on the other hand they frankly admitted that they freely allowed the widows to remarry.

From the above conflicting claims regarding widow remarriage it appears that they do not consider it prestigious to have widow remarriage in their society and as far as possible, discourage it. But in places like Tiyarpara such marriages do not appear to carry any stigma or loss of prestige.

The 1961 Census data also indicate that the incidence of widow remarriage among them is rather low. Out of total female Tiyar population of 19,968 as many as 2,276 or 11.40 per cent females are widows. Against this the number of widowers is only 554.

Some of the informants stated that where the widows remarry, such marriages are generally of the nature of junior levirate. But there is no compulsion in this matter. Besides, there is no religious rite connected with widow remarriage. The couple begins to live as husband and wife, after formally informing the community.

Divorce and Separation :—The position regarding divorce is more or less similar to that of widow remarriage. Risley (*op. cit.*) is categorical that the Tiyar in Bengal do not recognise divorce. During the field enquiries, except at Tiyarpara, the Tiyar informants were reluctant to admit that divorce is permitted in their society. But a few such cases came to light at Gilabari. It appears that like widow remarriage they discourage divorce though when the turn of events lead to a situation necessitating the separation of the husband and wife they acquiesce to the same. In areas like Tiyarpara divorce is permitted with the sanction of the Caste Panchayat.

In 1961 Census, 45 males and 60 females were returned as divorced or separated. These were mostly from Malda district adjoining Bihar. As in the case of widow remarriage, no elaborate rites of religious nature are observed in case a divorce remarries.

Death Rites:—The Tiyar generally believe that a person dies as and when willed by God or destiny. But a few persons, especially at Tiyarpara, sometimes associate death—particularly when it is too sudden or takes place through accident—with such supernatural causes as black magic or machination of witches or evil spirits.

Though the most common mode of disposal of the dead body, is reported to be by cremation, in certain areas, as in Tiyarpara, the dead body is disposed by immersing it in a river. But in case of deaths caused by accident, such as thunder strokes, snake-bites, etc., the dead body is buried. The dead bodies of children below two years are also buried. It is said that in Tiyarpara, no dead body has been cremated during the last two years. It is also claimed by them that they resort to this practice of disposing the dead body by immersion as they cannot afford the high cost which is involved in case of cremation.

In Tiyarpara, the Tiyar dispose the dead body by immersion in the Kalindi river flowing by the side of the village. Before immersion, the Tiyar perform the last funerary rite by burning a small candle prepared from cotton and soaked in mustard oil and applying fire in consecration to the mouth of the deceased. The deceased's eldest son performs the ritual of *mukhagni* by touching the flame of the burning candle to the mouth of the dead body. After this ritual the mourners stuff the clothes of the dead body with pieces of stones, sands etc., and fasten the same with the corpse before immersing it in the river. But no priest is required on the river bank to assist the mourners in performing the last rites before immersion.

The Tiyar of Jabdapata, Kochpukur and Gilabari practice the cremation method for disposing the dead bodies. They have access to the cremation ground (*sasan*) used by other communities of the village including the high caste. The *sasan* is usually situated outside the village at a distance of one to five kilometres. At Jabdapata it is located in an open field at a distance of 1-1/2 km. while at Kochpukur it is situated at the bank of Adiganga river, 3 kms. away. The bank of a nearby tank is utilised as the *sasan* by the villagers of Gilabari.

The Tiyar of these villages observe rites and rituals, similar to those of their neighbouring Caste Hindus in connection with the disposal of the dead body. They carry the dead body to the *sasan* on a bier made of bamboo. The elderly women cleanse the house

with a mixture of cowdung and water after the body has been taken out. They also wash the household goods, and, thereafter take a bath. They also keep burning incense in the room of the deceased for three days.

On arrival at the *sasan*, the dead body is given a bath in water. It is said that all the belongings of the deceased, except the precious ornaments of gold or silver, are burnt or buried along with the body. Before arranging pyre of wood an offering of five *kari* (shell) and *tamar paisa* (copper coins) is made to Ma Basumati for the use of the land on which the pyre is arranged. The dead body is placed on the pyre with its head directed towards the north and the feet facing the river Ganga. The Tiyar of Jabdapata also place a flower of plantain plant and a bunch of *tulsi* (*Ocimum santum*) leaves on the pyre in case of the occurrence of the death on a Saturday or a Tuesday. They, however, could not throw any light to the belief associated with the above practice.

Usually, the eldest son or, in his absence, any other male relative performs *mukhagni* ceremony, i.e., igniting the fire near the mouth of the corpse. In case of burial it is his prerogative to first throw a handful of dust in the grave dug up for the body. After the body is completely burnt into ashes, the chief mourner collects the *asthi* (unburnt bones) for disposal. Later, the mourners, who accompanied the dead body to the burning ground take a bath before returning home. After reaching their home they purify themselves by keeping their palms near the fire for a moment and chewing the leaves of the *neem* tree and *chalbhaja* (fried rice).

In case of Tiyar of Tiyarpara who practise the immersion method for the disposal of the dead body it is claimed that a Brahmin priest officiates at the obsequies. A Napit shaves the beard as well as pares the nails of the male mourners. He also shaves the heads of the deceased's sons and brothers. Both male and female members after having their nails pared by the Napit, take a bath in a tank or river.

Except at Tiyarpara, they also perform the bone disposal ceremony when the chief mourner visits the river Ganges, takes his bath and throws the bones into the river. But the bone disposal ceremony is not performed on a fixed day by them everywhere. The Tiyar of Kochpukur, immediately after the collection of the bones from the pyre, throw them into Adiganga river flowing by the side of the *sasan*. The Tiyar of Jabdapata perform it either on the day of cremation itself or on the third day after it, while those of Gilabari perform it only a few days before the *sradha* ceremony. The former preserve the *asthi* in a lump of

mud and keep it either in the room of the deceased or in a cowshed. But the latter preserve it in the hollow of a bamboo.

The ceremonial period for mourning also varies in the community. The Tiyar of Jabdapata and Kochpukur traditionally observe this period for thirty days, while those of Gilabari for fifteen days. But the Tiyar of Tiyarpara have been observing it for eleven days only. Apart from the household of the deceased it is claimed that the ceremonial mourning is supposed to be observed by those who are within three generations of relationship with the deceased in father's line. During this period, the mourners are expected to observe certain restrictions on food and religious activity. At Jabdapata and Kochpukur the chief mourner offers every evening during this period some *habishyanna* (boiled and sun-dried rice mixed in ghee), to the soul of the deceased in front of the plant of *banajali* implanted by him in the courtyard, after returning from the *sasan* on the day of cremation. He also lights an earthen lamp before the plant in the evening.

The chief mourner at Gilabari observes this practice likewise; but he makes the offering in front of a *tulsi* plant instead of *banajali*. But at Tiyarpara the chief mourner offers cooked rice to the soul of the deceased person on the bank of the river, only the day after the death and not thereafter.

The main *sraddha* ceremony is preceded by *ghat sraddha*. On this occasion offerings of *atap* (sun-dried rice), milk, ghee, honey and fruits are made to the soul of the deceased person as the *pind* or food for the dead person, before the plant is uprooted and thrown into a tank or river along with the *pind* by the chief mourner.

The main *sraddha* ceremony is observed on the day after the *ghat sraddha*. According to the informants (except at Tiyarpara), the usual rites and rituals observed by the Hindus are performed by a Brahmin priest. After observing the *ghat sraddha* a few Brahmin, it is claimed, are entertained with a feast of fruits and sweets. But at Tiyarpara the Brahmin refuse to accept any edible from the Tiyar.

Next day, a feast is given to the villagers of their own caste with the *moral* or the headman of the community as the chief guest.

Further, once every year, the Tiyar observe annual *sraddha*, when the head of the household offers water to the soul of the deceased sometimes, as Tiyarpara, he throws some cooked rice, wrapped in a banana leaf, into a tank or a river in the name of the deceased. While at Jabdapata these rites are performed every year in the month of *Kartik* (October-November) on the occasion of *Kalipuja* at Kochpukur these are observed on the death anniversary.

Religion

According to Risley, "The Tiyar are almost to a man Vaishnav in creed." (*op. cit.*). But during the field investigation conducted in connection with the present study, it was found that they worshipped a number of goddesses or deities associated with the *Sakta* sect of Hinduism, and worshipped by the other neighbouring Caste Hindus as well. Of all their favourite deities referred to by Risley, Kali and Mansa appeared to be more popular in the villages surveyed. The Tiyar in all these villages claimed to be great devotees of Kali, Mansa and Lakshmi.

As stated by Risley also, it was found that they performed their religious ceremonies, especially the community worship, under certain trees or plants, such as *seorah* (*Trophis aspera*)—a common scrubby plant *neem*, *bel*, *gujali*, *banajali*, mango (*Magnifera indica*), and *tulsi* (*Ocimum sanctum*) where *gramthan* (the common sacred spot or altar for the community worship of the deities) are located. Each village was having one or more such *gramthan* of its own in respect of the Tiyar community; but the construction design and location of the altars as well as the deities worshipped there, more often than not varies, from one area to another.

At Jabdapata there are two sacred spots or altars known as *mahakaltala* and *olaibibitala* which are represented in the form of a rectangular platform built with brick and mortar. But while the former is located under a Sheora robusta tree and, looked upon as the seat of several deities, the latter is located under a *neem* tree.

Kochpukur, where the place of community worship is known as *thakursthan*, has three separate altars made of clay. Besides, each pond in the village has on its bank either a cemented or an earthen altar, known as *mahakaltala*.

As regards Tiyarpara there are altogether five *gramthan* or altars for common community worship. The altars known as *mayerthan*, *premrjathan* and *darwarthan* are made of clay and situated under a tree, locally known as *jial*. These are decorated with marks of vermilion, which is regarded as sacred. But the two other sacred spots known as *hanumanthan* and the *gramdevthan* for the worship of Hanuman and the village deity, have no platforms as such and are simply demarcated by a piece of red flag tied to a bamboo post.

At Gilabari there is only one altar which is used for the worship of *gramdevta* or *gramraja* (village deity). This is represented by a stone and located under a mango tree (*Magnifera Indica*).

The Tiyar in the four villages which were studied, claimed that in their religious observances they availed the services of degraded Brahmin, priests, having the title of Chakravorty or Bhattacharya at Jabdapata and Kochpukur, and Tiwari or Pande



7. *Mahakaltala—a place of community worship of the Tiyar at Jabdapata village*



8. *Olaib'bitara—another place of community worship at Jablapata*

at Gilabari and Tiyarpara. As noted earlier, the last two villages, are located in Malda district adjoining Bihar; and here the Tiyar are served only during the marriage ceremonies.

According to Risley, the Tiyar offer sacrifices to the deities during the religious ceremonies. In this connection he has mentioned that they sacrifice a swine to Bura Buri in the month of *Paus* (December-January) on *Sankranti*, though they do not eat its flesh. Similarly, during Ganga festival celebrated in *Jeth* (May), they offer a white kid or a pigeon along with milk to the spirit of the river (Risley, *op. cit.*). However, during the course of the field investigation, the Tiyar denied that it was obligatory for them to offer sacrifices of animals during the worship. In fact, according to them, they rarely sacrifice animals and whenever they do, it is mostly in the fulfilment of a vow, when they would sacrifice a goat or a pigeon or a duck, but never a swine. According to them, a swine is never sacrificed in their society, not even in the past.

As stated earlier, Kali, Mansa and Lakshami are the most popular deities of higher order worshipped by the Tiyar in the areas covered during the field investigation for the present monograph. The Tiyar in these villages, except at Tiyarpara, also worship Sitla. But from the various *gramthan* referred to in the preceding para, it appears that they also worship Hanuman, Thakur and Premraja in addition to a number of gods and goddesses of lower order as well as family deities. The latter appear to exercise a greater influence in their day-to-day life and, therefore, worshipped on various occasions.

Risley has recorded an interesting legend associated with Premraja, whose altar has been referred to earlier. According to this legend Premraja was a popular brigand belonging to their community and residing at Bauragar in Tirhat (Uttar Pradesh). He once disappeared along with his boat. In 1864, one Baijua Tiyar gave out that Premraja had appeared to him in a vision and ordained that the Tiyar should cease to be fishermen and instead devote themselves to observing certain religious rites which would procure prosperity to the community. Accordingly, about four thousand Tiyar collected at Purnea and after worshipping the idol of Premraja provided by Baijua sacrificed three thousand goats. This was repeated near Benaras, where a murder was committed (Risley, *op. cit.*). It appears that the step taken by Baijua in the name of Premraja was a social movement aimed at securing a higher socio-economic standard for the community with the backing of the supernatural. But as stated by Risley, the movement was short lived and unsuccessful.

The religious life of the Tiyar is characterised by the observance of a number of worships and festivals which can be broadly

grouped into two categories, viz. worships and festivals at the household level for the welfare of the family and those at the community level for the well being of the community as a whole. In the latter case the *Moral* (headman) of the community in his absence. Some of the village elders take the initiative and all the households make contributions to meet the expenses.

Festivals and Worships at Family Level

Barai Puja :—On the new moon day, in the month of *Baisakh* (April-May), a few Tiyar households at Jabdapata worship Baroj Kali, represented by the stereotyped image of the goddess Kali. Baroj is said to be the deity presiding over betel-leaves. Her worship is performed only by those household who actually cultivate betel-leaf. They believe in the legend of the Baruj, the chief betel-leaf growing community, that once goddess Durga had assumed the form of Baroj Kali and that the betel-leaf had its origin from her tongue. The ceremony is performed by a Brahmin priest on a plot of land, where Baroj Kali's image is installed.

Ambubachi :—The Tiyar widows perform *ambubachi* ceremony for three days. During this period they avoid cooked food, and take only fruits. At Jabdapata and Kochpukur the males also refrain from works connected with agriculture, such as ploughing, etc.; but this is not the case with the Tiyar of Gilabari. Besides at Tiyarpara, the *ambubachi* ceremony is not performed by the Tiyar at all.

Raandhan Parbana or Ranna Puja :—This festival is observed in connection with the worship of Manasa by the Tiyar of Jabdapata and Kochpukur on *Sankranti*, the last day of the month of *Bhadra* (August-September). It is one of the most important festivals of the Tiyar of these two villages and is observed with much enthusiasm. A day before the festival, in the evening, rice and a few vegetable curries as well as fish are cooked in new earthen pots. Next morning, the goddess Manasa is worshipped in front of a *Phanimanasa* (cactus) plant in the courtyard. After the worship the stale food, kept overnight, is offered to a branch of the *Phanimanasa*, kept near the oven. Thereafter, it is served to the relatives and friends.

But the Tiyar of Jabdapata do not observe this ceremony. Instead they observe three other festivals in honour of Manasa, as aftermath of the *Arandhan Parbana*. These are *Khaidera Parbana*, *Khirpur Parbana* and *Chachari Parbana* are observed on the new moon day in the month of *Sravana* (July-August). It is said that during these festivals, Manasa is worshipped in the different households by a Brahmin priest.

Lakshmi Puja or Bastu Puja :—Bastudevi worshipped by the Tiyar is actually the goddess Lakshmi, which is not represented

by any image. Its worship is performed on *Kojagari lakshmi purnima* (full moon day after *Durga puja*) in front of a granary. But at Kochpukur Lakshmi is worshipped on the same day when *Kali puja* is observed in the month of *Kartik*.

The Tiyar of Gilabari observe a special ceremony relating to the goddess Lakshmi. In the month of *Ashar*, before sowing the seed of paddy, they take vows promising sacrifices to the goddess Lakshmi. These vows are honoured in the month of *Paus*, after the harvesting is over, with the sacrifice of goats, pigeons, ducks, etc., in their respective homesteads.

Gopuja :—This is observed at Kochpukur and Jabdapata by a few Tiyar on the first day of *Baisakh* in connection with the worship of cow, which is regarded by them as the incarnation of Durga or Bhagavati. In the morning all the cows possessed by the family are smeared with oil and turmeric, bathed in water and then decorated with marks of vermilion on their foreheads. The head of the household then gives a ceremonial reception to the cows by taking a *barandala*, a brass plate containing a lighted earthen lamp, a little quantity of paddy, a small piece of turmeric, a few drops of mustard oil and a copper coin. He touches the plate to the foreheads of the cows with the prayer, "Oh Mother Bhagwati, please forgive our sin for employing you in our service."

Paus Sankranti :—Except at Tiyarpara, they observe *Paus sankranti* on the last day of the month of *Paus* (December-January) with the worship of goddess Lakshmi. Besides, cakes and various other festive dishes of food are also prepared on this occasion.

Sadh :—On the *sankranti* (last day) of the month of *Aswin* (September-October), the Tiyar of Jabdapata and Kochpukur observe *sadh* ceremony associated with the cultivation of paddy. It is symbolic of the *sadh* ceremony observed in the case of a pregnant woman as the fertilization of the plant is associated with her. The Tiyar cultivator families offer palmyra seeds, coconuts, flattened rice, *atap* rice, and sweets to the paddy plants in the fields in the name of Lakshmi the goddess of wealth. They do not observe this ceremony at Gilabari and Tiyarpara.

Aal Durga Vrata :—The married Tiyar women at Jabdapata observe a *vrata* (vow), worshipping Aal Durga throughout the month of *Agrahayana* (November-December). It is believed that Aal Durga is an incarnation of the goddess Durga. They also identify the goddess Aal Durga with the Makar Chandi deity of Makardaha, a place situated a few kilometres away from Jabdapata. It is further believed that Durga assumed the form of Aal Durga to exterminate the *daitya kula* (demon-dynasty).

On the first day of *Agrahayana*, an earthen plate is filled with soil and a small *ghat* (earthen pot) is filled with water and a

kalmi, santi, kincha, and man plant each as well as a paddy stalk are placed in it. Next the pot is placed in the middle of the plate and some grains of *ksheshari karai* are sown in the soil in the plate around the *ghat*. The married women, after taking bath in the morning daily worship the plate and its contents with offerings of flowers and water, in the name of Aal Durga. On the last day of *Agrahayana* the earthen plate along with its content is immersed in a tank. Next, the women celebrate the occasion by taking eating festive cakes. But the widows are prohibited from observing this *vrata*. It is performed only by married women for the long and healthy life of their husband.

Heladhara Vrata :—This is observed at Kochpukur by the unmarried Tiyar girls throughout the month of *Agrahayana*. During this period the twin deity of Hara-Gauri is worshipped every morning with the offerings of water and flowers to seek the blessing of the same for the boon of a husband of choice.

Mahakal Puja :—At Kochpukur the Tiyar, owning tanks or ponds, used to worship Mahakal Thakur at its sacred spot, situated by the side of the tank, in the month of *Chaitra* (March-April) or *Vaisakh* (April-May), when the time is opportune to renovate the tanks. Mahakal is worshipped in the same way as Manikpir and Bibima, discussed in a subsequent account. It is said that a Brahmin priest presided at the worship of Mahakal with the offerings of *Kshir* (condensed milk), supplied by a Muslim Fakir of the neighbourhood, with the belief that if the deity is pleased fish will grow and multiply rapidly in the tanks. But, for the last few years the Tiyar have stopped this worship altogether, as they have abandoned large-scale fishing.

Jamai Sasthi :—A few well-to-do Tiyar households of Kochpukur and Gilabari observe *jamai sasthi* ceremony, by offering choicest presents to their son-in-laws in the month of *Jaisthya*. It is admitted that this has been recently copied from the Caste Hindus of the locality.

Saraswati Puja :—Some Tiyar households are found to worship Saraswati, the goddess of learning, in the month of *Magh* (January-February).

In addition to the religious rite on festive occasions, the Tiyar worship a few household deities regularly. Thus, Lakshmi is worshipped every Thursday. Goddess Manasa is worshipped every Saturday and Tuesday in front of the *phanimansa* or cactus plant in the courtyard. The Tiyar of Gilabari worship, once a week, either Gosain Thakur or Kali whichever is their family deity. They perform *kali puja, narayan puja* and *sitala puja* in the house on special occasions, like marriage in the household. Ordinarily the family deities are worshipped by the elderly housewives.

Community Worship and Village Festivals

Dashahara Festival :—This community festival is observed by the Tiyar of Jabdapata, Kochpukur and Gilabari during the worship of *Manasa* in the month of *Jaisthya-Ashar*, the day of the festival being fixed after consulting an almanac. The ceremonial part of this festival consists of the worship of the goddess *Manasa* by a Brahmin priest at *mahakaltala* with the offerings of *atap* rice, fruits and *siddhi*. Similar community-worship of the same goddess is performed by the Tiyar of Gilabari. But unlike at Jabdapata and Kochpukur, the members of the community at Gilabari purchase an image of the deity from the *Kumbhakar*as (clay-modellers) of the same village. The idol is worshipped in *Sravana* (July-August).

Sitala Puja: The Tiyar of Jabdapata and Kochpukur worship *Sitala*, the goddess associated with smallpox, at *mahakaltala* or *thakurthan* in the month of *Falgun* (February-March), on any Saturday or Tuesday with the offerings of fruits, etc. A Brahmin priest presides over the ceremony. The same night professional *kirtanias* (singers of devotional songs) hired for the purpose, sing songs to the honour of the deity. It is believed that if *Sitala* is pleased with the worship, they are saved from the smallpox epidemic. The worship of this deity is also organised individually by some Tiyar households. In case, any member of a household suffers from smallpox, the female members vow before *Sitala* that they will worship her in the house on the recovery of the ailing members.

Worship of Manik Pir :—The Tiyar of Jabdapata worship Manik Pir, a legendary Muslim saint, alongwith the *Sitala Mata* in shrine called *Olaibibitala*. A curious feature of this worship is that somehow, they equate the Pir with Lord Mahadeva, one of the Gods of Hindu Trinity. The genesis of this practice is not known; not even the Tiyar could explain this association or syncretism. The Tiyar at Kochpukur and Jabdapata worship *Bibima*, another legendary deity, along with Manik Pir at the same altar or *thakurthan*. Another remarkable feature of these worships is that in both the villages the Tiyar require the services of a Muslim *fakir* (mendicant) from some neighbouring village, beside that a Brahmin priest, who offers *ksheer* (condensed milk), prepared and supplied by the Muslim *fakir*. The latter receives some payment for his services as do the Brahmin priest. The Tiyar ascribe to these deities control over certain diseases affecting the cattle. On this occasion, they also sing devotional songs.

Kali Puja :—The Goddess Raksha Kali, one of the many incarnations of the Goddess Kali, is worshipped by the Tiyar of Jabdapata at *mahakaltala* in the month of *Chaitra*, on any Saturday or Tuesday during *krishnapaksh* (the dark fortnight) for the general

welfare of the Tiyar community. The Tiyar at Kochpukur do not perform this worship ordinarily. But, when there is any epidemic in the village, they worship the goddess Raksha Kali at the *thakurthan* along with the sacrifice of goats.

Gramdevata Puja :—It is understood that until a decade ago the Tiyar at Gilabari used to worship their village deity, *gramraja*, at its altar in the month of *Agrahayana*, before harvesting paddy, in expectation of greater yield. But, this community worship is now tending to be split up into individual household worship, with the offerings of flowers, sweets and fruits and prayer for a better harvest. When asked to explain the reason for this transformation, the Tiyar stated, that it came about as a result of unwillingness of the majority of the Tiyar households to share the expenses.

Except at Tiyarpara, the Tiyar also participate in various other Hindu festivals in the neighbourhood. They do not organise *Durga puja* themselves but participate in the *puja* organised by their caste Hindu neighbours. They also participate in the festivals of *sasankali* or *kali puja* and *charak shivaratri* etc., along with other neighbouring Hindu communities, including the caste Hindus.

Taking an overall view it appears that the Tiyar of Jabdapata and Kochpukur, perform the common religious rites of the region more frequently than their agnates at Gilabari. Again the religious life of the Tiyar of Tiyarpara seems to belong to an altogether different complex. Though like the Tiyar of the other three villages they worship a number of goddesses associated with the *sakti* cult, it appears that in their religious observances they have not been influenced by the caste Hindus to that extent as their counterparts in other areas. Their religious ceremonies are performed by a priest belonging to their own community. There were two such priests at Tiyarpara. The office of the priest is not however, hereditary. Any aged Tiyar, who is considered to be intelligent and fit for performing the worship, is appointed to the office, by a gathering of the community. The worship of their deities is sometimes accompanied by sacrifice of goats, pigeons and ducks. Twice a year they jointly worship the village deities, namely, *Burima* or *Mayer*, *Gramdeva*, *Premraja*, *Hanuman* and *Darwar*, twice a year at the *than*. The first worship of the village deities is performed on any day in the month of *Kartik* or *Agrahayana*, prior to harvesting. They take vow before these deities that they would offer the goats, pigeons and ducks in case a bountiful crop. Again, after the harvesting is over, they worship the village deities for second time in the month of *Magh* (December-January). At this time they fulfil their vow and worship the deities along with the sacrificial objects promised. After the worship, they take the choicest non-vegetarian food along with *pachai*, an intoxicant.

In addition to all the above any of the deities from amongst Bisara (Mansa) Parmeshwari, Gaheli, Ka'li, Narsinha, Hanuman, and Bagmasan is worshipped as the household deity for the well-being of the family. The worship of the household deity is done somewhat elaborately on the *sankranti* of every month according to the Bengali calendar, *parwa* or first day of *Baisakh*, *sankranti* of *Shravana* and *dol purnima*.

At Tiyarpara, the Tiyar worship the deity Premraja. Perhaps this deity is the same as Premraja of Purnea as reported by Risley (*op. cit.*). At Tiyarpara, however, the Tiyar are not aware of the regional spread of the deity or about any associated legend.

The religious practices of the Tiyar seem to indicate that though traditionally boatmen and fishermen, their religious cycle is now geared more to the needs of the agricultural communities. Actually, some of the family worships as well as the community festivals, such as the *bastu puja* and *sadh* are observed for a bountiful crop. On the other hand, the worships and festivals associated with boating or fishing have receded to the background or actually ceased as mentioned in the preceding account in respect of Mahakal Thakur, who is associated with the fertility of fish. In the villages where investigations have been conducted, the Tiyar did not acknowledge the worship of Pir Badr, Khwajah Khizr, Shah Madar or Khal Kumari mentioned by Risley (*op. cit.*). But as is seen from the preceding account, in certain areas they worship Manik Pir when a muslim *fakir* interacts with a Brahmin priest. But the Manik Pir is associated with the well being of cattle wealth, unlike the pir(s) mentioned by Risley who are regarded as deities having control over water. It seems that there have been changes of symbol to suit the present economy. Thus, it is seen that in the wake of their occupational mobility from fishery to agriculture, they have imbibed the ethos of the agricultural communities in so far as the supernatural is concerned. It may not be out of place to mention here, that, such a transformation has taken place in case of certain other communities, like the Mallah, who have shifted their occupation of boatmen to agriculturists (C.I., 1961, Vol. I, Part B (iv), 1969 : P. 42).

Magic-religious Beliefs and Practices :—In certain areas a few Tiyar also believe in the existence of some evil spirits, known as Brahmadaitya, Shakchunni, Pretyoni, etc. According to them, a premature death or death from an accident inevitably turns the deceased's soul into one of the malignant spirits mentioned above. Incurable disease, which professional physicians fail to diagnose or cure, are sometimes explained as the outcome of the activities or ingress of some of these spirits.

There are two *ojhas* (magicians) at Jabdapata and one at Kochpukur, who are supposed to exercise ghosts or evil spirits.

The office of the magician is not always hereditary. The *ojha* selects a few young Tiyar boys, desirous of undergoing the training of a magician, as his disciples. Eventually, only one or two trainees are retained and the others who do not show promise are dismissed. The remaining one or two successful trainees serve as assistants to the magician, until they specialise in the know-how of gaining mastery over the evil spirits. The magician drives out the evil spirit from the body of a person by uttering some incantations. The Tiyar at Jabdapata claim that the magicians of their village are often called for help by the neighbouring Hindu communities including the Brahmin. There are many Tiyar at Tiyarpara who subscribe to the view that illness is caused by the machinations of evil spirits. A solitary Tiyar in the village specializes as *ojha* for curing diseases. On a dark night, the magician takes a pigeon, smears it with a few marks of vermilion and sets it free in the air, uttering some incantations. It is believed that along with the pigeon the spirit associated with the disease also leaves the body of the ailing person and goes beyond the bounds of the village.

As the magician does not charge any remuneration for his services to the Tiyar of the village, he is respected by all for this honorary service. He earns his livelihood as an agricultural labour. But he often gets the gifts of paddy or rice from the patients after their recovery.

There is a special class of *ojha*, known as *saper ojha*, who specialise in curing snake-bites. The Tiyar still depend on these *ojhas* for curing the cases of snake-bite. Along with most of the people belonging to other caste of the region, they never consult a medical practitioner for the treatment of snake-bite. The *ojha* removes the venom by applying some indigenous herbs and roots on the affected part of the body to the accompaniment of incantations.

Of late, the Tiyar, especially the more enlightened and educated ones, seem to have lost faith in magical practices. Some of them take the help of a magician, only when the medical practitioner gives up the case.

Recreation

It appears that the Tiyar have limited sources of amusement and entertainment. There are hardly any recognised sports and games in the community. The children play minor games, such as hide and seek, in the village alleys and streets along with the children of the other communities, while a few adult males spend their leisure time in playing cards or chess. But the major source of entertainment for them appears to be the seasonal and religious festivals wherein they participate with gay abandon. In

these festivals dance and music is a must for them. They sing and dance to the accompaniment of musical instruments. But they do not seem to have any musical instrument characteristic of their own community nor any song especially composed by them. At Tiyarpara they claim that *dhol* (drum) as an instrument which they have been playing since generations. They manufacture the *dhol* themselves. In other areas they sometimes also play on other varieties of percussion instruments, such as the *khol*.

Apart from the fairs and festivals, during their leisure hours sometimes a group of Tiyar can be heard singing *harinam sankirtan* (devotional songs composed in reverence of Hari), often to the accompaniment of a harmonium and a *dhol*. The songs are mostly composed in Bengali dialect of the area of their settlement. During ceremonial occasions the Tiyar of Tiyarpara usually sing religious songs which are often composed in mixed Hindi and Bengali, locally referred to as *Khotta* language which is actually a separate dialect as discussed in an earlier account.

The radio and cinema are the most popular sources of amusement. The Tiyar visit the nearly urban and semi-urban centre, whenever they can afford to watch a movie. They also like to listen to music, especially film music broadcast, from the All India Radio, Calcutta. But only a few of them possess radio sets. Their largest number was in Jabdapata. In the other villages only a handful of individuals possess them.

Inter-community Relations

As stated earlier, though forming a hamlet of their own the Tiyar live in multi-ethnic villages and are, therefore, in close physical proximity of other communities, including the caste Hindus with whom they interact in diverse situations.

The Tiyar have commensal relations with the communities which are considered at par with them in social status. But inter-caste marriage is disfavoured. The breach of this rule, it is said, evoke the punishment of ex-communication. But it appears that while the community reacts adversely in the case of marriage of a Tiyar with a person belonging to a community lower in status, they have no serious objection to inter-marriage with person belonging to a community enjoying a higher status. As stated elsewhere, a few persons at Kochpukur, whose daughters were married to caste Hindus, were subjected to mild jeers but were not ex-communicated.

A few Tiyar families are converts to Christianity. In fact, most of the Christians residing at Kochpukur are Tiyar converts. According to them they embraced Christianity two or three generations ago. It is said that originally only 2-3 families embraced Christianity but the number of converts swelled during the course

of time as a result of procreations. For all practical purposes they are disowned by Hindu Tiyar who would not have any inter-marital relations with them. Even in the matter of commensality while the Christians would accept food or water from the Hindu Tiyar, the latter do not reciprocate. The same is the case with a few Muslims residing in the village. It is said that while the Muslims accept food and water from the hands of the Tiyar, the latter do not reciprocate. But their ceremonial distance is not always insurmountable. As mentioned in a preceding section, a Muslim *fakir* even plays a role in certain religious worships of the community.

Elsewhere, the affinity of Tiyar with Rajbanshi has been discussed at length. The Tiyar of Kochpukur and Jabdapata completely identify themselves with the Rajbanshi, while those of Gilabari and Tiyarpara deny any relationship with them. In the latter two villages though they are having commensal relations, they do not entertain marital relations with each other.

The social status of Tiyar appears to be uncertain in some places, a fact recognised by Mitra who included them in the group of 'low level castes', who abstain from beef, pork and fowl (*op. cit.*: 21,76). There is little difference of opinion among the earlier writers about their social status in different parts. Risley has stated that in Bihar and Bengal, generally they are reckoned impure. He has also referred to the discriminatory social status among the various strata on the community as, according to him, along the northern bank of Ganga the Nal Tiyar engaged in manufacture of mats of *nal* reed were considered so low that the Tiyar engaged as fishermen repudiated any association with them (Risley, *op. cit.*). According to O'Malley (*op. cit.*), the Tiyar hold a very low rank, their touch being defiling. Similarly, Porter (*op. cit.*) has also held the view that Tiyar is an untouchable caste following the occupations regarded with contempt by Hindu society. Lacey has also echoed the opinion expressed by others and mentioned that they cause pollution by touch even from a certain distance. But at the same time he has stated that they are on the border line of being considered depressed (C. I., 1931, Vol. VII, Pt. I, 1933 : 286). In other words, though of lower status, they are only marginally depressed.

But the field investigation conducted in different parts of West Bengal indicates that, in areas like Tiyarpara, they do not have so low a status as given out by the earlier writers.

Nowhere, not even at Tiyarpara, their touch or physical proximity is considered as defiling or carrying pollution to others. They have free access to all the parts of the village, including the temples or other sacred spots visited by caste Hindus. Similarly, they do not encounter any disability in the matter of utilization

of common water source in the village, used by caste Hindus, including the Brahman. Though according to Mitra (*op. cit.*, 76), they are usually not served by the Dhoba and the Napit from the information gathered from the villages visited, it would appear that on their ceremonial occasions they are almost universally served by these two communities.

During their marriage and religious ceremonies the Tiyar are also in receipt of traditional services from the Brahman priest. But the class of the Brahman who serve them as well as the other depressed communities, like, the Rajbanshi, Pod, Bagdi, etc., are considered degraded and their services are not utilised by caste Hindus. But as hinted elsewhere, the Tiyar of Tiyarpara do not enjoy a status at par with their counterparts in the other villages, and the degraded Brahman serves them only during their marriage ceremonies.

The Tiyar reciprocally accept food and water from those communities which have no objection to accept these items at their hand. These include Tantubaya, Kaibarta and Kumbhkar. But the other neighbouring caste Hindus, like the Brahman and Kayastha, refuse food or water from the Tiyar. However, the latter do not accept food and water from the communities which are ranked below them. Thus, the Tiyar at Jabdapata and Kochpukur do not accept food or water from such neighbouring communities as the Hari, Mochi, Kora, Bagdi, Poundra, Jele, Koch and Bind, Dom, etc. Interestingly, at Gilabari it was observed that the Tiyar who are ranked lower than Teli, do not accept water from the latter while the former accept food as well as water from them.

From the preceding discussion on the social status of the Tiyar it appears that, except Tiyarpara, the Tiyar do not actually have such a low status as is indicated in the earlier accounts on the community. A possibility is that during the course of the last five or six decades they have improved their status to a certain extent. It cannot be said for certain whether this is on account of their identification with Rajbanshi, or shift from the occupation of fishing or boating, regarded as low, to agriculture, which is indicative of better status. A softening of the attitude of the caste Hindus towards the depressed castes or castes of low status in general may also have contributed to their somewhat better status.

Organisation of Social Control, Prestige and Leadership

It would appear that the traditional caste panchayat, which is languishing at present, was once a very powerful institution for social control in the Tiyar society. Though he has made no specific mention of the *panchayat* among the Tiyar of Bengal,

referring to the Tiyar of Bihar, Risley has stated that it (the caste *panchayat*) is ".....a well organised body presided over by a headman (manjhan), whose jurisdiction is supposed to comprise the traditional number of twenty-two villages. Each manjhan has under him a chharidar or stick-bearer, whose business is to procure the attendance of persons summoned to appear before the *panchayat* and generally carry out the orders of the manjhan." (Risley *op. cit.*).

During the field investigation the Tiyar claimed that they had a very strong caste *panchayat* with unquestionable power wielded by its members who used to decide all sorts of issues, such as disputes over the land and property, breach of the caste norms relating to endogamy and commensality, as well as other matters of concern to the Tiyar society. It could also be termed as a politico-religious body, as apart from exercising social control over the members of the community. The traditional *panchayat* also played a significant role in regulating the observance of religious festivals. The main punishment invoked by the *panchayat* in case of violations of the caste norms or other offences was imposition of fines on the guilty person. In serious cases of defiance of the caste norms or the rulings of the *panchayat*, the extreme penalty of ex-communication, dreaded by all, was resorted to. It is said that in the past no one dared to defy the decision of the caste *panchayat* under any circumstances and it was rare that a person moved the court of law for redress of his grievances.

It would seem that the traditional *panchayat* among the Tiyar operated on a three tier system with the village *panchayat* at the base, territorial or *raja panchayat* covering eleven villages at the middle, and finally the *baiserdak*, the *panchayat* covering twenty-two villages, at the top. It would be of some interest to observe here that the operational level of the community *panchayat* over twenty-two vilages is also found among certain other communities, like the Khatik of Uttar Pradesh, whose *panchayat* is referred to as *baessi panchayat* literally, 'dealing with twenty-two' (C. I., 1961, Vol. V, pt. V-A, 1972).

In so far as the villages covered during the field investigation are concerned it was found that in only two of them *viz.*, Jabdapata and Tiyarpara, the caste *panchayat* was still functioning as an organ of social control. While the office bearers of the *panchayat* at Tiyarpara succeed to their office on a hereditary basis those of the *panchayat* at Jabdapata are selected. The *panchayat* at Jabdapata is known as *moral* and is presided over by a person who also goes by the name of the *moral*. But the Tiyar of Tiyarpara refer to him as *bara moral*. The *moral* at Jabdapata is appointed to the post by the village elders on the basis of his wisdom, knowledge and experience in life. He is assisted by one or more assistants,

known as a *chhota* (junior) *moral*, referred to as *koleman* at Tiyarpara. His job is to assist the *bara moral* in deliberating on the issues brought before the *panchayat* and helping him in arriving at a decision during any adjudication. As in the case of the Tiyar of Bihar, referred to in the preceding account, Tiyar of Bengal also have the functionary, known as *chharidar*, to assist the *moral*. He communicates the decisions of the caste *panchayat* to the Tiyar villagers or summons the erring person, against whom a complaint has been lodged, to the sitting of the *panchayat*. However, at Tiyarpara there is no such functionary and the orders or the decision of the caste *panchayat* are conveyed by any person who might be remunerated for his service. The procedure for convening the meeting of the *panchayat* is as follows.

Whenever someone wishes to lodge a complaint with the *panchayat* or *moral*, he deposits a sum of Rs. 1.25 to the *chharidar* to whom complaints is first reported. The *chharidar*, as directed by the *moral*, informs the communitymen in the village about the sitting of the *panchayat* and takes upon himself the task of presenting the accused person in its sittings.

In some cases before formally convening a meeting the *moral* tries to arbitrate in the dispute, failing which the *panchayat* holds its meeting—usually in an open space—where one adult member from each Tiyar household in the village is expected to participate.

The *panchayat* hears the grievances of both the parties and records evidence, verbal or written, if any. The *moral* delivers the judgment after consulting his assistants. The usual amount of fines realised from the guilty person as punishment is generally spent on certain measures being taken for the welfare of the community in general. At Tiyarpara the person who is declared a culprit or guilty is also required to bear the cost of distributing *harial* (rice beer) to the office bearers of the *panchayat* in addition to the fine imposed upon him.

It is said that though at present no organised caste *panchayat*, functions at Gilabari, it was having one in the recent past. But its headman was known as *pramanik*, and was assisted by a *dewan* and a *mukhia*.

Theoretically, Jabdapata is covered by the *raja panchayat*, having eleven villages under its jurisdiction, with properly appointed office bearers. The role of the *raja panchayat* is to deal with cases which are too difficult to be handled by the village *panchayat* or those involving persons belonging to two different villages. As in the case of the village *panchayat*, the headman of the territorial or *raja panchayat* is also known as *raja*, after the name of the *panchayat*. He is assisted by a *mantri* and a *dewan*. The *raja*

as well as the *mantri* are selected from amongst the *moral* of the eleven villages constituting the territorial *panchayat*. The procedure of the working of the *raja panchayat* is also similar to that of the *moral*.

The *baiserdak*, the *panchayat* covering twenty-two villages, was supposed to come into picture in a dispute involving villagers falling in the jurisdiction of two different *raja panchayat*. Its headman was also referred to as *raja* who was either selected from amongst the two constituent *raja panchayat* on the basis of seniority in age and tenure of the office held by him, or succeeded to the office on a hereditary basis, as at Tiyarpara—the two villages being covered by two different *baiserdak*. It is said that in the past such a *baiserdak* functioned at Gilabari also.

At Kochpukur, instead of the *raja panchayat*, covering twenty-two villages, an organisation called *samiti* was reported. It is said that in the past the *samiti* performed the same functions as the *raja panchayat*, but covering thirty to forty villages within a radius of 15—20 kilometres. The *samiti* was having three or four persons, called *patture moral*, as representatives from each village under its jurisdiction. They were called *patture moral* as they communicated with each other through letters.

But, except at Tiyarpara, the *raja panchayat*, *baiserdak*, as well as the *samiti* has become almost defunct. Even the *moral* or village *panchayat* functions in an organised manner in only certain villages, such as Jabdapata and Tiyarpara. It is particularly effective at Tiyarpara where the people belonging to the community still respect its decision. But at Jabdapata the members of the community do not always have complete faith in it. They often move the court of law if they are not happy with the decision of the *panchayat*. Sometimes, particularly the young and educated Tiyar tend to completely ignore it. With the spread of education and frequent interaction with other communities they now tend to depend more and more on the State agency for justice or the court of law.

The statutory *gram panchayat* are functioning at Jabdapata and Gilabari. At Jabdapata, the *gram panchayat* co-exists with the traditional caste *panchayat* without any apparent conflict as the role of each is notionally differentiated in the unit. While, in the matters relating to the development and provision of amenities in the village, like the provision of water supply, improvement of village roads, facility for agriculture and education, etc., they approach the statutory *panchayat*, the matters concerning socio-religious affairs or breach of caste norms are referred to the traditional caste *panchayat*.

At Gilabari, where the *moral* or caste *panchayat* does not function, the Tiyar have two representatives of their community

in the statutory *panchayat* functioning in the village. The statutory *gram panchayat* does not function separately at Kochpukur or Tiyarpara. But the Tiyar from these two villages have a representative each in the *gram panchayat* located at Bargachia and Haripur respectively.

Thus, it is seen that the Tiyar associate themselves with the statutory *gram panchayat* as well as the traditional institution of *caste panchayat*. But it is noteworthy that a few young and enterprising Tiyar at Jabdapata and Kochpukur have taken initiative assuming leadership and come into picture through the institution of statutory *panchayat*. In fact, the *pradhan* of Khasmara *anchal panchayat* was a Tiyar resident of Jabdapata, located in that *anchal*. Similarly, a young matriculate Tiyar of Kochpukur had become a member of the Langalberia *anchal panchayat*. It came to light that the Tiyar in these areas had assumed the leadership on behalf of the backward communities and pioneered their cause. But it is not known whether in the other strongholds of Caste Hindus they were equally effective in championing their cause.

Social Reform and Welfare

In the retrospect it is seen that the Tiyar seem to occupy somewhat better position among the Scheduled Castes of the State. They appear to be politically conscious and have effective voice in the areas of their concentration. Most of the members of the community in the areas visited were aware that their community is included in the list of Scheduled Castes and, therefore, entitled to certain constitutional safeguards as well as other privileges for their welfare. They admitted that they have derived benefits from such measures or schemes as agricultural loans, subsidy for houses, provision of water supply and, particularly, scholarships for pursuing education in schools and colleges. But a common complaint was that the facilities offered to them were inadequate and benefitted a very small section, of their population.

From the preceding account it is noted that though an organisation known as *samiti* was formed for undertaking social reforms in certain areas; no organised reform movement at the state level appears to have taken root in the recent years. A reference has already been made of the religious movement in the community towards the close of the last century, which exhorted the community to give up their traditional occupation and improve their status by performing certain religious rites. As stated earlier, the movement was short lived and unsuccessful. But the movement aimed at recognition as Rajbanshi, started towards the beginning of the twentieth century was effective, particularly in the thirties

during which period, many Tiyar gave up the traditional occupation of fishing and took to agriculture. It is not known whether the recognition as Rajbanshi as such played the main role in improving their status, or it was the actual occupational shift from fishing to agriculture which brought about an improvement in their status. Here the implication of this shift in improving their standard of living is also to be considered. According to the Tiyar informants there has not been perceptible improvement and this has stood in the way of satisfaction of their aspiration for a higher social status.

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ANNEXURE

Framework for Ethnographic Study

I. *Name, Identity, Origin and History*

1. Name; synonym; sub-caste/sub-tribe as in President's Order and is in other published sources such as census reports, monographs, etc., grouping with other castes and tribes during various censuses. Affinity with other castes and tribes according to recognised authorities.
2. Etymological significance of the name; names by which the community is referred to by (a) others and (b) itself.
3. Identification of the community by occupation or any other way of life.
4. Myths and legends connected with the origin and history of the community and its segments; historical references and popular beliefs about history and migration of the community.

II. *Distribution and Population Trend*

1. Area where found; population and concentration in the State and outside; physical aspects of the areas of concentration.
2. Numerical strength in 1961 and population variations during 1901—1961; sex ratio; age-groups and rural urban distribution in 1961.

III. *Physical Characteristics*

1. Racial stock; appearance and affinity with other known communities.

IV. *Family, Clan, Kinship and other Analogous Divisions*

1. Family; size (observed and published), types, residence after marriage, descent, lineage and its economic and religious function and inheritance.
2. Clan/*gotra* and sub-clans; names, etymological meaning, clustering of clans, belief and mythology about origin, status among clans, clan and regulation of marriage (preference and prohibition), occupation and clan, clan and rituals, clan and food (restrictions, prescriptions, etc.).

3. Others : Phratry, Duel organisation, like moieties, etc., in 2 above.
- V. *Dwelling, Dress, Food, Ornaments and Other Material Objects Distinctive of the Community*
1. Settlement; village site, location, settlement pattern, (agglomerated, nucleated, dispersed, sprinkled, isolated, amprophous, star-shaped, horsehoc-shaped, linear, rectangular, circular or ring-shaped, etc.) and variations; regional pattern *vis-a-vis* pattern of the community.
 2. Neighbourhood pattern on the basis of religion, castes (Caste Hindus, untouchables) and tribes, etc., with segregations, if any, and the basis thereof.
 3. Dwelling unit; compound, entrance, source of water, the use of different parts of the house (latrine, cattleshed, isolation huts etc.); shape (square, round, irregular, etc.); storeys; nature of floor, plinth, wall, roofing, thatching; ventilations and doors; material used; decorations and embellishments; temporary structures.
 4. Dress; including head gear and foot wear used coordinarily, on ceremonial occasions and special occasions, sex-wise and according to majority or minority; dress of priests and office bearers; variations.
 5. Ornaments; use; material used; from whom obtained; variations according to sex and age.
 6. Personal decoration: tattooing; mutilation (chipping of teeth, etc.); hair cutting; how done, purpose, attitude and variations according to sex and age.
 7. Food and drink: materials (staple and other), prescriptions and prohibitions, fuel, utensils, and mode of preparation; practices connected with serving and taking of food; preservation of food and rituals, if any.
 8. Equipments connected with economic pursuits, religion and ritual; how procured; material used, construction, manipulation and purpose.
 9. Other household equipments. As above.
 10. Equipments connected with recording of time, space and weight and their methods of use. As above.
- VI. *Environmental Sanitation, Hygienic Habits, Disease and Treatment*
1. Environmental sanitation : settlement, disposal of night soil, garbage, etc.
 2. Hygienic habits : cleanliness of body, teeth, dress, houses, utensils, etc.

3. Diseases : incidence; local names; interpretation of the causes; symptoms; diagnoses and cure-persons and methods involved.
4. Modern systems of medicines and attitude of the community towards it.

VII. *Language and Education*

1. Ancestral Language : classification according to Grierson, persistence of ancestral language and literature.
2. Mother tongue : classification according to Grierson; biligualism and multi-lingualism, regional language.
3. Information collected during 1961 on language and literature.
4. Education and literacy : traditional and modern attitude information collected during 1961—literacy and levels of education.

VIII. *Economic Life*

1. Economic resources : land, community land, individual ownership and types of land possessed and land utilised.
2. Forest wealth : flora and fauna, nature and extent of right in the forest, forest utilization.
3. Fishery, Livestock and others.
4. Working force : sex-wise, urban and rural variations comparison of the same with the region.
5. Non-workers.
6. Industrial classifications: details as collected in the field and comparison with that of the 1961 Census figures; traditional occupation and changes in the pattern; main and subsidiary occupations.
7. Forced labour, bonded labour, patron-client relationship (Jajmani), mode of payment.
8. Seasonal migration connected with occupation : recruitment, formation of working groups.
9. Nomadic movement : cycle and occupational pattern.
10. Shifting cultivation : method, implements and equipments, produce, participation, cycle of rotation, measure to regulate shifting cultivation and its impact.
11. Terrace cultivation; as above.
12. Income and expenditure : sources of income, extent, expenditure on food, clothing, house, education, social functions and others.
13. Other aspects of economic life.

IX. Life Cycle

A. Birth

1. Beliefs and practices connected with conception, barrenness, still birth, miscarriage, abortion, child death, regulation of sex, etc.
2. Pre-natal and natal practices : residence, diet, work, taboos, etc., delivery place, assistance, equipments used in delivery, position during delivery, severance of umbilical cord (who does and how done), disposal of placenta.
3. Post-natal practices; confinement and segregation, ceremonial pollution, diet for mother and child, rituals.
4. Protection and care of child and training.
5. Attitude towards birth of child, preference about sex, preference about number, segregation of sex, etc.

B. Initiation

1. Initiation ceremony; descriptions.
2. Pre-marital sex relations within the community, outside the community, sanctions and taboos.

C. Marriage

1. Age at marriage for both sex : prohibited degrees of relationship, preferences, widow remarriage (preferences and taboos).
2. Civil status and social status.
3. Types of marriage; monogamy, polygamy (Polyandry and Polygony).
4. Selection of spouse: qualities valued (for bride and groom) mode of selection, procedure.
5. Modes of acquiring mate: by negotiation, force, intrusion, elopement, etc.
6. Terms of settlement : payment of bride price, dowry, service, exchange, adoption, etc.
7. Ceremonies connected with marriage : details including who presides over the marriage and services of functional castes.
8. Statistical data as per 1961 Census.
9. Divorce : reasons and procedure.

D. Death

1. Concept about death, measures to ensure future well being of the soul, measures to avert harm by the spirits.

2. Methods of disposal : burial, cremation, exposure, floating on water, etc.
3. Preparations for disposal of dead, informing friends and relatives, treatment of the dead body, digging of pit etc. for disposal ; how carried, who carry, who accompany, place of disposal, methods of disposal; norms and taboos.
4. Ceremonies connected with disposal.
5. Death rites : details.
6. Monuments : tombs, megaliths, etc.
7. Pollution : duration, restrictions in work, food, dress, shaving, hair cropping, sex life, etc., removal of pollution.
8. Mourning : mourners and duration.

X. *Religion*

1. Deities : supreme deity, benevolent deities, malevolent spirits, presiding deities of village and other aspects of life including occupation, clans, *gotras*, etc.
2. Place of the deities in the regional pattern and Brahmanical and other traditions.
3. Rituals and concepts associated with the pantheon.
4. Spots associated with the deities, pilgrim centres and methods of worship.
5. Religious functionaries.
6. Calendar of festivals and their observance.
7. Concept of soul : hell, heaven, rebirth, transmigration of soul, etc.
8. Sects and denominations : name, distribution, beliefs and practices, etc.
9. Statistical information.

XI. *Leisure, Recreation and Child Play*

1. Use of leisure time; for males, females, children and adult; seasonal variation in leisure time.
2. Recreations—their mode and extent, for males, females and children.
3. Leisure and recreation with reference to work.

XII. Relation among different Segments of the Community. Recognised segments—name, basis (territorial, ceremonial, social, prestige, religion, sect, education, age, etc.). Inter-relationship among various segments; status of the segments, status of women.

XIII. *Inter-community Relationship*

1. Ceremonial relationship : service by Brahmins, traditional service by castes like barbers, washermen, etc.
2. Pollution by touch or proximity to high caste Hindus, use of well, admission to temple.
3. Secular relationship : model for other communities; dominance due to economic resources, political status, social status, etc.
4. Bridge role, buffer role, alliance and antagonism of the community.

XIV. *Structure of Social Control, Prestige and Leadership*

1. Social control : levels of social control, community level, regional level, heredity, special functionaries, etc., social control by other agencies.
2. Mode of acquiring offices.
3. Control exercised by traditionally recognised leaders, functionaries of statutory bodies of the region, powerful individuals belonging to the community, etc., at the regional level and local level.
4. Relationship between spheres of social control and agencies of social control.
5. Leadership : for social change, for technological change, for political action and for other organised activities at the community level, regional level and local level.
6. Social prestige : method of gaining social prestige (by performing ritual, merit of feast, associating with historical association, etc.) symbols of social prestige.

XV. *Social Reform and Welfare*

1. Social reform movements : intensity; reasons (for raising social status, establishing traditional norms, for westernisation, etc.), history and import of the movements.
2. Social welfare : agency, religious organisation, community as a whole, Govt. official and non-official, role of the social welfare measures and impact.

XVI. *References Cited and Other Bibliography*