LOOKING-FOR-MONEY: SIMPLE COMMODITY PRODUCTION
IN THE ECONOMY OF THE TAPAH SEMAI OF MALAYSIA

BY

ALBERTO G. GOMES

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Text O.K.
Except where otherwise acknowledged, this thesis describes my own research and analysis.

Alberto G. Gomes
Abstract

This thesis examines the nature of the articulation of the economy of the Tapah Semai, a Malaysian aboriginal (Orang Asli) group, with the wider Malaysian economy. Its primary aim is to document the extent of the market linkages to demonstrate that the prevailing image of the people as subsistence farmers with limited involvement in the market economy is misleading. This view is portrayed in the literature and is held by the Malaysian government which bases its policies in respect to Semai (and other Orang Asli) upon it. On the basis of an indepth village study and a regional socio-economic survey covering all the Semai villages in the Tapah region, it is demonstrated that the Tapah Semai are now deeply enmeshed in simple commodity production as well as commodity consumption.

In a detailed examination of how a sample of six households in the study village, Sempak, allocated their time to production, it is demonstrated that the people spent treble the time on commodity production, such as fruit collecting, forest product gathering and rubber tapping, than they spent on subsistence production such as swiddening, fishing and hunting. It appears that the villagers allocated more time to commodity production because it was more efficient and productive than subsistence production. For the sample households in Sempak, it was found that in terms of imputed market value, subsistence production produced only one eighth the value of a equal amount of time spent in commodity production. As a result of its low productivity relative to commodity production, subsistence production is in decline.
It appears that the villagers’ current focus on commodity production is also linked to their ever increasing desire and dependence on market goods. These market relations are underwritten by a pervasive system of credit and indebtedness which is necessary for the maintenance of regular trading relations with several middlemen. A detailed examination of the expenditure of the sample households indicates that about half of their total expenditure was on foodstuff which formed almost all of their food consumption.

The commoditisation of the Semai economy is seen to have engendered several changes in intravillage social relations such as the development of private property, the ascendancy of appropriative practices, the appearance of intravillage entrepreneurial enterprises, the commodification and decline in sharing and labour cooperation, all of which are creating incipient social differentiation.

This thesis ends with a discussion of the future of the Tapah Semai as simple commodity producers. Although the Semai economy is quite resilient, given its broad nature and flexibility, its continued viability is dependent upon several factors beyond the people’s control. The most crucial factor is legal tenure to an adequate land area. However unless the Malaysian government recognises the current nature of the Tapah Semai economy, the future of simple commodity production among the Tapah Semai is precarious.
Preface

The Orang Asli are not well known to many Malaysians. Those who do know a little about these peoples generally have the wrong impression of them. They subscribe to the image of the Orang Asli as "jungle dwellers", "backward", and "naive" which is how the Orang Asli are usually portrayed in the school textbooks and the local newspapers. I too had such a view of the Orang Asli until I met a group of them in 1975.

During my childhood, I also gained the impression of the Orang Asli as mysterious and exotic from the stories my father, the late Joao Antonio Gomes, had narrated about his numerous encounters with the "sakai" in his travels across Perak in the pre-war era. Being a music composer, he translated his fascination of these people into a melodic musical piece which he named "The Sakai Rhythm". This was based upon his mental record of the "calls" of the Semai in their communication with each other and the rich background sounds of the forest. Hence, the Orang Asli have always been presented to me as "naive", "backward", "exotic" and fairy-tale like characters in my childhood days.

In 1975, I had my first opportunity to meet the Orang Asli. I was part of a group of undergraduates sent to a Semang resettlement in Kelantan for fieldwork. This fieldtrip was organised by Dr Terry Rambo to whom I am very grateful for introducing me to Orang Asli research. In the following year, I carried out a month's field research among the same group of Semang for my honour's thesis which was supervised by Dr Terry Rambo. For my
masters (1977-1979) I conducted field research on the Semang and the Temuan. During this period too, I visited more than 20 Orang Asli villages throughout the Peninsula as supervisor of the week-long fieldtrips for undergraduates in the Department of Anthropology and Sociology, University of Malaya. From these field research experiences, my image of the Orang Asli changed radically; they no longer seemed to me as fairy-tale characters but as real people with pressing problems among which was poverty and economic development. This present study gained its stimulus from my desire to document that the prevailing image of the Orang Asli is currently misleading for a large section of the population.

Like the Tapah Semai, upon whom this study is based, who frequently take on debts being a distinctive aspect of their economy, I have incurred debts with many people in carrying out this research. But unlike the Semai who usually clear their debts at the end of each fruit season, I might never be able to repay mine; I can only express my thanks here to my "creditors".

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My research on the Tapah Semai would not have been possible without the cooperation and assistance of the villagers, particularly the people from "Sempak". It is rather unfortunate that it would reveal their identities if I were to mention them here. I only hope that this thesis would serve them well and repay at least a small part of my enormous debt with them. I should also like to thank Bah Akeh (field officer of the Tapah JOA office), Bah Toneh (Anthony Williams-Hunt) and Colin Nicholas for their assistance and companionship on numerous occasions during my field residence. To the staff of the Jabatan Orang Asli, particularly Dr Baharon Azhar (the Director-general), Mr Mohd. Tap, Mr Jailani and Mr Redwan, I wish to express my gratitude for their assistance and support. I would also like to thank my colleagues at the Department of Anthropology and Sociology especially Dr Rokiah Talib, Ms Mazidah Zakaria and Dr Zainal Kling (Head of Department) for their support and the University of Malaya for granting me study leave to undertake this research.

My family and parents-in-law have been a constant source of encouragement and support especially when I was in the hospital with severe malaria. To them I wish to extend my heartfelt thanks. It is unfortunate that my father has not lived long enough to see me complete this thesis. He taught me the virtues of determination, diligence, and dedication which served well in my accomplishment of this research.

To several of my friends and relatives who have helped me in some way or the other, I wish to express my appreciation. In particular, I should like to thank Hui Weng Tat who has, through his wizardry with the computer, helped me enormously in the production of the graphs and pie-charts; Tan Kien Seng (my brother-in-law) who used his cartographic skills to good measure in drawing the maps; Tan Kien Eng (another brother-in-law) for
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Finally, I wish to thank my wife, Karen, who has relentlessly typed the entire draft at mostly odd hours (in between feeding our newborn daughter) and provided me with the encouragement, warm support and love particularly during the many depressing moments I went through whilst undertaking this research. I am also grateful for her and my son's patience and perseverance.
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Chapter 1

Introduction

This thesis concerns the present day economy of the Semai, a Malaysian aboriginal (Orang Asli) group. On the basis of an indepth village study and a regional socio-economic survey, it examines the nature of the articulation of the Tapah Semai economy with the wider Malaysian economy.

A common finding in studies of the economies of encapsulated minorities is the persistence or retention of noncapitalist forms of production despite penetration by capitalism. Among the varied forms of noncapitalist production is simple commodity production which, in some cases, is maintained by capitalism (or capitalists) and in others, developed in response to mercantile capitalism. Within the last ten years considerable attention has been paid to simple commodity production in both theoretical and ethnographic terms. Much of this concern has been with the role of such production in the incorporation of peasant communities in wider market-oriented economies. Among some of the issues raised as a consequence of this concern are the specificities of simple commodity production, its persistence and continuity and the absence of social differentiation among simple commodity producers. Many of these issues are however as yet unresolved.

Although there is now an extensive literature on the Orang Asli in general and the Semai in particular, little attention has been given to the economy of these people. Most of the studies have been devoted to such cultural aspects
as language and religion and partly as a result of this, the Semai have been erroneously portrayed as subsistence oriented people with limited involvement in the market economy. Another factor contributing to this image is the fact that the best known works on the Semai are from prior to the Second World War when it more accurately reflected the situation. It is thus not surprising that this prevailing view is misleading in respect to contemporary Semai given the developments and economic changes that have occurred in the past few decades.

This misconception also stems from the treatment of the Orang Asli in these anthropological studies as more or less closed societies. Although there is some mention of trade relations and State influences, the analyses focused on intravillage social relations and generally ignored the relations of the communities with the wider society and the structural impact of these linkages.

The Malaysian Government also subscribes to this prevailing view. While it is possible that the Government's view has been influenced by the existing anthropological literature, it arises more directly from its espousal of the prevailing modernisation model of change which represents the Semai and other Orang Asli as subsistence oriented, "backward" and "traditional" people in need of modernisation through the diffusion of new technology, "modern" values and market orientation. This model is dualistic, envisioning two sectors - the modern and the backward - and focuses on the attributes of these sectors and directives for change, while ignoring the structural relations that exist within and between sectors. This present study is aimed at correcting this image of the Semai.
1.1. Semai, Trade and Market Relations

Little is known about the history of the Malay Peninsula prior to 1400 A.D. A number of historians, notably Lamb (1964), Wang (1958), Wheatley (1961) and Wolters (1967) have reconstructed the history of this region before 1400 on the basis of several Indian, Chinese and Arab sources which were mostly traveloques. These sources, as might be expected, vary in the degree of reliability and some are inconclusive and speculative. Nevertheless, they are the only material available for a historical reconstruction since archaeological evidence is scanty and inconclusive particularly in linking up with the present day Malayan inhabitants.

It is, however, certain that the Malay Peninsula was tied into the vast network of Indian-Arabic and Chinese maritime trade that dominated Southeast Asian waters, politics, religion, and economics until the 16th century A.D. As Lamb (1964:107) writes about this trade along the Straits of Melaka (Malacca):

The commerce passing through the Straits, as indeed that on the overland bypasses, clearly was made up of two distinct elements. On the one hand, there was the long distance through-traffic: the carrying, for example, of Chinese manufactured goods, silks and, by the seventh or eighth centuries A.D., ceramics for the great markets of the Middle East. On the other hand there was a trade with the interior peoples, in which eastern and western manufactures were exchanged for local produce.

The "local produce" was mainly forest products such as rattans, bamboos, damars, gharu wood, ivory, rhino horns and bee's wax\(^1\). It appears from the historical sources that this trade in forest products existed at least since the first millennium A.D.

There is good reason to assume that the ancestors of present day Orang

\(^1\)See Dunn (1975:111-112) for a detailed list of forest product exports from the Malay Peninsula during this era.
Asli were the primary suppliers of these products. As Dunn (1975:108) argues:

The forest aboriginals were, until the 19th century, the only people available to exploit most of Malaya's forest land. As forest-adapted people... they were also the only people armed with the necessary experience and knowledge to seek out and wisely exploit the resources of their forest subsistence zones.

However, it is likely that most of this trading was done by aboriginals residing close to the trading ports along the coasts while those in the interior were either not involved or only had peripheral involvement.

As Dunn (1975) speculates, the forest product trade spanning the period between the 5th and 14th centuries must have been small but steady and the mode of exchange was barter. It seems that the trade intensified in the 15th century following the growth of Melaka (Malacca) as a primary trading centre in the region. It has been suggested by Wheatley (1961:309) that, as trade flourished, an internal system of trading evolved where goods passed through several trading points in the Malay Peninsula before reaching Melaka where these items were traded to Indian, Arab and Chinese merchants. The flourishing trade owed much of its vigour to an increased demand in Europe for the "exotic" products of the East ("spice islands"). Owing to the increased demand, it is likely that about this time the remote aborigines began to be drawn into the trade.

By late 15th century, Portuguese merchants journeyed to the East to buy these products directly from the local traders and by 1511 they conquered Melaka and consolidated their hegemony over the "spice islands". The Portuguese were followed a century later by the Dutch and later the English.

2See Benjamin (n.d.) for a detailed discussion of the Malayan culture-history which is based on an analysis of linguistic, archaeological and ethnographic evidence.
The Europeans dominated and controlled the trade during the 16th to 19th century but it is suggested that there was little change in the trading system:

The Europeans, of course, added new political elements, and they brought with them their technology; but they did not create a fundamental change in the basic factors of trade, population and products (Lamb, 1964:112).

There is, however, no record of precisely how this trading system functioned. Nonetheless, a reconstruction drawing substantially from Bronson (1977) who proposed a speculative model of the trading system in Southeast Asia prior to the 15th century and the descriptions of the trading system as existed in the 19th century and early 20th century (see Skeat and Blagden 1906 and H.D. Noone 1936) will be suggested. The trading system that evolved about the 15th century and possibly earlier appears to have remained relatively unchanged until the mid 19th century.

Given that the interfluvial areas of the drainage basins of the Malay Peninsula are mostly inaccessible forests and mountains, the trafficking of goods is likely to have been confined to water routes. The internal trading network would probably be congruent with the dendritic pattern formed by the main river and its tributaries. Figure 1.1 adapted from Bronson (1977) illustrates this system. A would be a trading centre at the river mouth where merchant vessels would stop to trade. It would most likely be a typical Malay village with the majority of the villagers engaging in wet rice cultivation (sawah), fishing and possibly tin mining especially in Perak, while a few would serve as what Dunn (1975) calls "tertiary" traders who were usually village leaders or people from the ruling class. Their strategic location gave them control over the whole trading network of the river basin.

B and C would be what Bronson (1977) labelled as second- and third-order
trading centres located upstream and at the confluence (kuala) of primary and secondary rivers. These centres would be smaller Malay villages and settlements of Orang Asli who were probably quite Malayised and possibly even Islamised. These villagers would be subordinates (rakyat) of the leader (penghulu)\(^3\) or ruler (raja) residing in A. As Bronson (1977:45) notes:

B- and C-level centers will sometimes by (sic) administered by or even colonized from A; they may well be bound to A through instruments of indirect rule, such as oaths of fealty, regular tribute, and assertions by A of rights to select or confirm local leaders.

As in A, people in B and C would be sedentary rice cultivators who may also engage in swiddening, fishing, hunting and a few would also be involved in the forest product trade as "secondary" traders. These traders would have relied on the forest dwelling aborigines (D) for the forest produce which they would have bartered with goods such as ironware, salt, tobacco and cloth which the aborigines did not make.

The aboriginal settlements (D) would have been small, remote and dispersed. This settlement pattern was probably partly in response to Malay slave raiding on aboriginal populations\(^4\). For this reason, the aborigines would have desired minimal contact with Malays who might turn out to be slave hunters. This xenophobia could have resulted in the trade being intermittent and may have stimulated the practice of "silent trade". Skeat and Blagden (1906:229) describes this practice as reported among the Perak Semai in the 19th century by De la Croix:

The wild Sakai [Semai] of the Perak Hills (Sakai Bukit) in trading with the Malays always either employ a "tame" Sakai as their intermediary, or else confine themselves to depositing their jungle products on the banks of the rivers at times and in places which are

\(^3\)Significantly, the word penghulu literally means "controller of the interior"

\(^4\)See Kirk Endicott (1983) for a detailed discussion of the effects of slave raiding on the aborigines.
tacitly understood. They then withdraw, returning some time later to fetch the articles which the Malays offer them in exchange.

In the 1800s, there was unprecedented scholarly attention given to the Orang Asli. Much of the literature published prior to 1870s is difficult to interpret given the writers confusion over ethnic and place names. Nonetheless, they provide useful insights into the way Orang Asli lived during the 19th century.

In a paper published in 1850, John Anderson, Colonial Secretary to the Penang government wrote:

They [Perak Sakai] live by hunting chiefly, but as before mentioned they cultivate the soil in a rude and partial manner. The seed is cast into holes made by a sharp stake. The only arms they appear to have, are sharpened poles of bambu, and the blow-pipe and poisoned arrow...(1850:429)

Several years later, Hale (1886) published a paper describing the Semai economy in greater detail on the basis of information he gathered whilst traveling in the Ulu Kinta district (which is adjacent to Batang Padang). He observed that the Semai lived in relative seclusion:

The Sakai are essentially landsmen; living up here as they do in the mountains, and near the sources of the rivers where it is quite impossible to navigate them...(Hale 1886:286)

His description of the economy was focussed on the hunting and fishing technology of the people and gave only little attention to trade of which he notes:

It must be understood that the Sakais whom I visited have long been in communication with the Malays, who live only a few days' journey away, and can most of them talk the Malay language; besides which they have procured a great deal of property from the Malays, such as wood-cutting tools, sarongs, cooking utensils (Hale 1886:288).

He, however, found that money was not used in the trading and implied that the Semai were naive in barter exchange:
Money is as yet almost unknown; in fact, at one house I was most innocently offered a necklace containing amongst other precious things, such as monkey's teeth, snails' shells, brass rings, monkeys' hair in tufts, and strings of black and white seeds, nearly $2.00 in small silver and copper coins, all of which the owner was anxious to exchange for one string of glass beads, value ten cents, and a small tobacco box with a mirror on the lid, value four cents more (Hale 1886:287).

In 1888, Wray, in his expedition in the Batang Padang region also observed trading between Semai and Malays. As he informs Skeat and Blagden (1906):

...there seems to have been a certain amount of intercourse kept up between the two races in the shape of a traffic in jungle produce and tin ore, on the one part, and knives, axes, cooking-pots, salt, cloth, etc, on the other (1906:528).

These writings make it clear that trading was a significant activity among the Semai and the mode of exchange was barter. But they imply that this activity was subsidiary and the people were engaged primarily in "unsophisticated" cultivation, hunting and fishing.

This image is also portrayed in the works of Annandale and Robinson (1903), and Cerruti (1908). In their anthropological and zoological expedition to the Malay Peninsula, Annandale and Robinson (1903) undertook thorough and systematic investigations on the Batang Padang Semai ("Mai Darat of Batang Padang") among others. With respect to the economy, they concentrated on describing the various subsistence activities and only mentioned trading in passing. It is clear that the people did engage in trading at the time since, as the authors themselves noted, they used metal earrings and household implements and utensils that were not locally manufactured but traded from the Malays (1903:34,40). Furthermore the writers mentioned that the people reared poultry to sell to Chinese pedlars and townfolks and indirectly mentioned forest product trading when they were describing Semai-Chinese relations:
Chinamen, on the other hand, recognize that it is more profitable to be on good terms with the Sakais, and, therefore, treat them with some appearance of generosity, obtaining in return good bargains in the way of poultry, jungle produce, and tin (Annandale and Robinson 1903:48).

Cerruti had a more intimate knowledge of the Batang Padang Semai having lived with them for several years. Because of his knowledge, he was officially appointed the first Superintendent of the Perak Sakais in 1901 with the primary role as liaison officer. He published a book entitled My Friends the Savages in 1908 about his experiences with the Semai. In a paper published four years earlier, Cerruti summed up the economy of the Batang Padang Semai at the turn of the century as follows:

The Sakais are essentially nomadic, and clear only very limited areas in the hill forests for cultivation; of rice culture they know little, for corn or maize and the Sikoi, sweet potatoes, and tapioca, are their principal crops. The most primitive of the Sakais still subsist by the chase, using the Sumpitan, or blow-gun, and poisoned darts to kill wild animals and birds (Cerruti 1904:117).

In respect to trade, Cerruti wrote in his book that the people were ignorant of trading and money. In fact, he claimed that he had initiated the trading of forest products among the people:

There were extensive woods of rattan, and other magnificent reeds which are called in England Indian and Malacca cane; there was resin oozing copiously from the trunks of the trees...I began gently to make my Sakais comprehend how much I should like to gather these products and transport them to where I might exchange them for other articles that we were without. It was of no use to speak to them of money because they had not the smallest idea of what it meant. At first they responded roughly that they did not care anything at all about the matter...I began to distribute gifts, especially tobacco, freely and frequently amongst them, only mentioning my wish occasionally, as if by chance. And my prodigality had its reward. One day I saw them returning from the forest abundantly laden with the products I wanted. It was a good beginning and was followed by a constant supply (Cerruti 1908:43).

Given that forest product trading had existed for several centuries in the
Malay Peninsula, there is every reason to doubt Cerruti’s claims. It might be argued that the people with whom Cerruti traded may not have participated in the long standing trade. This is, however, hard to accept given early reports and evidence of a well established trading system among the Semai in the earlier literature (especially Hale 1886, Skeat and Blagden 1906, Annandale and Robinson 1903).

None of the early commentators, however, described the trading system in the Batang Padang or Tapah region as Logan had done for the Jakun in Johore (see Figure 2.1). However it seems likely that the trading system among the Tapah Semai in the 19th century would have been similar to the one that Logan described for the Jakun in the 1850s which was summarised by Skeat and Blagden (1906:236):

The Malayan Penghulu, Jinang, or other headman in each river-district was also the head of the monopoly of trade with the Jakun. Hence traders entering the river most commonly visited him, and he either supplied them from his own store, or purchased what they required from the riverain Malays, or allowed them to do so themselves. This system was enforced with more or less rigour, according to the character of the Penghulu, but traffic was always to a certain extent carried on without his intervention, though strangers were absolutely prohibited from trading with the Jakun direct... The Malays settled on the rivers leading into the country of the Jakun might be divided into three classes: (1) the Penghulu and his relatives and dependents; (2) the Johor Malays (who frequently belonged to Telok Blanga, and enjoyed a certain consideration and prestige owing to their means and their Singapore connexion); and (3) miscellaneous settlers who did not possess these advantages. The trade with the Jakun was chiefly in the hands of the first and second classes, who acted in concert. The prices at which purchasable articles were to be valued was from time to time regulated by the Penghulu, who in this, as in all other matters, consulted the principal men of the river. The Penghulu next conferred with the Jakun chiefs or Batins, and so managed the discussion as to carry the point already agreed upon.

The early 19th century saw the expansion of forest product trade with China. A growing number of Chinese traders arrived at Singapore, which by this time had become the main entrepot of the Malay archipelago, to obtain
products such as camphor, beeswax, forest resins, and so on. As to the effects of this growth in trade on Orang Asli, Andaya and Andaya (1982:133) note:

the demands of the China market encouraged the gathering of local products and closer co-operation between the collector and middleman. During a trip to Pahang Munshi Abdullah in 1838 saw Jakun not only bringing resins, rattans and aromatic wood to trade with Malays but also working in Malay gold mines. In an effort to tap reserves of manpower, Malay rulers may have encouraged orang asli headmen to associate more closely with Malay government. In 1844, for example, Bendahara Ali of Pahang appointed a headman as his representative over all orang asli in the Endau River area in southern Pahang, while Temenggung Ibrahim of Johor posted agents at numerous aboriginal settlements to supervise forest collection.

Concomitant to this expansion in Chinese demand was the increased European demand for certain forest products particularly gutta pecha, a rubber-like forest resin that was mainly used in the manufacture of underwater cables. With the rising profits in Singapore for these products, there was a growing concern among Malay middlemen who bartered with the Orang Asli to strengthen their monopolistic control over the Orang Asli producers.

During this period, there were also several political, social and economic developments in the Malay Peninsula that eventually destroyed the existing Malay-Orang Asli trading network. From the beginning of the 19th century, the British gradually extended their hegemony in the Malay Peninsula and by the end of the century they had established colonial rule over much of the area. The imposition of colonial rule was accompanied by relative political stability and a favourable economic climate. The colonial administration induced several changes in the social set-up of 19th century Malaya. Among these was the official abolition of slavery in the 1870s, although it persisted in some parts for another two or three decades. In respect of the Orang Asli, abolishing this practice made them more confident in residing close to
Malay settlements which led many of them to move from their remote areas to more accessible locations. As a result they came into increasing contact with more non-aboriginals many of whom were also interested in trading with them. The Malay middlemen, thus, found it difficult to maintain their monopolistic control.

The rapid economic development particularly in tin mining and commercial agricultural plantations necessitated the establishment of an infrastructure, especially a communications system. From the 1880s to the 1930s there was spate of road and railway construction which opened up the country side and facilitated peopling of the area mostly by Chinese, Indonesian Malay and Indian immigrants who had been arriving in growing numbers since the 1800s. As a result of the improved communications, Orang Asli were able to bypass the Malay middlemen at the river mouths to trade directly with Chinese traders elsewhere. As Wray noted to Skeat and Blagden (1906:529) about the Semai at the turn of the century:

Those of Batang Padang have lately taken to going by railway to Telok Anson to sell rattans, dammar, and other jungle products at better prices than they could get from the up-country Malays.

While the improved communications had stimulated the change in the Orang Asli trading set-up, the economic transformation at the turn of the century had indirectly affected the forest product trade. The development of commercial agriculture, particularly rubber (*Hevea brasiliensis*) plantations and the tin industry occurred at the expense of forest product trade which became less important for the Malayan economy. Furthermore, with the decline in the trade to China and India the demand for forest products was further dampered. It seems that many Semai villagers during this period started to grow rubber and fruit trees as cash crops and engage in wage labour. In a survey carried out in 1936, H.D. Noone (1936:4) found that:
Many tribes indulge in external trade, washing tin and tapping jelutong, whilst most groups collect rattans for sale. Some earn salaries as elephant drivers, others as labourers for felling on estates, whilst on Cameron Highlands some have settled down to permanent occupation on one estate.

By this time the Tapah and Cameron Highlands Semai were regarded as a reliable and cheap source of estate labour as a Tea estate manager had indicated to H.D. Noone:

> Had it not been for the good work done by the "Orang Bukit" [Semai] Blue Valley Estate would not have been opened up so quickly and cheaply. I had three hundred or more in gangs: an alternative to chinese labour on the Highlands with its high prices (1936:50).

It is, thus, clear that the process of commoditisation (and monetisation) of the economy of most Tapah Semai villages was well underway by the 1930s. They were as H.D. Noone (1939) found:

> in a stage of transition owing to fairly protracted culture contact. They live close to mining areas and rubber estates, or on the edge of Forest or Game Reserves.

It was basically a transition into a market-oriented economy; a transition from a 'natural economy' where production of use-values was dominant to one subsumed in the circuit of capital.

The process of commoditisation of the Semai economy was interrupted during the Japanese Occupation (1942-45) and the communist insurgency (1948-1960). Many Semai who were afraid of meeting up with Japanese soldiers fled into remote areas where they remained for most of the communist insurgency period. In the 1950s some were forced into resettlements that were closely guarded to prevent them from falling under communist influence. Nevertheless, at the height of the insurgency period, Williams-Hunt (1952) found that several Semai villages were dependent on rubber and fruit plantations for cash income but were still actively involved in swidden cultivation.
It seems certain that the process of Semai market integration has accelerated with the rapid rural development since independence (Merdeka) in 1957. There is, however, no indication of the extent of Semai involvement in the market economy during the 1960s and 1970s. Dentan who carried out extensive field research with the Semai in 1962-3 and who was partly responsible for the fact that the Semai are possibly the most widely known Orang Asli group, portrayed the people as subsistence oriented farmers with limited involvement in the market economy. This view prevails in the works of subsequent researchers such as Fix (1971,1977) and Clayton Robarchek (1977) although they do indicate that there had been "changes" in some Semai villages. Fix, for instance, writes:

Currently, several villages no longer have enough land remaining to practice swidden cultivation and depend almost entirely on cash received from rubber holdings for subsistence (Fix 1977:10).

And Clayton Robarchek (1977) who had worked with Tapah Semai asserts:

A major consequence of these developments [rubber planting and JOA sponsored economic development projects], especially in the west where transportation is relatively good, has been a decreasing reliance on subsistence gardening in favor of wage labor, the cultivation of rubber, the gathering and sale of various forest products, most notably rattan and bamboo, and the expansion of aboriculture...(1977:10)

Upon this prevailing view Carey (1976), who was the former Director-General of the Malaysian Department of Aboriginal Affairs, generalised that the Senoi "tribes" (which includes the Semai) are "shifting cultivators" (p177) and are "largely independent from an economic point of view" (p196). Similarly, Rambo (1979:9) writes:

The Senoi [which includes the Semai] are shifting cultivators living in small villages scattered widely through the forest. Although agriculture provides the bulk of their caloric needs they also engage

in considerable hunting and collecting of forest products both for self-consumption and for trade with the outside world. Although trade has been carried on for thousands of years and is important to their survival, particularly as the means for obtaining iron tools and salt, the Senoi are economically far more autonomous than the seemingly more primitive Semang.

In this study I will demonstrate that the Semai at least those in the Tapah region are now deeply enmeshed in commodity production as well as commodity consumption. From a detailed examination of time allocation in production I observed that the people spent more time on commodity production such as the collecting of fruit (like durian and petai), forest products (mainly rattan, bamboo and insects) for sale mostly to traders and rubber tapping, than on subsistence production. Commodity production is partly reinforced by people's need for cash with which to purchase market products upon which they increasingly depend; indeed today the Semai obtain most of their food from the market.

1.2. Theoretical Orientation

This study employs a synthesis of several theoretical approaches in economic anthropology. While some of the questions posed are analysed in a micro-economic decision-making framework, others are best addressed in a broader regional context and with insights from paradigms which emphasise micro-macro linkages. Neoclassical economic theory is employed in examining people's allocation of work effort to the various choices in production and the individual and household strategies which influence economic decisions. The attention paid to strategies and aggregate actions of individuals and groups overcomes some of the conceptual problems of the "articulation" approach which is the main theoretical basis of this study.

The unit of analysis is primarily the household but wherever possible the
analysis is carried out at the level of individuals. Several household studies have employed Chayanov's model (1966, orig. 1925) in examining household economic decision-making and strategising. Chayanov's study of Russian peasant households led him to assert that "the degree of self-exploitation is determined by a peculiar equilibrium between family demand satisfaction and the drudgery of labor itself" (Chayanov 1966:6). He found that as the family proceeds through various stages of its life cycle, it experiences changes in both the size and the composition of its labour force, which he expressed as a ratio of consumers to workers. He noted that the changes in this ratio are related to variations in income, farm size and labour intensity among families or households. During the early stage of the domestic cycle growth when the consumer/worker ratio is high, peasants evidently increased their work intensity. As children joined the domestic labour force, the labour intensity of the parents levelled off and eventually decreased.

According to the Chayanovian analysis, change in the consumer/worker ratios also affects the productivity of individuals:

...the energy developed by a worker on a family farm is stimulated by the family consumer demands, and as they increase, the rate of self-exploitation of peasant labor is forced up. On the other hand, energy expenditure is inhibited by the drudgery of the labor itself. The harder the labor is, compared with its pay, the lower the level of well-being at which the peasant family ceases to work...the greater the quantity of work carried out by a man in a definite time period, the greater and greater drudgery for the man are the last (marginal) units of labor expended (Chayanov 1966:81).

This theory has been criticised on several grounds. In questioning its

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6 Following Sahlins' work (1972), there has been some attention given to this model in anthropology. See, for example, Barlett (1980), Durrenberger (1984), Dove (1984) and Minge-Kalman (1977).

7 See, for example, Deere and de Janvry (1981), Friedmann (1980), Harrison (1977) and Hunt (1979) for detailed discussions of the critiques of this theory.
general applicability, several Neo-Marxists argue that the Chayanovian analysis which is based on research among pre-war, non-commoditised Russian peasantry in which no factor of production had a market value and relatively few goods were produced for market consumption is an inappropriate model for analysing commodity producing "peasants". Furthermore, it is contended that since Chayanovian analysis focus on the peasantry as an isolated and seemingly autonomous group, they are unable to relate "peasant" households to the rest of the economy in any meaningful way. Nevertheless, the Chayanovian model is a useful analytical tool for examining the internal dynamics of household production and may assist in explaining certain peasant behaviour that would seem irrational in light of other micro or macro economic approaches.

The neglect of external linkages is the general intrinsic shortcoming of most micro economic analysis of households and individuals. As Kahn (1980:102) has noted, "all micro-analysis can show is the internal rationality of behavior within externally imposed limits." It is, therefore, necessary to examine the micro-macro linkages in order to obtain a well rounded analysis of the economy. The works of Neo-marxist articulationists are particularly useful here.

The articulation approach focuses on the nature of the structural linkages between capitalist and noncapitalist economic forms. Articulation is viewed as:

the coexistence and interaction of two opposing or complementary economic fields which operate according to different principles of organisation and exchange and which exhibit different labour force characteristics reflected in the types of jobs and individuals represented (Long and Richardson 1978:186).

The early articulationists were primarily concerned with the question of un-
derdevelopment. They stressed not only on how the capitalist system utilises noncapitalist economic forms for its “reproduction” but also how these noncapitalist forms which are retained by capitalism constrain the development of capitalism. As Kahn (1978:111) notes:

Underdevelopment is caused by the incomplete penetration of capitalist relations of production and the persistence of precapitalist economic forms.

As a departure from orthodox Marxists who argue that capitalism will destroy all noncapitalist forms in its advance, articulationists assert that capitalism simultaneously preserves and destroys non-capitalist economic forms:

capitalism neither evolves mechanically from what precedes it, nor does it necessarily dissolve it; indeed, so far from banishing pre-capitalist forms, it not only coexists with them but buttresses them, and even on occasions devilishly conjures them up _ex nihilo_ (Foster-Carter 1978:213).

This articulation is, moreover, viewed as a process, taking place in a sequence of stages. Rey, for instance, posits three stages; these are summarised by Foster-Carter (1978:218) as follows:

(a) an initial link in the sphere of exchange where interaction with capitalism reinforces the pre-capitalist mode. (b) capitalism ‘take root’, subordinating the pre-capitalist mode but still making use of it. (c) the total disappearance of the pre-capitalist mode, even in agriculture.

Varied explanations have been given as to why capitalism preserves noncapitalist economic forms (see Bradby 1975 and Wolpe 1979 for detailed discussion). The four common explanations are:

(1) For noncapitalist economic systems to serve as markets for capitalism (Luxemburg’s thesis)

(2) To increase profits by exploiting non capitalist systems (Lenin’s theory of imperialism)
(3) For noncapitalist systems to serve as source of cheap labour (Meillassoux 1981, Wolpe 1975)

(4) For noncapitalist systems to provide raw materials for capitalist systems (Bradby 1975).

Some critics (notably Mouzelis 1980 and Carol Smith 1983) have argued that these functionalist explanations are teleologically orientated and do not actually explain why these noncapitalist forms are retained.

Another major shortcoming of the early articulationists is their over emphasis on economic aspects which has led them to neglect the political and cultural dimensions in the articulation. In order to overcome this problem, several researchers notably Prattis (1982), Chevalier (1982) and Carol Smith (1984) have recently made attempts to integrate socio-cultural factors in their analyses of articulation. Carol Smith (1984) in her analysis of Guatemalan economy goes as far as to suggest that "the power of capitalism to transform the periphery rests on political (and cultural) foundations rather than on economic ones."

Articulation models have also been criticised for ignoring the role of human agency in the analysis of transformations since they focus on structures. As Mouzelis (1980:367) stresses:

...structures and the reproductive requirements can cause or transform nothing...But if an explanation is sought for the emergence, persistence and transformation of social phenomena, the focus must be on a different mode of determination where the projects, strategies and tactics of collective actors (operating within structural limits allowing a lesser or greater number of alternatives) are the centre of analysis. Any attempt to brush aside actors, or to present them as mere effects of systemic constraints, inevitable leads to teleological explanations.

In this study, attention is given to the strategies, decision-making, negotiation and manipulation by individuals and groups in order to avoid this problem.
Another major weakness of most articulation models is their focus on the role of capitalism as the sole agent of change. They assume that noncapitalist economic forms do not have their own internal logic but are determined solely by the logic and motion of capital. Within the past decade, several researchers\(^8\) have paid much attention to the analysis of the noncapitalist economic forms particularly simple (or petty) commodity production (SCP). These scholars have employed, with some changes, the analytical concept SCP formulated by Marx and later developed by Lenin and Kautsky\(^9\) in the analyses of market incorporation of "peasant" societies. While Marx, Lenin and Kautsky viewed SCP as a transitional form that will be eventually destroyed and replaced by the classic capitalist "mode of production", these recent scholars observed that SCP tends to persist despite the penetration of capitalism. However, instead of explaining the persistence of SCP as a response to the abstract needs of capitalism, most of these scholars devote attention to the specificities of this form of production which are linked to its persistence.

As Bernstein (1979:425) points out:

Simple commodity production is distinguished from capitalist commodity production by its 'logic' of subsistence (meeting the needs of simple reproduction) as opposed to the logic of the appropriation and realisation of surplus-value and the accumulation of capital.

It is generally accepted that simple commodity producers produce goods for a market and have control over their productive means. They still however, continue to produce use-values for their direct consumption. The unit of production in SCP systems is mostly the household. The conditions that are

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recognised as prerequisites for SCP include a well developed commodity market, competition among units of production which makes producers price responsive, free contractual relations among producers and labour mobility. There is, however, some disagreement about the position of wage labour in SCP economies. While Friedmann (1978,1980) and Kahn (1980) contend that simple commodity producers neither extract surplus value from wage labour nor pay surplus value to non-producers, Carol Smith (1984:80) points out that empirical studies have shown that in many SCP economies, producers “do utilise wage labour on a regular if not sustained basis.” She suggests that the defining feature of SCP should not be an absence of wage labour but should be “the absence of a fully proletarianised, self-reproducing labour force.”

Another defining feature is the existence of a market for the factors of production particularly land. It is argued that the absence of such a market denotes that the producers operating within such economic conditions are imperfectly integrated into the market. On the basis of such an observation, Friedmann (1980) distinguishes between peasant commodity production and petty commodity production. She points out that unlike petty commodity producers, peasant producers control land that does not have a market price and as such are only partially integrated into regional or world markets. Furthermore, she draws attention to the fact that while SCP has a “single, universal underlying logic”, peasant commodity production systems are each historically unique.

One of the main issues to which SCP theorists have devoted considerable attention is the question of class differentiation associated with SCP. Several studies (for example De Janvry and Deere 1981, Friedmann 1978, Kahn 1980, Carol Smith 1984, Gavin Smith 1979) have indicated a lack of class differen-
tiation in many SCP economies. This observation has been linked to the persistence of SCP in these economies. This issue will be addressed in Chapter 6 in light of the findings of these studies.

1.3. Methodology

The field research upon which this thesis is based was conducted between September 1982 and February 1984. For most of this 18 months, I stayed in a Semai village in the Upper Batang Padang river valley in the State of Perak, Malaysia.

Although most of the data was gathered through systematic monitoring of the activities of some individuals and structured surveys, I also relied on the conventional anthropological techniques of participant observation and casual interviewing in my data collection. I lived in a Semai-type house that was especially built for me in the village and readily participated in village activities. My interviews were conducted in the Semai language but frequently interspersed with Malay. Although I could understand Semai fairly well, I did not speak it fluently.

During the initial weeks in the village, I carried out a household census which formed an important base in my subsequent collation of the genealogies, life histories (including property ownership and land-group membership) and oral histories of the village members and mapped some topographical features including swidden fields and orchards of the settlement. With these types of village information in hand, I was able to familiarise myself with the settlement and its people.

The bulk of the quantitative data presented in this thesis was collected
through the recording of the time allocation\textsuperscript{10}, production output, income and purchases of six married couples (marital pairs) who constitute the core members of six households in the village for one calendar year (1 November 1982 - 31 October 1983). For the time allocation and production data, I kept daily records on these couples' activities mostly by recall interviews usually carried out in the evening of the day the activities were performed. To insure maximum recall, I urged some individuals in the sample to keep daily records of their own and spouse's time allocation for the various activities in a notebook I gave them for this purpose. They used the alphabetic code I taught them to facilitate the task. As a sample of such records, I present an entry made by Bah Openg in his diary for the 5/5/83.

5/5  O, CP, 8-9 am, 2, $30, O, Ayau
     O, H, 5-6 pm, 1

CP and H stand for petai collecting and hunting respectively while 8-9 am and 5-6 pm represent the time spent of the activity. This entry reads: Bah Openg (O) from 8-9 in the morning collected two bundles of his own petai which he sold for $30 to Ayau, the trader. And from 5-6 in the evening he spent hunting and obtained one animal. I would then ascertain the details of his activities by asking a series of questions like who did he go with?, Did he give or share the money with anyone? If so, why? For petai collecting I would also ask who climbed the tree and how much petai did each worker carry if he worked with someone else. For hunting, I asked about the details of his quarry like the type, length and estimated weight if I do not get to see and weigh the game for myself.

From such records and follow-up recall interviews, I was not only able to

\textsuperscript{10}See Gross (1984) for a review of this technique as used in anthropology.
monitor the activities of most individuals but also register some of the social interactions especially those related to economic activities. However one major shortcoming of this time allocation method is that it does not record labour intensity. It must be borne in mind that the work rhythm varies for different productive activities. As Gross (1984:545) points out:

While hunting and fishing, for example, involve irregular bursts of activity—interspersed with periods of relative inactivity, chores like weeding crops...have a fixed rhythm with a small number of highly repetitive body movements.

Thus even though people may spend long hours fishing and relatively short periods on weeding because of the nature of the work much greater effort is expended in weeding than fishing.

For collecting data on expenditure, I relied on the same individuals to record their household's purchases and spending in special account books usually immediately after shopping to ensure maximum recall of their expenditure. I gave them a check-list of the various goods Semai normally buy with an alphabetic code assigned to each item to facilitate the recording. I found this method, which was actually suggested by one of my informants, more reliable than my initial method which I employed for about the first two months, where I interviewed the people about their expenditure at the end of each day. Usually, by day's end people found it difficult to recall their expenditure incurred earlier in the day.

To attain a high degree of accuracy in the monitoring, I cross-checked all entries in the self-kept diaries and account books and the answers to my recall interviews with information I got about the activities in question from other village residents through casual conversations, from shopkeepers in respect of purchases, and from my randomly conducted spot observations of the activities. Furthermore, for some pursuits like fruit collecting the time
allotted could also be cross-checked by the returns reported since the output per unit time for any given producer was fairly constant. At the onset of the monitoring, I explained to people my purpose in keeping such records and emphasised that these must be accurate. I informed people that the records would only be used for the research and would be accessible to other people only in a totally anonymous format. I do not think, therefore that there was reason for the people to falsify the records. Furthermore, I am convinced by numerous indications that I had people's trust. In one case, for example, a person, Bah Nandok informed me that he and his wife had collected and sold 11 bundles of petai on a certain day although he told his fellow villagers that he obtained only 5 bundles. Although I trusted him, to be sure I cross-checked his information with the trader and found it to be correct. In another case, Bah Rahu allowed me to examine his bank savings account book and copy the transactions in my note-book although, as he claimed, no one else in the village besides his wife knew about this savings accounts.

The validity of the time allocation study may also be questioned in respect to Semai conception and use of time. A major criticism levelled against time allocation studies of non-western societies is the use of western time units which may differ substantially from native conceptions of time in the analysis of the behaviour in these societies11. Most Semai nowadays conceive of time in terms of hours and minutes but still follow their time-honoured division of the day into early morning (hupur begelap), morning (begelap), late morning and afternoon (Yah) and night (duui)12. Furthermore, Dentan's observation of the Semai he studied in 1962-3 that they bought wrist watches and clocks

11 See Gross (1984:520) for a discussion of this criticism.

12 See Dentan (1979:52-54) for a more detailed discussion.
"as ornaments rather than time pieces"¹³ is inapplicable to most present-day Tapah Semai. All the individuals in my sample not only know how to read time but also constantly keep track of it.

Although some errors and omissions in the recording may have occurred, judging from the high degree of tally between the entries and the information I obtained from other sources about the activities I am confident that these are minimal and do not affect the analysis in any important way.

In respect to the validity of the data, another question that may be raised and requires attention here concerns the representativeness of the sample households, the study village and the surveyed year. Initially, I kept records of all ten households in the main hamlet of the village but after five weeks I stopped monitoring the activities of three households which were relatively less reliable, in terms of recording, and about six months later another household was dropped from the sample since its members had temporarily moved to another settlement. Although the sample constitutes about 60% of the households in the study village, one of the problems in terms of representativeness is that five of these are made up of young families (married couple below 30 years old). Thus I do not have complete representation of households in different developmental stages of the domestic development cycle in my sample.

In order to try and establish how representative the study village was for the region ("river valley"), I carried out a more detailed and extensive socio-economic survey than my initial pilot survey of all the Semai settlements in the Upper Batang Padang river valley. On the basis of my interviews and

¹³Dentan (1979:51)
observations in this survey, I feel confident that the study village is representative of Semai economic systems of that region. In general, all these settlements have been incorporated within a wider market-oriented economy and what varies among them is the extent of commoditisation. However, unlike other villages the forests surrounding the study village were logged by a timber company in 1981. This logging may have caused a reduction in certain forest resources like rattan and the animal and fish populations in the locale thus affecting people's returns from forest collecting, fishing and hunting.

People seemed to feel that the survey year was representative of a normal year in regard to productive activities and harvests. I have, however, certain reservations about this. First, it was observed (not recorded) that people had spent much time on forest collecting outside of the survey year but allocated relatively little time to this activity during the survey period. This suggests that it is possible that the data on time allocation and production for forest collecting may not be representative for other years. Second, as people themselves acknowledged, the durian harvest during the survey was better than for most years. In 1985 I received news from the village that the 1984 durian yield was exceptionally low. Thus the data on durian harvesting is probably representative of only high yielding seasons. Third, it is probable that people spent less time on agriculture during the survey year than they normally would. None planted rice swiddens during the survey year although some cultivated minor swiddens in March and April 1983. Nonetheless, it must be emphasised that given the varying environmental conditions the nature of production is bound to vary from year to year.

In this thesis, the names of people mentioned are pseudonyms. The "Bah" and "Wah", which is sometimes abbreviated to "B" and "W", in front of
names refer to the sex of the individual; male and female respectively. Sem-
pak is a pseudonym for the study village. The Ringgit (Malaysian Dollar) referred to in this thesis was equivalent to approximately A$.40 (or A$1=M$2.20). Although some linguists (see, for example, Benjamin 1976 and Diffloth 1968) have developed an orthography for Senoi languages which uses symbols not found on a normal typewriter, I have resorted to my own orthography. The only symbol used in this thesis for some Semai terms is "'" which represents a glottal stop.
Chapter 2

The Setting

There have been two principal periods of research on the Semai. Between 1880s and 1920s writers were mainly concerned to document Semai "customs" and beliefs (cf Cerruti 1908, Evans 1923), to describe their material culture (cf Annandale and Robinson 1903, Hale 1886) and to analyse their language (cf Blagden 1903, Clifford 1891, Luering 1901, and Miklucho-Maclay 1878) and racial characteristics (Annandale and Robinson 1903). This period was followed by a lull in interest which was not rekindled until the 1960s when attention turned to ecological and socio-cultural concerns. As a result of the extensive literature on Semai social organisation and culture, the Semai have become the best known of the Orang Asli groups.

In the 1960s and early 1970s there appears to have been a renewed scholarly interest in the Orang Asli and the Semai in particular. On the basis of fieldwork in two Semai settlements in different locations, one in the highlands and another in the lowlands, Dentan (1965) wrote a dissertation on the "dietary patterns" of the Semai. He also provided detailed descriptions of their subsistence production, social organisation and socialisation. One of his main findings related to the conspicuous absence of violence which prompted him to label the Semai as "a nonviolent people" which later became a sub-title to a subsequent work.

This supposed nonviolence aroused the interest of Clayton Robarchek (1977),
a social psychologist, who undertook field research among some Tapah Semai villagers to further investigate this question. He confirmed the prevailing image and explained the absence of violence as basically a consequence of Semai world view and ethos. He concluded that:

aggressive behaviour is not a part of the cognitive maps devised by individuals for securing satisfaction of their wants; it is not perceived as a behavioural option in traditional Semai society (1977:270).

Carole Robarchek (1980) who worked in the same villages as her husband wrote on the kinship structure and territoriality of the Semai.

Alongside this research on personality and behaviour, there have been studies on Semai language, demography and genetic microdifferentiation during the 1960s. Diffloth (1968) had undertaken extensive linguistic research on Semai language. He found that the Semai spoke several dialects which nevertheless had many common features that were distinctive from other Austroasiatic languages. In his study on Semai demography and genetics, Fix (1971, 1977) found considerable genetic differentiation between Semai local groups. He explained this in terms of several socio-cultural, demographic and ecological factors such as the high frequency of migration, the considerable degree of "fusion - fission" of Semai settlements and "a prescription to marry outside the personally defined kindred" (Fix 1971:137).

This chapter will address the social and political aspects of Semai life in the Tapah region. It will examine the role of the external relations and historical conditions that have promoted the shaping and structuring of contemporary Semai social structure and organisation, particularly in the formation of social groupings and territorial organisation. These social and political aspects are significant factors in the village economy. In particular, the village system of land and property ownership and kinship structure are closely
linked to such economic aspects as production, distribution and differentiation. A consideration of such social aspects is, hence, important in the examination of the Semai economy. I begin this chapter with a discussion on Semai ethnicity and will then proceed to an examination of the regional, village and household social units of significance to the people.

2.1. The People

On the basis of their culture and history, Semai are officially classified as Orang Asli (aborigine) who are legally defined as:

1. any person whose male parent is or was a member of an aboriginal ethnic group, who speaks an aboriginal language and habitually follows an aboriginal way of life and aboriginal customs and beliefs (this category also includes a descendent through males of such persons);

2. any person of any race adopted during infancy by aborigines, who has been brought up as an aborigine, habitually speaks an aboriginal language, habitually follows an aboriginal way of life and and aboriginal customs and beliefs, and is a member of an aboriginal community;

3. the child of any union between an aboriginal female and male of another race, provided that such a child habitually speaks an aboriginal language, habitually follows an aboriginal way of life and aboriginal customs and beliefs, and remains a member of an aboriginal community.

[Aboriginal Peoples Act 134 of 1954 (amended in 1974)]

It appears that the most important and least ambiguous feature in Orang Asli identification is language upon which this ethnic category is conventionally divided into three groups - Negrito (or Semang), Senoi and Melayu Asli (Aboriginal Malays) - which are further subdivided into nineteen “tribes” (see Figure 2.1 for the names and location of these groups). The Semai with their northern neighbours, the Temiar, constitute most of the Senoi-speaking group.
Figure 2.1 ORANG ASLI GROUPS OF THE MALAY PENINSULA
In terms of population, the Semai are the largest Orang Asli group with approximately 18,000 people, most of whom are found in the States of Perak and Pahang. They live in small villages dispersed in the foothills, valleys and hillslopes in the central part of The Main Range of Peninsular Malaysia. As Diffloth (1968:65) writes:

Semai is a term used by the Jabatan Orang Asli [Department of Aboriginal Affairs], probably following H.D. Noone, to identify the Senoi aborigines living in an area roughly circumscribed by a line joining Ipon, Teluk Anson, Tanjong Malim, Raub, Kuala Lipis and the Kelantan-Pahang boundary to the north.

In the early literature, Sakai was used in some works as reference to the Senoi group. This label was however also used to refer to the whole aboriginal population. As this term, which implies slave status, has derogatory connotations and is held to be invidious by the people, it has been replaced by the label Senoi (which means “human” in the Senoic languages) to refer to Sakai as used in the specific sense. Clifford (1891) was possibly the first to have defined two separate tribes of Senoi which he labelled as Northern Senoi and Central Senoi. Later Schebesta referred to the Northern Senoi as Ple-Termiar and the Central Senoi as Semai1. As Noone noted, Semai or Seman is the Temiar name “which these southern hill people have adopted from the northern neighbours” (H. D. Noone 1936:7). However, the precise meaning and derivation of this ethnic label is unclear. To add to this, there is also some confusion as to the primodial characteristics of the Semai as an ethnic group. The focus in the early literature has been on racial characteristics (see Annandale and Robinson 1903, Cerruti 1908 and Skeat and Blagden 1906) as the means of ethnic identification. This method is, however, clearly problematic given the extensive racial mixture within the Semai population (see Fix 1971). The numerous intermarriages

1See H. D. Noone (1936:7)
that have taken place between Semai and other Orang Asli and to a lesser degree with Malays, Chinese and Indians have resulted in regular introduction of genes into Semai population.

Dentan considers the Semai as constituting a "people" for the following reasons:

First, the Semai all live in a definable geographic area. Second, they share a tradition of having been dispossessed and persecuted by non-Semai....Third, they have a common language which is unintelligible to non-Semai. Finally, they share a common attitude toward a great many things, most notably violence (Dentan 1979:4).

He divides them into "west Semai" and "east Semai" on the basis of geographic location and the extent of assimilation into the neighbouring cultures but he acknowledges the fact that such a division is an oversimplification given the heterogeneity of Semai villages. Significantly, in a later paper, Dentan (1975:54) notes:

The word Semai thus does not refer to a unified set of people who are conscious of their identity as a people.

Although the label Semai is currently becoming popular as a self-reference term among the villagers particularly in their interactions with non-Semai, people still often refer to themselves as Senoi ("human being or man" in the Semai language) or Mai Darat ("people of the interior"). When Semai speak of any other Semai group, the term mai(people) is invariably used in conjunction with some sort of toponym denoting the name of a river, tributary, or specific location at which the group is known to reside. Hence, people from Bertam valley are known by other Semai as Mai Taao Bertak or simply Mai Bertak (people of Bertak) where Taao Bertak is the Semai name for Bertam river. Similarly, people residing close to Tapah town are called Mai Tapah.
Semai identification by outsiders and by Semai themselves is primarily based on language. They speak a Sinoic (central Aslian) language known to linguists as Semai which is classified as an Austroasiatic language (see Diffloth 1968 and Benjamin 1976). Villagers remarked that people from the neighbouring villages are Semai because they spoke the same language (*roc sama*'). However, they also pointed out on the basis of dialectic differences that there are several "types of Semai people". Clayton Robarchek (1977:23) also noted this:

Semai themselves are highly conscious of these differences [in dialects] and can, after hearing a visitor speak a few sentences, locate his place of origin with remarkable accuracy.

Nonetheless, it was observed that in spite of the dialectic differences villagers indicated a certain sense of affinity with another Semai speaker.

As Semai are being drawn into the mainstream of multiethnic Malaysian society where ethnicity commands a central position in social and political interactions, they have become conscious of the need to align or associate themselves with an ethnic identity. Since the ethnicity of the other ethnic groups are somewhat well defined, the Semai are aware that they cannot fit into any other group. They do not want to "become Malay" (*muit gob*) because the Malay-Semai relations were and are generally not cordial and as Dentan (1975:50) has correctly noted, "Semai normally identify themselves as the opposite of Malays". In fact, as Dentan (1975:54) has pointed out, "What unity the Semai feel they have seems to come from their constant contrast of how they live with how Malays live". Many Semai have become Christians or Bahai and may have been more receptive to these faiths than Islam to further dissociate themselves from Malays (who are Muslims).
2.2. The Region

The Batang Padang District (Daerah) takes its name after the main river of its drainage system. As in most of the major rivers of the State of Perak, the Batang Padang river has its source in The Main Range, the mountain ranges which run in a North-South direction through the central part of the Malay Peninsula. The upper river basins of the Batang Padang, Cendriang, Bidor, Sungkai and Selim rivers are the home of the Batang Padang Semai. This study is based on the Semai who live in the upper part of the Batang Padang river basin (see Map 2.2). They refer to themselves and are known by other Semai by the toponym, Mai Tapah ("people of Tapah"), which is derived from the name of the main town in the region. Tapah, which is situated on the North-South trunk road, is a predominantly Chinese populated town that has its roots in a mid-1800s mining settlement. Today it serves as the main administrative and commercial centre for the District.

At the time of my survey in January 1984, there were approximately 2400 Tapah Semai living in this region in 27 relatively small villages. The village size varied from a low of 30 people in 5 households to as many as 250 people in 48 households with the average size of 90 people per village. These villages form the river basin group. As Dentan (1979:15) writes:

Because it is easier to travel by river than to clamber over hills, the Semai in a single river are more likely to visit each other than to visit people in other river basins. For the same reason, they are very likely to marry people from the same river basin, so that most of the inhabitants of a single river basin tend to be related to each other. The result is that any given river-valley population, being relatively isolated from other Semai, tends to speak its own dialect and to have customs rather different from those of other Semai.

The Tapah Semai river basin group, however, is not endogamous as there are
Figure 2-2  SEMAI VILLAGES IN UPPER BATANG PADANG RIVER BASIN
numerous cases of spouses coming from other river basins. It appears that certain historical factors discussed below have transformed the river basin group which "was once merely the product of the geographic environment" (Dentan 1979:80) into a unit of social significance to the Semai.

The upper part of the Batang Padang basin was occupied by an almost entirely Semai population until the 1880s when growing numbers of Malays, Chinese and Indians began to settle in this region. As Annandale and Robinson wrote in 1903:

it is only within the last fifteen years that Batang Padang [region] has been sufficiently opened to admit Malay, Chinese, and Indian settlers. It does not appear that the upper valley of the Batang Padang River was ever within the sphere of purely Malay colonization... (1903:29)

There is, however, no historical or archaeological record of how long the Semai have lived there but presumably they were there long before the Malays began to settle in large numbers in Perak from the 16th century onwards.

Early writers (Annandale and Robinson 1903, Cerruti 1908, Evans 1923, Schebesta 1925, Skeat and Blagden 1906) found the Batang Padang Semai residing in dispersed and remote hamlets in the "deep" forests in the early 1900s. But it seems that at an earlier period before they were harassed by the Malays the people may have lived in larger villages. One of Cerruti's informants stated:

Once upon a time these parts were not so deserted, and populous, prosperous villages were scattered over the forest. But our tranquil-

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2 Benjamin (1966:13-15) found the Temiar to be organised along similar lines. He also noted that the river valley groups are not endogamous as his analysis of the genealogies had revealed that "marriage has taken place for generations between valleys, often over great distances" (p15).

3 See Andaya (1979) and Winstedt and Wilkinson (1934) for a historical account on the growth of Perak.
lity and well-being excited the envy of other tribes who wanted to subject us to them and to make us work like slaves, so they came against us armed, and pillaged, burnt and destroyed everything belonging to us. We were dispersed and compelled to live in isolated huts erected in the most inaccessible places in order not to attract the attention of other men (1908:92).

There is no record of the nature of Malay-Semai relations prior to the 19th century. But it is certain that there was some trading between the two groups for several centuries as has been discussed in the previous chapter. Malay slave-raiding on Semai could have taken place anytime from the 16th century onwards. In writing about this practice in reference to the Batang Padang Semai, Wray (1903:180) noted that:

Prior to the English occupation of Perak, the Malays used to hunt the Sakais like wild beasts, and endeavour to catch and enslave them.

Since Malays were prohibited by their religion from enslaving fellow Muslims, the non-Muslim Semai and other Orang Asli were the prime targets of slave raiders. The slave-raiding parties took mostly women and children and killed off the men. Many Semai related stories from their parents' generation about slave raiding and past conflicts with Malays. As Kirk Endicott (1983:237) notes, "These stories shape and justify a world view in which outsiders, especially Malays, are pictured as dangerous and untrustworthy." The xenophobia among the Semai is said to be one of the most enduring effects of slave-raiding.

It seems that the Semai mainly adopted a "policy of fleeing rather than fighting" in response to conflicts with Malays (Dentan 1979:2), but there are stories about well organised battles between the Semai and Malays which Semai oral traditions say evidently culminated into a major war called *praak*
There is no historical record of these battles and people were not certain as to when they occurred. Some say that the fights took place just before British rule which would mean around the middle of the 19th century. Most villagers claim that the Malays armed with mostly spears and swords came up from the lowlands in groups of 10 to 20 following the river routes into Semai “country”. They believe that these warriors were sent by the Sultan of Perak to punish the Semai for polluting the rivers with pig’s guts and lard which are offensive to the Muslim Malays. It is said that the Malays had made prior requests to the Semai to become Muslims but the Semai were unwilling to comply. Cerruti (1908:109) also noted this:

Some centuries later, in an era of fanaticism, invasions [by Malays] were made upon them [Semai] with the object of converting them to Mohammedism but the only result was fire and bloodshed...

Politically, these battles can be interpreted as Malay attempts to incorporate the Semai into the Malay State of Perak which began to colonise and spread its hegemony into the interior around the 16th century. The adoption of Islam by the Semai would have resulted in their integration into the Malay community. In fact, the Semai phrase for conversion into Islam is *muit gob* which means literally “to enter Malay” (see also Dentan 1975).

It is also possible that the Malay interest in Semai incorporation was economic in nature. Their incorporation would have accorded the Malay rulers more control over the then potentially lucrative forest product trade which probably suffered during the era of slave-raiding and Semai dispersal in the forests. Such control would have resulted in greater appropriation

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4 *Praak* is derived from the Malay word *perang* which means “war”. My informants were not clear as to what is the meaning of *sangkil*.

5 Cerruti (1908:109) and Robarchek (1977:26), however, also mention these battles.
through taxes and other forms of extractions which would have undoubtedly expanded State coffers by substantial amounts.

It seems that Semai usually fled from the Malays as Cerruti (1908:109) wrote about the Batang Padang Semai:

after each conflict the surviving Sakais fled further into the forest (into those parts which had never been before exploited) or to the natural strongholds of the far off mountains.

Given that the Semai were ill equipped with weapons and warfare techniques, they must have had to flee from their militarily more experienced marauders. Semai however claim that they were successful in driving away the invading Malays. It is noteworthy that in their oral tradition, the Semai were said to emerge victorious not through military means but through magical ways. They talk of a powerful shaman who led the Malay warriors into a swamp and then through incantations (jampi) directed a swarm of bees to attack and kill them.

Semai narrators say that the era of warfare, slave raiding and Malay incursions into their "country" ended only at about the turn of the century. Although they claim that the people then were politically autonomous, it appears they were partially integrated into the Perak State as evidenced by several developments. From Semai accounts it seems that following the formal abolition of slavery in the 1880s and the protectionist policies of the colonial administration the Semai were more confident in open interactions with Malays.

Meanwhile the dispersal of a growing Malay population in the 19th century led to an inevitable decentralisation of authority of the Malay Sultanate (Gullick 1958:11). Chieftains who controlled the river routes to the interior were able to consolidate their power and remain fairly independent from the
Sultan. Civil unrest was rife in Perak as conflicts among the chieftains and among the Chinese tin miners were frequent. There were also frequent civil disorders due to fighting among Chinese Secret Societies. The British intervened by establishing a system of "indirect" rule primarily to prevent further economic deterioration of the State. The consolidation of British rule in Perak did not however result in the total disintegration of the Malay Sultanate.

Ironically, it appears that the Perak Sultanate's efforts to incorporate the Semai into the Perak State saw success only at the time when it was subordinated by the colonial administration. In the early 1900s, the Perak Sultanate employed a typical British tactic in incorporating the Semai and other Orang Asli. As Dentan (1979:67) writes:

At the turn of the century the Sultan of Perak began to assert Malay authority over the Semai by giving certain west Semai elders fancy titles and "letter of authority" *(surat kuasa)* that acknowledged them as "headman"

According to oral sources, an influential leader, Bah Busuh who was originally from the Bidor region but later settled in Bot (8th Milestone village) received such a letter from the Sultan of Perak. This letter dated 30.4.1909 which is kept by the current headman was actually signed by the Penghulu of Batang Padang, Tok Bais who was one of the minor chiefs (with the title of Tan Dewa Sakti) of the Perak Sultanate but it had the royal seal which suggests that the order was from the Sultan. It is stated in the letter that Bah Busuh (or spelled as Bah Bongsu in the letter) was to serve as headman *(penghulu)* of the *orang darat* ("people of the interior") residing in the region stretching from Tapah to Ringlet (Cameron Highlands). He was given the title *Maharaja Lelawangsa* but was referred as *datok* by the Semai.
The existence of a regional headman among the Tapah Semai was also implied by Clayton Robarchek (1977:88-89):

...in earlier times, there was not a headman for each band, but rather... there was a single headman who lived far down the valley of the Batang Padang at Batu Tiga [Third Milestone]. This headman's authority was said to have extended far upriver... The village where he resided was also the terminus of the road at that time and thus it would have controlled the access to the entire Batang Padang valley upstream.

Robarchek, however, was referring to the Malay chief (Penghulu of Batang Padang) instead of the Semai regional headman who lived in Bot, which is about eight miles from Tapah, rather than in Batu Tiga (3rd Milestone). The Malay chief used to reside in Batu Melintang which was also known as Batu Tiga before the Tapah-Cameron Highlands road was built. This village which is situated on the banks of the Batang Padang river about three miles from Tapah has control over the access to the entire upstream valley. Since trade goods were transported mostly through the Batang Padang valley into the interior from the earliest periods, the Malay chief, who was strategically situated between the upriver Semai settlements and Tapah town, had control over Semai trade until the opening of the Tapah-Cameron Highlands road bypassed Batu Melintang in the 1930s (see Figure 2.2).

It is, however, clear that headmanship is a recent introduction in the Semai community. Villagers have claimed that although there were no headmen in the past, some elders (mai ratna) and shamans (halaa') were recognised as leaders. Given the high value placed on individual autonomy by the Semai it would have been difficult for a headman to assert his authority particularly when people were dispersed in the interior. As Dentan (1979:68) points out:

...although outsiders have introduced a position of authority into the Semai band, the authority itself is diluted, and a Semai can ignore it entirely by moving to another band or settlement. The ability of one person to constrain the actions of another is limited.

Nonetheless, it appears that Bah Busuh was able to wield some authority
over the Tapah Semai as he is attributed to have initiated several significant changes in the social and territorial organisation of the people. These changes certainly enhanced the formation of supravillage groups particularly the river basin and river valley entities.

With the assistance of some Semai leaders, Bah Busuh is said to have established a system of ‘law’ which was modelled on Malay customary law (adat). A native ‘court’ system was also set up to deal with the ‘law’ breakers. The court trials (bicara') were conducted by the regional headman in the presence of the wrong-doer’s kindred (waris) who were called upon to speak in the defence of the ‘law’ breaker. These meetings were also convened to resolve disputes among people, families or even villages. This system of law and courts persist today6.

Since a frequent source of dispute among villages in the region at the time was over the rights to land and resources, Bah Busuh initiated a meeting of elders from different parts of the river basin sometime in the 1920s to seek a solution to this recurrent problem. The result of this meeting was an elaborate system of land ownership and rights that is still followed by contemporary Tapah Semai. The river basin of Upper Batang Padang was divided into several territories called lengrii7 which were (and still are) geographically defined by rivers and mountain ridges. Each lengrii is controlled (or ‘owned’ as the Semai assert) by a group of village residents known as mai pasak who are the descendents of the founder members of the land, the pioneers who first resided and cleared swiddens in the area.

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6See Clayton Robarchek (1977:214-222) for a detailed discussion on the bicara’ (or bicara as written in his work).

7This term is, undoubtedly, derived from the Malay word negri which means land, country, settlement.
One of Bah Busuh’s primary roles as regional headman was to serve as spokesman for the Mai Tapah when dealing with Malays. Possibly to strengthen ties between Semai and Malays, Bah Busuh evidently presented the Malay chiefs with tributes in the form of fruit, mushrooms, hill rice and forest products which were collected from the many settlements in the river basin. This tribute-giving evidently went on for about a decade. Although from this practice it would seem that the Semai were fully incorporated into the Perak State, I would argue that it served more as a token of the people’s recognition of the Perak Malay rulers. Villagers were possibly aware that the good favour of Malay rulers would be some protection against harassment by Malay neighbours.

Evidently not all the food collected from the villagers was given to the Malay chieftains. It seems that Bah Busuh used up a part of the collection for feasts (cha’ cha’ entoi) that were attended by most Tapah Semai. This system of appropriation and redistribution is a precursor of a present-day system known as komisen (“commission”) which will be discussed in Chapter 6.

The changes instituted among Tapah Semai during Bah Busuh’s era had far reaching implications for their social organisation and ethnogenesis. The fact that villagers from different parts of the upper river basin met to establish a common system of ‘law’, ‘courts’ and territoriality would have enhanced their solidarity and feeling of ‘togetherness’. They would have begun to see themselves as forming a group, Mai Tapah, rather than as a disunited people from dispersed villages. Their consolidation would also have been strengthened by the extensive social interactions among villagers from different parts of the area during the feasts organised by the regional headman.

Upon his death, sometime in the early 1930s, Bah Busuh was succeeded as
regional headman by his father's brother's son, Bah Besarpingan. Table 2.1 below shows the line of succession of the regional headmanship.

Table 2-1: Line of Succession of the Regional Headmanship in Upper Batang Padang Valley.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>HEADMAN</th>
<th>PERIOD OF HEADMANSHIP</th>
<th>RELATIONSHIP TO FORMER HEADMEN</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bah Telut</td>
<td>1956 -</td>
<td>Bah Busuh's grandson</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bah Yok</td>
<td>1953 - 1956</td>
<td>Bah Besarpingon's brother</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bah Pelankin</td>
<td>1951 - 1953</td>
<td>Unrelated</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bah Besarpingan</td>
<td>1930s- 1945</td>
<td>Father's brother's son</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bah Busuh</td>
<td>1909 - 1930s</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

With the opening of the Tapah-Cameron Highland road (*Jalan Pahang*) in the 1930s, Tapah Semai came into increasing contact with non-Semai. The older villagers recollect that people moved their settlements closer to the road to facilitate trading. This greater accessibility of villages stimulated the transfer of the villagers' trading allegiance from the Malays, particularly the Malay chief in Batu Melintang, to Chinese middlemen who gained direct access to Semai producers and products. This period saw the intensification of commodity production among the Tapah Semai and the growth of market relations.

Another group of non-Semai to establish contacts with the Tapah Semai during this period were the Christian (mainly Methodist) missionaries. Although the missionaries had converted some villagers and established schools and health clinics, they did not have a strong impact on the people. The number of villagers converted was small. Today there are only about 200 people who claim to be Christians and almost all of them live in one village, Batu Tiga.

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8 See Means and Means (1981) for a description of the Methodist missionary activities among the Semai.
The process of integration of the Tapah Semai with the wider Malaysian society was interrupted during the Japanese occupation of Malaya from 1942 to 1945. The Japanese had a reputation for ferocity among the villagers who retreated deep into the forest to avoid contact with them. The forest, however, was also the base for anti-Japanese guerrillas who relied on the villagers for food and forest guidance. The older villagers recollect this period as a difficult one since they had to subsist solely by hunting and gathering. Although people were not short of food, it seems that they were deprived of market food for which they had developed a preference over the years. The Japanese surrender in 1945 did not however end their predicament for this period was followed by an even more difficult one during the communist insurgency, officially known as the Emergency (1948-1960).

Like the anti-Japanese forces, the communists who operated from several forest bases in their guerilla warfare against government forces relied on the Semai and other forest fringe or forest dwellers for food supplies and strategic information. To deny the communists Orang Asli support, the British colonial government embarked on a policy of resettlement where forest dwellers and other potential communist supporters were relocated into settlements nearby towns to facilitate surveillance. As older villagers recall, most Tapah Semai were moved either voluntarily or forcibly and cramped into three settlements at the 3rd Milestone, 14th Milestone and 17th Milestone which were closely guarded by security forces. They recollect that although they were well fed in these “camps”, disease was widespread and many died as a result. The poor health facilities and overcrowded conditions may have caused this high incidence of disease and deaths. As a result this strategy was eventually abandoned following criticisms of the government’s poor treatment of the aborigines.
In place of resettlement camps, the colonial government set up 'jungle forts' in certain Batang Padang areas where forest dwelling aborigines were suspected of supporting communist terrorists. From these 'forts', the security forces sought to keep deep forest Semai under surveillance. The villagers were encouraged to stay close to the 'forts' and make use of the security and medical services provided there. The communists, in response, established an organisation called Asal (Malay word for aboriginal) which sought to recruit aborigines as insurgents. In fitting with Semai (and Senoi) social organisation, an Asal group was organised for each river valley and was usually led by a prominent headman or leader. As for the role of this organisation, R. Noone (1972:152) writes:

Their function was to supply food to the Communist terrorists, to buy supplies for them from the jungle forts and the road-head shops, to act as their couriers, porters, and guides, and, most important of all, to surround the terrorist camps with a protective screen of listening posts to give timely warnings of the approach of Security Force patrols.

For the Upper Batang Padang valley, the organisation had recruited Bah Pelankin, the regional headman. He is said to have committed many atrocities on his fellow people who as a result generally feared and disliked him. As R. Noone (1972:163-164) writes:

Bah Pelankin was the Asal organizer for the Batang Padang. He was known to have murdered and tortured several aborigines for non-cooperation...

Bah Pelankin was eventually ambushed and killed by a village headman in 1953.

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9See R. Noone (1972:151,152)

10Holman (1958:163-165), Gouldsbury (1960:132-139) and R. Noone (1972:163-165) have also mentioned Bah Pelankin and his operation as Asal organizer.
In response to the constant harassment from both security forces and insurgents, the Tapah Semai, as villagers in some other river basins, held a meeting where most people in the area attended and agreed to a pact of mutual help (known as "river-valley pacts" in the literature). The strategy decided at the meeting was that the upstream dwellers (mai ditah) would support the communists and downstream inhabitants (mai direh) the government. But neither would provide information which might directly or indirectly endanger them. Their hope was that they would be identified as supporters of the victors irrespective of the outcome of the conflict.

The Emergency had far reaching effects on the Tapah Semai (and other Orang Asli). In respect to the Tapah Semai, Clayton Robarchek (1977:31) writes:

The period at the relocation camps and at the jungle forts brought exposure to new goods: batik sarongs replaced barkcloth loincloths, brass and aluminum cooking pots supplemented green bamboo tubes, and enameled tin plates competed with banana leaves. There were new foods such as canned fish, milled rice, and sugar, and wage labor brought money with which to acquire these goods for the first time.

Although it is possible that some villagers may not have been exposed to such goods as Robarchek mentions prior to the Emergency, it seems that most people had been buying these items at least two decades or more before this period. Rather than introducing the people to such goods, the resettlement resulted in increased expenditure on these "new" goods.

In respect to the social consequences of this period, the three strategies - Government initiated resettlement, communist organised Asal groups and the villagers' 'river valley pacts' - that were implemented during the Emergency, undoubtedly reinforced the inter-village links and strengthened the ties among villagers in the river basin. Furthermore, it was during this period that the government was made aware of the strategic importance of the Tapah Semai
and other Orang Asli. To “win over the aborigines”, the government embarked on a policy of economic and social development in the aftermath of the disastrous resettlement efforts of the 1950s. The Department of Aboriginal Affairs was established in 1954 specially to implement this policy. Although the government has implemented several economic and social development projects among the Tapah Semai, most villages in the region have had little direct State involvement in their economies (see Chapter 7).

2.3. The Village

Like most Tapah Semai villages, Sempak village, is situated beside the Tapah-Cameron Highlands road. The village divides physically into three sections. The main settlement, where the sample households for this study reside, contains 13 households. They stand between two smaller hamlets, one with three dwellings and another with four. The view from the settlements is dominated by the luxuriant green vegetation of either planted rubber trees or forest. Footpaths which radiate from the hamlets lead to rivers, swiddens, fruit trees and forests. The main track through the larger hamlet stretches from the road-side to the summit of the hilly range that forms the scenic backdrop of the settlement as well as the boundary of the village territory. Several broader dirt tracks and some sparsely vegetated areas are evidences of commercial logging activity in 1980 by a logging company under government licence.

Before the Emergency, Sempak people evidently lived in four hamlets dispersed in the remote areas of their village territory. It seems that during the Emergency the government security forces had persuaded them to regroup and settle closer to the Tapah-Cameron Highlands road. They constructed their houses at the location of the present main settlement but remained there for only a few months. Evidently the high incidence of disease and deaths in
the settlement stimulated them to settle elsewhere. They moved across the road to a new site where they again stayed for only a few months. They were then relocated with several other Tapah Semai at the 3rd Milestone camp a few kilometres away by the government. Towards the end of the Emergency they were allowed to return to their home village. As before the Emergency, the Sempak people lived in dispersed hamlets for about two to three years until they were confident enough to engage in open relations with non-Semai. As older Sempak people claim, they moved to their present location to ease trading.

Although the settlement is relatively permanent nowadays, villagers are still quite mobile almost entirely between villages and rarely moving off to live continuously in the forest. Unmarried adolescents commonly move from village to village for a few years before getting married and starting a family. They would visit their relatives or friends in other villages and temporarily attach themselves and participate in the activities of a household in the host villages. In such moves, adolescents expect to meet potential marital partners. From October 1982 to January 1984, three teenagers (one female and two males) stayed and worked in Sempak for between one to two months each while four Sempak youths stayed away for similar lengths of time in other villages.

It is also common for families to make extended visits to the wife's or husband's village if they are both from different villages. Tapah Semai adhere to an ambilocal form of postmarital residence whereby the couple decides in which village, i.e. the husband's or the wife's, to set up their household. At Sempak village, out of 10 village exogamous marital unions, 6 were virilocal and 4 uxorilocal. However, the couples frequently shift between viri- and uxorilocal residence in the early years of their marriage. The foremost reason
for this continual shifting is the couple's desire to maintain their control over
fruit trees in both their villages by frequent and extended visits. The couple
may even reside separately in their respective villages to collect fruits during
the fruit season. A case in point is the couple, Bah Sulong and Wah Aleh.
During the fruit season Bah Sulong remained in Sempak to collect durians
while his wife spent the whole of the fruit season in two other villages col-
lecting durians.

The continual movement of couples may also be stimulated by the feeling of
"homesickness" (reyiak) by either spouse. Sometimes, the family may move
for specific reasons such as personal disputes and illness\(^\text{11}\). The following are
examples of such shifts:

Bah Cekap's elder sister with her three children had moved into
his house (E) after she left her husband. Initially the relations be­
tween the two families were cordial but soon they were strained as
the sister's immoral behaviour became a grave concern of the other
Sempak villagers. To avoid a confrontation with his sister, Bah
Cekap and his family moved to reside temporarily in his father's vil­
lage about a kilometre away.

Wah Nor (of Household B) went to stay with her ailing father in
another village in January to help out. Initially her husband
remained in Sempak for several days and commuted daily to see his
wife. He too then decided to move in with his father-in-law. The
couple stayed there for about one month (January to February 1983)
before returning to Sempak.

As a result of the considerable population mobility, the population of Sem­
pak varied between 80-100 people. Table 2.2 shows the population structure
of Sempak village. The village population was relatively young with the
mean age at 22.4 years and 40 per cent under 14 years. The sex ratio is
85.7 which means that there is an excess of females in the village population.

\(^{11}\text{See Fix (1971) on the Satak area Semai for similar observations. He too found a high fre­}
quency of migration in the Semai villages he studied.}\)
Table 2-2: Age-Sex Composition in the Village (January 1983)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>AGE CATEGORY</th>
<th>MALE</th>
<th>FEMALE</th>
<th>TOTAL NO.</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>60 over</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>50 – 59</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>40 – 49</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30 – 39</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20 – 29</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>27.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10 – 19</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>18.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0 – 9</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>30.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>91</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As among other Tapah Semai, Sempak people owe part of their village solidarity to the fact that they share control and ownership over the village territory (lengrii'). Since the 1920s, villages are defined among Tapah Semai as groups of people inhabiting a river valley. The territory they occupy is demarcated by streams and ridges and is usually named after the main river of its drainage system. The homestead (or homesteads) in a village territory is indigenously known as tmpaat (following the Malay term, tempat, which means place) but nowadays settlements are commonly called kampong (Malay term for village) following the official names for Semai villages. For instance, the village at the Seventh milestone along the Tapah-Cameron Highlands road is officially known as "Seventh Mile Village" (Kampong Batu Tujoh) but the Semai called it "The place of Rengsak Territory people" (Tmpaat mai lengrii' Rengsak) or simply "Rengsak Place" (Tmpaat Rengsak) where Rengsak is the name of the main river in the territory.

In terms of membership of a lengrii', villagers draw a distinction between 'true' lengrii' (lengrii' pasak) and 'residential' lengrii' (lengrii' numpuk).
They refer to the territory where they have control and ownership rights that they obtain through membership of the ‘land owing group’ (mai pasak) as their ‘true’ lengrii’ (lengrii’ pasak) while the village territory where they reside as a result of marriage or some other reason as ‘residential’ lengrii’ (lengrii’ numpuk).

An individual claims rights to a ‘true’ lengrii’ by being recruited through birth into the ‘land owning’ group (mai pasak) that ‘owns’ the territory. They do not regard their place of birth or the place of their parent’s burial as their ‘true’ lengrii’ unless it is their parent’s true lengrii’. Furthermore, they do not lay claim to one on the basis of long term residence. The principles of the ambilineal cognatic descent system, which the Semai adhere to, determine recruitment into the ‘land owning’ group. In such a system, individuals regardless of sex can claim rights to a village territory through their father’s and/or mother’s membership but in order to gain social recognition of these rights they have to indicate an interest in the affairs of the village. Ideally, villagers must maintain constant close ties and interact with the other residents and show an interest as well as work on the maintenance and reproduction of their fruit orchard or rubber trees (kampuk) to activate their rights. While some may stay in their ‘true’ lengrii’ others may occasionally reactivate their rights by making extended visits even though they do not reside permanently in their territory. Cognatic descent, theoretically, allows a person to set claims to more than one lengrii’. However, most people lay claim to only one ‘true’ lengrii’ and voluntarily exclude themselves from the others that they are entitled through cognatic descent by allowing their close ties to lapse and by not interacting intensively with people in the other lengrii’. As they say, “we have ‘forgotten’ (inseep) our other lengrii’”.

In their ‘true’ lengrii’, villagers can hunt, gather, fish, collect forest
products, and cultivate crops but do not have exclusive rights to land unless it is a swidden that they cleared and are still using. In other words, individuals have rights to use the land in the lengrii in the way they desire but hold these rights in common with others in the ‘land-owning’ group. Nowadays, it appears that some people try to control the land on which their groves of fruit trees (kampuk) grow. Ordinarily it is considered proper to consult the owner of a kampuk if one desires to exploit resources in or in the vicinity of the area. In most cases the recognised owners would grant permission to other people wishing to extract resources from their kampuk unless they view the resources with a certain sense of sentimentality or regard their removal as potentially disruptive to their fruit trees. An actual case in point is when the owner of a kampuk refused permission for a group of villagers to collect bamboo from the vicinity of his fruit trees. He insisted that the bamboo provides much desired shade in his kampuk. The group complied. This case and many similar cases observed indicate that the owners of a kampuk can have a considerable degree of control over the land and resources around their fruit trees.

Those who claim a territory as ‘residential’ lengrii can exploit the territory just as the ‘true’ residents but they cannot plant and claim for themselves fruit trees in the village land. They can, however, do so on behalf of their spouse and children who regard the place as their ‘true’ lengrii. They gain rights to harvest fruit from these trees through their spouse and children but once their marriage dissolves they lose these rights. The dissolution of a marriage will also end their claim based on that marriage to a village territory. Since village exogamy is the norm among Tapah Semai, there are likely to be many ‘residential’ lengrii members in every village.

Besides being directly or indirectly linked to the village territory, most resi-
dents in a village may be kin (or affinally) related. As the genealogy chart for Sempak village shows, most of the households are genealogically linked. Although people in a 'land-owning' (mai pasak) group may be kin-related, it is not a kin grouping since it is very likely that the pioneers of the territory were unrelated to each other. The Sempak ancestors came from different parts of the region but mainly from Bertam valley, (close to Cameron Highlands), Kenoh (near Tapah), 3rd Milestone (Tapah-Cameron Highland road) area and 6th Milestone territory. They were unrelated to one another and resided in households dispersed in the village territory (lengrii').

An important kin based social group is the bilateral kindred called waris. As Carole Robarchek (1980:100) notes:

A waris is ego-centered and composed of ego's relatives on both father's and mother's sides...[however] some members of the waris may not be related to one another, since it includes both ego's father's and mother's consanguineal relatives...

Unlike the 'land-owning' group, the waris group is not territorially based since its members may reside in numerous different villages. People rely on their waris for support, both emotional and material, during marriages (weddings), deaths (mortuary ceremonies) and personal disputes with others. A person summoned to a bicara' (native court) to resolve a dispute will resort to his waris for support and assistance in his defence.

People in a village may also see themselves as symbolically related through being “looked after" by the same spirit familiars (gunik). According to Semai beliefs, the shamans (halaa') in their curing ceremonies rely on their spirit familiars (gunik) which appear in their dreams offering to serve them. During the seances (kubut) which may be attended by most people in the village, the shamans invoke their spirit familiars by singing the ‘dream song' (jenulak) supposedly given to them by the spirit familiar to assist them.
The spirit familiars evidently assist the shamans to ward off the disease causing spirits afflicting a sick person while in curing a person suffering from "soul-loss" which results in listlessness and eventually death the familiars supposedly help by retrieving the lost soul. During these seances which may go on for three to seven consecutive nights, the shaman, when in a state of trance (which is believed to be the time when he is possessed by the spirit familiar), may "blow" the spirit familiars into the souls (klook) of the others present so that these spirits may "look after" them. Usually the prohibition of certain foods is associated with spirit familiars. In Sempak village, most people are prohibited from eating pineapple and kulip (Scorodocarpus broneensis) which adds to their distinctiveness as a village group.

As in every Tapah Semai village, Sempak village has an acknowledged head­man (penghulu) who was chosen for his popularity, competence and leadership qualities. Apart from serving as mediator and judicator in disputes and quarrels among village residents, the headman, being government (JOA) appointed and salaried, also serves the dual, sometimes conflicting, roles of village spokesman and government agent. The headmanship is usually hereditary but in some cases, as in Sempak village, in the absence of a suitable incumbent, another person not directly related to the former headman may be nominated as the successor.

The village headmanship is certainly a recent introduction among the Tapah Semai. People say that the British were responsible for the appointment of village headmen. Some villagers claim that Peter Williams-Hunt (Tok Jangut - "Mr Bearded"), who was the first Commissioner of Aborigines, had appointed their first headmen. It seems that villagers depended on elders for village decisions in the absence of headmen in the past. Given the villagers emphasis on personal autonomy, most headmen find it difficult to assert their
authority. Decisions are still mainly made by village consensus. For the headmen to have things their way, they have to debate eloquently at the village meetings in order to manipulate public opinion in the favour of their view.

To assist the headmen, several elders or household heads most usually males are appointed as their assistants who are called *seten* which is derived from the English term assistant. In Sempak, there are seven assistants who actually comprise of all the respected males in the village.

2.4. The Households

The village itself can be described as an assembly of households. A Semai will usually respond to a question of how large a certain settlement is, by giving the number of households in the settlement. The household is the basic unit in situations within the village territory or outside of it, for activities ordinarily are performed either by single households or by larger units comprising several households.

Significantly, villagers refer to the household either as "house" (*duk*) or "family" (*kelamin*). A household may be referred to as "house of so and so"; for example "house of Mezan’s father" (*duk minek Mezan* where *duk* means house and *Minek Mezan* is the teknonym of the household head). These two terms of references for the household are both appropriate but not precisely accurate. The household is a coresidential group where membership is determined by the Semai principle of "where one eats and sleeps" (*Tmpaat cha’nah ru bohbet*) and, equally important, by kinship ties. While the core of the household is a group linked by close kinship, non-kin, (*pek waris*) may be included. However as Table 2.3 shows, all Sempak households consist of persons related through descent, marriage or adoption. Thus, it is not mis-
leading to speak synonymously of 'household' and 'family'. About 85 per cent of the households, which average between 4-5 persons each, are the nuclear family type. The composition of some households in Sempak varied during the period of field research. In Household C, the wife's sister moved into Household A (another sister) in June 1983 while the two sons in Household J joined several different households within and outside the village during the year.

### Table 2-3: The Composition of Households in Sempak (June 1981)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>HOUSEHOLD</th>
<th>SIZE</th>
<th>HUSBAND</th>
<th>WIFE</th>
<th>CHILDREN</th>
<th>OTHER</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>G</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>J</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>K</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>L</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>O</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>WS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>T</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>M,D</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Usually the members of a household act together as a unit for production and consumption. Each household is a cooperating organisation of individuals who contribute to its production and share its products; each is economically autonomous in relation to other households. As in many similar societies, the production unit is contingent on the production process or activity. The production unit may comprise a greater number of households in fishing with stupeficans than in fruit collecting which is mostly done by persons from one household working together or individually. The unit of consumption in
Semai villages does not always correspond with the production unit. In most cases, however, the main unit of consumption is the household. But this unit may be larger, such as a group of households, a hamlet or even a village, in some circumstances such as when there is abundant meat after a successful hunting or trapping operation or when there is a good rice harvest (see Chapter 4 for a detailed discussion).

The household is also a unit of ownership of swidden land that is still being used and certain types of property (such as household goods), the members of the household having use rights of articles and property and a share of the product if the property is used in production. The husband and wife in a household pool their property which they have amassed on their own or inherited (sakaa') from their parents for use by the household. However, the ownership and control of fruit trees and certain articles like blowpipes, gold ornaments, wrist watches, cassette players and motorcycles are usually regarded as private but in general people in a household have easy access to each other’s possessions.

The household possesses exclusive rights over the swidden its' members cultivate but once it ceases to ‘use’ (in the sense of management or harvest) the field, the land reverts back to the public domain ‘owned’ by the ‘land-owning’ group. The principle of usufruct which determines the land tenure of the swiddens generally underlies most property ownership claims. For instance, a trapper claims exclusive rights over the snares he sets and the quarry caught by them but once he leaves them unattended for some time and expresses a disinterest in continuing to set them, he relinquishes these rights; the snares may then be used by anyone else outside the trapper’s household. However, Semai regard it as proper etiquette for a person wishing to re-use the snares to seek the trapper’s consent. Nonetheless, regardless of the response to the request, a person may claim rights to the snares if he uses them.
The principles of ownership and control of fruit trees are well defined by comparison to other Semai property. Villagers claim exclusive rights over fruit trees that they themselves have planted (chet halior) or they have inherited (sakaa') from their relatives. Inheritance is bilateral and every child inherits fruit trees and other property irrespective of sex. However it appears that the distribution of fruit trees is unequal with the older children receiving more. In the division of estate, the owners (or a mediator they choose) will count (banci') the fruit trees and then distribute (sair) them among their inheritors. In such cases, which is known as cha' halior ("eat alone") the inheritors possess private ownership of the fruit trees which are usually pooled together with those owned by other household members to constitute the household property. Sometimes, the owner may not divide up his estate among his inheritors but may transfer the ownership of the fruit trees to his descendents, usually a sibling set, as a group; an arrangement which Semai aptly refer to as cha' samak ("eating together"). In such type of ownership, the owners cooperate in the maintenance and harvesting of their fruit trees and share equitably the produce from these trees among themselves. This type of ownership, undoubtedly, encourages cooperative production among individuals from different households. Table 2.4 records the number of fruit-bearing durian and petai trees owned by six Sempak households according to the type of ownership. It is noteworthy that only one person has productive fruit trees he himself planted. Although the other individuals have planted substantial areas with fruit trees, these have yet to bear fruit. The information in Table 2.4 shows that there is substantial disparity among the households in respect to the trees owned. For instance, the core members of Household D individually own 33 durian trees which amounts to almost five times that of the number individually owned trees by Household E (7 durian trees).
Table 2-4: Number of Productive Durian and Petai Trees Owned by Individual in the Sample

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>HOUSEHOLD</th>
<th>PERSON</th>
<th>DURIAN 1</th>
<th>DURIAN 2</th>
<th>DURIAN 3</th>
<th>PETAI 1</th>
<th>PETAI 2</th>
<th>PETAI 3</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>B.Nandok</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>B.Rahu</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>B.Cendik</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D</td>
<td>B.Openg</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D</td>
<td>W.Siao</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E</td>
<td>B.Cekap</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E</td>
<td>W.Buyas</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td>B.Sulong</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td></td>
<td>97</td>
<td>138</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>138</td>
<td>148</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Index
1 - inherited individual *(cha' halior)* form of ownership.
2 - inherited sibling/shared ownership *(cha' samak)* form.
3 - planted on own.

Marriage initiates the developmental cycle of the household. Upon marriage, the couple builds a house in the settlement in which they choose to reside. During the housebuilding, which may take about a month, the couple will stay in a relative's house but it will operate as a separate household in respect to production and consumption. Upon moving into a new house, the couple may invite an unmarried sibling or widowed elder to stay temporarily with them for the sake of company.

The household expands through birth, adoption and incorporation. Normally within the first year the newly formed household begins to expand with the birth of child. With the advent of children, the labour situation in the household changes. The wife burdened with childcare will not be able to join her husband in production as frequently as she may have before childbirth.
A division of labour based on sex is more evident during this stage of the household developmental cycle. The wife performs the various household chores and cares for her young children while the husband engages in the various productive activities to obtain their livelihood, although the couple may cooperate in some activities if they have someone to baby-sit. However, this sexual division of labour is not rigid as it is common to find men engaging in housework and childcare.\textsuperscript{12}

Children who can walk and speak are left free to move around and play in the village compound. They rarely contribute their labour to household production before reaching seven years old. Before reaching their teens, they may assist in domestic work, childcare and in some production such as fruit collecting, fishing and insect collecting but not on a regular basis. Most children in this age group (8-12 years) usually spend a whole day fishing, butterfly collecting, or bird catapulting in the village environs mainly for their own consumption or pockey money with which to buy tit-bits for themselves.

Adolescents are expected to contribute their labour to household production. However, they, as noted earlier, are seldom found in their natal households since they are generally very mobile. Nonetheless, they are an important source of labour to other households as they often contribute their labour to the households that they join on a temporary basis in their move from village to village. During the survey year (November 1982 to October 1983), three households (A,C,D) in the sample received services of adolescents for varying periods of between 1-2 months.

\textsuperscript{12}See also Karen Endicott (1979) for the Batek Negrito and Nowak (n.d.) for the Hmak Btsisi.
Thus, it appears children on the whole contribute very little to their natal households. As a Semai man succinctly put it:

"Children are useless when they are young. All they think of is play. When they are older, all they do is go here and there and forsake their parents".

However, the same person noted that he and his wife have children because:

"When I am old and unable to climb my petai trees and carry durian on my back, I can rely on my son, Anjang, to care for my trees and buy me rice, fish, tobacco."

Hence, it is apparent that the economic significance of children in Semai society lies in the fact that they are a source of security in old age. Children also, of course, provide much desired companionship to parents. It is mainly for this reason that childless and elderly (with married children) couples adopt children. There are three cases of child adoption in Sempak, in households H, I, J. The wife of Household H and the head of Household I adopted their grand-daughters while in the case of Household J, the couple adopted the husband’s FBD’s grand-daughter (from C). The children are aged between 8-12 and assist substantially in carrying out the domestic chores.

The foregoing provides the general context for the detailed analysis of the economy of a sample of Sempak households. The composition of these households, labelled as A-F, is described in Table 2.3. In terms of household size, the sample households are representative of the village. It must, however, be noted that all these households are in the early developmental cycle. Although the couple at the core of Household C are middle-aged, their children living with them are young; they have two older children adopted by two other Sempak households. Even though the sample does not constitute a cross-section of the Sempak households in terms of developmental cycle, it nonetheless adequately represents the village in respect of household economic behaviour.
Chapter 3

Production: Time Allocation

The economy of the Tapah Semai is characteristically mixed. Villagers engage in a broad range of productive activities for both cash income as well as subsistence. While some activities occur throughout the year others are performed on a seasonal basis. During certain months, people combined several activities which are carried out in a sequence or simultaneously on the same day. In general the villagers are highly opportunistic in procuring subsistence or earning money. Such economic behaviour is not unique to Semai; it appears that most other Orang Asli also subscribe to it (cf Baharon 1973, Benjamin n.d., Kirk Endicott 1979a, 1984, Gomes 1982, Howell 1983, Nowak 1983, Rambo 1979). As Kirk Endicott (1979a:8) writes on the Batek:

The Batek have a flexible mixed economy which is based upon a strategy of always being ready to shift from one type of economic activity to another as circumstances change and new opportunities arise. The Batek have a range of exploitative skills which enable them to take advantage of the most promising economic opportunities available at any given time.

In recent years, the subsistence activities of swidden cultivation, hunting and fishing, which the Semai are noted for in the literature, have been relegated to secondary economic status. Today, of primary importance to their livelihood are the commodity productive pursuits of fruit collecting, forest product trading, rubber tapping and wage employment that they keenly undertake to earn cash. Given their increasing desire for money which primarily stems from their dependence on the market for most foodstuffs, vil-
lagers prefer to engage in any kind of cash earning activity. People may even sell products produced for their own use if direct requests for them are made. In some villages at higher altitudes where durian and petai trees do not thrive, people grow corn, vegetables and flowers primarily for sale. Similarly, people in a few villages engage in fishing and frog hunting largely for cash income while nowadays hunters instead of sharing with fellow villagers commonly sell their produce to others, a practice that was unthinkable in the past. Although these activities have become commoditised, villagers generally carry them out primarily for the satisfaction of their own and household’s needs and sell only a nominal portion of their produce.

The wide choice of productive activities undoubtedly accords people protection against the economic risks that are likely to occur in village economies relying on only one or two productive activities. In the case of Sempak, if say, the fruit yield (which is erratic) is low, people can resort to tapping rubber or collecting forest products or working for wages to obtain cash incomes to maintain their ever increasing market purchases. Moreover, they may do more fishing and hunting and cultivate larger swiddens to produce greater amounts of supplementary food in order to relieve temporarily and partially their reliance on market food. Given this fairly extensive range of activities that they can choose from at most times of the year, people continually have to decide on how to allocate their working time to various productive pursuits.

This chapter examines how people allocated their working time to production during a survey year (November 1982 - October 1983). On the basis of the time allocation data of the six married couples, it demonstrates that people devote substantially more hours to commodity production than subsistence activities. In the process, it also shows the variation among in-
individuals, particularly between the sexes, in the way they allocated their time to commodity production, subsistence production and domestic activities. Generally, men spend more hours on commodity production than women who are primarily involved in subsistence production and domestic activities such as food preparation, firewood gathering, house cleaning, washing clothes. This chapter also examines the seasonal variation in time allocation and indicates how this relates to the nature of the mixed economy.

As Gross (1984) emphasises, time allocation analysis in the context of production only records the duration of an activity or activities and ignores the labour intensity involved in the task. To overcome this shortcoming, some notion of the labour intensity in each activity will be provided when describing the various productive activities.

3.1. Aggregate Production

A conspicuous feature of the pattern of Semai labour input, as can be seen from Table 3.1, is that the villagers have a short working day. On average, a man works between 1-2 hours per day on commodity and subsistence production and less than an hour (about 50 minutes) on household chores, while his wife spends about 2 hours daily on domestic work and about half an hour on commodity and subsistence production. In comparison to other similar societies these work hours are short. For example, in the case of the South American Machiguenga Indian swidden cultivators, Johnson (1975) documented that the men spent about 5-6 hours on subsistence activities and 0.2 hours on food preparation daily while the women allocated 4 hours and 2.4 hours to these activities respectively. Similarly, in the case of Javanese peasants who like the Semai also produce for the market, White (1976) found that the men devoted between 5-6 hours to productive pursuits and the women 4 hours daily and that household activities namely housework, food
preparation and firewood collecting took 23 minutes of the men’s time and 4 hours of the women’s time daily. The question arises as to how the Semai manage by working such short hours daily. Endicott (1984), on the basis of his research on the economy of the Batek Negrito (of Malaysia), who like the Semai engage in the trading of forest products and fruits but on a relatively limited scale, provides a clue to this question. He found that the Batek need to work less hours if they collect and trade rattan rather than gathering wild food. In his words:

...the Batek obtain an adequate diet...while working 28.63 hours per week [or 4.1 hours per day], for men, and 20.09 hours per week [or 2.9 hours per day], for women. Of this, the time spent working rattan is 10.52 hours for men and 3.28 hours for women. To gain an equivalent number of calories by digging tubers would require 16.42 hours for men and 5.12 hours for women. Thus, by taking opportunities to collect and trade rattan, the Batek substantially reduce the hours they must work each week... (Endicott 1984:40)

The Semai are well aware of this relative productivity and so devote substantially more hours to commodity production than subsistence production. For instance, one hour spent on petai collecting may earn enough money to purchase around 10 kilograms of rice which would require a much greater labour input, in terms of time, and effort, to produce from a swidden.

Table 3-1: Annual Time Allocation of Men and Women in the Sample to Production, November 1982 - October 1983

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PRODUCTIVE ACTIVITY</th>
<th>MEN</th>
<th>WOMEN</th>
<th>TOTAL</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Commodity</td>
<td>2906</td>
<td>552</td>
<td>3458</td>
<td>30.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Subsistence</td>
<td>870</td>
<td>341</td>
<td>1211</td>
<td>10.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Domestic Work</td>
<td>1666</td>
<td>5078</td>
<td>6744</td>
<td>59.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>5442</td>
<td>5971</td>
<td>11413</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage</td>
<td>47.7</td>
<td>52.3</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average per Day</td>
<td>2.5</td>
<td>2.7</td>
<td>2.6</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Partly for this reason, as Table 3.1 shows, commodity production absorbed almost treble the number of hours people allocated to subsistence production although nearly 60 per cent of the villager's working time was devoted to domestic work. Of the 2 hours and 40 minutes each person spent daily on the various work activities about one and half hours went to domestic work while commodity production used up 50 minutes and subsistence production only 17 minutes.

In respect to sexual differences in time allocation, the variation between men and women is striking. They both contributed almost equal time to work, however. While the men were responsible for 84 per cent and 72 per cent of the hours allocated to commodity production and subsistence production respectively, the women contributed 75 per cent of the labour for domestic work. For the men, slightly more than half of their working time went to commodity production while only 16 per cent of their production hours were spent on subsistence production and 30 per cent on domestic work, 40 percent of the latter being was on housebuilding. In contrast, the women devoted only 9 per cent of their labour time to commodity production and 6 per cent to subsistence production but 85 per cent of their productive hours to domestic work. In terms of hours per day, of the 2 hours 40 minutes that they worked each day, the women spent 2 hours and 20 minutes on household work and the remaining time on the other production categories while the men allotted one hour and 20 minutes to commodity production and the rest of their daily working time to other tasks. Thus, it is clear from the data that women were confined to the domestic sphere while men did most of the commodity production.
3.2. Commodity Production

The activities categorised as commodity production include fruit collecting, forest product collecting, rubber tapping and wage labour. These activities are primarily geared towards producing commodities which are sold in the market. Although on some occasions the products from these pursuits may be consumed by the producers or utilised by their households, the amounts involved in such consumption is small. Furthermore, these activities, as people themselves acknowledge, are "looking-for-money" work (kerja' ke' duit) which they differentiate from subsistence pursuits that they refer to as "looking-for-food" work (kerja' ke' cha').

3.2.1. Fruit Collecting

Of the various commodity productive pursuits, fruit collecting (and harvesting) earned most income and absorbed most time among the Tapah Semai. As Table 3-2 shows, this activity took up almost 64 per cent of the sample's total time allocated to commodity production. The two major fruits collected for market consumption are petai (Parkia speciosa, betar in Semai) and durian (Durio spp, sempak in Semai) and the minor fruits which are harvested intermittently and in relatively small quantities for sale include larah (Baccaurea griffithii), ramei (Baccaurea motleyana), jering (Pithecellobium jiringa) and langsat (Lansium domesticum). As one might expect, the labour processes, work intensity and labour requirements vary according to the type of fruit to be harvested. Basically, fruit collection involves one or other of three techniques: the most difficult and hazardous is climbing to pluck the fruit that ripens high in the trees; easier is plucking with the aid of a long pole to detach the fruit from their trees; and the simplest method is picking up the ripe fruit from the ground. Although women are not prohibited from climbing trees they rarely do so which, since it is the principal method of harvesting, partly accounts for why their contribution to fruit collecting is low.
Table 3-2: Annual Time Allocation by Men and Women in the Sample to Various Commodity Productive Activities, November 1982 to October 1983

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PRODUCTIVE ACTIVITY</th>
<th>MEN</th>
<th>WOMEN</th>
<th>TOTAL</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Fruit Collecting</td>
<td>1858</td>
<td>348</td>
<td>2206</td>
<td>63.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Forest Product Collecting</td>
<td>205</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>207</td>
<td>6.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Insect Collecting</td>
<td>279</td>
<td>199</td>
<td>478</td>
<td>13.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rubber Tapping</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>76</td>
<td>2.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wage Labour</td>
<td>491</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>491</td>
<td>14.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>2906</td>
<td>552</td>
<td>3458</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage</td>
<td>84.0</td>
<td>16.0</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

There are five stages in petai collecting. These are: (a) searching for trees with ready-to-pluck pods [a process called ke' betar, "looking for petai"], (b) tree climbing, (c) plucking (d) gathering fallen pods and tying them into bundles, (e) carrying the petai to the roadside where traders wait to buy Semai products. Searching may take about 5-30 minutes depending on how far the groves of fruit trees are from the settlement and how much the collectors know about the fruit situation of their petai trees. In Sempak, most of the villagers' petai trees (and for that matter, durian trees) are within 20-30 minutes walking distance. Villagers constantly monitor the state of the fruit on their own and other trees whilst out hunting, fishing or insect collecting. Such information is exchanged at the regular informal meetings (sembang) in the village during the people's leisure hours, saving people much time in searching for ripe petai.

Being excellent tree climbers, the collectors usually take about 5 minutes to climb a petai tree. They may take along a bamboo pole to facilitate the
plucking which normally takes about 10 minutes for one bundle of 90 pods. Women, children and older men unable to climb trees, may assist the collector by gathering the fallen pods and tying them into bundles, a process that ordinarily takes about 10 minutes per bundle. Therefore, a petai collecting operation yielding one bundle absorbs about 30 minutes for the actual plucking and bundling and between 20-40 minutes for walking to and from the orchards and the settlement or roadside. Although tree climbing may appear to be the most difficult aspect of the whole petai collecting process, most collectors told me that they find the transportation of the bundles which may weigh between 5-10 kilograms through difficult terrain the most strenuous of the various collecting stages. About 60 per cent of the time spent fruit collecting was directed to plucking petai pods which ripen near the top of the 20-30 metres tall trees thus, requiring difficult and hazardous climbing.

Unlike petai harvesting, the collecting of durian does not necessitate tree climbing since the fruit falls when ripe. Hence, both men and women participate more equally in this activity. Furthermore, in contrast to petai trees which may bear fruit throughout the year, the durian fruit ripens and falls only during the months of June to August in Sempak and in some other places again in November and December. During this season, people typically do not engage in any other productive pursuit besides durian collecting which is the highest cash earner in Sempak village and certainly the main source of income for the Tapah Semai. Durian is mostly collected and transported to the village early in the morning and sometimes in the evenings. As in petai collecting, the worst part of durian collecting is the transportation of the fruit from the orchard to the roadside. While two persons in the village transport their fruit on motorcycles, the rest carry their durian in baskets strung on their backs. A basket laden with durian may weigh between 20-50 kilograms. The fruit is unloaded by the roadside where the traders may col-
lect them and transport them to tertiary middlemen or the villagers may sell them directly to consumers usually commuters on the Tapah-Cameron Highlands road.

During the durian season, the collectors may stay in their farm huts (duk kampuk) ideally constructed in the midst of their fruit trees during the day to guard their fruits from animals and people since their presence usually serves to deter prospective thieves. On an average, a person may spend about 2-3 hours per day in gathering the fruit and carrying them to the roadside.

Women are less active in durian collection than men. Only three of the six women in the sample collected durian, partly because of the drudgery of having to carry heavy loads through difficult terrain and partly because it interferes with the performance of certain other activities regarded as primarily women’s work.

3.2.2. Forest Product Collecting

While the collecting and trading of fruit stands as the principal mode of obtaining cash among the Tapah Semai, people draw upon other sources of cash income as well. However, as Table 3-2 demonstrates, they allocated relatively little time to these other pursuits. Contrary to expectations raised by the Semai reputation as forest collectors in the literature, the people devoted only 6 per cent of the total hours they spent on commodity production to forest collecting, or 207 hours annually. The two main forest products collected for trade are rattan (Calamus spp) and bamboo. Gharu (Aquilaria spp) wood and bertam (Eugeissona tristis) flowers were also collected and traded during the survey period but these were of minor importance since only about 3 hours were devoted to them by two individuals. People also searched for certain saleable insects in the forest.
Only the men collected rattan during the survey year but I have observed women working with their husbands on this activity at other times. As the villagers acknowledge, rattan collecting is an arduous task. The labour processes in this pursuit include walking long distances over rough terrain in search of the vines, tree climbing to cut off the crown that secures the vine to its host tree, pulling the vine down which requires considerable strength, skinning the vines and then cutting them into the required lengths before carrying them on shoulders to the village. In husband-wife teams, the husband climbs the tree to remove the crown of the rattan vine and pulls the vines loose while his wife subsequently assists in skinning and chopping the vines into desired lengths. Both will then carry the rattan according to their relative capabilities to the village where the vines are stored before they are sold to the trader.

Collecting rattan may take a whole morning (between 7 a.m. and noon) as it is becoming scarce in the areas close to the settlement and consequently difficult to find. Given that this task is relatively time consuming and is an arduous activity, it is not surprising that the households allocated little time to it. However, I have observed villagers collecting large amounts of rattan at times other than during the survey period which suggests that people may allocate considerable number of hours to rattan collecting in spite of the hard work if there are no other cash earning possibilities or when there is a sure demand for this resource.

Both men and women collect and trade bamboo. In contrast to rattan, this resource is readily available close to the village and is easier to cut. Furthermore its transportation is relatively less strenuous; people drag the bamboo poles all the way (mostly downhill) to the village. However, the demand for bamboo is limited to the vegetable gardeners' in the Cameron
Highlands and the basket manufacturers in Tapah. Hence, because the people were in competition with several other potential suppliers for this limited demand, they devoted only 44 hours to bamboo collecting. Many hours were spent by the people in collecting bamboo for their own use in housebuilding discussed below.

Unlike rattan production, insect collecting is not a strenuous activity. During the day people walk along streams in the forest equipped with homemade nets, in search of valuable butterflies; at night they use powerful torchlights to hunt for certain insects and invertebrates to sell to traders who specialise in supplying collectors. Most villagers declare that this activity is leisure and not work (kerja'). Notwithstanding, it is a significant source of income at times when there are few cash earning options available. This pursuit took up 13.8 per cent of the peoples' commodity production time. The difference between the sexes in time allocation in this activity is not as marked as in the other commodity productive activities.

In butterfly collecting, the villagers set out in pairs or small groups. Most of the time is taken up in walking but they may rest in certain spots where urea or dried prawns are deposited to attract the butterflies. Typically, they may spend 4-5 hours at a stretch, usually in the morning, collecting butterflies.

The other insects or invertebrates that villagers collect for sale are the leaf-insect (Phasmida phyllium, char in Semai), stick-insect (Phasmida lonchodes, cincak in Semai), several species of beetles and scorpions (especially Heterometrus longimanus). The leaf-insect, stick-insect and scorpion are ordinarily hunted in darkness since the insects are more readily discernible with a powerful torchlight and the scorpion nocturnal. In such nocturnal collecting
operations, which the people call *susud* - literally "to shine the light" - the collectors "work" in pairs or groups for normally 3 to 4 hours. The collectors focus their torchlight on tree branches in search of the insects while traversing the numerous jungle paths and the person that first spots the insect has claim to it even though someone else may catch it.

### 3.2.3. Rubber Tapping

The tapping of *Hevea* rubber (*Hevea brasiliensis*) which the villagers insist was a major activity in the past is of minor importance in Sempak nowadays. Most Semai villages in the region are surrounded by rubber trees, which were planted in the 1960s, giving a casual observer the impression that the villagers depend mainly on rubber for a livelihood. In some communities this is the case. But in Sempak, rubber tapping is a minor supplementary pursuit which never competes with fruit harvesting. As Table 3-2 shows, rubber tapping and processing took only 2.2 per cent of the sample's labour time for commodity production. Only two Sempak households engaged in this activity during the survey period although several more did tap their trees in January and February just before I left the village. Nonetheless, rubber tapping is important as a source of economic security; when the villagers do not have other means of earning cash they can resort to this activity.

The villagers say that rubber tapping is an easy but monotonous task. Its alleged monotony may partly explain its unpopularity among the people who clearly prefer variety in their production. In a typical day of rubber tapping, the tapper leaves home at about 6.30 or 7.00 am for the trees. For each tree an incision is made on the bark which draws out the latex that flows into a cup tied beneath the incisions. It takes the tapper about thirty minutes to tap 10 trees. The trees are left for approximately one hour to
bleed enough latex to fill the cup during which time the tapper may engage in some other activity, normally petai collecting. The tapper then returns to the trees to collect the latex which is carried to a spot where there are rubber rollers or presses. There the latex is poured into metal containers resembling bread pans and mixed with small amount of formic acid which serves to hasten the coagulation of the latex. A few moments later, the block which is still soft, is placed onto a smooth and clean surface like a piece of corrugated iron roofing and is stamped with the feet to flatten it so that it can be passed through the manually operated rollers. These rollers which require at least two people - one to turn the wheel and the other to ensure that the blocks are properly fed into the machines - squeezes out the excess water and further flatten the blocks into sheets which are sun-dried for a few days and subsequently stored beneath the house. It usually takes one hour to produce three sheets of rubber by this process which is called mesin obviously after "machine".

3.2.4. Wage Labour

As in rubber tapping, another occupation that people can resort to when in desperate need of cash is wage employment which is readily available in the region. In Sempak, this occupation was unpopular among the residents during the survey period although, from the life history records, it was found that many people, particularly males, have engaged in this activity intermittently in the past. In the other villages, there were numerous people who worked regularly for wages. While a few held salaried positions in the government service (particularly the JOA), army and police, most were employed as labourers for the non-Semai vegetable farmers and tea planters in the Cameron Highlands or fruit plantations, rubber estates, tin mines and the National Electricity Board elsewhere in the region. In a village close by, six males work regularly and another ten intermittently for a Chinese-owned fruit plantation.
The figure, given in Table 3-2, which suggests that wage labour is important actually creates a distortion as only one person engaged in this activity. He worked 61, 8-hour days in the nearby orchard. As with the other Semai labourers, his work entailed weeding and spraying pesticides and fertilisers.

It was observed that some people performed odd jobs for money. In one case, a man, Bah Sulong, received $10 from a Malay durian trader for building a shelter which took him approximately three hours. During the year, two men gathered bertam (*Eugeissona tristis*) leaves and thatched roofs for their fellow villagers in return for cash. The village headman and some teenage girls ‘worked’ at four Malay weddings. The headman played the violin while the girls served as dance partners. They received between $10 to $20 per night per person. Some villagers were given cash for demonstrating the use of the blowpipe to tourists visiting the village. One Sempak man obtained a total of $170 over seven such occasions during the year.

3.3. Subsistence Production

Even though much emphasis is given to commodity production, subsistence activities such as swiddening, fishing, hunting and gathering persist in the village economy. As people often remark, "we must not forsake the activities of our forefathers." These activities are categorised under subsistence production on the basis that they are primarily geared to production for household consumption. Although people may occasionally sell products from these activities in response to direct requests, the incidences of such sales are few. In Sempak, sale of frogs by a resident to a vendor on two occasions is the only such case.
3.3.1. Swiddening

Villagers cultivate three types of swiddens: rice swidden (selai baa’), tapioca or maize swidden (menchar or selai yang), home garden (bunduk which literally means “back of the house”). As in usual swiddening practice, an area is cleared of its natural vegetation, burned and planted with useful crops in the cultivation of these agricultural plots. The rice swidden which was considered the major swidden is cultivated once a year. It is losing its importance in the village economy. Today tapioca or maize swidden, which like the traditional rice swidden is planted together with a variety of cultigens resulting in a complex mosaic of useful and edible flora in one plot of land, is more popular since unlike rice swiddens they can be cultivated at almost any time of the year and with less work effort. Tapioca and maize swiddens do not require as much weeding since these plants can compete with weeds better than most rice varieties grown. Furthermore, unlike rice cultivation, which abound with rituals, there are no rituals and taboos associated with tapioca or maize cultivation.

Most households have small gardens usually planted at the back of their houses. Several types of cultigens according to the household members’ choice are grown in these gardens. These serve as kitchen gardens as the household members frequently gather tapioca leaves and spices for immediate use in cooking when such are in need. Along with vegetables and condiments, pandanus, fruit trees and decorative plants are raised in these plots.

In planting a rice swidden or tapioca and maize swidden, people distinguished three types of forests: jeres (primary forest), liboy (transitional between primary and secondary forests), and pabil (secondary forests). Nowadays, villagers prefer planting in secondary forests since these are easier to clear and hence, requires less work effort. They would also use tran-
sitional forests particularly for rice swiddens but rarely primary forests. The trade-off of using secondary and transitional forests is that swiddens grown on these need more weeding as these clearings are noted for their rapid weed growth.

In selecting a site for a swidden, cultivators normally follow a set procedure. They will decide on a site after taking into consideration its accessibility from the settlement (the more accessible the better), the forest types, and the plant indicators of soil fertility. In general, people recognise areas abundant with bamboo, *lempoi* (*zingiber chrysostachys*) and *beltop* (*Eugeissona triste*) as potentially productive for cultivation.

In the cultivation of rice, once an area is selected, people will then clear a small area of about one square metre around the centre of the site and then announce their intention to the ground spirit (*nyani kawul*) believed to inhabit the area. They then return to the village and on the next day will make the final decision on whether to use the piece of land after interpreting the previous night’s dreams for good or bad omens. Good omens are interpreted as the granting of permission by the ground spirit to cultivate a swidden in the area. The area first cleared becomes a sacred site called *junjunjung* where certain ritual implements are stored and rites are performed. These sites are easily discernible by certain plants, such as banana, sugar cane and some wild plants, which are recognised as the preferences of the ground spirit. These rituals are not observed in the cultivation of other than rice swiddens.

Ordinarily, women undertake most of the clearing, planting, weeding, harvesting and grain processing whereas the men are expected to fell the large trees and fire the clearings. Hence, as Table 3.3 demonstrates, women spent more hours (59 per cent) on agricultural work than men. It must be borne
in mind, however, that the work effort in terms of labour intensity involved in agricultural work is greater than in activities like fishing, hunting and even fruit collecting. Most agricultural processes, especially planting, weeding and harvesting, involve fixed rhythm work and is generally not greatly interspersed by periods of resting.

### Table 3-3: Annual Time Allocation by Men and Women in the Sample to Various Subsistence Productive Activities and Housebuilding, November 1982 to October 1983.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PRODUCTIVE ACTIVITY</th>
<th>NUMBER OF HOURS</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>MEN</td>
<td>WOMEN</td>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agriculture</td>
<td>103</td>
<td>150</td>
<td>253</td>
<td>20.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hunting</td>
<td>297</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>297</td>
<td>24.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fishing</td>
<td>470</td>
<td>191</td>
<td>661</td>
<td>54.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>870</td>
<td>341</td>
<td>1211</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage</td>
<td>71.8</td>
<td>28.2</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Housebuilding</td>
<td>666</td>
<td>78</td>
<td>744</td>
<td>38.1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Sempak residents did not cultivate rice swiddens during my village stay although one man (Bah Openg) with the assistance of an adolescent male spent about 3 hours a day for 4 days in April in clearing an area for such a swidden but subsequently abandoned his plot. Some households planted minor swiddens with tapioca as the main cultigen in February, March and April 1983 and January 1984 while most people tended homegardens. During the survey period, two households (B and D) working collectively planted a tapioca swidden. The cultivation of this swidden will be described in some length in order to examine the time allocation to the various agricultural processes:

24,25 February: Wah Siao (HhD) working about 3 hours a day cleared an area about 15 square metres covered with bamboo to plant a tapioca swidden.

31 March: Bah Openg (HhD) set fire to the area. This task took him about 2 hours. The vegetation however, did not burn completely.
2 April: Wah Siao and Wah Nor (HhB) piled up the unburnt bamboo and set fire to the area for the second time. This process absorbed about one and half hours.

3, 4 April: The women spent about the same number of hours in these two days to repeat the burning since their initial efforts saw little success.

7, 9 April: The women, spending around 3 hours the first day and 4 hours the second, planted the swidden with tapioca cuttings, maize, lemon grass, long beans, squash and pumpkin.

Swidden activities constituted less than 5 per cent of the sample's total production time and, as Table 3.3 shows, only about 21 per cent of the hours devoted to subsistence production. Of the 253 hours the sample gave to swiddening, about one third went to the harvesting of rice in January planted in the previous year. Typically women did most of this task. To provide some idea of the work effort in rice harvesting, a typical harvesting operation by three individuals will be described on the basis of spot observations:

Bah Kantat and Wah Apong, his wife left the village, with their grand-daughter, Wah Nuni, at 8.55 am for their swidden field about 300 metres away. They arrived at their swidden hut at 9.08 am.

9.08 - 9.18: Bah Kantat remained in the hut, smoking a cigarette while the women were changing into their farm clothes.

9.18: The women began walking up the steep gradient to the higher parts of the field to begin harvesting while Bah Kantat remained in the hut.

9.30: The women began cutting the sheaves of rice with finger knives. Bah Kantat joined them two minutes later.

11.35: All three harvestors stopped worked and began to go back to the hut with baskets laden with rice grains on their backs. At the hut, Bah Kantat and Wah Nuni rested while Wah Apong gathered about 500 grams of tapioca leaves closeby.

11.42 - 12.58: The women engaged in the processing of the grains by first stamping on the stalks and then, by winnowing, separated the filled grain from the empty shells. Meanwhile, Bah Kantat roasted a few pieces of tapioca.

12.59 - 1.14: Wah Apong laid out the grain on a straw mat to dry.

1.20: Wah Nuni began walking back to the village with the grain she harvested. The couple remained in the hut resting until about 3 pm.
Since no major swiddens were planted during the survey period, it would be reasonable to say that the time allocation data may not be representative of time allocation to swiddening in other seasons or in other villages. Nonetheless, the fact that the villagers nowadays plant rice swiddens irregularly and intermittently demonstrates the declining importance of these types of swiddens in the contemporary Semai economy. To ascertain the frequency of swidden planting over a longer period 10 Sempak households were interviewed about their plantings of rice swiddens in the previous ten years (1972-1982). Of these households, two had planted seven swiddens each, 1 six swiddens, 2 three swiddens each, 3 one each and 2 have never cultivated one before. Moreover, they say that the size of plots planted has reduced over the years.

3.3.2. Fishing and Hunting

Unlike swidding, fishing and hunting are not fixed rhythm work. Most of the effort given to these pursuits is in the walking. People sometimes walk several kilometres in search of fish or game. The fact that these pursuits are interspersed with resting and are performed with other productive activities like fruit harvesting or gathering makes them much less monotonous than most swiddening labour processes. For this reason some villagers consider these as leisure activities even though these pursuits are sometimes arduous since people have to walk through difficult and hazardously slippery terrain.

These pursuits are performed sporadically. As Dentan (1965:47) notes:

...days and even weeks will go by with very few fishing [and hunting] expeditions, followed by a couple of days during which almost everyone goes fishing until the weather stabilizes or the fad wears off.

The stimulus for such outings is normally someone's good catch. Furthermore, a change in the rainfall and subsequent change in the rivers condition may induce people to fish or hunt frogs while during the fruiting and har-
vesting seasons when wild animals are attracted to the orchards or swiddens people may engage in considerable hunting and trapping.

Unlike swidden cultivation, fishing continues as a popular activity as during the survey period, the sample allocated 661 hours to this activity which makes it the second most important (in terms of time allocation) productive pursuit after fruit collecting. Fishing also serves as a source of specific protein food that is generally unavailable in the market as well as a social activity. The people prefer to fish in groups and whilst engaging in this activity they share jokes, exchange stories and horseplay.

The methods employed in fishing include hook and line (*tengroit* for daytime fishing and *penggob* for night-time fishing), hand fishing (*rengrop*), basket fishing, fish trapping (*bubu*), weir fishing (*marek*), cast-net (*jala*), spear-gun and fishing with stupeficiants. In general, these fishing methods except in the use of fish traps and weirs involve considerable walking which absorbs most of the hours devoted to this activity. While most of the fishing outings may take from 3 to 5 hours, in fish-trapping a person spends about 30 minutes to set the traps and subsequently 10 to 30 minutes per day depending on how far the site is from the village to check the traps for fish.

Hunting,¹ which is predominantly a male activity, absorbed marginally more than one third of the men's labour time to subsistence production. The main weapon in hunting is the blowpipe (*blau*) which is used in obtaining arboreal animals such as squirrels, monkeys, birds and bats. Catapults, clubs and “fanning” (smoking the animal out of its hiding places) method are also used in hunting and in several other villages men hunt with shotguns which invari-

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¹For detailed descriptions, see Dentan 1965:32-46 and Robarchek 1977:54-56.
ably are more efficient than the blowpipe for killing larger animals. However, most of the wild meat is obtained through trapping where ingeniously made traps and snares are employed.

The *jenluk* (spring noose snare) is the most popular snare used among Sem-pak men. Some men told me that they prefer to work alone in trapping but it was observed that they mostly worked in pairs or groups where each trapper sets his own snares and has exclusive rights to the quarry caught in them. There are three stages in trapping. In the initial stage (called *praloh*) men walk along a path in the forest, halting occasionally at specific spots, usually under fruit trees, where the snare is constructed but not set and some tapioca pieces are left as bait. This is repeated for 3 to 4 days to attract the animals in the vicinity to the snares. In the next stage (*trabet*), the trappers set their snares in the evening and early next morning in the third stage, they check the snares, collect the quarry (if any) and reset the snares.

### 3.3.3. Gathering

Vegetable gathering which produced almost all of the villagers' vegetable food intake was mostly undertaken in between work processes of other productive activities. It was observed that people rarely go out specifically to gather vegetables. Furthermore, since the main vegetable, tapioca leaves, is readily available close to the villagers' houses, the gatherers actually spend very little time to gather such food. Owing to the difficulty of keeping records of gathering as well as the problem of time measurement, I do not have complete time allocation data on this activity.
3.4. Domestic Work

During the survey period, four households (A,D,E,F) in the sample built new houses, three (B,D,E,) built farm houses (*duk kampuk*) and four (B,C,D,F,) undertook house renovations. The villagers claim that they build a new house about once every four or five years and replace the roof, if made out of thatched palm, once every two or three years. Most of the materials for their houses are from the forest but some village houses have floors made out of purchased sawn timber and roofs of corrugated iron sheets. Some houses in other villages are almost entirely constructed out of bought materials such as cement, bricks, timber and glass.

The work processes in housebuilding can be divided into four sequential stages with differing labour time requirements and labour intensities. These are:

(a) Gathering of wood and rattan for the house framework.

(b) Construction of the framework.

(c) Gathering and thatching of palm leaves for the roof and laying out the roof.

(d) Gathering bamboo for the walls and floor and the construction of these parts of the house.

The labour for housebuilding is drawn mainly from the household but sometimes people from other households may provide assistance and they are usually "paid" with gifts of food or tobacco. In the first stage, the male members of the household gather the large and strong wood used as corner posts (*cenol*) while the women may gather the slender wood. This gathering may take between a few days and several weeks depending on how intensely the people work. Some may spend about an hour a day on this task for
several weeks while others may work 4-5 hours daily for a few days. Once these materials are gathered, the older or more experienced men (sometimes with assistance from women) construct the framework. They usually work for 4-5 hours per day and may complete this work in between 2 days to a week depending on the size of the house. Both males and females gather palm leaves but the females do most of the thatching while the males lay out the roof. It was observed that a couple working for 4-5 hours a day, which is the normal practice in such task, on gathering and thatching the leaves usually produce about 50 thatched palms which may constitute between $\frac{1}{8}$ and $\frac{1}{10}$ of the roof of a normal house. Male and female household members combine their efforts in the gathering of bamboo and the making of the walls and the floor of the house. Generally, in housebuilding the villagers work relatively more intensely than in the other activities and for comparably long hours in a stretch. Furthermore, as Table 3.3 shows, men spent enormously more hours on this activity than women.

Records on domestic work like cooking, childcare, laundry and house cleaning were not kept because after a period of initial observation it was clear that the number of hours people spent daily on this activity is fairly consistent and regular. Although both men and women performed domestic duties, women spent considerably more time on these tasks than the men. Women spent about 2-3 hours per day on domestic work.

3.5. Seasonal Variation

Peninsular Malaysia lies near the equator and experiences an equatorial climate. However due to its insularity and exposure to the monsoonal winds, it experiences seasonal variations which are absent in most other equatorial areas. The tropical monsoons, Northeast and Southwest, impose somewhat distinct wet and dry seasons in Peninsular Malaysia but not as severe as in
other tropical regions especially the Indian subcontinent and mainland Southeast Asia. The Northeast monsoon brings much rainfall in November to January while the Southwest monsoon carries less rain bearing clouds across the Peninsular after passing Sumatra in May to July. The dry spells occur during the months of February, March, July, August and September. The months of April and October are referred to as the transitional months since they are between the retreating and the advancing monsoons. These seasonal changes are crucial in the fruiting of certain plants people grow. For example, the blossoming of the durian flower requires a dry spell and hence occurs in mid January and February. If heavy rainfall occurs during this period the durian flowering will be adversely affected. These seasonal weather changes are also significant in the annual scheduling of production. The dry spells are essential for the burning of the vegetation in swiddening. People have to clear the forests prior to the dry season so that the plant cover will be sufficiently dry by the end of the season at which time the clearing must be burned.

Figures 3.1, 3.2 and 3.3 illustrate the number of hours allocated to the various productive pursuits for the survey year (see also Tables in Appendix A). A striking feature is the substantial seasonal variation in the production time allocation. As Figure 3.1 shows, there was considerable monthly variation in the allocation of hours to commodity production with two labour peak periods: one in March and the other in July. It can be seen in Figure 3.2 that the peak in March is caused by the substantial increase in hours spent in collecting insects and wage labour whereas the one in July is due to dramatic increase in fruit collecting. This Figure also shows that from November to May people engaged in a broad range of productive pursuits while conversely the range of productive activities is lowest from June to September which corresponds with the main fruit season. So, basically there are
two seasons. The villagers too draw a distinction between these seasons. The fruit season which is the period when they earn relatively high incomes is referred to as renghung ("light") while the other times of the year is called tohoog ("dry season"). During really severe tohoog periods, the villagers request loans from their traders to purchase food and participate in the minor cash-earning activities like insect collecting, forest product collecting and rubber tapping to supplement their relatively low income from fruit collecting. It was also during this period that the man who engaged in wage labour worked most of the days he spent on this activity. In contrast, during the renghung periods, the villagers earn substantial cash incomes and hence, need not engage in other cash-earning activities. In fact, the forest product trader, aware of this, never makes requests for forest resources from the people during this period.

The seasonal variation is attributable to the seasonal characteristic of the fruits people harvest and the climatic variations. As mentioned earlier, the durian fruit ripens and falls during the months of June to August while although, petai trees bear fruit throughout the year, their yield is greatest during this period too. The blossoming of the durian flowers around January or February (the dry season) is certainly an important indicator which people take note of when planning their annual work schedule. Judging from the flowers people estimate the potential yield for the year. Generally if they anticipate a good crop of durians, as during the survey year, they are likely to request more loans from their traders during the tohoog period to see them through at these difficult financial times instead of engaging in arduous cash-earning work like forest product collecting. They expect to be able to pay off their debts with the potentially high incomes during the durian season. In such a situation, they are also likely to engage in considerable fishing, hunting and insect collecting during the tohoog period more as much for so-
TIME ALLOCATION FOR COMMODITY AND SUBSISTENCE PRODUCTION

MONTH

TIME ALLOCATION FOR COMMODITY AND SUBSISTENCE PRODUCTION

SUBSISTENCE PRODUCTION

COMMODOITY PRODUCTION
Figure 3.2
TIME ALLOCATION FOR COMMODITY PRODUCTION
cial reasons as productive ones even though the protein food obtained through fishing and hunting are preferred. Furthermore, they are not likely to cultivate rice swiddens which due to climatic factors need considerable labour input in burning and planting during the fruit season. They make this decision not because of labour shortage owing to competing activities but rather on the fact that during the fruit season they may be in “high-spirits” and not in the mood for other work more arduous besides durian collecting. This is the reason given by the man who had cleared an area for swiddening but never got around to planting during the fruit season. When asked why he did not plant rice, he told me that he was “not in the mood” (segat).

If a poor harvest is predicted, they are likely to devote more time and effort to forest product collecting, rubber tapping and wage labour during the tohoog period to earn cash in order to compensate for the expected low durian crop. This probably explains why the people spent much time tapping rubber in January and February 1984 and expressed interest in collecting forest products since villagers anticipated a poor harvest for that year. Furthermore, they are likely to plant rice swiddens and engage in much fishing and hunting to reduce the degree of their dependence on the market. It must be borne in mind that the rice swiddens are not only important as a source of rice, tapioca and vegetables but also as a source of protein since the swidden attracts wild pigs, rodents, birds and monkeys which Semai hunt and trap. Men usually hunt and set their traps around swiddens.

The annual schedule of production is also regulated by rainfall which determines the timing of the cultivation of rice swiddens. The fields are cleared in April so that the vegetation will be sufficiently dry for it to be successfully burned in July or August. Planting has to be completed in August to ensure that the rice is ready for harvesting before the rainy season in Decem-
ber. Some say that they do less fishing during the rainy season but Figure 3.3 shows that this is not always the case. Although they allocated relatively less time to fishing during the wet months of October and November, they spent about 17 per cent of the annual number of hours in fishing during the month of December which is the wettest month of the year. Rainfall also affects rubber-tapping and petai collecting. Rubber trees are not tapped on rainy days since the rainwater may dilute the latex and men avoid climbing wet petai trees which are dangerously slippery.

Conversely, as the data show, during the hot and dry season in February-April the villagers spent substantial hours in fishing and insect collecting. They say that during such times they prefer to work along the jungle streams to enjoy the relative coolness of the forest and streams. It was observed that during these months if the villagers have earned money from the then low yielding petai trees or some other supplementary source, they are likely to choose fishing over insect collecting which they will do if they have no other means of earning cash.

For subsistence activities and housebuilding, the villager's monthly time allocation is in a general state of flux. However, as Figure 3.1 demonstrates, in general it appears to follow the trend in commodity production for the months of November to May and subsequently drops to almost zero during June to August when the time allocated to commodity production is greatest. In the light of studies on several peasant societies where it was observed that during peak agricultural labour periods the farmers lacked labour to devote to other productive pursuits, one might assume that Semai do not engage in other activities during the fruit season for the same reason. However, given that the villagers work for only about 2-3 hours a day in durian collecting and may spent the rest of the day gambling, shopping or visiting (sembang)
during the fruit season, this assumption is not valid. Some people say that they are not in the mood for other "work" during the fruit season. I would argue that at such periods, the people's renghung (light-heartedness), relates to the fact that they already have access to adequate money and food and are, therefore, not motivated to engage in other production. The villagers however do not totally forego their other productive activities during the fruit season. Men were observed fishing and women gathering tapioca at such times. They remark that they engage in such pursuits because they are fed up with rice and market purchased fish and yearn for the "food of their forefathers". Some men told me that they usually set snares for rodents around their fruit trees during the durian season but had not done so during the survey year. This is certainly an ecologically sound practice given that rodents are attracted by the rotting fruit.

3.6. Individual Variation

Table 3.4 shows the hours the individuals allocated to the two domains of productive activity. It can be seen from this table that there is substantial individual variation in the annual number of hours worked and in the way people allocated their labour time to the two production spheres. For example, Bah Openg devoted 897 hours to these production categories while Wah Nor only 59 hours. All the individuals except Wah Andah, Wah Nor and Wah Siao devoted more hours to commodity production than subsistence production. While for all the men, commodity production absorbed over 60 per cent of their working time on these production categories with a range of 62.1 per cent to 89.3, there is enormous variation in the women's allocation of hours to this pursuit. For instance, Wah Siao devoted only 11 per cent of her time to it whereas Wah Aleh spent 90.2 per cent of her working hours on commodity production.
Table 3-4: Annual Time Allocation to Commodity and Subsistence Production by Individual.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PERSON</th>
<th>COMMODITY HOURS</th>
<th>COMMODITY %</th>
<th>SUBSISTENCE HOURS</th>
<th>SUBSISTENCE %</th>
<th>TOTAL HOURS</th>
<th>TOTAL %</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>B.Nandok</td>
<td>333</td>
<td>62.1</td>
<td>203</td>
<td>37.9</td>
<td>536</td>
<td>100</td>
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<td>W.Andah</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>22.1</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>77.9</td>
<td>95</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B.Rahu</td>
<td>378</td>
<td>69.9</td>
<td>163</td>
<td>30.1</td>
<td>541</td>
<td>100</td>
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<tr>
<td>W.Nor</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>39.0</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>61.0</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>100</td>
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<tr>
<td>B.Cendik</td>
<td>426</td>
<td>81.3</td>
<td>98</td>
<td>18.7</td>
<td>524</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>W.Elar</td>
<td>311</td>
<td>75.3</td>
<td>102</td>
<td>24.7</td>
<td>413</td>
<td>100</td>
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<tr>
<td>B.Openg</td>
<td>664</td>
<td>74.0</td>
<td>233</td>
<td>26.0</td>
<td>897</td>
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<tr>
<td>W.Siao</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>11.0</td>
<td>97</td>
<td>89.0</td>
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<tr>
<td>B.Cekop</td>
<td>377</td>
<td>89.3</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>10.7</td>
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<tr>
<td>W.Buyas</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>77.6</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>22.4</td>
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<tr>
<td>B.Sulong</td>
<td>728</td>
<td>85.0</td>
<td>128</td>
<td>15.0</td>
<td>856</td>
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<tr>
<td>W.Aleh</td>
<td>119</td>
<td>90.2</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>9.8</td>
<td>132</td>
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<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>3458</td>
<td>74.1</td>
<td>1211</td>
<td>25.9</td>
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Most of the hours spent on commodity production went to fruit collecting. It is demonstrated in Table 3.5, that all the individuals participated in this activity but the hours they devoted to it varied enormously from a low of 9 hours in the case of Wah Siao to 505 hours for Bah Openg while Table 3.7 shows that for most individuals this activity absorbed a substantial portion of their working hours. Generally all the women except Wah Elar allocated relatively few hours to this task. In contrast to the other women who rarely assisted in petai collecting which interferes with the carrying out of their housework and childcare duties, Wah Elar accompanied her husband in most of his petai collecting operations and actively participated in durian collecting. She could do so because most of the housework and childcare in her household were done by her teenage sibling and step-daughter residing with her. Both petai collecting and household chores are typically performed in
the morning since there is a greater demand for petai in that time of the
day and women prefer to wash clothes and dishes in the river in the morning
when there is company and when it is relatively cool. Further, petai collect-
ing can be efficiently accomplished by one individual unless there are many
pods to collect. In regard to this, it was observed that the time saved by
having one's wife's help is actually low and a husband-wife teamwork in col-
lecting petai may even turn out to be inefficient in terms of returns to
labour time unless several bundles were produced.

In respect to durian collecting, only three women engaged in this pursuit.
While Wah Elar and Wah Aleh worked daily on this task, Wah Nor col-
lected durians irregularly. Conversely, Wah Andah and Wah Buyas who
were both in confinement after giving birth and Wah Siao who was pregnant
at the time of the season did not participate in this activity.

It appears that the individual variation among the men in time allocation
for fruit collecting is largely a function of the number of fruit trees they own
or have access to. Bah Openg and Bah Cendik who have control of a rela-
tively large number of trees (as Table 2.4 shows) were the ones to devote
comparably most hours to fruit collecting. Conversely, Bah Sulong having
control of a small estate devoted only 19.4 per cent of his working hours to
fruit collecting although, in terms of hours, he contributed about 9 per cent
(as Table 3.8 indicates) of the sample's total hours on this activity. Most of
his working time went to wage labour instead. In fact, the reason he gave
for engaging in wage labour which was unpopular among the others is that
he needed the cash earned in this activity to compensate for his low fruit in-
come. It is for this reason too that he engaged in rubber tapping which he
subsequently abandoned when he worked for the fruit estate. After the sur-
vey period, he tapped rubber almost daily in January and February.
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Table 3:5  Annual time allocation to various productive activities as in households (in hours)
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<thead>
<tr>
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**Note:** The table represents the annual time allocation to various productive activities by individual (in % of total of each activity).
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**Table 3.17** Annual time allocation to various productive activities by individual.
Rubber tapping was infrequent because three of the six sample households do not own rubber trees in the village. In fact, of the 10 households in the main hamlet, only four own rubber trees in the vicinity although two claim that they have trees elsewhere in other villages.

In forest product collecting, seven persons from the sample participated in this activity but as Table 3.8 indicates three men, Bah Rahu, Bah Openg and Bah Cekap were each responsible for about 30 per cent of the sample's annual hours on this pursuit. They each worked 60 hours on the task. The others spent little time on this activity for various reasons. The women, in general, said that they were "not in the mood" (segat) (which is a normal Semai response to a question of why they are not doing something) to collect forest products. For the three other men, Bah Nandok and Bah Cendik were involved in petai collecting almost daily and Bah Sulong was working for the estate at the time the forest product trader requested for a consignment.

In contrast to forest collecting and rubber tapping, all the individuals except Wah Siao engaged in insect collecting. But there was much variation between individuals. For example, Wah Elar allotted 90 hours to the task but Wah Siao none. As the Tables show, there was also considerable individual variation in time allocation for fishing, hunting and housebuilding. For instance Bah Nandok spent 139 hours on fishing but Wah Aleh a mere three while in hunting the range was from Bah Cendik's one hour to Bah Openg's 84 hours although for four of the men (Bah Nandok, Bah Rahu, Bah Openg, Bah Sulong) the differences annual number of hunting hours among them were nominal. In housebuilding, the men spent appreciably more time on this activity than the women. Among the men, the differences in the hours spent on this activity partially reflects the variation in the sizes of houses built. However, it must be noted that Bah Nandok and Bah Openg received
assistance from helpers and saved considerable time since they used bought materials. Bah Nandok paid his step-father residing in a different household $100 to gather and thatch palm leaves for the roof and purchased sawn timber for the flooring whereas Bah Openg used the corrugated iron roof of his former house for his new one. Bah Cekap who spent the most number of hours on housebuilding built a new house and a farm house and worked alone most of the time.

Given such a broad range of productive pursuits and the substantial variation among the individuals in how they allocated their working time to these activities, it is interesting to establish how people budget their labour time.

Two cases which provides hints on this question are presented below:

Bah Nandok was sitting by the hearth pondering. I asked him what was on his mind. He replied that he was thinking of where to go to look for petai (ke'betar). He pointed out that he needed money to buy rice and baby's milk which his wife had just informed him that they had run out of. He said that he had to change his plans for fishing which he made last night. To my question of why he did not buy these items on credit, he responded that he already has substantial debts with the Indian owned shop and he feels that the shopkeeper may not extend him credit. He then grabbed his machete and set off to his petai trees.

Bah Cekap was complaining that he did not have any cash-earning work other than insect collecting. He said that he received only $1.50 for the butterflies he collected the previous day which he insisted was just enough for a few cakes and packet of cigarettes he bought at the Indian-owned shop. I suggested that he could work (like Bah Sulong) at the nearby orchard which pays $10 a day. He replied that working for the orchard entailed long hours, between 7 am to 3 pm and he would only receive his wages once a fortiethnight. Bah Openg, who was with us, interjected that the manager could not be trusted. He said that he heard from his friends working for the orchard that they sometimes had to wait several weeks for their wages.

It is clear from the first case that the return from the productive pursuit is an important factor that villagers consider when they decide on allocating their labour to the particular task. Bah Nandok's need for cash determined
his decision to collect petai rather than fish. If he had the money to buy
the food his household needed, he would have set out fishing rather than col­
lecting petai which were not mature enough and were consequently sold at a
lower price. In the second case, it is evident that although wage labour has
higher returns, people have to wait for these returns. In contrast, even
though insect collecting is less productive in terms of total returns as well as
returns per hour (as I will demonstrate in the following chapter), its returns
are more immediate since the insects collected can be readily exchanged for
cash. From these two cases, it appears that the returns especially in cash to
labour are foremost in people’s minds when they decide on how to allocate
their labour time to production. Furthermore, they will tend to choose an
activity in which they have access to its returns, especially cash, without
much delay if in need.
Chapter 4

Production Output and Income

This chapter examines the returns to the villager's labour input for the various productive activities discussed in the previous chapter. It will compare the output of the two production spheres - commodity production and subsistence production - in order to demonstrate their difference in productivity as well as the relative importance of commodity production over subsistence production in the contemporary Sempak economy.

Since the economy is cash oriented, I have taken cash as a standard measure to facilitate comparison between the two production spheres. I have assigned a monetary value that is based on 'market replacement' and/or proxy values for each product, particularly from subsistence production, which are consumed within the village and not sold. Market replacement values refer to the market prices (i.e. the prices that people pay for the product in the shops) of the articles. For example, people buy rice for about $1 per kilogram and tapioca for $0.70 per kilogram, so I have taken these as the market replacement values. For some of the products that cannot be purchased from the market, I have used the prices of similar products to estimate the proxy value. For locally gathered vegetables I used the average price of $2 per kilogram calculated from the average prices of the common vegetables people buy. In the same manner, I have assigned the proxy values for game and fish at $4.30 and $2.00 respectively. For housebuilding, I have estimated the value as $1.13 per hour which is based on the salary or wage...
paid to Orang Ali housebuilders by the JOA\(^1\).

The unit of analysis in this chapter, unlike in the previous one, is mainly the household. Commonly, the output of individuals are pooled with those of their fellow household members for use by the household. Although it was possible to ascertain the individual's output for many activities, in some it was difficult to isolate accurate data for individual production since people themselves were not aware of how much they individually contributed. For example, in husband and wife petai collecting teams, the husbands may in some instances give a share of the produce determined by certain distribu-tional principles to their wives but in most instances the money is kept by the husband for household expenses. Where possible, the data is provided by individual in order to ascertain the individual productivity in the various productive pursuits.

4.1. Aggregate Production

As Table 4.1 demonstrates, commodity production contributed about 96 per cent of the annual cash and imputed income for the six sample households. For all these households, commodity production generated between 93 to 97 per cent of their annual cash and imputed income. There was, however, sub-stantial household variation (see Table 4.1 and Figure 4.1, in the cash amounts earned from this production sphere. Household D earned 30 per cent of the total cash income from commodity production by the six households while Household E earned only 9 per cent. In terms of per capita income figures (see Table 4.2 and Figure 4.2), the variation differs with Household B ranking highest with $3114 per person while Household F the lowest with only $725 per person. Despite this variability in per capita and

\(^{1}\text{See Chibnik (1978) and Altman (1982) for a more elaborate discussion of this technique.}\)
household income, there is little variation among the households in the im-
puted income contribution from subsistence production.

Table 4-1: Annual Income (cash and imputed) from Commodity Production and Subsistence Production by Household.

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<tr>
<th>HOUSEHOLD</th>
<th>COMMODITY PRODUCTION</th>
<th>SUBSISTENCE PRODUCTION</th>
<th>TOTAL</th>
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<td>A</td>
<td>4769 93.8</td>
<td>314 6.2</td>
<td>5083 100</td>
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<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>5639 97.1</td>
<td>167 2.9</td>
<td>5806 100</td>
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<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>5435 94.5</td>
<td>314 5.5</td>
<td>5749 100</td>
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<tr>
<td>D</td>
<td>10427 97.1</td>
<td>307 2.9</td>
<td>10734 100</td>
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<tr>
<td>E</td>
<td>2686 95.2</td>
<td>136 4.8</td>
<td>2822 100</td>
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<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td>3277 93.1</td>
<td>244 6.9</td>
<td>3521 100</td>
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<td>32233 95.6</td>
<td>1482 4.4</td>
<td>33715 100</td>
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</table>

Mean 5372 SD 2742

It is noteworthy that the average household cash income of $5372 per an-
num calculated from the incomes of these six households is not substantially lower than the average Malaysian rural household’s yearly income of $7080 per annum and is slightly more than half of the average Malaysian annual household income of $9156 for 1982. Furthermore, one household (D) earned 14 per cent more than the average Malaysian annual household income.

4.2. Commodity Production

It can be seen from Table 4.2 that the trading of fruit collected in the vil-
lage generated an average of about 89 per cent of the annual household cash income which makes fruit collection the main cash earning occupation. However, there is substantial variation in fruit income among the households

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2 Figures obtained from Mid-Term Review of the Fourth Malaysia Plan, 1982.
FIGURE 4.1

DISTRIBUTION OF ANNUAL CASH INCOME AMONG THE SIX HOUSEHOLDS THOUSANDS

- A: 5.112 = 14.9%
- B: 6.227 = 18.2%
- C: 5.823 = 17%
- D: 10.432 = 30.4%
- E: 3.988 = 8.7%
- F: 3.623 = 10.5%
Figure 4.2

Distribution of Annual Per Capita Income Among Six Households

- A: $1,025 = 11.4\%$
- B: $3,114 = 34.8\%$
- C: $832 = 9.3\%$
- D: $1,739 = 19.4\%$
- E: $1,494 = 16.7\%$
- F: $725 = 8.1\%$

TOTAL: 100\%
which underlies the income inequality of households. While household D earned about one third (33 per cent) of the annual total income from fruit collecting, Household E and F were each responsible for only 8 per cent of this income. The other three households earned about the average income of $5098 from fruit collecting. As in time allocation where it was shown that the variation in hours spent on fruit collecting is closely related to the variation in the ownership and control of productive fruit trees, the variation in fruit income among the households is also largely explained in relation to this variable. A comparison of Table 2.4 and Table 4.2 shows, for example, that the couple in the highest earning household, Bah Openg and Wah Siao of Household D, together owned 34 per cent of the productive durian trees and 40 per cent of the productive petai trees individually owned by the sample.

**Table 4-2:** Annual Cash Income from Various Commodity Production Activities and Other Sources by Household.

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4.2.1. Fruit Collecting

Slightly more than half of the income from fruit trading was from the sale of petai. As Table 4.3 shows, petai was harvested throughout the year with the number of bundles (about 90 pods each) collected ranging from a low of 30 bundles in September to a high of 228 in June for the six households. All households except C and D produced almost equal number of bundles. The overwhelming disparity in petai production between Households C and D and the other households is a reflection of the disparity in the direct access to petai trees. As Table 2.4 shows, C and D own considerably more trees than the other households. Furthermore, Bah Cendik of Household C plucked petai from his brother’s trees during the survey year since his brother who is in the army was away from the village for most of the period.

The petai income varies considerably between the months. During the survey year, the six households together earned 12.6 per cent of the annual petai income in the low yield months of September, October and November while 37 per cent of the total petai income was obtained in the high yield months i.e. May to July. The petai prices the traders pay, as one might expect, vary according to the yield period from $7 in the high period to $20 during the low one. Consequently, the variation in monthly petai income is somewhat muted and as such does not correspondingly reflect the extent of variation in the monthly petai output.

The petai income may not correspond with the output for another reason. As people may sometimes pluck petai from trees belonging to others, part of the value of the output is normally appropriated by the owner/s of the trees. Four specially selected cases of this practice are provided below. These cases were chosen on the basis of their diversity in the distribution, circumstances and extent of appropriations.
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<tr>
<td>(1963)</td>
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<td>(1966)</td>
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<tr>
<td>(1967)</td>
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<td>(1969)</td>
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<td></td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Note:** The unit of real has about 90 pence.
Case 1 - Whilst walking to his grove of fruit trees, Bah Nandok noticed that his MZD’s petai trees had plenty of harvestable pods. He decided to pluck them and collected three bundles. He sold the petai for $38 and then proceeded to his MZD’s house. He gave all the money to his MZD who kept $15 for herself and handed $23 to him for his effort.

Case 2 - Bah Rahu was requested to pluck petai from his wife’s FB’s trees. He collected and sold five bundles for $100. Upon selling, he immediately handed the money to the tree owner who initially took $20 and gave Bah Rahu $80. However upon Bah Rahu’s insistence that this was not a fair arrangement for the owner, he accepted the $30 that Bah Rahu returned to him. Hence, the proceeds were eventually shared evenly.

Case 3 - Without being asked, Bah Sulong collected and sold five bundles of petai from his brother’s trees. He handed the $40 he got for them to his brother who shared (sair) it equally among themselves.

Case 4 - Bah Rahu was asked to pluck petai from his wife’s father’s trees. He collected three bundles which he sold for $60. As in the normal practice, he gave the money to the tree owner for distribution. His father-in-law gave only $15 to Bah Rahu who expressed his disappointment to me.

These cases indicate that the amount appropriated by the tree owners varies. While in many of the cases I have observed the cash was divided equally as in Case 3, in most cases (as in Case 1 and initially in Case 2) the owners, in what is considered as a good gesture (budi bor) and in demonstration of their generosity gave a larger share to the petai collectors. It appears that if the tree owners are unable to pluck their own petai they may be more generous in their distribution in order to encourage the collectors to pluck their petai in future harvests. Conversely, they may be stingy (kareit) in their distribution so as to discourage people from plucking their petai.

In all the cases presented, as in most instances, the tree owners distributed (sair) the petai income between themselves and the producers. It is considered as proper etiquette for the collectors to hand over the petai income to the tree owners for distribution.
Appropriation may also occur in the co-operative collecting of petai involving the owner(s) of the trees and their invited relatives or friends (see Chapter 6). The distribution of output is not made *ex post facto* in the minds of the producers (or owners as in the cases discussed earlier) but may be determined by production itself. In the previous chapter it was mentioned that the petai collection involves five stages in production: searching for petai, tree climbing, plucking, gathering and bundling and transportation. If the collecting party comprises only able-bodied men then it is likely that everyone will perform identical tasks i.e. each one will carry out all these separate labour processes. As it was pointed out previously, in a mixed party a division of labour based on sex and age (if older or younger males unable to climb trees participate) ensues with the able males doing the actual plucking while the females and aged or juvenile males engaging in the gathering, bundling and transportation of the petai pods. The distribution in such co-operative collecting is mostly determined by the number of petai bundles carried to the village irrespective of who climbed and plucked the pods or who owns the trees. The following is a case in point:

Bah Openg, Bah Rahu, Bah Nandok, Bah Pep and Bah Kasut plucked 17 bundles of petai from Bah Openg's wife's mother's trees. Everyone performed identical tasks but Bah Pep and Bah Kasut each carried 4 bundles and the other three men carried 3 bundles each. Of the $170 received for the petai, Bah Openg gave $25 to the owner, $33 each to Bah Pep and Bah Kasut who carried more bundles, $27 each to Bah Rahu and Bah Nandok and kept the remainder ($25) for himself.

Like in petai production, there is an enormous variation in durian output and income among the households. As can be seen from Table 4.4, while Household D earned $4562 which amounts to about one third of the total durian income of the six households, Household F collected only $757 worth of durian. As in petai collection, this variation reflects the ownership and control of durian trees among the households.
Table 4-4: Durian Production by Household and Individual

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>HOUSEHOLD</th>
<th>PERSON</th>
<th>NO. OF INDIVIDUAL</th>
<th>RANGKAP</th>
<th>VALUE($)</th>
<th>INCOME($)</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>B. Nandok</td>
<td>229</td>
<td>916</td>
<td>1858</td>
<td>300</td>
<td>18.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>B. Pep</td>
<td>170</td>
<td>680</td>
<td>300</td>
<td>2608</td>
<td>18.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>W. Itam</td>
<td>176</td>
<td>704</td>
<td>300</td>
<td>2608</td>
<td>18.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>W. Kalim</td>
<td>150</td>
<td>600</td>
<td>150</td>
<td>2608</td>
<td>18.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>B. Rahu</td>
<td>749</td>
<td>2996</td>
<td>3361</td>
<td>300</td>
<td>25.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>W. Nor</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>200</td>
<td>200</td>
<td>3561</td>
<td>25.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>B. Cendik</td>
<td>85</td>
<td>340</td>
<td>568</td>
<td>456</td>
<td>11.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>W. Elar</td>
<td>85</td>
<td>340</td>
<td>568</td>
<td>456</td>
<td>11.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>W. Nani</td>
<td>211</td>
<td>844</td>
<td>456</td>
<td>456</td>
<td>32.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D</td>
<td>B. Openg</td>
<td>663</td>
<td>2652</td>
<td>3530</td>
<td>4562</td>
<td>32.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>W. Wen*</td>
<td>245</td>
<td>980</td>
<td>1032</td>
<td>4562</td>
<td>32.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E</td>
<td>B. Cekap</td>
<td>179</td>
<td>716</td>
<td>802</td>
<td>802</td>
<td>5.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td>B. Sulong</td>
<td>85</td>
<td>344</td>
<td>349</td>
<td>408</td>
<td>5.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>W. Aleh</td>
<td>N/A**</td>
<td>N/A**</td>
<td>757</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td></td>
<td>3078</td>
<td>12312</td>
<td>13882</td>
<td>13882 100.0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Wah Wen is Bah Openg’s sister-in-law residing in his household.

** Wah Aleh was not able to recall this information. She collected durians in another village.

# The value is based on the trader’s price per rangkap (a pile of durians) which in 1983 was $4.

It is common for tree owners to ‘hire’ labour or arrange with others to collect their durians. They may do so if they have a good durian yield or if they have too many trees to harvest or if they reside elsewhere. Household A presents an interesting case in point. Bah Nandok’s relatives from another village arranged with him to collect durians from their trees in Sempak. Unable to do it himself, he, in turn arranged with Wah Itam, his sister-in-law and Wah Kalim, his visiting relative who were temporarily attached to his household at the time to collect the fruit. Of the roughly $1300 cash income from the durians Wah Itam and Wah Kalim collected, about half was appropriated by the owners while they each received only 23 and 12 per cent...
respectively of the value and the rest about 15 per cent was appropriated by Bah Nandok (see the difference between value and individual income in Table 4.4). For his own trees, Bah Nandok, claiming that he was unable to collect the durians from all his trees alone, instructed Bah Pep another visiting relative who was temporarily staying with him to share this task with him. Bah Pep was given about 44 per cent of the income from the durians he collected while Bah Nandok kept the rest on the basis of his ownership rights.

Similarly, Bah Rahu invited his friend to assist him in collecting his durians at another village but they shared the work and income fairly equally between themselves. In another interesting case, Bah Cendik and Wah Elar (husband and wife) worked together in collecting durians belonging to Bah Cendik's daughter, Wah Nani while she collected her father's durians. These arrangements generally result in a difference between the value (trader's price) of the durian collected and the income received since usually part of the value is appropriated by the tree owner. However, this disparity also exist because the people (sometimes) sell the durians to passers-by at prices higher than the trader's price. The proportion of durians sold to the trader varies among the individuals. Some individuals such as Bah Cendik and Wah Elar sold about 95 per cent of the durians they collected to the trader to whom others like Bah Openg sold roughly 73 per cent of their durians.

In comparison to petai and durian incomes, the cash income from the sale of the other fruits collected (mainly larah, langsat and ramei) formed only 1 per cent of the annual cash income of the six households. Only men engaged in this activity since it involved tree climbing.
Table 4-5: Collection of Other Fruits and Forest Products and Rubber Tapping by Household and Individual.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>HOUSEHOLD</th>
<th>PERSON</th>
<th>OTHER FRUITS</th>
<th>RATTAN</th>
<th>BAMBOO</th>
<th>RUBBER</th>
<th>TOTAL</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>B. Nandok</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>7.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>B. Rahu</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>154</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>253</td>
<td>25.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>B. Cendik</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>89</td>
<td>9.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B. Elor</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D</td>
<td>B. Openg</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>126</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>139</td>
<td>385</td>
<td>39.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E</td>
<td>B. Cekap</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>7.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td>B. Sulon</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>109</td>
<td>11.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>983</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

% of Annual Cash Income: 1.0 1.0 0.5 0.4 2.9

4.2.2. Forest Product Collecting

The cash incomes from this activity were meagre. The three men, Bah Rahu, Bah Openg and Bah Cekap who were responsible for most of the time spent on this activity earned 85 per cent of the total income from forest resource trading of the six households. However the villagers have earned substantial amounts from this activity at other times. In September and October 1982 (prior to the survey period), five Sempak households that engaged in rattan collecting earned a total of $1533 ranging from $412 for the couple at the core of Household F to $150 for Bah Openg in Household D. In April and May 1982, these households collected and traded $412 worth of rattan. Hence, for just these two rattan collecting periods, these households obtained $1945 which is almost four times the cash income they earned from this activity during the survey period. It is obvious then that people allocated substantially more hours to rattan collecting in the year prior to the survey period. The question arises as to why did they do so. As noted in the previous chapter, the annual cycle of productive activity is organised around the
ripening of the fruit trees. If people expect a good harvest they are likely to
engage in fewer cash earning activities such as rattan collecting. According
to the villagers and the trader, the durian season (June-August) in 1981 was
a poor one and the people generally earned low cash incomes from fruit trad­
ing in that year. Thus, they engaged in much rattan collecting in 1981 and
1982 to compensate for their low fruit income. Although the blossom of the
durian flowers in early 1982 had indicated a good harvest which did occur,
people had to work on rattan collecting for cash income since most of their
1982 durian income would be used up in the repayment of the high debts
they incurred in the year as a result of the low income in 1981. This also
explains why people engaged in rattan collecting soon after the 1982 durian
season.

The low time allocation to rattan collecting and its relatively low produc­
tion during the survey year is also a consequence of the evident over ex­
plotation of rattan resources in 1981 and 1982. Some collectors stated that
they had to walk a few kilometres away from the settlement to "look for
rattan" (ke' cho'). It is also likely that this depletion of rattan resources is
due to the logging operation carried out between April 1980 to January 1982.
Large scale logging undoubtedly disrupts the forest environment where the
rattan vines thrive. However, I was unable to ascertain the extent of
damage by logging operations to the forest resources that the people tap.
Nonetheless, people said that it was easier to find good rattan before the log­
ging operation than nowadays.

Insect collecting earned less than one per cent of the annual cash income of
the six households. As Table 4.6 demonstrates, the variation among the
households is not as substantial as the variation in cash income from the
other activities. Of the various insects or invertebrates collected and traded,
butterflies accounted for 44 per cent of the cash income from this activity although they were the most inexpensive; all the butterflies caught during the survey period were priced between two and a half cents to forty cents each although there are some rare ones that can fetch as much as $20 each. Leaf-insect was priced between $1 to $3 each while stick insects were sold for about 10-30 cents each. The prices for beetles varied enormously according to the species; some were sold for a few cents while others fetched several dollars each.

Villagers often collected rare insects without knowing their prices or market value. For example, Bah Sulong collected four beetles which he accidentally came across while working at the fruit orchard without knowing their market value. He was given, to his surprise, $7 for each. Because of this element of luck involved in insect collecting, some people aptly draw a similarity between this activity and gambling. As a Semai man succinctly put it:

   Going out to catch butterflies (chap krbaag) is like buying 4 digit lottery tickets (Empat Nombor Ekor). Sometimes you strike small. Sometimes you strike big. And sometimes you don't strike at all.

Not all the insects sold were obtained from deliberate collecting. Ten leaf-insects sold for $22 and four beetles sold for $28 were caught when the collectors were engaged in some other activity. If the cash ($50) received for insects caught outside intended insect collecting and the amount spent on batteries used in the nocturnal collecting of insects are subtracted from the total income, the cash returns from insect collecting were about $180 for the six households. Despite the low returns, this activity was popular. As the Table 4.6 shows, everyone in the sample participated in this task. Its popularity may be related more to its potentiality of earning high but indefinite returns (as in gambling) than its actual returns.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Income</th>
<th>Households</th>
<th>Percent</th>
<th>Households</th>
<th>Percent</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>123.5%</td>
<td>228.15</td>
<td>1.5</td>
<td>3.70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>256.00</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>256.00</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>258.00</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>258.00</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>46.00</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>46.00</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.00</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>2.00</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Table 4.6:** Income Distribution by Household and Individual Income
4.2.3. Rubber Tapping

Of the two households that engaged in this activity only one sold the rubber sheets they produced. Bah Openg sold the sheets that he jointly produced with Wah Siao, Wah Wen, Bah Pep and Bah Loi which weighed 142 kilograms for $239. He gave Bah Loi and Bah Pep $60 and $40 respectively according to his own accounting of their labour input. He pointed out that since the women were "regular" household members and that he spent the remaining money on household expenses he did not see the need to give the women their share of the rubber production cash income. I estimated the three unsold sheets weighing about 4 kilograms that Bah Sulong produced were worth $5. As mentioned in the previous chapter, several Sempak households engaged in rubber tapping in January and February 1983 before I left the village. For January, Bah Rahu (B), Bah Openg (D) and Bah Sulong (F) worked for about 10-14 days on rubber tapping and produced and sold $78, $51, $69 worth of rubber sheets respectively. They said that they would continue to tap rubber until the fruit season. From the data for January, I estimate that they would earn between $100-$150 per month on rubber tapping if they engage in this activity on a regular basis.

4.2.4. Wage Labour and Petty Trading

Wage labour was not a popular activity during the survey year. Bah Sulong, who was the only person in the sample to engage in wage labour in the survey period, earned $610 at $10 per day. As already noted, one of the reasons that this activity was unpopular is the fact that people have to wait for their wages which are usually paid forthnightly or monthly. There are two other possible reasons. First, as people generally prefer to work in the forests or along the jungle streams particularly during the hot and dry months, wage labour is unattractive since most of the jobs available are in plantation orchards, tin mines, and the tea plantation which require working
in the sun. Second, unlike most other activities the people are involved in, it is not self-planned and directed and the people feel the loss of autonomy strongly.

Petty trading which represents another source of cash income in the village contributed 3.1 per cent of the annual cash income of the six households. A common type of such trading is the buying and reselling of durians. From the sample, Bah Nandok, Bah Cendik and Bah Sulong like many villagers in the region bought durians from their co-villagers to sell at dearer prices by the roadside to passers-by. They earned profits of $288, $130 and $282 respectively. On a few occasions in the survey year, Bah Cendik and Bah Openg bought areca-nut and betel leaves from town or a Malay trader in bulk and sold them to their fellow villagers for profits. On a larger scale of profiteering ventures, Bah Cendik and Bah Rahu set up small home-based stores stocked with alcoholic drinks, soft drinks, snacks and titbits, tobacco and betel leaves to cater for the villagers' needs. They obtained these goods at bulk prices from the nearby shops or from the town and sold them at higher prices to accrue profits. Bah Cendik earned a profit of $259 whereas Bah Rahu made $27. These ventures are discussed in detail in Chapter 6.

4.3. Subsistence Production

In Table 4.7 which presents the imputed income from the various subsistence productive activities and housebuilding, it is demonstrated that this income is low for all the six households. Almost half of this income is from the gathering of vegetables and tapioca, the only vegetable and tapioca supplied being almost entirely from the home gardens or swiddens. The income from fishing and hunting is unexpectedly low given that the people spent substantial time on these pursuits and that the economic and nutritional value of protein food is relatively higher than carbohydrate and vegetable foods.
Household variation in imputed subsistence income is low unlike for cash income. It appears that subsistence production income is closely related to household size. Using Spearman's rank correlation coefficient it was found that these two variables have a high rank correlation of .83. This means that the income or output from subsistence production was higher in households with a greater size and vice versa.

Table 4-7: Annual Imputed Income ($) from Various Subsistence Productive Activities and Housebuilding by Household.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ACTIVITY</th>
<th>HOUSEHOLD</th>
<th>A</th>
<th>B</th>
<th>C</th>
<th>D</th>
<th>E</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>TOTAL</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Agriculture</td>
<td></td>
<td>20</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>98</td>
<td>4.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Rice)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gathering</td>
<td></td>
<td>217</td>
<td>120</td>
<td>272</td>
<td>203</td>
<td>97</td>
<td>201</td>
<td>1110</td>
<td>47.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fishing</td>
<td></td>
<td>64</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>180</td>
<td>7.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hunting</td>
<td></td>
<td>13</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>94</td>
<td>4.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sub-Tot al</td>
<td></td>
<td>314</td>
<td>167</td>
<td>314</td>
<td>307</td>
<td>136</td>
<td>244</td>
<td>1482</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Housebuilding</td>
<td></td>
<td>99</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>131</td>
<td>295</td>
<td>226</td>
<td>840</td>
<td>36.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td></td>
<td>413</td>
<td>229</td>
<td>341</td>
<td>438</td>
<td>431</td>
<td>470</td>
<td>2322</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

4.3.1. Swidden Cultivation

The amount of rice produced by the six households is very low. It constituted a mere 3 per cent of their annual rice consumption. Interestingly, of the six households in the sample only Households C and D planted rice swiddens although members of Households A, E, F also harvested rice. It is common for the cultivators to invite others to join them in harvesting rice from their swiddens. The invited harvestors get to keep for themselves the rice they harvest. Normally the cultivator will reciprocate assistance given by others during clearing, planting or weeding of a swidden by inviting them to harvest the rice crop. For example, Wah Siao of Household D invited Wah Andah and Wah Elar to harvest rice from her swidden since they assisted in the planting. However, Wah Buyas (Wah Siao's sister) and Wah Aleh of
Households E and F respectively were also invited to join in the harvesting although they had not helped in the cultivation. Wah Siao explained that she had invited her friends and relatives to harvest her swidden regardless of whether they had helped so as to share the rice produce with them. The women harvested and kept for their respective households about 20 per cent of the total rice harvested from Household D’s rice swidden.

In another case, adult members of Household D (Bah Openg, Wah Siao and Wah Wen) joined in the harvesting of rice from Bah Openg’s step-mother’s swidden in another village, since they had assisted in the planting. They returned to the village after having spent about 3 hours a day harvesting for five days with 8.55 kilograms of rice, of which they kept 4.55 kilograms for their household consumption and distributed 4 kilograms among other households in Sempak.

People thus apparently keep very little of the rice produced from their swiddens for their own consumption. In the first case, Household D harvested 20 per cent of the rice from their field and subsequently distributed some portion of this amount among several other Sempak households. Of the approximately 73 kilograms of rice harvested from their swidden, the members of Household D eventually consumed only about 6 kilograms (or 8.2 per cent). In the second case, the harvestors gave away about half of their net returns. Thus, it seems that the social exchanges associated with rice swiddens may be more important than the actual returns to the cultivators. It is not just the point that people share the produce from their swiddens that is significant in these social practices but also the fact that they engage in cooperative work in the swiddens which is becoming less common. It appears that the little collective labour prevailing in swiddening is the last bastion of this type of labour arrangement in contemporary Semai economy where production has become increasingly individualised (see Chapter 6).
The rice yield (see Table 4.8) from the five swiddens planted in the village varied considerably from a low 2.9 kilograms of rice per kilogram of seed sown to a high of 11.6 kilograms. The average yield for these swiddens was 6.88 kilograms of rice to one kilogram planted. In comparison with the figures provided by Cole (1959:204) for some Temiar households in which the rice productivity varied from a low 6 kilograms to a high of 17.5 kilograms per kilogram of seed planted with an average of 11.2 kilograms per kilogram planted, the rice yield in Sempak is significantly lower. This low productivity can also be demonstrated in terms of yield per hectare. The swiddens in Sempak yielded between 204 to 907 kilograms of rice per hectare with an average of 429 kilograms which is much lower than the yields obtained from rice swiddening in several other Southeast Asian societies.

Table 4-8: Rice Production in Sempak (1983)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>HOUSEHOLD</th>
<th>SIZE OF SWIDDEN (ha)</th>
<th>AMOUNT PLANTED (kg)</th>
<th>PRODUCE* (kg)</th>
<th>YIELD PER HECTARE (kg)</th>
<th>YIELD PER KG. PLANTED</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>0.09</td>
<td>7.2</td>
<td>20.7</td>
<td>230</td>
<td>2.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D</td>
<td>0.08</td>
<td>7.2</td>
<td>72.6</td>
<td>907</td>
<td>10.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>G</td>
<td>0.05</td>
<td>3.6</td>
<td>14.2</td>
<td>284</td>
<td>3.9</td>
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<tr>
<td>H</td>
<td>0.21</td>
<td>7.2</td>
<td>42.8</td>
<td>204</td>
<td>5.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Z</td>
<td>0.08</td>
<td>3.6</td>
<td>41.7</td>
<td>521</td>
<td>11.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>0.51</td>
<td>28.8</td>
<td>192.0</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

* Weights are of threshed but unmilled grain.

This relatively low yield is related to the decline of importance of rice swiddens in the contemporary economy. It is well documented that rice swiddens

3The yields in some such societies are reported as: Iban-730 kg/ha (Freeman 1970:257), Land Dayak-1562 kg/ha (Geddes 1954:68), Yao-1849 kg/ha (Miles 1967:16), Kantu'-650 kg/ha (Dove 1981)
planted in previously mature forest areas and which are weeded regularly are more productive. Since people today do not depend on their swiddens for their subsistence needs and would rather spend their time on more lucrative cash-earning activities, they clear relatively immature forests for cultivation and do not weed their swiddens regularly. As the village headman noted:

People in those days were more diligent in planting rice swiddens. They planted large plots about 6 gantak (21.6 kilograms) of rice. They cleared jeres (primary forest) and were diligent in weeding. People today are always not in the mood (segat) to plant rice swiddens as people before. They only want to work for money (kerja' ke' duit) and plant small plots like mine and some even plant small grassland (lallak, imperata cylindrica).

Notwithstanding its low yield and declining importance, the rice swidden is still economically significant since it also functions as a source of other comestibles and provides opportunities for hunting and trapping. Before the rice is harvested, people gather and harvest maize and vegetables like tapioca leaves, long beans, squash, pumpkin, amaranth, cucumber, bitter gourd which are ready for harvest a couple of months after they are planted. Usually the amount of vegetables obtained from the swiddens are small and may be sufficient for only a few meals while most swiddens in the region, except those in the higher altitudes, where maize is extensively grown not only for domestic consumption but also for sale, are planted with little maize and consequently produce a small quantity of it. In Sempak, the five swiddens produced about 1-2 kilograms of amaranth and long beans and about 60 maize cobs, while the other vegetables planted failed to grow.

After rice has been harvested, the swidden normally serves as a source of root crops mainly two or three species of tapioca and sweet potato; spices and condiments like lemon grass; chillies which are also frequently found in the home-gardens; and flowers that are grown mainly for use in ceremonies.

The rice swidden may be used as a source of such food and resource for
several years, normally 3-4, after the rice harvest. When the old swidden (selai manah) is left to fallow, the cultivator may still attend to it since fruit trees notably petai, durian, rambutan, langsat, rambai and larah are normally planted in the rice swidden. Hence, the rice swidden sometimes actually transforms into a fruit orchard (kampuk) after several years with care being taken to ensure that the regrowth of wild plants in forest regeneration does not stifle the growth of these fruit trees. Typically the cultivators clear the area around the fruit trees from time to time to remove the competition from other plants or weeds.

While the rice and other types of swiddens directly serve the purpose of providing carbohydrate and vegetable food, they indirectly function to attract wildlife that is a potential source of meat. The crops grown in the swidden attract feral animals notably pigs, rats, birds, monkeys and deer which are trapped or hunted down by the villagers. As mentioned earlier, trappers ordinarily set snares in the swidden and its vicinity to catch these animals while hunters armed with blowpipes, shotguns or catapults hide around them waiting for wild game. It is, however, impossible to ascertain this particular value of the swidden but as people acknowledge most of their wild meat is obtained from swidden areas or orchards rather than the forests.

Even though the output after considering these various other "functions" of the rice swidden is still low, it is highly valued. For the villagers, the rice and vegetables grown in the swidden are always tastier than those purchased from the market. People remark that the rice from their swiddens is "sweet-smelling", "filling" and tasty. A comment by a villager is telling in this regard. After the special meal where newly harvested rice was cooked and consumed to celebrate the rice harvest, a man remarked, "I haven't eaten such good rice for a long time. I am now full (baheit which also means
satisfied). Because domestically grown rice is highly cherished, people share whatever little they have harvested with others in the village so that everyone gets to taste it. Knowing that such rice is available, the villagers who have no hill paddy to harvest may have a desire to taste the rice. According to Semai belief, it is crucial for people to fulfill their desire to avoid being in a state called pehunan\footnote{See Chapter 6 for discussion of this concept} which is said to endanger their life by causing disease, spiritual attack and even death.

4.3.2. Fishing and Hunting

River fishing and gathering produced little in relation to the number of hours people allotted to this pursuit. As Table 4.9 shows, the hourly returns in kilograms is extremely low. On average each person obtained only about 140 grams of protein food per hour allocated to this activity. There are also vast differences in individual productivity which will be discussed in a later section.

Of the 91 kilograms of protein food obtained from the rivers by the households, about 80 percent was in the form of five species of fish\footnote{These are: Ka'soi (Acrossocheilus spp), Ka'dak (Ophioccephalus lucius), Ka'chu (Clarias spp), Ka'tengas (Acrossocheilus spp), and Ka'rep (Achrochordonichthys melanogaster).}, the remaining 20 percent being made up of frogs and toads. Almost all the streams in Sempak are relatively shallow and swift and consequently cannot maintain a rich and abundant aquatic fauna. There are just a few species of fish, frogs and turtles that can survive and reproduce in such waters. Furthermore, being small, these streams can easily be overfished; consequently, after over utilisation, it may take several years before the fish population can recover and grow to its optimal level. Villagers are not concerned about sustaining the fish population. They use whatever methods available to catch
fish and other edible water creatures regardless of how disastrous these could be to the fauna population. They frequently use stupefacients to catch fish and in some instances may even resort to the use of pesticides which totally destroy the aquatic life. Some streams are devoid of their once rich fish population because of the people’s use of poisons and overfishing while most streams have only small fish for the same reasons. The people often reminisce of times when they used to catch large and plentiful fish and there is no reason to doubt this.

It is also possible that the reduction in the fish population, particularly in Sempak, is partly a result of logging operations. The increased debris carried in the streams as a consequence of logging use up much dissolved oxygen in its decomposition process. This dissolved oxygen is crucial for the survival of aquatic animals and its reduction can have a profound impact on the fauna population.

As in swiddening, people often share their produce from fishing and riverine gathering with others in the village, particularly if the catch is large. Two cases will be described in order to illustrate this practice.

Bah Nandok and Wah Andah in a fish drive using hands, spear-gun and weir caught 28 fish of two species weighing a total of 750 grams and one frog weighing 100 grams. Upon return to the settlement, Wah Andah gave 7 fish weighing 100 grams to Wah Elar, her sister, and another 7 weighing 150 grams to Wah Siao.

Bah Openg and Bah Nandok fished with cast-nets for about 2 hours. Bah Nandok landed 78 fish weighing a total of 1.3 kilograms while Bah Openg caught 104 fish weighed at 1.7 kilograms. Bah Nandok’s wife gave 10 fish each to four other households (C,H,J,I) in the village while Wah Siao, Bah Openg’s wife, gave 20 fish each to Household E and Household H and 10 fish to Household B.

It is worth noting from these cases that the individuals distributed about half the amount of fish they caught and kept the rest for own consumption.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of Pane</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
<th>Total</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>m. A'Her</td>
<td>10.00</td>
<td>100.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b. Starch</td>
<td>26.00</td>
<td>93.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>m. A'Her</td>
<td>20.00</td>
<td>66.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b. Starch</td>
<td>20.00</td>
<td>50.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>m. A'Her</td>
<td>20.00</td>
<td>40.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b. Starch</td>
<td>20.00</td>
<td>60.00</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

TABLE 4.9: RIVER FISHING AND CULTURAL PRODUCTION (IN KILOGRAMS) BY INDIVIDUAL ACCORDING TO TYPE OF Pane.
This was the usual practice. However, there were actually very few cases of such sharing by the sample households during the survey year largely because they caught few fish. The few incidences of fish sharing were limited to the fish drives, cast-net fishing and fish trapping. These fishing techniques are generally the more productive.

Notwithstanding its low returns and productivity, fishing is still a popular activity in the village. As mentioned in the previous chapter, people set out fishing in groups and engage in much joke sharing, horse play and conversations whilst fishing. This aspect of sociability inherent in this activity must not be underestimated. In fact, some people claim that they go out fishing more for the company and good fun than the material returns. Besides renewing and maintaining their cordial ties with others in the village, people through fishing are also able to obtain certain protein food particularly frogs and toads that are unavailable or difficult to get in the market and are much appreciated as well as highly valued as a food relish.

As for fishing so too the returns from hunting were low during the survey year (see Table 4.10). In this period no large animal was killed nor trapped by members of the households and the only relatively large game obtained in the village was a mouse deer weighing about 8 kilograms which was trapped by a villager not in the sample. Most of the animals obtained were rodents. These were mainly caught by trapping. About 44 percent of the animals killed or captured were obtained by trapping. Incidentally some of the quarry was caught when people were engaged in other activities. For example, Bah Nandok and Bah Cendik caught a ground rat each on different occasions whilst fishing while the lizards Bah Cendik obtained were caught when he was in the forest collecting insects. In another instance, Bah Nandok and Bah Cekap together trapped and clubbed a monitor lizard which they came across by chance whilst traversing the river on a fishing outing.
During the survey period, three men (Bah Rahu, Bah Openg and Bah Cekap) trapped rats but on a small scale. For the total of 65 hours they spent on trapping, during which they set about 20 snares each, they obtained about 10 kilograms of rodent meat. In large scale trapping operations, the output is naturally much higher. For example, in such an operation which was carried out after the survey period, Bah Nandok, Bah Rahu, Bah Openg and Bah Sulong produced more meat than during the whole survey year. Each trapper obtained between 6-7 kilograms of rodent meat for three days of trapping with about 60 snares per person. This raises the question as to how representative the survey year was in respect of hunting. The villagers acknowledged that the output from this pursuit has dropped over the years. Older villagers recalled "those days" when they obtained plenty of wild meat through hunting which seems to be partly related to having spent more time on this activity in the past.

As in fishing, hunters and trappers are expected to share their quarry with others if they kill a large animal or procure large numbers of small game. Since the output was meagre during the survey year, there was just a few incidences of sharing of wild meat although there was a large scale distribution of a wild pig that was shot by a Semai from the neighbouring village. The wild pig was sold to Sempak residents who had to pay for their share of the animal6.

Despite its low returns, hunting remains an important activity in Semai society. Unlike rice swiddening, hunting (and fishing) can be carried out at almost anytime of the year. Partly for this reason it is a suitable off fruit season activity.

6This case will be discussed in Chapter 6.
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Further like fishing, the returns were highly valued. Some say that these domestically obtained meat and fish are tastier than their market replacements. As a reason for the large scale trapping operation, Bah Nandok told me that they yearned for rodent meat since they have not eaten such meat for several months. In another example, Bah Rahu reasoned that he fished during the fruit season because he missed eating the fresh-water fishes from the rivers even though he could afford market fish at the time. Most of the output from these pursuits is unavailable in the market and villagers, hence, have to procure them on their own.

Furthermore, unlike rice, the market replacements for the returns from these pursuits are relatively more expensive. As will be seen in Chapter 5, the cost of purchasing even this low level of protein from the market would be substantial. The prices of market fish and meat are quite high and people can afford to buy them only occasionally. For example, a kilogram of pork may cost between $4 and $5 and may be consumed in two meals by a household.

4.4. Monthly Income Variation

Figure 4.3 illustrates the monthly variation in household cash income while Figure 4.4 presents this data for the six sample households. These figures clearly indicate the seasonal nature of household cash income. The monthly cash income of the average Semai household is under $400 for most of the months except June and July. In July, as Figure 4.3 shows, the cash income peaked to a staggering $2400. This month was the peak of the durian season. In the months of September, October and November, the household cash income dropped to below $200. This period corresponds with the off-fruit season (tohoog).
As Figure 4.4 illustrates, this pattern is evident for all the sample households but with some degree of variation. While the cash income peaked in July for all the households, there was considerable variation in the cash income among the households in the other months. For instance, in May the cash income of Household D rose sharply to almost $1000 while Households A, C, E and F experienced drops in their earnings. This variation stems mainly from the fact that the monthly petai incomes varied substantially between households. As Table 4.3 indicates, Household D earned $904 from the sale of petai in May which represents its second highest petai yielding month whereas the other households earned average if not low petai incomes during this month.

Also evident in Figure 4.4 is the fact that the highest earning household, D, obtained higher cash incomes than the other households for all the months except September, October and November.

4.5. Productivity

The cash returns per hour of labour for the various productive activities are used as the primary unit of comparison for productivity. However, it may be argued that the hourly cash returns do not accurately reflect the returns to labour for some activities since the time allocation study do not consider labour time spent on related activities prior to the study as in the case of rice harvesting. Ideally, all labour inputs must be considered in the calculations of returns to labour. The returns from fruit harvesting are not only for the labour allocated in the maintenance of the fruit orchards and the harvesting of the fruit but also for the labour processes of clearing and planting done previously. But in this case since the trees have borne fruit for numerous seasons, I would contend that the initial labour investments in the planting have been amortised over the previous harvests and the fruit har-
FIGURE 4.3
MONTHLY VARIATION IN HOUSEHOLD CASH INCOME
MONTHLY VARIATION IN CASH INCOME BY HOUSEHOLD

Figure 4.4
vested at present are direct returns to the labour invested in orchard main-
tenance and fruit harvesting. However, this argument is not applicable to
swidden cultivation since the swiddens are utilised for a relatively short
period. Hence, in order to obtain an accurate depiction of the hourly returns
in swidden cultivation the labour-time spent on the initial processes needs to
be measured and considered in the calculation. Since the figures for labour
time allocated to the initial swiddening processes are not available, the hourly
returns for swidden cultivation was not calculated.

The hourly returns to labour, as White (1976:153) noted, depict "...the
returns accruing to the producer from a given amount of work...". This
measure is more convenient for comparative purposes than total returns since
as the previous sections have indicated in some productive activities a portion
of the value accrued from the labour expended is appropriated by others on
the basis of ownership rights or through certain socially prescribed distribu-
tional practices.

From the time allocation figures, it appears that 74 per cent of the time
spent on commodity production over subsistence production earned 96 per
cent of the income while the other 26 per cent of labour time allocated to
subsistence production returned only 4 per cent. While one per cent of the
working time spent on subsistence activities produced $57 worth of products,
an equal amount of time allocated to commodity production would have
produced $436 worth or almost eight times more. In terms of hourly cash
returns, one hour given to commodity production returned about $9.32 while
subsistence production produced $1.22 worth of products per hour of labour
input (see Table 4.11).

In the light of these figures it would seem surprising that the people spent
anytime at all on subsistence production. Evidently, factors other than returns per hour and a concern with productivity underlie the persistence of subsistence activities.

The hourly cash returns of the various productive activities vary greatly particularly between the most productive activity, fruit collecting and the least efficient, fishing. As Table 4.11 shows, the hourly cash returns for fruit collecting which averages about $11 per hour of labour input are comparably much higher than for the other pursuits. Forest product collecting ranks a poor second in terms of hourly cash returns at $2.68 per hour while insect collecting returned only $0.81 per hour making it the least productive cash earning activity. The two subsistence productive activities generated very low hourly returns. Fishing produced a mere 25 cents per hour while hunting returned only $1.46 per hour.

The individual variation in productivity is immense. In fruit collecting the range is between $19.81 for Bah Rahu and $5.47 for Wah Buyas. The range is low for forest product collecting but great for insect collecting, the other relatively popular activity with the low being 10 cents for Wah Nor and a high of $3.35 for Bah Sulon. For the subsistence activities, the range was moderate at 0 to 77 cents in fishing and very high in hunting where Bah Sulon managed only 11 cents per hour but Bah Cendik $4.30 per hour. Generally, women had lower hourly returns for all the activities than the men. The relatively low hourly returns for women in fruit collecting is due to the fact that they generally did not carry similar amounts of fruit as the men. As was mentioned earlier, the distribution of the produce is usually determined by the quantity of fruit (especially petai) transported. In insect collecting the disparity in productivity between the sexes arises because men engaged in more nocturnal collecting which is immeasurably more productive
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Report</th>
<th>Harvest</th>
<th>Productive Activity/Resource (§)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>9:45</td>
<td>0.57</td>
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TABLE 4.11  HOURS OF VARIOUS PRODUCTION ACTIVITIES BY INDIVIDUAL

Page 140
despite its need of a larger cash outlay than daytime butterfly collecting. Women, in contrast, spent more of their insect collecting hours catching butterflies. Similarly, in fishing men were more productive than women because the men used more efficient fishing techniques like cast-nets, fish traps and spear guns which women normally do not use. These forms of fishing, like blowpipe hunting and trapping, are regarded as men’s domain.

From the foregoing discussion it is clear that commodity production particularly fruit collecting is immensely more efficient as a means of earning a livelihood than subsistence production. Secondly, men are more productive than women in the various productive pursuits.

4.6. Decline of Subsistence Production

Thus far it has been demonstrated that people allocate a small portion of their working time to subsistence activities like swidden cultivation, river fishing and hunting. Villagers say that nowadays they are not interested (segat) in planting swiddens or carrying out other subsistence work (kerja’ ke’ cha’) and even if they do engage in such activities they do them on a smaller scale than before or than their forefathers (mai manah). Some, especially of the grandparental generation, repeatedly remarked that they used to clear and plant vast areas with rice and tapioca and perform large scale trapping operations until recently, possibly in the 1960s7. The more articulate villagers explain the drop in their interest in subsistence activities as a consequence of the intensification and concentration of labour on commodity production. As one elder commented, villagers nowadays are more interested in doing “looking-for-money” work (kerja’ ke’ duit) than looking-for-food” work (kerja’ ke’ cha’). Hence, today they are often “not-in-the-mood” (segat)

7Some elders say that after the British left i.e. independence in 1957.
to swidden, fish or hunt. Most people stated that they do not need to plant rice swiddens or engage in frequent fishing and hunting as in the past since with the cash they earn nowadays from the various cash-earning activities they can purchase their subsistence requirements from the shops. That people are "not-in-the-mood" or do not regard subsistence activities as necessary only partially explains the decline in subsistence production. There are obviously more factors than the ones people give for their present low interest in subsistence activities. Since these factors differ somewhat for swidden cultivation and fishing and hunting, each activity will be discussed in turn.

As a reason for their reluctance in planting rice swiddens, some youths told me that their lack of knowledge of certain agricultural rituals associated with good harvests has discouraged them from cultivating such swiddens. There are several rituals performed in the cultivation of rice swiddens. At the outset people are expected to request permission from the ground spirit (nyani kawul) believed to be residing at the land chosen for cultivation. The cultivator needs to carry out certain prescribed rituals in this procedure. Subsequently in almost every phase of the cultivation the swiddener has to perform rituals mainly to appease the ground spirit which people believe must not be offended if they want a good harvest. Once the rice is ready for harvest, another set of rituals is undertaken to ensure that the "rice soul" (ruai baa’) which is associated with high yields is cared for in the spiritual realm. Because of the perceived need to perform these special agricultural rituals, most present-day rice swidden cultivators are elders who have learnt how to carry out these rituals from their fathers. However, as one elder remarked, the youth use their lack of ritual skills as an excuse for not wanting to plant rice swiddens. Elders generally comment that today’s youth are just “lazy”.

As argued in the previous chapter, although rice swiddening and fruit har-
vesting are seemingly incompatible activities in terms of labour demand since their peak labour periods are identical, there is actually sufficient household labour for both these activities. To recapitulate, it was pointed out that ecological factors necessitate the firing and planting of rice swiddens during the durian season. Given the fact that the labour required in the planting of rice swiddens has a more valuable (in terms of monetary returns and economic livelihood) alternative use in fruit harvesting, one might argue that people will naturally allocate more labour hours to fruit harvesting than rice swiddening leading to the demise of the latter. However, as it was suggested earlier, since people usually work only 2-3 hours daily on durian collecting they really do have enough labour time to devote to both durian collecting and rice swiddening during the same period. In other words, these two pursuits do not actually compete for labour.

To seek an explanation for the decline of swiddening, it is necessary to look at productivity. The productivity of rice swiddens in Sempak is extremely low. From the regional survey, it appears that this feature is common to most villages in the Tapah region. Furthermore, from people's recounting of their plantings of previous swiddens, it was evident that there has been a drop in rice yields in recent years. Several interconnected factors are responsible for this decline in rice yields. As it will be demonstrated later, the labour situation has changed largely as a consequence of increasing commoditisation of the contemporary Semai economy. Among these changes is the increased individuation in production and the corresponding decline in labour cooperation. As a result, inter household labour exchanges which are the corner stone of the cultivation of large scale swiddens are relatively less common. This means that households which are now dependent almost solely on their own labour-power can clear only small and less mature forest land for agricultural purposes. Clearing larger areas of land would lead to greater
labour demands, especially for weeding. Although land clearing is less time consuming with young forest plots, weeds are more abundant and must be cut more often than on mature forest land. Furthermore, higher yields occur in swiddens planted on mature forest land than young forests since more nutrients stored in the vegetation are released in the former type of forest cover than in the latter in the firing of the clearings. With the low productivity as a result of both infrequent weeding, and the lack of nutrients in "young forest" swiddens, the returns to labour input are greatly reduced. These low returns undoubtably discourage people from planting rice swiddens.

Furthermore, the returns from swiddens have a low market replacement value and are generally easily available in the market. People usually pay only about $1.00 per kilogram for rice and 70 cents per kilogram for tapioca. In the case of Household D's swidden which produced the greatest amount of rice, the 72 kilograms of rice harvested from this plot may be worth about $72. It may take between 3 1/2-10 hours of labour input depending on the petai prices to earn sufficient cash from the sale of petai to buy this amount of rice which could be expected to take roughly 60 hours of labour for its production. This also indicates that the opportunity cost of rice cultivation is very high since the value generated in the alternative activity, fruit collecting is much higher than the value of rice produced. Hence, it is not worthwhile for the people to cultivate rice. However, since the domestically produced rice is preferred to market rice and cherished by the people, it is likely that its specific use-value is much higher than its market replacement value. In other words, the value of hill rice is higher than the price of market rice in the village. Nevertheless, the opportunity cost may still be high even when the specific use-value of hill rice is considered.

In contrast to rice production, growing tapioca is still worthwhile for several
reasons. The labour hours required in tapioca cultivation are much lower than in rice cultivation since little weeding and maintenance is needed. Furthermore, there is no peak labour period in its cultivation since tapioca can be harvested at anytime whenever there is a need and the roots can last for several months in the ground. Moreover, unlike rice cultivation, tapioca swiddens can be planted at anytime of the year. Since the labour input needed in tapioca swiddens is low and the value of returns (roots as well as leaves) is relatively high, as demonstrated earlier, the opportunity cost is not as high as in rice cultivation. This may explain the fact that tapioca swiddens persist as a fairly popular activity in the Semai village.

The decline in fishing and hunting is not as marked as rice swiddening. As the time allocation figures have demonstrated, people in the sample spent considerable time on these pursuits. However, as noted earlier, villagers say that they used to allocate more time to these activities in the past. The following case is relevant:

Two families (Household B and D) stayed in their orchard houses (duk kampuk) in the same compound in the forest for about 8 weeks in March-May. During their residence there they cleared a plot for rice cultivation, planted a home-garden and engaged in fishing and blowpipe hunting almost daily. The men (Bah Rahu and Bah Openg) also set snares by which they caught numerous ground rats. Bah Rahu told me that they are living as before; doing alot of fishing, hunting and trapping.

Hence, as people acknowledge, there is certainly a drop in the hours given to these activities. As with rice swiddening, the decline in fishing and hunting may be due to their low productivity which, as some people stated, discourages them from engaging in these pursuits.
Chapter 5

Market Relations

Commodity production requires a market for its continuity. Furthermore, in the production of highly perishable commodities, such as durian and petai, ready access to markets is a necessary precondition for the continuity of the production pursuit and the survival of the household. In the preceding chapter, it was shown that commodity production is far more efficient than subsistence production. Largely for this reason subsistence production is in decline in the Semai economy. Current subsistence production is certainly insufficient to meet the villagers’ subsistence requirements and actually provides only a small proportion of the peoples’ diet. For example, the amount of rice harvested by the sample households was sufficient for only about 20 meals per household of five members. Villagers, hence, rely enormously on the market for their food needs.

This chapter examines market relations. In particular, it elucidates the extent of people’s dependence on these relations and describes salient features of these links. Strategies employed by the villagers in buying and selling products will be discussed in order to demonstrate, against the prevailing view, that people are not naive about trading.

The data on expenditure are based on my records of the six sample households for the survey period (November 1982-October 1983). The recorded expenditure constitutes about 70 per cent of the annual cash income
of the six households. It is likely that the bulk of the discrepancy between expenditure and income is due either to unrecorded repayment of cash loans received and spent prior to the survey period or to people's hoarding of cash. Limited information on their outstanding debts or amount of cash hoarded is available since people were understandably reticent to disclose such information. The disparity is also due to some unrecorded cash transfers and outflow from the village. For example, Household E members spent much of their durian income for 1983 whilst staying in another village in September and October. Unrecorded expenditure constitutes the rest of the difference.

5.1. The "Market" Place And The Traders

People purchased market goods from several sources: itinerant retailers, nearby groceries, town shops and village stores. They sold their products mostly to a few traders (towkay) who visited the village frequently. They also occasionally peddled their produce especially fruit to passers-by and even other Semai. In Sempak, seven retailers travelling by car or motorcycle loaded with a variety of food and wares for sale visit the settlement daily at different times of the day. These vendors also visit the other villages situated along the Tapah-Cameron Highlands road. They sound their horns when they approach the villages to inform the people of their arrival but the villagers often wait at the roadside for these peddlars. In the mornings, two Chinese vendors stop at the village: one hawking cakes and noodles on a motorcycle while the other sells various goods and cakes transported in a stationwagon. People often buy Chinese cakes and noodles for their morning meals and other essentials that are needed urgently such as baby's milk (condensed milk cans), soap and tobacco or cigarettes from these itinerant retailers. About midday, a fishmonger on a motorcycle who also retails other fresh food stops by at the village. The villagers bought most of the fish and vegetables they consumed from him. In the afternoon, another vendor
travelling in a car laden with a variety of products and consumables, including alcoholic drinks, visits the villages. In the late afternoon and early evening, three peddlars on motorcycles travel along the road: one sells Malay cakes, another bread and tit-bits and the third carries several items such as dried fish, betel leaves, areca-nut, snack foods, kerosene, cooking oil, tobacco and cigarettes, all in small quantities. All these traders carry as many different types of food and goods as possible in order to cater for people's diverse requirements. Since the competition among these vendors is intense not only among themselves but also with the other alternative sources of market goods, they resort to various ways of securing the custom of the villagers. One of these ways is selling their goods on credit. They find it difficult, however, to compete with the local shop-keepers, whose business can generally cope with greater levels of outstanding credit. Although price cutting is another strategy open to the vendors, being small enterprises these travelling entrepreneurs are usually unable to compete with the shops, indeed they generally charge higher prices for their goods than the shops relying on convenience to make their wares attractive.

Although these vendors do make shopping more convenient for the villagers, people buy most of their groceries and other requirements from the nearby shops just because they are cheaper. There are numerous grocery shops situated either in the settlements or close to the villages. Some of these are Semai-run but most are managed by Chinese, Indian and Malay shop-keepers. Sempak residents bought most of their groceries and consumables from an Indian owned shop about one kilometre down the road towards Tapah while they occasionally purchased things from two shops located about one and a half kilometres up the road towards Cameron Highlands. One of these is a village shop situated in the neighbouring village and run by a Semai family and the other is owned and managed by a Malay man who has been retailing
there for many years. These shops are stocked with a range of goods that are normally in demand by villagers. The shopkeepers maintain close relations with the people. These relationships are stable and characterised by mutual familiarity. In the case of the Indian shop, which is a family concern, all the family members speak fluent Semai, interact openly with their Semai customers and one of the brothers running the business has married a local Semai girl.

These shops were not only the source of most of the people's food provisions but also served as meeting places. People sit in the shops for hours on end chatting with members of neighbouring villages while eating and drinking. Such stores, thus also functioned as centres for information exchange and flow.

Goods were slightly cheaper at these closeby shops than from the travelling vendors but were more expensive than in the town shops. For example, a can of fish which cost $ .90 at the Indian shop was sold for $1.00 by the itinerant retailer but was priced between $ .75 to $ .85 in Tapah. Despite these price differences, people generally preferred to shop in the nearby stores for several reasons. First, these shops are obviously more conveniently located in terms of their proximity to the village. Sempak residents take about 15 to 20 minutes to walk to the Indian shop and less than five minutes to cycle there. Second, and more importantly, mainly due to mutual familiarity between the shopkeeper and the villagers, the managers of the closeby shops generally extend credit freely to their customers. In contrast, the people were rarely able to buy things on credit in the town shops since these stores dealt with a much larger clientele and the people less well known to the shopkeepers. Hence, the villagers shopped at these town stores only when they had sufficient cash and especially on Fridays when the weekly market is held.
During the fruit season, several other itinerant peddlars visit the village to sell clothes, kitchen utensils and crockery. At such times, villagers frequently visit the towns. They don their best clothes and travel to the town by public transport, bicycles, motorcycles and even by foot. In town, they congregate at coffee shops and exchange stories while drinking and eating. Before returning to their villages, they stop at shops there to buy groceries and the fresh food market to purchase fish, meat and vegetables. Significantly, the Semai refer to towns as *kedai*, a Malay word meaning "shop", clearly indicating their main involvement with the towns.

The traders who sell things to the villagers, rarely purchase village products. The people sell their products to other traders or middlemen with whom they have had long-standing trading relations. These buyers normally specialise in the purchase of particular commodities. Hence, there is the *towkay sempak* (fruit) who purchases durians, petai and other fruits and there is the *towkay awat* (bamboo) who buys bamboo and the *towkay cho* (rattan) who deals in rattan. However, in some villages, the traders may buy products that they do not usually deal in if there is no other trader for those items. It is relevant to mention that the term *towkay* which is a Chinese word meaning "head of the family" refers to an entrepreneur or wealthy person in Malaysia. In Semai usage this word also refers to the owner of capital and/or head of a production team in intravillage relations (see Chapter 6). In the context of external relations, however, people use *towkay* to refer specifically to a Chinese trader.

In Sempak, people sell their fruits mainly to two fruit *towkay* but there are several other itinerant traders with whom the villagers may occasionally trade. During the fruit season, some villagers even set up stalls along the road to sell durians to passers-by. Furthermore, as noted earlier, some Semai
buy durians from fellow villagers to sell at the roadside. There are two rattan towkay who deal with the Sempak people as well as other villagers in the region, a few bamboo traders, and one insect trader (towkay krbaag). While the forest product traders drive close to the villages to collect the commodities, people usually transport insects to the towkay who stays about two kilometres away and rubber sheets to traders in Tapah.

The fruit and forest product traders require official permits from the Forestry Department to trade in such commodities. According to the Forestry Act (1935), licences to deal with products from forest reserves must be obtained and levies and taxes on these resources have to be paid to the State government. Since most of the villages in the region extract resources from areas gazetted as forest reserve, these commodities are officially regarded as forest products irrespective of whether the plant resources have been cultivated. In the Tapah region, each trader is officially permitted to buy forest products from a stipulated area and then expected to pay levies and taxes on the commodities he purchases. However, traders normally do not buy products only from their area. They often carry out illegal transactions with villages outside their legitimate trading area. For example, the main fruit towkay in the region has a legal permit to buy products only from a few villages (3rd Milestone, 5th Milestone, 6th Milestone) close to Tapah but he trades with most of the villages in the region. Since the allocation of trading permits is determined by the State’s policy of giving preferences to bumiputra traders in accordance to the New Economic Policy (NEP) many Chinese traders were unable to obtain licences to buy products from villages in which they have had longstanding trade relations. However, many such traders continue their trading relations illegally by normally paying off the authorised traders. Although such “costs” including the taxes and levies are borne by the traders, the producers usually bear part of these costs indirectly. The
middlemen desiring to maintain their profit margin may purchase the resources at lower prices. Furthermore, this State control may result in strengthening the buyer's position of monopsony. The authorised traders may act on the towkay's behalf in driving away other itinerant middlemen by threatening to inform the authorities.

Unlike in the past when the villagers traded mostly with Malays, the main traders today are Chinese. The Chinese trader unlike his Malay counterpart who is inhibited by his religion, Islam, often participates in the Semai festivities particularly the feasts (cha' cha' entoi) where pork and other foods tabu to Muslims are usually the main items on the menu. The Chinese trader is normally easy-going and often engages in horseplay and shares vulgar jokes with his Semai suppliers. He tries to know everyone in the villages at least by name and keeps up with the village gossip. He invites the villagers to his house during Chinese festivals especially the Chinese New Year. Some people have even stayed at the traders' houses on occasions. Thus, in general, the relationship between the Chinese traders and the Semai is cordial. People say that the towkay is their "friend" (kawat) but may remark ambivalently: "He is a cheat and a terrible person but we like him." The Malay trader, on the other hand, ordinarily feels ashamed of openly interacting with the people. He may be subjected to ridicule and malicious gossip if he is seen mixing with Semai (or other Orang Asli) by other members of his community or village.

Having a trader interested in a certain product is undoubtedly crucial in the production or collection of the item. Sometimes if a trader approaches a villager with a request for a certain amount of a particular product which the villager feels he can produce himself, he will not inform others in the village for fear of competition. As people will put it: "He does not want to share his towkay". The following is a case in point:
A Chinese man approached the headman with a request for 100 bertam flowers which are used as decorations. He offered $1 per flower. The headman agreed to supply him the flowers in a week's time. The headman and his wife without telling anyone else in the village commenced cutting the flowers in the forest the following day. Meanwhile Bah Nandok complained that he did not have much cash earning work to do. I suggested that he collect bertam flowers but he replied that unlike the headman he does not have a towkay for such a product. He remarked that he would only collect bertam flowers if another trader requests them or if the headman invites him to join in. He added that he does not want to cut in (potong trip) on the headman's deal. He pointed out that the headman alone can easily meet the trader's request and as such does not need others besides his wife to assist.

5.2. Market Dependence

Nowadays, people depend on the market for most of their food requirements. As shown in Figure 5.1, which is based on the data from the sample households, for all the types of food, except vegetables, the amount purchased from the market is much greater than the amount procured through village production. Only 16 kilograms or 2.8 per cent of the annual total of 577 kilograms of rice consumed¹ per household was locally produced. For meat and fish, the percentage from the market is slightly lower. About 28 kilograms (88 per cent) of the 32 kilograms of meat (including canned meat) consumed per household during the survey year was purchased and 187 kilograms (93 per cent) of the 202 kilograms of fish consumed was bought. In the case of vegetables only 6 kilograms was purchased whereas the household gathered approximately 67 kilograms. Villagers generally say that they do not like to eat the largely Chinese grown vegetables since some have heard that the Chinese farmers use human excrement for their cultivation. People bought very little fruit from the market largely because fruit is plentiful in the village and the other fruits for sale are imported and therefore generally expensive.

¹Although some of the rice produced and purchased was given to other households the amount would be more or less returned by gifts of rice from other households. This also applies to meat and fish.
Domestically Produced and Market Purchased Foods (Percentage)

Vegetables
Fish
Meat
Rice

Figure 5.1
ANNUAL HOUSEHOLD EXPENDITURE ON VARIOUS CATEGORIES

- Foodstuff: 49% 2008
- Tobacco/Betel/Alcohol: 12% 494
- Household Goods: 9.8% 405
- Personal Items: 8.8% 364
- Other Items: 20.1% 824

TOTAL EXPENDITURE: 324

% OF TOTAL EXPENDITURE: 100
Given their dependence on the market for most of their food supplies, it is not surprising that almost 50 per cent of the people's recorded expenditure was on foodstuffs, as shown in Figure 5.2. On average, each household spent about $170 per month on foodstuff and between $30 and $70 on each of the other expenditure categories. Of the amount spent on foodstuffs, about 30 per cent was on rice. On average, each household bought about $47 worth of rice each month; approximately $30 on fish (including canned fish); and only about $5 on meat (fresh and canned). Most of the remaining foodstuff money was spent on purchase of cakes and snacks sold by the vendors, and on food and drinks bought at the nearby shops and at restaurants in Tapah. People also bought coffee, tea, sugar, milk, various spices and condiments and cooking oil.

Villagers also purchased a variety of consumer items such as soap, toothpaste, tooth brush, clothes, shoes, medicines and even cosmetics which constituted 9 per cent of their expenditure. Four people in the six households bought radio-cassette players costing between $70 and $130 and many purchased cassettes. Some spent between $50-$150 on gold ornaments and wrist watches.

Most larger household goods such as kitchen ware and furniture were bought mostly during the durian season. Almost all the households are equipped with mass produced furniture like cupboards, beds, dressing tables which cost them between $60-$150 for each item. In 1982/3, two households bought such items; one (Household C) purchased a cupboard and a showcase and the other (Household D) a bed, a cupboard and a dressing table. Four households in the village own black and white television sets which are run on car batteries; two of these bought theirs during the survey period. For three of the households, their television sets and the car batteries cost about
$500 each while the other household (C) paid $900 for their set. The more regular household expenses include kerosene for lighting purposes as well as fuel; batteries for torchlights, radios and cassette players. Occasionally hardware for housebuilding and repair; torchlights, and new tools such as machete, hammers, saws and the like were purchased.

About 12 per cent of the villager’s expenditure or $41 per month per household was spent on tobacco, betel and alcoholic drinks. On average, a household bought about $20 worth of tobacco (and cigarettes), $9 of betel leaves and areca-nut and approximately $12 on such alcoholic drinks as beer, stout and Chinese wine. Most of the alcohol was consumed during the fruit season. Interestingly, the amount people allocated to this expenditure category per month was only $6 less than their monthly expenditure on rice.

The expenditure on the “other items” category which constituted 20 per cent of the annual purchases was largely on transport expenses. Four men in the village own motorcycles; two (Bah Rahu and Bah Openg) bought new ones on hire purchase the previous year (1981) for which they were still paying installments during the survey year while one (Bah Jee) purchased his several years ago and the other (Bah Sulong) bought a used one for $400 in August 1983. Bah Rahu and Bah Openg spent between $50 to $80 each per month on hire purchase repayments, motorcycle maintenance, and rider’s licences and about $10 to $20 on petrol per month. Other households in the sample spent only roughly $10 per month on transport expenses mainly on bus and taxi fares.

About one third of the funds in this category was spent on lottery tickets and gambling. Several regularly bought lottery tickets particularly “4 digits lottery” (Empat Nombor Ekor) and some, especially during the fruit season,
incurred heavy losses in card games. For instance, Bah Openg lost $727 in gambling during the fruit season.

So far, it has been documented that the villagers rely on the market for their income, through mainly trade, with which they purchase most of their food needs and other manufactured goods. However, their income is seasonal as demonstrated in Figure 4.3. They earn substantial cash incomes during the fruit season, in particular in July, but very low monthly incomes at other times of the year especially in February-April and September-November. Their expenditures, on the other hand, are regularly between $200-$325 per month over the year except in July and August. While a few households may save for expenditure during the low income months, most rely on credit from the traders and shopkeepers to make up the difference between income and expenditure. This system of credit and debts is a significant feature of Semai market relations which facilitates the maintenance and continuity of such market relations.

5.3. Market Relations: Credit and Indebtedness

The system of credit and debts in Orang Asli market relations is usually portrayed as the cause of their dependence on the market and it is seen as mostly advantageous to the traders. For instance, Noone (1936:47) notes for the Temiar:

The principle of the Chinese [trader] is deliberately to fix an imaginary debt on each group by considerable gifts of cloth and implements...the Temiar, no matter how much rattan [rattan] he may bring in, is always reckoned to be still in debt: this is worked by attaching an entirely unjust value on the goods supplied.

Further, as Williams-Hunt (1952:46) reports:

Malay and Chinese traders are only too ready to make a quick profit from the unwitting Aborigine and sooner or later a system of "advances" is made care being taken to see that the Aborigine is always in debt.
Although the traders certainly stand to gain from having their suppliers of products or their customers indebted to them, this system of credit is also advantageous to borrowers not only in terms of having access to manufactured goods when they are unable to pay for them immediately but also for other reasons.

Sempak residents often purchased goods on credit from the nearby Indian shop. The Indian shopkeeper told me that he provides this service to help the villagers since, as he pointed out, their income is erratic. He claimed that his only motive in extending credit freely was to secure customers and not extra profits. He pointed out that he does not charge interest on the credit. Giving credit freely is certainly a boost to his business as many villagers, as they acknowledged, shop with him for this reason. There is, however, a considerable risk of non repayment in extending credit freely. Although many repay their debts so that the trader will continue to extend them credit, some have not and a few are unable to do so. The shopkeeper usually pressures for repayment by continually reminding the debtors (or their kin) of their debts with him. In one case where a debtor had died before settling up, the Indian shopkeeper, his creditor, pressured the deceased man’s brother to repay the outstanding $500. The brother succumbed to this pressure and eventually agreed to repay his brother’s debts.

In respect to the shopkeeper’s claim of not earning extra profits or interest in his credit services, the following case demonstrates otherwise:

Bah Cendik requested the Indian shopkeeper’s assistance in buying a television set for him from Tapah. The shopkeeper bought a set which he claimed cost $900. Since Bah Cendik could only afford $400 at the time, the shopkeeper told him that he could pay the rest later. I checked the price of the television in the shop and discovered that it was selling at only $600. It appears, then, that the Indian shopkeeper had charged $300 for his services although he claimed that he was just helping Bah Cendik.
However, he, like the other traders the villagers buy from, does not charge higher prices for goods bought on credit nor demand an interest on it.

The shopkeepers of nearby shops are not the main sources of credit for the villagers. Although people buy goods on credit from these shops, the debts they incur are relatively small and are repaid quickly. Commonly, a person may buy goods especially foodstuffs from the shop and promise to pay for them in a few days time.

Villagers rely upon the towkay for loans when in need. Without legal claim to land or other valuable property, the villagers lack collateral in obtaining loans from financial institutions. The towkay does not demand such collateral when extending credit. Instead he insist on the villagers' promise to supply him fruit and forest products. Thus, by extending credit freely, he is able to secure large fruit or forest resource consignments from his debtors who feel obligated to supply him these products. The debtors usually comply with the towkay's wishes. They fear that their requests for future loans may be rejected if they do not keep their promise. In fact, a towkay may occasionally threaten his debtors by indicating that if they are caught selling to other traders he will cease to give more credit. Nevertheless, "back door" deals do occur. Some villagers with outstanding debts sell their fruit especially, durian, to passers-by or within the village to the petty traders, at higher prices than the towkay's set price. To avoid being caught in such deals, people either sell their fruit at the roadside in the late afternoon or evening when their creditors are least likely to visit the villages or hire others to sell them on their behalf. The debtors normally repay their debts at the end of the durian season. The towkay subtracts the amount owing to him from the amount due to the villager for the durian supplied. Table 5.1 below shows the extent of debts incurred by the six households with the durian trader:
### Table 5-1: Debts With Durian Trader (1983)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>HOUSEHOLD*</th>
<th>DURIAN INCOME DUE FROM TRADER($)</th>
<th>DEBTS REPAYED($)</th>
<th>NET INCOME($)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>872</td>
<td>570</td>
<td>302</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>920</td>
<td>208</td>
<td>712</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D</td>
<td>1808</td>
<td>400</td>
<td>1408</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E</td>
<td>535</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>445</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td>326</td>
<td>130</td>
<td>196</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>4461</strong></td>
<td><strong>1398</strong></td>
<td><strong>3063</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Household B did not incur debts with the durian towkay.

It appears that the traders are actually giving cash advances for the fruit rather than loans to the villagers although these are called “loans” (*hutang*). In some instances the traders, in particular the rattan towkays, give cash advances usually at the time the consignment is requested. The following case illustrates such a practice:

In September 1982, Ah Seng, the rattan towkay, requested rattan from the Sempak people. He gave $750 to Bah Nandok as an advance to distribute among the people interested in supplying him with the consignment. Bah Nandok kept a record of the advances and the distribution in a notebook. During the collecting period, the collectors claimed that they were Ah Seng’s “employees”. A week or so later the collectors requested more cash and Ah Seng complied with another advance of $500 bringing the amount owing him to $2,200 which includes the first advance and previous outstanding debts. After three weeks of collecting the group comprising twelve persons collected 7750 stocks of rattan which was sold for $3100. At the time of the trading, the trader paid off $900 the amount due after subtracting the $2,200 in debts. Ah Seng was reluctant to have the debts cancelled but the debtors insisted on repaying them. A forthnight later, Ah Seng gave out $805 as new advances for more rattan.

From the traders’ standpoint, it is to their advantage to have the producers in debts to them. As long as the people have outstanding debts with them, they have a lien on the villagers’ productive potential and their products.
Since the traders have to compete with numerous potential buyers of Semai products, they have to resort to means of gaining a monopsony over Semai trade without affecting their profits. Granting credit freely and putting their suppliers into constant debts with them is one way of achieving this objective.

For the producers, the advances and credit indicate that there is a secure demand for their products. This is imperative given that these products deteriorate quickly resulting in a rapid loss of their marketability. As such, people almost never collect forest products unless there is an expressed demand backed by advances for them. Fruit, in contrast, are collected without secure demand from traders since they can easily be sold to passers-by. Nevertheless, given the large quantities of fruit produced for sale it is impossible to market all the produce to passers-by, villagers need traders to market their produce. Furthermore, while ordinary buyers are inclined to choose the fruit they buy from the villagers and will purchase only the good fruit, traders buy fruit irrespective of quality but at lower prices. For this reason the villagers prefer selling to the traders despite the lower prices.

Being indebted to the towkay does not, however, mean a total loss of autonomy for the villagers in marketing their produce. As noted earlier, there is the possibility of "back door" deals which if carried out inconspicuously will escape the trader's or creditor's attention. Most people, however, refrain from such deals for fear of severing the relations with their traders. Undoubtedly and as people are aware, the traders are important to the villagers. As Robarchek (1977:59) notes:

While the traders make most of the profit, they also provide valuable services including a transportation and marketing system for Smolai produce, and credit, which is unavailable elsewhere.
5.4. Trading

European scholars writing on Orang Asli trading relations have tended to highlight their economic “exploitation” (used in a non-Marxist sense) by Malay and Chinese traders. For example, Cerruti, (1908:49) writing on the Batang Padang Semai at the turn of the century, notes:

They [traders] supplied them [Semai] with goods of the very worst quality, charging them at the highest prices, and as these consisted principally of tobacco, salt, iron, *sirih* (betel leaves) and pieces of calico they lasted no time, and had to be frequently replaced. As a matter of course this fraudulent manner of trading made the poor Sakais’ [Semai] debts amount to fabulous proportions and then their swindling creditor dictated the conditions he best liked: the man had to follow and serve him or if there was some woman in the family he preferred, he would carry her off either to keep for himself, or privately sell to another.

For the trading of Orang Asli products, Skeat and Blagden (1906:15) remark:

...they [Orang Asli including the Semai] were still most outrageously imposed on by the Malay, who traded upon their *naïve* simplicity, and at the same time upon their unrivalled knowledge of the jungle, to acquire for his own purposes immense quantities of gutta, camphor, eagle-wood, rattan, damar, and other valuable jungle products, for which he paid the collectors the merest fraction of their real value. (emphasis added)

Using the Jakun (another Orang Asli group) as an example, on the basis of Logan’s report published in 1847, they describe the extent of such “exploitation” and mention other economic deceptions employed by the traders:

The principle managed was simply that of maintaining a high value for anything that was sold to the Jakun, and a low one for what was bought from them...the Malays sold the goods which they purchased in Singapore at advances of from 100 to 400 per cent,

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whilst they bought "taban", camphor, dammar, and other produce of the forest at from 100 to 400 per cent below the prices which they received in Singapore (Skeat and Blagden 1906:237).

The swindling practices mentioned include the forgery of debts accounts to extract greater repayments and the use of fraudulent weighing methods for the articles bought or sold.

Carey (1976:78), however, has pointed out that the extent and frequency of these exploitative practices has been immensely exaggerated. Furthermore, as Dodge (1981:1) argues:

...to apologists for colonialism the treatment that the Aborigines received at the hands of the Malay formed part of the defence for imperial expansion.

These views imply that the Orang Asli are naive in their market relations, and entirely passive in their relationship with the traders. The evidence from Tapah Semai villages demonstrates that these conceptions are not altogether true.

Several older people in Sempak have indeed, related to me incidences when they were swindled by traders. Although they were aware that they were being cheated they did not complain for fear of annoying the trader because he might stop trading with them if accused of swindling. They explain that before the Japanese occupation there were very few middlemen. Villagers admit that until two decades or so they were innumerate and unaccustomed to weights, measures and currency used. Hence, they were easily cheated through the use of deceptive weights and measures, counting errors and pricing in the trader's favour. Since the 1960s, most people are numerate and familiar with the measures and currency used in the market. Some keep account books of their transactions particularly their debts incurred with the traders. Usually villagers assign a person the task of keeping such records.
For instance, in one rattan trading operation, Bah Nandok recorded in a note book how much the towkay advanced to the party of collectors and the amount of rattan loaded onto the truck. When the rattan sellers received payment a few days later, Bah Nandok at an informal meeting of the people involved in the collection of the rattan checked the records against what people were paid to ensure that they were not cheated. In every village, I found that at least a few individuals could perform such tasks.

Although people today are relatively well versed with such matters as counting and keeping accounts which are crucial in market relations, they are, however, still not totally free from being cheated. Pricing of products is still largely the trader’s prerogative. But Dunn’s (1975:101) observation that the Orang Asli “is not in a position to bargain” and “accepts what prices he is offered by the secondary trader because the only alternative is to allow the material to deteriorate” is not an accurate depiction of trading relations at most contemporary Tapah Semai villages. The intense competition for Semai products gives the collector-producer some degree of bargaining power.

The trader’s price for durian is fixed before the season and usually varies year by year whereas petai and rubber prices fluctuate seasonally and even daily. Rubber prices are related to those prevailing in the world market while petai which is totally for local consumption depends more on the supply rather than the demand which is stable. The traders pay low prices for petai and rubber during the high yield periods when the supply is expanded and higher prices at the low yield periods. Petai prices even vary considerably over a day. Ordinarily, the prices are higher in the early morning when competition among the traders is greatest and lower after midday when fewer buyers are available. Most traders set out early in the morning in search of prospective petai sellers in order to market the pods before midday.
by which time the pods may begin to deteriorate. The petai are mostly sold at the fresh-food markets in the towns. These markets are active mainly in the mornings when most people, particularly housewives, do their shopping. The expanded demand in the mornings accords the petai collectors a greater degree of price bargaining power. Villagers, obviously aware of this, mostly collect petai early in the morning so as to obtain the highest possible price.

Forest product prices are normally set prior to collecting. When the trader requests these products, he informs the villagers the price he is willing to pay although, as discussed below, he may change it at the time of the sale. On the basis of this price and other factors discussed previously, people will decide on whether to take up the consignment. Insects are priced by the traders according to their type, the rare ones obviously being more valuable and higher priced than the common types.

It is clear from the foregoing discussion that for products such as fruit where competition among buyers is great there is price negotiation and bargaining while for commodities like forest products where little or no buyer competition exist the collectors do not have much leeway in price determination. Furthermore, the pricing of the village products is influenced by market conditions and the quality of the products. Hence, in price bargaining the collector must have a good knowledge of the market conditions. In general, the trader is the source of such information for the villager who does not have a direct link with the tertiary traders nor the market centres in the urban areas. The trader informs the collectors or producers about the demand and supply and of the urban prices for their products. Frequently, he gives wrong market information to justify his offer of a lower price. The following is a case in point:

Bah Cendik was waiting at the roadside with three bundles of
petai for a buyer. After awhile Ah Yau, the fruit *towkay* drove up the road in his lorry. He stopped and asked Bah Cendik how much did he want for the petai. Bah Cendik responded that he wanted $15 per bundle. Ah Yau said that $15 was too much and offered $10 per bundle contending that petai was plentiful at the time and at $15 per bundle it would be difficult for him to market them. He hastily added that he would tend to lose out on the deal if he bought the pods at the price Bah Cendik requested. After some hesitation, Bah Cendik agreed with the trader's offer. I later discovered from records of other petai trading transactions for the day that the going price had been $15 per bundle.

This practice is common. Traders almost always declare that the demand for a particular product is low or the supply is great or both when making an offer. Most middlemen apparently have the knack of making the Semai feel that their requests are unreasonable. However, if the traders do not have a monopsony over the trade, such strategies would be futile and self-defeating since the producers can always sell their products to another buyer with a better offer.

Interestingly, the manipulation of market information as a strategy in price bargaining is not limited to the traders. In fact, the traders' strategy is often undermined by some Semai tactics. Traders depend on the villagers for information on the supply of the products. People often distort such information given to their traders. For instance, people frequently misreport the availability of fruit and forest products in the village. Two exemplary cases follow:

Ah Seng, the rattan *towkay*, visited the village requesting rattan. He spoke with Bah Misak to find out whether people were interested in collecting rattan. He offered 40 cents per stock of *rotan kaki* and $1.20 for *rotan batang*. Bah Misak told him that very few people are keen on rattan collecting since they were busy with petai collecting (which was incorrect and rattan is difficult to find in the vicinity of the settlement). He added that the prices Ah Seng offered were low. The *towkay* responded that if the villagers collect good rattan for him he might raise his prices and then instructed Bah Misak to gather a collecting team. Later in the evening, when the villagers were relaxing at their usual meeting spot in the settlement, Bah Misak related his meeting with Ah Seng. He told the villagers that he found numerous *rotan kaki* vines, near an orchard, which would be sufficient to meet Ah Seng's request. Later, in response to my
question about the information he gave to the towkay, he said that he had to lie so that the trader may give better prices. He also pointed out that his statement about the difficulty in finding rattan is true for such rattan as rotan manao but there is still plenty of rotan kaki.

Ah Yau, the fruit towkay, on his daily rounds to buy petai stopped at the roadside near Sempak to talk to some villagers who were seated there. He asked them whether the durian flowers have blossomed. Bah Rahu and Bah Nandok who were amongst the group told Ah Yau that they predict a poor harvest judging from the flowering of the durian trees but Bah Openg said that his trees might yield a lot of durians in the coming season. Later, Bah Rahu and Bah Nandok confided in me that they actually expect a bumper harvest but told Ah Yau differently with an expectation of a price rise for durians whereas Bah Openg pointed out that if he told Ah Yau that he predicts a poor harvest, Ah Yau may stop giving him loans or credit.

From these cases, it is clear that villagers also manipulate information they give to the trader.

Another strategy the traders often employ in bargaining is the underevaluation of the quality of the products. As noted earlier, the quality of the product is another determinant of price. The maturity (old or young), freshness and extent of deterioration (damaged skins of rattan or holes in durian) of the product are considered in the evaluation of forest resource and fruit quality. Generally, mature, well ripened and fresh products fetch higher prices. Rubber sheets are graded according to certain criteria such as the amount of impurities, thickness of the sheets and so on. Insect prices vary according to the type and the condition of the insects. If the insect is damaged, its price will depend on the extent of the damage. Since the evaluation of all these products is very subjective, the trader and the seller often have different opinions about the quality of products. The trader normally judges a certain product to be of poor quality to support his offer of a low price. For example at one of the rattan sales, the towkay complained
that the rattan stocks were of poor quality, either too young or damaged. He reduced his offer price by a considerable amount and threatened not to buy the resources if the villagers did not accept these lower prices. He made his price reduction appear so reasonable that the villagers were convinced and accepted his offer. In petai trading too, the buyers often underrate the quality of the pods by saying that they are either too young or unfresh in bargaining for a lower price than the one the producer requested.

As people are aware that the price of a commodity is linked to its quality, they frequently resort to mislead the buyers about the quality of their products in order to obtain higher prices. They employ several forms of deception. In bundling up the petai pods, collectors usually tie the better looking ones on the outer ring to hide whatever poor quality pods are put at the core of the bundle. For durians, the seller may cover up holes in the fruit which indicate possible damage by worms and often put the bad fruit beneath a pile of good durian in making the "heap" (rangkap) which is the unit of measurement in durian trading. Similarly, in tying up bundles of rattan stocks, collectors put the undamaged vines on the outside and the damaged or deteriorated ones on the inside. Hence, it is apparent that, as in market information, both parties in this trading relations manipulate the evaluation of the quality of the products in price bargaining.

Similarly, some of the various forms of measurements used in the transactions for the commodities are arbitrary and as such can be manipulated: petai are sold in bundles (bekas in Semai or ikat in Malay) of 90 or 100 pods each; durian in heaps called rangkap; rubber sheets and latex in kilograms; and rattan and bamboo in pieces or stocks called batang or in bundles (ikat). Although the bekas or ikat for petai measurement may be fairly standard, the collectors sometimes tie fewer pods than the required
number for a bundle. The *rangkap* in durian trading is very arbitrary. It varies with the person laying out the durian in heaps. The seller will make the *rangkap* smaller whereas the buyer larger.

It is, thus, clear that since most people are familiar with the forms of measurements used in trading and are well versed with counting, the traders cannot easily swindle them. In any case, traders, nowadays, refrain from cheating Semai, as they are aware, that if they are caught doing so they may lose their business with the people.

There is considerable competition among traders for Semai products particularly fruit. This gives the villagers some degree of bargaining power in price determination. The prices of the products are generally influenced by market forces. But at the village level there is much price negotiation and the Semai, against expectations, are not always at a disadvantage. Given the mutual need for each other, the traders and Semai producers try to maintain a fair and cordial trading relationship.

5.5. Purchasing

Villagers shopped often. Most people bought things daily from itinerant vendors and usually visited the nearby shops at least twice a week and even daily during the fruit season. While some went to Tapah between once or twice a week, others only went once or twice a month. The most frequent travellers to town were the men with motorcycles who went there as often as every day at some periods of the year.

The people shopped in a distinctive way. An example will illustrate this:

Bah Nandok with two of his children, Bah Atun and Wah Endah walked to the Indian shop. He just received $40 from a petai sale of which he gave $10 to his wife. At the shop, he ordered drinks
and snacks for himself and his children. After drinking and eating he called out to the shopkeeper for the bill for the drinks and snacks which amounted $2.90. He gave the shopkeeper a $10 bill and with the change he gave his children a ringgit each. The remaining money ($5.10) was left on the table. He then requested one gantang (3.6 kilograms) of rice for which he paid $3.40 from the money on the table. After awhile, he asked and paid in turn for some tobacco (75 cents), cakes (60 cents), panadol (20 cents) and matches (20 cents) until all the money on the table was used up.

This buying practice is typical among the villagers. A person will decide on how much to spend at the shop and then buy item by item according to an order of priority. Usually the first item ordered is rice if the shopper does not intend to drink or eat at the shop. Most times people at least have a cup of coffee or tea or a bottled drink.

The example above illustrates shopping during the low income period. Their expenditure is somewhat different during the fruit season, although people may still buy in this distinctive way. They purchased more of each item and more items than normally when they have more cash. In fact, they incurred 41 per cent of their annual recorded expenditure during the months of June, July and August when they earned 60 per cent of their annual cash income. As Figure 5.3 shows, the people’s expenditure for all the categories peaked during these months. Although they spent substantially more money than their annual average on foodstuffs during this period, this increment was not proportional to the expenditure increases on the other categories. Expenditure on foodstuffs constituted only 35 and 26 per cent of total expenditure for July and August respectively which is considerably lower than the annual average of 49 per cent. The income elasticity of demand for these items is low because they are the staples and their purchase is not greatly influenced by increased cash income. This is clearly shown in Figure 5.3. Compared to the other categories, the expenditure on foodstuffs does not vary so dramatically over the months. Further, it was calculated that the rank correlation
(Spearman’s) between monthly cash income and monthly food expenditure is very low at .27.

In respect to the various foodstuffs, it can be seen in Figure 5.4 that there are increases in spending on rice, meat, fish and others during the fruit season. Several households bought more rice than they needed for immediate consumption to store for future consumption particularly during the periods when they have little cash. As can be seen from the figure, an increase in rice purchase in a certain month is followed by a decrease in the following month. For example, an increment in expenditure on rice in August was followed by a reduction in September. The increase in expenditure on fish and meat was small during July and August. Most of this addition was due to the fact that people bought more expensive types of fish and meat. The increase spending on other foodstuff was largely because people ate and drank more frequently at coffee shops. Interestingly, there are two other peaks in the expenditure on this category, one in January and the other in April, during the low income periods. As Figure 4.3 demonstrates, there was an increase in cash income in December but a drop in January and a slight increment in April. It appears that the expenditure on this category is only nominally linked with cash income.

Unlike foodstuffs, the expenditure on personal items is closely linked with cash income. During the high income periods, villagers bought portable radio/cassette players, clothes and gold ornaments. In testing the relationship between monthly cash income and expenditure on personal items, it was found that these two variables are highly ranked correlated (Spearman’s) at .89.

Even though some households bought furniture, kitchen utensils and crock-
Figure 5.3: Household Expenditure on Various Categories by Month
MONTH

HOUSEHOLD EXPENDITURE ON VARIOUS FOODSTUFFS BY MONTH

Figure 5.4
ery and one (Household D) purchased a television set and a battery costing $500 during the fruit season suggesting a close relationship between income and expenditure on household goods, the rank correlation (Spearman's) between monthly cash income and expenditure on household goods is moderate at .43. The explanation for this is related to the types of household goods bought for most of the other months outside the fruit season. As can be seen from Figure 5.3, the average household expenditure on household goods was less than $32 per month for all the months except August when it increased to slightly over $200. Almost all the spending on this category during these months was on kerosene, batteries, and laundry soap which are income inelastic. In August when they had received their durian income, villagers bought items such as furniture and television sets which are highly income elastic.

The relatively high expenditure on the category "Tobacco/Betel/Alcohol" during the fruit season is due to the increased consumption of alcoholic drinks by the villagers during these months. The household incurred 46 per cent, 30 per cent and 35 per cent of their annual expenditure on this category on alcoholic drinks, tobacco and betel respectively during the fruit season. However, a low rank coefficient of .21, calculated by using Spearman's rank correlation method, for monthly cash income and expenditure on this category suggests that the income elasticity of demand for this category of goods is low. When these goods are examined separately it was discovered that the peoples' expenditure on tobacco and betel was fairly stable throughout the year suggesting no or little relationship with cash income. But the expenditure on alcoholic drinks varied monthly according to the cash income. It appears, then, that the demand for tobacco and betel is income inelastic whereas the demand for alcoholic drinks is highly income elastic. In short, villagers consumed more alcoholic drinks when they earned higher cash incomes.
In respect to the category "other items", of which travel expenses constitutes 66 per cent, a similar pattern to the other categories was observed; people spent more money on this category during the fruit season. In fact, about 50 per cent of their expenditure on this category was incurred during the months of June to August. In the course of this period, many people incurred high travel expenses since they often visited towns and other villages, some lost money by gambling which was popular among the people only during the durian season and one person, Bah Sulong, bought a used motorcycle for $400. The rank correlation (Spearman's) between monthly cash income and expenditure on "other items" is moderate at .58. It would be much higher if not for the regular monthly payments which Bah Rahu and Bah Openg had to make in respect of their motorcycles bought on hire purchase.

In general, the rank correlation (Spearman's) is moderate at .61 for monthly income and expenditure. There are two reasons for this. First, people borrow money to maintain their expenditure on certain market products especially market foodstuffs or buy things on credit during low income earning months. Second, people hoard or save excess cash earned during high income earning months to pay for their excess expenditure over monthly income at other times of the year. From the data it is evident that the recorded expenditure in July constituted only 25 per cent of the income earned in the month whereas in August, September and October the people spent 118 per cent, 75 per cent and 61 per cent respectively more than their cash income for these months.

Apart from seasonal variation in expenditure, there is considerable variation in household allocation of cash to various categories and the amounts they spent on each category. This variation is largely a reflection of the income
variation among the households. Nonetheless, other factors notably household size and taste are also significant determinants of this variation in expenditure.

A comparison between the pie charts (Figure 4.1 and Figure 5.5) on the distribution of annual cash income and the monthly household expenditure among the households reveals that there are only minor differences between the distribution of income and the distribution of expenditure among the households. For all the households except Household C the difference is less than 3 per cent. Interestingly, for Household C, which contributed 17 per cent of the income of the household but spent 12.5 per cent of the total households' expenditure, its recorded expenditure constitutes only 53 per cent of its recorded cash income. This disparity is largely due to unrecorded loan repayment and cash remittances. As noted earlier, Household C had an outstanding debt of $500 with the Indian shopkeeper for the television set. It is likely that this debt was repaid during the survey year. Furthermore, it was learnt much later on in my field research that Bah Cendik of Household C had sent money to his brother residing elsewhere on several occasions earlier on in the year. He could not recall how much he remitted but he estimated between $200-$300. He claimed that the money was his brother's share of the petai income since he plucked petai from his brother's trees on several occasions. Hence, this amount should actually be deducted from Household C's income rather than added to its expenditure.

Notwithstanding the variation in the proportion of unrecorded expenditure among the households, the fact remains that expenditure corresponds closely to income among the households. This correspondence is also evident in a comparison of per capita income (see Figure 4.2) and per capita expenditure (see Figure 5.6). In short, as one might expect, there is a positive relation-
FIGURE 5.5

AVERAGE MONTHLY EXPENDITURE OF SIX HOUSEHOLDS

A = 286 = 14.4%
B = 349 = 17.1%
C = 256 = 12.5%
D = 676 = 33.1%
E = 209 = 10.2%
F = 261 = 12.8%
Figure 5.6

Average Monthly Per Capita Expenditure of Six Households

- A: 57% = 10.5%
- B: 176% = 33.6%
- C: 36% = 6.0%
- D: 114% = 11.1%
- E: 104% = 19.2%
- F: 52% = 9.6%
ship between income and expenditure among the households; those with higher incomes incurred higher expenditures. Hence, the income inequality among households in the Semai village is reflected in household spending.

The effect of household size on household expenditure is small. As can be seen from Table 5.2, the amount the small households spent per month on foodstuffs is not much less than the amount the largest household (C) spent on this category. Similarly, for personal items, Household B spent more than three times that of Household C even though it is less than one third the size. On the whole, the data shows that there is little correspondence between household size and expenditure. The argument that a larger household will incur greater expenses is not always true in the context of Semai expenditure.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>EXPENDITURE CATEGORY</th>
<th>A</th>
<th>B</th>
<th>C</th>
<th>D</th>
<th>E</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>TOTAL</th>
<th>X</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Foodstuffs</td>
<td>141</td>
<td>134</td>
<td>149</td>
<td>293</td>
<td>132</td>
<td>150</td>
<td>999</td>
<td>166</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal Items</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>185</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Household Goods</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>88</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>200</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tobacco/Betel/Alcohol</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>246</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Others Items</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>123</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>183</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>407</td>
<td>68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>286</td>
<td>349</td>
<td>256</td>
<td>676</td>
<td>209</td>
<td>261</td>
<td>2037</td>
<td>340</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Percentage</strong></td>
<td>14.0</td>
<td>17.1</td>
<td>12.6</td>
<td>33.2</td>
<td>10.3</td>
<td>12.8</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Several interesting observations about household variations in expenditure can be drawn from Table 5.2. In respect to foodstuffs, an interesting feature is that while the other households allocated $130-$150 on foodstuffs per month even though their sizes varied considerably, Household D spent about
double this amount on this category. This household disbursed almost $300 per month on food whereas its neighbour, Household C, which is almost equal in size and similar in composition to it, spent only half this amount on the same item. It spent considerably more than the average household monthly expenditure for rice, meat and fish and substantially more than the average for other foodstuffs of which about 40 per cent was on food and drinks consumed at the shops. The members of Household D, in particular Bah Openg, regularly ate and drank at the shops and during the survey year they incurred about $560 on these expenses which constitutes 7 per cent of their reported expenditure.

As for personal items, the expenditure variation among the households is mainly due to the purchase of relatively expensive articles like cassette players and gold ornaments by some households. For example, Household B spent less than $20 a month with an average of $11 per month on this category for all the months except July and August when it disbursed $237 and $261 respectively on personal items. This high expenditure was due to the purchase of a cassette player, many recorded cassettes, and gold ornaments. In contrast, Household F which did not buy such articles spent a much lower monthly amount on this category; coincidentally the $11 per month it spent on personal items corresponds with Household B's average on such expenses for the months apart from July and August.

In respect to household goods, the striking observation is the high expenditure on this category by Household D compared with the other households' spending. This household is responsible for 44 per cent of the expenditure on household goods by the sample. Such an enormous difference is due to the fact that Household D purchased a television set and a battery which together cost $500. It is worth mentioning that this amount constitutes about 50 per cent of Household D's spending on household goods.
There was some household variation in the consumption of tobacco, betel and alcohol. Most households except B and D spent about the monthly average per household ($41). The members of Household B do not smoke which explains their low expenditure on this category. Household C spent the most on tobacco. The couple from this household bought an average of $34 worth of cigarettes and tobacco per month. This amount was marginally higher than Household D’s expenditure on tobacco. Although the couples from households A and F smoked as much as those in C and D, they incurred relatively lower expenses on this item largely because, unlike the couples in Households C and D, they regularly purchased cheaper brands of cigarettes or tobacco.

Tobacco smoking and betel chewing are significant practices in social interaction and exchange in the Semai village. At village meetings and ceremonies, tobacco or cigarettes are exchanged and betel, areca, and lime usually placed in straw pouches are passed around. In fact, these items are regarded as necessities for such functions. The exchange of tobacco and betel is said to spawn cordiality at such meetings. As some would put it, this practice is meant to "break the ice". Hence, for this reason, the expenditure on tobacco and betel may not be entirely for personal consumption.

The variation in the expenditure on betel, areca nut and lime among the households is a reflection of the differences in the consumption of such items. While some people, particularly the members of Household D and F, considered these items as high priority ones, most regarded them as relatively unimportant; they would buy them only if they have cash to spare after buying food and tobacco.

As for alcoholic drinks, each household except Household E spent between
$10-$20 per month on this item. The most popular drink was stout which the people call "Mr Black" *(Bah Tangeh)*. These drinks were mainly consumed by the men; women rarely drinking alcoholic beverages. A 750ml bottle of stout or beer cost about $5. In terms of bottles of beer or stout, the households bought about 167 750ml bottles during the survey year. Most (46 per cent) of this was purchased during the fruit season.

Alcoholism is on the rise in several villages in the region. I suspect that some households spend much more than the sample households on alcoholic drinks. For example, one Sempak household spent almost $200 on alcoholic drinks in November 1982 when the six sample households together allotted only $10 to it.

In regard to the expenditure on the category "other items" (mainly transport expenses), the variation among the households is enormous. The households (B,D,F) that owned motorcycles incurred the most expenses on this category. While Bah Rahu (B) and Bah Openg (D) had their motorcycles for the whole survey period, Bah Sulong (F) bought his only in August which was towards the end of the survey year. The high maintenance costs, petrol expenses and the monthly hire purchase payments explain the enormous disparities between households B and D with the others in the expenditure on this category.

In general, expenditure on foodstuff was predominant for all the households. Furthermore, it is clear that an inequality in expenditure exists among the households in the Semai village. This household inequality stems from the uneven distribution of income among the households and much less so on the variation in household sizes. A question that arises is what bearing has this inequality in both income and expenditure on Semai egalitarianism.
Chapter 6

The Impact of Commodityisation on Social Relations

The previous chapters have concentrated on examining production and market relations without considering the impact of these factors on intravillage relations. This chapter will discuss the impact of commodity production and market involvement on intravillage social relations in the light of the varied arguments developed in several studies on this subject.

Anthropologists have long been interested in the effects of contact with a capitalist economy on "tribal" and "peasant" societies. They have, however, been more concerned with describing these effects rather than examining the structural impact of the articulation of these communities with the wider capitalist economy on intracommunity social relations. Furthermore, in keeping with the anthropological traditions, they have been theoretically and methodologically oriented to studying communities as relatively self-contained and homogeneous social units which has made it more difficult for them to examine the issues in question. More recently, several anthropologists (c.f. Kahn 1980, Chevalier 1982, Gavin Smith 1979, Carol Smith 1984, Meillassoux 1981) have developed the theoretical paradigms in anthropology to seek a better understanding of the impact of commoditisation on social relations.

A number of recent studies, largely drawing from Engel's model, have

1See Signs (1977) and (1981) for reviews of some of these studies.
argued that market involvement and commoditisation tend to adversely affect gender relations. These studies contend that with the development of commodity production women become less involved in production and are consequently confined to the domestic sphere. This change has, in turn, been associated with a decline in women's status. However, as other studies (c.f. Stoler, 1977b) have shown that this line of argument can not be generalised to all peasant societies.

Commoditisation and market involvement has also been linked to the development of private property, the ascendancy of appropriative practices, the growth of intravillage capitalist ventures and the decline of sharing and labour cooperation. These developments have, in turn, been associated with incipient social differentiation. Many researchers, for instance, have argued following Lenin, that forms of private property ownership, being more compatible with commodity production, would predominate over communal forms of ownership in the process of commoditisation. Further, it has been suggested that the institution of private property tends to enhance appropriative practices within communities despite internal social pressures. In respect to the growth of intravillage entrepreneurial enterprises, some studies (c.f. Lopez-Gonzaga, 1984) have proposed that the desire to increase cash incomes to maintain ever increasing market demands have motivated some villagers to engage in intravillage retail trade. As for sharing and redistribution, many anthropologists (c.f. Erasmus in Moore 1975, Scott 1976, Popkin 1979) have related the waning of intravillage sharing and labour cooperation to market involvement in several peasant societies. This chapter examines whether these varied arguments are applicable to the Tapah Semai in general and the Sem-pak people in particular.

Until recently, there have been no analyses of the impact of commoditis-
tion on Orang Asli communities. In the last few years, several papers on this subject have been published or delivered at conferences. Even though these studies document several interesting observations, they are generally inadequate in several ways. First of all, they mostly describe social changes resulting from development projects or "modernisation" in a rather generalised way that fails to examine the structural impact of such changes on social and gender relations. Secondly, they tend to focus on the effects of State development projects on Orang Asli communities and altogether ignore the impact of Orang Asli market involvement on intravillage social relations (but see Kirk Endicott 1979b and Howell 1982 for two exceptions). Thus, partly for these reasons and also because they have generally treated the communities they researched as internally homogeneous and self-contained, they do not cast light on such questions as gender differentiation or social differentiation.

6.1. Gender Relations

There is a recent and growing body of literature concerning the impact of "development" or capitalist penetration on women's autonomy and status and gender relations in general. One of the suggestions in several studies taking their cue from Engels is that commodity production and capitalist expansion has brought about the loss of women's autonomy and the emergence of sexual inequality in numerous societies. For the Hmong of Mainland Southeast Asia, Cooper (1983:175) argues that the husband-wife relationship has become increasingly unequal as opium cultivation, a cash production activity, has replaced (and is replacing) rice cultivation as the predominant productive activity. He relates this to the fact that women are less involved in opium cultivation than rice swiddening. In another case study, among the egalitarian Chewong, an Orang Asli ethnic group, Howell (1983:79) found

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...indications that Chewong society is becoming stratified along sexual lines, and that individual men are beginning to emerge as leaders.

She attributes this incipient "social imbalance" to the recent emergence of Malacca cane trade and the contact of Chewong with Malay and Chinese and the State. She explains that unlike in the collection of the other rattan species in which both men and women participated, the collection of Malacca cane, which is relatively more strenuous, was primarily done by men. Being a relatively lucrative enterprise, Chewong men engaged most of their work effort on this activity which enabled them to earn large amounts of cash. With these earnings they bought various consumables and claimed these as their own. The women, on the other hand, became economically dependent on their husbands since they no longer earned their own cash income as in the past. Howell contends that the women's economic dependence alongside the "alien models" of sexual inequality which Chewong are confronted with in their dealings with non-Chewong underlie the process of stratification in their villages.

Some studies, in contrast, have concluded that women's autonomy remains unaltered in certain societies despite the development of commodity production. Stoler (1977b), for example, argues that women in the Javanese village she studied maintained their autonomy and economic independence despite the intrusion of capitalism: they managed to this because they engaged in cash earning work, especially petty trade, as much if not more than men and also because they had control over land and capital (see also Dewey 1962). Nowak (n.d.) arrived at a similar conclusion in her study of the Hmak Btsisi' of Peninsular Malaysia. She asserts that women's autonomy was unaffected by the penetration of capitalism largely because husbands and wives still frequently worked together. Her assertion fits with Johnson and Johnson's (1975:646) conclusion in a study of four South American Indian groups that in economies,
where men and women engage in complementary labor, the husband/wife bond is reinforced through co-operation and interdependence, resulting in mutuality and respect between the sexes.

It appears that the findings of these studies in respect to the impact of commodity production on women's autonomy differ because of the variation in productive relations and the particular circumstances of each case. Stoler, for example, observed that Javanese women unlike their Chewong, Hmong and Btsisi' counterparts engaged in trade and much cash earning work while Nowak found that male-female cooperation was common among the Btsisi'. Unlike the Malacca cane collecting of the Chewong where only men participated, both men and women frequently worked together in fishing and marine foraging which were the predominant productive activities of the Btsisi'. Hence, in order to examine gender differentiation among the Semai, it is important to look at the circumstances and productive relations in Sempak village.

As in other Orang Asli communities, division of labour among the Semai is predominantly based on sex\(^3\). Although there is sex-typing of tasks there are no restrictions against performing activities assigned to the opposite sex (see Karen Endicott 1979 for the Batek). For example, while hunting is regarded men's work (kerja' kraal), women are not prohibited from performing it and although women rarely join their husbands on hunting trips, they may kill game which they encounter accidentally if men are absent at the time. Similarly, cooking and childcare which are considered women's work (kerja' krdol) are frequently done by men. Most labour processes are, however, either "alternating" i.e. performed by men at certain stages and women at others as in rice planting where men spike the ground with a dibble stick

\(^3\text{See also Karen Endicott (1979), Howell (1983), Nowak (n.d.)}\)
while women drop seeds into the holes or "mixed" where men and women work together in carrying out the same tasks as in weeding or hook and line fishing. For most "mixed" activities, the married couple is the production unit. It was, however, observed that Semai men mostly worked alone but when they did engage in cooperative labour they worked mostly with their wives (cf. Nowak, n.d:5, on the Btsisi').

This fairly flexible sexual division of labour implies sexual egalitarianism. However, two observations in respect to production time allocation and productivity which I have discussed in the previous chapters indicate areas where there is incipient inequality. First it was observed that women spent considerably less time on commodity production than men, and second that they were less efficient. Their general inefficiency and low productivity stems not only from their inability to compete with most men in strenuous activities but also from the fact that they were more involved in subsistence activities which were relatively inefficient. Furthermore, in some activities, particularly fishing, women usually employed less efficient techniques than men which invariably resulted in their relatively low catches. The question that arises here is what are the implications of these observations on women's autonomy and on the prevalent gender relations in Semai villages. It appears that Semai women are fairly autonomous despite their confinement to the domestic sphere and their low productivity because of certain social factors.

As in several other Southeast Asian groups⁴, bilateral inheritance among Semai serves to mitigate against gender differentiation to some extent. This type of inheritance allows for women to inherit ownership and control of land and trees and gives them equal rights to such property. Furthermore, ac-

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⁴For examples, see Stoler (1977b).
According to the distributional principles (see Chapter 4), it would mean that women with control of their productive means have rights over products regardless of whether they participated in the production process. A case will illustrate this:

Wah Buyas inherited several durian and petai trees from her father. Before she married her husband, Bah Cekap, she used to ask her male relatives particularly her sister’s husband, Bah Openg, to collect her petai. She would give between half and two thirds of the petai income to her “helpers”. Since her marriage, Bah Cekap plucked her petai and collected most of her durians which he sold but handed the money to her. She would keep some for herself and give the rest to her husband who is expected to spend most of it on household provisions.

In the case of property amassed after marriage, the couple supposedly possess equal rights over it. In respect to fruit trees, couples commonly cooperate in planting them which, therefore, gives each person equal rights as presupposed in cooperative labour. In the event of a separation or divorce, the property accumulated jointly during the marriage is divided as equally as possible between the couple.

It appears, then, that bilateral inheritance and its concomitant equal access to and control over property alongside the high degree of individual autonomy favoured by Semai allows women to be economically independent and autonomous. They can claim a share of the commodity production income despite the fact that they spend considerably less time on such production than men. Hence, insofar as fruit collecting is the predominant productive activity and bilateral inheritance persists, women’s autonomy is in theory protected but greater gender differentiation is likely if male villagers concentrate on rattan collection or wage labour or any other work that would exclude women’s labour.
6.2. Development of Private Property

The principles of ownership and control of property among the Tapah Semai were outlined in Chapter 2. In respect to land ownership, it was noted that villagers collectively claim "ownership" or have control over certain "territories" (lengrii') on the basis of their direct kinship links to the land owning group (mai pasaš) who are recognised as the "owners" of the territory. Residents with such ties to the group have unquestionable rights to the land and its resources whereas those without such links have restricted rights; in particular, they cannot plant fruit trees for themselves. It was also observed that although land is collectively "owned" it is becoming common for villagers to establish control over the area on which their fruit trees thrive. In spite of the fact that some villagers are recognised as custodians of particular sections of the village territory and may regulate access to the resources in their "areas", anyone residing in the village may use the land. By custom, anyone wishing to use any area in the village territory may do so even without asking the custodian in advance. Nonetheless, villagers do sometimes request the custodian's permission as an expression of courtesy. They feel that it is not proper to utilise an area or extract resources from it without requesting the custodian's approval. Since each villager has control over more or less similar areas, in terms of size, resource wealth and so on, in the territory, no inequality in the control of land prevails. Differences, however, exist in the ownership and control of fruit and rubber trees.

Villagers privately own fruit and rubber trees which they have planted themselves or inherited from their relatives. For the inherited trees (sakaa') people may either privately own them (cha' halior) or share ownership with their siblings (cha' samak). It was observed that even though every member of the family was given a share of the "estate", the distribution of fruit trees among the inheritors was mostly unequal with the older children receiving
more. Furthermore, since there is no consideration given to the differences in productivity of the fruit trees, it is always possible that some inheritors might end up more advantaged than others by being allocated higher yielding trees. These inherent inequalities in the distribution partly underlie the substantial disparity among households in respect to tree holdings and fruit production and income (see Chapter 4). A comparison between ownership of fruit trees and cash income among households had revealed not unexpectedly that households with a greater number of trees had earned higher cash incomes from fruit harvesting than those with fewer. It was, however, not possible to quantify or document the longer term differences in the productivity of fruit trees over my period of field research.

As private property is more compatible with commodity production\(^5\), individual ownership has become more popular as a form of tree ownership than sibling or communal ownership. Having private ownership the owners need not share the fruit income with anyone else; they have exclusive right to this income. As Semai put it; "if we 'eat the trees alone' (cha' samak) then we can keep all the 'profits' (untok) for ourselves." Individual ownership evidently promotes the tendency for individuation in production. In this kind of ownership people need not share work or cooperate in production as in communal ownership (cha' samak). It thus separates the producers from each other and puts them into competition with one another. This is analysed as another condition in simple commodity production and it will be discussed in greater length later in the chapter.


commodity production...supposes private property, a social division of labour, and production for sale by individual producers (and their families) who own the means of production.
Given the compatibility of private property with commodity production, in recent years there is a tendency for sibling or communal ownership forms to be converted to private ownership. It is indicative of this trend that out of the three cases of sibling ownership of fruit trees operating in Sempak at the beginning of my field research, two were dissolved eighteen months later when I left. These were dissolved as the tree owners arrived at a common opinion that frequent misunderstandings and disputes over fruit harvesting and distribution could not be resolved in any other way. In both these cases, as is usual practice, mediators (usually a maternal uncle or the village headman) were appointed to divide up the estate among the inheritors.

Private ownership accords the owners the exclusive right to do whatever they wish with their fruit trees. Unlike land which is communally owned, fruit trees as such can be bought and sold. Hence, they sometimes become commodities. People, however, sell their trees to other Semai but not necessarily to people from the same village. The following two cases are examples of such practices:

Being continually pressured by the Indian shopkeeper to repay his deceased brother’s outstanding debts, Bah Apung resorted to selling some of his durian trees to raise enough money. He sold six trees for $600 to another Tapah Semai who lives in town and works for the JOA. Having a steady income and a relatively high salary, the buyer could afford to pay for the trees immediately. Bah Apung’s relative, Wah Aleng who owned three durian trees close to the six trees, also sold her’s to the new owner to avoid potential dispute over the ownership of durians on the ground at the collecting season. She sold her trees for $60 each since they were relatively young.

Bah Buyah publicly announced his intention of selling some of his durian trees to pay off his debts. His brother residing in another village bought five trees for $500. The buyer told me that he purchased his brother’s trees to avoid the possible transfer of trees once owned by his mother to an unrelated outsider. Significantly he remarked, “We must not forsake our sakaa’ (inherited property). It is the link with our ancestors.”

It is interesting that in these cases, as in many others, indebtedness has led
to rising but mostly impermanent "treelessness" which is comparable to landlessness in "peasant" societies. Having fewer trees to earn fruit income would impose serious problems for the villagers to continue in commodity production and would undoubtedly lead to greater indebtedness and possibly to their proletarianisation (see Chapter 7). To escape from this "cycle of indebtedness", people have to increase their fruit tree holding. One of the two ways people have resorted to achieve this is by planting more trees. Villagers have informed me that in the past ten years or so fruit tree planting has evidently become increasingly popular among most Tapah Semai. It must, however, be noted that most of the productive trees owned by Sempak villagers were inherited and only a few trees were self-planted (see chapter 2). Nonetheless, it was observed that many people had planted trees that are yet to bear fruit. The fruit seedlings planted were specially selected taking into consideration the favourable characteristics of parent tree such as the flavour of the fruit, the yield and so on. This implies that people were not only concerned about increasing their tree holdings but also ensuring, by way of genetic selection, better future harvests and more marketable fruits.

It is also clear that villagers occasionally buy fruit-bearing trees from others to expand their tree holdings. Such purchases are a common form of investment by the wealthier Semai especially those with comparatively high salaried jobs. The dividends from this sort of investment are high and within a few years the income from the fruit sale would have covered the initial cash outlay. Such investments have led and continue to lead, by way of surplus accumulation, to considerable economic differences among Tapah Semai. The person who bought Bah Apung's and Wah Aleng's trees boasted of owning more than 100 durian trees most of which he claims were purchased from several villagers in the region. Assuming that he arranges with some villagers to collect the durian and shares the income equally with them, I would
estimate that his cash income from his durian trees would be around $5000 per season which is about the average household annual income. It must be emphasised, however, that the durian income is only a supplement to his salary from the JOA.

6.3. Appropriation

The ownership of property is linked to appropriation which following Brow (1978:449) is defined as the “transfer of some value from one group or person to another by virtue of a superior claim to it exercised by the latter.” Here I focus on the appropriation by nonproducers of a portion of the total product of direct producers. Basically, two forms of appropriation can be found in Semai villages. The first type is the acquisition of a share of the product by nonproducers on the basis of the ownership of the productive means; a form of appropriation that Roseberry (1976) labelled as “rent”. The second form is the extraction of surplus value by village headmen or the regional chief and his “assistants” through what Semai call komisen which is obviously a Semai-ised version of the English word “commission”. Interestingly, some villagers also called this commission “tax” (cukai). In an attempt to explain this practice, a villager pointed out that komisen is “the payment of ‘tax’ to the lengrit headman for the fruits harvested from his area.” Although a large portion of the “tax” accumulated may be returned to the villagers in the form of village feasts (cha cha entoi), the remaining portion is shared among the headman and his “assistants” for their own use. Therefore the benefits that direct producers receive from their “tax” are not equivalent to the expropriations.

Several cases of appropriation in petai and durian collecting have been discussed in Chapter 4. It was noted that sometimes people may harvest and sell fruits from trees belonging to others. While in some instances the collec-
tors have acted upon the invitations or requests of tree owners, in others the fruit have been collected without the owners' prior consentment. To avoid being charged with theft which is considered a serious offence that people perceive would bring forth severe social sanctions\(^6\) and spiritual attack\(^7\) on the offender, the harvestors in such a case must inform the tree owner(s) and allow the money they received for the fruits to be distributed between them and the owner(s).

The actual distribution of the product or money is usually the owner's prerogative. Given the absence of any prescribed rules on how the money should be shared, the distribution is almost entirely dependent on the owner's whims and fancy. However, the producers sometimes decided on how the money should be shared but expressed their opinion indirectly. As it may be recalled that in one case of petai collecting discussed in Chapter 4, the collector stating that the apportionment of the income was unfair to the owner returned some of the money the owner initially gave him to even out the shares.

Commonly, the owners kept a smaller share of the proceeds for themselves. Nowadays, however it appears that there is a growing tendency for owners to appropriate about half of the product or income. This is the common practice particularly in the distribution of income between owner(s) and collector(s) in durian collecting. On several occasions, owners appropriated a larger share of the fruit income for themselves.

\(^6\)Sanctions include fines imposed by the judicators at native court trials (bicara') and ostracism by fellow villagers but commonly offenders are subjected to malicious gossip and ridicule.

\(^7\)It is believed that the social sanctions may be accompanied by disease, physical harm and even death caused by spiritual agency.
The tendency for owners to increase their appropriations is related to two trends in the villages. First of all is the increasing emphasis people give in the distribution of income to the ownership of fruit trees rather than to the labour involved in the collecting of the fruit. More often in the past and less so today, the collectors or producers were given a larger share of the product on the basis of their labour. The owners in handing a larger share to the producers would rationalise their action with a statement that the "person who toiled deserves more". Nowadays, it appears that the general opinion among villagers is that trees owners should keep a larger share of the produce.

The second trend is the people's reluctance to share their fruit income. This has induced some owners to appropriate larger than usual amounts of the product with the hope of discouraging others from collecting their fruit. People are aware that they would earn higher cash incomes if they collect the fruits themselves instead of depending on appropriations. In a sense, if an owner "rents" his trees, he would actually be sharing his fruit income with others. This fact undermines the potentiality of such appropriations in promoting intravillage social differentiation. Significantly, such practices may actually prevent social differentiation by enabling women and older men who are unable to participate in the production process (such as climbing petai trees) to earn cash incomes. Nevertheless, the fact that some people were able to eke a living on the basis of their ownership of the productive means by way of appropriations and without having to participate in the production is significant.

Appropriation may also occur in cooperative labour where one (or several) participant is the owner of the productive means. The owner might keep a larger portion of the income. There were several instances of this in petai collecting. The following case illustrates this:
Bah Openg and Bah Leng cooperated in plucking eight bundles of petai which were sold for $131. They both carried four bundles each to the roadside. Bah Openg sold the pods to the trader. He gave Bah Leng $49 and kept $82 for himself. This distribution does not comply with the usual practice where collectors receive the cash equivalent of the number of bundles they transport (see Chapter 4). In response to my question why he had kept a larger share for himself, Bah Openg emphasised that he is the *towkay* ("owner") of the petai trees and as such deserves more.

This sort of practice was also evident in durian collecting, rubber tapping and fishing (particularly when nets were used). An instance in durian collecting is where Bah Rahu kept a larger portion of the income from durians that he and his friend collected on the grounds of his ownership of the trees. Similarly, Bah Openg appropriated a greater part of the cash income from rubber tapping than his coworkers for the same reason (see Chapter 4). It was also observed that in cooperative cast net fishing the owner of the net invariably was allocated a larger share of the catch.

These practices resemble the appropriation that occurs in the blacksmith operation in West Sumatra. Kahn (1980) observed that in the typical blacksmith operation, which consisted of a master (*nangkodoh*) who managed the enterprise and carried out the buying and selling, and two to four workers, the enterprise profits were divided among the workers and master with an extra share allocated to the workshop (*apa*) evidently to pay for the depreciation costs of the master’s equipment. When subjected to a more detailed analysis, Kahn (1980:91-92) found that this share was indirectly appropriated by the master; it represented "a kind of hidden profit accruing to the owner of the *apa*".

It appears that such appropriations which are becoming dominant in Semai internal or domestic economic relations, underline the importance the villagers place on the ownership of the productive means. The term *towkay* which is
used to refer to the trader in external relations refers to the owner of a resource or productive means in internal relations. It seems that when a person claims to be a *towkay* he is actually implying that he has a right to appropriate a share. A comment from a villager is telling in this regard. This villager was given a share of the money received by two other villagers from tourists for demonstrating the use of a blowpipe which belonged to him. On justifying his claim to the share, he remarked "I am the *towkay* of the blowpipe."

The other form of village appropriation (*komisen*) holds greater potential for promoting intravillage social differentiation. It is grounded in a hierarchical system that developed only in the past six decades or so. Villagers informed me that the *komisen* system among Tapah Semai was initiated sometime in the 1920s by the regional chief, Bah Busuh (see Chapter 2). In its initial form, people evidently presented a portion of their rice and fruit produce to their chief who kept some for a feast where most Semai in the region attended and presented the other portion to the Sultan of Perak as a tribute. It seems that this tribute presentation was discontinued a decade or so later. However, villagers still continued to make such contributions to their chief who redistributed these presents at feasts (*cha' cha' entoi*). Evidently, just before the Japanese occupation, a new *komisen* system was established in the region. Instead of having to contribute a portion of their harvests, people were expected to pay commissions to their village headman for the fruits and forest products they sold. It seems villagers then paid 5 cents for every bundle of petai and 2 cents for every durian "heap" (*rangkap*) they sold to the trader.

At the time of the present research, the commission was set at 20 cents for
a bundle of petai and a "heap" of durian and $10 per lorry load of rattan or bamboo. However, instead of the villagers paying the commissions, the traders were expected to pay them. Although the traders sometimes gave the commissions directly to the village headman, the money was usually given to the villagers who were expected to hand it over to the headman. Villagers are expected to give the commissions to the headman of the lengrii (village territory) from where they collected the fruits. It was learnt that most Sempak people kept some of the commission for themselves and gave their headman only a small portion of it. This sort of practice had resulted in a dispute among the villagers in the neighbouring settlement where several village meetings (bicara) were convened to resolve the matter.

Given that the traders pay the commission, it might be argued that this practice is not appropriative. However, since producers are almost certainly bearing these extra costs the traders incur, it is reasonable to assume that they are indirectly paying these commissions.

While most headmen redistributed a major portion of the commissions to the villagers through gifts of money and/or through feasts and only kept a small share for themselves, several headmen had appropriated large shares of the commission and in the process had accumulated considerable wealth. In one of the Tapah Semai villages, the headman accumulated enough cash mainly from commissions to pay a building contractor to build him a concrete house costing $14,000. Even though such an appropriative system could cause intravillage social differentiation, it is undermined by its contradiction with the villagers' prevasive egalitarian outlook and desire for individual autonomy. The refusal of some villagers to hand the commissions over to the headman is indicative of this fact. Significantly, when asked why he did not give the commission to the headman one man remarked,
Why should I give the *komisen* to the headman. It should be mine. I worked and why should the headman "profit" (*untok*).

6.4. Growth of Profit Making Enterprises

A growing number of Semai are becoming aware of the possibility of obtaining an income from intravillage petty trading enterprises. As many people have acknowledged, most villagers nowadays are motivated to engage in retail trading and other entrepreneurial enterprises by the desire to "look for profits" (*ke' untok*). Some of these enterprises were described in Chapter 4. The most common form of intravillage trading is the buying and selling of durians whereby some enterprising villagers buy durian from others to sell for profits to passers-by. Some villagers occasionally retailed betel leaves and areca-nut which they purchased at bulk prices. In several villages, people have set up shops selling various goods such as bottled drinks, alcoholic beverages, canned food, cakes, snack foods, tobacco, betel leaves, areca-nut, soap and so on. At the time of the regional survey in January 1984, there were 12 Semai run village shops in Upper Batang Padang valley. In Sempak, two households (B and C) set up small scale retailing businesses in their houses. They sold a limited variety of goods and kept small amount in stock since, as they acknowledged, they were not prepared for the greater risks involved in dealing with more goods. Household B sold betel leaves, areca-nut, snack food, tobacco, cigarettes and soap while Household C retailed beer, stout, aerated drinks, cigarettes and snack food. As capital, they used some of their surplus durian income. Since they purchased most of their stocks on credit from the nearby stores and the town shops, their businesses actually required little capital. These shops were preceded by two larger scale retail businesses, one set up in 1980 and the other in 1981. Both these enterprises were discontinued after being in operation for only a few months since the shopkeepers could not cope with the numerous problems they encountered in running their businesses. These ventures are described in some detail here:
In July 1980, Bah Openg and Bah Nandok formed a partnership to set up a village shop. They raised their capital from their surplus durian income. They built a hut to serve at the shop which was stocked with bottled drinks, canned food, salt, tobacco, cigarettes, sugar, coffee, biscuits, snackfood, sweets, betel leaves, areca-nut, soap, kerosene and matches. These goods were purchased at bulk prices from the Chinese shops in Tapah. The shopkeepers insisted that they spent about $200 per month on stock replacements and earned approximately $100 per month as profits. The business lasted for only two months. Several reasons were given for its failure. Bah Openg said that they encountered losses on the second month as a result of two thefts of some goods. Bah Nandok, however, declared that he used up a large portion of the capital for his personal expenses. He reasoned that this reduction in capital together with the large amount of the turnover in outstanding debts incurred by their customers had led to cash flow problems which eventually crippled the business.

Bah Rahu and Bah Sulong set up a similar type of business as the first shop in October 1981. They also built a hut in the village to serve as a shop. They invested an initial capital of $150 claimed to have spent about $500 per month on stock replacement. They insisted that they earned about $120 - $150 per month as profits. Their shop lasted five months. Evidently they shut down their business after it had led to a conflict between the shopkeepers and Bah Cendik who is Bah Sulong's elder brother. It seems that Bah Cendik accused them of over pricing. This accusation apparently had led to a confrontation between Bah Rahu and Bah Cendik which factionalised the village for some time as people took sides. Notwithstanding this conflict, the shopkeepers also acknowledged that their venture incurred cash flow problems since a large portion of their capital was immobilised as a result of substantial outstanding debts by many villagers.

It is clear from these cases that is is not easy for a Semai to be an entrepreneur among his own people. Customers easily make accusations of overpricing or cheating against shopkeepers who are their relatives and friends. Furthermore it is difficult to make a good income from storekeeping because of the small profit margin on each item, the demands for credit from kin and other villagers and the low inventory found in most stores. Granting credit is a potential danger for most village shops and other retailing business. With little or no capital they can not replace their stocks. Once a shop is closed, it has little chance to recover its debts.
Notwithstanding the fact that most of these intravillage profit-making ventures do not last long, their very existence and efflorescence have significant implications. Clearly, it indicates that not all of Semai cash income immediately flows out of the village as payment for market purchases. Some cash which forms the basis of such profit making intravillage transaction circulates within the village before it eventually flows out. In the process, long-term social relationships among villagers usually expressed in a kinship idiom and governed by practices of reciprocity are becoming those of the cash nexus. Indicative of this trend, it is not uncommon for people to demand "wages" (gaji) from relatives for assistance in some sort of work which in the past was regarded as reciprocal and/or obligatory among kin. A case in point is when a man paid $140 to his elder brother for gathering roofing material for his new house. In another case, a person requested $6 from his affine for transporting a car battery for recharging which cost $2. Interestingly, he justified his $4 'profit' on the basis of his 'capital' (his motorcycle) input and not the petrol nor the time invested. He also reasoned out that if the Indian shopkeeper charges that rate for the service why can't he.

It appears that the notion of "capital" is gradually being incorporated into Semai internal economic relationships. In one case which illustrates this, Bah Rahu laid claim to a share of the income earned through the sale of fish caught by Bah Sulong and his affines in another village on the basis of his "capital" (modal) invested in the purchase of the fish net. Apparently, the share of the income was entirely for his cash investment of $10 since he had not directly participated in the fishing.
6.5. Changes in Sharing Practices: Food exchange and sarikat

Dentan describes the practice of sharing among the Semai (1965:82) as:

a system of multi-person reciprocity, backed by social and supernatural sanctions, [which] insured that no Semai would starve. The influence of money, however, is eroding this system among the economically more secure lowlanders.

He noted that among the West Semai (lowlanders), which would include most of the Tapah Semai, sharing was less extensive than as among the East Semai (highlanders). This difference was attributed to the difference in the extent of monetisation in the economies of the two groups. As Dentan (1979:50) argues:

The introduction of money has a devastating effect on this aboriginal Semai economy. As a standard of value, money necessarily introduces the forbidden element of calculation into economic exchanges. Moreover, money, unlike food, does not spoil so that sharing does not increase the amount of wealth available. Finally, it is much easier to hide money than food so that identifying “selfish” people becomes harder.

This argument resembles that of the Bohannans (1968) on the impact of money in the Tiv economy. They (1968:246) noted that “it is in the nature of a general purpose money that it standardises the exchangeability of all items on a common scale.” However as Gregory (1980:648) argues:

there is nothing in its nature that causes money to destroy gift exchange systems. They are destroyed by the political power of foreign institutions when conflict emerges.

In respect to “foreign institutions”, Gregory was referring to the European capitalist system which “has been accompanied by the emergence of commodity production and the development of the wage-labour system” (Gregory 1980:648). Hence, he seems to argue that it was commoditisation of the economy that had led to a demise or decline in sharing rather than monetisation per se. These issues will be addressed in the context of the sharing among the Tapah Semai but first a description of the share practices is in order.
Sharing is a clearly evident part of daily life among the Tapah Semai. The sharing ethic is strongly advocated among the villagers. Young children are brought up to share their food and belongings with their siblings and friends. While villagers who are generous are much liked by their neighbours, selfish people are often subjected to ridicule and malicious gossip. Alongside these sanctions against stinginess and the inculcation of a sharing ethic in the socialisation process are two key ideological concepts - pehunan and genhaa' - which serve to ensure and maintain sharing among villagers.

As Clayton Robarchek (1977:105) notes, pehunan refers to the “state of being unfulfilled, unsatisfied, or frustrated in regard to some specific and strongly felt want...” A person who has incurred pehunan is believed to be in danger of attack by supernatural and wild animals and prone to accidental injury, illness and even death. These sanctions are also known as pehunan. A hypothetical case is presented here to illustrate how this concept is related to sharing. If an individual B had developed a craving for rodent meat on seeing rats that person A had trapped, B should satisfy his desire to avoid incurring pehunan. Hence, B should get A to offer some of the rats to him. Usually B would hint his wish by making such remarks as “I haven't eaten rats for a long time.” Since it is likely that A and B are kinsmen or friends, A would not want B to incur pehunan and would, thus, readily offer B a share of his catch. If A does not share his food and if anything undesirable linked to pehunan ever happens to B, A would be accused of causing B's misfortune and may be summoned to defend his “misconduct” (tenhaa’) at a village trial (bicara') where he may be fined if found guilty of the charge. Whether he is summoned to “court” or not, he may nevertheless be subjected to malicious gossip and could even be ostracised from the village which indicates the seriousness of this offence in the Semai community.
The other concept, *genhaa* is more directly related to sharing. It refers to misconduct in respect to sharing. For example, one is said to have committed *genhaa* if he severs a sharing relationship with another individual without any conceivable reason. As with *pehunan*, a person who has committed *genhaa* is believed to be in danger of attack by supernaturals and wild animals and prone to accidental injury, illness and even death. It appears that *genhaa* complements *pehunan* in ensuring and maintaining sharing among people.

Basically, there are three forms of sharing among the villagers: food sharing, work sharing\(^8\) and the sharing of wedding and funeral expenses (*sarikat*). While these practices except for the sharing of wedding and funeral expenses are largely undertaken among people within a village, intervillage sharing particularly in *sarikat* practices is also common.

In food sharing, villagers draw a distinction, on the basis of the scale of the distribution between two types: *ouk* and *sair*. *Ouk* which means "give" in Semai refers to small-scale food distribution involving only a few households. The number of receiving households depends on the amount of food intended to be shared. It was observed that households gave mostly domestically produced and market-purchased rice, fish and vegetables. Food was given to other households on the basis of co-residence, kinship, productive relations and friendship. The concept of accumulating "social credit" by being generous at times of plenty in order to draw upon it at times of relative food shortage appears to underlie this sharing practice.

Food sharing was relatively intense among neighbouring households. It was

\(^8\)Work sharing is discussed in the following section.
observed that as people moved into newly built houses they would immediately begin to share their food with their new neighbours who would reciprocate these gifts. A case in point is when food sharing between Bah Rahu and Bah Openg's households was greatly intensified during the 6 week period when they both lived close to one another in the forest.

It is also likely that since one's neighbours are usually one's kinsmen or friends, the food sharing among neighbours could also be due to the fact that they are related or are in friendly terms with each other. However, as it was observed that villagers often gave food to kin and friends who were not neighbours, it can be said that kinship and friendship ties are equally important in determining the sharing of food.

Food exchange also appears to be linked to cooperative labour. It was observed that on several occasions food sharing had intensified among the coworkers in cooperative production. This suggests that it is likely that people who work together may engage in more food exchanges among themselves. In a case which exemplifies this, it was observed that Bah Nandok and Bah Cekap exchanged food more often than usual when Bah Nandok was working with Bah Cekap to build the latter's house.

Many villagers have told me that people nowadays make food gifts less frequently than about ten years ago. However, I gained the impression from numerous observations that such sharing is still common in the village. Although I do not have quantitative data to show this, I found that households distributed rice to others almost every time they purchased more than about 10 kilograms (2.5 gantang) of rice or distributed fish if they bought about one kilogram of it. From my incomplete records I would estimate that each household would make gifts at least once a week and even more often during
their relatively prosperous periods. Hence, it appears that such food sharing is still popular despite the fact that the village economy is monetised and commoditised to some extent. Dentan (1979:50) has also observed this among the "West" (Kampar) Semai:

The west Semai, most of whom use money and often buy food in a Malay-Chinese market, still share food with close kinsmen or within the household and the neighbouring households of kinsmen. It is thus possible that this type of food sharing is less extensive and intensive nowadays than it was in the past, although it is only villagers' statements on which this contention is based. Significantly, one villager noted

Nowadays, people have become stingy (kareit) I think because they are only interested in looking for money and profits (untok) and not how their friends are doing - whether they [their friends] are healthy or have enough to eat.

The other form of food sharing, sair⁹, refers to large-scale sharing encompassing several households if not all the households within a hamlet or village. Unlike ouk sharing, this form of sharing is formalised and is presupposed by the principle of equity. Usually the village headman or one of his assistants would distribute the food according to a set procedure. The distribution is carried out in public so that on-lookers can keep tab on the sharing to ensure that shares are fairly equal.

Large animals (menhaar entoi), such as wild pig, deer and so on, obtained in hunting are usually shared in this manner. A hunter having killed a large animal would inform the headman who would delegate a few men to carry the animal to the settlement where it would be butchered. The different parts of the animal are separated as it is butchered and heaped separately on

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⁹This word is quite likely a Semai-sed version of "share". It is also used to refer to the division of inherited property and the distribution of money among co-producers in commodity production.
a mat of leaves (usually banana) surrounded by several pots or plates, each belonging to a household within the village. Once the meat has been cut into fairly equal pieces, the distributor would drop a piece of meat into each pot or plate. He would try to be as fair as possible, making sure that every pot or plate has about equal amount of meat from the various parts of the animal. The hunter would receive the same amount of meat as others in the village.

Evidently, since the late 1970s, a commodified version of this form of sharing has been growing in popularity. In this type of sharing, the hunter instead of giving his kill to the village would sell it or would expect to be reciprocated in cash. Since it is still considered improper to sell his game to his fellow villagers, the hunter would sell it to people from another village. Significantly, the animal, if large would be shared out as in the sair practice but each share would be priced and households, if they wish, can have more than one share. Also significantly, villagers noted that their payment was for the hunter’s “capital” (modal) i.e. the shot-gun and cartridges he “invested” and not his effort in the hunting. The following case is an example of a commodified sair:

A man from the neighbouring village shot a wild pig weighing about 40 kilograms and offered it to Sempak residents. No price was negotiated. The village headman informed others in the village and since people wanted the pig, he delegated a group of men to carry the animal to the village. While the pig was being butchered, the headman asked each household the number of shares they wanted to ascertain the total number of shares he should make. Nine households requested for one share each while one asked for three shares, another two shares and one none, adding up to a total of 14 shares. Meanwhile, the people present in the headman’s house where the pig was being butchered and distributed, discussed how much they should “pay” the hunter. The headman pointed out that the hunter should be acknowledged for his generosity and the people must reciprocate (timbang salah) this good gesture. They agreed to $35 after little deliberation. Thus each share was priced at $2.50.

As in this type of commodified sharing, sarikat which refers to the system of
intervillage sharing of costs incurred at major village ceremonies and feasts such as weddings and funerals is formalised and monetised. Villagers say that the present system involving cash contributions had replaced the former system where people from other villagers contributed food and labour to a village holding some major feast. It began sometime in the 1960s with the sharing of the wedding expenses of the regional headman's son.

The term, sarikat which is clearly a Malay loan-word (sharikat or syarikat) meaning "company" or "firm" is a rather appropriate one for this system of sharing as it is relatively formalised and contractual. In Semai usage, however, the term connotes "togetherness" or "solidarity".

To illustrate how this system operates, the sarikat practice in a Sempak wedding is described. The bride was a Sempak girl and groom was from another river basin, Cenderik (Chenderiang). At a meeting to discuss the wedding plans, the bride's father had suggested a budget of $400 which was agreed to by both parties. As is usual practice, each side was expected to raise one half of the money required for the wedding. On the bride's side, of the $200 that had to be contributed, $80 was collected from the waris (kindred), each having to pay an equal sum, while six other villages in the region had contributed the remaining $120. These villages were considered the members of Sempak sarikat upon which the Sempak people could demand contributions for weddings and funerals since they had made similar gifts at feasts held in these other villages. Two of these villages donated $10 each while the other four contributed $25 each (see Table 6.1). As is normal practice, an elder member of the bride's kindred (waris), in this case the mother's brother, allocated the amount each village should contribute. There are certain formalities associated with the presentation of the money. Upon the appointed date for presentation which in this case was a day before the
wedding, an emissary from each village in the sarikat visited Sempak to present the money. The money was wrapped in a white handkerchief and ceremoniously presented to the village headman. As in most such ceremonies there was much exchange of tobacco and betel among the people present at the "meeting". The same sort of procedures were followed in the collection of the money from the bridegroom's side. On the eve of the wedding, the money was all collected and the Sempak people met to discuss what to buy on the next day for the feast.

Table 6-1:  
Sarikat Contribution to Wedding in Sempak  
on 1st March 1983

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>VILLAGE</th>
<th>AMOUNT ($)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Botu Enam</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chedot</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kuala Woh</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bengsak</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bot</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pos Woh</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>120</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

These formalities are strictly followed. If a village headman or his emissary contravenes the set procedure, he is liable to be summoned to a village trial in the host village and may end up with a token fine. One such case occurred when Bah Cendik of Sempak handed in less than the amount requested from Sempak residents for his brother's son's wedding in another village. He was summoned by the headman of the host village and after much debate by the various parties involved, he was fined $25. Even though he did not have to pay the fine, which was a token, he was nonetheless ashamed of the incident.

The contributions made in the sarikat system is usually recorded by one of
the residents in a village. For Sempak, the record of previous sarikat contributions only extended as far back as July 1982 as records of prior donations had been discarded. Table 6.2 presents this data. It can be seen in the Table that Sempak people had contributed money to ten villages while Table 6.1 shows that they had received sarikat donations from only six of these villages. A question that arises is what is the basis for sarikat membership. When Sempak residents were asked to list the villages in their sarikat, the six villages which contributed to the wedding and Batu Sepuluh were named. For the Sempak wedding, Batu Sepuluh villagers, most of whom being members of the bride’s kindred (waris) had donated $40. All these seven villages are closeby and Sempak people had kindred (waris) members in them. As Table 6.2 shows, Sempak people donated money to four other villages which were not asked to contribute for the March 1st wedding. It seems that Sempak people have several kindred members in these villages. In the case of the Sahum wedding, the bridegroom’s kindred are mostly from Sempak which explains why the people were expected to contribute as much as $150. It thus appears that geographical proximity and kindred membership are the main criteria in sarikat membership.

Table 6-2: Sarikat Contributions by Sempak Villagers to Other Villages

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>DATE OF WEDDING</th>
<th>VILLAGE</th>
<th>AMOUNT ($)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>28/07/82</td>
<td>Kuala Woh</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1/08/82</td>
<td>Kuala Woh</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24/08/82</td>
<td>Botu Enam</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1/09/82</td>
<td>Bot</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22/10/82</td>
<td>Batu Empatbelas</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6/01/83</td>
<td>Pos Woh</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5/12/82</td>
<td>Kuala Woh</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12/02/83</td>
<td>Sahum</td>
<td>150</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24/03/83</td>
<td>Tapah Road</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1/07/83</td>
<td>Tapah Road</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10/07/83</td>
<td>Kugek</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8/08/83</td>
<td>Kuala Woh</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21/08/83</td>
<td>Rengsak</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>294</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Although people had mentioned a *sarikat* system for death ceremonies, there was no evidence of its operation. This system (*sarikat dat*), if it does exist, appears to be far less well established than the *sarikat* system for weddings. At a death ceremony of an infant in Sempak, it was observed that some people from other villages who were mostly relatives of the bereaved had donated money to the dead baby’s father. These donations were made on a personal rather than on a village basis. Furthermore there were no formalities or ceremonial presentations involved in the giving of the money.

The *sarikat* system is an epitome of the way sharing has changed in the Semai village. It appears that sharing nowadays is becoming increasingly formalised, contractual and commodified as evidenced by the commodified *sair* and the *sarikat*.

6.6. Decline in Labour Cooperation

Although production is becoming increasingly individualised, it is still common for villagers to perform work tasks on an exchange basis. Several reasons were given by villagers for the desirability of cooperative labour in certain production activities. Some people noted that companionship in work serves to relieve the tedium of a task. It is particularly common in fishing and insect collecting for two or three married couples to “work” together for this reason. Friendship ties play an important part in determining with whom one cooperates. Since these ties vary from time to time among villagers, the production teams are rarely permanent.

Cooperation is crucial in certain tasks such as fish drives where the labour of several people working simultaneously is required for them to be performed efficiently. For example, weir fishing requires at least two people, one to disturb fish from beneath the rocks and other hiding places and another to
catch the fish that are trapped in the weir as they are driven into it by the river current. In fishing where stupeficans are used, several people are needed to collect stupefied fish before they revive or are swept downstream.

Villagers also stated that labour cooperation is desirable among co-owners in production tasks where the productive means, which they own in common, are used. For example, in sibling ownership (cha’ samak) of fruit trees, co-owners are expected to cooperate with each other in maintaining and harvesting the fruit trees. For this reason, Bah Rahu worked about 30 per cent of his petai collections from certain trees for the survey year with his brother with whom he shares ownership of the trees. He worked alone in almost 60 per cent of his collections mainly from trees that he privately owned. In another case, Bah Openg and Bah Cekap cooperated on several occasions in petai collecting because their wives (who are sisters) shared ownership of some of their trees.

As people also acknowledged, labour cooperation is considered desirable in the event of a good harvest in order to share the “good fortune” (nasib bor) of some villagers with their less fortunate counterparts. It is regarded as good a gesture (budi bor) for cultivators or owners to invite others to cooperate in the harvesting of their crop. As was noted earlier, harvestors usually kept what they themselves harvested. In contrast to the harvesting arrangements in several other communities (for example, see Stoler 1977a for the Javanese peasants) where owners appropriate a share of the harvests of their guest harvestors, there is no such appropriation in cooperative harvesting among the Semai villagers. In fact, it was observed that owners of the swiddens or fruit trees more often than not ended up with smaller shares of the produce in these harvesting arrangements. However, the sharing aspect of such arrangements must not be overemphasised. It is always possible that
villagers may have invited others to harvest their crop not only to redistribute their produce but also to obtain the extra labour required during peak periods.

In labour cooperation some individuals are recognised as leaders by their fellow villagers on the basis of certain criteria: age, marital status, ownership of fruit trees, initiation of activities, specialisation and headmanship. Significantly, the leader in a production team is sometimes referred as towkay which, as will be recalled, is also the local term for owner of trees or other productive means and trader or entrepreneur.

The leader of a production team or cooperative group serves a dual role as an intermediary between the direct producers and traders and a distributor of work and products (or income). Commonly, a participating member of a working team who owns the productive means employed in the production process is regarded the leader by others in the group. In cooperative groups where everyone has equal rights to the productive means or the owner is not a participant or is considered too young to make decisions, a leader is chosen by general consensus of the group. Preferably, the leader must be older and married or already a village leader such as a headman or assistant headman. However it was observed in some cases that the initiator of an idea or plan was regarded as the leader. One such case is when a villager who proposed a plan for fishing a certain river with stupeficients was unanimously chosen as the leader even though he was younger than many of the other participants. In certain activities such as those associated with ritual, the leader will invariably be the ritual specialist or shaman (halaa').

In spite of the recognition of leaders in cooperative production, the participants are still autonomous and the distribution among them is fairly equi-
table in most production. If they are unhappy with the leader they would pressure for a change in leadership and if that fails they would cease to participate in the production. The work and products are usually distributed equally among the participants regardless of their status or relative wealth. However in commodity production where one person is recognised as the owner of the fruit or rubber trees, the relations between cooperative producers are becoming increasingly unequal. As noted earlier, the owner (towkay) would appropriate part of the value produced by co-workers who are sometimes referred as their “coolie” (kulih) on the basis of their ownership rights.

The towkay-kulih relations are not class relations, however. An individual who is a towkay is one economic relationship may be a kulih in another. To illustrate this, if A is owner of petai trees and B of a cast net, A will be the towkay of B his kulih in petai collecting, but in cast net fishing the relationship will be reversed. Also in contrast with capitalist relations, kulih are not alienated from the product of their labour. The owners may appropriate a larger share of the product for themselves but usually they allocate this to the maintenance of the household in which the kulih may be a member or the kulih may regain their losses in the form of gifts from the owners.

It appears that labour cooperation is undermined by growing tendency towards individuation in production in most villages. Villagers prefer to work alone or with their household members largely to prevent sharing of their limited resources with other households, even though through reciprocation they would regain more or less what they redistributed. Taking petai collecting as an example, data in Table 6.3 demonstrate that most men worked alone for about 40-50 per cent of their annual number of collections and worked with their spouse or another household member for most of the other
harvesting occasions. Although villagers frequently went out to collect forest products in groups, they did so more for companionship than economic reasons; they worked on their own and kept the products of their labour for themselves. Significantly, villagers worked with persons from other households more frequently in all subsistence production, except hunting, than in commodity production. As can be seen from Table 6.4 which compares cooperation in petai collecting, insect collecting, hunting and fishing, villagers cooperated with persons from other households in 64 per cent of their fishing operations but only 34 per cent in petai collections and 33 per cent in both insect collecting and hunting. People generally preferred to hunt alone which explains the low percentage for hunting.

Table 6-3: Petai Collections by Six Men by Form of Production Unit, November 1982 to October 1983 (percentage in brackets)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PRODUCTION UNIT</th>
<th>INDIVIDUAL</th>
<th>INDIAN</th>
<th>B.</th>
<th>B.</th>
<th>B.</th>
<th>B.</th>
<th>B.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>NANDOK</td>
<td>RAHU</td>
<td>CENDIK</td>
<td>OPENG</td>
<td>CEKAP</td>
<td>SULONG</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Individual:</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>34</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(28.7)</td>
<td>(55.9)</td>
<td>(31.8)</td>
<td>(44.3)</td>
<td>(50.0)</td>
<td>(51.5)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cooperation:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>With Wife</td>
<td>8</td>
<td></td>
<td>72</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>6</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(8.5)</td>
<td></td>
<td>(50.7)</td>
<td>(3.4)</td>
<td>(11.8)</td>
<td>(9.1)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>With Other Members of Household</td>
<td>13</td>
<td></td>
<td>9</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(13.8)</td>
<td></td>
<td>(6.3)</td>
<td>(25.5)</td>
<td>(3.0)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>With People From Other Households</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>24</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(49.0)</td>
<td>(44.1)</td>
<td>(12.0)</td>
<td>(26.8)</td>
<td>(38.2)</td>
<td>(36.4)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Collections</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>124</td>
<td>142</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>62</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(100)</td>
<td>(100)</td>
<td>(100)</td>
<td>(100)</td>
<td>(100)</td>
<td>(100)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Apparantly, the villagers' inclination to keep information about their produce or cash income within the household, to avoid demands on them by others, also underlies their preference to work less with persons from other households. The following case exemplifies this point:

Bah Nandok and his wife, Wah Andah collected 8.5 bundles of
Table 6-4: Percentage Of The Number Of Times Individual Cooperated With Persons From Other Households According To Productive Activity

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PERSON</th>
<th>PETAI COLLECTING</th>
<th>INSECT COLLECTING</th>
<th>HUNTING</th>
<th>FISHING</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>B. Nandok</td>
<td>49.0</td>
<td>37.5</td>
<td>36.3</td>
<td>67.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>W. Andah</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>68.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B. Rohu</td>
<td>44.1</td>
<td>69.2</td>
<td>25.0</td>
<td>74.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>W. Nor</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B. Cendik</td>
<td>12.0</td>
<td>15.8</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>33.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>W. Elar</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>15.0</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>33.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B. Openg</td>
<td>26.8</td>
<td>88.9</td>
<td>7.2</td>
<td>73.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>W. Siao</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>45.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B. Cekap</td>
<td>38.2</td>
<td>15.0</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>61.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>W. Buyos</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>66.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B. Sulong</td>
<td>36.4</td>
<td>20.0</td>
<td>12.5</td>
<td>50.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>W. Aleh</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average %</td>
<td>34.4</td>
<td>32.8</td>
<td>32.9</td>
<td>64.5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

petai which they sold for $110 but they told their fellow villagers that they plucked only 4 bundles and earned $40. Bah Nandok told me not to tell the other villagers how much he actually earned. He explained that people may expect food from him or make demands for money or food if they knew that he and his wife earned a lot of money.

The increased individuation in production is also related to the observation that cooperation is not required in most village production. An individual can easily perform most activities without help from others. Furthermore, in some activities such as fruit collecting, production efficiency may decline with more people working.
6.7. Social Differentiation

It was demonstrated in Chapter 4 that the distribution of cash income among households was unequal. As explained in this chapter, redistribution would not have had much effect on these income differentials. In any case, while it is possible that some surplus income may have been redistributed, it was demonstrated in the preceding chapter that the bulk of the additional cash income was utilised in increased consumption. Households with higher cash incomes incurred greater expenditures than those with lower earnings. Most of the incremental expenditure was on such goods as gold ornaments, cassette players, motorcycles and television sets which have become indicators of relative prosperity. The unequal distribution of such goods among villagers is a tangible sign of considerable wealth differences.

Any visitor to a Tapah Semai village could not help but notice the extent of intravillage wealth differences. Most noticeable is the variation in houses. One would find wooden houses with corrugated iron roofs alongside traditional bamboo and attap dwellings while in some more affluent villages, there might be one or two concrete houses with tiled roofs and glass windows. On closer examination of the settlement, observers would notice motorcycles parked under some houses and television aerials on the roofs of few while many are devoid of such signs of prosperity.

It must be borne in mind, however, that this is not social differentiation which is, as Bernstein (1979:430) writes, related to “the conditions in which wealth becomes capital, when it is not consumed individually but productively through investment in means of production”.

Most current analyses of social differentiation draw on Lenin’s (1964) work on the development of capitalism in Russia. Against the view of the
peasantry as a static or undifferentiated group of producers, Lenin observed sharp differences among peasant households stemming from their varying capacities to acquire and concentrate productive means within the communities. He distinguished such differences from disparities in property ownership among households, which he termed "simple differentiation" (Deere and de Janvry 1981:337). This view counters the Chayanovian contention that economic differentiation is internally conditioned from "demographic differentiation" (consumer/worker ratio) among households. Lenin emphasised that social differentiation develops as a consequence of the interaction of households with the wider capitalist economy in which they are encapsulated. In the process two social classes - a 'rich' class of petty producers or "kulak" and a class of 'poor', semi-proletarian 'peasants' - emerge. Lenin argued that members of these two emerging classes relate to commodity production in different ways. The more well-to-do peasants are involved in commodity transactions through the purchase and renting-out of land, devote more time and effort in commodity production and in some cases, even purchase labour power. The poorer farmers, in contrast, often pay rent for their land, allocate most of their time to subsistence production and will work for wages.

As Roseberry (1976:54) emphasises, differentiation "can only be realised in those social situations in which peasants have options for the use of the surplus product other than consumption and ceremonial expenses". It has been argued that the availability of options for capitalist investments to villagers is an important precondition for social differentiation. These choices would allow richer villagers to invest their surplus on capitalist enterprises rather than spend it on consumables.

It was demonstrated that this precondition is nascent in Tapah Semai villages. In respect to property particularly fruit trees, it was suggested that
private property is becoming a predominant form of ownership. Furthermore, fruit trees have apparently become commodities as villagers nowadays engage in the buying and selling of such property. Despite these factors, it appears that there is as yet no major inequality in tree holdings among villagers. Whatever differences that exist are temporary and could easily be reversed. This stems from the fact that villagers having equal access to land, which is communally 'owned', and are able to expand their orchards simply by planting more trees.

As for intravillage capitalist enterprises, some studies have suggested that these ventures tend to create a class of rich entrepreneurs amongst poor peasants. In a recent study of Buhid "swiddeners" in the Philippines who are in many respects similar to the Semai, Lopez-Gonzaga (1983) explained the incipient economic differentiation she found among the people as a consequence of the entrepreneurial enterprises by some villagers:

With the differential Buhid responses to the new opportunities for the investment of their surplus, an incipient form of economic differentiation is emerging. Within the past two decades of direct participation in the lowland market economy, small-scale entrepreneurship among these people had led to the creation of a segment of producers with larger landholding, surplus to hire seasonal wage labor, and capital for investment in new tools of production such as the plough and carabao. The institution of private landholding and the concomitant demarcation of land among the emergent local elites may be seen in such instances as Buhid entrepreneurs buying out land from fellow Buhid debtors unable to pay their debts (Lopez-Gonzaga 1983:182).

For the Tapah Semai, insofar as the villagers' entrepreneurial ventures have not been entirely successful and the village entrepreneurs have earned meagre profits from their ventures, such activities have not, as yet, induced any significant intravillage differentiation among the people. Being small-scale because they lack capital and collateral for more credit and with low profit earnings, most village entrepreneurs cannot survive by just trading; they have to perform the various productive activities like their fellow villagers for the
viability of their households. Nevertheless, there are a few successful Semai entrepreneurs in the region who engage solely in retailing. Whether a distinct class of entrepreneurs is imminent in the villages remains to be seen but I would argue that in time to come once a few villagers are able to accumulate larger amounts of capital and expand their businesses, internal differentiation will be more obvious. At the moment, petty trading is just as the people say, a "side business" that they perform to supplement their fruit and forest product income.

In opposition to those who maintain the inevitability of differentiation, several researchers have documented the absence of social differentiation despite the penetration of capitalism in a number of communities. Some have explained this as a consequence of sharing and other institutional levelling mechanisms which tend to mitigate against accumulation. It is argued that in the process wealthier individuals find it difficult, if not impossible, to accumulate their surplus income while the differentiation stemming from productivity is retarded to produce a fairly homogeneous community. Perhaps the best known example of such an argument is Geertz' "shared poverty" model. In his study of the Javanese economy, Geertz (1963) found against expectations that population growth and the introduction of cash crops had not resulted in class polarisation. He explained the absence of a class divided Java as a result of the Javanese practice of sharing labour and products which he labelled "shared poverty:

With the steady growth of population came also the elaboration and extension of mechanisms through which agricultural product was spread, if not altogether evenly, at least relatively so, throughout the huge human horde which was obliged to subsist on it. Under the pressure of increasing numbers and limited resources Javanese village society did not bifurcate, as did that of so many other "underdeveloped" nations, into a group of large landlords and a group of oppressed near-serfs. Rather it maintained a comparatively high degree of social and economic homogeneity by dividing the economic pie into a steadily increasing number of minute pieces, a process to which I have referred elsewhere as "shared poverty." (Geertz 1963:97)
Geertz’ contention is extended in Scott's (1976) "moral economy" model. Scott argues that peasants are primarily concerned in minimising risks to avoid economic disasters such as crop failure and starvation. He points out that they would forego opportunities to earn higher incomes or accumulate wealth for less lucrative but secure ventures. This "safety-first" attitude of peasants is just one of the various ways farmers insure against risks. He contends that peasants also create social institutions that "normally insures the weakest against ruin by making certain demands on better-off villagers".

He notes:

Well-to-do villagers avoid malicious gossip only at the price of an exaggerated generosity. They are expected to sponsor more conspicuously lavish celebrations at weddings, to show greater charity to kin and neighbours, to sponsor local religious activity, and to take on more dependents and employees than the average household (Scott 1976:41).

He argues that these social controls tended to prevent intravillage social differentiation (Scott 1976:42). However, he also observes that:

Village redistribution worked unevenly and, even at its best, produced no egalitarian utopia...there was always some tension in the village between the better-off who hoped to minimize their obligations and the poor who had most to gain from communal social guarantees (Scott 1976:43).

Some neo-Marxist anthropologists have advanced somewhat similar arguments in explaining the absence or retardation of class formation in the communities they researched. Gavin Smith (1979), for example, contends that certain village obligations and reciprocal labour arrangements among the villagers tended to hinder class polarisation among Peruvian peasants. Similarly, Voss (1983) argues that the extensive labour cooperation among the Igorot of Philippines underlies the absence of sharp social differentiation.

The question now is does the Semai practice of food giving result in reducing differences among households. Do better-off households give their surplus
food to poorer ones? There are several observations which tend to suggest that this food distribution practice has minimal effects in levelling off disparities in food supply among households. It is clear that what it does do is allow households to maintain their subsistence without having to buy food on credit when they have little money. Since there was much variation in weekly income among households, there was also much household variation in food supplies, (which were mainly purchased) at different times of the year. At a particular time, a household may have relatively more income, and consequently surplus food, to share with other households but due to low cash earnings at another time it would have to depend partially on food gifts from these households, some of which would have earned higher incomes to enable them to purchase more food. In a sense, people were accumulating debts with their fellow villagers rather than with shopkeepers when they received such food gifts at times of relative food storage.

Although no longer-term quantitative data are available, it does appear that households would have received from their beneficiaries amounts more or less similar to what they have given out over time. This implies that the type of reciprocity associated with this kind of sharing tends to be more balanced than generalised. It is clear that people were not purely altruistic when they made such gifts; they expected a similar gift in return particularly at a time when their food supply was low. That is why sometimes households refused to accept a food gift offered to them when they too had enough or surplus food. Furthermore, several villagers told me that they would stop giving food to a household that did not reciprocate their initial gift. Hence, insofar as such food sharing tends to be governed by the principle of balanced reciprocity, its potentiality in redistributing food surplus among households is undermined.
In respect to labour cooperation, it might be argued as in Geertz' "shared poverty" model or Scott's "moral economy" approach that such practices would serve to spread the available work opportunities among villagers and would consequently retard if not prevent intravillage social differentiation. This assumes of course that wealthier individuals (or people with more harvestable trees) or households would invite poorer individuals or households to harvest their crop. In the Semai context, this "function" of cooperative labour is minimised by the fact that such cooperation is performed on an exchange basis. Normally an invitation to harvest is reciprocated. Some villagers have expressed openly that they invited others to harvest their fruit with the expectation of a return invitation. The following is a case in point:

On 19th of July (1983), Bah Openg invited Bah Cekap to pluck his wife's petai. Together with three of Bah Openg's household members, they collected 18 bundles which Bah Openg sold for $216 at $12 per bundle. Bah Openg and Bah Cekap each carried 4 bundles while the other three carried the remaining 10 bundles. Bah Cekap was given $48. The following day, what seems like a reciprocal gesture, Bah Cekap invited Bah Openg to pluck his petai in another village. With help from a third person, they collected 10.5 bundles which Bah Cekap sold for $90. He divided the money equally among the collectors since each carried 3.5 bundles.

It may be recalled that Bah Openg's household had the highest cash earnings among the six households in the sample while Bah Cekap's was the lowest earning household. Therefore, if Bah Cekap's return invitation was not recorded, it would appear that Bah Openg's invitation to cooperate in harvesting his wife's petai trees is an act of redistribution of his household's surplus. However, it is apparent that Bah Openg in collecting Bah Cekap's petai on the following day recovered a large part of the money he indirectly "gave" Bah Cekap. Nonetheless, there may be some transfer of income from the wealthy to the poor in this kind of cooperative labour. In the case dis-

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10 The following discussion will focus on cooperation in fruit harvesting since almost all of the villagers' cash income was from this activity and hence any income redistribution in this activity would have significant effects in village income distribution.
cussed, Bah Cekap had $18 in the course of the two collecting events but it is likely that, in the long run, Bah Openg would have regained this amount through other similar cooperative labour arrangements with Bah Cekap.

It must be borne in mind that the productivity of fruit is erratic, variable and seasonal. A household may have plenty of fruit to harvest at a certain time and none at another. Since the timing of harvests particularly in petai production varies among trees it is likely that some households may have plenty of petai to collect at certain times when other households may have none. Hence, the practice of cooperative or rather exchange labour actually serves more to spread petai income throughout the year for each household rather than among households.

It appears, therefore, that despite the existence of the bases (or preconditions) for social differentiation namely the development of private property, the ascendance of appropriative practices, the availability of options for capitalist investments, there is as yet no sharp intravillage social differentiation among Tapah Semai. This absence of social differentiation is not a result of intravillage sharing of products and work as it was observed that the levelling capacity of sharing is undermined by the fact that Semai sharing is based on balanced reciprocity. Apparently, certain constraining factors and contradictions in the preconditions for class formation as they occur in the village tend to undermine the potentialities of these bases to create social differentiation. Among these factors and contradictions are the villagers' equal access to land which is communally owned, and the difficulties entrepreneurs encounter in running a business among their fellow villagers. However, given the existence of the bases of social differentiation it would be reasonable to say that the conditions for social differentiation are incipient among the Tapah Semai.
Chapter 7

The Future of the Tapah Semai

Although the Semai have been supplying forest products to the wider world since at least the 5th century and although there must have been a number of changes in their economy over this long period, the most dramatic changes have only taken place since the end of the 19th century. At this time the forest product trade began to intensify and by the 1930s many villages particularly the more accessible ones had become substantially involved in the market economy. During the subsequent years of the Japanese occupation and the Emergency there was a significant change in settlement patterns which appears to have been the primary precipitation of current Tapah Semai links with the wider capitalist economy. The recency of the Tapah Semai's dependency on commodity production raises questions about the future of their economy and its long term viability which this chapter will address.

It is generally asserted that there are two crucial preconditions for SCP: first, that producers must own or control their productive means; second that there must be a reliable market for their products as well as the goods and services that they require. The 'reproduction' of SCP, as Kahn (1980) notes, requires that all production units remain free, independent and equal. This form of production, thereby, requires:

the dissolution of prior relations of production - such as communal relations among peasants, traditional relations between peasant producers and their overlords, or ascribed determination of occupation...The individual petty commodity producer, then is found in a community of similar individuals all of whom have the same ac-
cess to factors of production, which are available through the operation of a market in factors of production (C. Smith 1984:79).

Equality of producers is seen as a key factor in this form of production since social differentiation would tend to undermine SCP as richer producers in their quest for greater surplus accumulation would appropriate an increasing portion of the product of the poorer producer’s labour. In the process a class of capitalists and a class of workers would emerge resulting in the total demise of simple commodity production. Thus social differentiation is seen as inimical to the existence and continuity of this form of production.

These preconditions are not determined by economic factors alone but as several researchers (notably Bernstein 1979, C. Smith 1984 and Chevalier 1982) have emphasised, the role of the State may also be important in the development and maintenance of SCP. While some studies have discussed the role of the colonial State in the emergence of SCP¹, others notably Carol Smith (1984) and Chevalier (1982), have analysed the role of the modern State in the creation and transformation of SCP. Carol Smith, for instance, in writing about the emergence of social differentiation among simple commodity producers in Guatemala points out:

Guatemala’s proletariat was not created by the inadequacy of peasant economy or by ‘rich’ peasants expropriating ‘poor’ peasants. It was created by a liberal political regime, representing the interests of a local bourgeoisie and perhaps other interests as well, who forcibly evicted peasants from their holdings (emphasis added, 1984:90).

These various issues need to be addressed in the context of the Tapah Semai in order to examine their future as simple commodity producers.

¹See Kahn (1982) for a discussion of this in respect to Southeast Asia particularly Indonesia and Malaysia and Bernstein (1979) for Africa.
7.1. Control of Productive Means

In respect to the ownership and control of productive means, it was noted that while land is communally "owned", fruit and rubber trees, which are the main productive means, are almost entirely privately owned. The intensification of commodity relations has imposed some changes in the indigenous principles of ownership of land and fruit trees. Among these are the dissolution of communal ownership of fruit trees and the recognition of custodial rights over land where one's trees grow. These developments are clearly leading towards a structured system of land and property ownership but one that is compatible with simple commodity production at least in its initial stages. This indigenous system is, however, not recognised by the Malaysian State. None of the Tapah Semai have titles to "their land" and they have yet to obtain security of occupancy.

This state of affairs partly stems from the State's view of the Semai (and other Orang Asli in general) as "shifting cultivators" with weak links to land. State officials seem to concur that "shifting cultivation" imposes a non-sedentary lifestyle whereby people are said to move to new settlements once every two or three years. Such a view is epitomised in the following statement by a high ranking state official:

It is difficult to give Orang Asli land. They just don't stay put in one area. They move all the time. I think it is because they are shifting cultivators. Anyway by allocating them some land we hope they will stay in one area.

It appears that H.D. Noone's observation made in the 1930s may still have some applicability today:

2This was recorded from my interviews with state officials regarding Orang Asli development. In respect to the Temiar, Carey (1976:180) notes:

Many people in Malaya think that the Temiar are fond of moving constantly, and that they have some kind of nomadic instinct.
If you are Malay who has his eye on a choice “dusun” [orchard] planted up by these people you tell the District Officer how the “Sakai” [Orang Asli] are “here to-day and gone to-morrow” (H. Noone 1936:4).

It is possible that the State view of the Orang Alsi as highly mobile arises partly from the image of the people portrayed in the anthropological works. Much has been written about Semai readiness to flee from danger and death (see, for example, Dentan 1979: passim and Robarchek 1977 passim). Williams-Hunt (1952:73), for instance wrote:

Many peoples have extreme fear of death and will remove camp immediately after the burial or even flee the camp leaving the body unburried.

It is clear that people have been relatively mobile in the past. As discussed in Chapter 2, Semai evidently moved frequently to avoid being brought under control by Malays with the consequence that their nomadism was particularly intense during the era of their slave raiding and attacks. The Semai were also very mobile during the Emergency as they were keen to avoid contact with either the Communists or the Government forces (see Chapter 2). Villagers are no longer nomadic and their settlements are fairly permanent. Nonetheless, it appears that government officers perceive that this kind of behaviour persists among the people. This behaviour was described to me as being current by several officials including the Assistant District Officer of Batang Padang.

Using the misleading assumption of the people having weak links to land, the government has made it explicit that “every effort will be made to encourage the more developed groups to adopt a settled way of life...” (Government of Malaysia 1961:2, emphasis added). Furthermore, it will recognise “The special position of aborigines in respect of land usage and land rights...” (Government of Malaysia 1961:2). In the implementation of these
policies, the government has designated some areas as aboriginal areas or reserves. The laws governing such areas are stipulated in the *Aboriginal Peoples Act* (1954 amended 1974). There are, however, certain ambiguities inherent in this statute as will be discussed later.

Land rights is a growing concern among Tapah Semai as many of them are aware that they do not have legal rights to the land they claim. This concern is evident in the several regional meetings of village headmen and leaders held in 1983 to discuss the land "problem". These meetings culminated in the formation of a regional Semai association (*Persatuan Orang Semai Batang Padang*) with the primary task of channeling the grievances of villagers to the proper authorities. Many people have expressed their fear that they might lose their rights to their fruit and rubber plantations or they would have insufficient land to replant or expand their holdings if "their" land is alienated to non-villagers. As one villager put it:

Durian and petai are our means of "looking-for-money". If the *gob* (Malay)\(^3\) takes our land from us, then we will have no fruits to collect and we cannot plant any trees either.

In the last few years, several researchers notably Hooker (1976), Kirk Endicott (1979), Liow (1982), Roseman (1982), McLennan (1983) and Means (1984) have discussed the legal and social implications of the Orang Asli plight in respect to land. There has also been considerable attention given to this issue in the local newspapers.

The Malaysian government, continually pressured by conflicting interests in regard to land development and utilisation, faces an enormous task in resolving this land issue. As Dentan (1979:103) notes:

\(^3\)Most Semai consider the government as a Malay government (*Perintah Melayu*). The colonial government was called "White man's rule" (*Perintah Mai Biek*).
As a tiny minority of the population of Malaysia the Semai have special problems, especially with regard to land. The Malaysian government does not and cannot acknowledge Semai claims to vast areas of the interior of the peninsula.

In the State of Perak, only 306 hectares have been gazetted as aboriginal reserve and another 17,325 hectares have been approved but have yet to be gazetted while applications for 25,090 hectares by the JOA to the state government are still awaiting a decision. It seems some applications were made as long as 20 years ago\(^4\).

The land that Semai utilise are also suitable for logging, mining and plantation agriculture. There have been several cases where Orang Asli have been displaced or adversely affected due to logging operations, mining, construction of hydro-electric dams, commercial plantations and land development schemes for Malays\(^5\). In most of such incidents the State governments were pressured by other concerns to move the Orang Asli to make way for these developments which mostly benefitted members of other ethnic groups. The following is a case of a Tapah Semai village, Berumin:

Berumin is a village of approximately 70 people situated about 10 kilometres from Tapah. Evidently about 10 years ago, the Oil Palm estate, owned by a commercial plantation firm, nearby expanded into the Mai Berumi territory (lengrii'). It seems that the villagers lost access to about three quarters of their territory and lost a large part of their durian orchards. The estate's expansion was approved by the State government. The villagers were naturally concerned over the matter and expressed their grievances to the Department of Aboriginal Affairs but their complaints carried no weight since the land they claimed was not legally theirs. Nowadays, eight out of the 20 adults are employed by the estate on contractual basis. They work as a team in harvesting the oil palm which brings them a monthly cash income of about $175 per person. The villagers claim that they used to earn substantially more money from fruit collecting in the past which seems reasonable in the light of the economy at Sempak.

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\(^4\)New Straits Times, January 16, 1983

\(^5\)See Endicott (1979) for detailed discussions of some of these cases and Nowak (nd:14-15) for a discussion of the eviction of Btsisi' (Mah Meri) of Carey Island by a commercial plantation.
The Tapah Semai generally rely on the Department of Aboriginal Affairs (JOA) in the resolution of their land "problems". However, with the near absence of the communist threat which in the past necessitated JOA's existence and efforts to counteract communist influence over the Orang Asli, the JOA is now regarded as a low priority department by the government. Given its present status, the JOA has diminished power to implement those of its policies and strategies which are opposed by other more powerful state departments or statutory bodies. For instance, in the Upper Batang Padang valley region the Forestry Department has a dual, sometimes conflicting, role of providing and controlling timber extraction concessions given to logging firms and of conserving and preserving forests while the National Electricity Board is concerned with tapping water in the region for its Hydroelectric power stations which supply most of the power needs of Peninsular Malaysia. The JOA's concerns often conflict with the interests of these state bodies.

Most land in the Upper Batang Padang region that is not legally owned by individuals or plantation companies has been officially gazetted as "forest reserve" (hutan simpanan) which is controlled by the State Forestry Department. In the early 1960s the JOA had applied for the conversion of parts of the forest reserve in the region into aboriginal reserves but this application was approved only in 1983. In that year, the District Office, representing the Perak State government together with the JOA and Forestry Department conducted land surveys to demarcate areas for conversion. Villagers who participated as field assistants in the surveys were occasionally consulted about the boundaries of their village territory and the ownership of fruit trees. However, it had been previously decided by the government that only a part of the land to which the villagers lay claim would be converted into aboriginal reserve.
The designation of parts of the region as Orang Asli reserves will not however improve the prospects of the villagers. The nature of the law in respect to such land imposes a certain degree of insecurity of occupancy. As Hooker (1976:180) points out:

the area of state land occupied by the Orang Asli is public domain and the greatest title which the Orang Asli can get, either as an individual or as a group, is tenant at will. There is no power in any Orang Asli to lease, charge, assign or mortgage such land although some dealings are possible with the consent of the Protector...land as such cannot be owned and no one group can claim rights over it as against another group. All that may be owned is the produce of the land both cultivated and (in some cases) wild.

Furthermore, as Liow (1982) has argued, Orang Asli do not possess any security of tenure in aboriginal reserves for while the State, through the Aboriginal Peoples Act (1954 amended 1974), has the authority to declare any area inhabited by the Orang Asli as aboriginal areas or reserves it also can wholly or partly revoke any such declaration. Hence, it appears that the State still holds the right to exploit resources, particularly timber, within aboriginal reserves.

Furthermore, as Williams-Hunt (1984) has emphasised, Orang Asli on reserves are not eligible for certain governmental aid available to other communities because they do not possess individual land titles. For instance, they cannot obtain rubber replanting subsidies and advice from Risda, (a State body for rubber development) and low cost credit from Bank Pertanian (Agricultural Bank) for this reason.

Thus, insofar as the Malaysian government does not recognise the system of land and property ownership of the Tapah Semai, the continuity of SCP

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6 New Straits Times (27.11.1984) report on the seminar - Development and the Future of the Orang Asli at University Kebangsaan Malaysia, Bangi, 26 November 1984
among the villagers is not assured. The State’s moves to convert some of
the forest reserve into aboriginal reserve would not in any measure resolve
the issue since the villagers would still not have security of occupancy under
the new system. In fact the demise of SCP is a distinct possibility if parts
of Semai “land” are converted into aboriginal reserves. Currently even
though Semai “land” is mostly forest reserve, villagers have access to all
areas they claim as their own despite the fact that they lack *de jure* land
rights. Noone’s (1936:40) observation on the Temiar also applies to the
Tapah Semai:

The Forest Enactments constituting these [Forest] reserves recog­
nise the Temiar to some extent as ‘lords of the soil’ but restrict the
felling of new clearings, and also control their trading in certain
jungle produce (rotans, atap, etc.).

Since non-Semai are prohibited from utilising forest reserves unless licensed by
the government, the villagers have exclusive access to the produce from such
areas. However, it is likely that the conversion of part of the forest reserve
into aboriginal reserve would eventually result in the withdrawal of reserve
status for the remaining forest land. This would mean that the non­
aboriginal reserve areas in Semai traditional territory might end up being sold
or leased to non-Semai. In such an event villagers would lose their rights to
fruit trees outside the aboriginal reserves. In fact Sempak people stated that
many of their fruit trees were not within the area mapped out for conversion
considerations. People were also concerned that the 300 acres or so of land
that will be allocated to them would be insufficient for them to expand their
orchards or replant rubber trees. They pointed out that not all of the area
demarcated for conversion is cultivatable because of infertile soils and
swamps.

Hence it appears that the localisation of villagers in aboriginal reserves will
result in the loss of fruit trees and land for cash crop cultivation which in
turn will affect the viability of SCP. As Kirk Endicott (1979:190) has pointed out in respect to Orang Asli:

The amount of land acquired and the kind of rights to it that are obtained will have a crucial effect on the future of those groups.

7.2. Market Reliability

Most Tapah Semai have easy access to markets. As noted in Chapter 5, villagers have a choice of several sources of market goods. They are visited daily by itinerant retailers and there are three shops within a kilometre and 14 shops within 10 kilometres of the village. They can thus readily obtain the market goods upon which they are increasingly dependant. Since almost all their food is market purchased (see Chapter 5) this ready access to markets is crucial. A continued dependence on market goods is predicated on simple commodity production and/or wage labour. Given that retailing to Tapah Semai is a lucrative enterprise, the market for goods and services will always be reliable. Furthermore, insofar as the villages maintain good market linkage, people would have no difficulty in procuring market goods.

The market for Semai products, on the other hand, is much less reliable and is inconsistent. While the demand for fruit is relatively good, the demand for forest products and rubber is variable. Producers have access to several market outlets for their fruit; they can trade them to specialised fruit traders or sell them to passers-by or other villagers who engage in petty trading. Therefore, there is always a ready demand for fruit and as such this commodity is collected even in the absence of direct requests by traders.

Forest products, by contrast, are collected for trading only if there is a specific demand for them. This is because the number of buyers of Semai forest products is limited to only a few traders. Unlike the period before the
1900s, world demand for these products is now small due to the availability of substitutes of one kind or another. In the current industry raw materials are rarely exported; instead they are utilised mainly by local furniture manufacturers who export the finished product. With the frequent change in furniture fashions the demand for rattan fluctuates considerably. Hence the market for rattan is not always reliable. Furthermore it seems that the rattan furniture industry has been in recession in recent years and will probably continue to decline in the future. In the Tapah region, bamboo is purchased by basket manufacturers and vegetable gardeners who use bamboo strips as supports for crops. The baskets are manufactured primarily for use in the transport of vegetables and fruit from the Cameron Highlands. It appears that the demand for bamboo is in decline as basket manufacturers are gradually substituting bamboo with plastics.

The inconsistent and unreliable market for forest products is not a recent phenomenon. The minor forest product industry has a history of fluctuating market demand (see Chapter 1). Many of the products collected for sale before the 1900s are no longer in demand. A classic case is *gutta pecha*, the latex from *Palaquium* trees. The demand for this commodity rose sharply in the early 1900s when it was discovered to be a suitable material for the manufacture of underwater cable insulators. The increased demand saw an intensification in the collection of this product and even its cultivation in estates (see Dunn 1975:96). The rising demand was, however, short-lived as within a few years more durable synthetics were produced as substitutes.

The local market for Hevea rubber is more reliable than for forest products. Villagers can readily sell their rubber to the several trading companies in

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7 *Business Times, 17 April 1982*
lapah. However world demand for this commodity is unstable. Furthermore, since the 1950s the international demand for natural rubber has been on a downward trend due to competition from synthetic rubber. This has created a high degree of uncertainty in the local rubber industry. The Semai are likely to suffer most in the event of a further drop in demand since they primarily produce poor grade rubber which is ordinarily in low demand.

Thus it appears that there is no secure market for many Semai products. An effective and immediate demand is crucial for the continuity of SCP among the villagers. Most of the village products are highly perishable and hence cannot be withheld from the market until demand (and prices) increase. Petai and durian must be sold within the day of harvest or gathering if a reasonable price is to be obtained.

7.3. The Role of the State

The initial governmental policies in respect to Orang Asli were formulated and passed as a statute, Aboriginal Peoples Act 1954, by the colonial administration during the height of the Emergency. In 1955, the Department of Aboriginal Affairs (JOA) was set up primarily as a tool of the security forces which were engaged in fighting the Communist insurgents. The primary task of the newly formed Department was to win over the Orang Asli from communist influence through the provision of welfare services and the administration of the resettlement programmes.

Upon independence in 1957, the Malaysian government continued with these

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8 This statute was revised in 1967 and subsequently amended in 1974 and tabled as Act 134 of the "Laws of Malaysia".

policies but with more vigour and a different emphasis. Although security matters were still an important concern, the Malaysian government embarked on a policy of "modernisation" with the objective of drawing the Orang Asli into "the mainstream of society". As stated in an official document (1961:2):

The social, economic and cultural development of the aborigines should be promoted with the ultimate object of natural integration at opposed to artificial assimilation. The primary objective should be the fostering of individual usefulness and initiative.

Regarding Orang Asli it appears that the Malaysian government’s main concern, which is a legacy of the colonial administration, is the protection of this ethnic minority:

The aborigines, being one of the ethnic minorities of the Federation must be allowed to benefit on an equal footing from the rights and opportunities which the law grants to the other sections of community. In so far as their social, economic and cultural conditions prevent them from enjoying the benefits of the laws of the country, special measures should be adopted for the protection of the institutions, customs, mode of life, person, property and labour of the aborigine people. However, such measures of protection should not be used as a means of creating or prolonging a state of segregation and should be continued only so long as there is need for special protection and only to the extent that protection is necessary (Government of Malaysia 1961:4).

It is clear that these policies are based directly on the "modernisation" model. This was made explicit in another official document (Jimin 1983:55):

The "modernization model", subscribing to the "stages of growth" theory as expounded by W.W. Rostow et al, is still being pursued by the department with respect of those Orang Asli groups who are living within the rural fringe areas...

Guided by this model, the Malaysian State has implemented development programmes primarily through the JOA which performs the three main tasks of "...the provision of medical treatment, education, and rural development" (Carey 1976:300). The rural development projects include: (a) the resettlement of Orang Asli into "pattern settlements" where they are housed in new
Malay-type dwellings, provided with a piped water supply, encouraged to cultivate cash crops such as rubber, oil palm, and fruit trees in specially designated plots of land, and provided with facilities such as a school, community hall, health clinic and sanitary conveniences; (b) the promotion of cash crops; and (c) the provision of agricultural skills and knowledge to unresettled Orang Asli. These rural development programmes are planned and operate to incorporate the Semai and other Orang Asli more fully into the market economy and the Malaysian state.

The role of the JOA in the economic "development" of the Orang Asli is not only limited to the implementation of these "modernisation" programmes but also, as Kirk Endicott (1979:189) has noted, its intervention "to minimise the effects of outside economic forces on the Orang Asli." The Aboriginal Peoples Act 1954 (1974) gave the JOA the power to exclude any person or class of persons from entering an Orang Asli area. In theory, the JOA acquired control over the external relations of the Orang Asli. The Department argues that the Orang Asli are grossly "exploited" (Jimin 1983:35-36) to justify its intervention in the economy of the villages and control of the marketing of village products. In the JOA's policy statement (1961:4), it is stated that:

The Department of Aborigines should however, continue to keep a watching brief over these people [Orang Asli], in particular to ensure that they are not exploited by outsiders in any way.

In practice, the impact of the JOA on Tapah Semai has been minimal. As this study has demonstrated, villagers are directly involved with the market economy with hardly any State intervention. The development of SCP among Tapah Semai is clearly a consequence of the villagers' market relations with traders and not a direct result of State policies. In such case, Talalla's (1984:29) statement that "Policy places an independent, subsistence oriented,
non-capitalistic and non-competitive, culturally distinct group of peoples into a milieu of market dependency, competition, consumerism and alien values" in respect to Orang Asli would be inapplicable to the Tapah Semai. It seems that in some instances the government has acted against the development of cash crops in some villages. Several people have related instances in the 1960s when government officials evidently uprooted rubber seedlings planted by the villagers. The officials apparently explained to the people that they could not plant cash crops on forest reserve land. It is possible that the rubber plantation companies may have pressured the Malaysian government to discourage the cultivation of Hevea rubber by smallholders in order to reduce competition in rubber production.

The limited impact of the JOA stems partly from the fact that it is a small department with little expertise in implementing government policies. Although it has recorded some impressive achievements, particularly in its medical services, many of its rural development projects have seen little success largely due to its small budget and lack of expertise. Under the Fourth Malaysia Plan (1980-1984), the JOA was allocated $40.1 million in development funding but this amount was reduced to $36 million with the Mid Term Review in 1982. About three-quarters of the budget is spent annually on operating expenditure, the bulk in salaries, leaving only about $5.3 million per year for development\textsuperscript{10}. Most of these development funds are allocated for the approximately 25 regroupment schemes currently underway.

As for the Tapah Semai, JOA has implemented one regroupment scheme in Sungei Udak in 1969 where 120 acres of rubber cultivation were subsidised, 29 Malay-type wooden houses were built and several years later a small rub-

\textsuperscript{10}New Sunday Times, January 13, 1985
ber processing unit (rollers and smoke-house) was provided. Since the 1960s, a further 72 houses have been provided for several households in 8 other villages. This has resulted in considerable intravillage and intervillage differences in standard of living as only some households particularly the headmen and their assistants have been allocated wooden houses. For example, in 10th milestone village (Kampong Batu Sepuluh) only 5 houses had been built for the headman and his assistants while the rest of the residents (about 20 households) lived in Semai-type houses.

The other major development projects for Tapah Semai include the subsidised cultivation of fruit orchards of about 10 acres each in two settlement - 25th Milestone and 3rd Milestone, the setting up of a fish farm costing about $3,500 in the 3rd Milestone village and the provision of live-stock such as goats, cattle, poultry and ducks, and fruit seedlings to several villages.

Apart from these JOA development projects, there have very few "modernisation" programmes initiated by other State departments. One major project is the "pipe-water scheme" implemented in most villages in the region by the Ministry of Health. In this scheme, the Ministry supplied the materials such as pipes and taps and the know-how while the villagers provided the labour.

Although the villagers are clearly not economically dependent on the JOA (or other State departments), it seems that they rely on it for protection and security. If they are harassed by other people or other state departments they usually resort to the JOA for assistance. The two following cases illustrates this;

Bah Bulat (Assistant Regional Headman) informed me that the Public Works Department had ordered people in 19th Milestone settlement who had their houses standing close to the road to resettle-
ment away from the road. Evidently the reason given was that the houses were an “eye-sore” particularly to travellers to Cameron Highlands. The village headman requested Bah Bulat to help to resolve the matter. Bah Bulat contacted the JOA officials in Tapah and demanded that the Department provide “better looking” houses to the villagers. However the JOA was able to persuade the Public Works Department to retract its order.

The headman of 6th Milestone village contacted the JOA officer at Tapah to assist in settling a marital dispute between an Indian man and a local girl. It was reported that the girl desired a divorce on grounds of ill treatment but evidently the man was unwilling to comply with her wishes. The headman had ordered the Indian to leave the village but he refused. The JOA intervened by threatening to prosecute the man if he did not leave the village on the basis of its power as stipulated in the Aboriginal Peoples Act, 1954 (amended 1974).

Thus in respect to the development of SCP among Tapah Semai, the role of the State has been minimal. I would argue that SCP, where producers must be free, independent and equal (Kahn 1980, Smith 1984), has gained considerable ground among the villagers primarily because of the State’s limited role and economic intervention. Indeed where the JOA or other State department has intervened in a village economy, particularly in regroupment projects, development efforts has often resulted in the loss of economic independence and autonomy among its supposed beneficiaries. For example among the Jahai Semang residing in a Government sponsored resettlement, Sungai Rual in Kelantan, I found that the people were heavily dependent on government food handouts which were provided to induce them to participate in the development programmes (Gomes 1982). Whenever the rations were seemingly not forthcoming, the people threaten to leave the settlement. As the JOA had been eager to ensure the success of this project, it had continually provided the people with the rations. For the Batek, Kirk Endicott (1984) observed that “government handouts” were the most preferred source of food. In respect to the Betau project where 1159 Semai had been regrouped into a patterned settlement, Talalla (1984:31) writes:
Although the Project appears to represent a considerable advance toward more culture-sensitive and self-reliant development, there are structural issues which may signify a hidden agenda of further dependency and underdevelopment that has occurred in the pattern settlements...increasing reliance on government bureaucracy for problem solving could have the same effect as it has in many of the pattern settlements: a reduction in the self-reliance that is supposedly fostered by the program, and an increasing reliance on welfare for support.

Hence, it could be argued that an increase in State involvement in Tapah Semai economy may foster the dependency on State aid among the villagers. As it is, people are relatively autonomous and economically independent in their self-organised commodity production. Theoretically, the government has considerable control over the marketing of Semai forest products. Under the Forestry Enactment 1935, the Forestry Department has regulatory rights over these products. The Act requires traders to obtain licences to purchase or trade forest products and pay levies and taxes on the commodities. By such means the departments can regulate the trading of forest products. However, as noted earlier, the Department has not been able to maintain effective control as traders were able to gain direct access to Semai products even without legal permits.

A factor in the survival of the current Semai economy is the realistic recognition of its nature by the government. As noted in Chapter 1, the Malaysian government subscribes to the prevailing image of the Semai (and other Orang Asli) economy as subsistence-oriented with limited involvement in the market economy. Policies based on such a misleading conception will undermine the development of SCP and the very independence of action in a market economy they are seeking to support. It is thus crucial that the government accept or recognise the current form of the Semai economy in its formulation and implementation of policies in respect to the Semai (and other Orang Asli where relevant).
7.4. How resilient is the Semai Economy?

Thus there are grounds for pessimism about the future of the Tapah Semai as simple commodity producers. They have yet to obtain secure rights to the land they utilise for cash-crop cultivation and the market demand for their products is unreliable and is in long term decline for many products. But there are also some grounds for optimism given the resilience of the Semai.

It was suggested in Chapter 5 that the system of credit and indebtedness, which is a key feature in the market relations of Tapah Semai, tends to ensure the continuity of trading relations. By drawing cash advances using future supplies of forest products as collateral, producers are assured of a guaranteed demand for these commodities while traders having a lien on the villagers' productive potential are assured of supply. In respect to indebtedness and crop-mortgaging, Friedmann (1980:172) notes:

*If social or natural conditions prevent the continuous ability of peasants to supply their needs over the course of the year, they borrow in periods in dearth. Once begun, a chronic cycle of indebtedness tends to reproduce itself. Prior debt prevents saving after the harvest, because the creditor calls in his loan, and means of personal and productive consumption will consequently be likely to run short again before the next harvest.*

However, among the Tapah Semai, it was observed that indebtedness does not usually carry over from one year to the next; most villagers repaid the debts incurred between durian seasons at the end of each season or in rattan collecting they usually paid off their debts at the time of the trading. They were not trapped in a "chronic cycle of indebtedness". There is, however, a possibility of them falling into such a trap particularly in the event of production shortfall or economic disaster.

The productivity in fruit collecting which contributed 89 per cent of the
villagers' cash income is erratic and dependent upon numerous factors beyond the producers' control. The erratic nature of fruit productivity is largely a consequence of a number of ecological factors which are highly unstable. Durian yields are greatly dependent on annual climatic seasonal changes and the behaviour of fruit bats which are the main pollinators of the durian flowers. Dry spells are crucial for the flowering of the durian tree but given the unpredictability of rainfall in equatorial areas there is always the possibility of insufficient dry weather at specific periods to induce trees to flower (Holttum 1954:5). Once flowers blossom, bats are then required to pollinate them. But given that the bat population is unstable, there is always the possibility of insufficient bats numbers for complete pollination. For example in one durian season the drop in yield around Kuala Lumpur was linked to the decline in bat population resulting from construction works in several bat infested caves. Even when durian fruits are growing, unexpected strong winds or storms can result in their premature fall.

Petai productivity is also dependent on climatic factors. According to the villagers, incessant storms usually damage petai flowers and ripening pods. They also noted that excessive hot weather could result in poor petai yields. Furthermore, unrelenting rainfall may prevent villagers from plucking ripened petai since people avoid climbing wet trees. The question that arises is what can villagers do to overcome temporary, as well as permanent, production short-falls in fruit collecting.

Clearly the villagers have several options in the event of production failures. They can: (1) diversify production (2) intensify labour (3) reduce expenditure (4) borrow or mortgage their crops (5) sell their property, particularly fruit

11 I was unable to verify these observations
trees and (6) sell their labour. These will be discussed in turn. It must, however, be emphasised that these options are not independent of each other; in fact villagers may simultaneously resort to several of these strategies to overcome a particular predicament.

As was noted in Chapter 3, villagers engage in broad range of productive activities. This diversity gives them considerable protection against economic risks or failures. In the instance of a poor yield in fruit production, they can resort to any of the various other cash earning activities, such as rubber tapping, forest product collecting and wage labour, in which the products are in demand. Villagers may also engage in such subsistence production as swiddening, fishing and hunting to relieve partly their high food expenditure. It was clear that people were concerned with maintaining this diversity. They have shown much willingness to take up any opportunity to earn cash. In several villages in the region, people have taken up novel enterprises such as fish farming, oil palm and cocoa cultivation, and flower gardening to further diversify their range of production activities.

There is certainly no shortage of labour in the Semai household for such diversification. As noted in Chapter 3, people worked an average of only 2 hours 40 minutes per day which is about half the working hours in most peasant communities. Although the labour in activities such as fruit collecting and agriculture is seasonal, there is still ample labour even during seasonal peaks that can be utilised to expand production possibilities or be invested in increasing the productivity of labour. As such they can intensify their production. They can, for instance, engage more labour in tapping rubber or collecting forest products or cultivate larger swiddens or set more animal traps and so on. There are, of course, constraints in production that need to be considered. For instance care must be taken to avoid over ex-
ploitation. Over-tapping of rubber trees would result in irreparable damage to the trees while extraction of forest products beyond sustainable yield could lead to a total depletion of these resources within the village environs. There are also the market considerations: whether there is a demand for products and whether prices make production worthwhile. Another factor is the diminishing marginal productivity of labour (satisfaction/drudgery in Chayanovian terms). For example, an increase in labour time in forest collecting would not necessarily lead to an incremental increase in productivity; in fact the marginal productivity (in terms of hourly returns) may drop upon labour intensification in this activity since, given the possibility that forest resources may already be depleted in closeby areas, collectors would have to walk greater distances in search of these products and concomitantly spend more time and effort on walking and carrying.

Another limitation to intensification and diversification in production is the availability of land or access to land and resources. Currently, this is not a serious problem as people have access to relatively large areas. This situation will inevitably change however when the villagers become localised into much smaller areas (about 300 acres per village) in the event of the declaration of aboriginal reserves.

It was shown in Chapter 5 that villagers are heavily dependent on the market for almost all of their food needs. This dependence stems from the fact that the villagers' current involvement with SCP has led to the decline in subsistence production. Household expenditure on foodstuff, however, constituted about half of total expenditure. It was observed that the expenditure on the non-food items was largely income elastic, that is, it expanded with increases in cash income and declined during seasonal cash shortage. Thus in the event of production short-falls and attendant reduced cash incomes, villagers may reduce their expenditure on non-food items.
In respect to borrowing and crop-mortgaging, it was noted in Chapter 5 that villagers take on debts with traders at times of poor yields or low cash incomes. Villagers, it seems, resort to such a strategy only if they feel that they can repay the debts by the following fruit season. They are possibly aware that chronic indebtedness will result in the loss of their economic independence. As noted in Chapter 6, indebtedness may lead to temporary "treelessness" as some debtors are forced to sell their fruit trees to clear their debts.

7.5. Conclusion

In this thesis I have documented that counter to the prevailing image held by the Malaysian public and the government of the Semai, the economy of these people is both dependent on simple commodity production, and is relatively affluent, given people's material aspirations and work effort. During the last hundred years or so the Tapah Semai have adopted a particular form of simple commodity production to suit their own ends. They have maintained links with the wider national and world economy on an increasing basis at the expense of their subsistence production which is currently in decline.

The survival of the current Semai economy as described here is dependent on both internal and external factors. Given the diversity of commodity production and subsistence production in the Semai economy that I observed during my fieldwork, the present economy appears to be resilient. However, there is a distinct possibility that in the future, intravillage social differentiation, which is currently nascent, will be amplified leading ultimately to people having differential access to the means of production leading in the longer term to the demise of simple commodity production.

The most apparent challenge to the contemporary Semai economy is from
external factors. In particular, the policies of the Malaysian government are likely to result in land alienation and the restriction of the people to areas which may be inadequate to maintain the current diverse and flexible economy. It seems likely that the areas which the Semai utilise extensively today will be made accessible for commercial exploitation by other Malaysian business interests. The Semai would have to compete with these wider and more powerful interests to maintain their cultural identity and current way of life. If this happens it seems likely that the Semai will be forced into becoming rural wage labourers and will experience a decline in their standard of living and autonomy which would be ironic in the light of the government’s development goals for the Semai which are aimed at achieving these conditions. There seems little doubt that in years to come "looking-for-money" (ke’ duit) for the Tapah Semai is going to become increasingly difficult.
**TIME ALLOCATION DATA**

Hours allocated on various productive activities by person by months.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Index</th>
<th>FH</th>
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<th>RT</th>
<th>IC</th>
<th>WL</th>
<th>A</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>H</th>
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<td>FH-Fruit Collecting</td>
<td>FC-Forest Product Collecting</td>
<td>RT-Rubber Tapping</td>
<td>IC-Insect Collecting</td>
<td>WL-Hage Labour</td>
<td>A-Agriculture</td>
<td>F-Fishing</td>
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**November 1982**

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October 1983
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### Appendix B

EXPERIMENTAL DATA
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Table 16: Average Monthly Household Expenditure on Various Categories by Month

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Table 17: Household Expenditure on Miscellaneous Items by Household by Month

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Month</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Foodstuffs</th>
<th>Personal Items</th>
<th>Household Goods</th>
<th>Alcohol</th>
<th>Tobacco/Related</th>
<th>Other Items</th>
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<tr>
<td>Jan</td>
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<td>280</td>
<td>280</td>
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<td>Feb</td>
<td>292</td>
<td>270</td>
<td>270</td>
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<td>270</td>
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<td>Mar</td>
<td>282</td>
<td>260</td>
<td>260</td>
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<td>Apr</td>
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<td>250</td>
<td>250</td>
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<td>May</td>
<td>262</td>
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<td>240</td>
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<td>Jun</td>
<td>252</td>
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<td>242</td>
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<td>Oct</td>
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<td>Nov</td>
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<td>Dec</td>
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Table 19: Average Expenditure Per Month on the Various Categories by Households in Percentage

<table>
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<th>Category</th>
<th>Items</th>
<th>Households</th>
<th>Range</th>
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Table 18: Per Capita Expenditure Per Month on Various Categories by Household

<table>
<thead>
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<th>Households</th>
<th>Range</th>
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</thead>
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Table 17: Annual Per Capita Expenditure on Various Categories by Household

<table>
<thead>
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<th>Category</th>
<th>Items</th>
<th>Households</th>
<th>Range</th>
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Table 16: Average Monthly Household Expenditure on Various Categories by Household

<table>
<thead>
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<th>Category</th>
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is not included in Table 2.3 had moved into the village just before I left. Included with the primary Semput group, the main household, Household Z, which is a separate family that is not genealogically linked with the primary Semput family (see Table 2.3). This chart does not include Denotes Household Labels.

Figure 1: Genealogy of Semput Households

APPENDIX C
Plate 1: Semai hamlet with rubber trees in the background.

Plate 2: A section of a government sponsored patterned Semai Settlement.
Plate 3: Firing of a swidden by two Semai teenagers.

Plate 4: Semai man harvesting rice with a finger knife.
Plate 5: Semai man plucking petai.

Plate 6: Petai trading. Chinese *towkay* negotiating with the collectors.
Plate 7: Semai woman dragging bamboo poles from the forest. Farm house in the background.

Plate 8: Semai woman buying things from a itinerant retailer.
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1979


Endicott, Kirk
1979a


1979b

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<td>1982</td>
<td>Gomes, A. G.</td>
<td>Ecological adaptation and population change: Semang foragers and Temuan horticulturists in West Malaysia. <em>East-West</em></td>
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