



**AgEcon** SEARCH  
RESEARCH IN AGRICULTURAL & APPLIED ECONOMICS

*The World's Largest Open Access Agricultural & Applied Economics Digital Library*

**This document is discoverable and free to researchers across the globe due to the work of AgEcon Search.**

**Help ensure our sustainability.**

Give to AgEcon Search

AgEcon Search  
<http://ageconsearch.umn.edu>  
[aesearch@umn.edu](mailto:aesearch@umn.edu)

*Papers downloaded from **AgEcon Search** may be used for non-commercial purposes and personal study only. No other use, including posting to another Internet site, is permitted without permission from the copyright owner (not AgEcon Search), or as allowed under the provisions of Fair Use, U.S. Copyright Act, Title 17 U.S.C.*

Vol XVIII  
No. 1

ISSN 0019-5014

CONFERENCE  
NUMBER

JANUARY-  
MARCH  
1963

# INDIAN JOURNAL OF AGRICULTURAL ECONOMICS



INDIAN SOCIETY OF  
AGRICULTURAL ECONOMICS,  
BOMBAY

to be at low levels. The State average for above two items comes to be Rs. 14.49 and Rs. 16.31 respectively. The above expenditure is found to be evenly distributed among the districts. Available data on per capita living expenditure reflect visible difference among the districts. It is estimated to range from a low of Rs. 137.82 to a high of Rs. 278.02 leaving thereby an interval of Rs. 195.21 for the State average. This low level of living expenditure is certainly an indicator of the economically weak condition of our rural folks. Since we find farm people's level of income is just at the margin to provide a bare minimum of living, the immediate challenge before the planners is to provide a change in this structural relationships.

Data on family size groups reveal an interesting trend in the level of household consumption. There seems to be a rising trend in consumption level from one low family size-group to next following bigger family size-group with the exception of the family size-group 3-4. The estimated range in total household expenditure rises from a low of Rs. 933.51 in smaller family size to a high of Rs. 2,861.91 in larger family size. The same trend is maintained in the level of food as well as non-food items of expenditure (See Table II).

There could be one of several reasons to explain this visible disparity. One of the major explanation could be that per household income tends to be relatively low in small family size-groups than in large size-groups of family. This creates an opportunity to have a better level of living. The relative advantage to the larger family group is that there are large number of earning members whose aggregate income makes a pool and thereby helps create conditions to enjoy relatively better level of living. Small family groups are at disadvantageous position in this respect. Furthermore, high asset worth of the big joint family becomes an incentive force for the members to bid for a relatively higher level of living.

---

### LEVEL OF LIVING OF A TRIBAL VILLAGE\*

G. S. AURORA

*Research Officer*

*Agro-Economic Research Centre for Madhya Pradesh, Gwalior*

'Level of living' is simply defined as actual living conditions. It is essentially an idea used for comparative purposes. Since the "actual living conditions" has reference to a very wide and somewhat diverse and elusive phenomenon, "indicators" have to be used for measuring the 'quality' of life. The 'indicators' are not to be misunderstood as the phenomenon itself; indicators suggest but do not represent. In this paper, we have used indicators which though forming a part of the broader category yet show some of the local colour, for example, among the drinks and beverages we have noted "*Tari* and *Mahuwa* wine".

---

\* This paper was prepared at the behest of Shri H. S. Azariah, Director, Agro-Economic Research Centre, Gwalior who very kindly allowed the author to use the Centre's data. Shri. K. M. Chaudhry collected all the quantitative data for a socio-economic survey of the village. The observational data is partially collected by the author and partially by the investigator.

### *The Community*

Bamanta (population—295), the tribal village in question, is located about nine miles from Alirajpur Tehsil town, Jhabua district. Fifty *Bhilala* and *Balai Adivasi* families live in its four hamlets. It is two miles in the interior from metallic road connecting “Alirajpur” to “Nanpur” and country further east. One may call Alirajpur Tehsil as very nearly the heart of the western most *Bhil Adivasi* region which spreads over three neighbouring States, namely, Gujarat, Rajasthan and Madhya Pradesh. Bamanta is mainly populated by the *Bhilala* tribe who are racially a cross between the Rajput and other non-Adivasi peoples and the indigenous *Bhils*. Culturally they are only slightly different from their *Bhil* neighbours.

The *Adivasis* have been in prolonged contact with the culture of their erst-while feudal overlords—the Rajputs and have, over the centuries, imbibed great many of the traits of their culture. These influences are noted in their dress, customs and probably the economy. It is most likely that the *Adivasis* were originally the inhabitants of the forests. When the Rajputs came to this region nearly four centuries ago they brought with them besides state craft, the art of cultivation as well; which in due course spread among the ‘children of the forest’. Today agriculture is the main source of income for the *Adivasis* and ‘hunting’ as a craft is practised by only a very small segment of the people.

### *Urban-Rural Contacts*

The *Adivasi* villages are scattered; sometimes one may see small nucleated hamlets and at other times individual farmer’s houses may be spotted right on their maize fields. In the comparatively level ‘valleys’ of this sub-mountainous region are to be found the ‘commercial villages’ populated mostly by the petty tradesmen, craftsmen, usurers and a few Rajput landlords. Most of these people belong to what we may call “Hindu civilization”. The economy of these urban people is almost entirely dependent on the *Adivasi* hinterland.

Each of the market centres within a definite region has a day of “hat” (*fete*) fixed for it when temporary extra stalls are put up to cater for the rush of *Adivasis* who visit the town (or village) to buy and sell. The *Adivasi* sells a bit of everything that is produced on his land, but very rarely all of it, except for the ground-nuts and chillies, which are his cash crops.

### *Health and Vitality of the People*

The *Adivasis* are generally shorter than the Indo-Aryan “*jatis*” of this region. Among the *Adivasi* “*jatis*” the *Bhilalas* are, on the whole, a healthier looking people with bigger bones, taller stature and more flesh on them than the *Bhils* and the *Balais*. All the *Adivasis* are sturdy people and can endure strenuous and continuous work for long periods.

### *Death Rate*

Death rates were calculated for the *Adivasi* population of the village between the years 1955-56 to 1960-61. The period is too short to make any definite generalisation about the trend of death rate. However, a perceptible rise in mortality rates has been noticed during the period. The mortality rate increased from 22 per thousand of population in 1955-56 to 42 per thousand in 1960-61.

Increase in mortality may be due to many and varied reasons such as a larger number in the old age brackets and spread of epidemics. From the available data it is hard to infer that there was a larger percentage of people in the old age groups in the past cohorts. It therefore seems plausible that some contagious diseases have spread among the *Adivasis* against which they do not have sufficient resistance. The available data on the causes of deaths is very unsatisfactory since there are no medical experts available in the villages who may diagnose the diseases correctly. It is, therefore, not possible to go into the causes of mortality by illness.

### *Some Diseases*

Information was solicited from the respondents about the family members falling ill in the reference period of the survey (September 1959-August 1960). Although not all the diseases reported could be identified. It did give some idea about the major diseases and the age groups suffering most from them. As is usual for most populations, children (below 15) are the greatest sufferers from most common maladies. Eczema is a scourge for the children and the second worst disease for the adults. Out of a total of 139 children, 57 suffered from this disease. Eczema is most often associated with deficiency of vitamins A, D, and C in the diet of the people. It spreads most easily under unhygienic conditions. Table I gives information about the persons suffering from the three main diseases and the number of days they were incapacitated due to the same.

TABLE I

Disease	Number of persons falling ill and total number of days for which incapacitated					
	Men	Days	Women	Days	Children	Days
Eczema .. ..	4	—	1	—	57	I.N.C.*
Fever .. ..	9	41	7	14	18	I.N.C.
Smallpox .. ..	1	15	4	17	5	I.N.C.

*Note* : Total population of men, women and children is 79, 77 and 139 respectively.

\* I.N.C.: Information not collected.

### *Hygiene and Sanitation*

Because the houses are spread out and there is no congestion in any of the hamlets, people have constant access to two of the most health giving boons of nature, namely fresh air and sun-light. Unlike some of the villages in the plains water never collects in the lanes thanks to the rocky conditions of the soil. No house has attached bathroom or lavatory and because cooking is a simple affair, the kitchen stove is usually in the living room itself. Kitchen utensils are washed outside—in the courtyard of the house so that there is no need for drainage outlets. Bath is usually taken with warm water every night before sleeping at a convenient spot, usually at the back of the house. Soap is almost never used, instead fine earth collected from near the beds of the streams may occasionally be used to rub

off dirt and grease from the body. The clothes are washed few times and far between and whenever washed it is taken care not to give more than one rinse since cloth costs money which is too scarce and precious. Although generally the sanitary conditions are naturally good people do not have any 'conscious' considerations for hygienic living. Water collected from the wells or the streams is seldom strained or boiled before using it for drinking purposes. The earthen pots where water may be stored get a thick layer of sediment at the bottom but the same are seldom cleaned. The houses are however broomed quite often and the floors plastered with layers of mud and cowdung paste, giving the houses a clean look. *Bhilala* houses have sufficient ventilation because of rather airy and loose roof tiles, windows are however, seldom kept—mainly for reasons of security.

### *Housing*

There are two types of houses in Bamanta—"The *havely*"—which is made of baked bricks, has been introduced by the Block Development authorities through grants to individual house holders; and the "*Jhonpde*"—which is the traditional mud hut. There are twelve "*havelys*" and 35 "*Jhonpdas*". All houses, except three of the "*Jhonpdas*", have tiled roofs. The plan of houses is very nearly the same. Each house has a compound surrounded by a fencing known as "*Bagad*". Within the compound there is a cattle shed—which is a wooden construction in one corner. In another corner there is a stand for keeping earthenware pots for storing drinking water. The house itself consists of one room with a verandah in front. The verandah is used for sleeping and sitting and the back room for kitchen and storage purposes. No data were collected on floor space but the available accommodation was sufficient for the modest needs of the family members and much better in comparison to the usual standards in the working class areas of the Indian cities.

### *Food and Drink*

The staple diet of the *Adivasi* consists of millet flour "*Roti*" and "*Ghugri*"—a variety of lentils, cooked like a soup. Occasionally maize flour may be cooked into a saltish paste called "*Rabdi*"; this is a delicacy. Rice and wheat are too dear to eat, though some of the progressive farmers do grow wheat on irrigated land. Block Development authorities have encouraged and helped people to dig wells and in some cases reinforce their walls. There are altogether 13 wells in the village which are used for irrigation purposes. These wells have made it possible for these farmers to grow two crops on some plots of irrigated land. Many of these farmers have begun growing vegetables and fruits like "*Papayas*" and Guawa. Most of the vegetables are sold in the weekly market and only a small quantity consumed by the *Adivasis* themselves. Among the fruits, mangoes provide the richest harvest and count for bulk of the fruit consumption. Occasionally "*Temru*" and a variety of dates with fruit like berries, and some wild berries are also available as additional food. During the spring, ripe "*Mahuwa*" flowers are gathered from the nearby jungles and used either to distil wine or dried and stored for consumption later. The quantity and quality of food available varies drastically throughout the year. During September to March, *i.e.*, the period of *kharif* harvesting to *rabi* harvesting the *Adivasis* are comparatively better fed but after "*Holi*" (*Bangoria*) festivals the "belts" begin to be tightened. During May, June and

July near starvation conditions are reached in many *Adivasi* families. During this period, palm tree juice, "*Neera*", is fermented or rather allowed to ferment to become "*Tari*" in the containers hanging from the slashed and dripping "fingers" of the palms. A "*Roti*" of bajra or "*ghugri*" flour with dried *Mahuwa* and plenty of fermented *tari* is all that an average *Adivasi* can provide the members of his family. Children and adults all drink it and get their nerves insensible to the pangs of hunger. Both *mahuwa* flowers and palm juice are rich in sugar content and some of the essential vitamins. In fermented form their caloric content is very high.

### *Clothing*

In regard to clothing it was found that most men and women had only two suits of clothes, one of which was generally bought before the "*Bhangoria*" festival—nearly ten days before *Holi*.

### *Entertainment*

Major entertainments of the *Adivasis* are attending feasts on occasions of marriage and "*ujban*". There is no feast on the birth of a child or the death of an old one. These feasts are mostly arranged during late spring when the *Bhilalas* sell their cash crop, groundnut and the "*Tari* season" is usually in full swing. Visits to one's relatives are also common during the "*Tari* season". "*Bhangoria*" and "*Holi*" days are the *Adivasi*'s days of enjoyment and merry making. "*Bhangoria*" market days are reserved for the young to flock to the market towns bedecked in their best clothes and jewelry.

Work and entertainment mingle when people come to work for others on "*Dhasia*". During harvesting the host must feed or supply "*Tari*" to the persons called to help. "*Parji*" is a system of strict exchange of labour; one adult person's work-day must be returned by an adult work-day. "*Parji*" is necessary during the harvest. Everyone works hard and consciously so that others may do the same when their turn comes. Although nuclear family living is predominant, old, infirm, disabled and orphaned children are never left uncared by their relatives. Life is hard but traditions are strict on this score.

### *Texture of Life*

When people have sufficient to eat their faces exude joy of life and smiles never seem to desert their faces, but their expressions harden when the cruel summers advance and the empty maize and jowar cobs gape. People are, however, used to hardships and are content through hunger and disease. Faith in life is explicit in noisy but short period of wailing when a near and dear departs for the land of the spirits. The proof of the warmth of filial love is in smooth growing up of the children and in the fact that children cry but rarely and, generally, only when they are unwell. Emotional attachments are restricted to members within the family and even there seldom assume any semblance of "possessiveness". Quarrels between neighbours are rare, but when they do take place, it is feared that they may lead to violence.