

CHAPTER TWO

Rajgahr Village: “Rice, Rich People and Tractors”

THIS CHAPTER introduces Rajgahr Village by describing its general ethnographic features in 1969 and by describing the national context within which Rajgahr is located. Critical to this description is the view that the village is a product of progressive differentiation and growth. The present chapter therefore provides background data for the historical and comparative analyses which constitute the foci of this study.

The Co-Operative Republic of Guyana¹

Lying on the northeast coast of South America (Map 2.1), Guyana's land area is approximately 83,000 square miles with a population of 638,000 persons² of mixed ethnic origins. The country can be divided into four natural regions³; of these, the coastal plain contains eighty-eight percent of the population in settlements along the length of the public road which traverses the coast (Jayawardena, 1963: 1). Each of the three major rivers (Essequibo, Demerara and Berbice) which dissect this horizontal plain serves as a general boundary for the administrative districts into which the country is divided (Map 2.2).

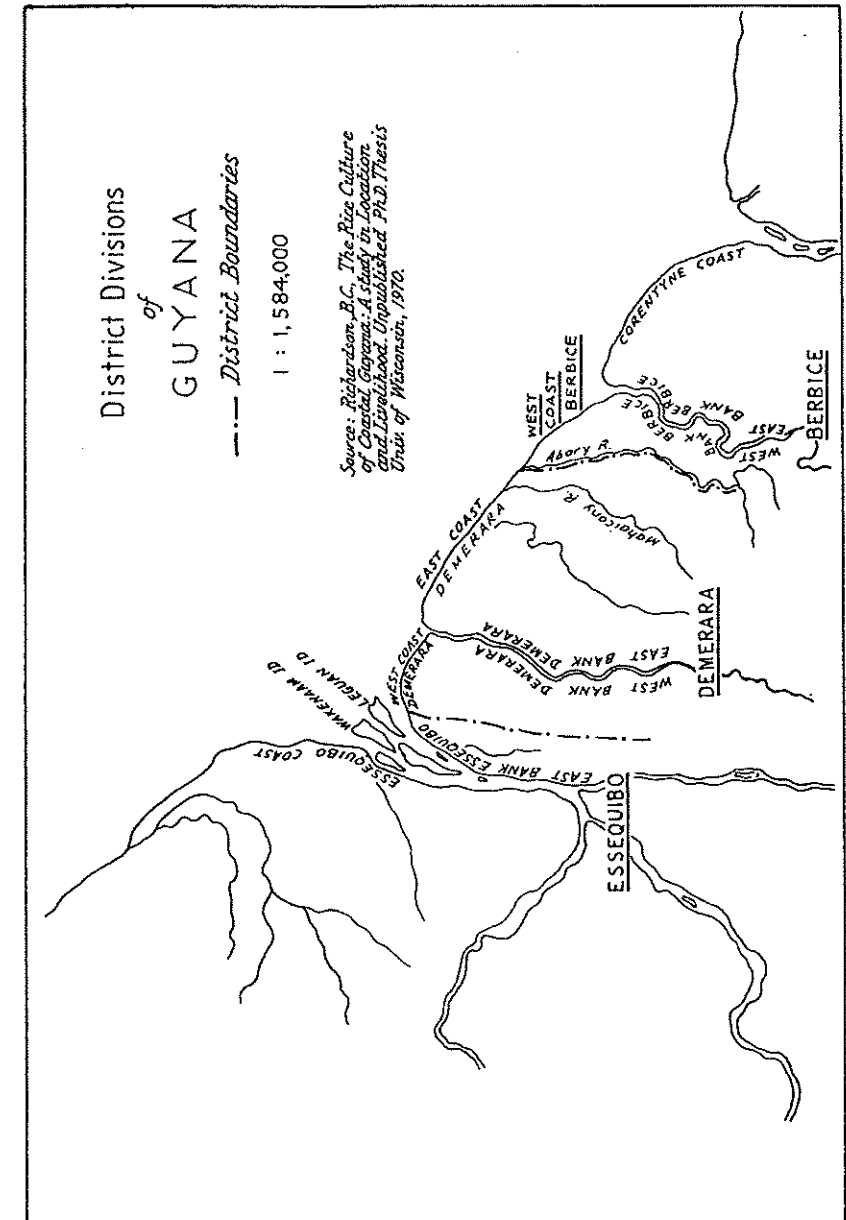
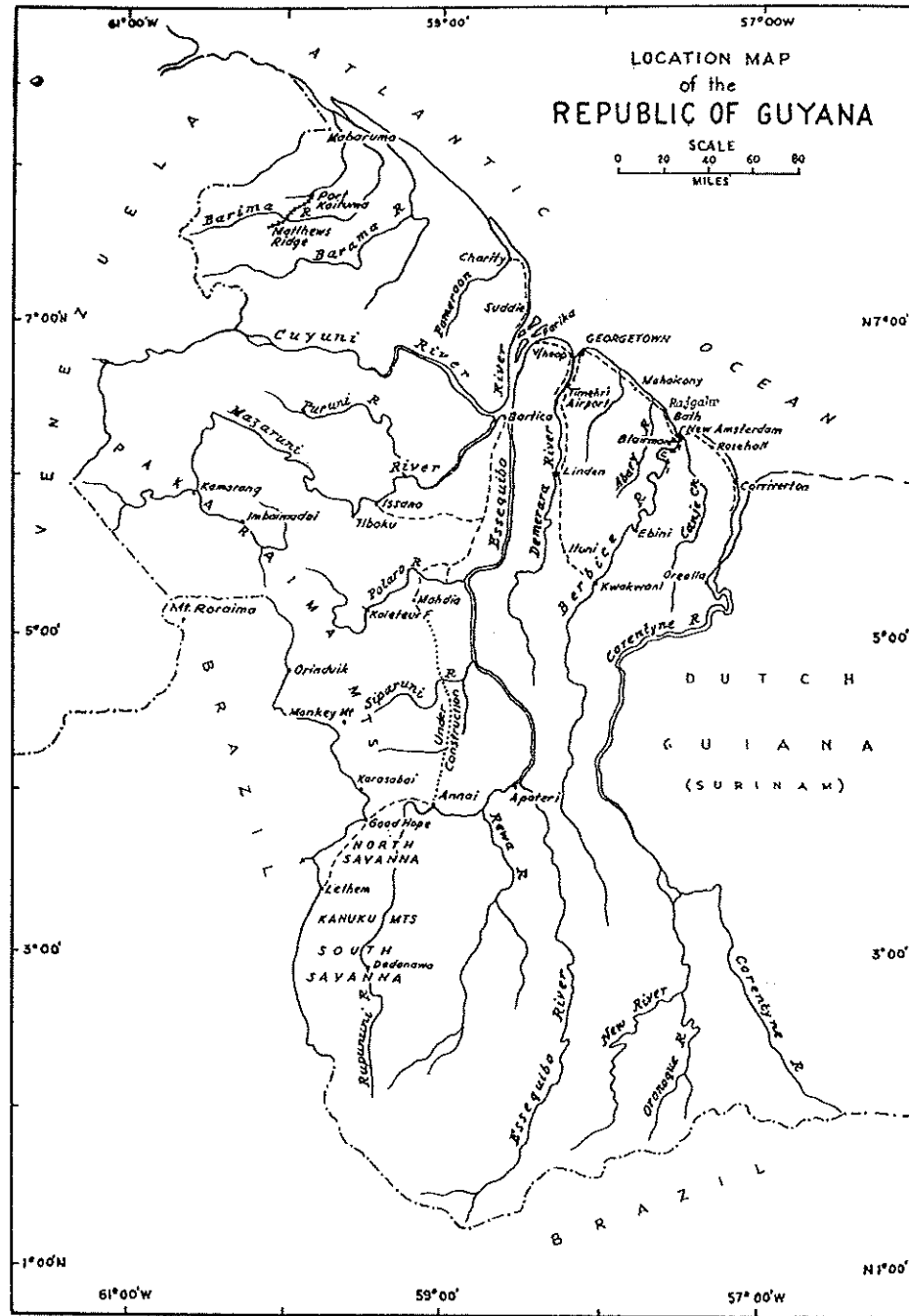
In political-economic terms, Guyana is part of the “third world”, that group of countries which has two-thirds of the world's population and one-seventh of the world's income (Reubens, 1962: 2). More specifically, Guyana is one of those countries which has been labelled as a “plantation society” and a “plantation economy” (Mandle, 1973). Such countries may be defined as

...those ... where the internal and external dimensions of the plantation system dominate the country's economic, social, and political structure and its relations with the rest of the world (Beckford, 1972: 12).

1 The Colony of British Guiana became independent in 1966 with the Queen as Head of State. In 1970, the country was declared a Republic and a President elected by the Legislature. Guyana, however, has remained within the British Commonwealth.

2 *Guyana Year Book*, 1967.

3 The four natural regions are: (1) the coastal plain; (2) the sand and clay areas; (3) the highland regions; and (4) the interior savannahs.



There are two general effects of this status: underdevelopment as a persistent condition and particular institutional arrangements which are a product of the plantation economy. For example, the country's occupational distribution is not like that of a traditional agrarian economy since the agricultural sector is not, in statistical terms, of paramount importance.⁴ Instead, the incorporation of Guyana into the European capitalist system via the plantation economy has produced a distortion in economic organization.

Specifically, the sugar industry is of overriding importance in the national economy. Until recently it was foreign-owned.⁵

According to David, 'sugar is the major single support of the economy of Guyana' and he concludes an analysis of the growth experience during the period 1953-1964 with the statement: 'The governing dynamic of the economy was the foreign-owned export sector comprised of sugar and bauxite'. Sugar and its by-products accounted for an average of 50 percent of the total value of exports over the period 1954-1964; its contribution to G.N.P. was of the order of 17-20 percent and in 1965 sugar accounted for 20 percent of total fixed private investment. As labour displacement in the industry proceeded in recent years, its share of the labour force has fallen from 20 percent in 1956 to about 15 percent by 1960; however, the industry still remains the single most important employer of labor. And in recent years income and excise duties on sugar and its by-products contributed roughly 20 percent of total government revenue; ... As concerns sugarcane production peasant cane farming is insignificant as foreign-owned plantations account for 98 percent of total cane production (*ibid.*: 245-246).

The economic imbalance resulting initially from the plantation system and the continuance of this system have caused, and are reflected in, other economic features. For example, a high proportion of labour is engaged in services and public work projects which are not socially valuable production but merely wasteful duplication. Moreover, the tertiary sector is overcrowded and the large proportion of labour it attracts is not due to good opportunities, but is the result of the lack of opportunities elsewhere (Reubens, 1962: 6). Second, within each sector is a wide variation in the amount of labour an industry employs as compared with its contribution to the Gross Domestic Product (GDP). For example, mining employs 2.5 percent of the labour force but provides 11.3 percent of the GDP; manufacturing employs 12 percent of the labour force, but produces only 3.2 percent of the GDP. There are, therefore, many occupations which are overcrowded while the highest yielding industries employ few persons (*ibid.*: 6). The effects of this distortion coupled with a large

4 Reubens et al. report the following: the primary sector produces forty-five percent of the GDP and employs forty percent of the labour force; the secondary sector provides twenty percent of the GDP and employs twenty-four percent of the labour force; and the tertiary sector accounts for thirty-five percent of the GDP and employs thirty percent of the labour force (1962: 6).
5 All sugar estates were owned and operated by two foreign companies—the Bookers Group of Companies and the Demerara Company. The former owned 100% of eight estates, fifty percent of two estates, and twenty-five percent of one estate. The latter company owned 100% of two estates (Reubens et al.: 94-95).

population growth of three percent per annum are high rates of unemployment and underemployment. Finally, statistics reflect the seasonal nature of much employment, particularly in agriculture, as well as overcrowding on the land (*ibid.*: 4).

This characteristic of land shortage is typical of plantation economies throughout the world. It resulted from the monopolization of land by the plantations and therefore affected the growth and nature of the peasantry and caused the pluralization of the dependent nations (Beckford, 1972).

The West Indian peasantry is the outgrowth of the slave plantation system. The abolition of slavery in the nineteenth century was followed by a movement of the ex-slaves away from the plantations in an effort to establish an independent existence ... wherever they could find land. ... [Their] success depended in large measure on the availability of land. Since the plantation had already engrossed most of the best lands, little or none was available in some territories while in others what was available was either inaccessible or of very poor quality. Barbados, St. Kitts, and Antigua fall into the first category while Jamaica, the Windwards, Trinidad, and Guyana fall in the second (*ibid.*: 22-23).

In terms of the development of the plural society:

The relative importance of Negroes and East Indians ... is linked directly with the plantation. For example, plantations in the smaller West Indian islands did not need to rely on indentured labour ... because the ex-slaves there had little choice but to continue working on the plantations as all land had already been alienated. But in Jamaica, Trinidad and Guyana, indenture was necessary and East Indians were brought in. East Indians are a relatively small percentage of population in Jamaica as compared with the proportion in Trinidad and Guyana and this reflects the fact that the resource situation was far less open in Jamaica after the abolition of slavery. The sugar industries in Trinidad and Guyana developed rather late and, for the most part, after slavery had been abolished. Consequently, the plantation need for indentured East Indian labour was greater there (*ibid.*: 56-57).

The specific results for Guyana are reflected in the ethnic composition of "the land of six peoples":

Table 2.1: Ethnic Composition of Guyana, 1964⁶

Ethnic Group	Population
East Indian	320,070
African	199,830
Mixed	75,990
Amerindian	29,430
Portuguese	6,830
Chinese	3,910
European	2,420

6 Guyana Year Book, 1967.

Additionally, for Guyana as compared with other West Indian countries, the constraints on peasant production combined with pluralization produced a unique mode of production, notably, a relatively large East Indian population engaged in the small-scale cultivation of rice (Hanley, 1975; Mandle, 1973). This is the only major industry to be organized in this way. It began with indentured labourers growing rice on abandoned estate land and later moving into villages where the crop could be cultivated more extensively. After World War II, government development plans provided for a large-scale expansion of acreage. This, however, has had limited effects because the costs have been high relative to the resultant productivity; although mechanization brought large tracts under cultivation, the output per acre has decreased. This is partly because rice is a labour intensive crop—the more labour input, the higher the yields. With mechanization, yields decreased although the acreage increased. Further, with small and scattered holdings, many farmers are overmechanized; they do not have sufficient land in conglomerate holdings to permit the efficient use of machinery. As such, rice cultivation is out of kilter with the economic facts of the country: excess labour and limited capital. The conclusion: "Rice cultivation is in many cases unprofitable and many farmers only manage to produce because they are continually in debt. Those who find it profitable are those persons who usually combine rice with other occupations. Rice is a poor man's crop" (David, 1969: 89–122).

More generally, population heterogeneity and the apparent allocation of particular ethnic groups to specific "ecological niches," as in the East Indian monopolization of the rural sector and the African concentration in urban areas (Despres, 1970), has produced another feature common to plantation society:

In every [plantation] society, we find the recurrent feature of serious internal conflict existing alongside rampant nationalism (Beckford: 82) ... [due to] the disintegrative elements that derive from social and cultural plurality (*ibid.*: 80).

An additional element for Guyana in particular is the effect which the plantation system had on the water control problems which continue to plague the coastlands. Sugar plantations were established on the coastlands⁷ based on assumptions as to the fertility of the soil. However:

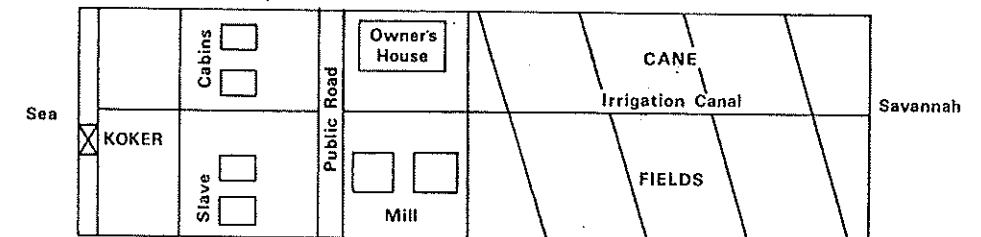
[The coastland is] not only uniformly flat, [but] lies some feet below sea level at high tide, and the first step in its utilization was its reclamation from the sea. This was ... carried out by the erection of a substantial earthen embankment along the entire front of each plantation as a defense against the sea. A similar dam was needed at the back

⁷ Dutch planters originally settled up-river on the assumption that the soil was best for cane growing. By 1700, they had moved to the lower reaches of the Essequibo, and British planters entering the colony at this time took up lands along the Demerara coast rather than in the riverine areas.

and one along each of the lateral boundaries to keep off the immense body of water that accumulates on the depressed coastland during the wet seasons and would otherwise result in widespread flooding, but was let in as required for purposes of irrigation by way of a canal running along the centre line of the plantation for its entire depth. At the foot of these dams on the inside are to be found trenches twelve to eighteen feet wide and about five feet deep. These are the borrow-pits that provided earth for the embankments, but they are utilized in practice as the main drainage canals. Fed by a system of smaller trenches and open drains, they discharge into the sea through one or more sluices or "kokers" as they are still called, the doors of which are opened as the tide ebbs and shut against the returning flood... Effective drainage is vital to the existence of these low-lying plantations' (Young, 1958: 2).

The ramifications were numerous. For example, the need to maintain the drainage and sea defense works increased the plantocracy's demands for a large supply of cheap labour and contributed to the pluralization of the society. Second, contemporary villages had to retain the physical features of the original plantations since free villages⁸ were formed by ex-slaves and indentured labourers on plantation lands which were deserted, bought, or turned into settlement schemes.⁹ In all cases, the village layout was formed by the plantation structure (Diagrams 2.2 and 2.3): lands near the foreshore were left empty to allow for the accretion and wearing away of the coastal area; houses were clustered along the public road which ran the width of the estate; and agriculture was placed behind the housing area. As a result, settlement patterns remained concentrated along the coastal road rather than dispersed the length of the plantation. This influenced "local government in the colony, for as a result, each of the villages came into existence as a clearly defined physical

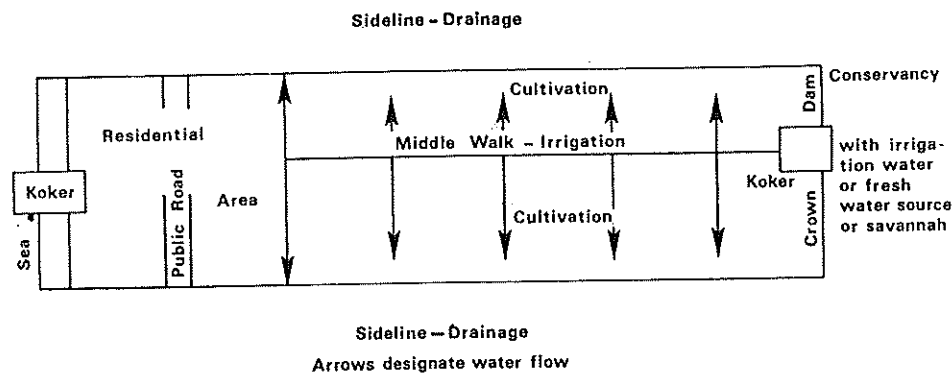
Diagram 2.2: Dutch Sugar Estate on the Guyana Coast.¹⁰



⁸ The nature of these free villages is discussed more fully in the next chapter.

⁹ Africans bought deserted plantations from government or from planters who were going out of business. East Indians bought plantations from African settlers or were given allotments instead of return passages to India.

¹⁰ From: Richardson, B. C., *The Rice Culture of Coastal Guyana: A Study in Location and Livelihood*, Unpublished Ph. D. Dissertation, University of Wisconsin, 1970, p. 32.

Diagram 2.3: Layout and Water Control of Guyanese Villages.¹¹

entity, separated from its neighbours by dams and canals". This allowed for "the growth of local patriotism" (Young, 1958; 2-3).

In addition, cultivation practices were affected. "The depth of these villages was to prove a handicap to their agricultural development since the distance between home and farm might amount to several miles" (*ibid.*: 3). Finally, the capital required for the upkeep of the water works has reinforced the corporate control which is exerted over the sugar industry at the present time. In turn, this limits the success of peasant production in both sugar and rice by giving a competitive advantage to those cultivators/corporations with large scale holdings and extensive capital.

Our conclusion ... is that the plantation system generates its own self-perpetuation by effectively containing internal threats to its destruction. Consequently, a dynamic equilibrium of underdevelopment is endemic in plantation economy (Beckford, 1972: 213).

The Co-operative Republic of Guyana, with its ideological and pragmatic efforts at reorganizing the nature of production, is attempting to alter this dynamic of underdevelopment. In 1971, the government nationalized the bauxite industry which was a wholly owned subsidiary of Alcan Ltd. (Grant, 1973: 251). However,

the nationalization ... and the political aftermath have ... raised questions about the capacity of the political system to cope with the strains that inevitably accompany an attempt of fundamental economic change in an essentially colonial society (*ibid.*: 252).

11 From: (1) *Ibid.*, p. 17.
(2) Cummings, L. P., *Geography of Guyana*, p. 43.

Rajgahr Village

Rajgahr Village was founded by the British colonial government, in 1902 as a land settlement scheme for former indentured East Indian labourers.¹² By 1969, it had grown from a few scattered households into a village with a population of 3,158. Located in the County of West Berbice (Map 2.2),¹³ the village is approximately fifteen miles from the mouth of the Abary River which marks the boundary between the counties of Berbice and Demerara, and approximately thirteen miles from Rosignol on the Berbice River across from the third largest town in Guyana,¹⁴ New Amsterdam. The village is fifty-six miles east of the capital, Georgetown, a journey of two hours by "hire car" along the well-paved road that runs the length of the coast.

The villages immediately adjacent (Map 2.3) are small in comparison and mainly African in ethnic composition. In fact, for a radius of five miles, numerous small villages located one next to the other¹⁵ make the size of Rajgahr stand out in comparison. Rajgahr has also become somewhat of an economic hub for this central area

12 The historical background of these land settlement schemes, and Rajgahr in particular, is discussed in the next chapter.

13 West Berbice District was originally a Dutch colony but its history is difficult to trace. Apparently, between 1784 and 1806, the area was taken up for cotton production which gradually changed to sugar after the importation of slaves was halted and a labour shortage ensued. By 1832, thirteen plantations were operating (*Directory of British Guiana, 1832*). With the abolition of slavery and competition from the United States cotton industry, by 1849, no cotton was being grown, and only three plantations were in operation (Dalton, 1885: 508). As planters left the area, the county was populated mainly by free African villagers. Their economic base appears to have been mainly subsistence agriculture. By the early 1890's, East Indians, former indentured labourers from Plantations Blairmont and Bath, were buying land near these two functioning sugar estates. Administratively, the west coast was tied to the larger County of Berbice until 1952 when it became its own administrative district with its own District Commissioner.

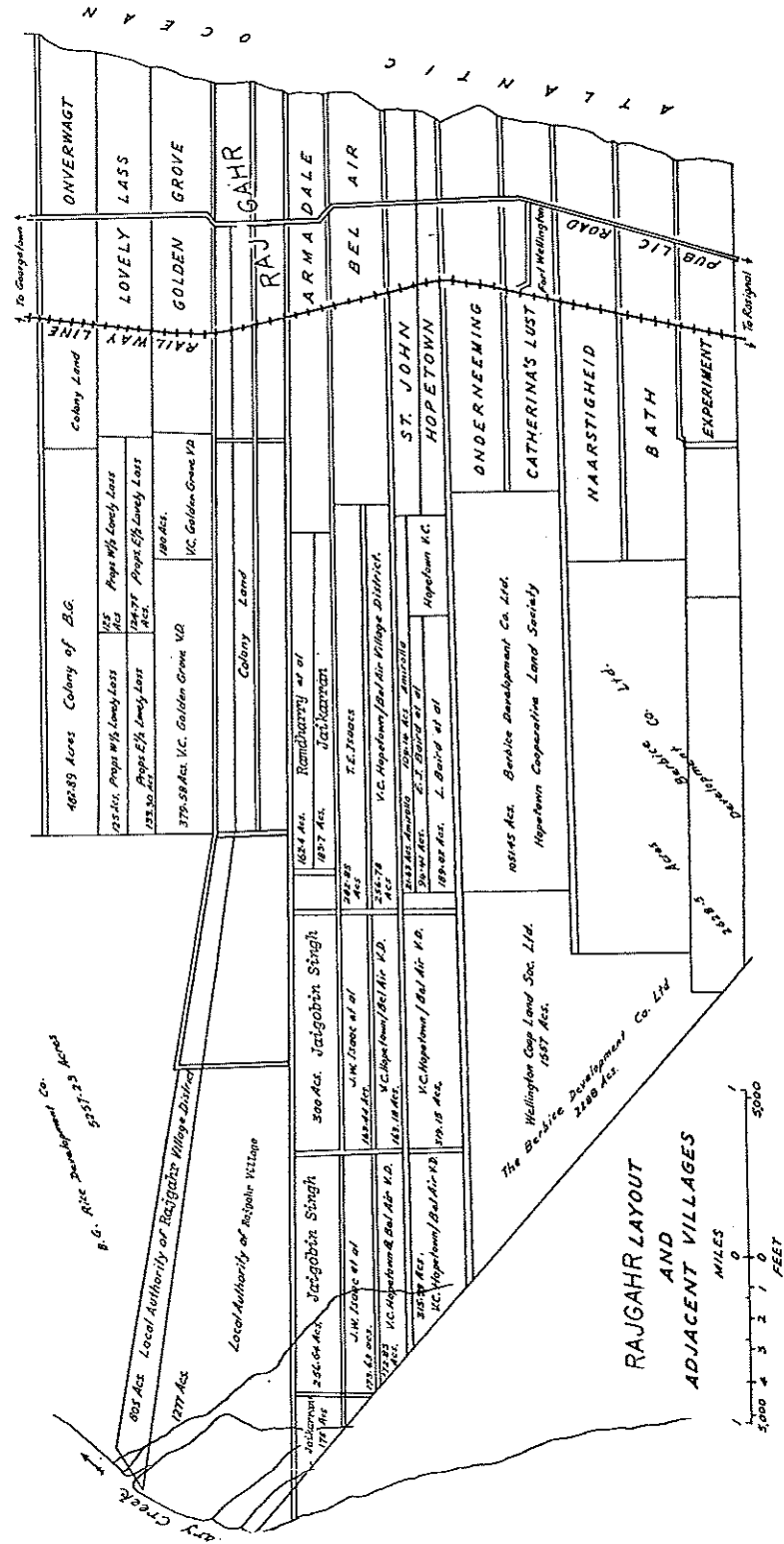
14 The three major towns in Guyana in order of size are: Georgetown, the capital, located at the mouth of the Demerara River; Linden, a bauxite mining town sixty-five miles up the Demerara River; and New Amsterdam, the administrative centre for the County of Berbice.

15 To the west of Rajgahr lie Lovely Lass and Golden Grove. The former, according to the 1960 census had a population of 297 and the latter, a population of 213. West of these is Onverwagt, formerly part of a land lease given to an American company and presently, a land development scheme in which villagers rent additional land. There is no resident population.

Immediately to the east of Rajgahr is Armadale Village. It is ethnically mixed and its history is intimately tied to that of Rajgahr. Its population, together with that of the village to the east, Belair, is given in the 1960 census as 462.

To the east of Belair are the villages of St. John and Hopetown. They are ethnically African with the populations given as 345 and 994 respectively. Still further east, is Onderneeming, a stretch of land housing sheds and offices for the Ministry of Works and Hydraulics which employs local labour for the public works projects carried out on the west coast. There is also an Anglican school serving mainly the Christian African population east and west of Rajgahr.

The next "village", about two and one-half miles east of Rajgahr, is Fort Wellington, the administrative centre for West Berbice. It is easily accessible by foot, bicycle or hire car. The



Map 2.3

of West Berbice. Its shops attract people from some distance away and its reputation is that of a "prosperous rice farming village" in which "there is a tractor under every house." Its drainage system, unlike those of the surrounding villages, functions well enough to prevent flooding during spring tides and rainy seasons. It is known as a village of "large houses and rich people".

Physical Features

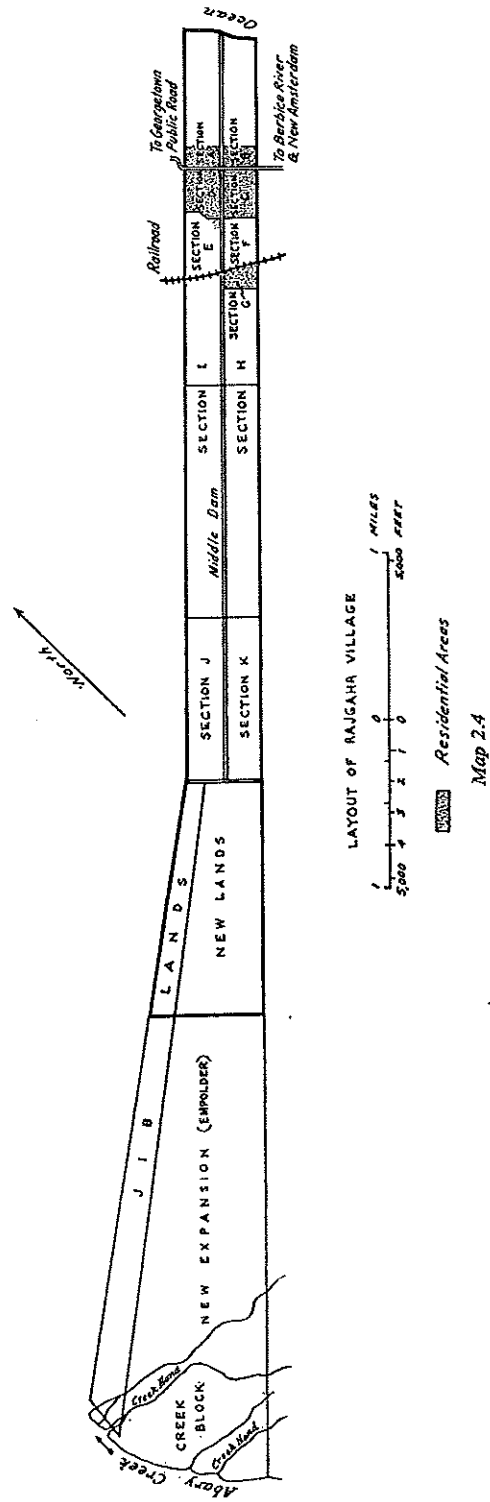
The physical characteristics of Rajgahr are "typical" of a Guyanese village. It extends in width 200 rods along the public road and stretches to a depth of seven miles south of the road to meet the Abary River which winds from its mouth (fifteen miles west via the public road) behind the villages of the west coast (Map 2.4). The government surveyor, in 1900, laid out houselots on both sides of the public road and divided the village into eleven sections. With reference to Map 2.4, Sections A, B, C, and D are the housing areas with a middle dam dividing A from B and D from C and serving as a main throughfare. To the rear of this housing area lie cultivation lots (Sections E and F) divided into plots running east to west. Behind Section F is another small housing area, Section G, and behind lie four more cultivation areas, Sections H, I, J, and K, which meet the "Crown Dam," the original village backdam and the southern village boundary as laid out in the original plan.

Individuals own house and cultivation lots and although every houselot was originally allocated with a cultivation lot, the two have become separated. Villagers may own several houselots without the cultivation lots, or vice versa.

Appendix I lists the number of house and cultivation lots in each village section and the number of houses. Clearly, not all houselots are occupied by homes. All lots, however, are owned by villagers some of whom have their houses on other lots and who use the additional ones as kitchen gardens, or to house machine sheds, or as part of their children's inheritance. The density of houses in each section varies. This is because household clustering has occurred near the public road and near the middle and sideline dams, obviously because ingress and egress are made easier, particularly during the rainy season. Location, however, has affected the monetary value of houselots and this now varies from under a few hundred dollars to over \$5,000.

compound houses the District Commissioner's office, a post office, a cottage hospital, a police barracks, a Magistrate's court and serves also as a housing area for administrative personnel.

To the east of Fort Wellington, is another empty stretch of land, once the plantation of Naarstigheid followed by Bath Settlement which is a recent creation by Bookers Company, owners of Bath Estate. Villagers had lived inland from the road and had provided the labour for cane production. The company, in an effort to end the paternalism of estate life, and because the cane fields were being moved closer to the Berbice River, moved the village to the frontlands, sold houselots and divested itself of administrative responsibility. The population is mainly East Indian and can be estimated at 1000 persons.



Beyond the Crown Dam and the area of freehold ownership lie Crown lands leased by the village authority for rental to inhabitants (Map 2.4). Since each cultivation lot is only three-quarters of an acre and since the lots are limited in number, the Crown lands are critical to the village economy. They are divided into the New Lands (lying to the immediate rear of the Crown Dam); the New Expansion or New Empolder area (lying to the rear of the New Expansion); the Creek Block area (to the rear of the New Expansion); and the Jib Land (a narrow strip running from the Abary Creek to the Crown Dam west of the Creek Block, New Expansion and New Lands). The total acreage is approximately 2,000¹⁸ and every houselot proprietor is entitled to a certain amount. The way in which these lands were taken up, the timing, and the method of allocation form an integral part of the politico-economic development of the village.

The Village Economy

Rajgahr Village's reputation as a "prosperous rice farming village" is only partially correct; the majority of villagers are not prosperous and the economic base is far more complex than simply "rice cultivation". Most farmers engage in more than that one occupation and for some, rice cultivation is not their primary interest. Vertical cleavages are very apparent. Additionally, the population is highly stratified according to annual income and, more importantly, in terms of access to productive resources. As already noted, some houselots are of higher value and some villagers own several. This is an initial index of the horizontal as well as vertical cleavages which underlie village organization.

a. Vertical Complexity

Table II.1 (Appendix II), the occupational distribution, shows the extent of local diversity.¹⁷ It shows, too, that while 586 persons¹⁸ were employed, 929 positions were filled. Most persons engage in an average of two occupations. This occupational multiplicity is related to four factors. First, it began with the inception of the village

16 It is difficult to ascertain the acreage available. Government maps do not differentiate between arable acreage and that used for dams, trenches, etc. As well, the amount cultivated annually varies according to the number of people who plant. Finally, the area in the New Lands is not marked on maps. According to the maps, the Jib area consists of 805 acres; the New Expansion, 1277 acres. Informants state that given the areas used for levees, etc., the amount which can be or is usually cultivated is as follows: Jib lands, 299 acres; New Expansion, 1165 acres; New Lands, 363 acres. On this basis, an approximation of 2000 acres for the total area is taken.

17 The data was obtained by the researcher through a survey of all village households.

18 This statistic does not include the large numbers of persons unemployed at the time. These would generally be looking for some type of wage labour.

because crop uncertainty forced residents to diversify their household economy. This was also encouraged by nearby sugar estates which needed casual labour during the harvesting and grinding season.¹⁹ Second, because rice production does not require the full time of a family's labour potential, families took up other occupations. Third, since 1902, the village population has been growing at a steady rate.²⁰ As additional services were required, villagers provided these. This not only contributed to village diversification, it provided individuals with a supplement to rice farming. Finally, the recent introduction of both mass education and the mass media has produced white-collar aspirations, hence, the large number who have become teachers and officials (clerks, police). Many of these, however, still plant a few acres of rice as do the majority of persons in other occupations.

Rice cultivation, then, in the midst of occupational diversity is the "basic" occupation of the village. Villagers cultivate approximately 4,580 acres in and around Rajgahr. Although this averages about thirteen acres per farmer, the amounts are differentially distributed (Table II.2). The majority of farmers (55.4%) cultivate ten acres or less while those who cultivate more than fifty-one acres may have holdings of up to 375 acres.

This uneven distribution is related to the location of an individual's land. Acreage is distributed in seven different areas (Table 2.4). This not only scatters plots, but more importantly, because of the different tenure regulations in each area, villagers have varying potential for acquiring large-scale acreage.

Table 2.4: *The Distribution of Ricelands*

<i>Location</i>	<i>Villagers Planting</i>
Rajgahr	215
Left Bank Abary River	119
Onverwagt Land Development Scheme	169
Armadale	7
Lovely Lass/Golden Grove	3
Hopetown	2
No. 6 Village/Mahaicony	1
Total	516

The Rajgahr area consists of the cultivation lots—three-quarters of an acre each which individuals own freehold—and the Crown lands leased by the village authority and rented to persons on the basis of two acres per proprietor (household owner). Every household, no matter the owner, entitles that owner to two acres. Because

¹⁹ This early history is discussed in Chapter III.

²⁰ The village population in each of the census years is as follows: 1911 — 632; 1921 — 778; 1931 — 1081; 1946 — 1497; 1960 — 2685.

some households contain more than one proprietor or because a family head may own more than one houseplot, families have access to varying amounts of riceland in this area. In addition, some of the Rajgahr Crown land is low-lying or swampy. Both conditions prevent farmers cultivating two acre plots because drainage and empoldering costs are uneconomical. Consequently, the village authority, in order to collect revenue from all possible land, rents these areas in five to twenty-five acre blocks to anyone who has the capital and willingness to develop them. Thus, a proprietor who has capital can add considerably to his Rajgahr acreage.

The lands on the left bank of the Abary—across the Abary River opposite the leased Rajgahr Crown land—are also Crown lands leased to individual tenants for twenty-one to ninety-nine years. This area was opened in 1919 and at that time some villagers applied for leases. The initial allocations were five to ten acres located in the first depth. The Land Lease Ordinance, however, gave the lessee of the first depth priority in leasing subsequent depths. In later years, many families took up these depths and thereby gained extensive acreage. Where capital was available to develop this low-lying savannah, the potential for expanding rice acreage was enormous. The result has been the already noted disparities in the distribution of acreage.

Onverwagt is a land development scheme set up in the late 1950's with acreage distributed in ten or twenty-acre plots. Renters are from Rajgahr and surrounding villages, and the allocation of plots is alleged to have been part of a political patronage system. Yet another area where Rajgahr residents may cultivate rice was differentially accessible.

The Armadale lands are privately owned by the third generation descendants of the original owner. Some of these are resident in Armadale, some in Rajgahr. The lands in Lovely Lass, Golden Grove and Hopetown are rented from residents in these villages who in turn have rented them from their local authorities. Cultivation is by sharecropping: the Rajgahr farmer returns fifty percent of his padi to the original renter. Because of this system, the original renter chooses a successful Rajgahr farmer who will give him high returns.

The lands in Mahaicony and Number 6 Village are extensive blocks leased from the national government. Again, however, capital is required for land development; in any case, political "lines" are allegedly needed to obtain such leases in the first place.

Acreage for rice cultivation, the major occupation in a diversified village economy, is differentially distributed depending on location; tenure regulations; capital to develop land; political resources; familial relationships; economic options made as early as 1919; houseplots owned; and a reputation as a successful farmer. Importantly, there is a cumulative process related to a family's ability to expand its rice base. For example: the more capital available, the greater the possibility of taking up undeveloped land which in turn permits more capital formation over time, which makes it possible to take up more land, etc.

This cumulative character is heightened by the fact that rice production is highly mechanized. One-third²¹ of the villagers own basic machinery (tractor, plough, harrow, trailer). Non-owners must hire machine owners for ploughing and reaping since the use of oxen, found elsewhere in Guyana, is not possible because no pasturage is available; all of the land has been converted to rice. Some villagers rent out equipment as part of their economic activities (Table II.1) although, for the most part, farmers who own machinery, plough or reap others' lands after their own work is completed. There is no clear-cut organization as to who ploughs whose land. Rather, it depends on whose tractor is nearby, although being a relative helps one to obtain services.

Sometimes, as another way of getting services, the non-mechanized farmer does part-time labour for a machine owner during crop time. This entitles him not only to a wage, but also to having his land ploughed and/or reaped. This dependency by non-owners, however, often means that their land is not ploughed before the rains, or is ploughed too late for proper growing. The reliance on mechanization thus constrains the poorer farmer and affects the differential success of families in rice cultivation.

This situation is intensified by the village drainage and irrigation facilities. In the Rajgahr cultivation areas, these are the responsibility of the village authority; in Abary and Mahaicony, they are the responsibility of the lessee; Golden Grove, Lovely Lass and Hopetown lands are under the jurisdiction of their respective village authorities; Armadale irrigation and drainage are the responsibility of the owners; and services at Onverwagt are provided by the government. Since the majority of farmland is in Rajgahr, Onverwagt and Abary, and since the latter two are adequately taken care of by the government or lessee, it is the Rajgahr water system which is the most relevant since it is here that the majority of smaller farmers have land under cultivation. By definition, small farmers have only limited land elsewhere.

Map 2.5 presents the drainage and irrigation system as it should ideally function in the Rajgahr cultivation areas.²² The trenches in the New Expansion are a recent

21 More precisely, 32.2% own tractors; 9.9% own tractor-drawn combines; and 9.3% own self-propelled combines. Of those who own machinery, the majority have unshared ownership. There are six cases in which two persons have joined together to buy equipment; five cases where three persons have joined together; and one case in which four farmers are sharing machines. In all these cases, the shareholders are close kin.

22 Ideally, excess water runs into the drainage trenches in the village centre and from these into the sideline trenches and middle trench, and then to the sea dam to be emptied through the Armadale koker. Irrigation water should be taken from the Abary Creek and carried in the high level canals throughout the cultivation area. Farmers, with the two ends of their fields meeting two trenches—a drainage and irrigation trench—are then free to let in or let out water as they choose. The New and Jib Lands' fields thus run east to west in narrow strips so that every field meets two trenches. Until 1969, fields in the New Empolder area were laid out in the same way.

For several reasons, this system does not function. Firstly, major kokers have fallen into disrepair and drainage water cannot pass from behind the Crown Dam to the front. Instead,

addition, dug in 1958, as part of a scheme which was never completed. As a result, they do not function properly.²³ Further, the old system does not provide irrigation although it drains the residential area and the land in front of the Crown Dam. Thus, farmers depend solely on rainfall for cultivating the rice crop. This has two major ramifications: First, farmers obtain only crop annually, unlike those farmers in areas which have irrigation schemes. Second, the success of the one crop is uncertain since it depends so much on the right amount of rainfall at just the right time. A farmer may not only lose a crop because of inadequate water control, but he also must wait until the following year to recoup his losses. Rice production, then, despite mechanization and seeming modernization, is still very subject to the vagaries which have plagued it for decades.

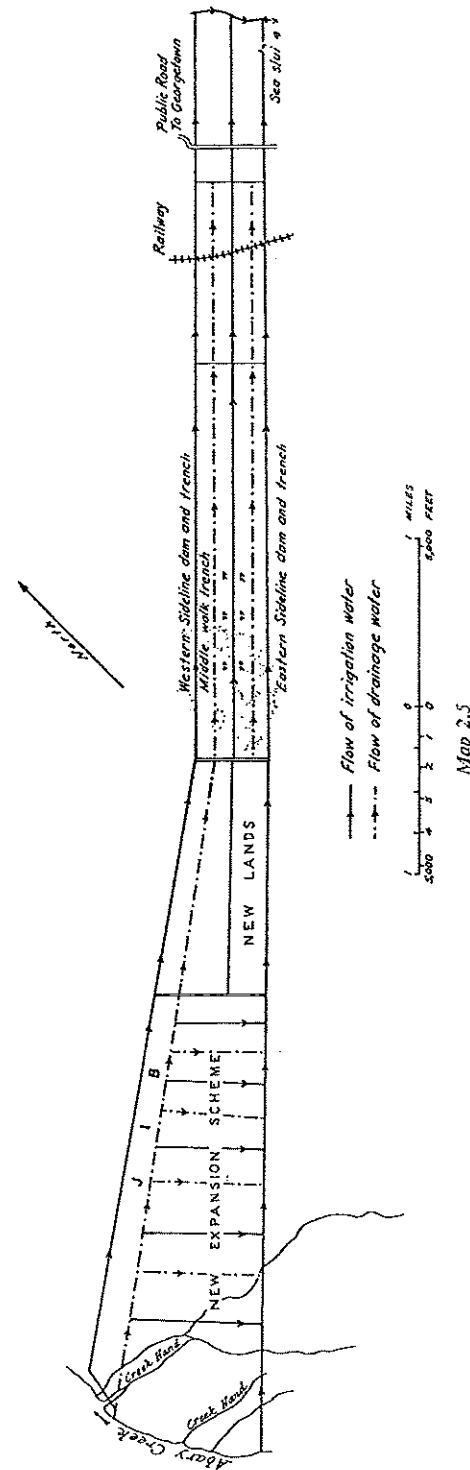
Obviously those families which have extensive holdings in different places lose less in case of a Rajgahr failure. Besides, such families are usually financially solvent, and extensive failure in any one year does not mean ruin or indebtedness. This latter pattern of crop failure followed by indebtedness is not uncommon. The small farmer becomes indebted to the rice millers and even in good crop years, he is forced to sell to the miller in case credit is needed in the future. The miller, however, pays lower prices for padi than do other agencies.²⁴

water in the rear backs up the drainage trenches and is eliminated into the Abary Creek through the trench that is supposed to carry irrigation water. As well, the sideline trenches are badly silted up and do not carry water: more drainage water is forced into the irrigation channel.

The "irrigation system" never functions. First, there is no pumping system to move water from the Creek into the high-level canal. Supposedly a fresh-water reservoir, the Creek is lower than the land it is supposed to irrigate. The irrigation trench, in any case, is needed for drainage. Further, when water is most needed, in the dry season, the Creek "runs salt", that is, sea water backs up the river and cannot be used. This is intensified by the Blairmont sugar estate pump, fifteen miles up river, which takes out vast amounts of fresh water from the Creek to irrigate the cane fields. Irrigation, then, does not exist. The drainage usually functions as long as the Armadale channel is kept clear and as long as the water behind the Crown Dam can flow out through what should have been the irrigation trench.

23 The New Empolder Scheme was financed by USAID to increase employment while it improved drainage and irrigation. As a result, shovel-men rather than draglines had to be used to dig trenches. Money ran out before the scheme was completed. It should have functioned as follows (Map 2.5): trenches dug from east to west—from the high level canal to the eastern sideline trench—were to be used alternately for drainage and irrigation. Farmers' fields were thus changed to run from north to south so that the ends could touch a drainage and irrigation trench. However, farmers have not benefited from the scheme and the loss of their old fields has generated much tension and political fodder.

24 The selling of padi and rice can be handled in several ways. Rice must be sold to the Rice Marketing Board, a government corporation. Some farmers mill their padi and sell to the Board (1.3% of the farmers). Alternately padi can be sold to a miller who sells the rice to the Board. This method is used only by small producers who need credit and who are indebted (27.6%). The final alternative is to sell to the Mahaicony-Abary Rice Development Scheme (Mards)—a government agency which buys padi, mills it and prepares it for export or domestic use (57.8%). The remainder of the farmers (13.3%) do not have enough padi to sell after keeping the amount they need for their own use.



The distribution of rice acreage, then, is related to mechanization, drainage/irrigation problems and methods of surplus disposal. All these contribute to varying degrees of success in the primary activity.

Such varying success also characterizes other types of primary production, that is, returns can be high, at subsistence level, or not even an economic option. Cattle-rearing, for example, is the special prerogative of those with Abary lands since the village has no pasturage.²⁵ Yet cattle give high returns and liquidity.²⁶ Even with Abary land, however, there are constraints on herd size: the savannahs provide very poor grazing and so extensive acreage is needed; floods in the rainy season mean that high places must be built; and the possibility of theft requires that a watchman be hired. In sum, land, labour and capital are needed, and the resulting differential success is reflected in Table 3, Appendix II; herd sizes range from one animal to over 200.

The significance of horse-raising must be mentioned at this point. Since horses are needed for large herds, they are a mark of the wealthy cattle owner. A family which owns horses is wealthy; wealthy families own horses.

The growing of greens and provisions for sale is another kind of farming. Again, however, it is not without its constraints since the majority of households have their own kitchen gardens. However, if a family invests labour and capital in the growing of difficult crops, such as cabbages and tomatoes, they can sell the produce in Georgetown for high prices. This cultivation is therefore characteristic of families who eke out a small cash return²⁷ and of a few families who make high profits.

The final occupation in primary production is fishing. This may be a subsistence enterprise of poorer families or a part-time activity for some who want extra cash²⁸ or a full-time occupation for those who make a major investment in nets and boats. This last group earns substantial profits by selling the fish within the village. The occupation, however, is regarded as being of extremely low prestige. This cultural value limits participation as does the need for capital in order to begin on a full-time basis.

25 Abary rearers do not generally sell milk since the distance between the Abary and the village is too great. Although the government has a barge on the Abary to buy milk for its Georgetown pasteurization plant, the prices are too low to induce herders to make an organized effort towards dairy farming.

26 There is no organized cattle industry in the sense of a steady supply of meat marketed through a consistent method of wholesaling. Rather, selling depends on the needs of a family at any given time. This number will vary from year to year. On the average, 9.0% sell none; 28.4% sell one or two; 31.4% sell three or four; 18% sell five to nine; 9.0% sell ten to fifteen; 4.5% sixteen or more. Assuming \$200 to \$300 received per head, the additional income is substantial although this has to be related to the number which can be sold without depletion; the larger the herd, the more cattle that can be sold, and the higher the income.

27 In such cases, women sell their goods either house to house or in a market held on the middle dam every Saturday morning.

28 Such persons fish with a minimum of equipment; they catch swamp shrimp or trench fish.

The overall picture of primary production is that it employs 81.8 percent of the working population but that its profits vary considerably and cause much economic differentiation. This is due to ecological factors; problems of capital formation; differential access to resources; and decision-making patterns. All these factors affect success.

A similar pattern holds for those self-employed in the tertiary sector. Here, factors militate against some families attempting certain of the occupations such as renting out farm machinery or owning a hire car, bus or truck. All families engaged in these latter services obtained their initial capital from other economic enterprises.²⁹ In the case of other services, there is again the pattern of relative success, particularly with shop owners. The types of shops are varied (Table II.4) with success dependent on location and initial capital investment. Shops are generally opened under an individual's house with only a small investment required for stock and alterations to the house. Then, depending on its location, whether on a main dam as opposed to a small side dam, and the services it provides, whether or not these are duplicated nearby, such a shop may grow to quite a large size. Shops thus vary from small cake parlours employing no additional labour (31.0%) to large businesses such as the rice mills which employ seven labourers.³⁰ In keeping with size, receipts vary from a few dollars to several hundred a day. Shopkeeping in and of itself does not, therefore, imply "middle classness". Instead, like primary production, it is an enterprise that varies dramatically in its returns.

The other village services (Table II.5), such as cattle-dealing, crafts and huckstering,³¹ are generally small-scale enterprises combined with other economic activities. Only the contractor and lumber dealer represent major economic enterprises. Thus, tertiary services, like primary production, do not mean that there is uniformity in returns; cross-cutting occupations are horizontal cleavages based on degree of success.

In the case of wage labour, the same pattern appears depending on whether labour is full-time or casual and whether it is skilled or unskilled (Tables II.6 and II.7). However, since over forty percent of the jobs are part-time and since the majority require unskilled or semi-skilled labour, returns are low for most labourers. In addition, employers are limited in number (Table II.8) and several are allegedly linked

²⁹ There are thirteen hire car owners in the village. Twelve own one car; one person owns three. Over eighty percent of the owners drive the cars themselves while two hire drivers. There are eleven truck owners, and one bus owner in the village. The trucks are used to transport padi, sand and lumber often for the owner's own business ventures but also as hire service. The bus runs from Georgetown to the Rosignol ferry carrying passengers and their loads.

³⁰ More precisely, thirty-one percent of the shops are worked solely by the owner; 45.2 percent hire one person; 14.3 percent hire two; and 9.6 percent hire between four and seven.

³¹ Of the fourteen hucksters in the village, two sell provisions and greens; five sell coconut oil; two sell sweets; two sell clothing; one sells newspapers; and two sell chickens and eggs. Nine obtain their products from outside the village while four manufacture the goods themselves.

into a political patronage system.³² Therefore, with the exception of a few well-paid permanent jobs, wage labourers are constrained by job opportunities and low wages. Because of these limitations, labourers also cultivate a few acres of rice. Prosperity is hardly the general level of this occupational group.

The final occupational type is the white-collar worker. Here again job security and returns vary. In the case of teachers (Table II.9), only half are fully qualified with the rest used only to fill immediate shortages. Job security for the majority is thus limited, the more so because of the general feeling that teaching, as a government job, is part of the political patronage system.

A second type of white-collar worker, "clerk/official", includes three village rangers, two village overseers, two clerks working in the District Commissioner's office in Fort Wellington, three policemen attached to the Fort Wellington barracks and two Justices of the Peace. This number is not likely to expand. Similarly, insofar as the priests are concerned, the needs of the community are limited. White-collar employment is therefore limited and, with the possible exception of an increasing need for teachers, mobility through this sphere is unlikely.

b. Horizontal Diversity: Differential Income Distribution

Related to the differential success of families in adapting to the availability of resources are variations in annual income (Table 2.5). This ranges from under \$900 per annum to over \$20,000. Despite this, sharp distinctions are not visible; instead, the picture which emerges because of differences in life styles, diet, house types, durable goods and machinery is a continuum with the very poor at one end

Table 2.5: Income Distribution within the Village

Income	Number and % of Households	
\$ - 900	109 households	20.1% of total
\$ 901-1500	127 households	23.4% of total
\$ 1501-2000	101 households	18.6% of total
\$ 2001-3000	86 households	15.8% of total
\$ 3001-4000	45 households	8.3% of total
\$ 4001-6000	33 households	6.1% of total
\$ 6001 +	39 households	7.2% of total

and the very rich at the other. These variable styles, incomes, and differential access to resources indicate that Rajgahr Village is most definitely a stratified community.

³² This is alleged for the Ministries of Education and Works/Hydraulics and for a Georgetown construction firm, partially owned by a villager. Finally, the village authority has been accused of hiring persons according to factional and political affiliation.

*Population Characteristics*³³

In 1969, the total population of Rajgahr was 3,158. With the exception of two intermarried Chinese, the village is ethnically East Indian. The age distribution (Appendix III, Table 1) indicates the youthfulness of the population: over a third is under ten years of age, and over seventy percent is twenty-five years or younger, a distribution not atypical for a Third World country.

A major change in the population character is the increasing educational levels reached over a period of time (Tables III.2, III.3, and III.4), that is, the younger the age group, the more education its members received. This change is related to the increasing availability of educational facilities and to the villagers' growing propensity to take advantage of these. This regard for education is very evident when age and education are controlled for sex (Table III.5). In the past, in keeping with traditional Indian culture, women received less education than men. The increasing proportion of women in the younger age groups who received and are receiving advanced education indicates that attitudes are changing and that the desire to participate is increasing.

Such aspirations are realized through expanded educational opportunities within the village itself. The primary school is required by law to admit all children between ages five and fourteen. Due to its central location, Rajgahr is also the site of a secondary school which serves a large portion of West Coast Berbice. This has encouraged female education by enabling girls to attend beyond the primary level while remaining under the immediate control of parents. Since access to secondary school depends on competitive entrance exams, taken in Standard 3, Rajgahr students often "win places" in Georgetown or New Amsterdam high schools: these are generally believed to provide a better education. Inevitably, there are students who fail to win a place in any high school but who still have aspirations. "Educational entrepreneurs" have opened two private secondary schools which also draw their students from the general West Berbice area.

Kinship and Marriage

The most important relationships within the village are kinship ties, both consanguineal and affinal. Kinship is reckoned bilaterally with genealogies recalled to three or four generations. The typical household consists of a nuclear family (Table IV.1) although the ideal is the patrilocal extended type. These, however, tend to disintegrate before the death of the father. Sons and their wives move into their own houses often built on a lot purchased by the father several years before in anti-

33 All the data which follow were collected in the 1969 survey.

cipation of the split.³⁴ The extended family seldom persists as a unit beyond two adult generations.

The role of kinship as a political and economic resource is critical. This role of kinship is initially reflected in the fact that families in the higher income brackets are more likely to be of the extended type (Table IV. 2). Although this is because there are more wage earners in extended households, it does indicate that the extended type can be more efficient for largescale enterprise. The wealthy keep their kin together for longer periods while conversely, the extended unit is a wealthier household.

Also related to economic and political strategies are marital alliances. Here, the initial option is between exogamy and endogamy. Traditionally, the East Indian pattern has been the former³⁵ (Jayawardena, 1963: 21) and the pattern in Rajgahr exhibits this tendency. Exogamy is used to extend the kinship network beyond the village while endogamy solidifies ties within and provides resources which may be more immediately useful. Depending on the objectives of a family, either tendency may be preferred.

Such strategy is possible because parents arrange marriages. This permits them to select particular alliances. In the past, marriage partners seldom met until the engagement or wedding ceremony. A variation is occurring at present: children see each other at school or in stores and ask the parents to arrange a marriage. The parents may do so, and the partners, properly chaperoned, see each other before the ceremonies.³⁶ The more recent the marriage, the more likely it has been arranged through the new variation rather than according to strict tradition (Table IV. 3). When parents do not agree to a match, an elopement may take place. Elopements, although showing a slight increase in recent years, have always occurred.

The general effect of household structure and arranged marriages has been to allow political and economic strategies to be played out through kinship patterns.

Religion

The religions found in Rajgahr are Hindu, Muslim and Christian. The Hindu community is divided between two sects, the Santan (48.2 percent of the total population) and Arya Samaj (16.5 percent). The Muslims are all members of the

34 The tendency toward virilocality has been noted for other overseas East Indian communities as has the break-up of these "extended families" a few years after the children's marriage. (CF.: Speckmann, 1965; Jayawardena, 1960; Niehoff, 1960; Klass, 1961; Mayer, 1961; and Benedict, 1961.)

35 The tendency towards exogamy also characterizes East Indians in Surinam, Trinidad, Fiji and Mauritius. (CF.: footnote 34 above.)

36 Again, these traditional and changing patterns characterize other overseas East Indian communities. (CF.: footnote 34 above.)

Sunni sect (20.0 percent) and the Christians (14.8 percent) are divided amongst eight churches and sects³⁷. This religious distribution is similar to the general distribution of the Guyanese East Indian population (Nath, 1950: 246). In Rajgahr, there is a Muslim mosque, an Aryan temple, a Sanatan temple, and a Presbyterian church.³⁸ The last is located by the public road near the middle dam. The others are located on the common land in the village centre and their physical proximity, given antagonistic religious rituals such as the Muslim sacrifice of cattle, has often led to conflict.

The roles these churches provide for village personnel are very important. A minister, priest or church president can use the religious community as a resource in political competition. In fact, the major protagonists have been, and are, church leaders. As a consequence of this overlap of roles, religious splits often become absorbed into the political process and vice versa. It should, therefore, be noted that the Aryan, Sanatan, Muslim and Christian Catholic priests are all villagers and hence, these religions are critical in local political processes.

Local Political Organization

The formal political structure of the village is set out by the Local Government Ordinances of 1907 and 1945. Three types of local units are defined: the village district, the country district and the unorganized areas. The first two have councils which function as the local authority; the last is governed directly by the central authority, the Local Government Board. As of 1936, Rajgahr has been classified as a Village District and so has had a council in which at least two-thirds of the members are elected by houselot owners ("proprietors").

The village council is "entrusted with the management of the administrative and financial business of the district and with its government generally".³⁹ This gives

37 The distribution of the Christian population among the various churches is as follows: Presbyterian - 7.4% of the total village population; Roman Catholic - 1.8%; Lutheran - 1.6%; Christian Catholic - .9%; Full Gospel - 8%; Anglican - .5%; Nazarene - .4%; Pilgrim Holiness - .1%; and Not Specified - 1.3%. The large proportion of Presbyterians is related to the Church's historical role. It was the first to proselytize among the Indian population during and after the indenture period. It founded the first schools for East Indians in Guyana, and is known as the "East Indian Church". More specifically, the original supervisor of Rajgahr after it was founded as an East Indian Land Settlement Scheme was Head of the Church in Guyana and until the late 1950's, the Church ran the Rajgahr Primary School.

38 The other Christian churches are located in Armadale (Lutheran, Roman Catholic) and Fort Wellington (Anglican). The Pilgrim Holiness Church holds meetings in a villager's house as does the Christian Catholic group which has been unable to obtain land in the village for its church. The Full Christian Gospel and the Nazarene churches have no location or priest in Rajgahr, but hold revival meetings in a tent outside the village every few months.

39 The Laws of British Guiana, The Local Government Ordinance, Chapter 150, Section 28 (1).

the council wide-ranging prerogatives because of the specific powers delineated in the Ordinances and because of Rajgahr's size and extensive resources. For example, all property "belonging to the village district is vested in the local authority as are the rents and revenues from these properties".⁴⁰ For the year 1970, village revenues and expenditures each totalled almost \$80,000 (Appendix V).

Coterminous with the council's financial control is its responsibility for public works, such as the maintenance of streets and the drainage and irrigation works. The council is therefore a major employer of casual labour (Table 8, Appendix II). At the same time, the prerogatives of leasing Crown land, controlling industry, levying rates and putting properties up for execution sale in case of non-payment of rates or rents,⁴¹ give the council important sources of patronage.

The council thus has authority and influence. As a result, since 1907, it has been the focal point of competition as factional leaders vied for its control by attempting to have their supporters gain the majority of seats. The village council is a political arena. Furthermore, the council's powers can be used as a resource for other political/economic goals.

From amongst themselves, the councillors elect a chairman and deputy chairman. The chairman (or in his absence, the deputy) exercises the "executive powers of the council between any two meetings".⁴² He presides at all council meetings "in which every question is decided by a majority of votes. In the case of a tie, the chairman has the casting vote."⁴³ Given these prerogatives, the positions are actively solicited by council members, particularly by factional leaders, and as with the council itself, there are two perspectives: the electoral competition generates an arena, while the position itself is a resource for use in other arenas.

Two further aspects of the council are relevant. First, the council appoints an administrative staff: an overseer, assistant overseer, clerk, rangers and watchmen. These carry out the day-to-day orders of the council and chairman. Successful government, for which the councillors take credit, requires the cooperation of this staff. The basis is laid for political manoeuvring. First, there is competition to exert control over who is appointed to the offices. Second, there is the utilization of such persons as resources in other competition. Village staff, despite their official "civil service" role, are drawn into local politics. This is complicated further because the officials are themselves villagers with their own alliances and interests. Still another arena is generated by persons attempting to obtain appointments, and these, once appointed, use their offices as resources for other goals.

40 *Ibid.*, Section 86, 87.

41 "Rates" are paid on freehold land; "rents" are paid on land rented from the Local Authority. Therefore, rates are paid on house and cultivation lots, rents are paid on rice lands.

42 The Laws of British Guiana, Section 80 (1).

43 *Ibid.*, Section 82 (2), (3), (4).

The second relevant aspect of the local political structure is related to the hierarchy of offices or levels in which the village is enmeshed (Table 2.6). Depending on the context or strategies used, a political arena may expand to incorporate one, several, or all of these levels.

Table 2.6: Hierarchy of Local Government Offices

<i>Level</i>	<i>Location</i>
Minister of Local Government	Georgetown
Chairman, Local Government Board	Georgetown
Local Government Board	Georgetown
District Commissioner of West Berbice	Fort Wellington
Chairman of the Local Authority	Rajgahr Village
Council of the Village District	Rajgahr Village
Local Population	

The Local Government Board has the power to alter or reverse all council decisions; all budgets and council motions have to be reviewed by the Board; and complaints that the "continuance in office of the village council [or specific] councillors is prejudicial to the... village"⁴⁴ are investigated by the Board. Finally, the Board appoints persons to the non-elective council seats and can remove any councillor for "cause".

The village public, the council, and councillors are not permitted to communicate directly with the Board. Instead, all communication must pass through the office of the District Commissioner who is the formal intermediary between the Board and all village councils in his District. This communication restriction is also applied to all levels of the hierarchy. A villager, for example, cannot approach the District Commissioner but must write to the council which forwards the letter via the council chairman.

Important results come out of this hierarchical organization. First, individuals at the lower levels constantly try to circumvent the hierarchy when it becomes politically expedient to do so, and the propensity to jump levels, to the point where villagers may attempt to communicate with Cabinet ministers and succeed, forms part of the political gamesmanship of the village. Second, the District Commissioner, partially because of his geographical proximity, is continuously drawn into local village politics. He is used both as a local political mediator and as a resource because of his middleman position vis-à-vis the Board which uses his opinions to make decisions concerning the village. Additionally, like the overseer, the District Commissioner does not remain passive. He too "politics" to get things done in the manner in which he feels they should be done.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, Section 71.