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**Wealth ranking in Mahilong, Bihar****Anup Sarkar**

This is the second time this ticklish task has been entrusted to a team of which I happened to be a member. There were three of us in the team, the names of the other two members being Pratul Chandra and Jayant. Along with the task of wealth ranking we had another task of assessment of potato cultivation of the farmer.

Before we set out to accomplish the tasks the group sat together and decided upon the strategy for interacting with villagers. There was a strong feeling that the assessment of potato cultivation should be taken up first as against the wealth ranking. Pratul took charge of recording what transpired.

Let me tell you a bit about the village. Mahilong is situated just by the side of the state highway, has a railway connection and the Usha Martin Factory is just on the other side of the road. Many households of this village have persons working in the Usha Martin. Ranchi City is close by. Therefore, the villagers' dependence on agriculture for their livelihood in this village is not that pronounced. The villagers admit that for a couple of reasons agriculture suffers from neglect. Thus finding a key informant was not easy, not because they did not exist but they are few in numbers. But when we found one we offered thanks and requested him to help us in the matter.

First he started narrating his difficulties, needs and achievements. We sat together at one corner of a 'Khalihan'. Two men came along which was welcomed as their presence offered positive impact. Meanwhile three young men had joined the team and were intensely watching what was going on.

As we were becoming relaxed with each other I made the humble submission as to whether the group could participate in a wealth

ranking. They kindly agreed immediately perhaps without knowing what exactly to be done and how. The word 'wealth' needed a lot of explaining so that it can give a comprehensive understanding. The group expressed their inability to do the ranking for the whole village (>1000 households), but agreed to and showed confidence in accomplishing the task for his 'tola' which had about 150 households. He named all the heads of the households, which came to a total of 143. To begin with, the man agreed to divide the households into 3 groups but later differed and grouped them into 4.

When the writing of names of 143 households was completed we were not sure as to how to proceed further in grouping the households into categories. Fortunately enough, the handing over the pen and paper to the villagers neatly solved the problem.

Handing over the pen and paper changed the whole atmosphere. The group thought that they should move to a cosy place and they did and our recorder followed them.

When the process started it was apparent that there was an intense consultation going on. In that process young lads were participating vigorously, confidently passing opinions, giving first hand information.

It took one and a half hours perhaps to complete the task. When the group handed over the pen and paper to us, Mr Pratul started enquiring about why and how this group has been done and what are the criteria?

We were very cautious in posing questions, ensuring that we excluded closed questions. The table presented in the result of such enquiries, the sequence of the criteria is that of the villagers (see Figure 54).

This exercise gave us a good deal of confidence and also raised the faith of the villagers' ability to do such ranking in a comprehensive way. I am quite sure that using people from different socio-economic classes will lead to different sets of criteria for such ranking.

**Remarks on the figure**

- 'Loud speaker' means the household has this set which is hired by others against payment and adding to income.
- 'Gun' - produced by a local blacksmith who got caught for manufacturing the gun - local variety.

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**Figure 54. Summary of wealth ranking of 142 households in Mahilong village, Bihar. The informants separated the households into four classes, from which four examples are shown**

GROUP 1: "VERY WELL" 6 HOUSEHOLDS													
NAME	LAND	CULTIVATED BY FAMILY	WATER	DRINKING HABIT	MOTOR CYCLE	FRIDGE	CHILD EDUCATION	BALANCE WELL	LOW IN DEBT	TV	FAMILY SIZE	OWN PLOUGH	ANIMALS
MAHATO	12	✓	✓	X	✓	✓	✓	✓	X	✓	-	-	-
MAHATO	12	✓	✓	X	✓	X	✓	✓	X	✓	-	-	-
MAHATO	12	✓	X	✓	X	X	✓	✓	✓	✓	-	-	-
MAHATO	12	✓	✓	✓	✓	X	✓	✓	X	✓	-	-	-

  

GROUP 2: "WELL" 11 HOUSEHOLDS													
MAHATO	8	✓	✓	✓	X	X	✓	✓	X	X	-	✓	✓
MAHATO	8	✓	✓	✓	X	X	✓	✓	✓	X	-	✓	✓
MAHATO	8	✓	✓	✓	X	X	✓	✓	X	X	-	✓	✓
MAHATO	12	✓	✓	✓	X	X	✓	✓	X	✓	-	✓	✓

  

GROUP 3: "So so" 57 HOUSEHOLDS													
MAHATO	8	✓	✓	✓	X	X	X	X	X	X	BIC	1/3	✓
MAHATO	3	✓	✓	✓	X	X	✓	✓	X	X	AVF	✓	✓
MAHATO	3	✓	✓	✓	X	X	✓	X	✓	X	BIC	✓	✓
MAHATO	3	✓	✓	✓	X	X	✓	X	X	X	AVF	1/2	✓

  

GROUP 4: "Poor" 70 HOUSEHOLDS													
MAHATO	2	✓	X	✓	X	X	X	X	X	X	-	✓	✓
MAHATO	2	✓	✓	✓	X	X	X	X	X	X	BIC	✓	✓
MAHATO	2	✓	✓	✓	X	X	X	X	X	X	BIC	1/2	✓
MAHATO	2	X	✓	✓	X	X	X	X	X	X	AVF	X	✓