

THE THĀKUR AND THE GOLDSMITH:
ASPECTS OF LEGITIMATION IN AN INDIAN VILLAGE

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ABSTRACT

The research upon this thesis is based was carried out from October 1973 to March 1975, and from January to March 1980, in the village of Singhara (a pseudonym), Jabalpur District, Madhya Pradesh state (see map 1., p.viii). Although situated in middle India, Singhara's culture and social morphology are fairly typical of north India. This is mainly because the villagers, with the significant exception of its tribal (Gond) population (the original inhabitants of the region), are all descended from immigrants who came into the area from the north in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries.

The thesis has two parts: 1) an examination of traditional caste values (chapters 3 - 7) and 2) a description and discussion of aspects of the modern political and economic life of the village (chapters 2, 8 and part of chapter 1).

As far as the analysis of caste values is concerned, the overriding concern is to further understanding of how the 'holistic ethic' (the defining ideological feature of caste society according to Louis Dumont) actually works and what it consists of. One of the purposes of the description of the political and economic life of Singhara is to suggest that the material conditions which nurtured the 'holistic ethic' in the past have changed, and are changing, significantly - and that such changes are inevitably accompanied by an emergent individualism. An attempt to interpret some of the political events in the village (partly) in terms of the moral uncertainties engendered by the simultaneous presence there of these two radically different ethical systems (i.e. one based on holism and transendence, the other on individualism and materialism) is made in chapter 8.

The two parts of the thesis are reflected in its title, "The Thākūr" standing for traditional order and values, "The Goldsmith" for the emerging new ones. The hope is that there will appear no discordant break between the two parts, that each will complement the other, and that, taken together, they will be seen as natural (and possibly even inevitable) aspects of an ethnographic account of a contemporary Indian village.

A full account of the theoretical framework in which the study is cast is presented in the thesis Introduction.

DEDICATION

To my parents, Edward and Jean,
my wife, Ruth,
and my children,
Ben and Naomi.

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Many people have helped me, in a whole variety of ways, to write this thesis. I would like to thank, first of all, those teachers (later colleagues) at the London School of Economics who first introduced me to social anthropology as an undergraduate, especially my three tutors, Jean La-Fontaine, Peter Loizos and David McKnight and - for lasting intellectual stimulation, enthusiasm, encouragement, friendship and support - Maurice Bloch. I would also like to thank other teachers and colleagues who have helped me on specific parts of the thesis; Ernest Gellner, Johnny Parry, Triloki Nath Madan, Leela Dube, Satish Saberwal, Simon Roberts and David Brown. Of all my teachers I would like to thank my long-suffering supervisor, Adrian Mayer, most. Without his consistent support, advice and help both in the field and out of it, the writing of this thesis would have been quite impossible. In both intellectual and practical ways he introduced me to Indianist anthropology, and my debt to him is great.

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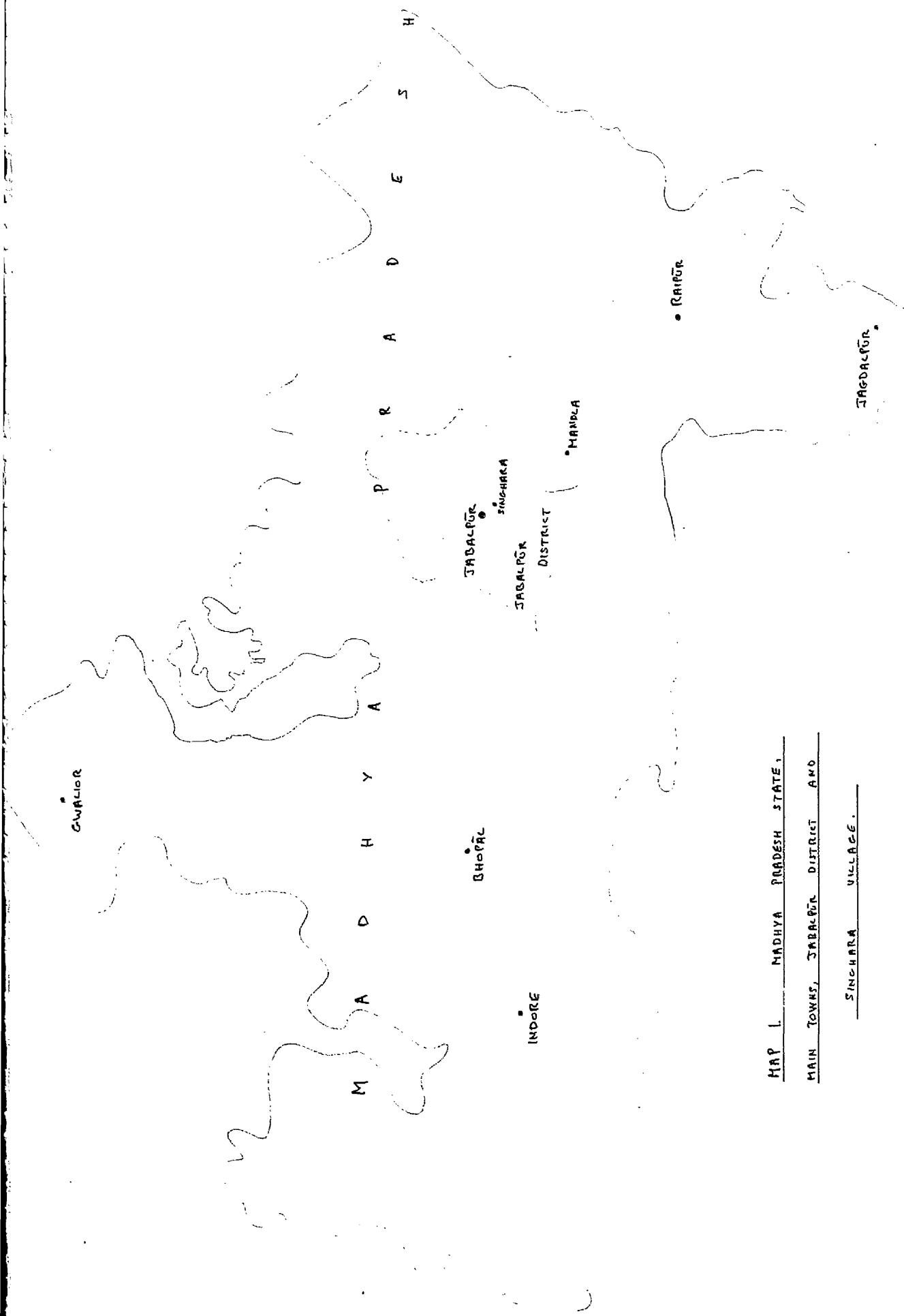
Finally, the greatest thanks of all to my family: to my parents, who have never ever failed to support me, and to my wife, Ruth, and children, Ben and Naomi, who know more than most about what it means to write a thesis.

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MAP I. MADHYA PRADESH STATE.

MAIN TOWNS, JABALPUR DISTRICT AND

SINGHARA VILLAGE.

INTRODUCTION

THE THEME

The theoretical interest of this thesis is in the process of legitimation, and most of the introduction which follows will be taken up by explaining what this complex term is understood to mean, and how it is intended to put it to use in the main body of the study.

Social thinkers of many kinds have long been interested in the problem of legitimation and legitimacy. Ernest Gellner traces the modern interest in the concept back to the concern by classical political philosophy with sovereignty "... wondering (about) who was the rightful ruler and what made him rightful" (1974: 24). Gellner argues that the compass of the term legitimation is wider than sovereignty, for while the latter applies solely to the realm of the political the former "... applies not merely to the political sphere, but also to any other, for instance the realm of the cognitive". In short "... most or all aspects of life ... require legitimation" (Ibid.: 25).

Following these observations, the present study is concerned partly with 'sovereignty' per se, sc. political authority and order, while the overall intention is to examine this particular aspect of order within a much broader consideration of order in general. Indeed,

the view adopted here is that the two concepts which are linked most closely to the idea of legitimation are those of order and ordering.

1. Kings and Gods

One name that is commonly associated with the modern (i.e. 20th century) sociological interest in legitimacy is Max Weber, whose identification of the three "inner justifications", or "legitimations" of domination - custom, charisma (grace) and legality - is very well known. Weber located the third of these "pure types" in the modern world, while suggesting that the first was exclusively, and the second mainly, characteristic of ancient societies. Not surprisingly the emphasis here, in the present work, is overwhelmingly upon the first type. A constant preoccupation throughout is the role and inner workings of custom or, to use Weber's own words, "the eternal yesterday" (Gerth and Mills, 1948: 78) in sanctifying authority and order. However, again hardly surprisingly, since Singhara village, like India itself, is moving apace into the modern world, a second motif of the thesis has to do with the implications for legitimation precisely of that movement. This latter theme appears particularly in Chapter 8, as well as parts of Chapter 2 and the final section of Chapter 1.

According to Gellner, Weber saw in customary

legitimation ("traditionalism") a blending of the natural, social and moral orders (Ibid: 146). This insight is fundamental. It is one which has been repeated ~~again~~ and again by subsequent authors. Indeed it is so familiar that the challenge for anthropology is not so much merely to re-assert it, but rather to work away at laying bare the social and psychological processes which lead to so heady a confluence between orders and realms which, after all, are regarded by modern thought as being quite distinct. One of the most fruitful ways to examine the connectedness, in any society, of these three realms is to look at the cognitive operations of that society's members by, for example, the analysis of ritual and myth, while paying particular attention to the presence therein of homologues and metaphors.¹

Thus, in his reflections on "traditionalist authority", Weber drew attention to the homologous nature, in patriarchal societies, of the relations between husband/father and family dependents, between master and serfs, and between sovereign prince and subjects. He further argued that such elements of the social sphere were metaphorically bound together within a "system of inviolable norms (which was) considered sacred" (Gerth and Mills, Ibid.: 296). In short, one of the connective tissues binding together the social and the moral was seen by Weber to be associations and homologues of the kind ruler: subject :: father:son :: god:man.

Such types of formulation flowered abundantly, long before the arrival on the anthropological stage of Lévi-Strauss, under the pen of A.M. Hocart. Because of their relevance to the present work, certain aspects of Hocart's analytical style may fruitfully be considered here.

There are, perhaps, few better examples of Hocart's genius at drawing out the construction of cognitive associations, through homologue and metaphor, than his analysis, in Kingship, of the marriage ceremony, in which he identified features which were strikingly similar to others found in the coronation ceremony. Starting from the fact that the bride and groom in an Indian marriage ceremony are surrounded by an aura of regality, divinity, or both (1972: 99-100) Hocart observed that royal marriage "... is constantly associated with (the king's) consecration" and that "... in Ancient India a king could not be consecrated without a queen" (Ibid.: 101). The classical 'reason' for this was that the king's wife "... inasmuch as she is his wife, is half of himself. Therefore as long as he does not find a wife, so long he is not born, for so long he is not complete" (from the Satapatha V.2.1.10 quoted in Ibid.: 102). But the (non royal) marriage ceremony revealed more than this. If the bridegroom was thought to be 'like a king' and the "king = god" (Ibid.: 105), a premise established early on in his analysis, and the bride was 'like a queen', and the

"queen = goddess", then the question arose as to what sort of god and goddess the couple were thought to represent. The answer, again inferred from the Satapatha in which the king's wife is associated with the goddess Aditi - "this earth" - was gleaned by the construction of the following equation:

Queen : King = Earth : Gods

King = God

(therefore) Queen = Earth (Ibid.: 105)

These associations were then added to, with the aid of various sources, and Hocart concluded that "the following equivalences are the result":

King = god = sky = aether = spirit = soul

Queen = goddess = earth = matter = body

(Ibid.: 106).

Hocart's style of analysis is persuasive because it helps reveal precisely how the social, natural and moral are combined, and how also the king's legitimation is but a part of a more general scheme in which the cosmic and social universes are conceptually organised. I have attempted to incorporate much of that style in the present analysis.

Hocart's 'first principle', the equivalence between king and god, is without much doubt the most elementary aspect of the legitimation process in traditional societies.

Balandier expresses the matter by asserting that "sovereigns are the kinsmen, the homologues or the mediators of the gods" (1970: 99). The ways in which expressions of this simple and critical fact are to be found in Singhara are various. Probably the most striking of its manifestations is the hypergamous union, which was established in the early 19th century, and which continues today, between the village Thākurs, the founders and former feudal landlords of Singhara, and families of Brahmins. Thus, even more directly than usual in an ideological world in which temporal ruler bows before spiritual authority, the Thākurs of Singhara - the 'sovereigns' at the local level - became, almost literally, 'kinsmen of the kinsmen of the gods'.

2. Order and Orthodoxy

Moving now to consider three further aspects of traditional legitimation as a process, each of which are examined at some length in the thesis. To start with, the process of legitimation encompasses both individual and social levels. The same set of symbols which legitimate the institutional order also, in Berger and Luckman's terms, "... operate to legitimate individual biography". It is said in Singhara that a man or woman who has passed through life with careful regard for orthodoxy in day to day behaviour and performance of rites de passage faces death with a tranquility born of a knowledge of having

lived within the limits of a quasi-divine plan. As Berger and Luckman say, such a reflection on one's own life history is not only "... conducive to feelings of security and belonging", but also enables "... the individual (to) ... view himself as repeating a sequence that is given in the 'nature of things', or in his own 'nature'" (Ibid.: 117). Customary legitimation, then, proceeds through the construction of symbolic universes which, in many important respects, do not allow for the distinction between the 'individual' and the 'society'. An example of a 'legitimizing concept' from another culture, the meaning of which displays this characteristic, is the Nyoro idea of mahano. This is perceived as "a power that enables the sovereign to maintain ... appropriate order" and also as a power which "... brings into play the vital force ... that controls ... individual lives at birth, initiation and death (Balandier 1970: 102 from Beattie 1959b, 1960a, 1960b). The present data yields examples of concepts of a similar sort (e.g. mān and sevā, which are both examined in Chapter 6).

3) Figures From the Demi-Monde

A second aspect of the legitimation process in traditional societies is the crucial role played by demonism, representations of chaos, fears about the collapse of the world, and intermittent feelings of dread

and terror about other types of personal and collective misfortune; in short the 'dark side' of life against which all positive moral imperatives draw sustenance. The concept of mahano for example, has a double aspect in this regard. It "... is recognised in the irruption of strange or disturbing events and in the manifestation of violence: it expresses ... an external threat", but it also appears as "... that (quality) possessed by any living system in order to exist" (Balandier, Ibid.: 102). Power is double edged, at one time legitimate, controlled, and comforting, but at another dark, illegitimate, uncontrolled, and frightening. A pair of terms which reveal these characteristics are two of the Tiv concepts for power, tsav and swem. The former term is conceived as the malevolent counterpart of the latter, and while "... all legitimate power requires swem, an ability to be in harmony with the essence of creation and to maintain its order ... (tsav) is associated with witchcraft and the counter society ... (as well as with) material success and ambition" (Ibid.: 104/5). In Berger and Luckman's view "... the 'night side' ... lurk(s) ominously on the periphery of everyday consciousness ... it is a constant threat to the taken-for-granted, matter-of-fact, 'sane' reality of life in society". The thought, which may be kept at bay by adherence to the conventional order, is ever present that this, the 'bright' and 'legitimate' side will "... be swallowed up at any moment by the howling nightmares of the other, the night side reality" (Op.cit.: 116).

All this is familiar enough, there being a large corpus of anthropological literature on the twilight counterpart of legitimate power and authority. Once again it was Weber who played a significant part in the development of such understanding. In his reflections on the place of suffering in the ethics of world religions Weber observed that the traditional ('primeval') attitude to those "... haunted by disease or other cases of obstinate misfortune" was that they were possessed by demons, or "... gods whom they had insulted" (Gerth and Mills, *ibid.*: 271). He ascribed such beliefs to the desire by the "fortunate" (the harvesters of the fruits of the conventional world) to convince themselves and others that they deserved their good luck. "Good fortune ... wants to be legitimate fortune" (*loc.cit.*).

Two notable anthropological contributions to our understanding of the role of the 'dark side' in legitimating orthodoxy in the Indian context are those by Carstairs and Sudhir kakar. The former examined what he termed "the reverse of the medal" - the "antithesis of Brahmanical/Hindu values" (1957: 135). He did so by exploring the lifestyle of the Bhil tribesmen who resided near the predominantly Hindu village he was studying. He found that, in some respects, their practices resembled those of the low caste communities of his own village. According to Carstairs these latter "... deplored those respects in which they failed to conform to the Brahmins' rules of orthodox behaviour (and thereby) acknowledged

their inferior status in Hindu society" (Ibid.: 136). The inference - that the less powerful, less honourable, and less fortunate regard their fate as in some way deserved - is a truly Weberian one. Its concomitant is that inferiors not only passively accept their own inferiority but actively grant their superiors legitimacy to be such. It is an inference of a kind that has met with a degree of hostility from a variety of other authors.² Kakar explores a rather different but no less fundamental aspect of the 'dark side': perceptions, expressed in myth and ritual, of the 'bad mother' and of the 'poisonous' character of women in general (1978: 92). He asserts that "... this dark imagery ... discloses the governing emotional constellations within Hindu society as a whole" (Ibid.: 93, 102).

Each of these faces of the sinister counterpart of the legitimate order manifest themselves in Singhara in the form of fears of the 'tribal' Gonds and their unconventional, 'uncivilised', nature; in the terror of spirits of the dead; in the deeply ambivalent attitudes to suffering, illness and poverty; in similarly ambivalent attitudes to women; in the distaste for certain foods; and so on. These themes are explored for the most part in Chapter 7, which is given over entirely to a consideration of the 'dark side', and also in certain other places in the account. My intention is to examine the implications of such conceptions for the creation and preservation of the dominant set of ideas and values in

the village world, about power, authority and the proper order of things and of men. As Balandier puts it: "All societies ... are obsessed by the feelings of their vulnerability ... the ordo rerum and ordo hominum are (constantly) threatened by entropy, by the destructive forces they bear within themselves, and by the wearing out of the mechanisms that maintain them" (Ibid.: 110).

4. Distinction and Integration

The third aspect of legitimation to be considered in this section of the Introduction, and at greater length in the main body of the thesis, concerns not so much the content of the process, but its form. Once more Balandier, following a lead by Durkheim and Mauss, expresses the core of the argument with elegance and precision. Dominated as the sacred and political are, in traditional societies, by the notion of order, their unity (Hocart's 'first principle'; also the first principle of legitimation as understood in this essay) depends upon their prior separation. It is these "... antithetical and complementary principles, whose opposition and association result in the creation of an order" (Ibid.: 108/9). That is to say the process is dualist in character. Furthermore, just as "cosmic" categories (natural elements, seasons, cardinal points, and so forth - each of them endowed with sacrality) are linked conceptually by such elementary dualism, so too

are social categories (sexes, generations, lineages, castes, etc.). To be joined together, social categories, or classes, have first to be separated, for "... the separation of contraries makes order possible, (and) their union establishes it and makes it fruitful" (loc. cit.). The best known pioneer of these analytical principles for the specifically Indian context is Georges Dumézil, whose notion of inclusions and exclusions (the dialectic of separation and unity) (Dumézil, 1940; Pocock, 1957) has proved abidingly useful for subsequent authors (c.f. Dumont, 1970: 67; Parry, 1979: 107). The operation of the dialectic is explored in various parts of the present work, especially in Chapters 3 and 5. In the former, the logic of commensal transactions is shown to follow the formal principles set out by Dumézil in what seems a remarkably clear and straightforward way. The essential unity of the caste hierarchy is shown to be achieved through a series of successive separations and unifications which, in the end, encompasses the entire village society. In the latter, it is argued that three sets of social categories are, each in turn, first made to appear distinct, and then drawn together in hierarchical and apparently productive unities.

5. Knowing, Believing, Accepting and Criticising

In order to expand them, some of the themes picked out so far may usefully be looked at again from different angles.

According to Berger and Luckman "Legitimation justifies the institutional order by giving a normative dignity to its practical imperatives" (emphasis mine) (Ibid.: 111). In other words, a large part of the legitimating process consists of affirming how social arrangements ought to be made, how social actions ought to be conducted, and so on. But, in addition to its normative role, legitimation has a cognitive aspect too. "Traditional faiths", says Gellner "... (are) wedded to the best available current forms of knowledge" (Ibid.: 147) while Berger and Luckman have it that "'knowledge' precedes 'values' in the legitimation of institutions" (loc. cit.). Thus, explanations and affirmations of what ought to be are accompanied by explanations of what is. It is worth dwelling on this cognitive aspect for a moment.

One day I asked a Chamār (leather worker) if he thought that his work was "dirty and bad". He replied "If they" (meaning high castes) "say so, it must be". But why "must it be"?

As I have said in note 2, I believe that an answer to this sort of question, which relies solely on arguments of the 'pure force' type (i.e. that subordinates accept their position solely because of the fear of the physical consequences if they do not), to be crassly over simple. The proposition that subordinates are trapped, not so much in webs of actual or potential violence, but in 'cognitive webs' which inhibit, or render impossible, the repudiation of hierarchy and subordination, seems to

me to be much more fruitful. Such a proposition is not, of course, a novel one. It was, for example, expounded with brilliance in the Introduction to African Political Systems. In the view of Fortes and Evans-Pritchard, political office in traditional societies is always associated with symbolic processes which effectively "remove ... the social system ... to a mystical plane, where it figures as a system of sacred values beyond criticism or revision" (1940: 18). Recent expression of, broadly speaking, the same proposition has been made by Bloch in the study, by him and others, of the political implications in traditional societies of formalised language which projects "... a political leader into a code where he cannot be contradicted or criticised" (1975: 25). Some of the ways in which the social system in Singhara are so 'elevated' to the mystical plane are described here. Clearly the role of formal rituals, some of which are described at length (with the proposition in mind) is critical. But so too is the whole body of manners and rules of etiquette having to do with sitting, standing, positioning, posturing, gesturing, greeting, and all the other formulae which govern intercaste communication on the more everyday level. I have attempted to describe some of these at various places throughout the work.

But these standard observations require an important postscript.

If it is the case that tightly structured

'cognitive webs' prevent argument about the basic principles of caste inequality, they manifestly do not inhibit argument about secular inequalities to anything like the same extent. I will try to illustrate this anecdotally and, in order to bring out the contrasting modes of discourse, I will begin the first illustration by placing its two 'heroes' in what amounts to a 'traditional' setting.

Two informants, who are very close friends of each other and of mine, habitually sit together in the evening. One of them is an elderly Brahman who always sits on the bench on his companion's verandah. The other is a tailor who always sits on the ground on such occasions. Both of them are demonstrably pious men, the Brahman's elaborate pūjā (worship) being a sight as regular and familiar to passers-by as is the sound of the tailor's intonation of parts from the Rāmāyana at twilight. I have joined them on the verandah more times than I can remember, and just as frequently the Brahman, whilst accepting gratefully all the betel nut, bidis and cigarettes that I and the tailor have about us, has reiterated his intention never to accept water or cooked food from Englishmen or tailors. He says that the very idea is abhorrent. Although I like to tease him with stories of fish-eating Brahmans from Bengal, of Singhara Brahmans who practised blood sacrifice in the nineteenth century, of contemporary Brahmans in the village who eat meat and

drink wine in the company of low caste acquaintances, and so on, there is never any serious argument about the basic principles underlying his protestations of caste orthodoxy. Indeed his commensal scruples do not seem to be taken as being in any way offensive by his friend. Quite the reverse: the high esteem in which the tailor holds his old friend derives directly from them. On other occasions they discuss altogether different matters, such as grain prices, interest rates, the corruption of local dignitaries, the immorality of contemporary politics. Now it happens that the tailor and the Brahman are leading figures in the production of stage drama in the village. A recent production of theirs was a thinly disguised allegorical tale about riches and poverty, death from hunger and the secular inequalities which they understood to be the cause of such things. One evening we discussed the play together. What was striking (to me) about this discussion was that once the subject changed, from the nature of caste to their play and its implications, the 'cognitive web' which otherwise locks them into a relationship thought to be quasi sacred seemed to fall away, and they became, as it were, not Brahman and Darzī, but two relatively poor peasant farmers struggling - more or less as equal partners - against the same day-to-day anxieties and difficulties in the face of capricious weather, money-lenders, the demands of large families, and so on.

A second example concerns the Chamār referred to above. One day I encountered him having a thoroughly

venomous altercation with a Brahman whose shoes he had just cleaned. There seemed no apparent limit to his expressions of disgust at receiving less than what he considered the appropriate payment for the service he had rendered. A little later in the day, the Chamār was a guest at an intercaste feast and, sitting outside the house in which it was given (as the rules of commensality demand of untouchables), accepted boiled rice and pulse from the hands of his indurative client (for the significance of which see Chapter 3).

Lastly, I recently asked, with deliberate disingenuousness, a pandit and a very wealthy Sonār moneylender, with both of whom I was taking tea in the market place, who they each thought had the more power in the village: Brahmans and Thākurs - or moneylenders. The question provoked a stream of abuse from the Brahman, who proceeded to heap scorn and derision upon the moneylender without drawing breath for what seemed like ten minutes or more. Bearing in mind that one was actually in debt to the other, the abuse seemed, on reflection, to be a clear example of the fact that the language of secular and religious inequality and hierarchy are in some respects very different. While it is quite acceptable for a Brahman to berate publicly a Sonār for being a moneylender, it is literally unthinkable for a Sonār to berate a Brahman for being a Brahman.

The finding by Bloch and others (1975) that less formal, less restrictive, codes, in which 'practical

politics' (and, we may add, 'practical economics') are discussed, often co-exist with the more formal and restrictive codes of traditional authority seems an appropriate one with regard to these anecdotes. As has been said, the main thrust of this thesis is directed towards the content and form of the more 'restricted' codes which legitimate traditional order. However, in Chapter 8, it is my intention to show how different the language is in which discussion about the contemporary economic and political order is conducted.

Thus, if the process of legitimation has to do with norms and with knowledge, it also has to do with the modes of discourse with which values and ideas are transmitted. This aspect will be illustrated in various ways as the ethnography unfolds.

6. The Moods of Demeter: Mortality and Metaphor

To turn now to a feature of legitimation which has already been touched upon, but which is so critical that it demands a good deal of expansion. Unlike in our own society, where the feature exists but is less marked, individual identity tends to be perceived in traditional societies in terms of the whole. The reasons for this may well be grounded in practical economic imperatives, but there are moral imperatives, too, and it is these which I seek to explore in the central chapters of this

thesis. One such moral imperative, which is of great importance in shaping our perception of the necessary continuity of the individual and the whole, is the idea of death.

The rituals which surround death and mourning in the village are described in the second half of Chapter 4, where I have taken some care to examine the purely religious expression of the search for a 'solution' to this fundamental problem. The main purpose of this particular section - and other related parts of the thesis - is, however, not primarily to engage in theological exegesis for its own sake (interesting though it may be). The significance of death for the legitimating process lies partly in the many ideas linked by metaphorical association to it, and it is with one such idea that the following paragraphs are concerned.

Closely linked by association to actual death is another state of 'non-being', anomie, the state of being 'dead to society'. Only marginally less terrifying than the idea of death itself is the notion of involuntary expulsion or exclusion from the human community (orderly, voluntary, withdrawal may be quite another matter). Repetitive affirmations of the unity of the individual and the whole are means of keeping the prospect of the fearful solitude of existence beyond the pale of society (and the idea of the Vaitaraṇī nadi described on p.233 and 235. is a particularly potent depiction of that prospect) away.

For Berger and Luckman "the symbolic universe shelters the individual from ultimate terror by bestowing ultimate legitimation upon the protective structures of the institutional order" (Ibid.: 119/20). Thus, the 'cognitive web' which appears at one moment to 'freeze' (Bloch's term) the individual into a never-to-be criticised acceptance of the institutional order, appears at another as a 'protective web', a "... shield against (the) terror (of anomie)" (Berger and Luckman, loc. cit.).

As I have said, there is probably no clearer example of the ritual statement of the unity of individual and whole than the system of food transactions (especially in its manifestation at an inter-caste feast). In the analysis of commensality in Chapter 3, I have concentrated in particular upon the formal properties of the system. I have not entirely ignored the substantive content, however, and have advanced suggestions about the symbolic meanings of the various foods which constitute the elements of the commensal rules. At this point, however, a link between commensal practices and their 'anomie defying' nature needs to be made.

Let us ask the simple question: 'where is food thought to come from?'

At one level, of course, the answer is equally simple: from fields and shops, from people's hearths, and, on ritual occasions, from the hands of Brahmans.

But, beyond these, there is another sort of answer.

There is an image of towering importance, in Singhara, which is seen most clearly at the two turns of the year - at Chaitra (March/April) and at Ashvīn (September/October). Worship of this image is conducted partly by placing before it rows of pots in which seeds of wheat have been planted. After a few days growth, the seedlings are taken in a procession through the village. Their growth is thought to be directly attributable to the productive capacities of the image. At one level, the seedlings themselves stand for all seeds that have been, or will be, planted in the village fields. These latter too are thought to depend upon the beneficently productive powers of the image.

The image is that of the goddess.

But who (as A.M. Hocart would probably instruct us to ask) is 'the goddess'? She has many names, including Kālī and Durgā. She takes many forms; sometimes large and terrifying, and sometimes small and benign. But, in ways which are described in greater detail in Chapters 5 and 7, the predominant associations linked to her (as the above comments may imply) are the earth and the feminine principle - or, to be more precise, the mother. An Hocartian equation may thus be 'thrown together' (his pleasing phrase) as follows: goddess = mother = earth. The goddess is 'like a mother' upon whose benevolence the growth of seeds - raw food - is thought to depend.

But the benevolence of the goddess may not be taken for granted, for in some moods her actions are malevolent and destructive. Indeed, her character seems to resemble closely another more familiar goddess, namely Demeter. Demeter exacted her revenge on both Zeus and the human community by drying up the earth and making it barren every year for the three months during which Persephone was forced to stay in the underworld. The reason for Persephone's yearly incarceration with Hades was that she committed a 'sin' when she had once been there in her early life. Her 'sin' had been to eat seven pomegranate pips in secret because she had been hungry and thirsty. In Singhara, too, there is a sense in which eating in secret isolation is thought to be sinful (see p. 178), and such 'sin' is thought to be provocative of the wrath of the goddess. By contrast the virtuous expression of sociality (and nowhere better to effect this than at an inter-caste feast) is thought to induce her benevolence. Life depends on food and also on the goddess who ensures its production. And so the inter-caste feast, the expression par excellence of a person's membership of, and place in, the hierarchy of village castes - the antithesis of 'sinful' solitary consumption - stands for no less than the tryst the individual keeps with life.

Let me put it this way. The problem is to identify the moral imperatives which subordinate individual

to whole in a village such as Singhara. What I am suggesting here, in Chapter 3 and elsewhere, is that such subordination may have its roots in the elementary horror of death, and the equally elementary will to live. The way that commensal rules and practices (in particular inter-caste feasts) 'defeat' death is metaphorically to bind the individual into a living and transcendent social whole - i.e. the caste system. Thus the food of life derives, in this case, not so much from music but from obedience to that system or, to put it generally, from fulfilment of dharm. It is this expression of commitment to dharm, to the caste system in particular, which, I argue in Chapters 3 and 7, is thought to release the productive beneficence of the goddess.

7. Transactions and Dimensions

Acknowledgement is due at this point to two seminal essays in political anthropology (1969, 1974) by Abner Cohen. In these essays, Cohen argues that one of the principal tasks which faces modern anthropology is the analysis of the interrelationship between, on the one hand, those symbolic structures within which political power and domination find expression and, on the other, those having to do with what he calls "... the perennial problems of human existence" (1969: 217). It may be argued (as the observations made here on the work of

Hocart, in particular, imply) that Cohen's prescription had already been followed for a considerable period before the publication of his essays. Nevertheless, the great value of Cohen's work lies in the fact that, at the time his essays were written, political anthropology in Britain was suffering from the wholly baleful influence of authors such as Smith (1966), Easton (1959) and Bailey (1969), whose interpretations of the nature of social and political transactions were, to put it as mildly as Cohen does, regrettably 'one dimensional'. Happily, though, Cohen's voice was not the only one to be raised in anguish at the attempts, by the so-called 'transactionalists', to reduce social action to the level of fairground competitions and tournaments (c.f. p.157). It is, for example, a tribute to the mainstream of Indianists in the halcyon days of Contributions to Indian Sociology that there was an inspired critical demolition of the general tendency for social anthropologists to favour a curious form of methodological individualism. It has already been suggested that one of the values of the notion of legitimation lies in the potential it has for bridging the phenomenologically arbitrary divisions - divisions which the turgid 'theories' of the 'transactionalists' were obliged to emphasise - between domains such as 'politics' and 'culture'. The view adopted here follows Cohen in regarding such domains as being as integrated as they actually are.³

8. The Powers of the Land

Up to now, I have made no mention of the writer to whom I owe most, in terms of the theoretical background of the present work, and I want to conclude this introduction with a summary of those of his ideas most immediately relevant to the aims of this study.

The three ideas to have emerged from Louis Dumont's various contributions to Indian sociology, which are most pertinent to this thesis, are those concerning what may be called the 'three subordinations': of economics to politics (and, ultimately, to religion), of power to status, and of individual to whole. These may be considered briefly in turn.

The argument advanced by Dumont on "the problem of economics" in traditional India is partly a matter of analytical method and partly one of empirical fact. The proposition is not that there was no 'economic domain' per se - a clearly absurd idea - but that "... economics remain(ed) undifferentiated within politics" (1970: 165). Put another way, the proposition is that it is analytically misleading to divide the economic and the political, in traditional India, into separate spheres. Before looking at what this means it would be useful first of all to consider one of its implications.

It is perfectly true, Dumont argues, that "... in India today there is a distinct sphere of activity which may properly be called economic" but, it is claimed,

"... it was the British government which made this possible" (Ibid.: 165, emphasis mine). Furthermore, modern economic science may rest on the assumption that 'politics' and 'economics' are distinct, but it does so only because it is a specialism that emerged in those (western) societies in which "... at the end of the eighteenth century ... economics (actually) appeared as a distinct category" (Ibid.: 164). The inference drawn from this is that modern economic science is relatively more able to provide useful analyses of the contemporary Indian economy than it is of the economy of traditional India. The reason for this, which is obvious enough, has to do with the type of economic activity the 'British made possible'; to wit, one based upon the political guarantee of the security of private property - that is to say, an economy in which "the transformation of land into a marketable commodity" had been effected, as also had the "... eman-cipation of wealth in moveables" (loc.cit., emphasis mine). In short, and rather broadly, the 'economy', which Dumont understands to have emerged under the guidance of British rule, is nothing more or less than the modern market type.

As far as Singhara village is concerned, the most fundamental change experienced there, since about 1830, has been the fall of a relatively unified 'dominant clan' of Thākūr landlords from a position of more or less total economic and political hegemony, and the corresponding

rise of a relatively diffuse class of merchants.

(This should not be taken to imply that the newly emancipated merchants have merely replaced the old feudal landlords as dominants over the same sort of economic and politico-economic system. Power has indeed changed hands; but the system has also changed its nature.)

Thus, Singhara's particular history, and its present economic arrangements, seem to fit comfortably into the scheme suggested by Dumont for India in general (although the extent to which there is a fully fledged market economy in the village is a tough empirical problem).

At any rate, it would be quite impossible for any visitor to the present day village to come away without the strong feeling that wealth had been 'emancipated' in no uncertain fashion. These matters are examined and described in the opening two chapters, and also in Chapter 8.

Our present concern, however, is with the nature of economics before, and shortly after, the British arrival. Up to the end of the 19th century, the Singhara Thākurs conformed more or less exactly to Dumont's general stereotype (1970: 162) of the classical 'dominant caste' (Kolenda argues that so called 'dominant castes' in traditional India were often, in fact, 'dominant clans' (1978: 42) implying that the latter term is preferable; it certainly fits the Singhara data much better). Their rights over land were pre-eminent, as was their power to grant land to others.

Justice and its administration lay exclusively in their hands; and they held the monopoly of authority.

Other inhabitants of the village, by contrast, enjoyed no formal security of land tenure at all, were used as 'free' labour by the Thākurs, and possessed little chance of upward economic or political mobility. The plots they did till were sufficient only for their own subsistence. There was little trade. In these respects, the traditional economy of the village was of a kind which Dumont understands as having been typical of traditional India rural India as a whole; one characterised by "... the subjection of the merchant and the insecurity of wealth" (Ibid.: 313/4).⁴

Thus, those who were dominant economically in pre-British Singhara were also dominant politically. The 'power' possessed by the Thākurs derived, in the first place, from their possession of land. Political and economic power were indistinguishable or, as Dumont has it, "... the two aspects are bound together in the same phenomenon ... politics encompasses economics within itself" (Ibid.: 165).

The one further step in the argument is that the politico-economic domain was itself further 'subordinated' to religion as, in a sense (to risk a contentious statement) it always has been, and must be, in all traditional societies. The reason is a basic one: the 'dominants' have to legitimate themselves; which assertion leads directly on to the second of Dumont's 'subordinations': of power to status.

9. Our Lady of Mercy

This aspect may be approached by picking up a thread introduced in parenthesis above.

The term 'dominant caste' is both important and misleading. At least it is quite misleading in Singhara's case. As is described in Chapter 1, the military conquerors of the district, the 'founders' of the village and subsequent rulers of the area, were in fact a small and tightly knit family, a clan, a group of brothers and their dependents; hardly a 'caste'. Furthermore even a cursory reading of the historical record of the area suggests that Singhara's special history in this respect was not untypical. Why then should we (striving as ever to remain faithful to the ideas of the villagers) call them a 'dominant caste'? The reason, once again, seems elementary enough. The necessity for legitimation required those who, at a material level, were no more than a militarily successful group of adventurous brothers to represent themselves at an ideological level as 'caste-like' body, whose dharm (duty) it was to rule; as a semi-regal 'caste'; a 'caste' of Kshatriya-like dignity; a 'dominant caste' which "... reproduced the royal function at the village level" (Ibid.: 162). It is precisely this conflation of the actual and the ideal which, as Hocart taught us, lies at the heart of political legitimation. The Thākurs of Singhara attained this state of

normative dignity, in the classical Hindu manner, by subordinating themselves, in the spiritual sense, to Brahmans or, to be completely precise, by placing themselves within the legitimate structures of the caste system. The fate of those village landlords who, in this part of middle India (which was entirely tribal until after about 1750), did not so place themselves - and who, therefore, did not achieve the necessary legitimation to continue as masters of their villages, after the late 18th century 'sanskritisation' of the region - was, simply, that they were chased away into the forest (see p. 54)!

And so, as the 18th gave way to the 19th century, the Singhara Thākurs' power came to owe its very existence to the legitimacy visited upon it by the Brahmans. In that sense the latter may be said to have given the Thākurs power - for power is nothing in itself. Power that is not legitimate is not really power at all. In other words, the process of political legitimation in Singhara consisted (as it still continues to do in some respects) of the drawing of attention away from the blood and fury of military conquest, the forced occupation of land, the subsequent exploitation of the majority by a small minority, towards an altogether more comforting system of ideas based upon the relative purity and impurity of very particular statuses and roles and the thick layers of meaning with which they came to be associated. The fact that power was 'subordinated' to status in this way did not deny or reduce it but, rather, confirmed it. As Dumont

puts it with such delicate accuracy, "... As the mantle of Our Lady of Mercy shelters sinners of every kind in its voluminous folds, so the hierarchy of purity cloaks ... its own contrary" (Ibid.: 78).

In short, then, the most immediately accessible manifestation of the subordination of power to status lies in the relation between 'sovereign' and Brahman, which on a slightly more abstract level implies the subordination of the 'real' to the 'ideal': "... the king ... appear(s) as a quasi-providential instrument whereby the theoretical world of dharm is linked with the real world here below" (Ibid.: 77). At the level of the village, the 'real' dominant clan becomes a 'dominant caste' whose political supremacy is found and secured in the secondary place it takes to those who are regarded as the 'homologues of the gods'.

And yet so slippery are the terms 'real' and 'ideal' that it seems necessary to qualify what has just been said, and to emphasise something said earlier. If, having located something called 'real power' in the king or, in the case of traditional Singhara, the Thākurs of old, one then proceeds to speak in terms of 'cloaks' or 'masks' (c.f. Bloch, 1977) or some such, the analytical road seems to become alarmingly bumpy. If, indeed, it is the case that in order to be itself power has to be legitimate, then it would seem not really to lie with 'the king' at all, but with those who make his office legitimate. If, in Singhara's case, the Brahmans were (and still are,

to some extent) the 'immediate agents' who rendered this service, those from whom legitimation ultimately came (and comes) were (and are) 'the king's' subjects.

Having discussed the crucial relationship between 'the king' and his 'priests', or (to put it in its actual ethnographic setting in our case), the local Thākur landlords and their Brahman affines, we may now confront the subordination of power to status, in another way, by considering, in more general terms, the ideological triumph of the caste system over relations of 'pure' wealth and power.

Fuller's altogether too hasty assertion (in response to arguments recently put forward by Mencher) that "... the caste system cannot properly be understood as an aspect of feudal relations of production" (1980: 400) provokes the riposte that, unless the description 'feudal' is considered in some way to be inappropriate as a description of the traditional Indian political economy, the historical facts of the matter are that the caste system was indisputably an aspect of feudal relations of production. Anthropologists should have regard for the facts of history, even if they do not always incorporate an historical perspective into their analyses. But, if Fuller is undoubtedly wrong in one respect, he seems undoubtedly right in another when he asserts that "... caste relations ... are ... important to people's self-identity" (loc.cit.). The point may be made with

even greater emphasis as follows. Dumont takes considerable care both to distinguish between the domains of economics and politics on the one hand, and ideas and values on the other, and also critically to repudiate the assumption that the latter of these domains is merely an adjunct of the former. That is to say, to revert to Fuller's terms, that while the caste system was indeed one aspect of feudal relations it was, as he may have wanted to say, not a mere reflection of those relations. (Dumont castigates authors such as Bailey and Gough, whose claim that "... ritual rank was almost invariably supported both by wealth and power" (1960:51) for suggesting such a thing.) At one level, therefore, the caste system requires explanation according to its own terms (i.e. in terms of purity/impurity, auspiciousness/inauspiciousness, and so on). Following this, as Fuller does imply, it also has to be explained why the relatively more subjective identity deriving from a person's caste affiliations appears to have been so clearly pre-eminent over the relatively more objective identity deriving from that person's position in the system of feudal productive relations. In Dumont's own terms, how is this ideological subordination of power to status to be explained?

In this thesis, my approaches to these problems are suggestive rather than comprehensive, but the overall analytical framework remains the same. The conceptual

emphasis given to very particular roles (i.e. caste roles) is understood as an expression of the compelling necessity for legitimation at both individual and social levels. The analysis in Chapter 6 (also Selwyn, 1979) suggests one sort of reason why the ideas, symbols and values associated with caste and the caste system have such extraordinary potency. I believe that the possibilities for taking the analysis further than I have done in this thesis are considerable, but at this point I merely want to look forward briefly to the line of thought which I have traced more fully in that and other chapters.

If we consider the relations between Brahman and Kshatriya, Brahman and Untouchable, the 'twice-born' and the non 'twice-born', or, very simply, between 'high' caste and 'low' caste, we may observe that the separation of the categories and their subsequent unification is achieved partly through the skilful employment of sexual and reproductive metaphors and analogues. Thākurs 'plough' while Brahmans 'sow'. In some contexts, the temperature associated with Shudras is thought to be in some way 'hot' while that of Brahmans is thought to be 'cool'. The movements of stars, the arrangements of planets, the demands of ancestors and gods - in short the activities and characteristics of those whose place is in a 'sky' above and beyond the earth are all clearly the province, above all, of the Brahmans (especially during the marriage season). By contrast Shudras are immutably

linked to this earth. Just as human life depends upon both the separateness and the unity of men and women, and vegetable life depends upon both ploughed earth and seeds, so social life is seen to depend on the orderly separation and unification of hot and cold, sky and earth, matter and spirit, prakṛti and puruṣa.⁵ These associations and homologues are indeed compelling, for they include caste too. At the social level, the very life and existence of the social order seems to rest upon the fruitful, orderly and hierarchical union of 'high' and 'low' castes. By extension (bearing Dumézil's insight very much in mind) since individual castes, and blocks of castes, are dyadically related to each other as 'high' and 'low', the society is seen to derive from the hierarchical union of all castes, conceptually grouped together within a whole.

We may take this just a little further: if the actual distribution of wealth and power, which derives from the purely material relations between real men and women, are 'encompassed' by, or ideologically subordinated to, a system of relations between the symbolically powerful statuses associated with caste occupations and affiliations, then it is because this latter system offers a symbolic universe which promises far more than the former. Consider the alternatives. On the one hand stands the hard, brutish, reality of peasant life and work in feudal or semi-feudal society; the juxtaposition

of extreme poverty and equally extreme wealth; high infant mortality; high susceptibility to smallpox, cholera, tuberculosis and other diseases; the incapable demands of landlords; the permanent threat of having too little to eat; all the conditions for the classic Hobbesian nightmare of the "... warre ... of every man against every man" (1973 (1651): 64). On the other hand stands an altogether different system, composed not of landlords or tillers, not of moneylenders or bonded labourers, not of exploiters and exploited, not of governors and governed, not of "... men apt to invade, and destroy one another" (Hobbes, *ibid.*: 65) but of Kumhārs (potters) "... without whose kalash (water pot), no marriage can take place"; of Telīs (oil-pressers) "... without whose oil, no marriage can take place"; of Barhaīs (carpenters) "... without whose wedding pole, no marriage can take place"; of Baniās (merchants) "... without whose turmeric, no marriage can take place"; of Sonārs (goldsmiths) "... without whose ornaments, no marriage can take place"; of Mālīs (gardeners) "... without whose garlands, no marriage can take place"; and of Brahmans "... without whose Ved no marriage can be successful".⁶ Birth and new life follow marriage, there can be no marriage without the full participation of every caste in the society of castes, which implies (to invoke Hocart's spirit) that there can be no life without caste. Thus if the hard realities of an exploitative system of

productive relations are 'encompassed' within the caste system, it may be because (to use some words of Hocart's chosen by Needham to act as frontispiece to Kings and Councillors): "It is not government that people want, but life" (1970).

Perhaps this direction is one in which the search for an explanation of the subordination of power to status may be fruitfully conducted.

10. Projections and Illusions

Finally to the last of Dumont's 'subordinations', one which has already been discussed here, the 'subordination' of individual to whole.

A convenient starting point would, perhaps, be the distinction drawn by Dumont between two fundamentally different sorts of analytical approach within the social sciences. (At a slightly narrower level, it is the same distinction, between those whom he called 'action theorists' and 'thought structuralists' which occupied Cohen in the two essays referred to above.) On the one hand there is an approach which, put rather grossly, may be associated with Utilitarian economics, Behaviourist psychology, and one form of 'transactionalism' in social anthropology. The first characteristic which may be said to unite these forms of analysis is the primacy given in them to the individual subject. Thus, Utilitarianism

"... seeks to derive economic and political structures from a hedonistic calculus of individual actions" (Bendix, 1968), while the raw material of Behaviourism is the behaviour of interacting individuals (Piaget, 1971: 139), and a guiding interest of transactionalism within anthropology is "man's ... central role as an entrepreneur" (Bailey, 1969: 18). The second characteristic of these approaches is the very secondary place given in them to actors' ideas and values. Thus, "... Utilitarianism artificially isolated the individual from the normative social context of which every individual is a part" (Bendix, loc.cit.), while the programmes of both behaviourism and transactionalist anthropology are flamboyantly summarised in Bailey's assertion that "... a valid sociological understanding can be achieved, given certain problems, by making abstractions immediately from behaviour, or from other non-verbal information, and by using only our own concepts, and evading the ideas of the people, supposing they have any which is not always the case" (1959: 90).

By contrast to this set of approaches and assumptions, there is another set, the first object of which, to quote Dumont, is "... the apperception of the social nature of man" (1970: 5). In this view 'society' appears not as "... a mere collection of ... monads" (Ibid.: 4), nor as a "... non human residuum" of such an association of 'real' individuals, but, instead, as a living part of individuals who actually can think and who

are guided by their thoughts. Whilst the first set of approaches tends to lead to the positing of an "... antagonism between 'the individual' and 'the society'" (loc. cit.), the second set seeks to emphasise the points of continuity between the artificially opposed 'individual' and 'society'. It does so, as Piaget puts it, by "... distinguishing between the individual subject, who does not enter at all, and the epistemic subject, that cognitive nucleus which is common to all subjects at the same level (1971: 139). (The terms which, for Dumont, correspond to these are 'empirical agent' and 'normative subject' (1970: 9).) It is with the latter of these characters that Dumont is concerned, rather than the fundamentally anti-social individual of the Hobbesian and Lockean traditions.

It should be made perfectly clear that it is no part of the object of this study to reflect on the respective merits of the two sets of approaches in any sort of general way. Restricting comment, therefore, to the anthropological manifestations of the implicit individualism of the first set of approaches, it may readily be admitted that they seem to provide a most suitable basis for analysis of problems associated with the practice of competitive games, other types of tournaments, cocktail parties (c.f. Goffman, 1959) or even academic politics (c.f. Bailey, 1977). What they are clearly not at all appropriate for, however, is any kind of serious analysis of the caste system; or, to be precise, for making any sense whatever of life in

Singhara village. It is (partly) because of this unsuitability (and the corresponding usefulness of the second set of approaches) that the five central chapters of the thesis have, as their ground base, the manifold expressions of the holistic ethic in village society. Only in Chapter 8 (building to a certain extent on themes apparent in Chapters 1 and 2) do aspects of 'individualism', as we understand it, appear. There is an irony here for, paradoxically enough, it may be that the methodological individualism of the transactionalists is not, after all, as 'conventional' or 'instrumental' (in the philosophical senses of these terms) as some of transactionalists would have us believe. It may be, in other words, that Dumont is right in claiming that forms of analysis which give primacy to the individual are appropriate for those societies in which the individual appears amongst the highest values. The fact, for example, that a form of methodological individualism so clearly 'works' for local level politics in India (c.f. the seminal studies by Brass (1965), Mayer (1966) and Nicholas (1965) amongst others) - as it seems also to do for politics in Singhara - may reveal little about the 'true nature' of man (whatever that may be claimed to mean), but may reveal a great deal about one feature of modern Indian society and culture.

One final observation on this topic needs to be made. Such of Dumont's statements as "... hierarchy is

the attribution of rank to each element in relation to the whole" (1970: 91) or "... caste(s) isolate (themselves) by submission to the whole" (Ibid.: 41) or "... the entire system (is) orientate(d) towards the whole" (Ibid.: 105) may be judged to imply a form of analysis which, as Cohen (after Fortes) nicely has it, "... neutralises the actor" (1969: 226) (which would surely be just as dangerous and romantic a strategem as its opposite (i.e. leaving society out)). Dumont's defence against such implications is found, I think, in his claim that "... a society as conceived by individualism has never existed anywhere ... (because) ... the individual lives off social ideas" (Ibid.: 10). The notion of 'eighteenth century man', therefore, was always, and at the most basic level still is (certainly and in particular in relation to India) an idealistic and romantic myth: a powerful puff of Hobbesian smoke.

I would like to think that part of the originality demanded by the rubric of a Ph.D. thesis may be found in this one in the attempts I have made to explore and dissect the form and content of expressions of 'orientation towards the whole' in those aspects of thought and action which are critically considered. A view I share with Dumont (following, in particular, Durkheim and Mauss) is that this task reflects "... the essential humanist aspect of the teaching of anthropology" (Ibid.: 8) pausing to add only, in fine, that such humanist endeavour may come to nought if taken to extremes.⁷

The intention of this Introduction has been to set before the reader in as clear a way as possible what it is that this study of a central Indian village sets out to do, and the approaches adopted in order to achieve its aims.

CHAPTER 1

SINGHARA VILLAGE: HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

1. Prologue

The visitor to contemporary Singhara cannot help but be struck by the simultaneous presence there of elements of both an old and a new order. On the one hand the continuing influence over village affairs exercised both by members of the old established Thākur family, and by members of traditional Brahman families, are plainly evident. Signs of caste distinction and hierarchy abound. Displays of deference - by youth towards their elders, by wives towards their husbands, by low castes towards high ones - are the hourly currency of social life in the village. And yet, on the other hand, and equally apparent to the observer, are signs of a different kind. When representatives of the local district administration pay their occasional visits to Singhara it is not to one of the spacious and airy old houses of the Thākurs to which they go first, but to one of the modern brick houses belonging to one of the village merchants. And while at first sight a Thākur or a Brahman may appear as the 'king' of a particular institution in the village it is nearly always the case, on closer inspection, that it is a grocer, a cloth merchant, a grain dealer, a goldsmith, or a money-lender, who is the 'kingmaker'. "It is," as a goldsmith

moneylender put it, "the business community that has the most power in the village today." In terms of the thesis title then, and as far as the exercise of power is concerned, it seems that 'the goldsmith', if he has not yet done so completely, is taking the place of 'the Thākur'.

But let us start at the beginning.

2. Stories

Clearly, it was important to Shiv Kumār Trivedī, the eldest son of Samar Singh (currently the president of the local branch of the Jan Sangh party and younger brother of Thākur Arjun Singh, the former leader of the village) that I should be acquainted with the history of his family. One reason for this, he (rightly) explained was that the modern history of the village began with the arrival there of his ancestors. Thus on my third evening in Singhara Shiv Kumār came to my quarters, accompanied by a large number of his younger kin, and told me the following story.

Three hundred years ago ancestors of the Trivedī family, who were at that time known only as Singh, came to Jabalpūr district from Dādāpūr, a village near Rishikesh in what is now Uttar Pradesh. At that time the area was covered by jungle and was inhabited by Gonds. It was ruled over by the Gond king Nizām Shāh, with whom the Singhs had previously made friends. The head of the Singh family came to Singhara and fought a battle against

the leader of its tribal inhabitants "with horses and spears". Then, having defeated this "terrible wild bhūmiyā¹ they gave the settlement its modern name, which means "where we take rest".² Once they had established a safe place, protected from the surrounding forest, which was inhabited by uncivilised Gonds and others, the Singhs brought more of their kin down from the north, together with other "respected" Brahman families to whom they had customarily given daughters in marriage. The Trivedīs, Shiv Kumār explained, still give wives to these and other Brahman families and do not take wives from them in return. Some generations after the arrival of the original Singhs, he continued, one heroic Singh went hunting with some British soldiers stationed nearby. The Singhs managed to kill a wild deer with a spear, which they presented to the leader of the British hunting party. In return for this and other services the British, who had by that time become rulers of India, bestowed upon the Singhs the title Thākur, a title they still use.

Seven days after Shiv Kumār told me this story, I heard an account of the history of Singhara from Budu Rām, a Brahman elder and an influential member of the district's Congress party, who had replaced Thākur Arjun Singh (Shiv Kumār's uncle) as village leader. This story was broadly similar to Shiv Kumār's, differing only in points of emphasis. Budu Rām also spoke of the region once having been covered in jungle and inhabited by tribal

people. In Singhara itself there lived a certain Bhil bhūmiya and his wife. This Bhil was a ferocious man who spent his time hunting animals and murdering people. Some Thākurs, led by a man called Chandan Singh, killed the Bhil and became allies with Nizām Shāh, the Gond king of Garha Mandla State. For assisting the king on a hunting trip, during which a deer was caught and killed, the Thākurs were rewarded with a jāgīr (tax free grant of land) of several villages (including Singhara) and the land surrounding them. Once settled, the Thākurs were joined by several Brahman families from nearby villages, to whom they were related. A few servant castes such as Dhobīs and Nāīs had come with the Thākurs. The remaining castes that now inhabit Singhara came later, attracted by the security offered them by the Thākurs and the possibility of enjoying a life free from the Pindārī bandits who were roaming freely throughout the region at the time, threatening the lives of the local inhabitants. Later, under the British, who introduced a new land tenure system, the Thākurs were granted mālguzārī rights over fourteen villages.

The following day I talked with Thākur Arjun Singh. According to him, king Nizām Shāh used to hunt regularly in Singhara district. At that time the forefathers of the present Trivedī family had been gomāstas (clerks) in the town of Barela. They had previously been resident in the province of Ayodh (Oudh), in what is now

Uttar Pradesh, where they had been ministers to the then Nawāb of Ayodhyā. Harchandan Singh, the leader of the family, had been subadār (governor of a province) there and had arrived in Barela with a retinue of soldiers, servants and relatives. In response to Nizām Shāh's invitation he and his retinue moved on to the site of the present village and killed the only occupant, "a terrible low caste bandit named Dāru Shāh", and founded Singhara. The first house built there was the one he (Thākur Arjun Singh) lived in today.

I subsequently heard several other accounts of the same story which each contained slight variations of detail. Arjun Singh's son told me that the Singhs had come to Jabalpūr from Hyderabad (to the south), while some villagers claimed, guardedly, that the Thākurs were 'really' Ahīrs related to an Ahīr clan now living in another village only four miles from Singhara.

Within these rather truncated and conflicting stories lie several very important clues about the character of the village. It is commonly agreed in all the accounts that the Singhs established themselves in the area by force of arms and that they became its rulers having done so. The nature of their dominance is in each case presented as more or less beneficent. The Thākurs not only drove out a previous landlord who is now regarded with terror and anxiety, but they continued to protect Singhara from 'tribals', bandits and other encroachers. A

distinction is thus made between the safety and civilised nature of the village, the 'inside', and an 'outside' which is made out to be wild and uncivilised. It is clear from the different accounts that the Thākurs are seen as protectors from local predators and that in this role they were given a measure of political legitimacy by the Gond dynasty, the British, and the villagers themselves. They appear, thus, to have been a relatively stable and permanent feature in an otherwise turbulent historical landscape. However, in contrast to the general acceptance of the legitimacy of Thākur politico-economic dominance, uncertainty about their origins and their 'true' caste status is apparent. Though most of my informants argued that the Thākurs "must be" Brahman, since Brahman families accepted wives from them and there was no such thing as inter-caste marriage, persistent rumours to the contrary were heard.

3. History

Passing from the above summary accounts, a more comprehensive historical outline of the area will now be traced. Apart from informants' memory and genealogical evidence, use is made of published and unpublished records relating to the period from about 1750 to the present.

The Gond and Marātha Periods

Prior to the arrival of the Singhs, the village had been a small tribal settlement located in the ancient Gond state of Garha Mandla.³ The whole of the region was a tribal one. Only later, following extensive migration from northern India, did it become what Karvé has described as a "southward thrust" of northern Hindu culture (1965: 165).

The zenith of Gond government came during the reign of Rānī Durgabatī, who occupies in and around Jabalpūr a similarly exalted position in peoples' minds as, for example, Boadicea does in some places in England. And for much the same reasons. Although Queen Durgabatī was defeated and killed by the Moghul army under Asaf Khān in 1564, her successor was allowed to resume possession of the state. In 1780 the last Gond king, Samar Shāh, lost Garha Mandla to the Marāthas of Sāgar. He had ruled for only nine months. His predecessor, Nuhur Shāh had ruled for three years, and his predecessor, Rājā Nizām Shāh, for twenty seven, from 1749 - 1776 (M.P.D.G. 1968: 92-3; C.P.G. 1909: 54-5).

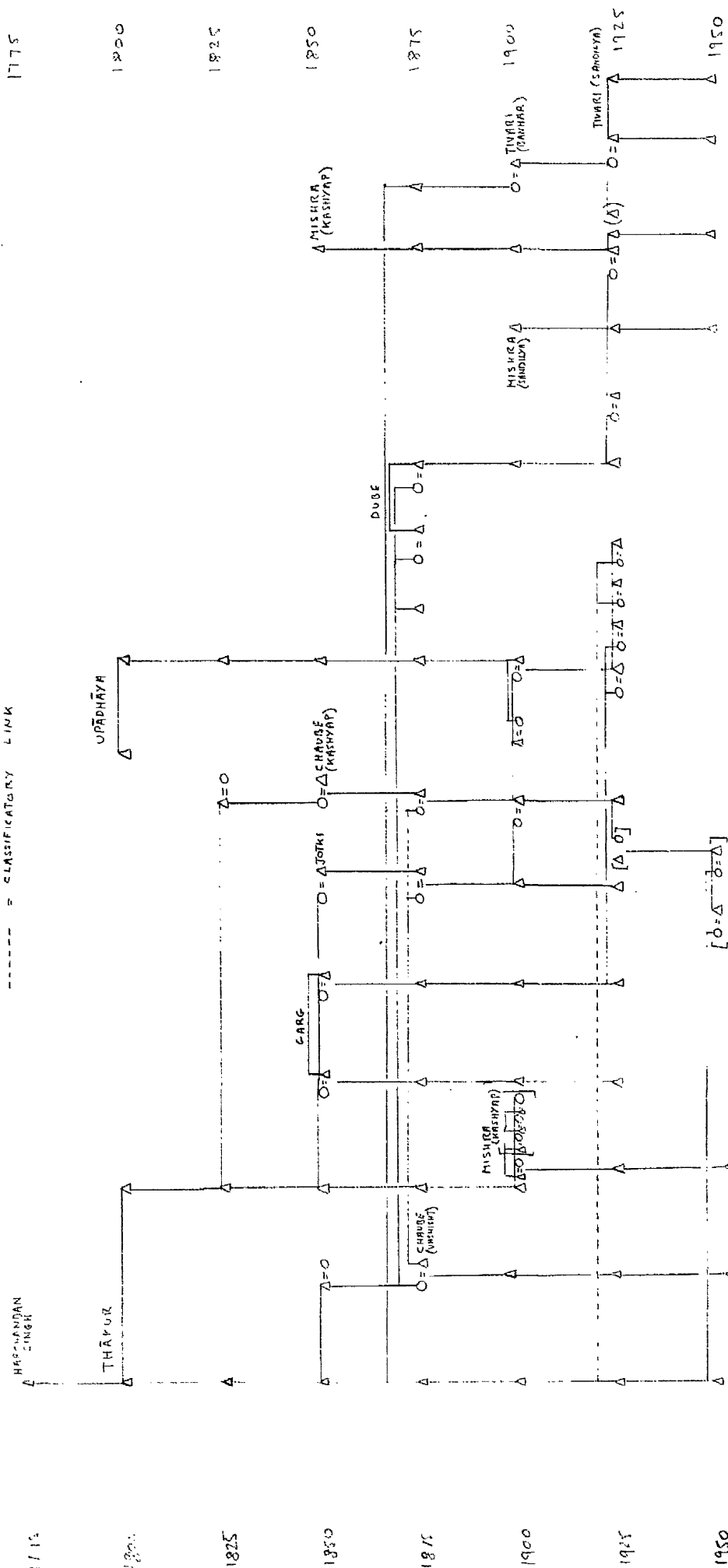
During the reign of Nizām Shāh, an adventurer named Harchandan Singh, supported by a retinue of family and servants, established himself in Singhara and its immediate region by force of arms. The previous landlord of the village, a Gond chieftain, was killed by the Sings and his followers were subdued under their rule. Dāru Shāh's

reputation amongst the village historians (see above) is probably quite unjust, given our knowledge of the nature of Gond petty chiefs of the area and period. The Singhs' military adventure was recognised by the king in his gift to them of an estate, comprising Singhara and several other villages, as a jāgīr. This series of events was typical of others in the region as a whole. Sleeman, for example, recorded that the granting of jāgīrs by the Gond kings to heads of favoured families was customary at that time (C.P.G. 1909) while Baden-Powell reported that the last years of Garha Mandla "witnessed the establishment of a number of villages and estates by clan adventurers" (1892. II: 441). The genealogy of the Singh family, part of which appears in figure 1, is consistent with the claim that Harchandan Singh of Singhara and King Nizām Shāh of Garha Mandla were contemporaries and that the former came to the village under the tutelage of the latter sometime during his reign.

The adoption by the Singhs of the title Thākur, by which their descendents are still addressed, may have occurred soon after their arrival. On the other hand it may have been a title they had been known by for generations before their settlement in Singhara. Both the name Singh and the title Thākur are appellations associated with certain chiefly Gond lineages in this part of Madhya Pradesh. Thākur is not, properly speaking, a caste name (Russell, 1916. I: 414) and the best translation of it is Baden-Powell's "Lords of the soil" (Ibid.: loc. cit.).

FIGURE 1. PARTIAL GENEALOGY OF THE THAKUR
LINEAGE, SHOWING THE SIGNIFICANT LINKS
BETWEEN THEM AND OTHER BRAHMAN FAMILIES.

[] = RESIDENT OUTSIDE SINGHARA
----- = CLASSIFICATORY LINK



The state of Garha Mandla fell in 1776 to the Sāgar Marāthas and was ceded by them shortly thereafter to the Bhonslas of Nāgpur (who were also part of the Marātha confederacy) (A.R. 1921/22.II: 100). The first of these Marātha governments was relatively weak and "its policy was to court the goodwill of the Thākurs" (of the region) "whose possession formed a complete cordon round the District" (S.R. 1907/12: 12). The Singhara Thākurs were probably so 'courted', for the village lay on the edge of the region controlled by the Sāgar Marāthas, and thus was of some strategic importance to them. Furthermore the Marāthas gave the Singhara Thākurs the title ubaridār. Ubaridārs, known sometimes also as muafidārs, were required to pay a form of tribute to the Marātha authorities which was substantially less than that demanded from ordinary village headmen, who were generally known as mālguzārs (Baden-Powell, Ibid.: 460). A mālguzār, which is much the most important of these terms, was an estate or village head responsible to the central government for revenue collection. An ubaridār was thus a privileged mālguzār. This is what the Singhara Thākurs were.

According to all accounts the Bhonsla period was chaotic (e.g. C.P.G., 1909: 38). In 1809, the area witnessed action by Pindārī bandits supported by descendents of the dispossessed Gond kings (M.P.D.G., 1968: 93). As the oral histories suggest, the Singhara Thākurs managed

to keep both Bhonsla agents and Pindārīs at bay. To this end, they built a fort on the main approach to the village at that time. As has already been recorded the villagers look back at the Singhara of this period as a haven of safety amongst the intrusive currents that swirled and eddied outside its boundaries. It is an image worthy of considerable emphasis.

Following the Marātha-Pindārī war of 1817 the district passed into the hands of the East India Company. At first it was administered by an agent, with direct responsibility to the Governor General, as part of the Sāgar and Narbadā Territories. Subsequently it was part of the North-Western Provinces until incorporated into the Central Provinces in 1861. It then remained under British control until Indian Independence in 1947.

The British Period

(a) Thākurs and Brahmans

In 1818 therefore, at the start of the British period, Singhara was a village controlled by a family of Thākur mālguzārs who, as jāgīrdārs and later ubaridārs, had enjoyed special tax dispensations under previous rulers. They had been established as local 'lords of the soil' for over half a century. The problem of their origin will probably remain. My own ideas on the subject may be judged from the comments above concerning the title Thākur.

At any rate, they were village chiefs different in only one respect from many other such chiefs in the area. As the turbulent years of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries gave way to the British period it was fortunate for the Thākurs of Singhara that they were regarded as Brahmans.

Sleeman reports that, ten years before it was ceded to the British, the region became the focal point for large scale immigration from the north. Immigrants came as "single families who sought a peaceful and permanent establishment in the soil" (C.P.G., 1909: 56). In time the immigrants "became a formidable body" which forced many of "the Gond chiefs with their followers (into) the hills and jungles" (A.R., 1872/3. VI: 56). This pattern of immigration was certainly one experienced by Singhara. What is of great interest about the Singhs, however, is that, unlike many of their fellow village chiefs of the period, they were not 'forced into the hills and jungles' by the wave of Hindu immigrants. As we shall see, they turned this tide to their own decisive advantage.

In figure II a partial chronology of the immigration from the north, as it applied to Singhara, is set out in caste terms.⁴ It gives some idea of how Singhara became the multi-caste village it is today, showing the approximate date of arrival in the village of the first families of each caste group currently resident there.

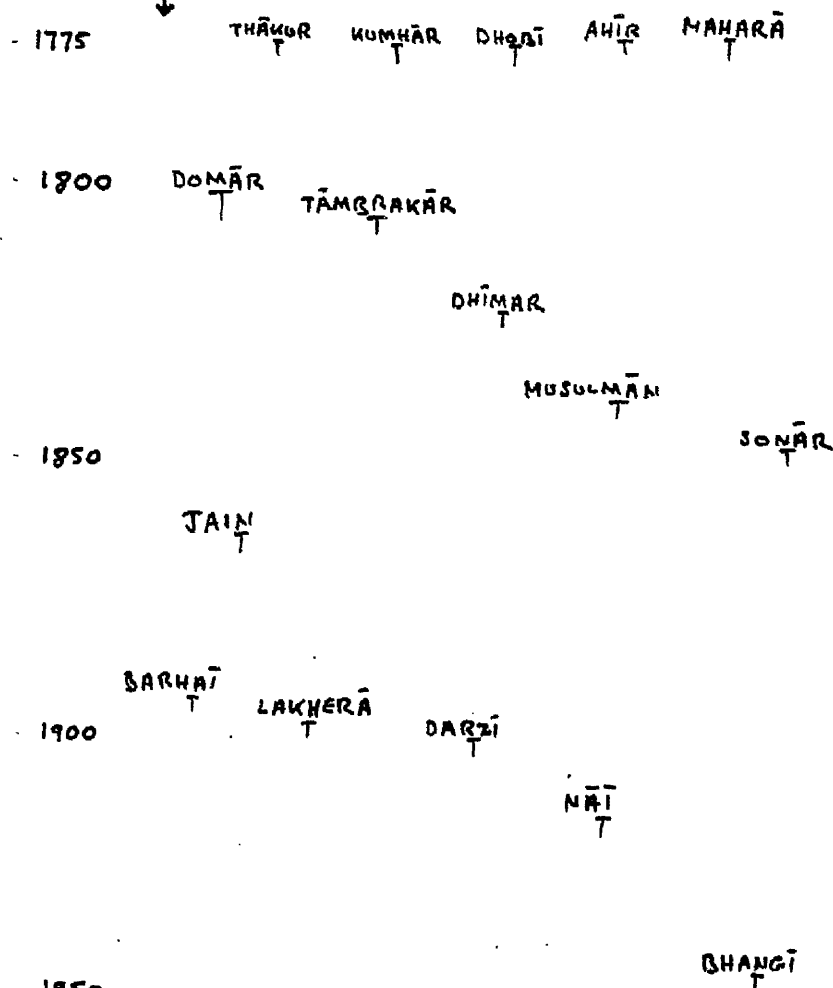


FIGURE II. DATES OF ARRIVAL
IN SINGHARA OF FIRST MEMBERS
OF MAIN CASTE GROUPS.

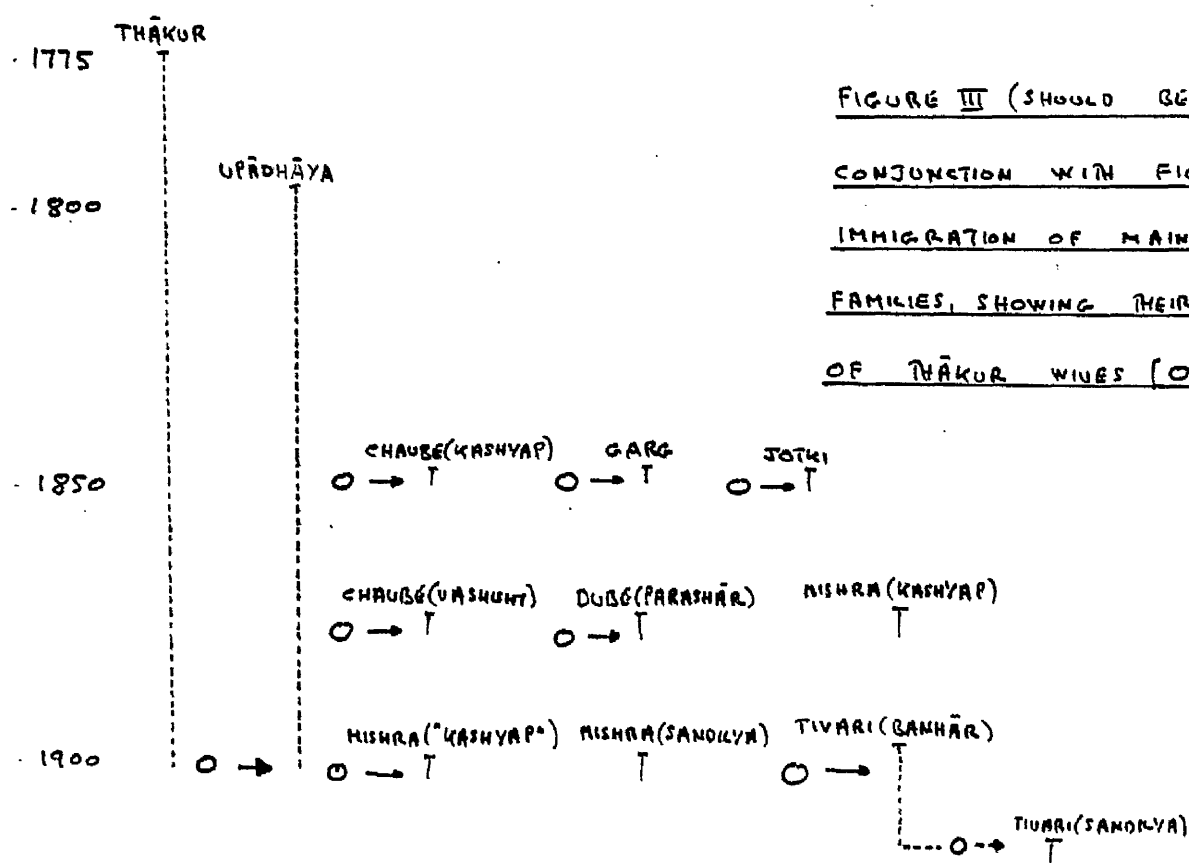


FIGURE III (SHOULD BE READ IN
CONJUNCTION WITH FIG. I):
IMMIGRATION OF MAIN BRAHMAN
FAMILIES, SHOWING THEIR RECEIPT
OF THAKUR WIVES [O →]

One of the most important categories of immigrant to Singhara consisted of families of Sadiupadi Brahmans.⁵ In figure III the family name, the gotra name,⁶ and the date of arrival of these families is given. What figure III also shows is that the Singhs established hypergamous unions with several of these families. These unions are still being repeated today.

There are two aspects of the Thākurs' relation to the incoming Brahmans which are of importance. The first concerns the fact that the former became permanent 'wife-givers' to the latter (which does not mean that the Thākurs gave their women only to the Brahman families; merely that whenever there was a union between the Thākurs and the other Brahmans the Thākurs were always wife givers and never wife takers). This established the ritual inferiority of Thākurs to the immigrant Brahmans. The second was that, along with women, the Thākurs gave quite large amounts of arable land to their new found affines as dowries. Indeed there has been a flow of property, in the form of land, houses and money from the Thākurs to these Brahman families until the recent past. Apart from being dowries there have also been inheritances after uxori-local marriages (i.e. when a Brahman has come to Singhara from outside to marry a Thākur girl with no brothers) and, in the case of the village pandits, property transfers in exchange for priestly services.

Informants' testimony, and evidence from contemporary holdings, enable us to gain a fairly reasonable

idea of the extent of these transfers. In the following account Brahman families are identified by name and (where necessary) gotra name as well.

The Gurg brothers, Bal Rām and Kripā Rām, who arrived in Singhara some time between 1825 - 1855, are reported to have received 20 acres, a house and Rs 500 each. The first arrivals of the Chaube (Kashyap) and Jotki families, who arrived shortly after the Gurgs (i.e. between 1825 - 1855) are said to have received similar amounts. It is likely that the two brothers who founded the Dube (Parāshar) lineage, and who came to the village some time between 1855 - 1885, received considerably more, probably as much as 120 acres of land each. The first member of the Chaube (Vashisht) lineage, who settled in Singhara just before the turn of the century received 156 acres and a double storey house. His son (a respected authority on village matters and the history of the Thākurs) says that his father had been regarded as an attractive match for the Singhs because he was at that time patvārī (village record-keeper). Some of Chaube's property was passed on, in his own sister's dowry, to the Jotki family. A lineage now defunct, Tivārī (Banhar) received at least 100 acres, which was passed on, through inheritance after uxorilocal marriage, to the Tivārī (Sāndilye) family. In about 1930 the father of the last sarpanch (head of the village council), Mishra (Kashyap), received 127 acres in inheritance after he had married the eldest daughter of a prominent member of the Singh

family who had no sons. The very first Brahman family to have come to the village, at the beginning of the nineteenth century, was that of the village pandits, the Upādhyāya family. Interestingly, this family has only recently begun to contract affinal links with the Thākurs, but their claim to have been granted tenancies in exchange for their services is entirely consistent with customary practices of the time. The founders of the Tivārī (Vashisht) and Mishra (Sāndilye) families, both of whom arrived in the village around 1900 were both petty traders. Both of them were grain traders and their activities doubtless benefited from the presence and patronage of the Singhs in various ways. Thus the majority of Brahman families living in Singhara today trace their presence in the village to forebears who came there at some time during the nineteenth century. Most of those forebears were poor, if not destitute, when they first came and nearly all of them owed their initial wealth largely to the Singhs.

Here then was a more or less 'classical' case of legitimation in the traditional Hindu manner. The only variation on the theme of the subordination of temporal power to ritual status was that the Singhara Thākurs were not Kshatriyas but Brahmans. I repeat, though, that there has never been any doubt that their status as Brahmans has always been inferior, and still is. Their 'wife-giving' status is only one amongst several signs of this inferior rank. Equally, though, there is

also no doubt about the economic and political control they exercised over the village throughout the whole of the nineteenth century. According to a contemporary Brahman elder, in those days if a Thākūr called you for an errand, even if you were a Brahman, you ran, as if your life depended on it, to fulfil it.

As I have said (and as is shown in figure II) Brahman families were not the only immigrants to Singhara in the nineteenth century. Some families from other castes had accompanied the Singhs to the village, and others came later. By 1850, there were, according to my calculations based on a comprehensive house to house census,⁷ at least 12 other castes in the village apart from the Brahmans. Apart from performing their traditional caste-related duties, the members of these castes, like the Brahmans, were cultivators on land controlled by the Thākūr mālguzārs. It is to consider specific aspects of the relations between mālguzār and cultivator in those 'traditional' days of the early and middle years of the nineteenth century that we may now turn.

(b) Mālguzārs and Cultivators

The single point I wish to make about the relation between the Thākūr mālguzārs and the cultivators of Singhara during this period is that the economic and political dominance of the former was, in common with

other mālguzārs in the vicinity, more or less absolute. As I have suggested in the Introduction, they were, thus, representative of the hundreds of other 'dominant clans' or 'dominant castes' to be found at the time all over the Indian country-side.

Whether or not the Singhs may be said to have 'owned' Singhara and its land is a point of some legal complexity.⁸ What seems quite uncomplicated, however, is that they controlled the village and the land surrounding it very much on their own terms. It is probable that few cultivators, with the possible exception of the Brahman families, enjoyed much or indeed any of the surpluses produced on the land they tilled. The views of the early nineteenth century British observers and administrators are all too clear on the matter. Their accounts are crowded with references to mālguzāri extravagance, mismanagement and exploitation. One report spoke of many of the mālguzārs' "entire inability to continue in their superintendence of their villages" due to the systematic exploitation of cultivators' productive efforts (B.C., 1830/31: 67), while one agent to the Governor General, a Mr Malony, wrote in 1830 that cultivators "scarcely ever pay money rents; the mālguzār takes all the produce and feeds them, furnishes seed and generally bullocks also: they are in reality mere labourers" (Ibid.: 70).

British policy towards the land was based upon perceptions such as these. The moral sensibilities of

Company agents may well have stirred with disapproval, but perhaps the main inspiration behind their interpretations of what was going on around them was the Company's eagerness to gain revenue for itself rather than for village landlords. (Not, let it be hastily added, that there was any contradiction between the former feelings and the latter imperatives.) The Company's men regarded the mālguzārs as impediments to the generation of increased production and the consequent yield of increased revenue which that would bring. British understanding was that agricultural production would rise if cultivators were given at least partial control over their land and were enabled to trade a proportion of the produce within a regional market economy. "We cannot draw," observed Malony in the late 1820s, "any considerable revenue from the people beyond our local expenditure unless they possess the means of profitable exporting their produce, and thereby enabling them to pay an amount of rent which they could otherwise not afford." (B.C., 1830/31: 1208).

In short, the relation of mālguzār to cultivator in the early nineteenth century appeared to British eyes as being deeply exploitative. Mālguzārs were noted not only for levying from cultivators more than was necessary to meet government demands, but also for being reluctant to pass on the required revenue to the Company. The mālguzārs' abuses appear to have been a favoured topic in a large number of Company and other reports. A large

part of the problem was that cultivators had no political or legal relations with government beyond the boundaries of the village until after the extensive land reforms which were subsequently enacted by the British administration.

It is within this portrait of the wider region that we may place the Thākurs of Singhara. There seems little doubt that their power was as absolute as the term 'dominant clan' implies.

(c) The Subversion of Traditional Dominance

We may move on now to consider some of the administrative changes introduced in Jabalpūr District by the British. The purpose of this is to give a broad overview of the way the economy of the village was penetrated by external government; how, as a result, the economic dominance of the district's mālguzārs (and hence that of the Thākurs of Singhara) was undermined; and how, for the first time, some of the cultivators came to hold the rights and privileges in land which allowed them later to emerge into the twentieth century as the genuine competitors in an increasingly open market economy that the British wished them to be.

The era of British land reform began with the first full scale Land Settlement of 1835. Up to that time government had been, as has been implied, removed and

distant from the day to day life of villages such as Singhara.

One of the aims of this first settlement was to encourage "landed proprietors on a village scale" (A.R., 1921/22. II: 108). The British believed that strong and secure rural landlords, acting as intermediaries between government and cultivators would serve the aims and interests both of political stability and economic expansion. In the light of the above-mentioned comments, it should be stressed that the British did indeed want the mālguzārs to be strong, but as intermediaries accountable to government, rather than to themselves as the semi-autonomous village chiefs they had been under the previous regimes. Thus they granted proprietary rights to existing mālguzārs. In the case of Singhara this may appear to have been a recognition by the administration of the status quo and the legalisation of Thākur dominance. In fact it was no such thing, for at the same time that mālguzārī rights were confirmed, the nature of those rights was changed in one crucial respect. As the Administrative Report observes: cultivators, who, before 1835, had been little more than free floating settlers, became the mālguzārs' tenants (Ibid.: 110).

In a proclamation of 1854, the rights of tenants became the subject of administrative protection. Certain of the older established cultivators were given the title mālik-makbuza (Ibid.: 109). These were "full proprietors

as far as their own holdings went, and with certain privileges", though they were "not large" (Baden-Powell, 1892. II: 480). This was almost certainly the type of tenancy that given to several of the Brahman families in Singhara. In that year, too, both mālik-makbuzas and mālguzārs themselves were given free right to transfer land (Ibid.: 456).

In 1856 a second class of tenant proprietor was established; the kadīm kashtar (A.R., 1921/22.II: 109). These were given protection and heritable rights in the plots they cultivated, provided that their rent payments to the mālguzārs were kept up (A.R., 1872/3: 23). Kādīm kashtars did not enjoy rights of transfer, but conditions were laid down that enabled them to become mālik-makbuzas once they had cultivated their plot of land for a given length of time (A.R., 1921/2.II: 110).

A third class of tenant, an 'occupancy tenant' was also established. By 1875 such tenants also enjoyed heritable and transferable rights with restricted rights to sublet. Beneath these lay a further class of 'tenants at will' who, before 1883, possessed no rights at all, except those gained through becoming 'occupancy tenants' after 12 years' continuous cultivation on the same plot (Ibid.: 112). For a time landlords were not averse to letting such tenants accrue the rights of 'occupancy tenants', but they became more and more unwilling to let this happen, with the result that in 1883 legislation was passed to make these 'tenants-at-will' into 'ordinary

tenants' with protected rights (Ibid.: 114).

A distinctive pattern of administrative policy could, by this time, be seen to be emerging. If, after 1835, the British had pursued a policy which confirmed the position of the mālguzārs, they had also paid increasingly close attention to the mālguzārs' tenants. They had codified various types of tenancy and had attached to them rights which had not previously been enjoyed by mere cultivators. Many of these rights incorporated the right to divide, transfer and sell land.

In 1870, however, it became apparent that some of the legislation protecting tenants from the whims of the mālguzārs was being ignored (A.R., 1921/2.II: 113), and in that year the government, through the Chief Commissioner, expressed the view that the power of the mālguzārs was still too strong. In 1875, orders were issued which "admitted that the application ... of the mālguzārī system had been a mistake" (loc.cit.; c.f. also Baden-Powell, ibid.: 388). If subordinate rights had been elaborated and protected before this date, they now came under even closer scrutiny (Baden-Powell, loc.cit.). The 1881 Land Revenue Act, passed after "the gradual spread of a settled order throughout the province (had) led to the diffusion of legal knowledge and an increasing facility for obtaining legal advice" (A.R., 1921/22.II: 115) consolidated the rights of tenants to transfer and divide where applicable (Baden-Powell, Ibid.: 485).

And so by the end of the nineteenth century, the principle elements of land tenure arrangements were as follows: mālguzārs, whose rights could be bought and sold, were leaseholders from the government of all or part of village estates. Such estates were held either by a single mālguzār or by separate mālguzārs each with his own part. (In the latter case, one was appointed lambardār and made responsible for revenue collection.) Mālguzārs were required to pay 2/3 of the revenue collected from their tenants to the government (A.R., 1921/2.II: 128). Tenants gave varying amounts of rent to their landlord, the amount depending on their status: Baden-Powell recorded a variation from 50% to 100% of the harvested crop (Op.cit.: 396). They were protected by the government from eviction by landlords, and were able, as were mālguzārs themselves, to transfer, divide and, in many cases, sublet their plots. The land, cultivated in person by a mālguzār was known as khudkasht; whilst his 'home farm', upon which he employed 'free' (i.e. forced) labour was known as sīr.

In 1920 those village landlords who still retained, wholly or in part, revenue exemptions, such as those incorporated in muāfī and ubārī tenures (some of which still attached to the Singhara Thākurs in 1911 (L.S.R., 1911)) were, as the records delicately put it, "enquired into". These "enquiries" proceeded on a yearly basis, the object being to abolish such anomalies. In 1939 the Central Provinces Tenancy Amendment Act curtailed the

the power of the mālguzārs to exact commissions on the transfer of land by their tenants.

The newly independent government of India carried forward land policy in a way that followed on quite logically from that which the British had embarked upon over a century earlier. In 1950 they passed two Acts, the Abolition of Proprietary Rights Act and the Agricultural Raiyats and Tenants Act, which abolished, finally and completely, the mālguzārī system. All tenants were thus brought into the same "direct relationship with government" (C.I., 1951. M.P. VII: 328).

* * *

The administrative reforms described above in general terms were accompanied by other equally radical changes. Communication networks were improved greatly in the region as a whole. The jungle around Singhara was opened up to village traders, and numerous small tribal villages became the subject of their ministrations. An all weather road was built from the village to the district's market centre at Barela and to Jabalpūr city. Increasing use was made of money and moveable wealth (such as ornaments) in economic transactions.

And the Singhs? In the nineteenth century they were not only despotic, but flamboyant and extravagant as well. The scale of their dowries indicates this. They are said to have been energetically profligate. They

built spacious houses and were lavish patrons of village fairs and festivals, conducting their own domestic ceremonies with a spirit of economic abandon. Informants record these occasions as having been opportunities for vast feasts and displays of izzat (honour). The Singhs were 'big men' in every sense, and were addressed in suitably deferential terms: maharāj, mālikjī, dādā; great lord, respected master, grandfather. In short, they seem, as has repeatedly been stressed, to have been fairly typical of the traditional north Indian zamīndār (landlord) of whom has been written that they were "improvident, extravagant, and lacking in any business habits" (Cohn, 1969:187). According to Raychaudhuri, zamīndārs seldom, if ever, engaged in usury (1969: 211). Informants have (wistfully in this latter respect) described similar traits in the Thākurs. Indeed, there is evidence that the Singhs went deeper and deeper into debt themselves as the nineteenth century drew to its end. An entry in the Central Provinces Gazetteer of 1909 recorded that a small town not far away from Singhara "is a place of considerable antiquity and was founded by the Gond Rajas of Mandla. It was originally held by the ancestors of the ubaridārs or quit-rent proprietors of (Singhara); owing to their indebtedness they sold the (town) for Rs 36.000 to the present occupants who are bankers of Jubbulpore city" (1909: 330). How prophetic this is for, as will become apparent from the chapter which follows, there is

a sense in which contemporary Singhara itself has become the property of 'bankers' too. The point is, to put it bluntly, the Singhs were far from the assiduous husbanders of their resources that the earnest men of the East India Company would have perhaps liked them to be. The effect of the British economic reforms, the effect that was intended, was to create a 'rational' economic environment which succeeded in bringing them gradually and inexorably to ruin.

The main beneficiaries of British policy were (as Saberwal (1979) has said in another context) the middle tenants, the mālik-makbuzas and kadīm-kashtars; the economic and administrative structures introduced by the British enabled some of them to progress upwards through a progression of tenancy statuses until they were able to purchase mālguzārī rights themselves.

The first such upwardly mobile person to obtain mālguzārī rights from the Thākurs was a Brahman grain merchant, quite unrelated to the Thākurs. He settled in the village some time between 1850 and 1875. There is a fanciful story, which his descendents like to tell, that he found a pile of buried treasure by the side of the Narbadā river, and started his grain business with the proceeds. But, however he actually came by his original capital, he and his two sons became the first of the successful entrepreneurs who exploited the changing conditions. By the turn of the century the family had obtained 5/16 ("5.10 Annas" according to the L.S.R. of 1911) of the

mālguzārī rights in the village, and one of its members had been appointed a lambardār (see above).

Another conspicuous beneficiary of the new economic environment was a Jain merchant, who began to acquire land shortly after the aforementioned Brahman grain dealer. Both Brahman and Jain capitalised on the demand, by the British, for wheat during the First World War. By 1920, these two families had acquired 5/8 of the mālguzārī rights in Singhara, while the Thākurs in that year held only 3/8 of these rights. From 1920 to 1947, several other families climbed into comparable, if lesser, positions of economic prominence. Notable amongst these were three Sonār (goldsmith) families and a second family of Brahmans. Broadly speaking, it is the descendants of these early socially mobile families who form the core of the economic élite of the village in the ethnographic present.

Conclusion

The purpose of this chapter has been threefold.

Firstly, a brief description of the 'traditional' political economy of Singhara and its region has been given. Because of the rather special history of this part of Madhya Pradesh, the establishment of the (caste encompassed) essentially feudal type of economy, typical of much of India in the pre-British period, was relatively late coming into being. Nevertheless there does not seem any reason

to suppose that the political and economic arrangements obtaining in Singhara by, say, 1800 were different in any substantive way from those which had existed for several centuries before that time in most of north India.⁹ It is taken as axiomatic, therefore, that it was, essentially, this form of political economy which constituted the cradle of the traditional Hindu caste system in north India. In other words, and in terms of the comments on traditional legitimation in the Introduction, it follows that it was this 'traditional' type of political economy to which the caste system had leant its legitimacy: it was this régime which took shelter under the cloak of Dumont's "Lady of Mercy" (see Introduction). Indeed the Thākur mālguzārs of the old order sheltered so snugly under that mantle that one would surely be forgiven for supposing that it had been tailored specifically for them.

Secondly, an outline of the land reforms instituted by the British has been given. The intention of this outline has been to give some idea of the contours of the transformation of Singhara and region from a relatively closed, feudal economy to a relatively open, market one. The crucial aspect of this transformation was the gradual acquisition, by cultivators, of rights in land. Such rights formed (as they still do) the cornerstone of a policy which also made land into a marketable commodity, eliminated forced labour on mālguzārī holdings, placed priority on the construction of new roads, with all the implications

for regional trade which that carried, and encouraged (through its revenue arrangements) the increasing use in the economy of money and similar moveable stores of wealth (such as ornaments). All this had a profound effect on life and society in Singhara, as it is still having. It is the relation of this type of emerging market economy, and its political concomitants, to the traditional visions of the caste system which seems to me to be the most difficult question (and possibly the most important one too) faced by modern Indianists.

Thirdly, some preliminary notes on the theme of traditional legitimation have been sounded (early on in the chapter, and in rather muted form). The British understood the mālguzārī system to be an outrageously exploitative one. An historian wrote of it as "a screen behind which oppression would go on undetected" (Smith, 1958: 637), while the East India Company's agents seemed uniformly of the opinion that the relation between the mālguzārs and ordinary cultivators was unjust and full of antagonism. But to a certain extent such views accord ill with the memories of past events which the villagers themselves have. The dominant impression given in their accounts is not so much of the discontinuities between their cultivating ancestors and the mālguzārs (though that aspect is not entirely absent) but more of the protective and benevolent aspect of the Thākur mālguzārs. But, of course, the greatest testimony to the legitimacy afforded to that

'old world' (dominated as it was by the mālguzārs and their demands) lies in the 'protective shield' of the caste system itself. Within the ideological framework of the caste system, the pain of the antagonisms the British perceived in the political economy of the day gave way to continuity, synthesis and moral unity. Now, although the economic and political structures of Singhara and its district have changed very radically indeed since then, those changes have not (yet) been followed by any kind of obvious conceptual revolution. Or so it seems on the surface. For the present, the 'mantle' of caste seems in place. And in this connection there is a strange little postscript; for there is a sense in which the hero of Singhara's past, as related by village historians, is a surprising one - Dāru Shāh, the wild and terrible bhūmiya with whom all the stores start. Some of his 'descendents' (i.e. Gonds) still live in the village, despised, neglected and, above all, feared. He, and they, represent the antithesis of all that is customary, valued and legitimate. Along with other images - of Pindārī bandits, of ghosts and demons, and other such fearful entities - Dāru Shāh and the Gonds continue to provide, for the moment, the "terror against which the institutional order" (which is to say the caste system) "represents a shield" (Berger and Luckmann, 1966: 119). For "the goldsmith" of the village today, that must be as pleasing a state of affairs as it was for "the Thākur" of the ancien régime.

CHAPTER 2

THE CONTEMPORARY VILLAGE ECONOMY

Introduction: Aims and organisations

The first aim of this chapter is, simply, to present an account of the economic life of the village in the ethnographic present. Apart from being an opportunity to set down some basic data - on agricultural production, land ownership, commerce, and so forth - the chapter also serves as a vehicle for the introduction of each of the castes represented in Singhara (see Table 1).

The second aim, which is more analytical, is to identify those features of the economy which demonstrate its nature as an increasingly 'market' type. The many signs of this include the clearly evident growth of the village market itself, an equally evident increase in the importance of money, a relative decline of caste and caste principles in the organisation of the division of labour, and the rise to a position of economic dominance of a small class of traders and credit merchants, who owe little to the old feudal social structure and everything to those land and other reforms originally enacted by the British, and subsequently built upon by subsequent administrations.

The chapter is organised into three parts. The first part consists of an account of the agricultural sphere of the economy. Data on soil types, the agricultural cycle, and the modes and methods of cultivation are presented. A classification of those who own and work the land is given

TABLE 1 Castes in Singhara

<u>Caste</u>	<u>No. of chūlhās</u> <u>('hearths')</u>	<u>Population</u>	<u>'Traditional'</u> <u>work</u>
Brahman (inc. Brahman/Thākur)	70	462	('Priests')
Kachchi	32	211	Vegetable growers
Telī	25	165	Oil pressers
Maharā	22	150	Agricultural labourers
Sonār	22	140	Goldsmiths
Kumhār	20	132	Potters
Gond	15	100	(Original 'tribal' inhabitants)
Yādav	13	86	Cowherds
Tāmbhakār	12	79	Copper workers
Dhīmar	11	73	Watermen
Darzī	9	60	Tailors
Barhaī	9	58	Carpenters
Domār	7	50	Basket makers
Jain	7	42	Business
Lakherā	6	40	Bangle makers
Chamār	5	33	Shoemakers
Musulmān	4	27	
Dhobī	4	27	Washermen
Kesherwani	4	24	Business
Gedarī	3	20	Goatherds
Nāī	2	12	Barbers
Lohār	2	7	Blacksmiths
Aggarwāl	2	3	Business
Bhangī	1	1	Sweeper
'Other' (inc. 3 chūlhās of mixed caste)	5	23	
Total	<u>312</u>	<u>2025</u>	

and the contours of the relations of agricultural production are traced. One of the minor, but important, themes here is the 'rationalisation' of agricultural techniques and practices in the farms and fields of those who I term 'commercial farmers'.

The second part of the chapter is concerned with caste related occupations. The main purpose of this section is to consider the influence of the caste system in determining the division of labour, and the extent to which that influence is lessening in the modern economy.

The third and final part consists of a consideration of the commercial life of the village. It is clear that the credit merchants of Singhara are the "power holders of a new order", as Wolff has described such a category of people in modern peasant societies in another context (1969:283); the main aim of this section is to outline the nature of that part of the economy over which they have come to preside.

A final preliminary point should be made. The way the chapter is structured demands a small degree of repetition. This seems to me to be unavoidable, for although the organisation of agricultural production, caste related work, and trade may conveniently be treated as separate sub-systems within the overall economy, there are, of course, points at which they overlap. To give one example, the production of singhārā (water-chestnut, the fruit which has inspired the pseudonym I have given to the village) by the Dhīmars (watermen) on the village tanks is at once a caste related occupation and also a commercial activity. Accordingly, such an enterprise deserves consideration in two sections of the chapter rather than one.

Agriculture

The soil of the village's 1302 acres of arable land is classified into four main types: kāli miṭṭī ('black earth'), seherā, patharīlī, and birrā. Fields of the first type, which are relatively few in number, lie beside the two tanks and correspond approximately to the sīr land formerly cultivated by the mālguzārs. Kali miṭṭī is the richest and most productive type of soil, its capacity for holding water being greater than any of the other four types. Fields of only this type are suitable for rice transplantation. A more common soil type is known as seherā. Provided rainfall is sufficient, or adequate irrigation is carried out, this soil holds water well enough to support both a dry and wet season crop. The effect of rain shortage on unirrigated seherā manifests itself earlier than in the naturally richer kāli miṭṭī. In 1974, when the rainfall during the monsoon was an estimated 50% less than usual, the paddy in many of the unirrigated seherā fields dried up, whilst that in the fields of kāli miṭṭī did not. Still less productive and yet more vulnerable to the vagaries of climate, is patharīlī ('stony ground'), which is found mainly in the hilly areas. Although both rice and wheat are grown on this type of soil, the yields of both are low. Land fit only for grazing livestock is known as birrā.

Both dry season (October-March/April) and wet season (June-October) crops, known respectively, throughout most of India as rabi and kharif crops, are grown. The two staple crops are wheat and rice. Apart from wheat, other rabi crops include pulses such as chanā (with which nearly

all the wheat grown is combined), masūr and ālsi; and vegetables, including potatoes, onions, peas, tomatoes, cauliflowers and chilis. Kharīf crops, apart from rice (of which there are several varieties) include oil producing plants such as ramtillā and tillī; ūrad pulse, and other vegetables and fruit such as soya beans, guavas, lady's fingers and water chestnuts.

The agricultural year

The agricultural year begins at the end of April with the festival of Akhtīj (or Akhtī as it is known locally). This is celebrated by pre-adolescent girls performing pūjās (acts of worship) in some of the fields, and a ceremonial ploughing taking place. This latter is a purely token act as the ground is still far too hard for any real ploughing to be done. Tradition has it that rain should fall briefly, for two days, about 15/20 days after Akhtī and that this rain loosens up the soil for more serious ploughing.

The rains proper start just before the middle of June. Before that, the farmers build up the banks of their fields so that the water will be retained for as long as possible in them. As the monsoon begins, the several varieties of rice and other kharīf crops are planted. Rice is normally planted by sprinkling the unhusked paddy (dhān) by hand straight into the field where it is left to grow on its own. In fields of kālī mittī however it is planted first in an enclosed area (bādī) and is later transplanted in the middle of the rainy season. This system (the rōpa (from rōpna, to transplant) system) is more productive than the former method partly because the ground

can be loosened very thoroughly by bullocks before transplantation.

During the monsoon period itself agricultural work, apart from transplanting, is limited to weeding and keeping up the banks around the fields. It is not a busy time.

The monsoon draws to a close in September/October and the kharīf crops are harvested from that time onwards. Paddy is cut into sheaves and is taken to one of the many threshing areas (khalihān). The usual method of threshing consists of the unhusked paddy being heaped up while 6 or 7 bullocks walk slowly round a central pole, grinding the rice grain to the base of the heap. Once the grain and husks have been separated, the paddy is winnowed with a shallow basket (sūpā) and then the rice is put into bags. The threshing season lasts about a month as this process is slow.

Besides being the time for the paddy to be threshed, October/November is also the time for the fields to be ploughed for the second time in the year, allowing the rabī crops to be sown.¹ The period from December to early March, like the monsoon months, is a relatively slack one as far as agricultural work is concerned. The late March/early April harvest of the rabī crops brings the agricultural year to an end (and heralds the beginning of the short but intense marriage season).

It may be appropriate, at this stage, to make two brief comments that arise from the above summary. Firstly, it may be remarked upon that the periods of relatively great agricultural activity in the agricultural year are interspersed with two periods of relative inactivity (from July to early

TABLE 2. * Land ownership

<u>Caste</u>	<u>Acres owned</u>	<u>Average acres per head</u>
1. Aggarwāl	6.18	2.06
2. Brahman	431.48	1.23
3. Thākūr	128.3	1.15
4. Jain	44.73	1.07
5. Sonār	149	1.06
6. Musulmān	26.75	0.99
7. Gedarī	16.57	0.83
8. Nāī	6.44	0.54
9. Darzī	30.42	0.51
10. Dhobī	12.8	0.47
11. Maharā	63.90	0.42
12. Lohār	2.88	0.41
13. Yādav	34.24	0.40
14. Kachchi	70.05	0.33
15. Lakherā	12.74	0.32
16. Barhaī	15.30	0.26
17. Telī	37.18	0.23
18. Chamār	6.72	0.20
19. Tāmbrakār	14.56	0.18
20. 'Other'	2.73	0.12
21. Kumhār	13.77	0.10
22. Gond	9.25	0.09
23. Dhīmar	2.36	0.03
24. Domār	1.23	0.02
25. Kesherwani	-	-
26. Bhangī	-	-
Total	1139.5 **	

* Table compiled from Patvāri's (1980) land records.

** Some of the village land (162.5 acres) is held by the gram panchāyat (village council) and by people from neighbouring villages.

TABLE 3. Machine and Mote* irrigation

<u>Caste</u>	<u>No. of wells with machine pumps</u>	<u>No. of wells with <u>mote</u> irrigation</u>	<u>Acres irrigated</u>	<u>% of (caste's) land irrigated</u>
Tāmbakār	1		5	34%
Musulmān	2		8	30%
Jain	1		12	26.8%
Sonār	3		22	14.8%
Kachchi	1	5	13	14.3%
Thākur	3		12	9.4%
Brahman	4		20	4.6%
Total	15	5	92	(% of Singhara's land irrigated by machine or <u>mote</u>) 8.07%

* The mote system consists of the drawing of water from a well by two bullocks walking down an incline away from the well. Attached to them is a rope which runs over a pulley-wheel and which raises (as the bullocks pull on it) a tin container full of water. The water is tipped out of the container when it reaches the top, and is then poured into specially constructed irrigation channels which lead into the surrounding fields.

September and from late December to mid March). It is in these months of the rainy season and the winter season that most people's budgets are squeezed. Consequently both these periods are ones in which the demand for loans from the moneylenders rises. Secondly, threshing takes so much longer when it is done using the traditional method (which demands the use of a fair quantity of bullocks and labourers) than when it is done with a modern threshing machine. At present there are only two threshing machines in the village, both of which are owned by 'commercial farmers'. Clearly such machines bring benefits to them, but they also represent a threat to the livelihood of others.

Categories of farmer or owner-cultivator

71% of chūlhās ('hearths', but here meaning family unit (see chapter 4)) possess some land which is cultivable (see Tables 2 and 3). Only about 27% of chūlhās own enough land to be able to feed themselves from agricultural production alone. Some of the members of those chūlhās which fall into this latter category are also businessmen for whom agriculture is only a part of more extensive enterprises. Thus the percentage of families who rely solely on cultivation of their own land for their income is considerably lower than this figure. Thus nearly three quarters of all families lack sufficient land to feed themselves from owner-cultivation alone and have to supplement their income from other sources.

An attempt will now be made to classify, in a necessarily broad way, four types of owner-cultivator (see Table 4).

TABLE 4 Income Distribution

Moneylenders-Commercial farmers- Extensive Traders	Yearly family income Rs380,000 (£21,000)+	(1.9%) 6ch's	4Son-1Ja-1Br -----
1a			
Moneylenders-Commercial Farmers- Traders	silver/gold cloth grain/food Rs22,500(£1,250)- brassware Rs150,000(£8,300)	(3.3%) 10ch's	5Son-2Br-1Ja-1Mus-1Tam -----
1b			
'Traditional' Large Scale Farmers- Traders	silver food cloth brassware Rs6,500 (£361)- Rs22,500(£1,250)	(5.8%) 18 chūlhās	9Br-3Mus-3Tel-1Ja-1Tam-1Son -----
2a			
'Traditional' Medium Scale Farmers- Traders - 2 or more salaries			39Br-11Tel-7Kac-6Son-5Dar-4Kesh- 3Mah-2Ja-2Kum-1Ged-1Nāi-1Dho- 1Agg-1Gon -----
2b			
Small holders + Wage/Salary earners			
Petty Traders - Veg & fruit (often associated - Grain with caste - Woodwork specialisms) - Tailoring	Rs4000 (£222) -Rs6500 (£361)	(27%) 84 chūlhās	18Br-13Kac-11Tel-7Tam-6Mah- 6Bar-6Son-6Kum-4Dhi-4Dar-3Lak- 2Ged-2Loh-2Ja-1Nāi-1Dho-1Agg- 1'other' -----
3			
Landless (or nearly so) Daily labourers	Rs2630 (£146) -Rs4000 (£222)	(30%) 94 chūlhās	14Gon-13Yad-13Mah-12Kum-12Kac- 7Dom-7Dhi-5Cha-3Lak-3Bar- 3Tam-2Dho-1Br-1Bha-3'others' -----
very petty trade			
4			
	Rs 2630 (£146) and below	(32%) 99 chūlhās	
			8 ----- 3

1. 'Commercial farmers' (see Table 5)

The most efficient farmers in Singhara, of whom there are about 16 (falling into economic categories 1a and 1b on Table 4) are those for whom agriculture forms only one part of more inclusive businesses. There are at least five aspects of their agricultural practice which set them apart from all other farmers in the village. Firstly, many of them own wells with machine pumps for irrigation, and those of them who do not are in the process of acquiring them. Secondly, apart from one or two farmers in category 2a, the 'commercial farmers' are the only agriculturalists in the village to use chemical fertilizer. Thirdly, many of them have already built, or are in the process of building, storage facilities for grain. This allows them to sell their produce at a time of year when prices are highest. Fourthly, their relationship with those who work on their land is also distinctive: whilst many of those in categories 2a and 2b make sharecropping arrangements (which does not necessarily exclude the possibility of them hiring daily labourers as well), the 'commercial farmers' use daily labourers exclusively. Finally, while others may plant several varieties of crop in the same field at the same time (see below), the 'commercial farmers' tend to grow only the staples rice and wheat/chanā. This particular practice would seem to be rooted in their distinctive orientation towards a 'rational' form of agricultural production.

This category of agriculturalist may be seen as the 'fruit', so to speak, of the kind of policy towards agriculture and agricultural relations which I have outlined

TABLE 5 Outline of the income of a merchant/commercial farmer from economic category 1a* (see table 4).

<u>Source of income and explanation</u>	<u>Yearly income</u>
<u>Agriculture</u>	
With a landholding of 35 acres, 15 acres of which is irrigated, and a yield of 195 quintals (19.500 KG) of wheat and no marketable yield of paddy, and subtracting 95 quintals for domestic consumption, payments to servants and labourers, etc, <u>sells</u> 100 quintals of wheat @ Rs 2 per KG**:	20.000
<u>Business (cloth, food/grain or silver***)</u>	
Attends five fairs (<u>melas</u>) per year, making an estimated Rs 8.000 profit at each one:	40.000
Attends three village markets per week, making an estimated profit of Rs 1000 at each one:	156.000
<u>Moneylending</u>	
The six main moneylenders in Singhara draw clients from some 50 villages <u>each</u> . The average population of the hundreds of villages in Singhara's hinterland is 300. Assuming that 32 of a possible 50 households in these borrow at some time during the year (which is a <u>deliberately conservative estimate</u>) each of the big moneylenders serves at least 1600 people. The size of loans varies from about Rs 100 - Rs 2000. For the sake of this calculation we may assume an average loan of Rs 500. The period of the loan also varies but, for reasons explained in the text (and also, by implication, in Table 9 which indicates that the four months December-March and also July and August are 'low' points in the agricultural year when pressure to borrow is greatest), it may be assumed that loans are typically taken for a period of six months (although this again seriously underestimates what is known to be the case in many instances in which loans are taken for much longer periods). Assuming an annual interest rate of 40% (it is frequently much higher) the income to one of these big moneylenders, from interest payments alone:	160.000
<u>Other</u>	
(See various points in the text)	4.000
Total Rs	380.000

* The sources of income of those in category 1b are, broadly speaking, similar to those in category 1a, although the amounts of income are less.

** The price of wheat varies according to season and quality of harvest from below Rs 1.50 per KG to above 2.50 per KG. Since many of the 'commercial farmers' deliberately wait to sell their wheat stocks until the price is high it seems a perfectly fair assumption that the average price per KG they sell it at is Rs 2.

*** The 'composite' person whose income is described here is not necessarily a goldsmith. I estimate that the yearly income accruing to the principal gold and silver merchants from trade in silver alone (i.e. not including separate moneylending activities) may approach, or even exceed, Rs 250.000.

in the latter part of the previous chapter. It was argued there that the aim of the British in this regard included the creation of a 'rational' and more productive class of capitalist farmer. It was also suggested that the policies of the post independence Indian governments did not take a different course, but rather consolidated it.² Both colonial and Independent governments placed emphasis upon the destruction of the old feudal order, and in so far as there are no Thākurs in either of the top two economic categories of Table 4, this aim has clearly been partially fulfilled. Furthermore, it is of considerable interest that some of the 'commercial farmers' of Singhara are quite articulate about their role as leaders of Indian agricultural development (O.U./B.B.C. 1981), and indeed it may readily be agreed that in the respects outlined above they are exactly that. A question which does remain though, not just for Singhara but for India as a whole, is whether this process of development which has produced such a 'vanguard' of a future Green Revolution can eventually encompass a much broader section of the population than it has done so far. There are those (e.g. Singh 1961 for example) who believe the answer may be a negative one.

2. Traditional farmers with large plots (see Table 6).

Included in the category of farmers who produce some marketable surpluses are several whose families were the traditional landowners. This is reflected in the fact that 50% of the 18 households I place in this category (i.e. 2a of Table 4) are either Thākurs or Brahmans. Amongst these

TABLE 6. Outline of the incomes of 'traditional' large and medium scale farmers from economic categories 2a and 2b*

Category 2a

Agriculture

With a landholding of 40 acres of good unirrigated land, some of it kali mitti, suitable for paddy growing and transplanting, produces 120 quintals of wheat worth approx.: 19.200

Produces 100 quintals of paddy (50 quintals of rice) worth approx.: 12.500

Other**

Owns an electric flour mill which makes a profit of between 10 - 15 rupees per day (say 12.50): 4.550

Total 36.250

Category 2b

Agriculture

With a landholding of 15 acres medium quality unirrigated land produces 20 quintals of wheat worth approximately: 3.200

Produces 10 quintals of paddy (5 quintals of rice) worth approx.: 2.500

Remittances

From two wage/salary earners in the family: 1.000

Other

Head of household employed in the weekly village market: 7.780

Total Rs 7.480

* These figures represent the total income received, before deduction of expenditure for the family's own consumption or for their payments to servants etc. In Table 5, in keeping with the desire to underestimate the income of those in category 1, such expenditure has been deducted. Tables 7 and 8 assume no deductions either.

** The ownership of a flour mill is presented here merely as an illustration of the sort of source of extra income enjoyed by persons in this economic category.

families there are several for whom cultivation is a full time occupation and the source of most, if not all, of the yearly income. For example, M., a prominent Brahman, whose forebear inherited land from a Thākur, holds 50 acres of land (part kālī mittī part irrigated seherā and part unirrigated seherā) from which he derives a yield of approximately 8000 kg of wheat and 9000 k.g. of rice in a reasonably good year. He is able to sell about 4000 kg and 2800 kg of each on the market. This may seem, as indeed it is, a healthy enough surplus. It seems to be the case, however, that nearly all the farmers with similarly substantial looking surpluses of agricultural production, who are primarily cultivators (rather than primarily businessmen in non agricultural enterprises) are subject to periodic spells of indebtedness. The reasons for this are familiar enough and are grounded in the need (particularly by high caste traditional farmers and especially by the Thākurs) to spend considerable sums on domestic rites of passage, the foremost example of which is marriage. (Comparable reports are common-place; e.g. Neale 1962:187; Moulik 1975:103; A.V.A.R.D. 1978:81.)

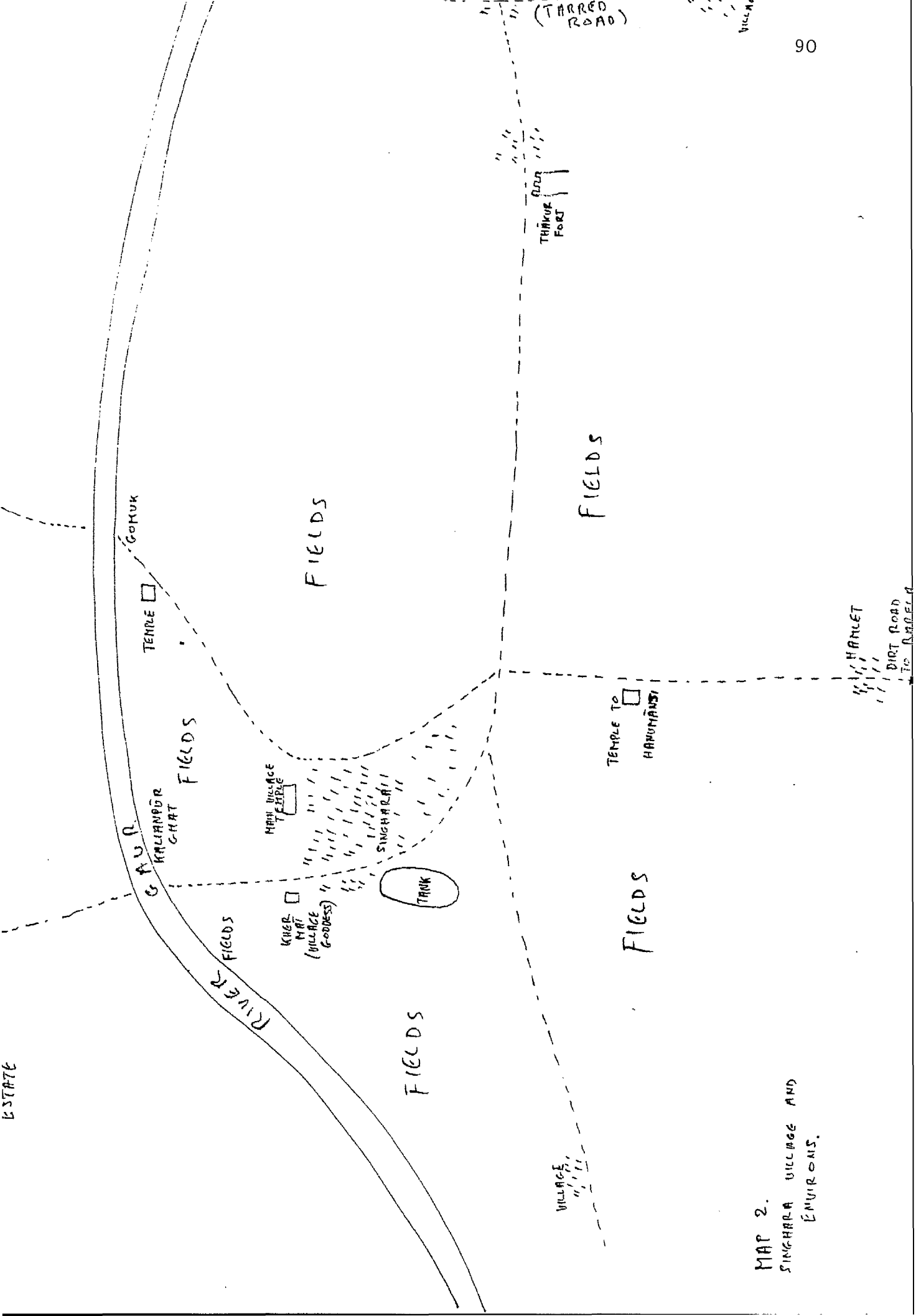
3. 'Traditional' farmers with medium sized plots

A second Brahman, whose ancestors were amongst the first to come to the village in the early nineteenth century, provides us with a good example of a third category of owner cultivator. Into this category are placed those farmers who produce enough for their subsistence needs but who do not produce surpluses on any scale (though, as in this case, they

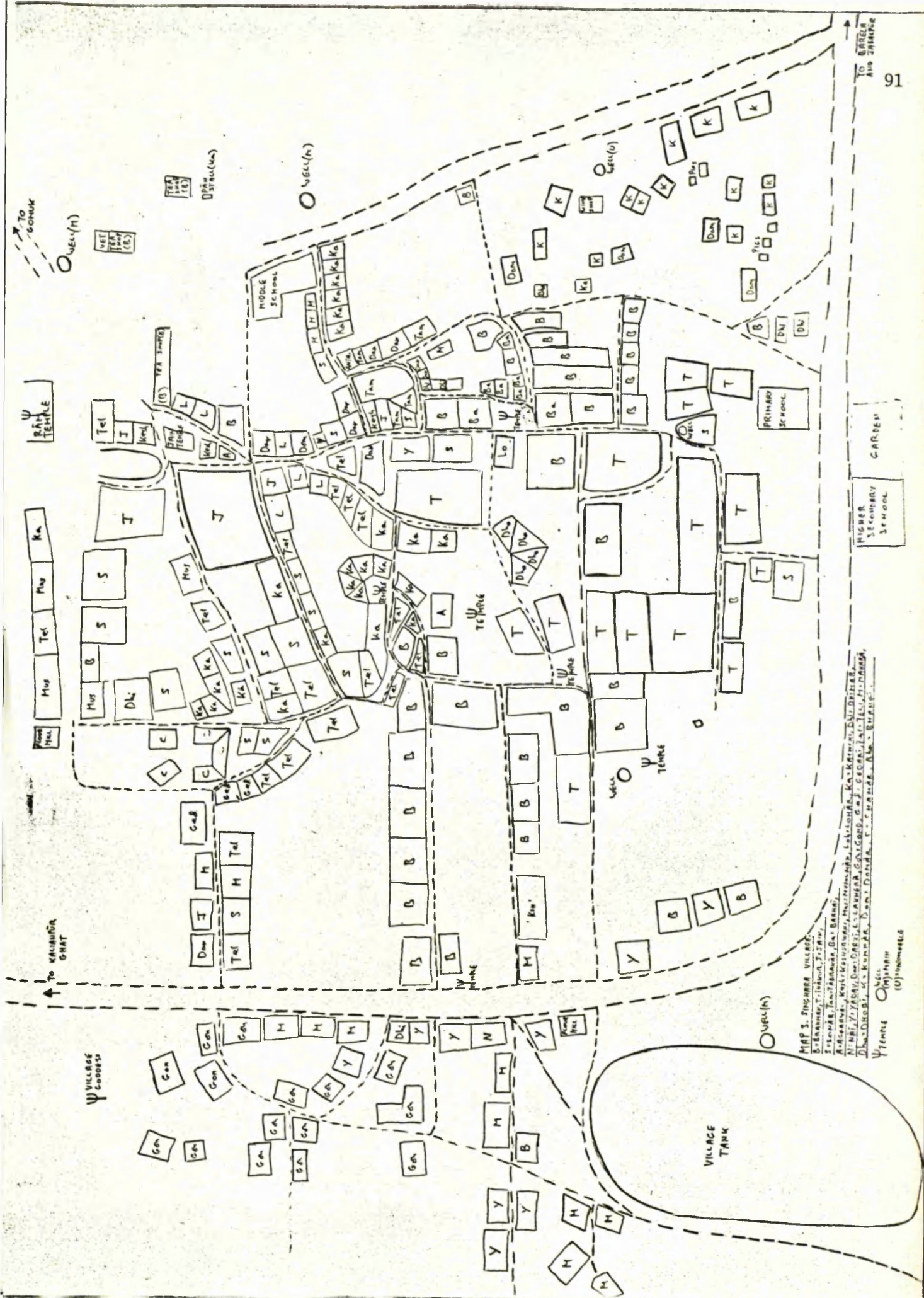
may produce petty amounts of cash crops).

G's farm consists of 15 acres of medium quality unirrigated seherā land. Both wheat and rice are grown for his family's own subsistence needs and not as cash crops. In an average year the harvest from this farm amounts to about 2000 kg of wheat and 1000 kg of paddy (i.e. 500 kg husked rice). Part of this yield goes to servants, part as seed for the following year's crop, and the remainder as food for the family. Thus no wheat or rice is sold, although other cash crops are. For example, in the wet season about five oil producing plants and pulses (ram tillā, tillī, arhar, urad and mūng) as well as ground nuts (mūng phali) are grown. Each of these is planted, tended and harvested separately, at slightly different times, and a modest profit is normally made. As is characteristic of cultivators in this and the following category, the crops in G's fields are grown in patches next to each other (i.e. each field contains several crop varieties). Fields such as these look very different from the one crop fields of the 'commercial farmers'; some of the implications of the difference between them will be discussed below.

There is one other important general point that may be made about farmers in this category (as well, to a lesser extent, about those in the previous one) by means of a particular example from G's farm. Approximately half of G's landholding lies along the bank of the Gaur river (see map 2). This river usually flows throughout the whole year and therefore constitutes a possible source of irrigation for the fields along its bank. G. acquired a pump set in 1970 and, at the time of field research, was faced with a decision



MAP 2.
SINGHARA VILLAGE AND
ENVIRONS.



whether or not to spend Rs 5000 on purchasing pipes and other equipment. This money could have been borrowed from the Co-operative Society and, G. claimed convincingly, would have increased the yield on his farm fourfold. However, instead, he chose to borrow Rs 5000 from a private money-lender at 25% yearly interest (which is relatively low by comparison with some of the rates charged) to pay for the marriage celebrations of his daughter.

This decision (which I believe to be quite representative) is not recorded in order to indicate any sympathy with the view, prominent in western sociology since Max Weber³ that the Indian peasant is 'irrational' in any absolute sense. However there is a general point that may legitimately be made. There are several landowners in this category of owner-cultivators whose holdings are declining in size as parts of them are sold off to raise cash. The main reason for this⁴ lies in the perennial strain that is placed on the economies of the old agrarian élite and their allies - that is to say Thākūr and Brahman families - by the demands made on them by the cost of domestic rituals, especially and pre-eminently marriage, the expenses of which are very high. In this respect the traditional farmers may be said to be on the horns of a dilemma which flows from the 'rationalisation' of the economy to which I have referred and to which I will return. High caste landowners such as G., and other traditional farmers, are faced with the fact that their social prestige and political influence depends upon substantial investment in conspicuous consumption. As Van der Veen puts it "...the Kshatriya⁵... must emphatically demonstrate his power to sway secular affairs; conspicuous

consumption and impressive behaviour are intrinsic parts of the Kshatriya model" (1972:24). Such investment may, as this example indicates, conflict with investment in agriculture, and is therefore very likely to have an adverse effect upon production. Further investment in 'prestige' may thus become possible only after funds for it have been raised from capital sales. And so the land-holdings of the old élite come under pressure.⁶ The 'commercial farmers' give large feasts and big marriage parties too. They build, are building, impressive pakkā (in this context, brick) houses and they engage in other forms of conspicuous consumption. In their case however such behaviour does not conflict with but, rather, derives (in a historical sense) from a comparatively austere approach to living.⁷

4. Smallholders (see Table 7)

The fourth category of owner-cultivators in Singhara consists of all those who own some land, but too little of it to meet their yearly subsistence needs. The factors that link the diverse individuals in this category include the possession of plots of (generally) medium to poor quality, unirrigated, unfertilized land; a greater dependence than those in categories 1, 2 or 3 on the climate; an absolute need to augment their income from cultivation by means other than agricultural production.

The broad and rather general categories which I have used here to classify agricultural producers have been based on a combination of factors that include (principally)

TABLE 7. Outline of the income of a carpenter/smallholder from economic category 3.

<u>Source of income and explanation</u>	<u>Yearly income</u>
<u>Agriculture</u>	
Owens 7 acres of bad unirrigated land, only 4 acres of which is suitable for crop production. Produces 12 quintals of wheat	1920
<u>'Kisān' work</u> (i.e. work for 15 regular patrons making ploughs, wooden harnesses for bullocks, etc.) From each patron he receives about 18 KG of wheat and about 10 KG of paddy (5 KG rice): For some of his patrons (<u>māliks</u>) he makes wedding poles and a variety of other ritual artifacts. For these he is paid separately and in cash:	619.5 200
<u>'Free lance' carpentry work</u> Apart from the work he does for his regular patrons the carpenter also makes other items which he sells (to anybody who wants to buy them). Chief amongst these are wooden cots and doors, for which he receives about Rs 800 and Rs 375 respectively in an average year:	1175
<u>House building</u> Works as daily labourer on some 4 - 6 new houses during the year for about 4½ days on each. The rate for a carpenter for such work is Rs 10 per cash per day:	225
<u>Other work as a daily labourer</u> During the year he (and occasionally his wife) do about two months of daily labour of various kinds:	600
	<hr/>
	Total Rs 4539.5

the size of holdings, the presence or absence of irrigation, the use or non use of fertilizer, and a style of cultivation which we will consider again shortly. This classification seems - despite its baldness - to have some heuristic value. A more exact classification follows after consideration of the economic activity of the village in toto.

There is one group of agriculturalists not included in the above categorisation, whose members merit a special mention. This group consists of families belonging to the kachchi caste, many of whom are, to use our terminology, market gardeners.

5. Kachchi market gardeners - specialist cultivators

Nearly all the 32 families of Kachchis own plots of land of an average size of two acres. Most of these plots are of good quality kāli miṭṭī and about half the plots are irrigated by the mote system (see Table 3). The Kachchis grow a large variety of vegetables including potatoes (ālū), onions (piāj), white radishes (mūlī), peas (matar), spinach (bhājī) of various kinds, coriander (dhaniya) and other aromatic herbs, chilis (mīrch), tomatoes (tamātar), egg plants (bhantā), lady's fingers (bhindī), cabbage/cauliflower (gobhī), marrow (loncī), garlic (lasun), yams (shuklā), and fruits such as guava (bihi), bananas (kelā) and limes (nimbū).. to mention the most important types.

The majority of vegetable sellers in the Singhara market are Kachchis, and the same is true in the other village markets in the vicinity to which the Singhara Kachchis go. They also travel to villages lacking markets and sell their

produce to individual households there. Thus the Kachchis are predominantly growers and traders in vegetables, although some Kachchi families do grow wheat and rice, for their own consumption, as well.

It is of considerable interest that the Kachchi community in Singhara is a particularly close knit one, a fact which has to do with the demands of vegetable production. The cultivation of a vegetable garden demands markedly more intensive labour than the cultivation of grain. This is met by women of Kachchi families, and not by daily labourers hired from outside the family. The other reason that this group is relatively close knit is that the intensive irrigation required for their gardens can be provided only under conditions of close co-operation between different families. (Thus, for example, while two gardens may be managed separately - by two separate families - both gardens may share one well). Of course co-operation exists between separate families in other castes too. But then so does wholesale non-co-operation.

Categories of agricultural labourer: sharecroppers and daily labourers (see Table 8)

The most efficient farms are cultivated mainly by daily labourers (mazdūr) under the supervision of the farm owner. Medium sized plots, owned by those whom I have termed 'traditional farmers', are worked in the same way, but are frequently also the subject of sharecropping arrangements. Small plots are usually cultivated by the owners themselves. Apart from sharecroppers and daily labourers, there are various other types of worker on the land. These

TABLE 8. Outline of the income of a Gond daily labourer,* with a family of five, from economic category 4.

<u>Month</u>	<u>Work description</u>	<u>No. of days worked</u>	<u>Rate</u>	<u>Total</u>
May	Boundary making	15 days for 4 people	Rs 2 per man	120
June	Ploughing and sowing paddy (owns 2 ploughs)	25 days	Rs 10 per plough per day	250
July	Transplanting & cleaning paddy	20 days for 5 people	Rs 2.5 per man per day	250
August	"	16 days for 5 people	"	200
September	Harvesting (paddy)	25 days for 5 people	Rates on <u>thekā</u> basis (see text); works out at 3 KG paddy per day per man. Worth:	375
October/ November	Harvesting (<u>kodon</u> & <u>kutki</u>)	15 days for 2 people	Rs 2 per man per day	60
	Ploughing	16 days for 2 ploughs	Rs 10 per plough p.day	320
	Ploughing & sowing wheat	10 days for 1 plough	"	100
December	Grass cutting	15 days for 2 people	Rs 2 per day	60
January	(Very little work in the village normally) Because of an exceptionally bad monsoon and grain harvest, the year before,** <u>government work</u> was provided by the state administration. Road building.	25 days for five	2KG wheat + R. 0.75 per man per day - i.e. 250 KG wheat + 93.75	469
February	Because of political and administrative 'blockages' the govt. work promised was not forthcoming***	Small odd jobs with bullock cart		110
March	"	"		100
(end March/ April	Harvesting (wheat)	25 days for 5 people	Rates on <u>thekā</u> basis, works out at 1.2KG wheat (Rs 1.8) per person p.day	216

* This table is based on the actual work of an actual Gond (cross checked against other information on other daily labourers to ensure its representative character). Total Rs 2630

** It so happened that in both periods of field research a very similar set of circumstances took place in this regard.

*** Such 'blockages' are not uncommon.

include permanent servants (naukar), and bonded labourers (bāra māsi) (i.e. those who borrow from moneylenders against promise of future work for them). It is mainly sharecroppers and daily labourers with which the following is concerned.

As has been recorded, tenancy agreements such as those in existence before the two Acts of 1950 have been abolished. Thus there are, strictly speaking, no 'tenants'. Successive governments have tried to encourage owner-cultivation and to limit 'landlordism' - through implementation of land ceilings, for example. It would seem, however, that the existing sharecropping arrangements have, to some extent, emerged from the old tenancy agreements. Sharecropping (adhiyan, half share) takes the form of the landowner handing over part of his land to someone else, who either supplies both seeds and labour or (in the case of the landlord supplying the seeds) merely the labour. At harvest time landlord and sharecropper halve the yield (the former having first taken his 'interest' on the seeds if he originally supplied them). Take the example of a landowner giving a sharecropper 50 k.g. of paddy. For four months, from the first ploughing until the crop is harvested, the sharecropper is expected to supply all labour - ploughing, planting and weeding - in return for half the yield left after the owner takes his seed 'capital' and the interest upon it. The agreement does not cover the labour associated with threshing, for which sharecroppers of this kind receive an extra amount of grain or cash at the rate of a daily labourer.

Sharecroppers have one advantage over daily labourers,

namely a relatively greater security. The disadvantage is that, while daily labour may provide a daily income (assuming of course that there is work), sharecropping does not. This means that sharecroppers almost inevitably require credit at certain times of the year. Most frequently such credit comes from private sources and involves considerable interest payments. Taking this interest as well as other expenses incurred during the months that the crop is growing into account,⁸ the margin of advantage that a sharecropper has over a daily labourer appears narrow. The landowners who make sharecropping agreements with others do so principally because they lack the liquid capital to hire labourers on a daily basis. There are also a number of landlords who have made such agreements because of their absence from the village.⁹ The most efficient farmers do not let out their fields to sharecroppers.

About 50% of the population of Singhara work as daily labourers (mazdūr) for some part of the year. About 32% of the population depend upon daily labour payments for their livelihood. The relationship between landlord and mazdūr is essentially short term, in which respect it varies somewhat from that between landlord and sharecropper. There is a large pool of potential daily labourers in and around the village (farmers hire mazdūr from neighbouring settlements as well as from the village itself). These two factors determine that the employment of daily labourers is finely tuned to the demands of the agricultural cycle and the beneficence or malevolence of the weather. A measure of the insecurity of daily labourers became apparent in

the winter of 1974/5 after the poor monsoon to which reference has been made. Although the state government provided relief employment on the roads of the area, many of those mainly dependent on wages from daily labour suffered noticeable changes and reductions in their diet. Indeed, as will be seen in chapter 8, these matters entered into the political debates of the 1975 election.

There are two modes of payment to daily labourers. A direct cash payment of about Rs 2½ for men and Rs 1½ for women is one. A piecework system is another. In the latter case, a farmer agrees to pay a certain sum in cash or kind after the completion of a particular operation, and the labourer may do the work when and with whom he pleases. In the former case, the landlord maintains strict supervision to ensure that the work is carried out continuously.

Summary

The two features of the foregoing upon which I would like to lay emphasis, because they help us to develop some of the main themes of this thesis, concern the distinctiveness of the 'commercial farmers'. Firstly, as has been indicated, owner-cultivators in this category tend to confine their agricultural production to the main crops of the area, wheat (with chanā) and rice, whilst the majority of the other cultivators tend to grow several varieties of crop, often in the same field. Secondly, as also noted, the 'commercial farmers' tend to use (exclusively) daily labourers in their fields, whilst others tend to use a mixture of daily labourers, sharecroppers, or their own, or

their family's, labour. Let us briefly consider each of these in turn.

There are sound practical reasons, as well as historical ones, for crop diversification. On an unirrigated farm, the risks of harvest failure are mitigated by growing several varieties of crop rather than a single one. For example, it is well recognised by the villagers that some rice varieties of inferior gastronomic and market value (kodon and samā to name two) are more resistant to drought than other more valued and valuable varieties. The same is true of other agricultural produce. Thus, in the event of a monsoon failure, a cultivator who has planted a range of different crops may be left with at least some of the hardier ones, rather than none at all. A second reason why most cultivators grow several crop varieties is that the labour required to plant and harvest them may be spread more evenly over a greater time span than is possible on a one crop farm. This is illustrated by the example presented above: each of those kharīf crops, grown together in one field, are planted and harvested separately, one after the other, by the same sharecropper (to whom part of this particular farm is let). Srinivas (1977:130) draws attention to a precisely similar feature of south Indian agriculture.

Apart from these reasons, and assuredly there are others (linked to the demands of a culturally complex palate, for example)¹⁰ the practice of cultivating a profusion of grain and vegetable types, with the resulting patchwork quality of much of the arable land in the village, has obvious and straightforward historical referents, as the comments on the complexities of nineteenth century tenancy arrangements

in chapter 1 implied. It appears to have been the practice of pre-Independence tenants and landowners alike to cultivate extremely small areas of land separately. Consequently, any one expanse of land was likely to have displayed the same complex pattern of crop clusters that many of them do now.

As to the greater use that is made of daily labourers, paid in cash or kind, by the 'commercial farmers' - which is perhaps part of a general (pan Indian) phenomenon of the rise in numbers of this class of agrarian worker,¹¹ several observations may be made. A cause, as well as a consequence, of the phenomenon is the substantially increased amounts of liquid funds that have been accruing to the 'commercial farmers' since the turn of the century, a flow considerably accelerated after Independence. A merchant taking Rs 3000 cash during a normal week's market (not to mention any other form of business) has neither need nor incentive to enter into those piecework or sharecropping agreements that are, as I have indicated, perfectly rational arrangements from the point of view of a cultivator faced with the combination of climatic uncertainty, limited liquid capital and relatively heavy demands for prestige expenditure.

Taken together these two features may be added to others (such as the use made by the 'commercial farmers' of machine irrigation and fertilizer) to give a picture of a fairly distinctive set of agrarian practices. Practices such as these are some of the signs of the thoroughgoing transformation of Singhara's economy from a feudal one, dominated by the Thākur mālguzārs, to a modern capitalist one, dominated (in a rather different way) by the 'commercial farmers'.¹²

Caste-related Occupations

Jan Bremen has argued that much of the anthropological literature on rural India has tended to overstate the importance to the economy of occupations deriving from caste membership, at the expense of the activities and "...relations involved in the organisation of agrarian production" (1974,XIII). There is a good deal of truth in this observation, but it does remain the case that most caste groups in a village such as Singhara are associated with particular forms of work, and it is to these that I now turn.

There is, in my view one important reason, beside the purely ethnographic one, for considering caste-related occupations carefully. This may be stated in two parts. In the first place, I have argued, both in the Introduction and in chapter 1, that the importance of caste-related occupations in the traditional economy were primarily symbolic, and that the really vital occupations, those connected with agricultural production, were never tied to caste to the same extent that occupations (such as cutting hair, carrying water, washing clothes, and so forth) which were the province of particular castes - and those alone - were. This is to say no more than that it is analytically necessary to treat the caste system and the system of agricultural production as interconnected but essentially separate systems.

That said, however, it would be a grave mistake to regard the caste system, the occupations associated with caste affiliations, and the economic relations which flowed from them, as being devoid of any significance for the 'real'

economy. Clearly a nineteenth century Dhobi who worked both as a caste specialist - as a washerman-and as an agricultural labourer for the traditional landowners, was 'locked into' his position in the society by both his caste affiliation and by the nature of his place in the agricultural economy. In this regard Saberwal's notion of the "twice-locked mass" of Colonial India (1979:260) is an analytically useful one. But, in the second place, with the gradual gaining of control by some caste specialists over their own materials, and with the increasing opportunities which such control present for converting 'caste work' into cash, and then into land and political power, some of the economic restrictions imposed by the traditional exigencies of the caste system have, clearly, begun to be lifted. There is evidence, in other words, that some caste occupations are 'breaking free' from their caste associations and are emerging into an ever more pervasive market economy in the form of occupations whose modus operandi is determined by that market economy rather than by caste rules and practices. Part of the purpose behind this examination of caste-related occupations is, thus, to assess the degree to which this type of transformation has, in fact, taken place, (or is, indeed, taking place now).

The relationship between caste and occupation is a complex one and the degree to which the former enters into the organisation of the latter varies considerably from caste to caste. I propose, therefore, to consider each caste in turn. I have found it useful to structure the description around certain questions, which are fairly standard fare in village ethnographies (c.f. Mayer, 1960:61).

They are as follows: What, in each case, is the significance of caste in determining and/or organising occupations? Some occupations are linked to caste in a very direct and obvious way; what is the significance of such occupations to the economies of each caste and to the economy of the village as a whole? To what extent are caste-related occupations carried out in the context of long term relationships between the producers and consumers of the goods and services associated with them? What role does the 'market' have in structuring the relationship between producers and consumers of caste-related goods and services?

Although these questions are stated separately here, the problem is really a single one, namely that of determining the place of caste-related occupations in the village economy and of describing the mode in which they are carried out.

Brahman

In the previous chapter, it was recorded that the first Brahmans to settle in Singhara were forefathers of the Upādhyāya family who were invited by the Thākurs to become the village pandits. It is still the case that only members of this one Brahman lineage act as pandits at domestic rituals in the village. The temple pūjārī (guardian of the temple) is also drawn from this lineage alone.

The duties of the pandits include officiating at ceremonies associated with marriage, birth and death. They are paid in cash for each performance of such rituals.

During the two months or so during which marriages may be carried out the three elder pandits (the heads of the three Upādhyāya households) work practically every night. Their catchment area is large, and extends into the hinterland around the village. The rate for each marriage is Rs. 25. The pandits are also called upon to cook at all those inter-caste feasts at which Brahmans are to be present.

The pandits, as well as members of other Brahman families, provide a whole range of other services. These include fortune telling, medical treatment,¹³ the exorcism of ghosts and other malevolent spirits, the conducting of devotional gatherings (often of a musical nature such as kīrtans and bhagats (c.f. chapter 7) designed to bestow fortune on a new business, auspiciousness on a new house, protection from illness, and so on.

The three pandit households share out their clients in such a way that each has a similar mixture of rich and poor families within its sphere of operation. Since the Upādhyāya family is, and always has been, alone amongst Brahmans in working as pandits, they necessarily enjoy long term relationships with the families they serve.

A significant amount of the Upādhyāya lineage's members' income comes from their work as pandits, although they are also farmers. But the members of all the other Brahman families derive small and relatively insignificant financial benefits from work deriving directly from their caste status as Brahmans. The majority are either farmers or employees in the modern economy, and they derive their income from these sources rather than any work associated directly with their caste.

Baniā castes

The names Jain, Kesherwani and Aggarwāl are names of merchant families belonging to Baniā (vanij (skt), merchant) castes. Of the Jains, one (referred to in the first chapter) is a cloth merchant, farmer and moneylender. Another is a grocer-cum-doctor. The Kesherwanis are all grocers and Aggarwāl is a freelance merchant of many parts (for example, he leases the marketplace from the village council and collects weekly rents from individual stall-holders). As none of these business activities is restricted in either theory or practice to members of Baniā castes, it cannot really be said that these occupations are linked, in the contemporary economy at any rate, directly to caste. There are Brahman and Telī grocers, Darzī and Dhobī cloth merchants and petty traders, and pedlars from all castes: the constraints against starting up in business have very little to do with membership or non-membership of a Baniā caste. If constraints do exist they derive from wider principles; an Untouchable would not be able to become a grocer, a Darzī would not be able to open a tea stall (because of the demands of the commensal rules), but there is nothing to prevent an Untouchable becoming a brick contractor, or a Darzī becoming a cloth merchant.

To these Baniā castes may be added the four Musulmān families who are tobacco and grain dealers, shop owners, and cultivators.

Sonār

The caste name Sonār is derived from the Sanskrit suvarṇa kārā meaning worker in gold (Russell 1916, IV:517). Before considering the activities of the members of this caste, it is useful to say a few words about the place of gold and silver in the socio-economic life of the village.

Women's ornaments of silver and gold, such as anklets, bracelets, earrings and the like, play a significant role in Singhara for two distinct reasons. The first has to do with honour. To possess and display ornaments brings a woman (and her close male kin and affines) status and prestige. Such ornaments form a portion of the collection of gifts that are presented by a bridegroom's family to the bride at her marriage. They constitute the most valuable part of a woman's personal property. Their cultural value may be illustrated by the following marriage song:

"Up to now she was with us; from tomorrow she will be apart. This is the custom of the world.

bindī (a gold locket) is on the forehead of banni (a bride); in every part bidāī (the departure of the newly wed bride from her natal home to that of her husband) is written.

This is the custom of the world.

Kān kī bālī (earrings) are in the ears of banni - in every part bidāī is written: this is the custom of the world.

Kangan (bracelets) of gold are in the hand of banni - in every part bidāī is written; this is the custom of the world.

Sari is on the body of banni ... etc.

Up to this time she was with us ... etc.

Pyāl (anklets) are on the legs of banni - on every part
bidāi is written ...

Up to this time ... etc."

This song gives some idea of the type of ornaments that are worn by women and the significance that they have.

Other articles of importance include necklaces (hār), waistbelts (kardhan), and silver wristlets (gajjarā). Most of these ornaments are made of silver, some of gold. All are valued objects to women of all castes (including Gonds).

Ornaments such as these have become the standard objects against which cash loans are given by private money-lenders, and it is in this role that they occupy a central place in the village economy.

Members of the twelve Svarnakār Sonār¹⁴ households deal in ornaments in several different ways. They buy ornaments in Jabalpūr silver market and sell them in Singhara. They also alter and restore ornaments, as well as buying them from villagers, melting them down and selling the metal in the Jabalpūr market as silver bars.

The Sonārs' involvement with gold and silver ornaments has been a significant factor in their sharp upward mobility during the last few decades. But, although they are the only people to actually make and restore ornaments, they are no longer the only caste to trade in silver. Two Brahmans have recently begun to trade actively in gold and silver, and the slightly curious sight of them sitting alongside the Sonārs, behind sacks spread out on the ground

with silver waistbelts and anklets arranged on top, may be witnessed regularly at local fairs and village markets. There seems every reason to suppose that the number of Brahmans and others trading in these objects will increase. Indeed there is no apparent reason to think that trading in gold and silver ornaments is an activity circumscribed by caste at all. Apart from Sonārs and Brahmans, some Tāmbakārs (see below) have also started to trade in silver.

Half a century ago the Sonārs were no more than smallholders and sharecroppers, who also acted as clients for wealthy patrons in much the same way as Darzīs, Dhobīs, Lohārs, and others, did. Their fortunes took a turn for the better when, shortly after Independence, forfeiture of land for bad debts was officially prohibited. This resulted in a need for other forms of security, which was met by the Sonārs' espousal of the trading of articles that they had previously only made. Thus, for a time, their traditional caste occupation of goldsmith was clearly of very considerable importance, both to them as a caste, and to the economy of Singhara and its region as a whole. They amassed large enough fortunes to be able to buy land and become successful farmers. Today, with Brahmans and Tāmbakārs already in the gold and silver business, and others likely to follow, the Sonārs' caste craft, as such, is of far less importance than that of the caste free activity of moneylending, associated as it is with the silver trade. In short their secular roles - as merchants and farmers - have pushed their caste roles into a position of relative minor importance in the modern economy of which they are prominent members. (It is also of some interest that the Sonārs now claim to be

Vaishyas whereas not long ago they were generally thought to be Shudras.)

Tāmbhakār

Although Tāmbhakār means 'copper worker' (Russell 1916, IV:536) none of the twenty-two families of Tāmbhakārs deal in actual copper, but they do trade, and are traditionally associated with articles made of brass and aluminium. These include trays and plates, water and cooking pots, cups, knives, figurines of gods and goddesses, and so on, and trade in these items is regarded by the villagers as the Tāmbhakārs' traditional occupation. Their stalls at markets and fairs are invariably the most visually arresting; clustered columns of bright brassware that gleam in the sun. Several Tāmbhakārs have recently become moneylenders in the course of which business they have also taken to trading in gold and silver objects. Some have purchased good quality land. Certain individual Tāmbhakārs have become wealthy and the caste as a whole has greatly enhanced its economic and political standing in the past three decades, not just in Singhara but also in the wider region.

The Tāmbhakārs, together with the Svarnakār Sonārs, refer to themselves, and are referred to by others, as 'Sonī' (see note 14). For a visitor to the village it may not immediately be clear who is a Svarnakār Sonī and who is a Tāmbhakār Sonī, for the name 'Sonī' is highly ambiguous. It sounds like a caste name and is sometimes used as if it were. In fact it was adopted fairly recently, following the example of another caste which also changed its name. (The relevance

of the following story is that it gives some insight into the fluidity of the relation between caste and occupation.)

Just after Independence, members of the Maharā caste (see below) held a meeting in Singhara in order to change their name. Reportedly, they considered 'Maharā' insulting. They decided, first of all, to call themselves Chandravāsī, but were forced to abandon the idea because they discovered that this was a Kshatriya name. So they called themselves Harijan because they thought this would put them in a good position to benefit from the positive economic discrimination that was beginning to be offered to so-called 'scheduled tribes and castes' in the new reformist Gandhian political atmosphere. Shortly afterwards they again changed their name - this time to Jahariya - as the name Harijan had connotations of untouchability. It was as a direct consequence of this, and other name changes which were being made at the time, that Seth Govind Dās (one of the Congress Party's most distinguished members, who represented Jabalpūr constituency until his death in 1974) chaired a meeting of Tāmbakārs and Svarnakārs in Jabalpūr. At this meeting, it was suggested that the commercial interests of both castes would be advanced if they were to come together as one. Agreement with this proposition was general, and it was decided that persons from both castes should write their name as 'Sonī' in future. The Tāmbakārs and Svarnakārs of Singhara are currently, and intentionally, vague about precisely how they are united and how divided. They do not, for example, intermarry, nor do they take kachchā food from each other (see chapter 3) in Singhara itself, although it is widely reported that they do both in Jabalpūr. In fact

the leader of the Svarnakār caste panchāyat has informed me that intermarriage amongst 'Sonīs' is conceivable even in Singhara.

It is too early to say whether all distinctions between Svarnakār and Tāmbakār will disappear in the future, but the fact that that eventuality can be contemplated is itself an example of a process that is perhaps far commoner than might be thought. Just as "the classic answer for a caste with two primary occupations" is to split into two separate sub-castes (Mayer, 1960:90), so, in some cases, may convergent economic interest express themselves by the merging of two formerly distinct caste groups.

Nowadays neither the Svarnakārs nor the Tāmbakārs could conceivably be described as being kāmīn castes.¹⁵ The majority of them are independent businessmen.

Telī/Sāhu

The term Telī derives from the Sanskrit taila (oil) and tillī (sesamum) (Russell 1916, IV:543). The traditional occupation of the Telī caste is oil pressing. I have no information on the circumstances surrounding the adoption or investiture of the title Sāhu (which Russell says "... is the title of a moneylender" (ibid:546)) by which Telīs are now known. In 1975, only two out of the 25 Telī chūlhās operated oil pressers (kolhu) although not long before then there were many more. The erection of an oil pressing machine in Barela has resulted in a large drop in demand for the cottage, bullock-operated, oil pressers.

Mechanisation of oil pressing has led to the

formation of a chain of 'oil entrepreneurs' in the region. Merchants in villages like Singhara buy small amounts of the harvest of oil-producing plants (black and white sesamum, ground nut, castor, for example) from local farmers. They, in turn, sell it to regional contractors, who may themselves sell it to others, who then take the crop to be converted into oil by the mechanical processor. Then, by a similar route, the oil travels back to the village, becoming, or so it is said, progressively more adulterated as it does so. My Telī informants claim that only those from the Telī caste are involved in this business. If so, then caste appears in this case, as in various others, as one organising principle amongst others in one specialised sector of the economy.

There are three ways that the traditional oil pressers are used in Singhara. First of all, rich farmers, with capital and storage space, use the services of the village Telīs to press oil for their private domestic use. Secondly, the Telīs themselves may either grow oil-producing plants in their own fields, or purchase such crops from other agriculturalists, and then sell the pressed oil themselves in their shops. Thirdly, petty agricultural producers may hire an oil presser from a Telī and press their own oil, paying 1 rupee for each 2 kg of oil pressed.

Thus the Telīs' traditional occupation is practised in a very limited way by the owners of the two oil pressers left in the village. Even for these two families the proportion of their income derived from oil-pressing per se is fairly small. Most Telīs are shop owners, small scale grain merchants and moneylenders.

Lohār

Ganesh Lohār (Lauha kārā (Skt) - worker in iron) is the only blacksmith in the village and though he owns seven acres of unirrigated land he works for most of the time as a blacksmith. He is paid by most people in wheat and rice rather than in cash, and maintains steady and permanent links with the families for whom he works.

Barhaī

The heads of all nine Barhaī¹⁶ households are carpenters. None of them possesses a great deal of land, the average per household being 1.56 acres, and no member of the caste is employed in the modern sector of the economy. The Barhaīs enter into yearly agreements with patrons - wealthy farmers - in exchange for an undertaking to make and repair all agricultural equipment needed during the year. In return for such work a Barhaī receives about 18 kg of wheat and about 10 kg of paddy. The Barhaī caste-elder has such an arrangement with 15 houses in Singhara, the second most senior member with slightly fewer, and the others with between about 15-20 households in neighbouring villages. Such arrangements are long term and may last through successive generations. This particular sphere of their work is divided amongst them in what is claimed to be a mutually agreeable way. Apart from work carried out in the context of these long term relations, Barhaīs also perform single tasks for occasional customers who pay in cash. I have outlined an income account of a member of this caste

in table 7. This particular example is fairly typical in most respects, except that its subject owns very slightly more land than the other members of the caste. It may be observed that only 18% of his income derives from what he himself describes as kisān kā kām ¹⁷ for 2/3rds of which he is paid in kind. Over 60% of his carpentry work is conducted on a more or less freelance basis (and in a more or less 'open' market). For such work he is paid in cash. It may be noticed, furthermore, that only about half his total income derives from his caste-related work, the balance being made from agriculture and daily labour. The two points which flow from these two facts are as follows. First of all, for even a carpenter, belonging to a caste more dependent than most on its caste specialism, a large proportion of income derives from sources outside the narrow field of caste-related occupation. Secondly, the proportion of carpentry work conducted on what is essentially a 'casual' basis outweighs the proportion conducted within the traditional dyadic patron-client relationship by nearly 2:1.

Clearly, in the sphere of kisān work, the Barhaī families do not compete in anything like an open market, for their patrons are shared amongst them more or less by agreement. However, as far as their freelance work (including house building) is concerned, less constraints are placed by specifically caste rules and practices. Individual carpenters are known to be better than others, and there is nothing either in theory or in practice to prevent a prospective customer from choosing between their services relatively freely. In this respect the forces of

the market are felt more keenly. (To add to the complexity Barhaīs, along with other service castes, ignore the ebb and flow of factional contours at their peril).

Nāī

The traditional occupations of the Nāī¹⁸ caste are cutting hair, shaving, and performing a large number of duties at domestic ceremonies which are second in importance only to those of the pandits. The heads of both Nāī households¹⁹ visit the houses of patrons regularly to cut their hair and to shave them, for which they are paid in grain at harvest time. They also work in and around the bazaar on market and other days for cash. I estimate that each Nāī receives about Rs 100 in cash and about Rs 200 worth of grain per month from the practice of these traditional services. Additional cash income from marriage, births and funerary rites is received by both male and female members (Nāin) of the Nāī households. The Nāīs are in fairly constant demand, and a sizeable proportion of their income derives from their specifically caste-related work. One of the families also owns 4 acres of good irrigated land, and its head has become a moneylender.

Dhīmar

Dhīmars (dhīvara (Skt.) fisherman) are traditionally associated with occupations having to do with water: water carrying, fishing, the cultivation of crops grown in rivers and ponds, and so on. Not all the activities of the village

Dhīmars are linked with water; a few of them engage in agricultural daily labour, others in the petty trading of agricultural produce. Three small orchards of guavas are owned by Dhīmars, and there is one who makes a reasonable income (equivalent to that of a school teacher, he tells me) from work as an ojha (healer/sorcerer).

Most of the Dhīmars' economic roles are, however, linked with water in one way or another, and their association with this symbolically potent substance lends them a position of some importance in the ritual life of the village. Nevertheless, it is perhaps only in their capacity as the daily bearers of water to the homes of wealthy patrons that they may properly be described as kamīns (c.f. note 15), although payments for such service are increasingly made in cash. Apart from being personal water-carriers, the Dhīmars are either servants, in a quite secular sense (two being paid by the state government as cook/peons in the hostel for tribal schoolchildren, and at least six employed as assistants in the village tea stalls) or independent petty businessmen (One Dhīmar runs a tea stall himself; several are fishermen). Although only a cousin of one, and not a village resident himself, the resourcefulness of one Dhīmar is worth a mention; he exports frozen fish, caught in the Narbadā, by train to Calcutta!

Water-chestnut (singhārā), a tasty and auspicious fruit the name of which I have used in place of the real name of the village, is grown in many of the tanks and lakes in the district, and the majority of the village Dhīmars are engaged in its cultivation. The organisation of this industry illustrates some of the more subtle aspects of the

relation between caste and economic activity. The village Dhīmars are divided into two separate sub-castes (in their terminology, kurri) named Barman and Sindiya. A co-operative has been formed that consists of six households drawn from both of these sub-castes. The six families in this village co-operative pay a total yearly rent of Rs 2400 (i.e. Rs 400 each) to the grām panchāyat for the right to cultivate water-chestnuts on one of the village tanks. One of the families from the Barman kurri is also a member of a second co-operative that cultivates these fruits in a tank in a village some ten kilometres away. The members of this other unit are drawn from seven different villages but they each claim to belong to the Barman kurri, and they claim that Sindiya Dhīmars are not eligible to become part of this group. What is of further interest is that this Barman co-operative²⁰ only sow and harvest the singhārā; they sub-contract the weeding of the tank out to yet another Dhīmar group made up of persons drawn from an altogether different and allegedly inferior kurri. The water-chestnuts themselves are harvested and sold to a contractor (himself a Dhīmar) from Delhi. It was reported in 1974 that the singhārā crop was sold to this contractor for Rs 15,300 and that he disposed of it for Rs. 65,000.

The cultivation of water-chestnuts provides a nice example of the flexible nature of the relationship between occupation and caste. In the case of one tank, singhārā cultivation is organised on the basis of common residence, and the common membership of the inclusive caste category Dhīmar. In the case of the second tank, singhārā

cultivation is organised on rather different principles: it is not enough to be merely 'Dhīmar', for the terms of entry to the cultivating co-operative are more exclusive and are based on common membership of an endogamous group within the Dhīmar caste.

Darzī

The traditional occupation of Darzīs (darz (persian) seam) is tailoring, and the heads of all nine Darzī chūlhās are, in fact, tailors. They are assisted by wives and younger members of their families. Traditionally, their tailoring work was confined to cutting and stitching. In the past they did not, normally, sell cloth or finished clothes themselves (cloth may be purchased from merchants in Singhara itself, Jabalpūr, or any of the local markets). As tailors the Darzīs ply their skills as independent businessmen and they do not have long term contracts with patrons quite in the same way that those in more clearly kāmīn castes do. They receive most of their payments in cash. Several have developed specialities; one is considered to be the best maker of men's jackets within (at least) a ten mile radius of the village, another makes nothing but blouse pieces for the Gond women of the vicinity, a third is a specialist in stitching trousers, a fourth is known as a shirt maker of distinction, and so on. Specialisation is indicative of the fact that relations between the Darzīs and their customers are slightly closer to a type associated with a market economy than to a so-called jajmānī system.²¹ Furthermore, they are not organised in any form of local 'sub-caste',

and the only constraints upon them and their customers, other than those of market forces, flow from factional and party divisions. Clearly it is not in the interests of a tailor whose customers are prominent members of one political faction to be seen campaigning for the opposing one.

Only one Darzī family in Singhara owns land of sufficient quantity to engage in agriculture to any significant extent. For the others, agriculture constitutes only a very minor source of income. In 1974/5 four Darzīs were either teachers or teacher-trainees. One bought and sold cattle and another worked in a city factory, returning home regularly. Despite these examples of their participation in other occupations, it remains the case that tailoring is by far the most important occupation for the members of this caste.

In the interests of clarity, I should clarify this last statement, for 'tailoring' may be too general a term. Five Darzī families own shops selling ready made clothes (that is to say they set up stalls for ready made clothes in the weekly market as well as in other local markets). These shops are of relatively recent origin. As indicated, the Darzīs' work has been limited in the past to cutting and stitching. Thus, the retailing of clothes by them is an innovation, and there is an important sense in which the Darzīs' participation in such an activity bears comparison with those of, for example, the Sonārs. Formerly, both the Sonārs and the Darzīs merely worked upon products (silver and cloth respectively) over which they had little actual control. In neither case did they buy

the products before working on them and in neither case did they retail them afterwards. Both were thus, in effect, no more than skilled labourers. I have already indicated how the circumstances of the Sonārs have changed. I think that the five ready-made clothes shops represent an indication that the Darzīs, too, may be entering a transitional period in which their relations with both their customers and the product with which they work, have begun to change in a radical way.

But these observations themselves require further qualification. In Singhara's weekly market there are fourteen ready-made clothes stalls. Apart from the five Darzīs from Singhara itself, the owners of the other stalls are: a Jain, a Telī, a Tāmbakār and a Dhobī (all from the village), two Jains, a Darzī and a Patel from Barela, a Patel from Sihora and a Sindhī from a neighbouring village; in short a fairly heterogenous (castewise) collection of individuals. Thus, while cutting and stitching may have been monopolised by those for whom these activities were 'traditional' occupations, the buying and selling of ready-made clothes is, by contrast, a seemingly caste-free occupation.

Dhobī

The traditional occupation of the Dhobīs (Dhāv (Skt.) to wash) is the washing of clothes. The terms under which washing is customarily carried out in Singhara are of two kinds. As kāmīns, the Dhobīs are expected to wash the bedsheets of all the members of those families (from all castes except the Untouchables) who have suffered bereavement.

The standard rate for this service is Rs 3 cash. A similar amount is given for washing the bedclothes of a household in which there has been a birth. Secondly, individual Dhobīs have long-term agreements with wealthy high caste patrons for whom they wash and press clothes in exchange for payment in kind. This type of arrangement may, in the past, have yielded relatively secure (even if low) incomes for the Dhobīs, but it does so no longer. Nowadays Thākur and Brahman patrons are looking for economies within their budgets and are tending to cut down on such expenditures as those on washermen. Amongst the newly rich, the Jains have a tradition of using Dhobīs, but few others do. Thus it is not surprising to find that only one out of the four Dhobī chūlhās in Singhara depends upon washing clothes for its income. The working heads of two of the other three are wage earners; one a schoolteacher, who does not wash clothes at all; the other a bus conductor who, with his brother, washes occasionally. The head of the fourth chūlhā owns one of the ready-made clothes stalls referred to above, specialising in childrens clothes. He no longer washes clothes at all and has become another of the successful petty shopkeepers whose ranks consist, as we see, of individual families from a fairly comprehensive spread of castes.

Thus there is still demand for the services of Dhobīs as performers of purificatory services after births and deaths, but the income from this work is small. 'Secular' washing can no longer provide even a subsistence income. The position of the Dhobīs may be summed up by saying that most of them are entering the modern economy whilst being

detached from their traditional occupation in the process.

Kumhār

The Kumhārs (kumbh (skt.) water pot) are, traditionally, potters, and this occupation constitutes much the most important (though not the sole) source of income for the members of this caste. The following account of the income of one Kumhar family is fairly representative.²² Their main activities - pot-making, brick-making, and tile-making - are considered in turn.

The water pot (matkār) making season is limited to about five months of the year. During this period, the family normally supplies 2-3 pots per month to each of about 50 client families in Singhara itself and 1-2 pots per month to each of about 250 clients from other villages in the vicinity. The first category of clients is slightly more dependable than the second, and the relations between this family and those clients in the village itself are nearly all long-standing ones. Payment for pots supplied in the context of these long-term relations are made in grain at harvest time. The Singhara clients give 4 kg of grain for the year's supply, while those from outside give about 2 kg. The income received by the family, for making approximately 2500 pots in the season is about 700 kg. of grain (about Rs 1400 in money terms).

The brick-making season lasts for 4-5 months, from January to April/May. The family claims that they make an average of 40,000 bricks in an average season. In 1974 they actually made rather less than this, selling them to

five clients, for well and house building, at the rate of Rs 30 per 1000. In 1974 they made Rs 950.

Tiles (khaprā) are made in the same months as bricks are and the Kumhārs make one or the other according to demand. In 1974 this family made some 700 tiles for a return of Rs 140. Like bricks, tiles are always sold for cash, sometimes to building contractors from Jabalpūr.

Apart from their potting, members of the caste derive small amounts of income from other sources. Women occasionally work as daily labourers in the fields; they raise chickens and pigs; for fairs and markets they make clay figurines and animals and godlings. This particular family received about Rs 120, Rs 180 and Rs 25 from each of these activities.

Thus, in 1974, this Kumhār family received an income nearly 88% of which derived from the sale of products linked directly to their traditional caste craft and about half of this was paid in kind by clients with whom the family has well-established ties.

Domār/Basūr

The three main activities of the Domār, or Basūr, caste²³ are basket (tokni) making, the provision of band music for marriage and other ceremonies, and midwifery (by the women of the caste).

Baskets are sold in the market for cash, and the yearly income received by an average family of the caste for this work is approximately Rs 400. Income from supplying band music is comparable. The rate for delivering a baby

is Rs 2 - so although this service is of very considerable symbolic significance (see chapter 5), its purely economic importance is fairly small.

Some long-term relations persist between Domārs and high caste patrons, but the nature of their craft renders such relations of markedly less importance than, say, those between the carpenters and their patrons.

In addition to these three occupations, all of which could be said to be the 'traditional' ones of the Domārs, they also raise pigs, and some Domār women also work as daily agricultural labourers. These two extra activities yield about one third of the total income of each chūlhā.

Lakherā

The Lakherā caste's traditional occupation, as their name implies (laksha-kāra (Skt.) a worker in lac (a resinous substance)) is the making and selling of lac bangles, and all six Lakherā families are largely dependent upon this craft-business. Members of the average chūlhā make about 100 bangles per day and sell them, in the markets of the district, for 10 N.P. each. Bangles have only a limited ritual function and the Lakherās do not enjoy any sort of kāmīn status with their clients.

Chamār

There are five Chamār (charmā-kāra (Skt.) leather worker) chūlhās in Singhara. Chamārs tan leather, make,

sell and repair shoes, but this work amounts to less than 50% of their income, the remainder deriving from daily agricultural labour.

Gedarī

Members of the Gedarī caste are traditionally thought of as herdsmen and the younger members of the three Gedarī families take charge of the herds and goats owned by their respective families. The bulk of their income, however, derives from the cultivation of their own fields, which are large enough for each family to be self-sufficient.

Like the Chamārs and the three castes that follow (i.e. Ahīrs, Maharās and Gonds) their 'traditional' caste related occupations, such as they are, count, economically speaking, for little.

Ahīr/Maharā/Gond

The occupation traditionally associated with Ahīrs (a caste name derived from the ancient Abhira tribe that, according to several texts, migrated to India from Central Asia some 2000 years ago and whose mythical links with Lord Krishn . are well known) is herding cows. However, in village thought and practice, the Ahīrs, together with the Maharās (a caste name with no clear derivation) and the Gonds, are part of a category of castes whose members have hardly any caste-related occupations. The 50 families in this category - about 16% of the village population - depend largely upon daily agricultural labour supplemented in a

number of cases, by income received from sundry other petty enterprises, such as the selling of milk.

Bhangī

There is one sweeper in the village. He is more or less entirely dependent on the goodwill of households in the wards where he sweeps. He is also paid Rs 10 per month by the gram panchāyat.

The 'Dominant Caste'

There is one 'caste' that remains to be discussed. Clearly, it is a different kind of caste from those described so far; in one sense it is not a caste at all and yet, in another sense, it is the most important caste of all. The activities of the Brahmans have been described; so too have those of the Baniās or Vaishyas. The other castes fall into the category either of Shudra or Untouchable. The omission is, of course, the 'caste' whose 'traditional occupation' is the holding of temporal power: in Singhara's particular case, the Thākurs.

Part of my intention in chapter 1 was to indicate the nature of the process which led to the diminution of Thākur supremacy; which led to the fragmentation of power; that not only changed the location of power but also its very nature. A fuller appreciation of the contemporary articulation of power, and of the Thākurs' role in the politics of the late twentieth century, may be gained in chapter 8. At this point, my concern is with more strictly economic matters.

Bearing in mind that the Singhs, former jāgīrdārs and ubaridārs under pre-British administrators, and sole holders of mālguzārī rights in the early years of colonial rule, effectively controlled all Singhara's land in the first part of the nineteenth century, a survey of their present economic circumstances is revealing. Between them the 17 chūlhās of the Singh family presently own 128.3 out of the 130² acres under cultivation.

Only eight Thākur chūlhās possess sufficient land to subsist on by cultivation alone, and nine other possess less than they need. Although there are five Thākur landowners of some substance none of them fall into the category of 'commercial farmers'. For example, 60% of the largest Thākur farm (about 35 acres) is let to three sharecroppers (an arrangement that I have argued above is typical of the 'traditional' rather than the distinctively modern 'commercial farmers'). Thus, it is not surprising that individual Thākurs are turning, increasingly, to sources of income other than cultivation. The general emphasis placed on rural education by post independence governments; the consequent expansion of school building in and around Singhara in the 1950s and 1960s; the fact that Thākur Arjun Singh was for many years chairman of the committee for regional education, explains why a relatively large number of Thākurs are presently teachers or teacher trainees working in the vicinity. In addition to teaching, several Thākurs have moved into other 'service' occupations in the modern economy that have taken them out of the village. Up till very recently there have been no Thākur merchants or shopkeepers (although during the period

of my original field research, a young Thākur youth opened a tea shop).

Once again, there is a chance to emphasise that the Thākurs have ceased to be the 'dominant caste' that they used to be in their heyday. In fact, there is no longer a 'dominant caste' in Singhara, a fact which is quite central to any attempt to understand the present economy of Singhara.

*

This section has been concerned with those occupational roles which flow directly from, or are linked directly to, caste affiliation. Some comment has been made on the traditional, caste-linked, activities of all the main castes represented in Singhara. It has not been possible to separate out these occupations from others in a completely tidy way, but if this serves to demonstrate the need for a certain analytical caution in attempting to summarise, so much the better.

The foregoing account of the way in which caste related occupations are practised in Singhara has pointed towards two related aspects of the contemporary economy there. The first concerns the existence, and the growth, of types of economic activities that have, so to speak, 'grown out' of caste-linked crafts/specialisms, but which, at the same time, have 'outgrown' their caste associations. The trade in gold and silver ornaments by the Svarnakārs is the most striking example of what I have in mind, but the selling of ready-made clothes by Dhobī and Darzī, the making of bricks and tiles by Kumhārs, the cash-cropping of the Kachchis and Dhīmars - and a host of other large and

petty entrepreneurial activities are all further examples. In other words, some former kāmīns and kisāns have, to a greater or lesser extent, acquired a measure of control over the ends and means of production which they did not previously possess. The Darzī, who does no more than stitch cloth given to him by a customer, is no more than a tailor. The Darzī, who not only stitches cloth himself but also buys and sells the finished product, has become a merchant, and competes with merchants from other castes (to be precise with Telīs, Dhobīs, Tāmbakārs and Jains from Singhara and others from elsewhere). The second aspect, very closely related to and helping to explain the first, concerns modes of payment for caste-related activities and trades. Only those from Kumhār, Barhaī, Lohār, Nāī and Dhobī castes receive regular payments in kind. The last of these is finding it increasingly difficult to secure such payments, and members of none of these castes receive more than half their income in grain payment - most of them considerably less.

These two aspects of the contemporary economy are examples of the differences between it and the 'traditional' one that was dominated by a small group of landlords and their cultivator/servants to whom payments were made more or less exclusively in grain. The fact that caste specialists now receive substantial proportions of their income in cash is both cause and consequence of the relatively more flexible relations between them and their customers/patrons. Thus a Kumhār, formerly locked into a permanently binding and highly restrictive relation with a landowning patron (mālik), now plays some part himself in determining not only what to

produce (whether bricks, tiles or pots, for example) but whom to produce for.

It may thus be argued that the place of traditional caste related work is changing and declining in importance. Forms of work that are relatively unrestricted by caste are, correspondingly, increasing in importance. To repeat: as Darzīs and Sonīs move away from the position of being the mere performers of traditional crafts/specialisms (of which they are the sole practitioners) to assume roles as shopkeepers and merchants, they increasingly encounter each other in a universe of competing individuals which is relatively less circumscribed by caste.

Trade

There are sound arguments, in my opinion, for devoting several pages solely to the consideration of trade and commerce. In chapter 1, I tried to show that one of the aims of the British was to stimulate rural trade in the region, and the implication of parts of the present chapter is that commercial activity is indeed increasing in importance in various ways. In order to explain why this is so, it is necessary to outline the nature and extent of the trade and commerce in and around the village. The small amount of repetition that this will involve may be justified on the grounds that to portray these activities either as, in some way, secondary to the agricultural system or as a mere aspect of the caste system would be seriously misleading.

The weekly market

The records show that there has been a weekly market in Singhara for many years, but its size has almost certainly increased over the last 25 years or so.²⁴ Every Thursday, over 200 shops and stalls are set up in the village square and adjoining lanes. About half the proprietors of these are residents of Singhara,²⁵ while the other half come from twenty other villages and from Barela town and Jabalpūr city. The 'shops', or stalls (anything from a permanent shop to a pile of articles on the ground) sell a variety of produce.

There are sixty stalls selling vegetables. A third of these offer a general selection of vegetables and are managed, in the main, by Kachchis resident in Singhara. The other two-thirds are smaller affairs, selling just one or two types of vegetables. The proprietors of these come from several castes including Kachchi, Patel, Dhīmar, Gedarī, Khatik and Maharā. There are 25 grocery shops of which 12 are large (six permanent), selling a wide variety of items. Of these seven are run by Telīs, five of whom live in Singhārā; two are run by Singhārā Jains, two by Singhārā Kesherwanis, and one (by far the largest of all) by a Singhara Brahman. The other grocery stalls are smaller, selling selected items only (oil, salt, supādī (betel nut), jaggari, and so on). These are run by Telīs, a Jain and a Kesherwani, all from Singhārā, and a Telī from Barela. The 15 ready-made clothes stalls are run by Darzīs (five) a Telī, a Dhobī, a Tāmbakār and a Jain from Singhara, and Jains (two), a Sindhī and a Darzī from elsewhere. None

of these is as large as the shops which sell untailed cloth. Of these latter the biggest is owned by a Jain from Singhara and the others by Jains (five) from Barela, Brahmans (two) from Singhara and others from elsewhere. The twelve grain shops, not surprisingly forming the hub of the market, are run by Telīs (three) a Keshewani, a Jain and a Musulmān, all from Singhara and six Telīs and a Jain from outside. Ten stalls offer trinkets (mirrors, combs, and sundry other immemorabilia) and the proprietors of these are Tāmbakārs (three) Jains (two) Brahmans (two) and a Maharā from Singhara and 2 Musulmāns from nearby villages. Of the ten barbers offering their services in the market, only two are from Singhara (see above). The ten fish stalls are run exclusively by Dhīmars, two of whom reside in the village. Each one of the eight bangle stalls are run by Lakherās from Singhara. The eight sweet shops²⁶ are run by a Tāmbakār, a Kachchi, Telīs (two), a Keshewani (three) and a Brahman/Dhīmar from Singhara. The eight shoe stalls are run, with one exception (interestingly, a Jabalpūr Musulmān), by Chamārs, three of whom are Singhara residents. Of the proprietors of the six basket stalls, two are from Singhara, four from other villages, all are Domārs. Apart from the regular tea stalls that customarily sell pān and supādī, five extra pān stalls which are set up in the market are run by Brahmans (two) and Chaurasias (a specialist pān making caste)(three) from outside. The five earthenware pot stalls are set up by five Kumhār families from Singhara. Four shops selling pots, pans and other utensils of brass, aluminium and steel, are run by Tāmbakārs from Singhara, and a fifth by a Lohār from Barela. Four

stalls sell tobacco and are run by Jabalpūr Musulmāns, and three bīḍī (tobacco rolled in a tendu tree leaf) and cigarette stalls by Musulmāns from Singhara. The three shops that offer silver ornaments for sale are run by two Svarnakārs and a Brahman, all from Singhara.

It needs to be stressed that an examination of the weekly market exposes only a fraction of the total amount of trade carried out in and around Singhara. There are other village markets, as well as periodic fairs and festivals, to which Singhara merchants travel regularly. There is also a lot of day-to-day commercial activity conducted in the village, at the permanent village shops and between individuals ((e.g. the entrepreneurial activities such as brick/tile selling, meat and egg selling)(N.B. not a single stall in the market sells either of these) and so on - as well as money lending transactions, which tend to be carried out in relatively private surroundings). Having said that, however, there are three points of interest that are immediately apparent in this simple listing of the proprietors of the weekly market stalls. Firstly, some idea of the sheer scale of trade and commercial activity in Singhara is given. Some of the stalls may be very small, but the fact that half of them are run by Singhara residents means that over one third of all families in the village are engaged in some form of trading in the market place. Secondly, although some specialised lines of business are monopolised by particular castes, and although certain castes (Jains and other Baniās, Svarnakārs, Tāmrakārs and Telīs in particular) are better represented in the market than others, it is clearly also the case that members of a

wide spectrum of castes are involved, at some level or another, in market activities. Thirdly, despite the fact that persons from many castes are involved in the market, there is, so to speak, one obvious absentee. With the exception of the young owner of the tea-stall that was built during the period of my field research by a member of that family, there is not a single Thākur market trader.

Grain, cloth, ornaments and credit

The three commercial activities that (arguably) dominate not just the market place but, more generally, the business life of the village as a whole, consist of the trades in grain, in cloth, and in ornaments. The importance of these derives from their being linked to the lending and borrowing of money. Thus, apart from outlining how and by whom they are organised, a primary aim, in considering these activities, is to indicate how trade in these commodities is connected with the operations of the village moneylenders.

About half of 'commercial farmers' are also the chief wholesale grain merchants in Singhara; a Brahman grocer, a Jain, and two Sonārs being the main ones. I have already given some indication of the amount of yearly harvest that each of these would expect to dispose of on the market. Each has sufficient storage space to enable them to release small amounts of grain throughout the year and thus take advantage of the higher prices that invariably occur towards the end of the growing periods and before the harvest. Many of those who buy from these wholesalers are Telī grocery

shop owners who retail the grain to the public either from their permanent shops or from their stalls in the market place. Such 'middle-men' also purchase grain from those small farmers who produce it as a cash crop. An important sub-category of these small farmers is formed by the predominantly Gond farmers from villages in the hinterland; they are renowned in the village for growing superior rice to sell and inferior qualities to eat themselves. These small farmers are commonly in debt to the grain retailers who lend them money which they pay back, with interest, at harvest time.

There are also a dozen or so village Brahmans who deal in grain in an altogether more discreet way, taking advantage of discrepancies in price between different regions.

If grain dealing is linked to the giving of credit (the situation in this regard is reminiscent of that reported by Campbell in Northern Greece (1964:247-256)) so too is the trade in cloth. The need for cloth is greatest during the winter months, a time when most people have least money to spend. If cloth is purchased at this time then it is frequently given on credit to customers who pay, with interest, after the April harvest. Not all cloth merchants give credit, but the larger ones do so as a matter of course. Prominent amongst these is one Singhara resident who is also a grain wholesaler.

Reference has already been made to the trade in gold and silver. My contention is that trade in ornaments of these metals (but particularly silver) has assumed a much more significant place in the village economy in recent years

than it enjoyed previously, and that the reason for this lies in the combining of this trade with moneylending. To give an example of the way in which this combination is achieved: the marriage season starts just after the winter harvest, when rates for silver are invariably the highest in the year (and when, incidentally, the rates for grain are invariably the lowest). A man buys an ornament at this time for, say, Rs 500. Later on in the year, say December or January, when agricultural activity is at its lowest (and the rates for food and clothing at their highest) the same man comes back to the ornament seller. This time he needs a cash loan to tide him and his family over the lean winter months. The item that he bought at Rs 500 would secure a Rs 200 loan (that is, half the 'value' with Rs 100 being subtracted as 'making charge'). The rate of interest (which varies from 25% to over 100% per annum) and the time for repayment would be agreed and the loan given. In the event of non-repayment, the ornament would be forfeited and then sold again at the price of a 'new' one.

Credit

Thus in various ways trade in grain, cloth and ornaments is linked with the giving and taking of credit. Those who are most prominent in these trades are also the most prominent moneylenders: the Jain cloth/grain merchant, the Sonār ornament/grain dealers, the Brahman food/grain merchant stand out. These are, without question, the present 'big men' (bare ādmī) of the village. Behind them stand other, smaller scale, merchant/moneylenders: the Telī

grocer/oil presser/grain dealers, some Tāmbakārs, and individuals from a fairly wide range of other castes.

Moneylending in Singhara is not a new phenomenon. References to the practice are to be found in the nineteenth century British records, and informants speak of moneylending as a feature of life in the early part of this century. Nevertheless it is generally agreed, by villagers and official sources alike, that the scale of moneylending and the influence of moneylenders has increased in the past two decades. I have already noted some of the reasons why this should be so: the perennial demand for seeds at sowing time, for cloth and grocery in the winter, for ornaments and other expensive provisions during the marriage season. There is another reason too: the failure of government, and government-related or assisted institutions such as the regional Co-operative Society, to provide workable alternatives to the services provided by the private moneylenders - despite the fact that these latter's terms and conditions are so obviously and heavily weighted against borrowers in any long term view. Let us look briefly at one such institution.

The Vishnu Datt Co-operative Society set up an office and bank in Barela in 1969, and a branch opened shortly afterwards in Singhara. The Society has two main functions. The first is to operate 'fair price' shops that sell cloth, food and grain. The second is to provide loans to farmers for the building of wells, the purchase of fertilizer and other projects associated with agricultural improvement. There is no 'fair price' shop in Singhara, although there is (or is supposed to be) a monthly ration

distribution (see p. 350). Informants think it unlikely that a 'fair price' shop, operated by the Society, would succeed in Singhara in the future.

The second function of the Society is to give loans from its bank in Barela. Since its inception in 1969, the Society has given 260 loans to Singhara villagers. The average loan was between Rs 200 - Rs 800 (the figures presented here derive from an official source) although some loans of Rs 2000 - Rs 3000 were made to several of the wealthy farmers. The majority of these larger loans were taken in the first year of the Society's operations and, with few, if any, exceptions, have not been paid back. During the period of my field research, the Society issued 'final' notices to these debtors to the effect that, if the loans were not repaid, land would be confiscated as compensation. The resolution of the Society to carry out this threat was generally doubted. The loans have not been paid back, with the result that the Society has virtually dried up as a source of credit. This is, of course, entirely consonant with the best interests of some of the largest defaulters; as private credit merchants themselves, no better strategy could have been employed by them to protect their monopoly.

It is fair to say that the Co-operative Society and the official banking system have both failed to meet the need for credit in and around the village. So too have other schemes, such as the direct loans made by government, through the village agricultural advisor (grām sevak), to certain types of cultivators.²⁷ Thus, the private money-lenders may be said to enjoy a virtual monopoly in this field.

As recorded, the need for credit is felt by a substantial majority of villagers - from the 'traditional' farmers with large holdings, to smaller farmers, to sharecroppers and to personal servants.

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From the late eighteenth century to the early twentieth, the Thākurs, as mālguzārs, dominated the economy of Singhara and its environs. More recently the position that they formerly held has been assumed by the new bāre ādmī of the village. Owing to Singhara's location on the edge of a large expanse of former jungle and small villages, the field covered by these financiers is very large indeed. While fully sharing Mayer's caution in such matters (1960:86N) and emphasising that the figure must remain an estimate, I calculate that the yearly income accruing to one of these modern bankers from interest payments alone is probably not less than 1½ lakhs of rupees (£8,333) in a medium year (see Table 5). I will return to discuss the political roles of these merchants in Chapter 8, and will conclude this present section by offering a thumb-nail sketch of one of the most influential of the 'big men', as given to me by an informant. There is no doubt in my mind about its penetrating accuracy.

"A man from the country comes to X .. hands pressed together. 'Namaste Bābū .. my father is ill and we have urgent need of medicines'. X sits, one arm resting on his knee, leg bent and looking uninterested. Averting his eyes from the man, he says that he is busy. 'Arre bhaiya .. I have much urgent need'. 'So come back tomorrow'. 'What time Bābū?' 'Arre, in the morning'. The man leaves, perhaps to a village some miles away. Next morning he appears again

to find X playing cards. 'Bhaiya..', he says softly. X looks up as if surprised, and is annoyed that the man has spoilt his game. He makes a show of politeness. 'Sit down, sit down', says X and resumes his game. An hour goes by. 'Bābū..' X gives a start, as if he had forgotten the man was there. Appearing full of sympathy and with a loud voice and expansive gestures he says 'look, I'll tell you what to do. Go to Y and tell him I sent you, and ask for what you want'. The man goes off to Y's house and, standing outside the door shouts 'Y Bābū'. A female voice shouts back 'Y has gone to the fields'. Back comes the man to X. 'Y is in the fields'. 'Sit down, sit down' .. and so on. If someone comes with ornaments X is full of sympathy and understanding. He quickly concludes the deal, takes the ornaments, gives the person money, fixes a rate of interest and a time for repayment. If someone comes to repay his loan X is very slow and certainly very correct in collecting the last nayā paisā from the borrower".

Conclusion

The economy of Singhara no longer has the relatively closed and static appearance it once had. The boundaries of the village have been physically and ideologically breached by pakkā roads and public and private transport, allowing both people and commodities to flow in and out between the village and towns and cities like Bareilly and Jabalpur. Some villagers have taken the opportunities with which they have been prevented by the opening up of the economy. Thus, while the slow decline of the old landlords

has continued, individuals from a variety of castes have constructed for themselves the means for their own upward mobility. The village Baniās (in particular the Sonārs) have clearly emerged from the subordinate position to which the traditional political economy confined them while some former kisāns and kāmīns have begun to operate successfully as traders and entrepreneurs. The Tāmbrakār owner of a large brassware shop, five acres of the richest and best irrigated land in the village, and a thriving moneylending business is but one example. And, if as yet their operations are on a smaller scale than his, there are others too; for example, the Dhobī owner of a ready-made clothes shop, another Dhobī who (with the help of the Department for Small Industries and the Bank of India) has recently set up a welding business, the Darzī cattle-dealer, the Brahman grocer and grain-dealer, the Gond owner of several bullock carts, six acres of land and a credit business, the Darzī, Maharā and Gond schoolteachers. The activities of these and others like them, are the living exemplars of a type of economy that has, in one sense, "liberated man as an economic agent" (Wolff 1969:280).

Furthermore, with the increasing penetration of external agencies, such as the Co-operative Society and the banks, the grām sevaks and veterinary officers, representatives of the police and other district administrators, and the increasing links between internal, regional, national and even (in the case of silver) international currents of trade, the old divisions between the 'inside' and the 'outside', which was so demonstrably of emotional, intellectual, as well as economic importance in the

traditional village world, have virtually broken down.

From the old order is emerging the van of a new one, some of whose leaders - with their electric pumps and bags of fertilizer, their newly found capability to buy adjacent plots of land from their debtors, and their freedom to employ daily labour on demand (rather than enter into the infinitely more complex relationships associated with sharecropping and other such arrangements) - are 'rationalising' parts of the economy in what is beginning to seem like a classical Rostovian manner. They are, indeed, the key personnel in the transformation of the rural economy of a country which has chosen the particular path to development that it has. Less comfortable aspects of this emergent system are also on display of course; one of the more arresting examples being the crowds of silent peasants squatting in the courtyards of the moneylenders' well-appointed brick houses every market day in the agriculturally quiet weeks around the winter festival of Sankrānt (i.e. in late January, February and early March) - crowds which are perceptibly swollen by a bad monsoon (as in 1974 and 1979 for example). Whether or not they, too, will one day benefit from a form of social system which appears, increasingly, to be becoming "an accessory of the economic system" (Polanyi 1957:75) is, of course, the critical test of that system.

But the economy of Singhara is not yet fully transformed; elements of the old and the new mingle, sometimes uneasily, as the small sketch of a prominent merchant may have indicated. In Wolff's pertinent words, "the old is not yet overcome and remains to challenge the new; the new is not yet victorious .. the new wealth does

not yet have legitimacy, and old power no longer commands respect" (1979:283).

Such an observation (intentionally) sounds themes which, although they are rooted in it and grow logically out of it, lead some way beyond the concerns of the present chapter. We may leave them now and take them up again in the final chapter of the thesis.

CHAPTER 3

PROLOGUE

At this point in the thesis the focus changes.

Chapters 1 and 2 were organised to meet three aims: to describe the day to day economic activities of Singhara villagers, to outline some general features of the economy as a whole, and to provide some idea of the changes that have occurred in the process of an economic transformation which began with the arrival in the district of the British, and which is still continuing. If in the 'traditional' period (in this case, late eighteenth, nineteenth, and early twentieth centuries) the economy was peopled by subsistence cultivators and labourers and was dominated by Thākur mālguzārs, it has now become a market economy dominated (in a more complex way) by individual credit merchants and 'commercial farmers'.

The limits of a primarily synchronic study such as this, with its broad overall objectives, have made it possible only to give an outline, rather than a thorough-going analysis, of the economic history of Singhara. Short as it may be, however, I would defend its essential accuracy. Thus, to take a parthian shot at the first part of the thesis, and to provide a suitably sharp background to the next part, I quote from an account of the north Indian rural economy which expresses nicely the main ideas that I have wished to convey so far.

"The present position of the Indian agriculturalist is the outcome of the impact of British rule and, through British rule, of Western capitalism ... upon the indigenous

system existing two centuries ago. ..All over India the economic impact of British rule has been the impact of market organisation and Western ideas of rationality upon an indigenous system which did not organise its productive and distributive activities around buying and selling and the concept of economic efficiency.

(As) market capitalism spread ... (in Great Britain) ... neither status nor custom, religion nor family, locality nor birth determined a man's means of livelihood, his place of abode, or his activities. He sold his working life and all pertaining thereto upon a market which valued him ... for his marginal productivity. ... This highest compliment to the individuality of man was also a threat to the amenities, ceremonies, and anchors of security which a man regarded as his life" (*italics mine*) (Neale 1962:6-7).

In my view, this latter paragraph, nominally about Britain, is peculiarly appropriate in the present context. In chapter 8 further consideration will be given to other manifestations of the emergent individualism and materialism of which Neale speaks. But, in the five chapters which follow I will first take a long look at some of these 'amenities, ceremonies, and anchors of security' (which, in this context, I take to be the values of traditional caste society) that now seem to contrast so strikingly with the values of the market place.

Dumont has argued convincingly that, in being concerned with individuals and the material relations between them, market values differ fundamentally from caste values whose form is essentially holistic.

The ethnographies of Mayer (1960) and Atal (1968), to mention two of the most distinguished amongst several,

have demonstrated that there are few better ways of illustrating this than through analyses of commensal practices. Thus, taking a lead from them, I turn now to consider food transactions in Singhara and to reflect upon what they tell us about caste values. I begin the chapter with a short review of previous anthropological work on commensality, providing the present analysis with some guidelines, and at the same time introducing several ideas whose usefulness, to the thesis as a whole, extend well beyond this particular topic.

Introduction

Stated very broadly the theoretical aim of this chapter is to demonstrate the presence and nature of the holistic ethic at work in this village society. The object is to offer some tangible evidence in support of Dumont's general assertion that in India "... the normative subject ... is constituted not by a single human person, but by a constellation of persons making up a whole" (1970b:141). Intertwined with this aim is another which may be expressed by a second assertion by the same author, that "... in the traditional Indian view there is no separation between man and nature and the human order is realized by conforming to the universal order" (ibid., p. 142). The third aim, also inextricably linked to each of the previous two, and equally well known to Indianist sociology, derives from Dumézil's brilliant conception of Indian society as one pervaded by the ideas of inclusion and exclusion. In an article under that title Pocock quoted Dumézil as follows: "The social hierarchy of the Hindus ... is linear only in appearance, in reality it involves a series of markedly Hegelian type, in which a thesis gives birth to its antithesis and then unites with it to produce a synthesis which, becoming in its turn a thesis, provides new material for the same process" (1957:23, from Dumézil (1940) Mitra-Varuna, Gallimard, Paris, p. 76). My purpose is to identify, with regard to a very particular set of activities (everyday commensal practices), something of the spirit of this ideological tour de force.

These three themes are, of course, all very familiar

grist to the Indianist's mill, but it is my view that there is still work to be done in further consideration of their actual operation and the implications flowing therefrom: not least in the contemporary context of a modern nation state the constitution of which enshrines ideals that are seemingly radically opposed to them, namely, secularism, democracy and equality. These latter ideas form no part of the subject matter of what follows, but yet there is a sense in which they constitute, as it were, distant and unseen shadows in the wings.

Commensality: a Short Review of Ideas

At the heart of concerns of writers on Indian commensal practices are three closely related issues as follows. (1) The way in which food is classified into various types. For example it will be seen that the present chapter is based upon data relating to five main types of food; kachchā (roughly speaking, boiled food), pakkā (roughly speaking, fried food), 'wet', 'dry' and 'no food' (see below and note 4). Apart from these, two further 'food' types are referred to; jūthā (scraps, left-overs) and faeces. (2) The role of these food types in articulating caste interactions. Castes express the nature of their relationship and their relative rank partly in the act of transferring, or not transferring, such different types of food as these. (3) The attributes (the associations and meanings) that these types are believed to possess, which themselves partly derive from food's interactional role.

One of the first western observers to point to the

fundamental importance of commensality in caste society was the Abbé Dubois. In 1825 he remarked, with customary verve, that he "... once met a Brahman who on seeing some eggs being broken and beaten up for an omelette, immediately complained of feeling unwell, and in the course of a few moments was violently sick" (1899,284). A more forceful statement of the feelings which may be aroused by food, and behaviour associated with it, in a society in which the cooking of one person may repel another would be hard to find.

The significance of Dubois' observation was that it focused directly (if implicitly) on the relationship between food and cooking, on the one hand, and caste structure on the other. It is this relationship that has occupied the sociological imagination ever since, and towards which one of the pioneers of modern caste studies, E.H. Blunt, turned his attention in 1931.

Blunt observed that all activities having to do with food are hedged about with 'taboos'. He argued that these commensal 'taboos' take the form of complex rules and prohibitions that determine the kinds of food a person should eat, how food should be cooked, with whom eaten, to whom given, and from whom taken. Blunt related these rules to caste hierarchy in a variety of ways. For example a caste whose members accept food from persons belonging to a large number of other castes is liable to be a low caste. By contrast if members of a caste are very particular about who they accept food from, then that caste is liable to be a high one. In short, the giving of food to others, was identified as a mark of high status and the taking of food

from others was identified as a mark of low status. But Blunt took some care to qualify these general principles. He recorded that Brahmans, in the course of their customary duties as village priests are almost daily in "... the receipt of food from all and sundry". According to the above principles this would signify a Brahman's low place in the hierarchy - clearly an absurdity. "The difficulty", wrote Blunt, "is solved by a gift of uncooked food which the Brahman cooks himself" (1931, 94). Thus, he suggested, it is only in the giving of particular types of food (for example, cooked food) that inferiority/superiority is expressed, while gifts of other types (for example, raw food) do not necessarily bear this implication.

Having thus distinguished between 'raw' and 'cooked' food, Blunt went further to distinguish between other categories; 'drink', 'smoke', vegetarian, non-vegetarian and the important sub-categories of the latter, kachchā or food cooked in water, and pakkā or food cooked in clarified butter (ghī) (ibid., p. 89). According to Blunt each of these food types is surrounded not only with a distinct set of rules but with attributes and associations as well.¹

Blunt was concerned not only with the way in which the caste hierarchy was manifested in transactions of food, but also in the more fundamental problem of the wider emotional and intellectual basis for the 'taboos'. Upon what idea, he asked, did the 'taboos' rest? His answer, following Crooke,² was that they each basically "depend on the conception that in every personality there is inherent a power, or rather a potentiality, for evil, which is to be dreaded and avoided" (ibid., p. 87).

Following Blunt's lead J.H. Hutton asserted in 1946 that "...the taboo on taking food cooked by a person of ... a lower ... caste ... is the keystone of the whole system" (1946, p. 71). He also suggested that in Indian society there is thought to be an identity between 'soul-stuff' ("the life matter of human beings") and cereal plants, and also between water and life. This led him to aver that "...it is the combination of grain with water that gives the sacred character to the kachchā food" (ibid., p. 74).

In 1960 A.C. Mayer presented data on commensal practices which were very much more detailed in one key respect than any previously presented.³ He recorded more or less exactly and systematically, who gave which type of food to whom. His conclusions were as follows. Firstly, "...the position of a caste on the commensal hierarchy can be assessed on the principle that eating the food cooked or served by another denotes equality with it, or inferiority; and that not to eat denotes equality or superiority. Those castes which are most exclusive eat from nobody else, and the lowest castes eat from nearly everyone" (1960, p. 34). Secondly (a refinement of the first) although no Brahman accepts kachchā food from any other caste, some Brahmans accept pakkā food from some other castes (in Ramkheri, for example, Brahmans accept pakkā food from Rajputs) and "... all the Brahmans will drink from the brass pots of a larger number of castes" (ibid., p. 37). Thirdly (also a refinement of the first) high non-Brahman castes tend to give and take kachchā, pakkā, and water to and from each other much more readily than the lowest castes in the village who "... are

more separate and more jealous of their status" (ibid., p. 60).

Let us take stock for a moment.

Blunt, Hutton and Mayer were all agreed on the existence of (at least) the following types of food; non-vegetarian, vegetarian, raw, cooked, 'drink', 'smoke' and kachchā and pakkā. There was general agreement that the transfer of 'cooked' food implies that the giver is equal or superior to the receiver although Mayer modified this by showing that transfer of cooked kachchā food implies relative superiority and inferiority more than the transfer of cooked pakkā food, which, occasionally, is given upwards. Each of the authors identified exclusively in commensal matters as denoting highness rather than lowness, although Mayer reported that the lowest castes in Ramkheri are exclusive too, especially towards each other. With regard to the attributes of the various food types Mayer was generally cautious (although he reported that vegetarian food was conceptually linked in Ramkheri with non-violence while meat was associated there with strength and action (ibid., p. 45)). It serves present interests to emphasize Hutton's claims that raw food and water are conceptually identified with 'soul stuff' and 'life' respectively, and that kachchā food is in some way 'sacred'.

If kachchā food was 'sacred' in Hutton's view, it became 'inferior' in the view of McKim Marriott, writing from the vantage point of Kishan Garhi village in Uttar Pradesh. In 1959 Marriott distinguished five categories of food and ranked them in accordance with what he claimed to be the local value system. From high to low, pure to impure,

honourable to dishonourable, these foods were 'no food',⁴ raw food, pakkī, kachchī, and garbage. Marriott argued that the way these foods were transferred by villagers suggested that "...that caste must be regarded as highest which receives the greater amount of ritual honouring and purification from others while giving the lesser in return" (1959, 97). This implied that in the course of being given 'upwards' (i.e. from members of low castes to members of high ones) the 'highest' foods ('no food' and raw food) conveyed honour and purity. 'Low' food (kachchā and garbage) by contrast, when given 'downwards' (and these two were not given upwards) conveyed shame and dishonour. There was also something else that Marriott perceived. In Kishan Garhi the "... patterns of food transfer define 5 blocs" (out of the 27 castes in the village) "very clearly ... These food patterns appear ... as positive relational devices. Indeed the circulation of food constitutes the life's blood of caste rank" (emphasis mine)(ibid., p. 98). In other words, the significance of food transfers seemed to lie not just in the mere expression of relative rank of two parties to a transaction but in the circulation of food through the system; transactions expressed rank, but they did so in terms of a whole.

It was not, however, this latter idea that Marriott chose to develop in his famous 1968 paper on caste, rank, and food transactions. In this essay he concentrated not so much on the operation of the system as a whole, or on the way that food circulated around in it, but on the "...symbolic transactions of highness and lowness between two castes represented by any members of those castes" (1968, p. 133).

Thus he argued that "... a cardinal assumption of ranking in statements" (made by his informants) "could be formulated very simply; givers are higher, receivers are lower" (ibid., p. 142). He also claimed that "villagers often seem to apply a strictly transactional logic, treating all foods, objects, and persons as if they were substantially equivalent" (emphasis mine, ibid., p. 145). On the basis of these two assumptions Marriott proceeded to place data on the transfer of five 'food' types (raw, pakkā, kachchā, jūthā (garbage) and faeces) in five matrices designed to represent castes in relation to each other as givers and/or receivers of each food type. In order to determine its rank Marriott awarded each caste a score. This score was computed by subtracting the number of encounters (out of a possible twenty-three, there being twenty-four castes shown in the matrices) in which a caste habitually 'lost' by receiving a particular food type, from the number of encounters that caste habitually 'won' by giving that food type. This elegant mode of presentation revealed the place of each caste in the hierarchy; Brahmans scored most, sweepers least, and all the castes in between scored in a way that would not cause surprise to anyone familiar with local caste hierarchies. Marriott concluded that his analysis "... encouraged one to look upon the set of intercaste transactions in any kind of food in Kishan Garhi as a kind of tournament among the twenty-four teams which make up this village's society" (ibid., p. 154). Pursuing this idea a little further he asserted that "... gaining dominance over others through feeding them or securing dependence on others through being fed by them appear to be the comprehensive goals of actors in the system of transactions

(ibid., p. 169).

There can be no doubt that Marriott's 1968 paper made a significant contribution to the study of commensal practices in rural Indian society. But there was also one problem (a very basic one) which his analysis left unsolved. This relates to the holistic perspective which he had begun to espouse in his previous (1959) essay (see above). Did his (1968) concentration upon transactions between pairs of castes imply that this holistic perspective was in some way incorrect? We are not told.

The importance of developing a holistic view (or a variety of such views) was taken up by R.S. Khare, the last and arguably the most authoritative author to be considered in this introduction. Khare argued that the idea of 'circulation' is one of the most fundamental in the complex collection of Hindu ideas about food. He drew attention, for example, to the idea that the very production of food is thought to depend on the proper working of what he termed the "primordial cycle"; human food is thought to be an 'organic' substance coming out of the 'inorganic' elements of water and fire. The production of food from these elements is thought to be dependent on the gods. In order for them to send the necessary heat and rain, the gods themselves have to be 'fed'. They are 'fed' by "sacrifice born of karma"⁵ (1976, p. 137). Thus "from food creatures come into being; from rain is the birth of food; from sacrifice rain comes into being" (Bhagavad Gita, quoted in loc.cit.). In this vein Khare argued that the cultural significance attached to the production and transfer of food in Hindu society could only properly be understood if these narrowly

commensal matters were regarded as part of a much more general "moral process" one aspect of which consists, as in this case, of the 'circulation' of the moral qualities of humans and gods within a cycle that includes also ancestors, inorganic elements and organic substances (ibid., diagram p. 136).

Moreover, according to Khare, food 'circulates' not only between humans and gods but also around the human community itself, members of which give food to, and take food from each other (ibid., p. 137). As in the case of the relationship between humans and gods, so in the relationship between humans and each other, the giving and taking of food symbolizes mutual dependence within a whole. In considering Khare's work a perceptive reviewer expressed part of the matter succinctly thus "... the maintenance of moral order is a basic value reaffirmed through the preparation, serving and eating of food. On the one hand, that order consists of analytically separate hierarchically arranged segments (families, castes, etc.) each of which maintains its identity and uniqueness through exclusiveness. On the other hand, the segments are interrelated and synthesized through complex processes of receiving and giving ... into increasingly inclusive social bodies. Commensality is carefully controlled to maintain both the separateness of the exclusive units and inclusiveness of larger social groups" (Beech, 1978). As I have already said it is this last notion: of the process of inclusion and exclusion, that is one of the main ones underlying the first part of the analysis which follows.

Food exchanges in Singhara: Constructing a Whole

(a) Contexts of food transactions

I have briefly referred to the categories of food with which I shall be concerned in this chapter. A slightly fuller description of these is now called for. They are: Kachchā, or food boiled in water and referring mainly to boiled rice and pulse; pakkā, or food cooked in clarified butter (ghī) or oil, and referring mainly to pūrī (a bread cake fried in ghī) and vegetables (sabzī); 'wet', including water, tea and pān (betel leaf and nuts mixed with lime and sundry other 'wet' substances); 'dry', including supādī (betel nut), bīdīs (tobacco wrapped in the dry leaf of a tendu tree - 'Indian cigarettes'), and cigarettes; and 'no food' (see note 4). While kachchā and pakkā are explicitly named categories, there is no name for the categories I have called 'wet' and 'dry'. However, such categories are very clearly implied in people's discussion as well as their action. In discussion people might say "I can take only betel from him, though I can take water from that one." By implication they would mean 'dry' food and 'wet' food.

For the purposes of this chapter I have placed the castes into groups or blocks (see Table 9). This arrangement is based on the structure indicated by the commensal rules to be described.

Inside or outside the village, in their houses, walking along a path, in the market place, in the fields - wherever they may be and on whatever occasion - men (and at home women) would very seldom be without betel nut and a sarontā (betel nut cutter). If one were to call at another's house, supādī, at the very least, would be offered to, and

Table 9. Castes arranged in their commensal blocks⁶

<u>Commensal blocks</u>	<u>Caste names</u>
Block I	Brahman and Brahman/ Thākur
Block II	Jain Sonār Tāmbakār Barhāi Lohār Kachchi Dhīmar Nāi
Block III	Yādav Darzī Lakherā Gond Gedarī Telī Maharā Dhobī
Block IV	Kumhār Domār Chamar Bhangī

accepted by, the visitor. In such a case the betel nut may be already cut, lying on a tray. Alternatively the host may take the uncut nut, which is hard and round, and holding it in his left hand, cut it into flakes, transfer the cut pieces so that they lie in the palm of his right hand, and offer them to his visitor, while touching his own right elbow or wrist with the fingers of his left hand. The visitor would then take the flakes with the fingers of his right hand, place them in his palm, shake them up and down a little, and 'shoot' them, so to speak, into his mouth. At ceremonial gatherings supādī would be handed round on a tray, usually with some bīdīs and possibly also some cloves, cardamom, loose tobacco with lime to mix it with, and pān. It would be difficult to imagine a meal, formal or informal, without supādī being handed round afterwards, either by the host to the company at large, or by an individual to the three or four other individuals nearest to him. Betel nut plays some part in formal rituals. For example, part of the ingredients which are exchanged by the two sides at the Phaldān (lit. 'the giving of fruit': a small pre-marriage rite) consists of whole betel nuts. However, the principal context in which supādī is exchanged is ordinary day-to-day social intercourse. Many people have betel nut in their mouths throughout the day.

Bīdīs are exchanged between men (women do not smoke publicly) in the same way as supādī is. In company a man might light several bīdīs at once, by holding a flame underneath the ends (never putting them to his lips), and then hand them round with his right hand.

Pān has the quality of being rather special in

comparison with supādī and bīdīs. Most families have the ingredients to make pān at home and they might offer it to an honoured (or at any rate slightly honoured) guest, if one were to call. The most important context in which pān is taken, however, may be illustrated as follows.

Villagers from all castes gather in one place on several occasions and for several reasons; to sing or to listen to religious songs (bhajans); to hold meetings or to attend ceremonies. Such gatherings take place on verandahs or courtyards of houses. Wherever held the seating at such gatherings is similar. Brahman elders sit in the centre of the company (perhaps with their backs to a wall at the centre of a semi-circle). Next to them sit non-Brahman high caste elders. In front of these sit younger Brahmans, Barhaīs, Lohārs, Kachchis, and other elders of castes in block II. Beyond these sit individual members of block III castes concerned directly with the function in hand. Beyond them, spreading out to the edges of the circle or semi-circle, sit children and other members of castes in group III. Perched on neighbouring verandahs, opposite perhaps, sit those from Untouchable castes. A little apart from the company, in a separate room perhaps, a place is provided for a Nāī or Dhīmar (or Barhaī or Kachchi, or any combination of these) to prepare chilams (pipes that on an occasion such as an intercaste gathering are normally made of mango leaves), ganjā (hashish), pān and possibly tea. At an appropriate moment tea is served to the Brahmans and, afterwards, to the others. Then the host or a Nāī serves the pān; first to the Brahmans and then to the other high caste elders. These eat their pān ostentatiously and deliberately together.

It is a performance in every sense.

As well as being prepared domestically these 'wet' and 'dry' foods are sold at the village tea and pān stalls. Singhārā has six such permanent stalls, and on market day more are set up. Five of these are run by Brahmans, the other by a Dhīmar. There is also a pān, bīdī and cigarette stall run by a Kachchi. These stalls are places to which members of all castes go, and there are several occasions during most days when small gatherings of people from different castes cluster round them. The Untouchables may purchase tea as long as they sit outside the building to drink it, and use cups and saucers that are kept specially for them in the rafters.

There is no stall which offers cooked food for sale. Thus this type of food is given and taken in the domestic context only.⁷ There are a number of situations in which people give and take food from one another. Virilocal marriage and a general rule of village exogamy mean that men and women are constantly coming to and going from the village. Sub-caste mates are spread out in surrounding villages and a caste pañchāyat may well involve the preparation and the serving of a meal to its members. Most domestic ceremonies include a meal for guests and it is on such occasions, especially those connected with marriages, that the largest number of persons from different castes gather to eat. As an example of such a gathering, consider a meal held by a Brahman host in the course of a family marriage ceremony. Male members of the host's patrilineage (khāndān) and its affines sit together in a central position and are served kachchā food by young

male or female members of that khāndān. High caste guests (from blocks I and II; for example other Brahmans, Jains and Sonārs) sit near the host's khāndān and are served pakkā food, while Dhīmars and Nāīs (low block II castes) sit further away and are served kachchā food. Further away still are seated servant castes from block III who are served kachchā food - as are those from block IV castes, who eat their meal some distance away from the main company. At the end of the meal a sweeper is given the left-overs (jūthā) of the meals of the high caste diners. Such an occasion is eminently 'effervescent' in the Durkheimian or Maussian sense of that term.

At all major festivals kachchā food is given by high caste masters to their kāmīns (hereditary servants). Sometimes the latter eat such meals in their employer's house. At other times a kāmīn may take the cooked food in a covered tray to his own house.

It is customary for a meal to be given to caste mates and occasionally others as a form of expiation for an offence. Thus, for example, a woman who had accidentally killed a cow was absolved (after a year's penance) only after that woman's family, who had been ostracized by the entire community, had provided a meal for representatives of each family in the village.

There are, then, a considerable number of occasions during which food is given and taken more or less publicly. Also important is talk about giving and taking food. As already observed, people may refer to their relationship with those of other castes in terms of the types of food they may take from (or give to) them.

Finally, it may be stressed that a person does not give or receive food at intercaste gatherings as an individual, but as part of a caste. Each food transfer is, in Maussian terms, a total prestation and communicates afresh the identity of that person in terms of his membership of a particular group, itself defined in terms of the society as a whole.

(b) Directions of food transfer and their structural implications

Before describing the directions of food transfers it needs to be made clear that the various categories of foods are conceptually and practically arranged as follows: jūthā, kachchā, pakkā, 'wet', 'dry', 'no food'; such that if members of caste A habitually give cast B a type high on that list, then they may automatically give that caste types lower on the list as well. For example, if members of caste A give kachchā food to members of caste B then they may automatically also give pakkā food, the 'wet', 'dry' and 'no food' categories too. Similarly if caste D members accept the 'wet' category from members of caste C then they may automatically also receive the 'dry' and 'no food' categories too. And so on.

Food transactions flow along the following lines.

Brahmans give kachchā food to all castes of blocks III and IV as well as those at the bottom of block II. To the rest of block II castes Brahmans give pakkā food. They accept kachchā food from no other caste and do not accept such food from other Brahmans unless they are of the same

lineage, or are close affines. They accept the 'wet' category from castes in block II and take only 'dry' food from block III castes. They accept nothing directly from persons belonging to block IV castes, although they do accept food which has been harvested by such castes. Thus, in the slightly tortuous terms adopted here, the Brahmans may be said to accept the category 'no food' from the Untouchables (see note 4).

All castes in block II give kachchā food to the Untouchables. Many (particularly high) castes in this block give kachchā food to many castes in block III. Most block II castes give and take pakkā food to and from each other; all freely exchange the 'wet' category amongst themselves. All castes in block II give 'wet' food to Brahmans and all other castes, taking this category only from Brahmans and, as already said, those of their own block. They accept only 'dry' food from block III castes and only 'no food' from those in block IV.

Block III castes accept kachchā food from Brahmans and those in block II already referred to in the previous paragraph. With very few exceptions they accept neither kachchā nor pakkā food from castes other than these. They take the 'wet' category from all castes in blocks I and II without being able to give it back. They give 'dry' food to all and take this category from all except the Untouchables.

Block IV castes take kachchā food from Brahmans and all those in block II. They accept this category from some, but not all, block III castes. They give nothing (except of course 'no food') to members of castes in blocks higher than themselves, and display considerable exclusiveness

TABLE 10

		Receivers																					
Givers		B	J	Son	Tam	Kac	Bar	Loh	Dhi	Nai	Tel	Yad	Mah	Gon	La	Da	Ged	Dho	Kum	Dom	Cha	Bha	
	B	P	P	P	P	P	P	P	K	K	K	K	K	K	K	K	K	K	K	K	K	J	
	J	W	K	P	P	P	P	P	K	K	K	K	K	K	K	K	K	K	K	K	K	K	
	Son	W	P	K	P	P	P	P	K	K	K	K	K	K	K	K	K	K	K	K	K	K	
	Tam	W	P	P	K	P	P	P	K	K	K	K	K	K	K	K	K	K	K	K	K	K	
	Kac	W	P	P	P	K	P	P	P	P	K	K	K	K	P	P	P	K	K	K	K	K	
	Bar	W	W	W	W	W	K	P	K	P	K	P	K	K	P	P	P	K	K	K	K	K	
	Loh	W	W	W	W	W	P	K	P	P	P	K	K	K	P	P	P	K	K	K	K	K	
	Dhi	W	P	P	P	P	P	P	K	K	P	K	K	K	P	P	P	K	K	K	K	K	
	Nai	W	P	P	P	P	P	P	P	K	P	K	P	K	K	P	P	K	K	K	K	K	
	Tel	D	D	D	D	D	D	D	D	D	K	D	D	P	P	P	P	K	K	K	K	K	
	Yad	D	D	D	D	D	D	D	D	D	D	K	P	W	D	D	D	D	D	K	K	K	
	Mah	D	D	D	D	D	D	D	D	D	D	D	K	D	D	D	D	D	D	D	K	K	
	Gon	D	D	D	D	D	D	D	D	D	D	D	W	D	K	D	D	D	D	D	K	K	
	La	D	D	D	D	D	D	D	D	D	D	D	D	D	D	K	D	D	D	D	D	K	
	Da	D	D	D	D	D	D	D	D	D	D	D	D	D	D	D	K	D	D	D	D	D	
	Ged	D	D	D	D	D	D	D	D	D	D	D	D	D	D	D	D	K	D	D	D	D	
	Dho	D	D	D	D	D	D	D	D	D	D	D	D	D	D	D	D	D	K	D	D	D	
	Kum	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	K	K	N
	Dom	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	K	N
	Cha	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	K
	Bha	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	K

Key:² J = Jūthā, K = Kachchā, P = Pakkā, W = 'Wet', D = 'Dry'
 N = 'no food'.³

1. In the Brahman caste kachchā food is exchanged within the khāndān (patrilineage) and between close affines.
2. N.B. First paragraph of this section of the text (on p.166).
3. A certain degree of flexibility is required when interpreting exchanges of this category. There are times and contexts when the distinction between 'no food' and 'dry' food appears less than sharp. For example members of several castes might accept a biḍi from a Kumhār if he were to place one on the ground some distance away from the recipient. No physical contact is involved in such an exchange. This illustrates what is perhaps a totally self evident fact: that 'real life' is seldom as rigidly rule bound as a matrix such as this tends to suggest.

amongst themselves. The sweeper accepts jūthā from Brahmans.

This information has been placed, in rather fuller form, in the accompanying matrix (Table 10).

The structural implications of these transactions may now be considered by observing some of the functions of

each food type and, following that, of the commensal rules in general.

To take kachchā food first. This type is freely given and taken within the localized caste group, except in the case of the Brahman caste in which it is exchanged only within the khāndān (patrilineage) and between close affines. Kachchā food is given by Brahmans to all other castes, except to the highest in block II. It is also given by high block II castes to castes in block III, and by all block II castes to the Untouchables. It is not, generally, given by one caste to another adjacent to it in the hierarchy, or by one Brahman to just any other Brahman. Thus, from the Brahman's point of view, as well as from that of some others, kachchā food is given to one who is either intimate or clearly inferior. This lends support to Dumont's statement that "kachchā food is reserved roughly speaking for relatives or members of the endogamous group and servants of very inferior caste" (1970a, p. 142), although as it stands, this seems a slight exaggeration.

Transfers of pakkā food fulfil a number of functions which contrast with those of kachchā transactions. Firstly, in so far as it is exchanged between many castes in block II and between all Brahman lineages, transfers of this type appear to be concerned less unequivocally with signifying inequality than transfers of kachchā food are. An exchange of pakkā food (in these cases) seems to denote a degree of equality between giver and receiver. Secondly, while members of different Brahman lineages do not, unless closely related by marriage, exchange kachchā (thus re-inforcing the separation between them) all members of this caste freely exchange pakkā food. Transfers of this type thus unite them. Marriott

reports that in Kishan Garhi all castes corresponding roughly to my blocks I and II exchange pakkā food (1968, p. 151). The role of pakkā food transfers thus seems similar in that village and in Singhara; those at the top of the hierarchy are united by such exchanges in a way that those at the bottom are not.

Water, tea and pān circulate freely within and between castes in blocks I and II. All members of castes in both blocks are able both to give and take this type to and from each other. Several castes in block III (Gonds and Ahīrs for example) exchange this category, but generally speaking they and the Untouchables accept 'wet' food only from a member of their own caste or from castes in blocks I and II. Thus transfers of this food type divide the society into two; on the one hand those (Brahmans and block II castes) who may give this type to others, and, on the other hand, those who may not. These two divisions are very clearly ranked; the former (the 'water givers') being distinctively superior to the latter (the 'water takers').

Finally, the 'dry' category also divides the society into two. This time castes of blocks I, II and III freely exchange it, and are thereby all distinguished from block IV, the Untouchables.

Thus the commensal rules do show, extremely vividly, how castes are divided against each other by transfers of one type of food only to be united by transfers of another into a more inclusive group, in opposition to another excluded group. By exchanging kachchā food, affinally linked Brahman khāndāns are united, and distinguished from other Brahman lineages. All Brahmans exchange pakkā food, and also give

both kachchā and pakkā food to most others, while taking neither from any caste lower than themselves thus distinguishing themselves in two ways. Brahmans and block II castes are unified in opposition to those in blocks III and IV by the circulation amongst them of the 'wet' category. All castes in blocks I, II and III exchange 'dry' food, but do not accept this type from the Untouchables, thus excluding them. Lastly, despite the fact that no member of any caste in blocks I, II or III may accept even 'dry' food from the Untouchables, pollution (if that is what it is) is not seen to be attached to 'raw' food touched in the process of being harvested by agricultural labourers who are also from block IV castes. And so it can be said that this category, here termed 'no food', may freely be exchanged throughout the entire society. Thus, in the end, the whole is constructed and all, from Brahman to Untouchable, are included within a system of give and take (lenā/denā). It is this symbolic affirmation of successive inclusions and exclusions which is, perhaps, the most remarkable feature of the commensal hierarchy in particular, if not the caste system in general (see Figure IV).

Nature, Transformations and Hierarchy

Now let us look at these rules from a slightly different angle, focusing on the "... persistent exchange of food across the social order" (emphasis mine) (Khare 1976, p. 125)⁸ for, as must be clear by now, no villager stands in a relationship with any other villager as either a giver or a receiver of food, but as both giver and receiver

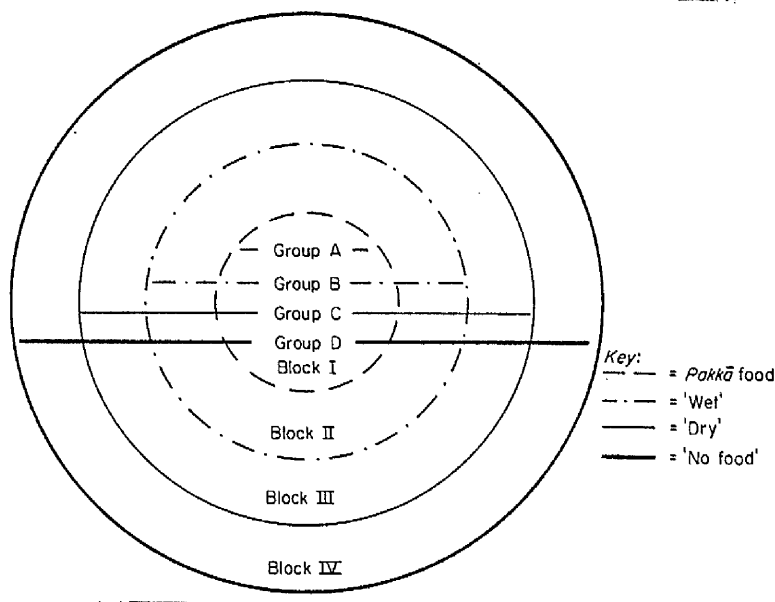


Figure IV Inclusions and exclusions. The diagram shows one of the most important properties of each food category. Castes (or, in the case of block I, Brahman patrilineages) are grouped according to the type of food freely exchanged between group members. Thus by freely exchanging one type of food certain castes are 'included' within one commensal group while certain other castes are excluded from that group. These latter may, however, be themselves 'included' within a broader commensal group by means of the exchange of another food type. This process continues until all are 'included' within a whole in which all may exchange the 'no food' category.

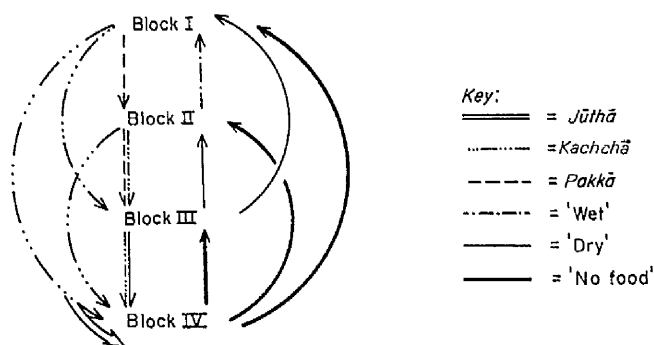


Figure V. Hierarchical and transformational aspects of food exchanges. A schematic representation of types of food exchanged between blocks of castes, showing that food given upwards is invariably of a less 'cooked', or transformed, type than that which is given downwards. For example, castes in block III give 'dry' food to those in block I while receiving kachchā in return - and so on.

of, in many instances, different types of food; each individual is related to each other individual outside his own caste as a partner in (frequently) an asymmetrical exchange of food. The value in approaching the system with this in mind is that it enables us to grasp another of its fundamental features, its transformational character.

Consider the relationship between any inferior and any superior in terms of the food they exchange and it will be observed that inferiors give superiors food that is invariably nearer to a raw and natural state than that which they receive from superiors in return. For example, an Untouchable Kumhār may 'give' (in the sense explained in note 4) Brahmans and others completely raw food, i.e. unwinnowed grain, unpressed oil plants, unpeeled fruit and vegetables, and so on (both Marriott (1968, p. 145) and Khare (1976:15) report similar practices in their respective field areas). In return the Kumhār receives kachchā food; of actual food the one that is considered the most cooked and transformed type. (By accepting left-overs (jūthā) a sweeper gives such raw food in exchange for a category even more transformed than kachchā). To take a second and less extreme example; those in block III castes may give 'dry' food to those in block II castes. Such 'dry' food, it should be said, is considered to be more transformed than the raw food ('no food') given by the Untouchables because it includes cut betel nut and burning bīdīs - and both cutting and burning are thought to be transforming processes (see also Khare 1976:15). In exchange they receive at least pakkā, which is thought to be two stages more transformed than cut betel nut. By way of comparison, third and fourth examples may be taken from

Ramkheri and Kishan Garhi. Both Mayer and Marriott (1960:37, 1968:151) report that Brahmans accept pakkā food from some, if not most, castes in the equivalent structural position to Singhara's block II castes. In exchange they give kachchā. Once more inferiors may be seen to give superiors food that 'comes back' more cooked, more transformed.

Thus the transformational character of the system may be expressed by the general formula: food given upwards is always less transformed than that food given downwards. I will try to demonstrate this in another way by examining what happened at a large but in no way untypical feast which was held in the village.

An elderly Sonār woman underwent, rather surprisingly, a successful cure for a serious illness. Her sons gave a feast for about 300 villagers from all castes as a thanksgiving.

Both paddy and wheat for the chapātīs came from the fields of the host's family and had been harvested by their daily labourers, some of whom were from block IV castes. On the actual day of the feast servants were hired to prepare the feast. The first set of these were from block III castes and they were required to carry out tasks which included taking the wheat grains to the mill to be ground into flour, cleaning the rice (i.e. removing the small stones and other rubbish from it), bringing other ingredients (vegetables, spices, betel nut, and so forth) from shops, and arranging them. All this was done just outside the walls of the Sonār's house and, because of that house's location near the market place, these tasks provided something of a spectacle for passers by. I was told, quite specifically and unequivocally, that this was the first stage of preparation and that the

next stage would have to be carried out by castes of block II, because Shudras (i.e. block III castes) cannot cut the vegetables. Thus, when all the ingredients were ready for them, Barhaī, Kachchi and Dhīmar servants (each from block II) began that next stage. They had been hired to peel, scrape, cut and wash the potatoes, onions and radishes. They did this in the courtyard of the house, just inside the walls, arranging the food in piles on thālīs (metal trays). They also prepared pān, mixing the betel nut which had previously been cut by the block III servants, with the lime and other ingredients, and fixing them on wooden sticks. The final stage, the actual cooking, was carried out by Brahmans in the cooking area in the central part of the house. They also served the cooked meal to the guests. The seating of the guests took the customary form, with Brahmans at the centre of a very large semi-circle, in this case spreading out over the road, with ever lower castes towards the edge (i.e. exactly as described earlier).

Thus food that started off completely raw was progressively transformed ('cooked' in the sense understood by this culture) by progressively higher castes until it was fully 'cooked', finally transformed, by the Brahmans, in which state it came back down the hierarchy. The plates of some Brahmans, with their left-overs, were picked up by the Nāī and given to the sweeper, while other guests threw away their own plates themselves.

An occasion such as this clearly demonstrates that the structure of food transformations recreates symbolically the arrangement not just of guests at an intercaste meal but the caste hierarchy in general. This is further reinforced

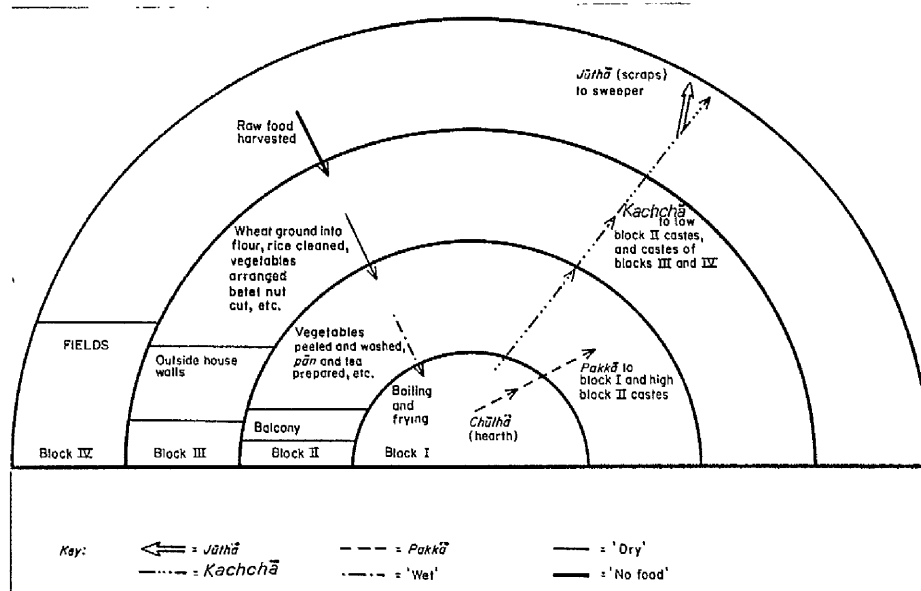


Figure VI. The commensal structure of a feast. The figure represents the career of food as it is prepared, cooked, served and eaten at an intercaste feast (*bhoj*). It shows how food is progressively transformed by members of castes from progressively higher blocks before being finally served by Brahman cooks.

by the spatial progression of the food. In this case food came from fields outside the village to a flour mill just within its boundaries,⁹ to an area outside the house of the host to that house's courtyard inside its walls to (finally) the very centre, the chūlhā (hearth) area of the house, and then out again. I have attempted to put all this in Figure VI.

One remarkable feature of this scheme is that it appears to conjoin nature and culture, in the following way. As Hutton (see above) and Khare (1976, 119) have emphasized, food not only actually has 'life-giving' properties but is associated in people's minds with 'life' in all sorts of ways.¹⁰ However, by all their actions villagers convey the message that food gains its life-giving qualities as much, if not greatly more, from all the cultural processes which

transform it, than it does from its own natural properties.

This last idea - that substances acquire life-giving properties by being transformed by superiors - is, I believe, a very pervasive one in Singhara, appearing in a variety of forms (see, for example, Chapter 5 and Selwyn 1979).

One further example which, like the feasting arrangements described above, demonstrates the attribution of specially beneficent powers to a progressively transforming food-stuff is as follows.

When my Brahman 'sister' bore a child, all the heat was said to have run out of her body (in which condition women are supposed always to be after parturition). Two days after the birth, a Kumhār (block IV) was instructed to provide a special earthenware pot, in which was put water together with small pieces of wood (kānki) supplied by the Barhaī (block II). To this, betel nut and turmeric were added by the mother's elder sister, who then boiled it. The resulting 'nectar' (amiya) was said to possess the power to heat the mother and to bring on her milk. It is said that if a woman drinks water straight from the well in this condition (i.e. having just given birth) she will die. How different from water that has been 'processed' with such care. The episode is a small illustration of an important set of ideas clustered around the central notion that some natural substances, in this case water, are, in some states, a source of danger, in this case mortal. However, the same substances may be made safe, acquiring life-giving properties in the process, by being carefully conducted through the appropriate cultural, and hierarchically organized, channels.

An Ultimate Sanction

The above remarks provoke a final observation.

The idea that to 'be itself' (i.e. to be life and health enhancing) food "has to be given away" - in order later to be received back, is an ancient one in Indian thought (Khare 1976, 125). I have argued that this idea manifests itself clearly in Singhāra and that food is thought to acquire beneficent powers in, and only in, the process of being carefully controlled and culturally transformed. This being so, one of the system's ideological achievements is to make it appear that (a) the inherent malevolence of the natural universe may be tempered and converted to benevolent effect by a series of appropriate culturally prescribed processes, and (b) that proper food may not be acquired by an isolated individual but must, rather, be acquired as a result of the circulating exchanges of individuals linked to others in ever more inclusive groups. All of which goes some way towards explaining why temporary or permanent expulsion from one's caste is such a serious punishment. An outcaste is one who cannot exchange food in the proper manner; who is excluded from the encompassing flow not only of moral substance but of physical substance (food) as well. Being condemned to eat his own food he is, in Blunt's terms (see above), 'exposed to his own evil' and, in the terms of the Bhagavad Gita "... to eating nothing but sin" (quoted in Khare, loc.cit.). Given the set of ideas about food which I have presented here, such an outcaste's 'social death' must seem (both to him and to others) practically indistinguishable from physical

death. The threat of being removed from the system of the giving and taking of food is clearly a very powerful instrument of social control indeed.

Conclusion

The data presented and the interpretation offered have been designed, primarily, to illustrate the working out of a holistic ethic in the empirical world of commensal practices in an Indian village.

At least three conclusions may be drawn which relate to the propositions advanced by the authors discussed in the first part of this chapter. First of all, although it would be naïve to dismiss, completely, Marriott's (1968) notion of intercaste food transactions as a 'kind of tournament between (caste) teams', it would seem even more naïve to accept this formulation as representing, as Marriott claims it does, 'the comprehensive goals of actors within the system of transactions'. Of course castes, like groups and individuals everywhere, compete with each other to a greater or lesser extent. But to imply either that that is all castes do, or that that is what they mainly do, seems altogether too simple. It has been argued in this chapter that a much more fundamental dimension to food transactions in an Indian village may be perceived. That is, to use Dumont's terms, the ideological subordination of the partners in food transfers to the whole. Secondly, and very closely related to the above, Blunt's audacious insight that commensal rules derive from the conception that within each individual personality lurks a potentially evil and destructive power which can be brought

under control by the inclusion of those individual personalities within an encompassing moral order appears sharply acute. Thirdly, Hutton's Hocartian equation between certain foods and 'life matter' points the way towards a final conclusion. The very existence of properly edible food is clearly conceived to be dependent upon (or even equivalent to) the circulation of a set of ever transforming physical and moral substances around the hierarchical order. That, indeed, must seem to the residents of Singhara a potent affirmation that the particular ordo hominum in which they find themselves derives from a truly universal ordo rerum.

CHAPTER 4

BASIC KINSHIP GROUPS AND VALUES

Introduction

My intention in the previous chapter was to lay the ground for, and take the first detailed steps towards, the examination of the 'holistic ethic' at work in village society. The particular features with which I was concerned (each of which was considered in outline form in the thesis Introduction) were (a) the phrasing of individual identity in terms of the whole (b) the latent fear of the individual uncontained, or unencompassed, by that whole (c) the segmentary nature of the commensal hierarchy (d) the transformational aspects of commensal practices and (e) the 'naturalization' of the cultural order defined by those practices. These features and principles (amongst others) are pursued further, from several vantage points, in the three chapters on kinship ideology and behaviour which now follow.

The aim of the present chapter, which is divided into two parts, is to describe some basic aspects of kinship practice and values. In the first part the terms which structure the kinship system, and their referents, are discussed, and a few paragraphs are devoted to reflecting upon how these may be regarded analytically. The second part is concerned with two ideas, or values, which are, in my view, of central importance in the kinship universe: mān (honour, wife-taker) and sevā ('service'). Both of these have to do with the giving of deference, and, though he discusses neither term directly, it

is interesting that Parry, too, finds it appropriate to set aside part of a chapter on clans and their segments to discuss the importance of deference behaviour (1979:146-149). One general reason why I follow Parry in this regard is to emphasise the pervasiveness of hierarchy at all levels of caste and kinship practice in the village. As Parry (after Pocock 1972: 65) says, "the principles which govern relations between castes .. and the idiom(s) in which these principles are expressed.. are homologous to those which.. organise relations within the caste" (Op.cit.:131). Exploration of this very basic fact will be carried forward in subsequent chapters, especially in chapter 6 - in which the notion of mān also features prominently (indeed the discussion of this term which follows here is intended, partly, to prefigure the analysis in that later chapter). But there are other homologues, at other levels, at work in the giving of deference, and an attempt is made to examine both mān and sevā in more general, 'non-kinship', terms as well as in very down to earth contexts of actual kinship behaviour. The purpose of this is to indicate the way in which everyday kinship practice is suffused, penetrated, and given meaning by principles of much wider scope and significance expressed in high religious ceremony. To put it in another and rather more particular way, the aim is to provide an insight into some of the fundamental continuities which may be perceived at all levels from the light touch on the feet of a respected member of the family to the ecstatic brandishing of a sword in the face of the goddess as her image is drawn through the streets after the autumn harvest (an image, incidentally, which will be with us again later on).

Part I. Kin Groups

Apart from describing the basic groupings of kin in the village (which is the main object of this part of the chapter) the three features of kinship organisation to which I want to draw attention are: the flexibility in usage of the terms for kin groups, the conceptual importance of affinity, and the significance for the kinship system of specifically Brahman kinship idioms and institutions which, in a sense, dominate those of other castes.

The Chūlhā

The term chūlhā means hearth, or fireplace. As a kinship term it refers to a group of persons who share the same hearth. The chūlhā is the smallest and most basic aggregation of kin and is the primary unit of economic co-operation. Its personnel fluctuate throughout its developmental cycle. One could say that there are four common 'types' of chūlhā in the village¹: (1) the nuclear family of parents and children (2) the joint family of parents, unmarried sons and daughters, and married sons with their wives (3) the three-generational extended family of parents, married sons and daughters-in-law and their children (4) the widow or widower with his or her married sons and their wives and children, a four-generational extension of that, or parents with their married sons and daughters-in-law and one or two matrilateral or patrilateral relatives of the parents (father's brother, father's widowed sister, mother's sister, etc.). A chūlhā is likely to start its life as the first of the above 'types' and then move through

some, if not all, of the subsequent stages until it divides.

Following partition, two or more separate chūlhās may remain in the same house (makān) which they formerly occupied as one chūlhā. But ownership and management of property is ideally (and, normally, in practice as well), at the level of the chūlhā - rather than at the level of the combination of chūlhās in the same house (except for a short transitional period). That said, however, there are contexts in which a ghar (house, with the connotation of 'home') comprising two or more distinct chūlhās is also a grouping of kin. Terms for kin in this latter category include ghar wāle (people of the house) and parivār ('family') - though these terms are less precise in meaning than chūlhā.

The Kutumb

The terms kutumb, kul, and khāndān all mean patrilineage.

The degree to which people are aware of themselves as members of distinct unilineal descent groups varies from caste to caste. Hence the importance of the kutumb in the internal organisation of local caste groups is not uniform. Brahman kutumbs are very clearly distinguished from one another. Elders of that caste are generally able both to trace their lineage back five or more generations in some detail and to identify the village from which the lineage originated in the past - i.e. its 'native place' (sousthān). Brahman kutumbs are commensally distinct (members of one accepting kachchā food from another only if a close affinal link exists between them - see previous chapter). Individual Brahmans are normally

both addressed and referred to by their kutumb name (which is not the case as far as other castes are concerned). In short, Brahman kutumbs may be said to be highly self conscious entities. By contrast, although people in other castes are aware of their kutumb, especially for ritual purposes, the boundaries of their kutumbs are often of less actual organisational significance than those of Brahman kutumbs.

Male members of the kutumb, together with their wives but not (properly) their sisters - who will join, or will have joined, the kutumb of their husband upon marriage² - worship their kul devtā (lineage deity) regularly once or twice a year. The majority of families worship corporately in a house of a kutumbī bhāī (lineage brother) on such occasions, though sometimes the kul devtā is worshipped simultaneously in two or more houses by different chūlhās of the same kutumb. Every house has a place where the deity resides. Normally it lacks shape but does have a name. Obeisance is also made to it at all family ceremonies. Sometimes the kul devtā is known as a ghar devtā, a house deity, illustrating the fact that what is sometimes a god of the kutumb is at other times a god of the household and, therefore, not always the symbol of lineage solidarity that the terms kul devtā suggest.

Mayer argues that the kutumb includes not only the agnates of an ego, but also that ego's mother's brother (māmā) and his father's sister (phūā) (1960,170). He associates the kutumb with the 'kindred of co-operation' and suggests that "the kutumb, like a lineage of co-operation seems to be defined by social contacts" (Ibid;171). Leela Dube, on the other hand, avers that the kutumb is quite unambiguously a patrilineage and, as such, does not and could not, include an

ego's MB, who belongs to a different kutumb. Similarly, she argues, since the FZ (phūā) has married into the kutumb of her husband upon marriage she is also excluded from an ego's kutumb. The usage of the term may vary, but its meaning in Singhara as patrilineage seems unambiguous. No villager would refer to either his MB or his FZ as belonging to his kutumb. It is true of course that a MB is an important relation to any ego - he gives him his first solid food for example (at the Annaprāsan ceremony) - but this and other prestations seem more intelligible if he is seen as a wife-giver to his sister's husband's family, and therefore not as a member of his ZS's kutumb. Indeed, the fact of affinity is, in a whole variety of ways (some of which are explored in chapter 6), a vital element in the relationship between a man and his māmā. In short, the mother's brother is a wife-giver and, though the relationship between wife-givers and wife-takers may become 'layered', in Madan's (1973) terms, over a generation, it remains true that the wife-giver/wife-taker relation is a permanent one and "...not even childbirth alters this fact" (Op. cit.:4). The difference between Mayer and Dube in this regard is, perhaps, not only about a point of fact but is, more importantly, a part of a broader and longer running discussion about the relative weight that is, and should be, placed on the principles of 'descent' and 'affinity'. The question is also raised about the extent to which action and concepts are kept distinct by villagers, and should be kept distinct by observers. By focussing on the co-operating kindred, Mayer may not allow sufficiently for the fact that while at the level of action we may see bilateral looking kindreds, at the level of concept we may become aware of the

clear distinctions between wife-givers and wife-takers, and hence between one kutumb and another (c.f. Dube 1974).

I have said that property is owned and managed by the chūlhā. However, it is evident, following the description of the economic life of the village in chapter 2, that there are times when the kutumb also appears to have an economic role (and, in a sense, may be said to 'manage' property). To put it as exactly as possible, there are times when Singhara residents who share membership of the same kutumb co-operate economically on the basis of that shared membership (the Upādhyāya kutumb, from which the pandits are drawn, is an example). Sometimes limited amounts of kin-aid - the loan of a plough or pump set for example - flow along kutumb lines. In these senses the kutumb does have some economic significance in some cases. Nevertheless its primary importance remains at the level of concept rather than action.

The foregoing applies to all castes in the village. As we reach the level of kinship grouping above the kutumb, we have to tread with considerably greater care. Let us first consider Brahman groupings.

The gotra

Every Brahman possesses a gotra name. In some cases this name is used as a 'surname' (Garg, for example, is, properly speaking a gotra name but is used in the village as a 'surname'). These gotra names are ascribed to a man at birth according to the principle of patrilineal descent. A woman achieves membership of her husband's gotra upon marriage. People thus speak of 'membership' and 'belonging'

to gotras. In Singhārā the fifteen Brahman kutumbs have ten gotra names between them, as follows (gotra names in parentheses): Chaube (Vashisht), Chaube (Kashyap), Chaube (Phulast), Jotki (Upmanya), Upādhyāya (Parasar), Dube (Parasar), Tivari (Banhar), Tivari (Sandilye), Tivari (Vashisht), Mishra (Sandilya), Garg (Garg), Trivedī (Vats), Mishra (Kashyap), Mishra (Kashyap) and Pande (unknown).

The status of the gotra name, and the way that it is used in Singhārā, is very much as Madan has described it in general terms in his careful analysis of the institution. The two negative marriage rules involving the gotra that are talked about in Singhara are that a man may not marry into his own gotra, nor give in marriage to a gotra from which he has previously taken (or vice versa). The first of these interdictions is observed with complete rigour and thus constitutes evidence to support Madan's assertion that one of the functions of a gotra name is to make "impossible even an unwitting breach of the prohibitions on marriage between agnates within the required limits" (1962:75). The limits to which he refers are those set by the rule of sapinda exogamy, which forbids marriage between consanguines of six or seven generations depth in the patriline and five or so generations depth in the mother's patriline.³ The fact that these rules are not verbally expressed at all in Singhara (as they are not amongst the Sadiupadi Brahmins of that part of Uttar Pradesh studied by Dumont (1966) does not invalidate Madan's argument. Furthermore, even when it is generally agreed by the respective parties that agnatic ties are of more than seven generations depth (as is the case with the Upādhyāya and Dube families, who migrated to central India from

the same village in the north where, one of them claims, they belonged to the same kutumb) or that agnatic ties are almost certainly absent altogether (as is the case with the two Mishra families who share the same gotra name but who came to Singhara from quite different directions), two families bearing the same gotra name will not, under any circumstances, contract an affinal link. This exemplifies the other function that Madan attributes to the gotra, which is to provide a means for people to distinguish each other ritually.

Some Singhara Brahmins are of the opinion that there are good and bad gotra names, and that gotras are, in some way, ranked. None expressed knowledge of the sophisticated division of gotras into uttam, madhyam and dhakara (high, medium and low) (Khare 1960:355), the 'three - thirteen - and yet others' or the 'three houses, thirteen houses, one lakh and a quarter houses' (Crooke 1896:294 and Dumont 1966:107). They did claim, however, that the gotras Garg, Gautam (persons bearing this gotra name live in a neighbouring village) and Sandilya are the highest gotras, and that one of the gotras I have mentioned is distinctively lower than the others, which seems like a truncated version of the type of theory to which these authors and others refer. At any rate, the gotra names, like most other names, are indeed spiced with the pervasive flavour of hierarchy.

Brahman divisions

North India is believed to be divided into five regional Brahman divisions. One of these, centred upon the ancient Indian capital of Kanauj (Kanpūr), is known as the

Kanakubja division. The Kanakubja Brahmans are themselves divided into divisions, the four principal ones in central India being Saḍiupaḍi, Kanakubja, Sanādhya and Jijhotiā. These divisions are thought, by Singhārā Brahmans, to be ranked in that order. Most claim to be Saḍiupaḍis, though Chaube (Vashisht) and Jotki claim to be Kanakubjas. The first of these says that his family must take a Kanakubja girl in marriage although a girl may be given to a Saḍiupaḍi family. Those from the latter division say they may give and take freely from both divisions. The Trivedīs claim to be Saḍiupaḍi Brahmans, while some others have expressed the opinion that this family belongs to the Jijhotiā division.

Other castes: Srenīs, Kurris, Bains, Gotras

The term srenī is presently used by the 'Sonīs' to describe the difference between Svarnakārs and Tāmbakārs. According to Basham, this term has the sense of mercantile guild, which fits rather well in this context. As has been stated (in chapter 2) these srenīs are endogamous and commensally distinct, though this is reportedly not the case in Jabalpūr city, where intermarriage between them is said to take place. As I have also said above, the possibility that these srenīs may cease to be endogamous in the future in Singhārā itself is actively contemplated by 'Sonīs' of both groups. Indeed, the use of this term in the village does, in my opinion, serve to illustrate the flexibility and malleability of kinship structures and the ability of a grouping based upon economic interest to assume the status of a kin-grouping under certain conditions.

Some castes use the term kurri to describe what they claim to be a localised endogamous group (I have also heard the term upjātī used to describe this group - but only rarely and never colloquially). The Dhīmars, for example, know of seven kurris in the vicinity (named Kewat, Revkar, Singhārā, Barman, Daria, Kauria and Sondia). Representatives of two of these, Barman and Sondia, are to be found in the village and are said by the Dhīmars to be ranked in that order (see previous chapter). Barmans and Sondias do not intermarry and are commensally separate, in the sense that they do not accept each other's kachchā or pakkā food - though they do accept water from one another.⁴ Similarly the Chamārs know of seven named kurris in the area and claim that they belong to one - as do the Dhobīs, the Bhangī, and several others. However neither the Lakherās nor the Darzīs claim affiliation to any such named kurri. Members of both castes say that they would readily marry with any other person with their caste name wherever in India they might be.

The kurri comes closest to that grouping of kin which has been defined by some anthropologists as the sub-caste (Ghurye 1950:20; Mayer 1960:5) and, recently, by another author as the 'marriage-circle' (Klass 1980:93). In my view these terms are amongst the most slippery in contemporary Indian ethnography and demand radical empirical and theoretical re-assessment. Since I also think that such a re-assessment requires an entire study to complete successfully I do not propose to enter the lists in this one - although I do have one or two very brief comments to make on the matter below.

Several castes say that they have name bainks within the kurri. These are said to be exogamous lineages of shallow depth. Members of the Barhaī caste, however, use the term

baink to describe that kin-grouping termed kurri by other castes.

Most castes have adopted gotra names. Maharās, for example, say that they belong to one name and exogamous gotra, Caravā, and that they know the names of others in the region. For many other castes the significance of the gotra name appears to be very slight. Adoption by low castes of gotra names illustrates the tendency for them to 'borrow' Brahman institutions. (Sometimes this seems to be done in a decidedly ad hoc and arbitrary way. A Brahman pandit at a marriage ceremony may assume that his client has the same sort of kinship institutions as himself, and thus might ask the father of the bride or groom the name of his gotra. The line of least resistance in such a situation is to adopt a name quickly.)

The terms baink, gotra, and kurri (occasionally upjāti) are thus used with considerable flexibility to apply to exogamous and endogamous groupings of kin. The usage of the terms parivār ('family'), birāderi ('brotherhood', 'people' - in the sense of 'my people') and samāj ('society', 'people' - as above) is similarly flexible.

Conclusion: Reflections on the 'subcaste', the status of kin groups and their terms, and related matters

One of the more intransigent problems in the study of north Indian kinship and caste organisation revolves around the empirical status of the 'subcaste'. This term seems to have been used first by Ghurye (1950) and was later employed extensively by Mayer (1960:152 ff.). Mayer himself

was scrupulously careful to indicate the dangers of thinking of the 'subcaste' in the terms that Ghurye - who asserted that 'subcastes' should be regarded as "real castes" - did (Op. cit.:20). Nevertheless, it seems to me that the very term 'subcaste' is itself an awkward one, however carefully it may be used. In my view, such a statement as "most subcastes are one of many divisions in the caste" (Mayer Ibid:153) implies that 'subcastes' are actual groups in the empirical world. (Of course, no such implication would flow from a statement such as: "jātis or birāderīs are thought of as being divisions in the caste system".) This is more than a linguistic quibble. The fact is that use of the term 'subcaste' easily leads, and has actually led, to the committing of what Pitt-Rivers has called "the empiricist's fallacy" of ascribing substance to an institution which is, properly speaking, only an idea (1971:231). To give an example. A recent student of the caste system, who professes to "part company" with Mayer only on a point of terminology (he likes the expression "marriage circle" better than 'subcaste' - but for no particularly fundamental reason) can assert with apparent total confidence that this unit (i.e. the 'marriage circle/subcaste') "is the unit of endogamy, organisation, and political control within the system, for there is no other!" (Klass 1980:92, his exclamation and emphasis). Not to put too fine a point on it, I think this is nonsense. In my view this statement is as misleading as similar ones on this matter by another author. Kolenda can say (on the same page) that, on the one hand, she is very aware of the multiple meanings and referents of the word jāti, and, on the other, that this Hindi term is best used "synonymously with the anthropological term subcaste

to mean an endogamous large-scale descent group" (1978:10). It seems to me most peculiar to both know that a term is used in all sorts of ways but still insist on giving it one main meaning. It is as though the anthropologist was locked in combat with his or her informants.

In Singhārā, the terms jāt and jāti (and to a lesser extent birāderī) are used with all the flexibility and looseness with which they are used in Malwa. Sometimes these terms are used in place of the term kurri, sometimes to describe a much more inclusive ideal group (such as "Musulmān" or "Jain"), and at yet other times they are applied to what otherwise might be termed varna ("Ap ka jāti kya hey?", one might ask a stranger. "Mera jāt Brahman hey", might be the reply). Following such usage, and bearing always in mind that most of the other terms I have discussed are used with a comparable degree of flexibility, it may be suggested that attempts to identify any real groups of caste or kin, with real boundaries, in the real world, are likely to be exceedingly difficult. Thus, it seems quite misleading to assert, as Dumont does, that subcastes are "groups which doubtless constitute the material of which the system is made up at the empirical level" (1970:62, emphasis his). The only material of the system consists of real men and women.

The Klassian view that in rural India bounded groups exist which are at once endogamous, politically organised and legally ordered under a common council, has a long pedigree in Indianist studies. But if I look at my data on marriage links and compare them with data on caste panchāyats I find a plethora of seemingly contradictory information. While some panchāyats (such as the Svarkakār caste panchāyat) are composed solely of residents of the village itself (even though

the caste adheres strictly to a rule of village exogamy), other caste panchāyats consist of members drawn from a number of villages in the vicinity (despite the fact that the marriage network of the caste covers a much wider area, as in the case of the Kumhār caste, for example). Furthermore, some castes, such as the Brahman caste, have no caste panchāyats at all, and they, like Darzīs and Nāīs in this respect, give and take wives from an enormously wide area. In short, I do not have one shred of evidence to indicate for certain that there are any real caste or kin groups at all at any other level than the strictly pragmatic one inhabited by 'kindreds of co-operation', to borrow Mayer's familiar phrase.

There are two conclusions to these reflections. The first is that the kin and caste groups implied by the variety of terms used to describe them, appear to form, divide, and transform themselves to accommodate the changing fortunes and interests of the individuals who use those terms (at least they are real enough). Once this is accepted, it becomes quite simple to explain how descendants of forebears belonging to a single kutumb can choose to say that they belong to two kutumbs (as in the case, for example, of the Dube and Upādhāya families); how Dhīmars can emphasise the importance of different levels of segmentation in different contexts; how 'Sonīs' can adopt the term srenī to describe what others might have described as jātī; and so on. Furthermore, in an area which has seen extensive migrations into it of "single families" (see chapter 1) from all directions, the whole idea that there are, or ever have been, large and organised endogamous descent group-like units seems improbable. To be sure, Singhārā's nineteenth century

immigrants 'thought themselves' into a segmentary system, but this does not in any sense imply that there was a system of segmented groups on the ground or that there is one now. However, secondly, the knowledge that kinship or caste groups may not actually exist in the empirical world does not detract from the fact that the 'segmentary thinking' in which the system is conceived remains one of the key characteristics of the holistic ethic present in caste society.

Part II. Honour and Service

We may turn now from a consideration of kin groups to an examination of two of the most crucial values which underlie and structure relations between kin. These are expressed by the terms mān and sevā; honour and service. As was implied earlier these terms do not belong solely in the domain of kinship (although an understanding of that domain demands an appreciation of both). Thus I will attempt in each case to place them in more general settings. To start with mān.

Mān

Formal definitions of the Sanskrit and Hindi term mān include Monier-Williams' "consideration, regard, honour (etc.)" and Platt's "self-confidence, reverence, dignity, worth, value (etc.)" (c.f. note 5).

Both these authors define the term from classical sources, such as Manu and the Mahabharata. There are also references to mān in the Bhagavad Gita, and, according to Edgerton's commentary on that work, it is associated there with "force, movement and excitement".⁵ Platt gives a second primary meaning to the term: son-in-law.

According to Srinivas "mān (is) a basic value" and, on the basis of his field research in Rāmpura, he defines the term as "self-respect" (1976:269,270). In Singhara mān has two primary meanings. The first is honour and self respect. The second is wife-taking affine(s) (c.f. Khare 1976:51,187,189 who uses the term in this sense).

Using mān in this second sense, my ZH, FZH, and DH are all my mān, while the ZH(s) of my ZH(s) are my trīmān (Leela Dube, personal communication). Indeed all those affines whom I class as wife-takers are my mān and, just as my MB, SWB, WB and his WB, and others in the category of wife-givers to my lineage, regard me and those of my lineage as 'honourable', so must I show deference and honour to my mān.

Clearly, the two meanings of the term are very closely connected to each other. As I have already said, a large part of the examination of mān, as wife-taking affine, is to be found in chapter 6; at this point I wish to focus, mainly, on mān as honour.

Following a lead from informants, there is one single event in the year which best captures the spirit of mān in the sense of honour and dignity. This is the ('Kshatriya') festival of Dasahra. Since many of the able bodied villagers of Singhara attend the Dasahra festivities in the city (together with thousands of other villagers from all over the region) it is to the festival in Jabalpūr to which I refer here.

Dasahra is, properly speaking, the tenth day of Nau Durgā, of which festival there are three main aspects; nightly dramatisations of the Rāmāyana (the Rām Līla performances), the bān processions on the evening of the ninth day, and the enormous processions on Dasahra itself. To start with, I will describe, briefly, the salient features of the Dasahra processions - for in these we may discern the operation of mān and begin to give the concept shape and lively definition.⁶

On the day of Dasahra, images of the goddess Kālī

(and Durgā) are paraded through the streets. Each image (there are a variety of forms) is placed on the back of a lorry or cart and is followed by groups of men who dance wildly, brandish swords and other weapons, and shout "Jai Kālī" ("victory to Kālī") ecstatically. When I witnessed the procession in 1974, in the company of several of my village informants, I was told that the goddess was the embodiment of mān, that the ecstatic dancers offering her their devotion were giving her mān, and that mān meant all sorts of things including respect, value, and anger. Bearing these observations in mind, let us observe how the goddess is portrayed.

As Mahā Kālī (great Kālī) the goddess appears black and demonic. Her tongue, which is painted bright red, is thrust obscenely out of her gaping mouth. Her breasts are full and prominent. Around her neck she wears a necklace of skulls, and in one of her hands she holds a head, recently torn from its body - its eyes bright with terror and with blood dripping from its throat. Informants explained that this image represented the suddenness and inevitability of death, and indeed it would be hard to imagine a more arresting image of that (c.f. O'Flaherty 1976:350). But Kālī's power is not solely destructive: the emphasis on her breasts and tongue indicate powers which are both creative and preserving as well.⁷

The goddess seldom appears alone. Sometimes she is shown slaying the demon buffalo, Maishasau. At other times, normally as Durgā, she is depicted either sitting on a lion or holding a lion's mane in one hand. In such a guise she appears as the tamer, or controller, of a beast commonly regarded as a 'king of nature' (which would also

appear to link her closely to her 'Kshatriya' followers - the 'kings of culture'). At yet other times she is shown trampling on the demon giants Shumb and Nishumb, who are made to look either dead or dying. According to my informants these characters represent personal anger and sexual lust respectively (Walker writes that these giants are widely thought to represent what he describes as the 'sordid passions' (1968 : 450)).

Before discussing how this iconography contributes to an understanding of the term mān, I wish, first, to describe the bān processions which take place on the evening before the Dasahra parade.

The bān processions start from small temples situated in various parts of the city. On the afternoon of the ninth day of Nau Durgā in small temples in various parts of the city several male devotees of the goddess work themselves into trance states, with the help of the temple guardians. When they are fully entranced, these devotees pierce their cheeks with long tridents (trisoul) and, supported by male assistants, lead processions of young women through the streets. These latter carry pots of nine-day-old shoots of wheat on their heads. The processions are accompanied by drummers and other musicians. When the processions reach the central city tank, the earthenware pots and their contents are thrown into the water and the tridents are removed from the devotees' cheeks.

What does all this have to do with mān? Let me emphasise again that the interpretive comments which follow are all based upon my informants' assertion that (amongst other things) Kālī embodies mān, that her followers are mān

givers, and the whole of the festival is, in a sense, a celebration of mān.

At least two main principles are enshrined in the images of Kālī/Durgā at Dasahra. The first of these has to do with power, or force, which is presented as being at once natural and divine. There can be few clearer images of the power of nature than the dramatisation of the passing of time and the inevitability of death, but the depiction of her as tamer of the lion serves to remind devotees that she is 'super-natural' as well. The second principle, nicely manifest in her trampling upon the giants, has to do with the subordination by the goddess of individual powers, forces and passions. In the face of the encompassing natural and divine powers inhering in Kālī the anger, desires and powers of mortal individuals appear weak and puny.

The analysis may be taken further by considering the role of Kālī's followers.

To say, as informants do say, that the dancers and ecstatic sword-brandishers that follow her give the goddess honour, or mān, is to aver that there is a sense in which the devotees themselves are also sources of the honour possessed by the goddess. This is directly reminiscent of Bloch's fine analysis of the Malagasy term for honour.⁸ Bloch argues that hasina is thought by the Merina to be "...an innate quality possessed by superiors" but that it is also "created by the acts of inferiors" (1977:29). This fundamental ambiguity is also a defining feature of the Hindi mān.

Further understanding of mān, as 'honour', may be gained from considering the bān processions. These, too, are concerned with natural and super-natural power and force,

both of which are inherent in the concept of mān. The natural power and fertility, represented by the young women, are combined and juxtaposed with the apparently super-natural powers and abilities of the possessed, entranced, male devotees. There is an alchemy here; female productivity placed against, and 'controlled' by, qualities shown to inhere in men (c.f. chapter 6 and the latter part of chapter 7 where I try to substantiate this proposition more fully).

To summarise. From the interwoven threads of meaning apparent in the Dasahra festival, there are two themes which stand out as being particularly relevant to an understanding of the term mān, as honour.

Firstly mān is a quality which is both given by inferiors to superiors (Kālī's devotees to the goddess, the wheat bearing women to their entranced male companions in the bān processions) and also possessed and given back by superiors to inferiors (for it is the goddess's own mān which fills her followers with enthusiasm). What is apparent here is the theme of shakti: the spiritual power associated with the creative, destructive and ultimately regenerative union of the male and female principles.

Secondly, the mān possessed by individuals is presented as being dependent upon their subordination to a total and encompassing power (of the natural and divine universe - of which human society is a part): this theme will emerge more clearly when we come to consider how the term is used in the kinship domain. The fate of Shumb and Nishumb points the way.

I suggest that the meaning of mān is suffused with these themes.

In moving from the effervescent streets of Jabalpūr city during the festival of Dasahra, back to the narrow lanes of the village, these reflections may be used as templates in our search for the significance of mān, as honour and dignity, in everyday kinship practices there, for the structure of kinship deference is analogous with the structure of deference behaviour at the Dasahra festival. In my view, each gives the other meaning.

For a person to give mān to another implies the giving of respect and deference. Such deference may be effected by the touching of feet, by sitting at a lower level than the one deferred to, by giving pān (or bidī) with the right hand, the fingers of the left hand touching the right hand wrist (one may express a lack of deference by handing out such items with the left hand or, even more blatantly, by throwing or dropping them at the feet of the recipient), and in numerous other more or less substantial actions.

Within every family, a son defers to his mother and father, his elder brother, his father's brothers, and those of his real or classificatory 'cousin brothers', whether they be matrilateral or patrilateral, who are older than he is. Younger persons defer to all older ones of their own caste. All non-Brahmans defer to members of the Brahman caste. A low caste man who meets a Brahman in the road may initiate a greeting by lightly touching the Brahman's feet or legs with his hands. In other contexts - when a Brahman, as pandit, officiates at a domestic ritual for example - all the members of that household, including women, may touch his feet either with their hands or with their foreheads.

The principle which cuts across that one which requires junior kin to defer to their seniors is that which requires 'wife-givers' to defer to 'wife-takers'. I deal with this more fully in chapter 6, but it is worth observing that this principle has implications within the chūlhā itself. On formal occasions a brother touches his sister's feet, even if she is younger than he is. Such action brings faint stirrings of comprehension; another context in which female power was deferred to has been glimpsed. So too has one in which those female powers were made to look subordinate to those of males. There is a satisfying twist here, for at one very solemn moment in the life of a high caste man - at his initiation - his sisters and his mother defer to him. But at all other times a brother gives mān to his sisters and, beyond them to his sisters' husbands and his father's sisters' husbands.

Each of these rules may be perceived in the cases described below: Before recounting them, however, a further proposition needs to be advanced. This is that one of the chief ways in which mān, which is an abstract quality, is given by one to another is by the more concrete activity of giving sevā, and time needs therefore to be spent considering the meaning of this latter term.

Sevā

Aspects of the meaning of sevā have been the subject of exploration elsewhere (Mayer:1979), and certain of Mayer's observations serve happily to introduce the present contribution to the understanding of the term.

The most important point that Mayer makes is that true sevā is not performed primarily to procure individual gain but that it "...should be entirely unselfish and unmotivated by personal ends and desires" (Ibid:5). The sevā given by one to another ideally provokes no direct reciprocation and no reward. Having said that, however, Mayer acknowledges that, paradoxically, sevā does in fact yield the 'reward' of 'merit' in a spiritual sense (if such an intangible quality can properly be called such). Thus, Vatuk is quoted to support the widely known belief that the supreme act of selflessness is the gift by a father of his daughter in marriage, and that this kanyādān is also thought to be supremely meritorious (loc.cit.). The clue needed to transcend this paradox is given by one of Mayer's informants who tells him "the object of sevā is ...janarddana" ("an appellation of Vishnu, meaning he who is worshipped" (from Dutt, quoted in Ibid:22) and that "Janta" ('the public' - i.e. society as a whole) "is also janarddana" (ibid:10). Familiar strains begin to be heard: the sevā given by one individual to another becomes true sevā only when performed with reference to the whole. The merit gained derives from selfless sevā to janarddana ("the creator, preserver and destroyer of the universe") and Janta ('the people'). Thus, as in the giving of mān, so in the giving of sevā the holistic ethic appears paramount. To emphasise this, Mayer records that the fulfilment of one's dharm (which Dumont, usefully in this context, defines as "action conforming to universal order" (1970:251) "can be seen as doing sevā" (op.cit.:21).

Following Shyamsundardas (1925), Mayer suggests, further, that within the definition of sevā lie several meanings

which include "the act of providing comfort" for superiors and "worship, adoration, devotion" by inferiors of both human and divine superiors (op.cit.: 8,15). Finally, and significantly, Mayer records that, in giving sevā, a donor gains not only merit but 'power' - in the strictly spiritual sense of shakti (op.cit.:10,11).

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With these remarks for company, some concrete cases in which sevā and mān appear in day-to-day kinship practice may now be examined.

Case I.

This case concerns a poor family of Dhobīs, a man of 65, his wife and three sons, two of who are married with four young children each. The two married sons each maintain a separate chūlhā, a third chūlhā being used by the old couple and the youngest son. The eldest son is a primary school teacher with an income of some Rs300 per month, the middle son is more or less unemployed, the third son is a washerman. The family manage a small plot of rocky land jointly. The old man's work is more or less confined to washing and pressing the clothes of one of the village 'big men' and it is general knowledge that outstanding debts are owed to this and other moneylenders. Two of the three sons are also in debt and a proportion of the yield from the family's land is regularly given to creditors.

The day came when the old man coughed and spat blood and a doctor in Jabalpūr diagnosed that he had a

combination of cancer and tuberculosis. He was prescribed a course of drugs, and was advised to eat a diet of eggs, rice and pulse twice daily with milk, vegetables and ghī. Both the drugs and the food implied a scale of expenditure which seemed quite prohibitive. But there was never the slightest doubt as to the course of action to be taken. The sons agreed unanimously that their land would have to be sold and their home mortgaged in order to follow the doctor's prescription. The old man, his sons explained, was to be given the best sevā his family could manage. The exact words of the second son were "we would not be sons if we did not give him sevā now". Thus the old man's sons, his wife, and his daughter who came to Singhārā from their married homes, as well as remoter kin who came to give sympathy, were each fulfilling his or her duty, their dharm, by giving their sevā to him in his hour of special need. And, amongst all this giving of sevā, an attempt was made to cure the old man in a way that was reminiscent of another time and place. One morning the second son passed my door with an armful of earthenware pots, with young shoots of wheat growing in them. I asked him what he was doing, and he told me that, according to local medical beliefs, nine day old shoots of corn were beneficial for the seriously sick. He was taking the young plants to his father who would eat them the same day, raw and at one sitting.

Despite being of a low caste, this family was also a highly respected one, and the village elders all came to visit the old man. The demonstrations of filial loyalty and good behaviour were talked about with admiration in the market place, and a friend who paid for some medicines also

gained a little merit for his small act of sevā.

Case 2.

A second case, also illustrative of the importance of both sevā and mān concerns rather less happy family relationships. A close informant, suffering from a double hernia, went to hospital in Jabalpūr to have an operation. His younger brother moved into the hospital as well, quite specifically in order to 'serve' his elder brother; to fetch water, to wash his clothes, to keep him comfortable. This was regarded by others as natural fraternal behaviour. But if his younger brother was beholden to serve my informant, so, too, were my informant's wife and her family (especially her brother) who happened to live in Jabalpūr. When, after the operation, the patient's elder brothers, father, and others of his agnatic kin arrived to stay in the hospital for some days, his wife and her brother should have been there to attend to them; to cook and to serve them meals, and so on. In fact, his wife merely went to see him twice, and her brother did not go to see him at all.

Now, although (as is probably obvious) there was a great deal more to the poor relations between my informant and his wife, his father's opinion of the matter was expressed in no uncertain terms. By not showing their respect to their mān, wife-takers, and by not fulfilling a highly specific set of services customarily expected on such occasions, the wife's family had behaved insultingly. Relations between the two families therefore became very sour indeed.

The situation later became worse after another

incident. My informant's wife had been staying in Jabalpūr with her natal kin for several weeks because she was expecting a baby. Sometime after the birth her brother came to Singhara to inform his brother-in-law that the baby had been born. But he only stayed in the village for ten minutes and actually refused to take a kachchā meal from his affines. This was considered to be an act of outright dishonour. Relations between the families were broken off and, some months later, my informant formally separated from his wife.

Case 3

The third case concerns a member of one of the larger Shudra castes and provided the subject of a caste panchāyat meeting.

Rām Prasād's daughter was married to a man in a neighbouring tehsil (district) and had a son by him. For the greater part of her married life, however, she had lived with her father in Singhārā, and her husband, not surprisingly annoyed at this state of affairs (which had been going on for two years), had complained several times to his father-in-law before bringing the matter to the caste council. Rām was called to the panchāyat and was asked to explain why he had not sent his daughter to her married home. He replied that his wife had deserted him for a lover in another village and that, therefore, it was his daughter's duty to stay with him in order to serve him. To be left to fend for himself, to wash his own clothes and cook his own food would expose him to ridicule and shame, he argued. The matter was complicated

by the fact that Rām's wife had taken their only son with her. This son never came to Singhārā to visit his father: indeed Rām said that he was not even sure that his son was truly his own. Only 'under compulsion', as he put it, had he originally accepted the boy as his son, but the propensity for his wife to be unfaithful left him doubtful about his legitimacy. Those present at the panchāyat knew that Rām's doubt in this regard may well have been soundly based; one of the elders said that they all had to decide the best course of action in the light of their knowledge of Rām's qualities (a reference to his low level of sexual activity). It was no secret that his wife had left him because of his failure to satisfy her physically. Rām told the panchāyat that he was intending to disinherit his son and give all his property to his daughter.

There were, thus, two issues before the panchāyat. The main one involved Rām's keeping of his daughter away from her husband. The subsidiary one involved Rām disinheriting his son.

Rām was asked directly whether he would unequivocally and publicly accept that his son was truly his, and send his daughter to her husband. At first he seemed willing to adopt this course, but he quickly changed his mind and, with some agitation, said "yes he is my son - but he never comes to see me - so no he is not. Look, I will give my property to whoever will serve me best in my old age. As my daughter is serving me, then all the property will go to her. We will enjoy it together until I die, then she will have it".

On the face of it the legality of Rām's case was,

to say the least, extremely thin. His daughter had been properly married, and her father had no right whatsoever to keep her from her husband for so protracted a length of time. What Rām chose to do about his son and his wife were quite separate matters that had no bearing upon this main issue.

But the meeting turned out to be a lengthy affair, and there was a considerable amount of support for Rām and the manner in which he had presented his case for keeping his daughter in the village. Several people shared the opinion of one fairly influential member of the caste who argued that since everybody was an individual, the panchāyat should leave Rām to make up his own mind what to do, and that the cast should not take this decision for him. This argument was eventually thrown out, and the panchāyat concluded (after a meal and a sleep) that Rām must send his daughter to her husband immediately, and that until that time he would be declared persona non grata within the caste (some of the seriousness of an action such as this has been considered at the end of chapter 3). But the decision was reached with some reluctance, or so it seemed to me at any rate, and not altogether because of the intrinsic weakness of Rām's case.

These three cases illuminate the two values under consideration.

Two of the cases illustrate the general rule that sons and daughters are expected to give sevā to their parents. In both of these the belief is expressed that sons who do not serve their father are, practically, not sons at all. It is almost certain that, had Rām's son lived in Singhara and

served his father well, the doubts concerning his real paternity would never have surfaced into the arena of public debate. The first case stressed other rules: wives must serve their husbands; a wife's brother owes sevā, as well as mān, to his sister's husband; wife-giving affines are expected in certain circumstances to serve wife-taking ones - the action expresses their obligation to present them with mān.

All three cases also illustrate the way in which a person's self-respect does not derive solely, or perhaps even primarily, from his caste status. Rather, it is seen to depend upon his or her ability to live correctly within the boundaries of the rights and duties prescribed for that status, upon his success (or lack of it) in receiving sevā and mān from those from whom it is due; and, of course, upon his ability in giving sevā and mān to those to whom it is due from him. In Rām's case in particular, another principle may be seen to be at work. It is highly unlikely that the case would have been allowed to fester for so long if it had not been felt that he was at least partially right in withholding his daughter from her husband. How is this to be explained? Now, it is certainly the case that, although it is more serious for a woman to remain unmarried, an unmarried man (an ordinary man, not an ascetic) is unlikely to be held in very great esteem. But for a married man to be seen to be in any way subordinate to his wife, or for him to be forced into the position of having to cook and clean for himself, is a sure recipe for shame and dishonour (upmān). I have heard such a one being described, with an entirely customary biological brio, as joru ka gulab: wife's rose. Not only had Rām suffered this fate but he had been publicly

cuckolded and deserted into the bargain. Did he not have the right to attempt to salvage what little self-respect he could by insisting that his daughter fulfil the domestic duties that any man regards as a right owed to him by the female members of his household? In the event, the matter was decided as a result of the constraining pressures from the wider society, and the primacy of a wife's allegiance to her husband over a daughter's loyalty to her father was, finally, invoked in no uncertain manner. Indeed, it would have been strange had the case not resulted in the way that it did. And yet there was this grey area of temporary uncertainty. Generally speaking, the shame that a man attracts to himself infects his family too, and, eventually, may spread to caste-mates as well. His daughter's presence in the village saved Rām, if only for a time, from the ultimate indignity of being seen by all as a cuckold, whose wife and children had left him, and to whom no sevā at all was being given. Such a person has no mān, and is, in a sense, not a person at all; and, perhaps worst of all, is left with the frightening prospect that the final and most important act of sevā will not be given him.⁹ Such a person invites not so much pity as fear (see chapter 7).

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I want now to consider one further aspect of the concept mān which (it is hoped) may bridge the gap between its meaning as honour and as wife-taking affine. The intention is to stress that mān does not mean merely honour - but a very particular type of honour.

One household in Singhara consists (rather untypically) of three brothers living jointly with their

respective wives and children. The affairs of this high-caste family figure prominently in conversation, and they are spoken of, by others, with a mixture of admiration and envy. It is said that the brothers make a particular point of treating their wives with strictly equal amounts of magnanimity: if one of their wives receives a new sari, the others automatically are also given one - no one wife receives any special or exclusive favours. It is said that the new house the brothers are building would have been impossible to build if they did not share the family's land and income equally between themselves. In short, the family is held to be one of the best examples of what can be achieved by joint action.

Hardly surprisingly, the members of this family, wealthy and successful as they undoubtedly are, are persons of considerable standing in the village. One of the brothers, a personal friend, is partial to telling me that he and his brothers are men of izzat (another term meaning honour) and there is little doubt that they are regarded as such by others. And yet the family are also thought of as being in some way arrogant and as having too much pride. The very same bazaar cognoscenti who, at one moment extol the brothers' treatment of their wives, tend, almost in the same breath, and against all the apparent evidence, to accuse them of meanness and tightfistedness in their behaviour. In short there is a remarkable ambivalence shown towards this family. I shall attempt to explain this ambivalence by first referring to the affairs of another, very different, fairly low-caste, family.

Ashok Lohār, the village blacksmith, is not a rich man, owning little land, and more dependent than most on his caste craft. In the 1974 marriage season he arranged the marriage of his son to a girl from Barela. The girl's family was a comparatively wealthy one, her father being a highly respected police inspector in that town. After the marriage ceremony, the young bride remained with her husband for a few days before returning, as is customary, to her natal home. Some six months later the girl came to Singhara for a second time, on the occasion of her new husband's family's yearly worship of their kul devtā. In order to emphasise the fact that his bahū had now formally left her father's kutumb and joined his own, Ashok placed special emphasis on the occasion: arrangements for the ceremony were more than usually conspicuous.

The new bride was sent for from Barela and was conveyed to Singhara in a large and very smart taxi. A taxi is not a usual sight in the village. As far as I recall, this was the only occasion on which I saw one there. It draws attention. But there it was, at 8.30 in the morning, one of the busiest times in the market place, as people gather for the daily bus to Jabalpūr, gleaming in the sunlight. When I enquired about this unusual phenomenon I was told by the company in the tea shop why it was there: "Ashok had sent for his bahū" (SW). I was also told that the bride's father, and not Ashok, had paid for it. The reason he had done so, I was informed, was "to make a show" (rūp banānā). The comment was not, it seemed to me, made with any malicious intent; on the contrary, the market place hummed with approval. The taxi was a concrete symbol of a flow of respect, of mān and sevā, from a wife-giving family to a wife-taking one.

The reason why the case of Ashok's taxi helps to explain why the proud brothers are regarded with ambivalence seems to me to be as follows. While it would be absurd to suggest that 'jointness' and harmony between agnatic kin are not qualities to be admired and emulated, there is, nevertheless, a sense in which such agnatic solidarity conflicts with another principle which must be considered to be ideologically superior, namely the hierarchical solidarity between affines. Essentially, this latter is expressed by the flow of substance from wife-giver to wife-taker.¹⁰ Such 'flows of substance', which are clearly marked, ritually, in the course of the marriage ceremonies, may be understood as one expression of the tendency to 'subordinate' power and wealth to status. There is no suggestion that the brothers do not intend to fulfil their obligations to future wife-takers; indeed they may well contract prestigious marriages for their daughters which will eventually bring them mān in plenty. But their present consolidation of wealth within their own family is, perhaps, not considered as 'honourable' an activity as, for example, that of Ashok's affines, who so conspicuously 'gave away' some of their wealth to their daughter's husband's family. In this case honour was exchanged, and in the process magnified. The brothers are currently increasing their store of izzat but not, necessarily, of their mān. As far as Ashok was concerned, however, it was, unquestionably, his mān which was increased.

Conclusion

The key values mān and sevā belong to an essentially 'ideal' world in which honour and grace subordinate substance, obligation to dharm subordinates individual interest, deference subordinates dominance. There are obvious parallels between the giving and taking of both mān and sevā and the giving and taking of food which was discussed in the previous chapter. Just as raw food given to a superior by an inferior is 'given back' as cooked food, in the process gaining spiritual value, so the 'honour' given by wife-givers to wife-takers, expressed in the gift of a woman, the dowry, substantial amounts of gifts thereafter (like Ashok's taxi), and the touching of feet, is 'given back' in the form of enhanced honour for the donor. The same is true of sevā. As Mayer puts it, the one who gives sevā to another derives spiritual merit from doing so. Thus the son becomes a true son by giving sevā to his parents, and a wife's status and identity receive painfully gradual but eventually certain recognition through the sevā she gives to her husband and his family as part of her pati dharm (duty to husband) and so on. Following this it seems difficult to deny that in some respects, and contrary to received local (and anthropological) wisdom, mān and sevā imply no less than a form of reciprocity that is positively definitive of caste society.

CHAPTER 5

BIRTH AND DEATH

Introduction

The two previous chapters have looked at caste and kinship values from several angles, and the two chapters which follow pursue this general course by examining, in some detail, three important rites-de-passage; those at birth, marriage, and death. It is suggested that much of the ethnographic substance which supports the analytical propositions advanced in the thesis Introduction is to be found in these rituals, and care is taken to relate the descriptions of the rites to those propositions. The present chapter is concerned with birth and death rites. Towards the end of the chapter some analytical points are made which take up several of themes that will, by now, have become fairly familiar: the primacy of the 'ideal' over the 'real', the 'meanings' of the roles played by certain 'honourable' kin and by certain key castes in the hierarchy, the uses of metaphors in 'legitimizing' birth and death and their attendant dangers, and so on.

Birth

It is common for women to bear their first child in their natal homes, whilst most subsequent births take place in a woman's married home where she is assisted in giving birth by her husband's close female kin. There are several

women in Singhara who are known for their expertise as midwives, but they are asked to attend only if complications are foreseen or actually transpire.

When a baby is born, mother and baby are washed and the umbilical cord is cut by a Domār woman.¹ The first substance that is given to a mother and baby, immediately after parturition, is asafoetida resin (hing) which is considered to be 'hot'. As recorded in chapter 3, it is thought that the process of giving birth empties a woman of heat and that it is, therefore, necessary for that heat to be replaced. Thus, from the time of the birth to the purification ceremony (chauk) twelve days afterwards, a mother is given a special nectar (amiya) consisting of water, small pieces of wood (kānki), supplied by the Barhaī, betel nut and turmeric - all of which are boiled in a new earthenware pot provided for the occasion by a Kumhār. This is thought to replace the mother's lost heat and to bring on her milk. It is said that if a woman should take pure (cold) water during this period she will die.

Mother and baby are thought to be in a state of impurity until the fourth day after the birth when a Dhobin (the wife of a Dhobī) washes all the clothes of the household and cleans the room in which the birth took place. After this cleaning (sir) the mother may be touched. However she is still barred from carrying out household work of any kind (particularly cooking and serving food and water) until the Chauk ceremony has been completed.

The Chauk ceremony

The Chauk (lit. auspicious pattern) rite takes place on the evening of the twelfth day after birth, and marks the end of the period of the mother's impurity. During the day of the ceremony the mother goes to the well and performs a pūjā (act of worship) known as ghāt marnā (the other occasion on which this particular pūjā is performed is on the night of the erection of the wedding canopy) which signifies her return to a state in which she may draw and serve water.

The rite itself is preceded by a procession, or processions, of women through the village accompanied by the Domār band and a hermaphrodite dancer(s). These are led by the married sister(s) of the baby's father. They come (of course) from their own villages, and bring gifts with them. The most important of these is a cradle which is carried by the (baby's) FZ (phūā) above her head at the front of the procession. The procession stops outside the house where the birth has taken place and various women, principally the FZ but also others from the gift-receiving household, dance to the music of the band. Then the cradle and other small gifts are accepted and are taken inside.

Inside the house, in the central courtyard if there is one, an auspicious pattern (chauk) is drawn and a thālī (tray) of ingredients is prepared. The main ingredients on this occasion are small pieces of kānki wood, rice and turmeric. Burning embers from the household hearth (chūlhā) are placed on the chauk.

Before the pūjā is performed the mother and baby

are themselves prepared. A Nāun (wife of a Nāī) paints a continuous line of a red resinous substance made from lac (called mahāvar) around the foot and heel of the mother. The Nāun also places vermilion (sindūr) on the mother's hair parting. It is said that both mahāvar and sindūr stripes signify that the mother's husband is alive, the term for such a woman being suhāgin. Mother and baby, having first bathed, wear fresh new clothes and ornaments. These are given by the mother's own brother (the baby's māmā (MB)) and also her classificatory brothers (which may include her FZ's sons). If these donors are wealthy, the gifts that they give at chauk may be quite substantial, including, apart from the new clothes for the ceremony and ornaments, other clothes, food, sweets and money. All these donors stand in the relationship of wife-givers to the lineage of the baby's father.

The main part of the ceremony begins when mother and baby emerge from the inner room into the area where the chauk has been drawn. She begins by throwing handfuls of kānki wood onto the roof of the house. Then the phūā (i.e. the baby's FZ) passes the thālī of turmeric, rice and kānki around the baby's head. This is said to drive away evil spirits and protect the baby from disease in the future. Even if the real phūā is not present, it is most important that this act should be performed by a woman to whom the term phūā may be applied (see below). Then the phūā holds a winnowing tray (sūp) over the mother's head, an act which is also seen as being protective. She then places a mark (tīkā) on the mother's forehead, and an auspicious pattern, such as the inverted swastika, on the headpiece of the mother's sari as well as on the baby's wrap. This pattern is made

either with pure water or with water mixed with cow dung (gobar). Finally the phūā and other 'father's sisters' throw prasād (lit. 'food offered to a god', here in the usual form of bātasha, light sugary sweets, considered to bring blessings on those to whom they are given) at mother and baby.

At the conclusion of the ceremony the mother leaves the central area and re-enters the inner room. Her way is barred, in a joking way, by the other women of the household (husband's unmarried sister, husband's brother's wife, for example) to whom she gives one or two rupee notes before they clear the way to let her through.

The rites I have described all take place inside the house and are performed exclusively by women. Meanwhile male kin and guests sit outside, on the verandah. If the baby is male or otherwise favoured, music is played, songs are sung, and the company treated to tea, cigarettes, pān, and ganjā in the customary manner (see chapter 3). As would be expected, the occasion is a happy one.

Six months after birth, the first feeding ceremony (known in Singhara as Pāsnī and, classically, as the Annaprāsan) is carried out: the baby's MB (māmā) gives the baby his first solid food.² In theory the baby is given mixed food from that time on, though in practice his or her diet is likely to be milk alone for a considerable time after the first feeding rite.

Comments

Just at the moment when a woman gives birth, produces life, she is considered to be impure, if not actually dangerous, and has to be avoided (by men, completely, and by women in slightly more subtle ways). Villagers explain this impurity by referring to the intrinsic impurity of the blood of childbirth, like that of menstruation. By washing and cleaning, both Dhobī and Domār play significant roles in the removal of this impurity, and it is argued that this activity makes them impure too.

And yet there is a remarkable paradox here, for one of the central activities of the Chauk ceremony consists of re-establishing the mother's association with blood, in a very precise and overt way. Both the vermilion stripe that is rubbed into her parting and around her foot signify the mother's blood (c.f. Walker 1968: 175). Furthermore, this blood is thought to be, as it were, at the service of the woman's husband, for only as a suhāgin (married woman) does a woman wear the continuous mahāvar line; unmarried virgins are carefully distinguished by wearing a mahāvar line around the foot that is broken at the heel.

This paradox may be explained in terms of an attempt, at some level, to deny real bodily processes - or at least to control and order them symbolically. (Khare suggests such an interpretation in a slightly different context and argues that a 'denial' of bodily functions and processes is characteristic of Hindu thought (1976: 105)). However that may be, the Chauk ceremony seems to give real female blood a low value and, in contrast, 'symbolic blood'

a high value. The wearer of the vermilion parting and the mahāvar stripe retrieves her honourable status while the bleeding mother is untouchable. That is, possibly, the main statement of this rite.

Pursuing this line of thought, consider the role of the phūā (the baby's FZ) and her attendants. It is she, assisted by a Nāun, who places the symbolic blood on the purified mother, and who otherwise purifies and protects her in the various ways described. The phūā is said to derive these protective and purifying powers from her honourable status as one who has been 'given away' by the lineage into which the baby has been born. She is thus linked with the baby's lineage's wife-takers (mān). We are, in Dumont's terms, in a 'hypergamous milieu' in which all wife-takers are considered honourable. This motif (of the honour of wife-takers) will be explored much more fully in chapter 6 but may be seen to be manifested here in the marked difference in the type of gifts given at Chauk by wife-taking affines and wife-giving affines.³ Apart from the cradle (and some clothes for the baby) the main things that are 'given' by the phūā and the women that accompany her are honour (in various symbolic forms including prasād), protection and purification. By contrast, the 'māmās' give relatively more substantial gifts; new clothes, ornaments, food, sweets and money. Significantly, the māmā himself also gives solid food at the first feeding rite.

Death

It is generally the case that the dead are cremated, the exception being children and unmarried adults of some Shudra and Untouchable castes who are buried. The cremation ground is on the bank of the river Gaur at Kalianpūr Ghāt (see map 2 on p.90).⁴ The cremation, and subsequent collection of bones and ashes by the deceased's agnatic kin three days later, take, essentially, the same form for all castes, although the rituals performed by the Brahmans are slightly more elaborate. Apart from these two rites, all castes also carry out rites on the tenth and thirteenth days after a death. Brahmans are the only caste in Singhara to perform the full shrāddh ceremonies (i.e. those rites at which pinds (rice balls) are made (see below)) and these are performed on the third, tenth and eleventh day after death. These are known as Arith Sangraha, Das Gātra and Ekādasī respectively.⁵ I will begin by describing the cremation and ash-collection as practised by all castes, and the subsequent rituals as practised by non-Brahman castes. Following this I shall describe the shrāddh rites as they are performed in Singhara by the Brahmans.

Cremation and the collection of bones and ashes

When a person dies, he or she is placed on a stretcher. Members of the deceased's family,⁶ caste fellows and, possibly, others proceed to the cremation ground with bundles of wood

for the fire. The body is placed on the pyre with the feet pointing to the south, the direction associated with death and the ancestors, the head to the north, the direction associated with the Pole Star (Dhrub) and the Great Bear (Sapt Rishi; lit. seven sages), and the mouth upwards. The fire is touched off by the eldest son of the dead man or woman- an act which is regarded as a particularly potent expression of seva (see previous chapter). Once the fire is alight, the mourning party go to the village tank or the river, where they bathe. Then they return to the house of the deceased where caste-fellows of the dead person each dip their big toe in water and pass it through a fire that has been lit on the threshold of that house. The procession, to and from the cremation ground, is accompanied by a Domār drummer.

On the third day after the cremation, the family, joined by one or two affines, return to the spot where the body has been burning. The closest relatives then squat round the mound of ash, and carefully select certain bones (see below) which they place in a small earthenware pot. Some of the ash is placed in a larger pot and the rest is thrown into the river. The cremation ground is then purified by being smeared with cow dung (gobar) and water, after which salt and flowers are spread on it. Following this, the party proceed to the river or tank. Each mourner washes himself and all his clothes. The procession then returns to the village, the pots of bones and ash being left in a safe place outside (under a hedge). Eventually these are taken to the Nārbadā river by the eldest son. Returning to their house, the family light an

oil lamp (dīpak) that burns until the tenth day.

On the tenth day (Das Gātra) the men of the deceased's family shave (face, head and under-arm hair) and their clothes are washed by the women of the house. A meal is given to caste-fellows. It is a day of cleaning and represents an end to the period of untouchability undergone by the family.

On the thirteenth day after the death (Tehrī) the family give a much larger meal, which is cooked by the village pandits, to which they invite as many relatives, neighbours and guests as they can afford. The guests of honour at this meal are Brahmans, of whom there must be a minimum of thirteen. The meal is said to be for the soul who, blessed and made peaceful by the presence of the thirteen Brahmans, is able to leave the state of ghostly limbo in which he has resided since the death and start out on his journey to heaven.⁷

This completes the cycle of ritual events that follow the death of a non-Brahman except for two other meals that may be given to caste-fellows: six months and a year after the death. These are known as Chemāsī and Varsī respectively.

I turn now to consider the more elaborate ceremonies performed by the Brahmans. In my experience it is not, nor has it ever been, the practice for any but the Brahmans to carry out the full shrāddh rites, although I have heard it argued by members of other castes that all but Untouchables are, in theory, capable of performing them. This view is shared by the village 'guruji',⁸ but the fact remains that

these rites are, for all practical purposes, the province of Brahmans alone - and so, I suspect, are they likely to remain.

Let us, then, return to the third day after the cremation; to the day upon which the bones of the deceased and the ashes of the pyre are collected.

The Arith Sangraha

Relatives and friends of the deceased proceed to the burning ghāt at Kalianpūr. While the mourners squat to one side, the Nāī prepares leaf plates and the eldest son of the dead person cooks a mixture of rice and milk on a fire of cow dung (gobar). Then an oil wick lamp (dīpak) is placed on each of eight leaf plates which are placed in a circle around the heap of bones and ashes. These point to the eight directions; north, north-east, east, south-east, south, south-west, west and north-west. Each of these directions are associated with a series of deities;⁹ ūrad pulse is then placed on each of the leaves.

When these preparations are complete, the eldest son performs a pūjā with salt, milk, honey, rice, cow dung, oil, ghī and ūrad pulse. He makes a chauk, upon which he places a clean cloth. On this he sets four leaf plates and on each of these a small coin. He faces south, looking across the ashes. He then makes four balls of rice (pind) from the mixture, and rolls them off the thumb of the right hand on to each plate. (The fingers of this hand, the 'pure' hand, are classified in such a way that the little finger (dev tīrth, 'god's place of pilgrimage') is conceptually linked with

god, while the three middle fingers (rishi tīrth, 'the sages' place of pilgrimage') is linked with the ancestors, while the thumb (pitr tīrth, 'father/ancestor's place of pilgrimage') is associated with the dead person him - or herself). The actual pūjā consists of spraying each of the pinds, with the mixture described above, to the accompaniment of mantrs. To end, the pinds are collected in a container and thrown into the river.

From the remains of the cow dung, the fuel of the fire upon which the rice was cooked, eight smaller fires are made and placed by the side of each dīpak. Pulse (arhar) and oil are then poured over them, making them flame. After this the purification of the ashes begins.

The eldest son sprinkles a mixture of cow dung, cow's urine, ghī, milk and sour milk (dahī) - collectively known as the panch gavy - on the ashes. Wearing conical rings of kush grass (kush angūthī) on the thumb and index finger of his right hand, he selects ten bones from amongst the ashes. Each of these ten bones is associated with each of the eight directions, the two extra being linked with the earth and the sky. He dips each bone into the panch gavy before placing them in a small earthenware pot, which will later be taken to one of the two holy rivers (Narbadā or Ganges) and thrown into the water.

After the ten important bones have been collected, the other mourners gather round the ashes and collect all the remaining bones, putting them in one or more earthenware pots. The ash is also gathered. Some of it is put in a pot and the rest is disposed of there and then in the river. The cleared area is then spread with cow dung and, from the

remainder of the rice and milk mixture, a pind of a Shiv ling is made and placed in its centre. The son performs a pūjā to Shiv draping a janeū (sacred thread) on the pind in the process. Lumps of salt, said to attract cows, whose hooves will further purify the spot, are spread over the ground.

When the purification of the ashes is finished, the mourners bathe in the river, washing both themselves and their clothes, before once more repairing to the village. The pots of bones and ashes are, as is customary, left in a safe place outside the village boundaries.

Daṣ Gātra

The ceremony of Daṣ Gātra takes place on the tenth day after death under the tree on the edge of the village tank. Agnates of the deceased attend. On this occasion ten pinds¹¹ are made by the deceased's eldest son, this time supervised by a pandit.

The rite begins with the laying out of a piece of new cloth on the ground by the eldest son. This, the 'altar', is given to the Mahapātra (funerary priest) after the Ekādasī ceremony (see below). Leaves from the palāsh tree (c.f. Crooke 1926: 413) are placed on this cloth. Two rows of ten small earthenware pots are arranged by the side of the cloth with water in the cups of one row and oil and a lighted wick in those of the other. The eldest son wears his sacred thread (janeū) on his right shoulder, so that it crosses his torso from right to left.¹²

In the instances I have observed this rite in

Singhara the pinds have been made from a mixture of rice and milk. It is said, however, that they should be made from rice and the panch gavy (see above). As before the pinds are made by the eldest son who, once again, rolls them over his right thumb on to the palāsh leaves, until ten pinds stand in a row. These are then anointed with a mixture of honey, ghī, oil and barley. A cotton janeū is laid upon the pinds after which they are thrown into the tank.

There then follows the tonsure ceremony (Mundan) during which the hair of those agnatic kin whose own fathers have died is shaved by a Nāī.

During the performance of the Das Gātra and Mundan the women of the family publicly wash the family's clothes in the tank while a Dhobī washes the bed clothes.

Das Gātra marks the end of the period of impurity (sūtak) observed by the members of the deceased's lineage.

Ekādasī (Barā Kām)¹³

Ekādasī, or 'big work' as it sometimes is called, is the longest and most elaborate of the funerary rituals. It takes place eleven days after the death and is performed by the deceased's agnatic kin accompanied by closely related affines. It is also attended by a Mahapātra or Maha Brahman, a Brahman whose ritual specialism is confined to funerary rites. Once more the principal actor, the 'sacrificer' (yajmān) as he becomes when he puts on the kush grass rings, is the eldest son of the deceased. As is Das Gātra, so

Ekādasī is conducted under the pīpal tree by the tank.

An 'altar' (vedi) is made of smoothed earth in the shape of square. Palāsh leaves are spread out in a row on the north side of this square. The yajmān (for so I will refer to the eldest son from now on) sits in front of this row of leaves, having first made a fire of cow dung and cooked a mixture of rice, milk, honey and oil (of black sesamum). To his left are more palāsh leaves and opposite, on the other side of the square, sits the Mahapātra. Before settling down to the substantive part of the rite the yajmān sprinkles water, flowers and kush grass on the Mahapātra. He also spreads more flowers and a sacred thread, both taken from his right side, and puts them on the leaves to his left.

The yajmān begins the main part of the ceremony by making twenty three pinds, sixteen of which he rolls off the palm of his right hand (having first put the kush grass ring on the third finger) over his thumb, making a line of pinds on the leaves in front of him. Each of these pinds are said to represent an ancestor, four for the proximate male kin (i.e. the deceased, his father, grandfather and great grandfather), four for the spouses of these, four for the distant agnatic kin and four for their spouses. A seventeenth pind is sometimes laid alongside these. As each pind is rolled off the yajmān's hand, the Mahapātra calls out the first name, gotra name, and date of death of each person signified by them. Eleven oil wick lamps are then placed in front of the altar.

When the pinds and the lamps have been arranged, the Mahapātra demands a meal, customarily in a mildly

insulting way. The mourning family return these insults with rebukes, saying something like "you just get on with your work; you will be given your food in due course when you have finished but not before". (There is a certain amount of such banter throughout the proceedings. The Mahapātra is expected to complain about the quality of the gifts he receives from the mourning family, for example.) Despite the wrangling between the Mahapātra and the deceased's kin, the women of the family do provide him with a full, tasty and specifically pakkā meal. He converts this into a kachchā meal by adding boiled rice and milk which he cooks himself. He then eats it, taking care to leave some left-overs (jūthā) which he gives to an elderly Basūr, who has been waiting throughout the ceremony a little way off. Having finished his meal and disposed of the jūthā the Mahapātra dons new clothes that have been presented to him by the mourning family. These consist of kurtā and pyjama, topī and shoes.

This is the point in the proceedings at which the gifts are given by the mourning family to the Mahapātra. The most important of these are the deceased's bed and bed clothes, his cooking pots, and a cow. This latter is normally substituted by money (which provides a ready made source for further banter). If the cow (or calf) is in fact given, the Mahapātra catches him briefly by the tail. With the aid of a cow the soul is said to be able to cross the Vaitaraṇī nadi (see p. 235). According to one informant the Vaitaraṇī river is a hellish place ('where sinners go') full of 'meat, smell, broken pots, blood, snakes, deformed people, crocodiles and fishes'.

After the meal has been consumed by the Mahapātra, the yajmān puts the kush ring on his left hand third finger and proceeds to give the Mahapātra, who has meanwhile lain down on the deceased's bed, a short massage. As is the lighting of the pyre, so is this massage spoken of as sevā, service, given by an eldest son to the soul of his dead father/mother incorporate in the funeral priest.

The final and in many ways most important part of the ceremony consists of the merging of the soul into the ancestors.

Three mats of palāsh leaves, threaded together, are placed in a line. The yajmān arranges the six pinds, which remain from the original twent three, on a mat on his left. These are sprinkled with kush grass and flowers. An additional, longer, pind is also made and placed alongside the six. These six are then put in a line on a central mat together with three oil wick lamps. Milk and water are poured over them. The long pind is then cut into three pieces (under a leaf in order to protect it from the view of the onlookers) which are merged into three of the six pinds on the central mat. There are now three large and three small pinds and the former are transferred to a third mat - on the right of the yajmān. The three smaller ones that remain on the central mat represent Vishvadev.¹⁴

The rites which ensure the soul's merging with the ancestors are considered to be nearing their end. The yajmān takes a purificatory bath and then, without looking back at the pīpal tree, departs from the scene with the mourners. The Mahapātra remains for a moment and, when he is alone, smashes the two earthen pots¹⁵ which have been

hanging in the pīpal tree and throws them, together with the pinds and all the other materials that have been used, into the tank. Informants claim that the pinds are so disposed of so that the fishes, frogs and snakes that inhabit the Vaitaraṇī (as the tank is thought to be at that moment) may devour them. By so doing these creatures are thought to remove the deceased's sin, leaving only his good deeds to accompany him across the river.

One of the most insistent themes to course through both sets of rituals is that which associates the moment of entry, and departure from, this world with danger and a threatening form of power. The anxiety of these moments is expressed metaphorically in a number of ways, some of which will now be explored. The observations which follow draw most from work by Das (1976 and 1977) and Kausik (1976).

Lateral Symbolism

Throughout the death rites the distinction between right and left is emphasised. The left side is given a prominent role: the soul is 'massaged' by the left hand, the rows of flowers and pinds are placed from right to left, and the janeū is worn at various times from right to left (see note 12). But although the left side is, undeniably, given a degree of prominence, it may also be observed that the pinds are made by the right hand, the bones of the

deceased are picked out by the right hand, the kush ring is worn throughout (with one exception) on the right hand - all of which confirm its role as the 'sacrificial' hand. We may thus see left and right in a sort of 'contest for prominence' which is finally 'won' by the right.

Apart from their daily association with faeces, and therefore with the 'deathly' part of the food cycle (Khare 1976:109), the death rituals associate the left side with potential threats from the ancestors and with demons (Das 1977), and also with the west and the south - the directions not only of death per se but also of ghosts and the potential malevolence of both (Kausik 1976:280). Both death itself and, by association, the left side are thus seen as threats to the order of things (Das 1976:262). By contrast, the right side is linked to the north and east - the directions of life (the east is also the dominant direction of worship in the marriage rites), men in the world, and (benevolent) gods (Kausik: loc.cit.). Thus the 'triumph' of right over left appears as the triumph over the disturbing forces of potential disorder by the more comforting forces of an order and life ensured by the gods mediated by the Brahmins.

Such an interpretation may be made slightly more rounded and secure by a slight but necessary shading of emphasis, the value of which will also show up in later contexts. According to Das, although "the ancestors have the power to cause great harm ... they also have the potential to bestow wealth and progeny on their descendants. Ancestors are conceptualised as the appropriate persons to bless the procreative activities of the householder" (1977:16). Now,

it will readily be agreed that many of the activities of these rites are propitiatory; everything is done - from lighting and feeding the soul in its state of limbo, to carefully reconstructing the necessary parts of its body, to inviting the thirteen Brahmins on the thirteenth day, and so on - to ease the passage of the soul from its former habitation to its new one. Ancestors, too, are invoked and appeased by the performance of the rituals - and a wealth of stories circulate in Singhara about the consequences of not carrying out these activities: there seems little doubt that a restless soul and uneasy ancestors are feared for their capacity to cause injury and harm (see also chapter 7 and Pandey 1949:410). On the other hand, there seems an equally pronounced conviction that if only they are properly ordered and propitiated, their power to confer blessings, rather than curses, will be realised. The condition for making them 'safe' and beneficent in this way is their ritual subordination to the gods, which is effected by proper ritual procedures by men.

The funerary rites elevate the left side to a position of prominence. But, as the broken pots sink into the stinking waters of the Vaitarani and the soul is released from the burden of its former sin, the left side is finally subjugated by the right, and both death and ancestors are tamed.

Heat and Cold

Both heat and cold feature prominently in the two sets of rituals discussed here. A mother is thought to

be more than usually hot before and during delivery, but afterwards grows unusually cold. In the latter state she is considered impure and, therefore, untouchable by the adult men of her family, including her husband. She is brought back to what is thought to be a reasonable and healthy temperature by a series of acts in which certain 'honourable' female relatives, particularly her HZ and/or HM, play prominent roles, as do representatives of several castes, including the Kumhār, Barhaī and Dhīmar. At death, the soul is thought to be potentially dangerously hot: hence the cooling libations throughout (Kausik ibid:283/4). The body itself is, of course, burnt, and, during the collection of the bones, elaborate 'cooling' of the burning ghāt takes place. At the conclusion of this and the other rituals the pinds and (finally) all the other artifacts used during the rituals are thrown into 'cooling' waters lest their heat, uncontrolled, contaminate.

Clues to the interpretation of this temperature symbolism lie close to the surface of the rituals themselves. In one context heat is associated with life and the blood of childbirth, in another with the struggle of the soul to leave the dead body. Taking these together, heat is associated with entry into and departure from this earth - with the critical points in the repetitive cycle of creation and destruction - and with the powerful energy thought to be present at these moments. Thus "in essence, heat is associated with life and fertility. The energy which can both activate and nullify life is a kind of heat: this heat when taken alone, however, can be highly dangerous ... it must be encompassed by cooling things" (Beck 1969:553).

So what are the 'cooling things'? Firstly, particular and familiar substances; water, flowers, and the panch gavy (cow dung, cow's urine, ghī, milk, and curds - all products of the cow and therefore possessing not only 'cooling' influences but 'preserving' ones as well).

Secondly, some of the principal actors involved in handling these substances may also be seen as 'cooling' agents. In the case of death, for example, the eldest son - the yajmān, the officiating pandits, the Mahapātra and the untouchable Basūr, who, by accepting the Mahapātra's jūthā, removes and absorbs some of the dangerous heat of the soul incarnate in that priest. With this particular action in view, and bearing in mind that the transition from death to life and life to death are thought to be extremely dangerous, the assertion that "the role(s) of the untouchable and Brahman (are) to neutralise (these) dangers" (Kausik, *ibid.*: 286) seems entirely reasonable. But in the same way that a series of substances and actors appear to 'neutralise' - make safe - the threatening heat associated with the soul at death, so a comparable cast of characters and substances are involved with the threatening cold associated with the immediate post natal period. The water given to the mother is not just any water, but water fetched by a Dhīmar, boiled in a Kumhār's pot, together with the Barhai's kānki, and presented to her by an 'honourable' female member of her family.

Transcendence

Following Schopenhauer's assertion that the problem of death stood at the outset of every philosophy, Freud suggested that the "protective formulas" invented and enacted by men to come to terms with their fear of death was an example of what he called the "omnipotence of thoughts" (1960(1913):86). This notion is useful in the present context.

Without attempting to venture into the minefield of Hindu eschatology, which has a lot to say on the matter (c.f. Scott n.d.), it may be accepted without much difficulty that the attempt in both sets of rituals to overcome the problem of death, and the anxieties surrounding birth, by establishing a world which transcends the material one, in order to control it (the whole purpose of the "omnipotence of thoughts", according to Freud) stands at the base of the rites described here. In a necessarily and shamefully compressed way, one aspect of the 'establishment of transcendence' may be considered.

In the Introduction to the thesis space was given to Berger and Luckmann's consideration of the central importance to the legitimating process of the (universal) perception of death as being opposed to order and society (an idea taken up by both Das and Kausik). One of the ways the funerary rites neutralise this opposition is by extending the realm of the Ātman (the "individual self" (Scott, *ibid*:3)) beyond the boundaries of mortal society to the cosmos. From their placing of the body on the pyre, in such a way as to align it with particular planetary

constellations, to their precise placing of dīpaks at the bone collection, in line with the directions and associated gods, to their construction of the vishvadeva, with all its complicated symbolism (see above and Scott, *ibid.*:17), to their summoning of the ancestors, represented in the thirteen Brahmins, to the feast on the thirteenth day, - what the mourners are asserting is their temporary 'stepping outside' of the frontiers of the day-to-day society of the village so that they may take part in a drama which is played at a cosmic level. At such a level the loss and pain accompanying actual death gives way to the security of the feeling that what has taken place is a mere passing of another boundary in the repetitive cycle of all souls. It is this "cosmization", to use Kausik's rather ungainly but effective term (*ibid.*:269), which at once legitimates death (by placing it within an order against which it is not opposed but within which it is encompassed) and which lies at the heart of the mourners' sūtak (impurity of death).

'Power' and status (again)

One of the most striking features of these rituals is the high degree of formal affirmations, made by those who participate in them, of their respective statuses in relation to each other. Villagers stress (pace Mayer, above) the importance of the role of the eldest son at the funerary rites. They are greatly concerned at Chauk with the re-establishment of the mother as the wife who may take up her duties as cook and 'servant' in the household, and who is also

subject, once more, to proper control by her husband. Prestations at this latter ceremony distinguish between the different statuses of 'wife-givers' (māmās and sālās of the baby), who give relatively valuable and substantial gifts, and 'wife-takers' (phūās and bahanoīs) who give (as would be expected from the mān) relatively less valuable, less substantial, but more 'honourable' gifts. The presence of thirteen 'true' Brahmans at the feast on the thirteenth day is as essential to the departing soul as is the presence of the Mahapātra and the Domār or Bhangī who, at the funeral of a Brahman, takes the latter's jūthā. And so on.

The increased preoccupation with caste and kinship statuses at those moments when the most important dramas of an individual's life are played out indicates one of the main themes of these ceremonies. The theme is all too familiar (even if it does have a slightly novel twist in this context). It is one of Dumont's 'subordinations' - of 'power' (in a rather special sense) to status. The terrifying power of nature, to create and destroy, is 'harnessed', or 'legitimated', by the performance of ritual acts which carefully re-affirm some of the most crucial contours of the institutional order; the respectfully subordinate positions of wife to husband, of 'wife-givers' to their mān, of women to men, son to father, young to old; the intermediate and fundamentally ambivalent position in the caste hierarchy of the Nāī and the Nāun; and the polar positions of the Brahman and Untouchable.

Conclusion

If the present work is thought to have any value it owes the lion's share to the radical and quite fundamental insight by Dumont and Pocock, worked out first in Contributions to Indian Sociology, that the caste system is, first and foremost, a system of ideas and values from which the system of actual groups of castes in the empirical world are, as Dumont was to put it later, a "by product".

The way chosen to approach caste values has been to assume three levels of ideological structure, each of which is inhabited by different sorts of symbolic phenomena and conceptual operation. At the first level are the 'raw materials' upon which the symbolic edifice rests, the substances of the drama; blood, water, betel nut, boiled rice, turmeric, vermilion hair, sweat, colours, temperature, directions, trees, rivers, cow dung, leather, flowers, faeces, and so on. All these (with others of course) are thought to possess 'meanings' in themselves, but they derive their critical sociological importance from the part they play in social interactions. At the second level are the more abstract ideological features of the caste system - those principles which the editors of Contributions, jointly and singly, worked away at uncovering; hierarchy, inclusions and exclusions, orientation to the whole, the notions of purity and impurity, of auspiciousness and inauspiciousness,¹⁶ of honour and shame, and so on. In my view the third level, and here the particular yields to the general, consists of a series of more 'elementary' ideas than these; concern with producing and reproducing, the will to live and the

terror of chaos and disorder. (Lest there should be any misunderstanding it should be made clear that it is not being asserted (in a Malinowskian style) that these necessarily constitute the inalienable 'givens' of the human condition, but merely that one revealing way of approaching the symbolic activity of Singhara villagers is with this kind of analytical framework).

In the third chapter, and in a passage which bore upon it in the Introduction, I tried to show the interconnectedness of the three levels in commensal practices - arguing that many of the 'third level' imperatives could be perceived in them. In the chapter following this one an argument will be advanced which attempts to demonstrate the link between certain ritual transactions between the sexes, between affines, and between castes, with certain basic ideas about the role of nature and culture in social reproduction. The present chapter has been concerned with the 'problem' of birth and death, and the ritual procedures taken to legitimate them.

An attempt has been made to show some of the ways in which certain substances (and artifacts) are used ritually to 'overcome' death and to 'explain' birth. But, just as important as the substances themselves are the actors who handle them. The efficacy of the former depends on the latter. More precisely, it is the correct performance by actors in their particular roles in the caste hierarchy which make the substances of the rites effective. In short, both sets of rituals not only legitimate birth and death, but re-affirm the legitimacy of the social structure as well.

CHAPTER 6MARRIAGEIntroduction

Having considered the rites that surround birth and death, I shall now move on to look at the most important domestic ritual of all, the marriage ceremony. Inevitably, I have had to be extremely selective in describing the marriage rituals (although the description is, as far as I am aware, reasonably extensive by conventional ethnographic standards) simply because they are both very long and complex, and because they could easily be the subject of a separate monograph on their own account. The basis for my selection will, I hope, become clear from the analysis in the latter half of the chapter.

PART I: MARRIAGE RITES: Description of the marriage
ceremonies

The first two ceremonies that mark the beginning of the series of marriage rites (see table 11) are held, either at the same time or on different occasions, at the bride's house. These are known as Phaldān ('the giving of fruit') and Olī (lit: the hem of a sari that, gathered in a fold, can be used to carry objects (such as the 'fruit' presented at the Olī).

The Phaldān

This involves a small number of men of the two sides: the groom and his close agnates, and at least one wife taking affine, probably his sister's husband (bahanoī), the bride's brothers, her father, and at least one wife-taking affinal guest. Before the ceremony the bride's family give their potential wife-takers a pakkā meal. The rite itself consists of the bride's father presenting the groom's kin with several gifts, namely a number of whole betel nuts, coconuts, and a small amount of money. The groom's side give betel nuts in return. The numbers of these items exchanged may vary though the groom's side always gives less than it receives. Thus, in a particular case, the bride's father presented 14 betel nuts, 2 coconuts and Rs 5 to the groom's kin, while receiving 10 betel nuts in return. The bride's father also gives one or two rupees to the barber (Nāī) accompanying the groom. He concludes by placing a decorative mark of turmeric (ṭīkā) on the foreheads of the

groom's father and brothers. Both sides embrace one another.

The Olī

The aim of this occasion, it is said, is to allow the groom's agnates, specifically his father's brothers, to see the bride's face and formally approve her as a potential bahū (lit: son's wife, but used more generally to apply to a new wife 'marrying in' to a patrilineage). Kin of both sexes participate and, again, though the affinal guests of the bride may well include wife-givers and wife-takers, her FZH (phūphā) and MB (māmā) for example, the affinal guests of the groom are practically always wife-taking ones.

Once again the groom's side are given a pakkā meal on their arrival. Then the barber's wife (Nāun) accompanying the bride's family makes a pile of uncooked rice behind which the bride sits. A close agnate of the groom then places sweets, a coconut and some money in the Olī. Her kinswomen weep. Her father places a tīkā on the foreheads of the groom's agnates and their affinal guests (he starts with these), and then gives each of them some money and concludes by touching their feet.

Both these rites are extremely short, but there are three features about them that we should notice. The first of these is the significance of wife-taking affines. Their role in the complex of rites will become pronounced as we proceed. Wife-giving affines are, as was recorded in chapter 4, known individually and collectively,

TABLE 11. Outline of the principal rites of marriage

<u>Name</u>	<u>Location</u>	<u>Principal Events</u>
Phaldān } Olī }	Bride's house	Small preliminary rites.
Lagan	Groom's house	Seals the marriage contract. Horoscope read. <u>Kachchā</u> meal given by groom's side.
Magar Mātī ('lucky' earth' - women only)	Both houses	Collection by women and girls of special earth, used to make hearths on which <u>maiher</u> (see text) is cooked.
Mandap	Both houses	Erection of wedding canopy.
Haldī and Chikut	Both houses	Rubbing of turmeric on spouse's body. Gifts given that dramatise the 'hypergamous chain'.
Bābā Bai (women only)	Groom's house	Re-enactment of rites and practices of marriage - a lot of joking.
<u>The Main Ceremony</u>	<u>Bride's House</u>	
(a) Mirchvānī		Barāt (wedding party) welcomed by bride's father, their feet washed. Given a 'hot' (spicy) drink.
(b) Agvānī		Fireworks - elders of both sides embrace in village square surrounded by villagers.
(c) Dvārchar		Threshold rite - bride's father and brothers make obeisance to groom's lineage (<u>vans</u>).
(d) Charhāvā		Public unveiling of bride - her adornment with ornaments presented by groom's family.
(e) Kanyādān		The giving away of the bride by her father.
(f) Bhaunvar		The seven circumambulations of the sacred fire.
(g) Batī Milānā (Inner Room)		The merging of two wicks of an oil lamp.
(h) Sabhā		Residue of dowry handed over.
(i) Bhoj Bhanvarā		Wedding feast. Groom's agnatic lineage in central place.
(j) Bidāī		The departure of the bride.

TABLE 11(contd.)

Muhajāyāna	Groom's house	The return of the <u>Barāt</u> , name given to bride, mixture of rice and pulse (<u>khichrī</u>) given by new wife to her husband who gives back his left-overs.
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as mān. Secondly, we should notice that the relative statuses of the two sides have become clearly marked already. The placing of the tīkā and the touching of feet are acts of deference, and in these two rites we have seen that both are performed by the bride's father, who thus honours the agnates of the groom and their mān. Thirdly, we may notice that the meal given by the bride's side to their guests is pakkā, and not kachchā. Though kachchā food will, as we shall see, be exchanged between affines of the same generation, the first gift of kachchā is a mark of superior rank and is thus reserved for the ceremony to which we now turn and which is held in the groom's house.

The Lagan

The nature of the two rites described so far is almost exploratory. By contrast The Lagan makes the proposed marriage contract irrevocable, and is on an altogether more elaborate scale. The term Lagan means 'auspicious time' (Mayer 1960:283 and Blunt 1931:361) and the central activity of the ceremony is the reading by the officiating pandit of the Lagan Patrikā, the horoscope, prepared in advance, that determines the most suitable date for the main wedding ceremony.

Rather than describe the rite in general terms I shall describe one particular Lagan ceremony. I do this partly for stylistic reasons, partly, and more importantly, because I believe it practically impossible to describe these rites in terms that are both general and detailed.

This is because there is some variation in their performance according to factors of caste and wealth. The one I describe here was held by a family of Brahmins of medium wealth.

On the evening of the ceremony the bride's party, men only, arrived in Singhara. This party consisted of the bride's father and his close agnates, the bride's FZH (phūphā) and his sons and grandsons, and the bride's father's FZS (his classificatory brother) who was also related as ZHF to the groom, and, as such was mān to the groom's side.

On arrival, the guests were welcomed by the head of the groom's family, the eldest brother of the groom's father, to whose house they were escorted. The company sat down and talked about mutual acquaintances and kin, while plates of refreshments and cups of tea were brought and served. "Here take tea" ... "no you take" ... "you first" ... "Oh, come on" ... "alright then, I'll drink" - the badinage was laboured and deliberate. (It is a time of high diplomacy and it is of crucial importance that the seating should be allotted and refreshments served according to correct principles of precedence. This involves, for example, the brothers of the future groom serving the bride's party before their own agnates. Behaviour is theatrical and tense. Respect is given with scrupulous attention to those to whom it is due). "Who is he?", asked a younger brother of the groom, pointing to a figure whose face was hidden in a shadow. "Your mansiā (MZH). "Oh, Mansiājī, excuse me", and the young man scrambled up to give respect. A perceptible glow was created, partly by the fire and partly by the excellent behaviour. (At such moments, indeed throughout

the cycle of marriage rites, 'good behaviour', for which there are a large number of colloquial expressions, is supremely important. Not infrequently I have witnessed a quarrel, occasionally a fight, at such an occasion. On this occasion all went smoothly).

After their refreshments, the older male guests rose and filed off to the latrine escorted by the host, jars (lotās) of water in their hands. Later they returned and, as always after mutual ingestion and excretion, washed their hands and mouths, coughed and spat, for all to witness. (All this is, in my view, as much part of the ritual as the religious ceremony itself - c.f. Srinivas (1976) and Loudoun (1976)).

The company then moved to the groom's father's house, where a large mat had been spread out and electricity connected for lights and a record player. Another of the groom's father's brothers showed all those who were to partake of the meal to their places. These included male agnates of the groom, the guests from the bride's side, as well as several villagers. The kachchā meal was served, with assiduousness, by the groom's brothers and their sisters' husbands. (This meal is the last the bride's father will accept from his future samdhī (DHF)). There was (and it is important that there should be) too much of it: everybody left some over. A Domār had been standing, a little way off from the house, during the meal, and some of the left overs were given by the host to him to eat at home.¹

All this time the women of the house had been squatting, huddled together, behind an upended string bed

(palang) singing wedding songs.

At the end of the meal the two families, joined now by a considerable number of other villagers, settled down in the courtyard of the house leaving a space in the middle for the ceremony itself to take place. Before it started pān, cigarettes, bīdīs and tobacco were offered by the groom's brother to the company. The order of service was precise; elders from the visiting family were served first, then important villagers, then elders from the host family, then younger members of both families, and younger Brahman guests from the village - after this guests from other castes. The pān - as is customary on occasions such as these - were skewered on a wooden stick. To take one pān from the tray involved "touching" all of them. Thus the necessity of strictly organised service. It would be polluting, for example, to the Brahmans if a man from a lower caste were to take a pān before all Brahmans had been served.

The main part of the ceremony, conducted by the pandit, then began.

The groom's sister spread cow dung (gobar) in the shape of a square in the centre of the courtyard. Upon this the pandit drew an auspicious pattern (chauk): an eight pointed star. In the centre of this was placed a small pile of wheat. On top of this the pandit put a lotā of water, covered by mango leaves, on which he placed a lighted clay oil wick lamp (dīpak). The pandit then mixed rice and water, making little rice balls, which he placed on the leaves next to the dīpak. At this point the groom came to squat on a small wooden stool in front of the chauk. In his hand he carried a leaf bowl with some money, betel

nut, turmeric and rice in it. The barber sat opposite the pandit, on the other end of the dung square. The pandit poured water on the right hand of the groom, who then poured the rice on to the leaf in front of him, and was given some kush grass. He and the groom performed several pūjās (to Ganesh, the god of fortune, to Prativī (or Prithivī), goddess of the earth, to Agni, god of fire) with materials (the Manglik Vastu) supplied by the pandit, and ash supplied by the Nāī.

Having completed the pūjās the bride's brother (who is shortly to become the sālā (WB) of the groom) touched the feet of his future bahanoī (ZH), placed a tīkā of rice and turmeric on his forehead and put a handful of flowers on his head.

It is at this point that the first part of the dowry given by the bride's family is handed over. In this case it consisted of money, saris and a coconut. This Lagan samān was prepared on a tray and was given by the bride's father to his son who in turn handed it to his future brother in law. The tray was then passed around for all to see.

The groom then gave a small amount of money to his sālā, who in turn gave the money to the pandit.

Sālā and bahanoī now stood. They placed pān in each other's mouths and embraced. Once again, the sālā touched his bahanoī's feet.

The Lagan patrikā was then brought and the date and time for the marriage was read out. Finally the sālā touched the feet of the elders of the host family and all the elder Brahmins present.

Magar Mātī

This small ceremony, known more widely as matmangarā: "the collection of the lucky earth" (see Blunt 1931:74) is performed by female kin and female neighbours of both bride and groom, separately, in their respective villages.

A Magar Mātī ceremony. Singhāra. 10.2.75

Female relatives and neighbours, led by the wife of the eldest brother of the groom's lineage (to whom I will refer, henceforth, as 'the eldest wife') and including several young unmarried girls, gathered in the groom's house. A pūjā was performed by the groom's mother and her elder BW (jethānī). They made an auspicious pattern (chauk), threw a handful of rice on it, and then made seven circumambulations, picking up rice grains as they went. These grains were to be kept, as they customarily are, near the maiher (see below).

A procession then set off from the house, preceded by a Basūr drummer, the young girls with small baskets under their arms, the women singing, to a bank of earth on the edge of the village, where the 'lucky earth' was to be dug. (There is only one such spot in the village). Having reached the spot the 'eldest wife' made a small pūjā, put a few coins on the ground, dug up three or four clods of earth, which she placed in her sari, and instructed the girls to fill their baskets up with earth. Then the procession wound its way back to the house of the lineage

elder, where the girls were ritually cleansed (or 'cooled') by having lotās of water passed round their heads (pānī utarnā). The Magar Mātī was taken into an inner room.

How the Magar Mātī is used: the preparation of maiher

Since maiher has already been mentioned, I take the opportunity at this point, to describe what it is and how it is made though it is not actually made until the next ceremony in the sequence, the Mandap.

The 'lucky earth' is used to make a hearth (chūlhā) upon which, on the day that the wedding canopy (mandap) is erected and again on the tenth day after the wedding itself (dashvanī), maiher will be cooked. Maiher consists of flour, jaggery, pure ghī, and water, and it is cooked by the women of the lineage supervised by the 'eldest wife'. It takes the form of small, pill-like balls.² On the days that the maiher is prepared, the lineage elder (or some senior relative who knows the family's history and genealogy) is present while his wife calls out the names of the ancestors, inviting them to the marriage.

There is a separate ceremony, (ghat marna) immediately preceding each preparation of maiher, at which the women and girls associated with the collection of the magar māṭī draw the water that is to be used in the cooking from the well. It is said that this water is especially pure and that it is able to drive away evil spirits. The maiher flour must be ground by the women of the gotra in a mill inside the room I have described. The ingredients are cooked in an earthenware pot, and with iron and wooden spoons, all of

which are made for this purpose alone by the potter, blacksmith and carpenter.

From Mandap to Dashvanī, that is to say from the time the wedding canopy is put up until it is taken down ten days after the marriage, the wife of the lineage elder leads the life of a sātvik (one who is virtuous and pure) eating mild food, refraining from intercourse, bathing after excreting, and keeping her house tidy and clean.

Mandap

The mandap (wedding canopy) is erected two days before the main wedding rituals. (Though these take place in the house of the bride, canopies are constructed in the houses of both partners). It is constructed on wooden poles.

The proceedings start, towards nightfall, with the departure of a procession of women and girls from the spouse's family. They walk from the house where the mandap is to be erected to 'present the wedding luggage' (sidhā hivāna) to the village goddess (Kher Māī) and to the temple. On the way they sing songs of an explicitly sexual nature. When they return, the officiating pandit ties a thread around the wrists of the kutumbī bhāī (the men of the spouse's lineage) and there is a session of singing religious songs and a distribution of prasād to villagers.

Then begins the digging of the holes in which the mandap poles are to be placed. This is initiated by one or more of the spouse's ZHs or FZHs; that is to say a mān. While labourers (Gonds, Ahīrs, Maharās probably) complete the

construction, the women process to the well to draw the pure water that is to be used in maiher preparation (see above); more sexy songs are sung. On the return of the women, the mān dig a hole in the centre of the booth, place turmeric, betel nut, paise, and maiher water in it, and insert the wedding pole (kambh).

After a meal, for members of the family, the senior female kin (that is to say the wives and mothers of the spouse's father, brothers and 'cousin brothers') prepare the maiher and recite the lineage genealogy, calling the ancestors to the wedding. As well as the ancestors, gods are named and invited.

The ceremony concludes with the spouse's sisters rubbing oil on the ankles, wrists and knees of the spouse. This is known as Tēl Charānā.

Haldī

The day after Mandap is one of merriment, sexual jokes and songs - one at which male and female family and guests, and most importantly the spouse, are smeared with turmeric (haldī). This is said to heat up the body for sexual intercourse.

The day starts with the groom (the ceremony is conducted separately at the houses of bride and groom: I have more experience with the weddings of grooms than of brides, which is why I use 'groom' here; it could of course be 'spouse') being rubbed from head to toe by young female kin and neighbours. The groom's mother receives similar treatment, and she is followed by her brothers' wives - until all the

women rub turmeric on each other's bodies. A band plays, and the atmosphere becomes quite noticeably 'hot' and is marked by a degree of physical abandon that is all the more striking in a cultural context that normally stresses the ideal of female modesty. Women then begin to rub the men with turmeric, frequently chasing them around before 'catching' them. This is followed by dancing in front of the band, with everyone in conspicuously high spirits. It is one of the very few occasions (another being the purification rite following a birth) at which men and women dance together. This joking is highly systematic.

Joking at Haldī

Apart from joking relations of varying degrees of intensity between men and between women, the three principal joking relations between male and female kin, which are dramatised at a time such as Haldī in the way described, are as follows: (a) Between devar and bhābhī; that is between a man and his elder brother's wife.³ (b) Between jija and sali; elder sister's husband and wife's younger sister. (c) Between a man and his sister's nand; that is between a man and his sister's husband's sister.⁴

Haldī, then, is a celebration the theme of which is human sexuality and which is both spoken of, and can be demonstrably experienced as, 'hot'. It is all the more interesting because the activities described so far go side by side with the presentation of gifts known as chikut or doriyā.

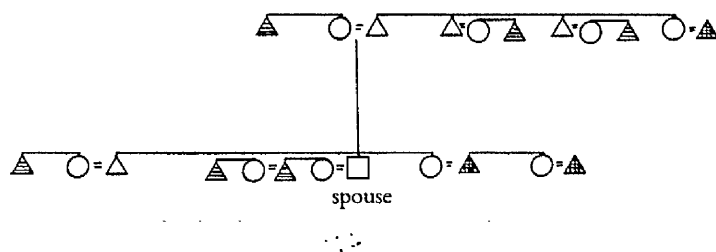
Chikut

Gifts consisting of cloth for a dhotī or blouse, bangles, sweets, rice, pulse, papad, a small amount of money and sometimes a sari, collectively known as chikut (and sometimes also as doriyā, which strictly speaking means the small basket of bamboo in which the chikut is placed) are given on two occasions in the cycle of marriage rites, one being at Haldī, the other at the Gavnā (the pre-consummation rite).

On the day of Haldī, women who stand in particular relations to the spouse organise parties of other women (who may not necessarily themselves be linked either as kin or even by caste to them) who proceed, accompanied by a drummer, to the spouse's house (where the Haldī is taking place). Before entering the house, they present their baskets of chikut to the groom's mother or to his or her elder brother's wife) who in turn hands it on to the spouse. But, although the chikut is a gift from women to women (that is to say it is both presented and accepted, ritually, by women), it is quite specifically and clearly said that it is a gift from a man to the spouse (see below).

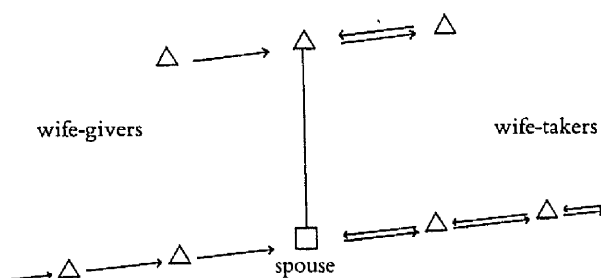
The male spouse will receive chikut from the following three categories of people:

(1)(a) Wife-givers of his parent's generation; i.e. his mother's brother (māmā) and his father's brother's wife's brother. (b) Wife-givers of his own generation; i.e. his elder brother's wife's brother and his own future wife's brother (sālā), as well as his sālā's sālā (see figure VII).

FIGURE VII Chikut Transfers

Those marked Δ (i.e. wife-takers to spouse's lineage) give chikut to spouse, and are given it back. Those marked Δ give chikut to spouse, who retains it. Although in practice, at the spouse's generation, chikut is given by affines up to two links remove from the spouse (I.E. WB, WBWB and ZH, ZHZH respectively), there is no limit in theory.

The diagram, simplified, shows clearly the ritual representation of the hypergamous nature of affinal relations (arrows represent chikut transfer). A hypergamous chain is evident at the spouse's generation.



- (2)(a) Wife-takers of his parent's generation; i.e. his father's sister(s)' husband(s) (phūphā). (b) Wife-takers of his own generation; i.e. the husband(s) of his sister(s) (bahanoī) as well as his bahanoīs' bahanoī.
 (3) Village 'friends' of his parents.

These fairly complicated looking rules can be reduced to a simple pattern, the outline of which, if not already so, will become very familiar as we proceed. Wife-givers and wife-takers associated with the spouse's lineage, give chikut to that spouse. The gift from wife-givers is retained, while that from wife-takers is given back. This presentation therefore brings into relief a (conceptual) chain of affinal links which constitutes a ritual demonstration of what Dumont has termed the 'hypergamous milieu' in which Indian marriage rites take place (1970: 124).

There are three points that should perhaps be added, or emphasised, for the sake of clarity: The first is that though, in the spouse's generation, the practical limit to chikut presentation at Haldī is wife-giver to wife-giver (i.e. sālā's sālā) and wife-taker to wife-taker (i.e. bahanoī's bahanoī) there is no limit in theory. This is exactly comparable to the customary rules governing invitations to weddings. It is quite often said that the number of mān, of the spouses generation, invited, and their distance from the spouse, is limited by the practical constraints of economy alone. The chain of affines, at the spouses generation, is thus of theoretically limitless length. The second point is that in the spouse's parents' generation, the limit is more clearly defined in terms of one wife-giving and one wife-taking link. The last point is that

chikut is not given by anyone in the spouse's grand-parental generation.

We may sum up Haldī by saying that the rite is, first of all, a celebration of human sexuality both spoken of and experienced as 'hot'; secondly, a dramatisation of the main joking relationships; and, thirdly, a statement of the links that bind wife-givers and wife-takers together in theoretically endless hypergamous chains.

The climax to the wedding rites begins on the day after Haldī, when the groom's party (barāt) (once again I am speaking from a male centred point of view here) prepares to leave the village to travel to the bride's house.

Bai Bābā

The barāt consists of men only: the women of the family, together with female ward neighbours, have a separate party, known as Bai Bābā. This is a strictly female affair, with the doors of the house locked and bolted against male interlopers. In the case of a man being found on or near the premises he would be chased away with sticks. The Bāi Bābā lasts for an evening and consists of a complete re-enactment of the rituals and practices of marriage, and includes two women, one taking the part of the groom, the other of the bride, acting out the physical consummation of the marriage. There is only one important point that I want to make about this occasion, which is that I have been told by my informants that at the Bai Bābā all verbal and physical limits on formal manners customarily observed

between the participants in normal day to day social intercourse are removed. In other words, there are no limits to joking. As far as I know this is the only occasion at which joking is unstructured, and it thus may be contrasted with other sexually 'hot' occasions, such as Haldī. (I may say that I have not seen Bai Bābā myself, but I consider the fact that the occasion was presented to me in the way I have described (by a wide cross section of male and female informants) extremely significant).

Partly for stylistic reasons and partly because (once again) there are some variations of form in the marriage ceremonies of different castes, I shall (following Yalman 1967: 165) describe the central events of the marriage (vivāh) ceremony in particular terms interspersing the account with comments and observations drawn from comparative material (I have attended some 10-15 such occasions).

The Barāt and Vivāh of a Brahman groom: March, 1974.

11 March, 6.30 p.m.

The bus,⁵ hired by the groom's father for the occasion, left Singhara for Narainganj, a village some 30 miles away on the banks of the river Narbadā. The Domār band sat in the back seats, the drummer playing spasmodically throughout the trip. On the way the bus stopped twice, once for a scent merchant who sprayed the company with varieties of scented water, and once for a temple pujārī who collected money for his temple. I mention this because it serves, in a small way, to convey the fact that we are

in the social context of a region and not just an isolated village. The barātī were in exuberant spirits: sexual jokes, fantasies, intimacies and direct and personal comments were freely exchanged. A feeling of shared warmth and comradeship that crossed boundaries of caste and kin was strongly felt - an 'effervescence', to use Durkheim's and Mauss's brilliant term, the loose structure of which would, of course, later be transformed into one of minute precision. I discovered that the two families had been put in touch with one another through the intermediary of the groom's father's sister's husband (matchmakers ('sources') are often 'respected' relatives, such as phūphās or bahanoīs).

Mirchvānī

On the arrival of the bus, the barāt was conducted by the bride's father to the janvāsā (the accommodation provided by the bride's family for the barātī, in this case the village primary school) where they were given a hot and spicy drink (mirchvānī) and where they arranged their belongings (beds and other sleeping materials). They then went out to the fields to excrete, and came back to wash and change clothes.

10 p.m. A representative from the bride's family arrived with a decorated horse which the groom, fully attired in brand new trousers, bright shirt, sash, crown, and dagger (all part of the wedding sāmagrī donated by the bride's family) mounted. The Singhara band launched into systematic trumpeting and drumming, and the barāt moved off, led by the groom, to the village bazaar (any open space

serves this purpose) where they gathered together on the edge of the square. Opposite them, emerging as it were like an army from the darkness, stood the men of the bride's party accompanied by a large number of villagers. Rockets and bangers were then let off, the latter, being placed in iron containers, making a very loud and frightening noise indeed. These made, as they invariably do, the groom's horse buck, requiring two or three bystanders to hold its head. At the height of the explosions the Narain-ganj kotvār (village servant) advanced across the square towards the barātī, twirling his sword.

Agvānī

On the completion of the fireworks came the Agvānī (lit: the act of going forward to meet one's guests. People normally refer to the Agvānī as including the fireworks). Elders of both bride's and groom's parties moved towards each other and embraced. Both parties then walked in a procession together towards the bride's house, on the threshold of which the next part of the ceremony was to be held.

Dvārchar

(This is the first ceremony of the marriage proper, and it consists of the bride's father presenting the groom with gifts; usually money. Once again the prominent role of the mān becomes visible. (It is my experience that it is customary for the groom's sister's husband(s) to accept from the groom the giftsgiven him by his future father-in-law

for 'safe keeping'. Indeed, it is often the case that the mān on the groom's side 'look after' all the transactions made between the two sides)). Pandits from both sides attended, and they conducted two pūjās, the first performed by the groom and the bride's father, the second by the groom and the bride's brother. During these pūjās the long bamboo pole, that has been standing beside the kambh under the groom's mandap, which had been brought with the barāt party, and which represents the groom's lineage (vans), is brought for the bride's father and brothers to worship.⁶

The procession then filed into the courtyard of the bride's house and sat down under the mandap, the two sides apart from one another. Women, family and friends of the bride, including the bride herself, sat huddled together in a corner, softly singing abusive and obscene songs about the barātī. Meanwhile the bride's brother's sādhu bhāī (WZH) went round spraying scent on the assembled guests. Simultaneously the bride, half hidden as she was, threw rice on the groom - or at least tried to, for the groom not only was taking evasive action but also was 'stealing' some of the mango leaves (bandanvārā) from the roof of the mandap.⁷

11.35 p.m. The barātī were sitting in a circle with the groom's father in the centre, beside whom were two suitcases filled with the presents that were shortly to be displayed and eventually given to the bride.

11.50 p.m. While the Singhara Nāī arranged the gifts from the suitcases, the feet of the guests were washed by the bride's brother (those from non-Brahman castes by a Dhīmar). This is considered to be a matter of considerable

prestige; washing another's feet is a clear act of deference, of the giving of respect and honour. An omission, however accidental, would have been interpreted as a deliberate and unpardonable insult. The groom's father directed the order of washing. The first three people to be so honoured were the groom's sisters' husbands, the groom's father's sister's husband, and the 'most respected' guest from Singhara, the 'elder statesman' of Singhara's Brahman community.

12.10 a.m. the barātī moved to surround the chauk (auspicious pattern) in the centre of the mandap. On the chauk lay a tray (thālī) in which rice, ghī, turmeric, incense, milk and kush grass had been placed. Next to the thālī stood a lotā and next to that two small wooden stools, one for the bride to sit on and one for her feet. In front of these was a round, decorated, earthenware pot (the raghu var, see note 11) which was covered by a brass lid into which oil had been poured. Next to this stood a lotā of water, later to be used in the invocation to Ganesh. Around this chauk stood the panch kambh (the five wedding poles of a bride's mandap, which correspond to the single kambh at the groom's mandap) that are the 'witnesses' to the marriage. Nearby stood the long bamboo pole, representing the groom's lineage, already referred to.

12.30 a.m. The bride, resting heavily on the arm of her assistant (the barber's wife (Nāun) from her village), descended the stairs from the balcony where the women were sitting and sat on one wooden stool, resting her feet on the other. The Nāī gave some kush grass and leaves to the bride's pandit,⁸ who sprayed water on the bride. He presented

her with rice, chanting mantrs. Using this, grass and turmeric she made a pūjā, in front of the raghu var, to Lord Ram.

Her Nāun assistant then drew away the top of the sari that had been covering the bride's face.

The barātī sat back and asked each other what they thought of the bride's looks. This moment may, without much doubt in my mind, be described as slightly 'shocking': it is worth remembering that many years will pass - that a new generation will have been born and raised - that several of the barātī will be dead or in their dotage - before the majority of them will see her face again; for until she reaches a mature status as mother of children who themselves may be on the point of marriage, a wife keeps her face covered (at least to elder men in her own caste) in her husband's village. To put it slightly differently: the bride is 'stripped of her identity' - is made an 'object' for the uninhibited gaze of the groom's kin; she is, furthermore, an unadorned object. It is in this state that she moves into the next section of the proceedings.

The Charhāvā

Charhāvā is defined by Blunt as 'a form of marriage' (Blunt 1931:74), but the term is used in Singhara to refer to that part of the ceremony at which the gifts from the bridegroom's side to the bride are presented.

The groom's FZH (phūphā) placed coins in a leaf and passed it to the Singhara Nāī, who gave it to the pandit.

The bride's Nāī gave the bronze pot, full of

ornaments, to the pandit who passed them over the bride's head, touched her lightly with it, and returned it to the Singhara Nāī.

The bride's FZ (phūā) emerged and placed burning coals on the chauk. Starting with the bridal crown, the presents - saris, cloth, gold and silver bracelets, necklaces, wristlets and other ornaments - were taken from the two suitcases by the groom's FB and, handled in turn by the Singhara Nāī, the pandit (who passed them round the bride's head) and the Narainganj Nāī, were piled up beside the panch kambh.

The bride's FZH (phūphā) then rubbed vermilion on the bride's head (on her hair parting). Meanwhile rupee notes were distributed (as indeed they were at fairly regular moments throughout) to the two Nāīs and the pandit. All these transactions were noted down by one of the groom's father's brothers.

1.00 a.m. The women, who had been singing fairly constantly since the beginning, departed. Chanting mantrs, the pandit sprayed water on the bride, the band started playing, and the bride rose to walk, head bowed, slowly round the chauk, while the barātī threw sweets (and rice) at her. She withdrew to an inner room.

There is always a pause at this point. Some of the barātī returned to sleep at the Janvāsā, others lay down to sleep under the mandap. A few sat and talked softly. There was an air of suspended movement and of liminality. The Domār band slept outside the gate while the village itself was silent as it can be only at dead of night. The slightest of breezes played with the

fragrances left by the events of the evening. Sometimes at this point a meal is served by the bride's side (always pakkā) for the barātī.

2.45 a.m. The bride's FZ (phūā) erased the chauk.

3.00 a.m. The pandit prepared for the next section of the ceremony (the Kanyādān). He made a new chauk in the shape of an eight pointed star, with a leaf in the middle, on which he put small mounds of rice and areca nut (the namak grahā). In a thālī beside him, he prepared flour and water, sugar, incense, sandal wood, rice, turmeric, ghī and vermilion. Behind the panch kambh he placed seven earthen pots.

3.20 a.m. The bride's FZ (phūā) and her mother came under the mandap from the house; the mother presented the groom with 1 rupee and led him to his place in front of the panch kambh. With her husband, she sat beside him. The pandit sprayed water on them, while the bride's father and the groom, chanting mantrs, performed a pūjā.

3.35 a.m. The bride's FZ (phūā) brought burning coals and placed them beside the groom. The groom consumed the rice balls prepared by the pandit. Then the Nāī left the mandap and went outside 'to bring water from the Ganges', returning a few minutes later to place the water at the groom's feet, which he touched. Standing up, he broke two sticks that he had been holding in his hand, saying "from today, new relations have started and old relations have to be left behind".

The Kanyādān

Supported as before by her Nāun assistant, the bride was escorted to her father and sat, face covered, in his lap. The pandit threw rice grains over her, chanting mantrs. The groom, whose face had been covered for the arrival of the bride, removed his veil.

The bride's father rubbed turmeric on the hands of his daughter and his son-in-law. The bride's brother poured water on them. The bride was then conducted by her Nāun to a seat beside the groom where her mother placed a tilak on her forehead.

Shining new brass pots (part of the dowry given by the bride's family) were brought out and exhibited to the company. Then, as bride and groom sat motionless beside one another, the parents of the bride left the mandap supported by the Nāun with their clothes knotted together. Mother and daughter wept.

4.30 a.m. (Little has happened since the bride's parents departed, the auspicious time (mahurath) for the Bhaunvar (see below) not having yet arrived. The Nāun has returned and is talking to the bride in whispers.)

Shortly before 5.00 a.m. a long procession of the bride's kin and neighbours, began to pay their respects to the couple by touching their feet and placing a ṭikā on their foreheads. Each of them in turn gave a small amount of money to the Singhara Nāī, the Nāun, and the Dhīmar. In order, they were FBW (kāki), eldest sister (jitsās - who touches the legs of her sister,

but not the groom), FZ (phūā), F's elder BW (barī mā), MM (nānī), NB (māmā) and his wife (māmī), another MB and wife, three mother's sisters (mausī), MZS (mauserā-bhāī), assorted agnates, the Dhīmar's wife, FZS (phupherā-bhāī) and wife, another Dhīmar, and then many village friends, B (bhāī), the Nāī, youngest B, another MZS, more village friends and, finally, MZH (mausiā).

Bhaunvar (the 'seven rounds')

5.50 a.m. The bride's FZ (phūā) brought fresh hot coals on a thālī. The Nāī prepared a 'brazier' (suruar) of mango leaves. His wife placed a garland of flowers on the bride. The Singhara Nāī sprinkled water in a circle round the fire, while the bride and groom poured ghī into it, making the flames rise. The pandit tied the clothes of the couple together.

6.05 a.m. The couple walked slowly round the fire three times. It is said that this is the moment when the couple are going to become one (their bodies remaining two, their souls merging). Neither the bride's parents nor her elder brothers are permitted to see this part of the ceremony.

The couple now stood in front of the fire, the bride holding a miniature winnowing tray in her right hand into which the pandit poured rice. Her husband put his arm round her and knocked the rice out. This was repeated seven times.

Then the bride and her FZ (phūā) sat down and were both covered by a sari. Hidden from view, her phūā parted the bride's hair afresh and rubbed vermilion.

(sindūr) into it, a mark born by all married women whose husbands are alive.

The Nāī filled the seven earthenware pots with water. Then the Dhīmar passed each one four times round the fire, and the Nāī also passed a loṭa full of water once round it.

6.45 a.m. The couple walked round twice more. Then the bride gave her marriage vows.⁹

Many more neighbours from the village then came to pay their respects to the couple.

7.05 a.m. For the second time her FZ (phūā) rubbed vermilion unguent into the bride's parting. The groom's brother placed a gift in the girl's lap.

7.15 a.m. The groom led his new wife round the fire twice more. (It may have been noticed that the couple went round eight times on this occasion. I confirmed that they had, quite simply, made a mistake.)

The main ceremonies under the mandap were now complete, and the couple moved into an inner room of the bride's house where a small rite known as the Batī Milānā was performed. This consisted of two wicks being placed in an oil lamp next to one another and being lit together, so that they appeared to merge. These rites are referred to by Blunt as Kohabar rites (Blunt 1931:74).

Meanwhile the barātī returned to the Janvāsā, to spend the morning in various ways. The groom's kin attended the Sabhā (lit: an assembly. See below). It is customary for other barātī to walk about the village, taking pān and tea, and paying compliments to the village women.

Bhoj Bhanvarā

At midday, the wedding feast (Bhoj Bhanvarā) was held. At this meal members of the groom's lineage (khāndān) occupied the central place under the mandap, while affines and guests sat in lines, according to caste, a little way off. The groom did not eat this meal. Women sang marriage songs. After the meal bride and groom and their families remained inside the house receiving guests.

At 5.00 p.m. the barātī, with the new bride and two female companions (sisters in this case) left in the bus to return to Singhara. The departure of the bride is known as the bidāī. (A girl's bidāī may be held weeks or even months after the ceremonies.)

To complete the account of the marriage rites I leave the description of this particular one, and return to an account in general terms. To that end I shall go back briefly to the Sabhā.

The Sabhā

The Sabhā is held, as indicated above, a few hours after the ceremonies under the mandap have been completed and it takes place in the janvāsā.

The purpose of this meeting is for the bride's family to complete the handing over of their daughter's dowry as well as to complete the payments due to those members of servant castes who assisted at the wedding.

Apart from any outstanding cash component of the dowry, there are three things that are handed over at this meeting: cooking pots, vegetables, and the raghu var, the decorated earthenware pot referred to earlier. This last is used by the bride on her arrival at her husband's house to cook a mixture of rice and pulse (khichrī) which she serves to the members of her new sasurāl (husband's family) from which moment she becomes a member of his kutumb. The vegetables and pots are also, self evidently, associated with her forthcoming role as wife and servant, at her husband's home.¹⁰

The Bidāī

A fairly common sound in the early mornings of the relatively short marriage season is loud weeping. Usually that means one of Singhara's daughters is going away on her bidāī, and both bride and her female kin demonstrate their sorrow at her parting (about which there are numerous songs) by weeping and wailing in no uncertain manner. There is no 'ceremony', in the strict sense, attached to the bidāī. The groom's kin are entertained by the bride's family to a meal, and the role of the mān is once more pronounced.

The Muhajāyāna

When the barāt returns with the new bride to the husband's village, the last rite of the marriage cycle is held, during which the groom's female kin and female ward

neighbours see the new bride for the first time.

Preparation for the Muhajāyāna consists of the drawing of a chauk on the threshold of the groom's father's house. In front of this chauk are placed two empty oil wick lamps (one resting, inverted, on the other). In front of these are put a pestle (mousal) and a long thin wooden stick used in the preparation of curds (mathanī) - tied together with a string.

The ceremony begins with the barber's wife, in her role as the new wife's attendant, untying the mousal and mathanī. The couple stand with their clothes knotted together in front of the chauk while the groom's kin, caste fellows and neighbours each in turn sprinkle rice on the couple, give them prasād (sweets) and mark their foreheads with a tilak. The groom's mother, who initiates these activities, also smears the lips of the couple and the groom's brothers with water. Throughout all this the bride's face remains covered.

Female kin and women neighbours then move inside the house with the couple. In turn the women approach the bride, do a pūjā to her, give her a small amount of money and, lifting her veil, look at her face.

When this is over the new wife fills a container (a thālī, winnowing tray or tin of some sort) with rice and holds it 'very firmly' on the ground, whereupon the bridegroom kicks it over seven times with his foot (i.e. more or less exactly similar to his action in the Bhaunvar). Perhaps to ensure that this symbolism is understood with the minimum of difficulty, a young baby is then produced from the folds of one of the participant's sari - to be

passed from bride to groom and back seven times. Following this the bride mixes rice, milk and sugar (dudh bhati) in a pot and gives small amounts to her husband's younger brothers. She offers the mixture to each of them five or six times, but on two or three of the occasions she 'deceives' them and gives them her little finger (kanipthaka, related to kaniptha, a younger brother) instead. Some of the remaining mixture (jūthā: what is left off after eating, 'defiled' by others) is eaten by the groom and his brothers, while the final remains are consumed by the bride.

The couple and the women then move outside once again and, together with male kin and caste fellows, process to the temple where the groom's mother offers a coconut to various gods. They return home to make pūjās to the household god (or gods).

Finally, the couple are surrounded by their kin. The knots binding them together (for they have been 'yoked together' throughout) are untied. There are fourteen knots altogether and the bride first attempts (and fails, so is helped by her new husband's younger brother (devar)) to untie her husband's seven knots, and then her husband attempts successfully to untie his wife's seven knots. It is said that the failure of the wife and corresponding success of the groom with the knots is auspicious:- it demonstrates the unequivocal authority of the groom over his wife. Thus unknotted, husband and wife throw a thālī, in which have been placed the contents of the raghu var,¹¹ backwards and forwards between each other seven times before upsetting it.

The new husband then enters the house, followed by his bride. The women of the house joke and protest - they bar the way and demand gifts. This is said to be 'making way' for a new woman to the household.

Later on, a meal is prepared and is served by the new wife to her husband's household members..Not only does she then become a member of her husband's ikutumb herself but she also receives a new name, which is given to her by the women of the family and the ward. Her pre-marriage name has been cast off at the 'breaking of the old relations' (see above).

That night husband and wife consummate their marriage, their bed and room having been prepared by the husband's female kin with whom he has a joking relationship (i.e. elder brother's wife's younger sister, cousin's wives - all classificatory bhābhīs). The following day these joke with him about his performance there.

The marriage has run its course. The mandap and the kambh will stay, as will the rest of the materials used, until on a particular day in the rainy season (see above) they will, like all objects that have been granted a temporary efficacious power, be thrown into the village tank to be 'cooled'.

PART II: Images of Reproduction

The second part of this chapter consists of an analysis of the marriage ceremonies which have been described above. The opportunity is taken not only to scrutinize the symbolism of the marriage rites alone but also (in what is hoped is an Hocartian manner) to use the insights gained from that exercise to further an appreciation of the ideological structure of the caste system itself. The burden of the argument is that what is said during the marriage rituals about the supposed qualities of, and relations between, firstly, men and women, and, secondly, wife-takers and wife-givers, is closely linked at a metaphorical level to ideas about the relation between high and low castes. Two main propositions are advanced; that men, wife-takers and high castes form a conceptual set which is made to appear distinctively superior to another set consisting of women, wife-givers and low castes; and that one of the 'achievements' of the symbolism used in the marriage rites (as elsewhere) is to make this inequality seem both necessary and inevitable. Each of the three relations; between men and women, between wife-givers and wife-takers and between high and low castes, will be examined in turn.

Men and Women

At Haldī, the bodies of male and female relatives, guests and, most importantly, the spouse are rubbed all over with turmeric (haldī). It is women who rub the haldī on;

their purpose being, it is said, to heat up bodies, especially that of the spouse, for sexual intercourse. Haldī is thus thought to be a celebration of human sexuality and is both experienced as, and spoken of, as 'hot'.¹² The fact that women do the rubbing - and the chasing of male guests too (see above) - suggests that the source of the sexual energy, thought to be created by the rubbing on of turmeric in this context, is perceived as being located unambiguously in women rather than men. In this sense, women appear as the active agents in the process of reproduction. The perceptions of this moment may be contrasted with three others; during the Olī, during the Bhaunvar, and at the Muhajāyāna.

At the Olī, the Nāun makes a pile of uncooked rice behind which the bride sits. One of the groom's father's brothers places sweets and coconuts in the bride's lap.

During the Bhaunvar, the couple circle the fire under the bride's mandap and stand in front of it.¹³ The bride then holds a miniature winnowing tray full of rice which the groom upsets, scattering the rice grains on the ground.

At the Muhajāyāna the container of rice held on the ground by the new wife is kicked over by her husband, immediately following which the couple pass a young baby backwards and forwards between themselves.

Taking them together, some preliminary comments about these three episodes may be made. If the link between rice and fertility seems clear, then it is noticeable that in each case the rice is raw, and that in the Bhaunvar and the Muhajāyāna this raw seed is upset by the groom. In

contrast with what happens at Haldī, it is thus the groom who, this time, appears as the active partner in reproduction. We may say, then, that the fertility of the bride is dramatised throughout in ways that will become more familiar as we proceed, but it is the groom who 'does the sowing', to use local phraseology. The gift by a close agnate to the prospective bride at the Olī is one of only two gifts that are given in the course of the rites directly to her, rather than through a specialist intermediary, such as a Nāī or a pandit. Sweets and coconuts are considered auspicious and the placing of them in the bride's lap contains manifest associations with the part played by men in reproduction. That this gift is given by an agnate, rather than by the groom himself, serves to emphasise that what is to be reproduced is not only children, per se, but also the patrilineage (the kutumb).

These associations can be pursued further in other contexts. Consider the procession of women, including virgins, to collect the magar māṭī; and also the small rite which precedes this procession, in which the spouse's mother and her jethānī each throw a handful of rice onto a chauk and then make seven circumambulations of it, picking up the grains as they go. Consider, too, the sexy songs sung on this occasion by the women - followed as they are by the digging of clods of earth which are placed in the hem of the lineage elder's sari and the young girls' baskets. Consider, finally, the fact that the 'lucky earth' is used to make special cooking hearths on which maiher is prepared on the evening that the mandap is erected, and that, on this occasion, ancestors and gods are invited to the wedding

by the wife of the lineage elder.

We may see in these activities the conjunction and association of the fertility of women and of nature itself (for that is what the 'lucky earth' symbolises). At these moments, the fertility of both is linked closely with the impending presence of the lineage ancestors, who are all conceived of as being male.

What is emerging is a picture of women as the source of sexual energy and as the possessors of a fertility which is closely identified with the fertility of nature. But they are also thought to have qualities that are juxtaposed with other qualities supposedly held by men in such a way as to render them (women) apparently 'wild' and 'disorderly'. The Bai Bābā, for example, is presented, by men at least, to justify a view that women, left to themselves, are 'by nature' hot, wild and disorderly. The concomitant of this is that only in their relation to men, as wives and mothers, do they become fully cultural or, indeed, fully human.

A particularly clear ritual statement of this latter idea is made in the main ceremony.

Before the Charhāvā the bride's face is deliberately exposed. After the barātī have discussed her features, the bride is presented with the ornaments brought to her by the groom's family. If we link this up with the fact that she is later given a new name by the female members of her husband's family, and that she also receives membership of his gotra, then we may interpret her public exposure and subsequent 'adornment' as stages in the creation of a new social identity for her. A woman's identity

is relatively more dependent upon her becoming a wife and mother than is the identity of a man dependent upon him becoming a husband and father.

This last idea is dramatised in other ways too.

It has been widely reported (by Mayer (1960) and Srinivas (1976) amongst others) that it is considered meritorious for a father to marry off his daughters before they start menstruating. In Singhara, an unmarried girl tends to attract unfavourable attention as she grows older. Discussions in the bazaar might contain references to her possible promiscuity and the ineptitude of her father. Eventually she might well become an object of 'moral panic', to use Cohen's (1972) phrase. A woman still unmarried in her twenties is regarded with deep suspicion and hostility. She becomes dishonoured. Furthermore, widows, at least those in castes that forbid widow remarriage, are required to eat, dress and behave with more than usual modesty. The message seems very clear. A woman untamed by wife-hood and mother-hood is perceived to be a threat, a danger and a liability to her kin, her caste and to society in general.

There is, predictably, another dimension to the relation between women and men that has to do with women's relative impurity and ritual inferiority.

The application of vermilion on the bride's hair parting by her phūphā and phūā has been described. The association between vermilion and blood is widely recognized (see also Walker 1968:175). Thus, women's identification with blood and openings is here established - to be repeated each day of her husband's life, for she replaces the vermilion stripe on her own head every morning. If her

relation to nature, or natural energy, has been dramatised previously in the ritual sequence, her impurity, in relation to men, is stated at this moment: for during periods of menstruation and also after parturition (i.e. when her association with blood is most obvious) a woman is considered impure (see Chapter 5).

A similar association is further emphasised in the Muhajayānā, when the new bride cooks khichrī in the raghu var for her husband. When he has eaten, he gives his wife his left overs (jūthā) which she then eats. This is quite critical, for this gift and counter gift firmly establish that the relation between husband and wife is homologous with the relation between gods and humans, and that between high and low castes. A short passage from Marriott clarifies the isomorphism: "... exchange in the sacrifice created a ranked relationship between gods and men ... gods, after they had eaten, returned only their leavings for men to eat ... the same relationship existed among the specialised natural genera within the society of men ... the Shudra... could symbolise his ranked relationship ... by feeding his human superiors and eating their leavings in return" (1974:985).

It has been suggested so far that the marriage rituals associate women with the source of sexuality, a fertility that is closely linked with the fertility of nature itself, blood, impurity, openings (the significance of which will become apparent) and also relative 'disorder'. At the same time that the force and efficacy of the nature transmitted by women is ritually presented as a vital component in the process of human reproduction it is also

clearly represented in various ways as dangerous and threatening. It has, therefore, to be 'tamed'.

Wife-givers and wife-takers

By ascribing to each qualities that are different the marriage rites thus distinguish between men and women and, having done so, integrate them - with one of the partners to the dyad subordinate to the other. And in the same way that the inferiority of women to men is clear, so also is the inferiority of wife-givers to wife-takers.

Let us remember that wife-taking affines are known individually and collectively by the term mān and that this term also means honour.

Let us now observe how the inequality between wife-givers and wife-takers is ritually established in the marriage ceremonies by looking at the relation between the two families most immediately involved; that of the bride and that of the groom.

At the conclusion of the Olī the bride's father touches the feet of the groom's father's brothers, while at the Lagan the bride's brother and the groom, the chief actors, sit facing each other across the auspicious pattern at different heights: the former on a leaf, the latter on a wooden stool. This pattern of distinction and deference spreads out to encompass all the members of the respective families and is dramatised in many other different ways - as follows:

At the Dvārchar, the bride's father worships the bamboo pole which represents the groom's patrilineage. No

comparable act of worship is made by members of the groom's lineage to that of the bride; neither do members of her lineage place such a pole under their own wedding canopy. Following this rite, the groom and his party are sprayed with scent and their feet are washed by a member of the bride's family. The rice throwing by the bride, and the bandanvārā stealing by the groom, follow.

At the wedding feast, members of the groom's lineage occupy a central position under the mandap while men of the bride's lineage, affines and other guests, sit in separate lines a little way off. A comparable image is the 'high table' to which diners at our own more traditional seats of learning attach significance. In precisely the same way that the commensal gatherings in an Oxford or Cambridge college provide, after grace, an opportunity for "attention to be focussed", to borrow Humphrey's happy (1977) phrase, upon those who, it is sometimes said, protect and embody traditional wisdom, so the wedding feast draws attention to the groom's lineage. The bride's lineage never materialises in a similar way at any stage.

These activities and images serve to underline the ritual superiority of the wife-taking family. Not only does it 'take shape', both metaphorically and in practice, in a way that the wife-giving lineage does not, but it is clearly seen to have the greater ritual efficacy. In the rice throwing game, a nice conjunction between the superiority of men and that of wife-takers may be observed.

However, it is not merely a case of the 'bride's side' being shown to be lower than the 'groom's side', but rather of a structural principle stating that all wife-givers

are subordinate to all wife-takers.¹⁴ This is most clearly demonstrated in the presentation to the spouse of chikut, which serves not only to differentiate very clearly between wife-giving lineages and wife-taking ones, but also to show them as being related to each other in a theoretically endless and hypergamous chain.

Having established the above principle, we may now turn to consider the roles of the mān in the rituals.

Even if most of the work involved in the erection of the mandap is carried out by labourers hired for the occasion, the digging of the holes for the mandap poles is initiated by one or more of the spouse's mān: a ZH or FZH. Mān also dig the hole in the central spot under the canopy in which they place turmeric, betel, coins, and a little of the maiher water. Furthermore they insert the kambh in the same hole. The symbolism of these actions seems unambiguously phallic.¹⁵

At the Sabhā, the giver and the receiver of the remaining parts of the dowry are customarily the 'most respected' members of the two sides, typically FZHs. It is they who embrace first, before the respective fathers of the spouses do so.

The sisters and the father's sisters of both spouses play crucial roles throughout. Being women, neither is strictly speaking mān though they are both deferred to, and they gain their ritual eminence by being married to, or being about to marry, wife-takers. The groom's sister prepares the auspicious pattern which is the centrepiece of the Lagan, while the bride's FZ (phūā) is one of the most active participants in the main ceremony, as we have seen.

And, just as in formal ritual contexts, so at moments interstitial to them, the mān play distinctive roles. ZHs are the only people not of the spouse's lineage who are allowed into the inner room where the 'lucky earth' is kept after it has been collected and before it is used. ZHs assist the groom's brothers in serving the kachchā meal at the Lagan, and a bride's elder sister's husband is customarily the last person to bid farewell to a bride as she sets off on her journey to her married home.

These activities speak for themselves. Mān means honour, and the function of the mān is to bring honour both to the ritual artifacts and to the wife-givers themselves. The gift of that part of the dowry handed over at the Sabhā is made the more 'honourable' because it is given not by an agnate of the bride but by a wife-taker to the bride's lineage. Similarly the 'lucky earth' is made more honourable by visitations not only from the spouse's agnatic kin, but also by wife-takers to that spouse's lineage. There are senses too, in which the marriage ceremonies may be viewed in terms of a gift of a woman in exchange for honour; it may only be remarked upon that one of these is tangible and material and that the other is not. Let us briefly rehearse the reasons that the villagers give to explain why this honour is so vital to them.

The fact that for a woman to remain too long unmarried brings a dishonourable reputation has already been referred to. So too has the fact that this dishonour spreads to her father and to her wider kin. Part of the reasoning behind these ideas is that the standing of a family is measured, to a significant degree, by the quality

of its affines. Of these, the wife-taking affines are by far the most important. This is nowhere clearer than amongst the Brahmans who maintain, with some small justification in practice, that there is an actual chain of affinal links which stretches through the village from the south of the region to the north.¹⁶ Thus the honour given by a wife-taker to a wife-giver (and vice versa; see below) appears to flow through a chain of affines binding them, as members of the same caste, together through women. (I have also argued, in Chapter 3, that the system of food transactions achieves a similar effect in regard to the whole community of castes).

There is yet another feature of the transactions between wife-givers and wife-takers which is highly pertinent.

Gifts handed over at the Sabhā include raw food (grains and vegetables), cooking pots and utensils and the raghu var, itself used as the cooking pot in which the new bride cooks the first meal of mixed rice and pulse for her husband. It would be tempting to see in these gifts a straightforward identification of wife-givers with raw food and the means of its transformation, and to look for a complementary identity between wife-takers, cooking and cooked food. Such a view would be too simple, for both sides eventually exchange cooked kachchā food. Nevertheless, it may be noticed that wife-takers initiate the exchange by their serving of kachchā food at the Lagan feast (which action bears comparison with the initiation of reciprocal terms of address in modern European discourse (Brown and Gilman 1960)). This may be set beside the 'gift' of left-overs by a husband in exchange for the

first meal of kachchā food cooked by his wife. Bearing in mind that left-overs are considered 'more cooked' than kachchā food, which in turn is thought 'more cooked' than pakkā food, there does seem to be a convincing case for associating wives and wife-givers with food that is relatively less cooked, and husbands and wife-takers with food that is relatively more cooked.

Thus, by a variety of means, wife-givers give honour to wife-takers and wife-takers are also, paradoxically enough, seen themselves to be sources of honour. (This seemingly paradoxical characteristic of honour which has been discussed in Chapter 4, has received considerable attention from writers such as Veblen (1917), Pitt-Rivers (1977) and Bloch (1977)).

High and Low Castes

Using the interpretative framework sketched out with regard to the two sets of relations considered so far, let us now consider aspects of the symbolic communication contained in the work performed by certain high and low castes. Some of this may be seen to concern reproduction too; not, to be sure, of children (although the language gains its efficacy by being very comparable to that) but, rather, of culture and society.

The Roles of Low Castes

To start amongst the Untouchables.

Domār women provide midwifery services. Because

of this they are placed in frequent contact with the blood of childbirth. It is this contact with such a supposedly 'impure' substance which villagers say is one reason for the untouchability of Domārs. More to the point, perhaps is their association with birth and reproduction in general. Recalling (from Chapter 5) that until the purification ceremony after birth both mother and baby are themselves 'untouchable', Domārs may be seen as being permanently in that state to which all women are temporarily confined at the time during which their powers of creation, so to speak, are most manifest. Women have the power to produce; Domārs are associated with the processes deriving from that power. Both are thought, therefore, to be potentially dangerous. Domārs are also drummers and bandsmen and, as such, provide the music for all the rites of passage including marriage. Thus again they appear at transitional moments at which both social and physical death and birth, destruction and creation, are present. And is not their acceptance of jūthā at the feasts of high castes homologous with the acceptance by a wife of her new husband's left-overs?

As potters, the Kumhārs make water pots, bricks and slates. The process of extracting clay involves the cutting open and the digging up of earth. In the brick making season swathes of land within sight of the village, but outside its boundaries, become particularly conspicuous. Their kilns, too, within which bricks and slates are fired, are also conspicuous - some of them placed next to the Kumhār quarter of the village. After dark, these mound-like structures glow against the night sky radiating heat.

Just as women and unmarried girls cut out the 'lucky earth' from a particular bank of earth, so Kumhārs cut open other parts to obtain clay and the association of both with heat is clearly manifest. Kumhārs also raise pigs, symbolically important because they consume human faeces. At a Kumhār caste gathering, these pigs are themselves eaten by the Kumhārs, a demonstration of their acceptance of a transformed version of jūthā.

Chāmārs are, of course, associated closely with leather and shoes. Now, no-one ever enters house or temple without first removing his shoes - which may be regarded as being intrinsically impure because of their association with dead cattle. I think, though, that we may also see them as conductors or containers of a power that derives from their contact with the earth, or ground, and the substances that exist there. This power is, so to speak, 'controlled' by leaving it behind when entering the ordered universe of home and temple. By the same logic, the people who make and repair shoes are conceptually linked with the disorder and power which they convey and, as such, are themselves perceived as objects to be controlled.

Although the Dhobīs have almost given up working as kāmīns, they still wash bed clothes stained with the blood of birth and menstruation as well as those belonging to families of the recently deceased; their connection with blood, reproduction and death being thus expressed. While the blacksmith's identification with heat is self-evident, both he and the carpenter have to do with the making of ploughs. The use of, or contact with, a plough is one of the most crucial of all indices against which

relative highness and lowness is measured, associated as it is with furrows, with earth cut open and made ready for seeds.

As water carriers, fishermen and cultivators of water chestnuts in the local tanks, the Dhīmars are closely linked with water. This is a substance associated in a very fundamental way with fertility and birth, as well as with death (see Heesterman 1957:119; and Crooke who asserts simply: "In India ... water is the prime source of fertility" (1926:54)). The work of other low castes such as the Maharā and Ahīr castes consists mainly of agricultural labour. In the same way that women and wife-givers are ritually connected to the powerful and life-giving forces involved in human reproduction, so those whose work involves preparing the earth - above all opening it by ploughing - are also identifiably linked to the power and efficacy, and danger, of nature and its processes.

The proposition being advanced is that an essential feature of lowness, in the conceptual universe of the villagers, is its association with the productive, reproductive and procreative processes of nature. But just as the forces of low castes are thought to be, at one level, powerful, creative and indispensable to man and society, they are also thought to be dangerous and potentially 'wild'. The alternative to their continued subordination to the qualities and characteristics of high castes is perceived, quite simply, to be chaos. (Some of the characteristics of this 'chaos' are explored in the chapter which follows.)

Brahman and 'high caste' roles

As priests (pandits), Brahmans fulfil a whole variety of ritual functions, some of which were described above. Consider the drawing of auspicious patterns and the reading of horoscopes. The auspicious patterns are drawn in relation to the cardinal directions and their sub-divisions, which are associated with particular gods, natural phenomena, and stages of life and death. Just as these patterns bring spatial order to ritual proceedings so horoscopes, based upon astronomical and astrological regularities, impose temporal order. If the symbolism is complex, the message is clear. In both these activities, we see the pandit sanctifying the universe by controlling and ordering it. Similarly, ritual formulas are used by pandits not only in formal ceremonial contexts but also in the curing of illness and the driving away of ghosts and evil spirits. Each family in the village is visited once a year by pandits to hear fortunes told. The first letter of every baby's name is given by a pandit. At each rite of passage a pandit is called to witness and to control the passing of one stage and the birth of another. In these ways, especially perhaps in their control of rites of passage and their ability to drive off malignant spirits which seem ever to threaten the institutional order with chaos, Brahmans, as pandits seem to be 'masters of order'.

They are also distinguished from lower castes in commensal matters. I have argued in Chapter 3 that (to oversimplify) low castes give Brahmans raw or semi-cooked food while Brahmans give back food that is fully cooked.

This exchange is clearly comparable with the exchange which takes place, or is thought to take place, between men and gods and between wife and husband at their first meal together. In all three cases, low gives to high a substance that high gives back after having transformed it and infused it with a quality that is at once intangible and honourable if not also divine.

It has been reported from elsewhere that ploughing is an activity frequently eschewed by the highest caste in a village (for example, Hutton 1946:78). In Singhara, the Brahmans neither touch nor operate ploughs while those from all other castes, including the Thākurs, do. By contrast, the Brahmans insist upon sowing their own fields with their own hands. Sowing is an activity closely linked with both fertility and transition. Describing it as "... an annual crisis, a rite de passage", Crooke tells us that sowing is widely considered to be so solemn and potentially dangerous an action that it requires a landlord or a priest (rather than a tenant or labourer) to carry it out (1926:250). A familiar theme seems to make itself heard once more. In the marriage ceremony, women and wife-givers were seen to be associated in various ways with a fertility that required men and wife-takers to both release it and make it safe and orderly. A similar statement seems to be being made in the ideas and practices surrounding these two basic agricultural tasks.

Conclusion

Some of the themes and ideas apparent in the marriage ceremony are also affirmed in the symbolism attached to caste occupations. Thus the symbolic content of the marriage ceremony yields insights not only into how relations between the sexes and between affines are perceived, but also into that body of collective representations which underlie and lend legitimacy to the caste system itself. Women, who actually bear children, wife-givers who actually present wife-takers with the means of perpetuating the lineage, and low castes who, as agricultural labourers and as craftsmen, actually produce, are associated metaphorically with each other in a conceptual set, or class, that is systematically represented as being necessarily subordinate to another consisting of men, wife-takers and high castes. This subordination is legitimated by ritually denying the actual interdependence of real individuals in the empirical world, and by ritually asserting that the former class is dependent on the latter in very fundamental ways indeed. Van der Veen's analysis of the relation between Brahmans and the dominant caste in terms of "the reality of dependence and the ideology of non-dependence" (1972:23) comes to mind.

CHAPTER 7

THE 'DARK SIDE'

The overall intention in the preceding four chapters has been to build up a portrait of villagers' conceptions of the proper order of things. But it may be readily agreed both that it is in the nature of moral systems to have a 'dark side', and that institutions which define the limits of the orderly often, paradoxically, draw sustenance from the visions of the disorder or chaos which it is presumed would result from their absence or removal. I shall turn now, therefore, to consider what Carstairs, in another context, has termed "the reverse of the medal" (1971: 125).

In one way or another the previous chapters (from Chapter 3 onwards) have been concerned with correct action or proper behaviour - in commensal matters, in relations between kin, in dealings with the dead and the newly born, in the fulfilment of caste occupations, and so on. In a sense, therefore, the notion which has been underlying a great deal of the foregoing has been that of dharm (which Dumont (1970:251) defines as "action conforming to universal order"). But, as Manu had it, "in order to distinguish actions, the creator separated dharm and adharma" (not-dharm) "and made pairs of opposites such as happiness and unhappiness" (quoted in O'Flaherty 1976:47). The present chapter is concerned with the second of such pairs of opposites, that is with the realm of evil, or adharma; the 'dark side' of

dharm and the legitimate order. The purpose of shedding light, so to speak, on this 'dark side' is to come a little closer to an understanding of what it is that dharm is thought to keep at bay. Following some of the formulations of Berger and Luckmann which were set out in the Introduction, my contention is that the values which support the structures of the legitimate derive a great deal of their potency from images which are thought to inhabit an altogether darker realm of the illegitimate.

In this chapter, I approach the 'dark side' from four main points of view. Firstly, the attitudes of the caste Hindu majority of the village population towards the tribal minority of Gonds in their midst are examined. The justification for this is that, in some contexts, the Gonds appear to members of other castes (from Brahman to Bhangī) as living personifications of evil and adharm. Secondly, some observations are made about the association made between sickness and death on the one hand, and sin on the other. Thirdly, the characters of some of the ghosts and evil spirits who populate the twilight penumbra of the village are considered. Finally, aspects of a sequence of spring festivals are described in order to discover what it is that they have to tell us about the villagers' conceptions of the 'dark side'.

Demon Gonds

As was recorded in Chapter 1, oral histories of the village often start with accounts of a battle said to have been fought between the early Thākur founding fathers

and the "terrible" Dāru Shāh, the Gond chieftian who, up till the Thākurs' arrival, had ruled the area. Nowadays, the village Gonds (Dāru Shāh's descendents, as it were) are, like most of their fellow tribesmen in the tract, economically destitute and politically powerless.

But, although the Gonds have lost their actual, political, power, they are believed to possess a number of other types of power on account of which they are feared by many villagers. The following stories, both told me by a Thākur informant, indicate something of the alleged nature of this power.

A Thākur once bought some rice from a Gond. The water in which this rice was subsequently boiled turned blood red. The Gond told the Thākur that if the rice water was thrown into a well then that well would dry up. The Thākur felt compelled to try. The well took seven days to dry up and has been without water in it ever since.

The sister of a Thākur, who had a Gond woman as a domestic servant, was returning home one day from the fields carrying some bhajiā (green vegetables). On the way she met her Gond servant who looked intently for a while at the vegetables. The Thākur woman then returned to her family, cooked the vegetables and served them ("fairly raw"). After the meal the stomachs of all those who had eaten it became distended. The Thākur himself went immediately to the Gond servant and asked what the remedy for this condition was. He was told that the members of his family ought to take hot water and salt, which they did. It cured them promptly.

It is worthy of remark that both these little tales

are concerned with food and the supernatural influence Gonds are thought to be able, on occasions, to exercise over it. A third account, of an event which took place during field research, develops this theme. It concerns a Brahman boy and a Gond sodhan (witch).

The son of a Brahman suffered from an infection of the throat which neither doctors from the town nor the Singhara pandits seemed able to cure. One day the child went into a trance during which he told of a recent incident. He had, he said, been in a field, near the village tank, guarding the sarpanch's mango trees. A mango fell off one of the trees and a Gond woman, who was nearby, ran to the spot to pick it up. He had reached the mango first himself, however, and had chased the woman away. He had eaten the mango. The Gond woman was very angry at this behaviour and swore that never again would he be able to pick or eat mangos. After a fortnight, in which he had remained perfectly healthy, he had fallen ill. Now, he said, his illness was making it ever harder for him to breathe. He was sure that he was going to die.

Some days after the boy's trance an exorcism was conducted by a Brahman and a Dhīmar ojhā (healer/sorcerer), during which the patient entered a second trance. This time he claimed that he was Barā Deo,¹ and that the sodhan who had cast her spell on him had previously killed four other people by the same method. The alleged sodhan was then brought before the company, assembled to watch the exorcism, and was threatened with a beating if she did not release her victim from his illness. Vigorously protesting her innocence, she passed a lotā of water around the boy's

head, threw the water on the ground, and said the boy would recover. And, very quickly, he did.

The special interest that sodhans are thought to have in inflicting harm upon children, illustrated by this story, is further manifested in the following.

A young Yādav (cowherd) boy was allegedly killed by a Gond sodhan. As he was dying he instructed his family to bury him together with an axe. He knew that it was one of the customs of sodhans to visit their victims' graves at midnight, to restore them momentarily to life, and to drink their blood. Sure enough one night his murderess came. The boy asked her to dance for him before drinking his blood. While she was doing so, he cut off her head, and went home to tell the story to his family.

There is another context, which perhaps misleadingly seems at first sight slightly more prosaic, in which the Gonds' association with food appears as a source of anxiety. On more than one occasion I have heard expressions of disgust and revulsion at their habitual consumption of a rice soup known as pej. Pej consists of semi-cooked rice grains floating in water. Although they drink it, the Gonds consider this mixture as proper 'food'. For people from other castes such mixing of categories (of food and drink) represents a breach of commensal propriety and thus is considered objectionable. But if the mere thought of pej can disturb the sensibilities of others from a wide variety of other castes, then the sight and smell of other Gondī food can provoke even stronger reaction. One evening, walking beside the Gond quarter of the village, I and a Brahman informant encountered a Gond going to his house holding a small,

steaming, cloth bag. My acquaintance enquired about the contents of the bag, and the Gond opened it for him to look inside. Catching sight of what appeared to be cooked grass, the Brahman held his nose, grimaced, and looked as if he was about to vomit. He explained later that he disliked seeing cooked food being carried along open paths between houses, and that the food just looked and smelt repulsive. He was unsure, he said, whether the bag had contained genuine food, or indeed whether it contained food for genuine humans.

It is not uncommon for Gonds to be referred to as 'giants', and I have heard it said that they are "giants who never fall ill". Their strength is thought to derive, in some way, from the jungle with which they are closely associated: they are known colloquially as dehātī log (country people) and janglī log (jungle people). This reputation for strength is periodically re-inforced during the annual wrestling tournament in Singhara. By no means all the competitors are Gonds on this occasion, but many of the village Gonds take part and are conspicuously successful at this highly important sport. Their work as labourers also provides an opportunity for their allegedly superior physical prowess to be confirmed in the eyes of some. A common sight in the village market place is Gond labourers lifting heavy burdens onto bullock carts, while their high-caste patrons look on from the calmer surroundings of a tea shop.

The Gonds are regarded not only as 'giants' but also as rākshasas (demons). Informants give several reasons for this. First of all, it is said that the Gonds have a

preference for māmā-phūā marriage (i.e. marriage between the children of mother's brother and father's sister). Such a marriage - between 'sister' and 'brother', as the standard kinship terms render first cousins - is regarded as incestuous and therefore disgusting.² The theory that such incestuous practices 'prove' that Gonds are really descended from the demon Rāvan is common currency in the village. Secondly, the Gonds not only eat meat but are also known to sacrifice goats at their main festivals. Other (low) castes do both of these things too, but they do not attract quite the same type or degree of opprobrium in the process (a similar observation is made from elsewhere by Carstairs (op.cit.:135)). Thirdly, the Gonds have a reputation, like many of the demons who feature in local demonology, for freer sexual practices than others.

Following all this, one notable feature of local iconography comes as no surprise. During the great autumn festival of Dasahra, images of the goddess appear in the streets of villages and towns all over the region. Many of these take the form of the goddess Kālī fighting the demon giants Shumbh and Nishumbh. In Singhara these two are said to represent anger and lust respectively.³ There is always something familiar about the physical features of these giants. They are depicted as being dark and well built, with round faces and curly hair; in short, they are depicted as Gonds.⁴ Images of the demon Rāvan, anti-hero of the Rām Līlās, which take place during the same festival, have a similar appearance.

In the attitudes of the majority towards the Gonds there are several interconnected themes which, by way of

summary, I shall now attempt to identify.

We may begin by recalling that, in the previous chapter, aspects of the structural importance of the distinction between 'kinship' and 'affinity' in the articulation of hierarchy within the caste was examined, whilst, in Chapter 3, the comparable importance of distinctive categories of food in articulating hierarchy between castes was discussed. What may be suggested here is that, by allegedly preferring māmā-phūā marriage, and by being commonly associated with a type of food which does not fit into the conventional categories, the Gonds are thought habitually to violate two significant rules - a violation which is seen as a basic threat to the hierarchical order itself.

This idea - that Gonds are 'beyond the pale' of the conventional, hierarchical, order is expressed in other ways too. For example, although the Gonds themselves claim that their god, Barā Deo, is a devotee of Shiv, there is a widespread belief amongst the rest of the villagers that Barā Deo is, in fact, a subversive deity with malevolent intentions towards the more orthodox Hindu deities. Furthermore, there is a general fear that the power the Gonds are thought to possess (or to have possessed in the past) is similarly threatening, because it is not 'contained' in the same way that other forms of power are. Thus, while the Thākūr rule of the early 19th century found its legitimacy in a classical manner (i.e. in the ritual subordination of the Thākūrs to the high-status Brahmans to whom they gave daughters), Gondī rule lacked any such conventional legitimization. Simply put, the political power of the 19th century Thākūrs is seen as having been subject to the spiritual

authority of the Brahmans, and hence 'contained' by dharm in a way in which the earlier political power of the Gonds was not.

The frightening figure of the Gond sodhan bears testimony to the feeling that the Gonds possess powers which are 'uncontained' in another sense, and that these powers are considered threatening. An understanding of the significance of the sodhan in particular, and of the Gonds' supernatural powers in general, is sharpened by a consideration of the things which they are thought most capable of attacking, namely food (especially raw food) and youth (especially babies). As we have seen, the importance given to the processing of food in Singhara is very great. It has been argued that there is a feeling that only after it has been properly cooked and served does food 'become itself' - nourishing and life-enhancing. It has also been implied that, in a not dissimilar way, people too become their full selves and gain their full identity only after having been subject to cultural 'processing'. But, unlike the rest of society, what the sodhan seems most attracted to are the unprocessed, the uncooked, the un-socialised. Such perverse preferences are redolent with subversion.

So it is that many of the qualities which Gonds are thought to possess make them seem, in the eyes of the majority, altogether lacking in respect for customary virtue and dharm. Small wonder, therefore, that they should regularly find that, in depictions of battles and conflicts between bad giants and gods, they should find themselves represented as the former.

Sickness, death, and the spirits of the dead

In his reflections on the place of suffering in the ethics of world religions, Max Weber observed that in traditional societies a common attitude to those "haunted by disease or other cases of obstinate misfortune" was that they were possessed by demons or "gods whom they had insulted" (Gerth and Mills 1948:271). Such an attitude is found in Singhara where illness and physical disability (by contrast with health and normal physical well-being which are both highly valued) tend to attract fear and anxiety, and are frequently thought to be the handiwork of malevolent spirits or deities. One of the purposes of this section is to consider the extent to which such malevolence is believed to be activated by human sin, or breach of dharm (a problem which, it may be emphasised, constitutes one of the main themes of the chapter as a whole). To this end I will first consider, very briefly, 'smallpox' (chaichuk) or, rather, chicken pox as it is nowadays, the 'evil eye', and the potential malevolence of the ancestors.

The smallpox goddess, Sitalā Mā, Barī Mātā (big mother), or Chhotī Mātā (little mother) is one of the deities which has received some attention in ethnographic references to illness. In Singhara the main association Barī Mātā has is with an excess of heat, and it is through this that a link between 'smallpox' and sin may tentatively be traced. In many contexts, too much heat is considered dangerous because of its supposed propensity to lead to uncontrollable emotions. 'Hot' food, for example, is

thought to engender lust, passion and anger, while 'cool' food is nearly always associated with virtue and wisdom. Now, it may be argued that there is nothing intrinsically wrong with the former set of emotions so long as they remain within the 'cooling' influence of the latter. But there certainly is considerable fear, expressed in the constant ritual efforts to prevent it, of heat 'breaking free' from the containing limits of cold, and, in a sense, that is exactly what happens, metaphorically, in the 'breaking through' of the anger and heat of the goddess in the form of 'smallpox'. The clue as to why her destructive heat is thought to break out lies in one customary cure for the disease: the singing of hymns (bhagats) by groups of men in or near the house of the afflicted one. As I record below, these hymns speak of the glory of the goddess, of her all-powerful virtue, of her ferocity in killing giants, and so on. In other words, they honour her and, by doing so, remind her of her devotees' piety and devotion to 'cooling' lives spent "under the flag of dharm as one of the bhagats has it. It is precisely such piety amongst her devotees which is thought to provide the best defence against the harmful effects of the goddess's anger.

A more immediate link between illness, death and sin is found in the idea of najar, the 'evil eye'. The sin which is believed to activate najar is jealousy (jalan, irsā or āha) which is considered a powerfully destructive emotion. There sometimes seems to be a lot of it about, particularly (and quite predictably perhaps) in the spring and autumn, the seasons of the most intense worship of the goddess, and of the winter and summer harvests. Wealthy

villagers often complain that they dislike going out of their houses because of the jealousy they meet when they do so, and Tulsidās's dictum that "even god cannot bear the jealousy of a poor man" is sometimes heard in the village. The death of children may be attributed to the 'evil eye' motivated by the jealousy of villagers who, dead or alive, are sometimes identifiable by name.

Apart from the 'evil eye', which is usually described as a sort of ghost, there are other spirits of the dead thought capable of inflicting harm on the living (in the form of illness or death). Malevolent ancestral spirits form one of the most important categories of these. As well as being thought able to exercise a benevolent and healing influence on their descendents (one cure for dehydration (sūkhrog) for example, is to tie a bone of recently deceased kinsmen around the neck of the sufferer) ancestors are also thought capable of doing a lot of harm. The ones thought to be most dangerous in this regard are those who have led an over sinful life themselves or who are not worshipped and honoured in the correct way by their surviving kin. Two of the principal functions of mortuary rites are, thus, the removal of the deceased's sin and the demonstration, through their carefully correct performance of the rituals, of the mourners' own piety. As Crooke puts it:

"No group of rites is more important ... than those devoted to the placation ... of ancestors. It is believed that after death the spirit, until its admission to the abode of the Blessed ... is dependent on the piety of its living descendants for the supply of food and other

necessaries which enable it to accomplish the difficult and dangerous journey to the court of Yāmā, god of death" (op.cit.:146).

If, through neglect by his descendants, a soul 'gets stuck' on its journey, it is feared that it will end up, together with other dark and demonic forces, close to the boundaries of this earth, and, from there, threaten the life and health of those who live on it. To put the matter very simply: both the good works of a man during his lifetime, and the continued good works of his descendants after his death, ensure ancestral benevolence. By contrast, a life lived outside the limits of dharm, and failure by descendants so to live their lives, is thought to provoke ancestral malevolence.

Without going any further it may be seen that there is something of an army of dark forces (and we have yet to meet some more of them) who seem to bear down menacingly on the living and healthy with threats of illness and untimely death. Not surprisingly there is also a veritable mass of protective measures taken to ward off these inhabitants of the 'dark side'. It is instructive to consider what some of these are.

As I have said, one cure for 'smallpox' consists of singing hymns to the goddess. These are conducted by a specialist in the disease, himself known as a bhagat. As well as having knowledge of the goddess, these specialists are presumed to have powers of communication with the spirits of the dead (c.f. Crooke, op.cit.:231). Another specialist in healing illnesses caused by extra terrestrial beings

is an ojhā (healer, sorcerer, exorcist). There are several of these in Singhara and they are drawn from a range of castes including the Brahman caste. Their treatments range from the singing of yantrs (hymns directed at evil spirits) to elaborate pūjās, to the beating of patients with bamboo sticks; all of which are intended to drive off malignant foreign substances which may have lodged inside the sick person. Defences against the 'evil eye' include the placing of lampblack around children's eyes, the wearing by children of black threads around their waists and wrists, the marking of domestic territorial boundaries during a family's yearly worship of its family god, and so on. Babies, the most vulnerable to attack by najar, are given regular doses of calves urine, which is held to be one of the purest substances imaginable (for which reason it is also given to those children suffering minor coughs and colds).

I have considered mortuary rites on their own account elsewhere, but, since it bears critically upon the subject of protection against the 'dark side', I shall stress again one aspect of these rites, namely, their efficacy in removing sin.

The removal of sin at mortuary rites is effected in at least three ways, each of which has been discussed, or referred to, in chapter 5. First of all, it has been argued that in the play between left (the side of the ancestors, sin and impurity) and right (the side of the gods, piety and purity) the primacy of the latter is always asserted. It was suggested that this may best be understood as symbolising the triumph of virtue over sin. Secondly,

the giving of particular gifts to the funeral priest was described. Following work by Parry (1979) and others, there seems to be little doubt that by accepting the gifts the Mahapātra is thought to absorb some of the sins of the deceased. Thirdly, following work by Moréchand (1975) and others, there also seems to be little doubt that the symbolic role of the Vaitaranī nadi is, similarly, to absorb the sins of the soul as it crosses the river on its way to heaven. One of the main purposes of all this sin-removal is to lessen the dangers of the soul turning into a spirit with potential to harm the living.

It is also important to stress that, mortuary rituals aside, the living have permanent obligations to the ancestors, and that non-fulfilment of such 'debts' is also considered capable of leading to harmful consequences. (A primary obligation is, of course, the engendering of children. An impotent man, or a barren woman, unable to carry out this obligation, provoke considerable anxiety because of the ancestral displeasure which such incapacity risks).

In conclusion, we may see that there are some states of ill health (sometimes leading to untimely death) which are thought to be caused by 'dark forces' (the wrath of the smallpox goddess, the anger of the ancestors, the 'evil eye', and so forth) which have both direct and indirect connections with human sin. We may also see that the most effective defence against such force is thought to consist of the removal of sin and virtuous behaviour in general.

Following closely upon these observations, there

is one further point I wish to make.

Traditionally, the penalty imposed on a person who has committed a serious crime is temporary or permanent exclusion from his or her caste. In my experience this penalty has been imposed on someone who killed a cow, a high-caste widow who publicly took a lover, and a person who had sexual relations with a close relative. But there are two sorts of people, who appear at first sight to have committed no crime at all, but who are, nevertheless, similarly excluded (albeit temporarily) from contact with kin and caste: mourners (who are treated as untouchable until the final rituals following death have taken place) and menstruating women (who may not cook, draw water, take part in rituals, or otherwise serve their families during their period).

Why should these two categories of people be so excluded?

As far as mourners are concerned, villagers say that death is polluting and that those in contact with death are therefore polluted by it. The matter could be left to rest there but for the fact that it never seems to be wholly clear (to me at least) why death is thought to be polluting. However, in the light of what has just been said about removing sin at the mortuary rites, it seems reasonable enough to suggest that what is polluting is not just death - but all the sin which is believed to surround it. But let us take this one stage further and suggest (speaking phenomenologically rather than eschatologically) that perhaps what is really polluting is, quite simply, the 'sin' of death itself.

To mount a properly convincing argument that the idea of death as sin (perhaps even the greatest sin) constitutes the basis of the sūtak (pollution) of mourners would require more evidence and analysis than has been presented here. Nevertheless, for better or worse, the suggestion is made, and it is further suggested that the same idea may be seen to be at work in relation to other forms of pollution too - for example, in that associated with menstrual blood. Bearing in mind that a kanyā (virgin) is regarded as pure and honourable, and that such purity stems from the promise of life and fertility that she represents, the fate of the menstruating woman appears readily explicable. There is a fairly obvious sense in which menstruation appears as the non-fulfilment of the promise of life symbolised in the virgin - as, in other words, a mini-death. Thus, while young pre-pubertal girls are called upon to perform pūjās in the fields before the spring crops are sown, in the belief that their presence will give life to those crops (see below), the menstruating woman is temporarily excluded from her family and caste lest she contaminate them with the idea of death. Perhaps that is the 'sin' for which she is temporarily placed on the 'dark side' of things, beyond the protective and comforting limits of dharm.

An attempt has been made in this section to follow Weber in looking for the connection between, on the one hand and in his terms "insulting the gods" or, in our terms, 'sin', and, on the other hand, disease and untimely death. It has been suggested that such a connection exists in the case

of 'smallpox', illnesses caused by the 'evil eye', and a much wider range of diseases thought to be caused by malevolent spirits of the dead. Although the defences against attacks by these dark forces take a number of forms, it is suggested that the basic defence is thought to lie in the fulfilment of dharm. It is dharm that keeps the 'dark side' at bay - even (in its transformation into moksh) the darkest and most powerful of its enemies, the ultimate adharm, death itself.

The Brahm and the Peepal tree

An understanding of the dark landscape beyond the boundaries of the 'legitimate' 'daylight world' of society may be advanced by a brief consideration of three sorts of ghost or evil spirit.

It is considered probable that if a person dies a violent or sudden death his or her soul will not pass easily away, but is likely to remain a restless wanderer. Thus when the cleaner of the village bus upset a kerosine lamp over the engine of the bus and was burnt to death, it was not surprising to hear at least three people claim to have seen him later as a bhūt (ghost). For a while those who normally slept outside took care to lock their doors at night. By contrast, those who die 'normally', and who have passed through life with careful regard for orthodoxy in day to day behaviour and in performance of rites-de-passage, and who ensured proper performance of the rites which follow death, are thought unlikely to become bhūts. Such

an individual is one who, to use Berger and Luckmann's searching terms "view(s) himself as repeating a sequence that is given in the 'nature of things', or in his own 'nature'" (1966:117). The confidence and (and feeling of security) which derive from 'repeating a sequence', or staying within the limits, is precisely that which the fulfilment of dharm brings; and one of the primary functions of bhūts, and other such disturbing spirits, is to remind the human community of the fact. To put it another way. Ideas such as dharm and moksh are nourished by the sad and frightening spectres of those entities, like bhūts, who have passed beyond the 'protective shield' which such pivots of the institutional order provide for the living.

A second threatening supernatural figure is the yaksh. According to Crooke, yaksh spirits are seen as "imps of evil" associated with "the shy wild tribes of central India" (1926:255). He recounts one story of a yakshini (the female of the species) who seduces a man and then eats him up. The story which follows here, from a Singhara villager, illustrates another aspect of the supposed character of these spirits.

A man went everyday to the latrine outside the village near the tank. He regularly sprinkled the little water that was left in his lotā on the roots of a tree which stood in his path as he returned. A yaksh who lived in the tree, was grateful for this daily drink and one day offered his services to the man. The man took the yaksh back to his house and told him to carry out a number of jobs; fetching water from the well, sowing seeds in his

field, whitewashing his house, and so on. The yaksh finished each task in one minute and, having completed all, came and said "Give me more work or I shall attack you". Being no fool, the man told the yaksh to fetch a long pole and to stick it in the verandah in front of the house, and to go up and down the pole continuously until more household duties needed to be done. Once engaged on this activity the yaksh could not stop, and his destructive powers were thus nullified. My informant added that this procedure was generally considered a good way of taming and controlling magical force.

The spirit which is, arguably, feared most and which is thought to be the most powerful, is the disembodied spirit of a deceased Brahman, a brahm. Crooke records that one of the reasons why brahms are considered especially dangerous is that there is a general "horror felt at the death of (Brahmans) by violence" (op.cit.:199). The following story of a pandit, a brahm and an oil presser was heard from a contemporary member of the pandit hero's lineage.

One day a Telī came to the village pandit and asked him to exorcise a brahm who had possessed his wife. The pandit agreed to help, and set out to the Telī's house. On the road he met a brahm who asked the pandit to return home immediately, saying that ill would surely befall him if he were to persist on his mission. The brahm was told to go away. Ten minutes later a messenger informed the pandit that his house had been burnt down. The pandit continued walking with renewed determination. Once more he was accosted by the brahm who repeated his warning, and

once more he was pushed angrily aside, and told to go away. Ten minutes later another messenger arrived with the news that the pandit's wife had been killed. This did not deter the faithful pandit who strode ever more purposefully on his way. He was again confronted by the brahm who repeated his warning. He was dismissed angrily. A third messenger then arrived with news that the pandit's son was dead. Even this did not shake the pandit's resolution and at last, knowing that his family and property had all been destroyed by the brahm, he arrived at the Telī's house, where he proceeded with the exorcism. This lasted five days. At the end of the period the brahm left the body of the Telī's wife and flew to the pīpal tree in the courtyard. The tree immediately withered, dried up and fell down. The death of this most sacred of trees was taken to be the final action of the brahm in its last paroxysm of rage before being finally dispatched to its proper resting place. As a token of gratitude the Telī rebuilt the pandit's house and swore that he would henceforth be 'like a son' to him.

Perhaps this is a simple enough tale, of the triumph of the pandit's dharm over the forces which would disturb it, to warrant little further comment. However I think the significance of the story may be appreciated in a slightly fuller way with the help of another, rather different, morality tale heard (as many such are) in the context of a period of mourning. My informant on this occasion was a Darzī who had lost his father - who was widely known to have lived an exemplary life and who had died in an especially auspicious way, having taken his morning bath

and first meal of the day, on a day of the month when it is said that a man's soul achieves moksh automatically.

One day, a king promised to give his kingdom to the first person he saw the following morning. On hearing this, many people set out from towns and villages all over the world to walk towards the palace, each one hoping to be the lucky beneficiary of the kingdom. On their way they had to pass through orchards of beautiful fruit, and many stopped to pick up the fruit, telling each other that there was plenty of time before they were required to reach their destination. Those who resisted this tempting prospect soon found themselves passing streams and tanks of wonderfully cool water. Some of them stopped to take baths there. Those who did not succumb to this temptation were soon surrounded by the most exquisitely beautiful dancing girls. Understandably, there were some who were diverted by these seductive sirens. The few that set their face against such inveiglement pressed on with their journey. Eventually they came near the palace, but before reaching it they had to pass through a bazaar with many sumptuous and glittering products on sale. All but one of the remaining travellers paused awhile to make some purchases. That one inherited the kingdom.

The leitmotif of this story is, clearly, the dangers of the temptations of the fruit, cooling streams, dancing girls and the products of the bazaar. Equally clearly a very similar moral underlies the story of the brahm and the pandit. The leitmotif of this narrative is the pandit's virtue expressed in his devotion to his duty. The repeated invitations made by the brahm to the pandit

to renege on his proper obligations in order to save his possessions and family are clearly designed to undermine the pandit's piety and to attack his devotion to his duty, his dharm as a pandit. Seen in this light the brahm's ability to cause terror appears all too explicable. He appears as a subversive whose aim is to overthrow proper dedication to dharm by appealing to the primacy of individual and material interest.⁵ But the healing powers of the pandit in this case derived, precisely, from his leaving the empirical world of family and property behind him. Both stories are reminders of one of the fundamental ideological features of caste society, namely the subordination of the material and the worldly to dharm and divine purpose.

The struggle of dharm with adharm; or the good and bad mother

In his study of childhood and society in India, Sudhir Kakar observes that "Indian mythology is replete with instances in which dharm deteriorates to such an extent that the Preserver Vishnu must assume human form to re-establish it by annihilating those responsible", citing the myth of the burning of Holikā as an example (1978:41). Indeed, this well known story is one of the clearest examples of its kind on this theme and we may consider it here. Before doing so, however, the context in which the festival of Holī is celebrated needs to be located.

Holī takes place at the end of the Hindu month of phālgun (February-March), which itself is the last month of the winter. Shortly after Holī the festival of Nau

Rātrī, or Nau Durgā, which consists of nine days of goddess worship, is held. The ninth day of this festival is also the festival of Rām Navmī, the celebration of the birth of Lord Rām. Now, although Holī, Nau Rātrī and Rām Navmī are quite separate festivals, there is, in my view, a sound analytical reason for considering the whole period - virtually three weeks of intensely religious activity from Holī to Ram Navmī - as one.

One of the dominant characteristics of this period as a whole is the general pre-occupation with the change from winter to summer, from the cold to the hot season. The change of the weather at this time is said to cause coughs, colds and fevers. Barī Mā ('big mother' - the bearer of 'smallpox') is thought to be much in evidence and babies are considered to be very much at risk from her attentions. Consequently it is a time when bhagats (see above) are sung. The emphasis on hot and cold, or, more precisely, the concern with the dangers inherent in heat generally,⁶ explain the many references made throughout the festival period to 'cooling' and 'cooling' substances.

Apart from the religious activity the period is also one which marks the beginning of an active part of the agricultural year, for the harvest of the winter crops starts just after Nau Rātrī. On the two occasions I witnessed Holī, Nau Rātrī and Rām Navmī in the village (1975 and 1980) the previous year's monsoon had been a partial failure, and there was, therefore, very real anxiety about possible food shortages later in the year. However, as will become apparent, anxiety about the effect of climate on crops is in fact one of the perennial themes of this

festival period.

We may begin the consideration of the three festivals with the Holikā story as it is told in Singhara.

For many years King Haran Kashiap (Hiranny Kashipu) was a devoted follower of Shiv. As a reward for his penance the gods (Brahmā, Vishnu and Shiv together) decided to give him a boon. The boon was that Haran Kashiap should never be killed inside or outside a house, in the day or the night, by fire or any other natural cause, or by man or animal.

Having acquired this boon Haran Kashiap changed his nature and began to terrorise the worlds both of men and gods. He burnt down the houses of 10,000 Brahmans and asserted control over 33 crores of gods. He also sent his son, Prahlād,⁷ to a guru (teacher) so that he too might learn how to be cruel. Prahlād, however, was a pious man and refused to learn what his father wanted him to. Haran Kashiap was outraged at this disobedience and immediately set about trying to kill his son. He asked his sister Holikā, also an evil woman who possessed a boon that she would never be killed by fire, to take Prahlād into a fire and burn him. In fact it was Holikā who was burnt and Prahlād who escaped. Following this failure Haran Kashiap tied his son to a pole and took a sword to kill him. With one slash he cut the pole in two pieces, and then, preparing to strike again, he jeeringly asked Prahlād "And where is your Rām now?" Prahlād replied "I am Rām, you are Rām, Rām is everywhere". This caused his father to hesitate and at that moment Vishnu, in the form of the half-man, half-lion Narsingh, appeared. It

was the time of the godhūli (when the cows are driven home from the fields - i.e. at dusk) and Narsingh picked Haran Kashiap up, took him to the threshold of the house, and tore him in half.

In Singhara the Holī festival takes place amidst all the colour and dung throwing as it does elsewhere, and is accompanied by the usual 'disorderly' behaviour and jokes that Marriott has described so vividly in his celebrated essay on Holī (1966). From the preparation for the festival, which begins several days before it, when roads to the village are blocked by tree trunks, to the collection of the wood for the bonfire by groups of noisy young men during the night of the fire, to the fire itself (normally lit an hour or so before dawn), there is a sense of mounting tension and excitement (which can quite easily slip into violence), the climax of which comes with the explosion of colour on the morning of Holī.

But rituals with a reversal motif are inevitably followed by the ritual re-establishment of customary order. At noon on the day of Holī, after all the chaotic enthusiasm of the colour-throwing, celebrants return home. Having first bathed and, particularly in the case of Brahman elders, performed their pūjās in clean and newly pressed white clothes, they take their meals, served from cooking hearths which have been freshly prepared by the women of their households. On that day the cooking fires themselves are freshly made too, and kindled from embers of the Holī bonfire. After the meal, the afternoon is taken up with smoking 'cooling' pipes of ganjā at home in the company of family, close friends and neighbours.

The theme of the Holikā story and the course of the festival's ritual activities may thus be seen to be closely interwoven. Just as the deeds of Haran Kashiap become increasingly ferocious, so the behaviour of the village youth becomes increasingly wild; just as the king, like a 'giant', seems on the point of annihilating his pious son, and establishing complete domination over the gods, so the conventional order of things seems on the point of collapse at the hands of the colour throwers (and this is, of course, classically, a Shudra festival). But finally, just as the evil king is torn to pieces by Vishnu, so all the built up 'heat' of the festivities are 'cooled' by bathing, eating, and the tranquil taking of ganjā. Order and the supremacy of dharm are restored, in the process of which is constructed the homology disorder: adharm:: order: dharm.

Moving on from Holī to Nāu Rātrī, the nine days of spring goddess-worship, we enter a more complex series of rites and associated beliefs, and, in a chapter of restricted length, it is only possible to pick out some of the principal themes within the barest of descriptive outlines.

The two main focal points of this festival are the madiyā, a small 'temple' used only at Nau Rātrī, and the principal village temple, dedicated to Lord Rām.

On the first day of the celebrations, about fifty earthen pots are placed in the madiyā in front of two small images of the goddess. Wheat seedlings are planted in these pots. By the ninth day these seedlings, known as javālī (c.f. chapter 4), will have grown to a height of

some four or five inches. It is said that if the javālī grow well it is a sign that the goddess will ensure a good monsoon and, consequently, that a good summer crop will follow. Sluggish growth, on the other hand, is held to portend a bad monsoon and a bad harvest.

Events in the madiyā are supervised by pandās: in this context 'priests of the goddess'. In Singhara these pandās are drawn from the Dhīmar caste. Each evening, devotees, surrounded by enthusiastic onlookers from all castes except the Untouchables work themselves into trances in which they are said to be possessed by the goddess. Before entering the madiyā, devotees and onlookers alike wash their feet and are required, while in the madiyā, to observe strict rules of conduct prescribed by the pandās. Outside, in the courtyard, a place is set aside for the singing of bhagats and the smoking of ganjā.

On the ninth and last day, the earthen pots are brought out of the madiyā and are taken by young girls, accompanied, in a long procession, by all the men of the village (and watched by all the women), to a large well in the market place. The seedlings are then thrown into the well, which is said to 'cool' them. During the course of the procession, and again just before the javālī are disposed of, the pandās, and some other devotees, become possessed once more, aided by loud and frenzied drumming. In states of trance they may whip themselves with iron chains, studded with sharp nails, or pierce their cheeks with the ends of long steel tridents (bān),⁹ on the tips of which are stuck 'cooling' limes.

Meanwhile, throughout the nine days and nights of Nau Rātrī, the names of Sītā and Rām are chanted without a break in the main village temple. This continuous chanting, relayed by speakers over the rooftops of the village, ceases at midnight on the ninth day of the festival, the day which is also the festival of Rām Navmī.

Although the ecstatic festivities in the madiyā and the constant chanting of "Sītā Rām" in the temple are the two central features of Nau Rātrī and Rām Navmī, other activities take place elsewhere. For example bhagat singing programmes are held in a variety of households-attended exclusively by women. But there is one event which seems particularly important to an analysis of the festival period as a whole. It was recorded earlier that the 'Untouchable' castes do not attend the madiyā. Instead, at least two of the four Untouchable castes (Domār and Kumhār) perform their own sacrifices to the goddess. These consist of the slaughtering of young pigs which, following the sacrifice, are eaten. The Kumhārs say that the reason for making such offerings to the goddess is to appease her anger. They say that, if she were not to be placated with pigs' blood, she might direct her malevolent blood lust at their children.

The festivals are finally completed by the kanyā bhoj ('food for virgins') on the day after Rām Navmī. All the young girls of the village gather near the now empty madiyā and are served kachchā food (i.e. food containing boiled rice and pulse) by the pandits. The atmosphere on this occasion is quite different from that which has

permeated the previous weeks, lacking any of the effervescence and excitement of that period. It is also the only rite in the entire sequence over which the village pandits assume a dominant ritual role.

Like Holī, the festivals of Nau Rātrī and Rām Navmī have a basic 'optimism' about them. One expression of this is found in the words of the bhagats, the hymns to the goddess, which are sung throughout the period. In them the glory of the goddess is praised (as she rides on her sandalwood chariot, her five-coloured flag flying above her, her seven sisters seated behind her, and so on) and her ability to dispose of threatening giants is stressed repeatedly. In this light she appears as the 'good mother' (the "nurturing, fear-dispelling presence" as Kakar (op.cit.: 84) describes this aspect of her).

Nevertheless, and also like Holī in this respect, the two festivals have their darker currents too. The symbolism of the javālī seedlings is perhaps the most accessible example of the pervasive anxiety that, by withholding her nurturing powers, the 'good mother' may be transformed into a 'bad mother'. Although more visual use is made of this particular image at the autumn festival of goddess-worship (c.f. chapter 4), the presence of the goddess as Kālī, who is regarded as the symbol of the inevitability of death and who, classically, is "the female form of time and death" (O'Flaherty, op.cit.:350; Kakar, op.cit.:44-47) lurks in the background of these spring festivals. The reasons given by the Kumhārs for their sacrifices, the widespread fear of smallpox during the

period, and the latent fear that the javālī will not grow sufficiently, all indicate a deep unease about the goddess's destructive potential, a fear that has a long pedigree in Indian mythology (c.f. O'Flaherty, op.cit.: 348-351; Kinsley 1975).

But if the fear of the dark side of the goddess seems undeniably present in the festivals, the accompanying belief in the efficacy of certain protective measures against this aspect of her are, equally clearly, present too. Perhaps the most significant, as well as the simplest, of such measures is the constant reiteration of the names of Sītā and Rām in the village temple. Lord Rām and his wife Sītā are regarded by villagers as the supreme models of good conduct. The chanting of "Sītā Rām, Sītā Rām" thus appears to be no less than an assertion that the ultimate insurance against the goddess's anger, and the surest guarantee that her dark side will remain subordinate to her bright and productive side, is unremitting devotion to Rām - Maryād Purashotham - "he with the best conduct", he who lives within the limits of grace or dharm. The final act in the sequence sets the seal, as it were, on the triumph of dharm over the possible outbreak of its opposite. By feeding the young girls, the pandits affirm that the creative energy the girls are thought to represent at that moment, will remain within the legitimate boundaries of dharm, rather than be transformed in some way into the destructive energy of a yakshinī or, indeed, the angry goddess herself.

Conclusion

The picture of adharm, or what I prefer to call the 'dark side', that emerges seems to me to contain four main and closely interwoven themes, each of which may be identified clearly in what has been presented.

The first theme arises out of the fear of a natural universe ungoverned, or uncontrolled, by cultural rules. This fear is expressed in the attitudes towards Gonds (who are regarded as being closer to nature than to culture and who are, consequently, generally feared and distrusted); in the pervasive feeling that certain basic natural processes, such as the passing of time, birth and death, seasonal changes, and so forth, require elaborate cultural control; in the deeply ambivalent attitude to the goddess (in one sense the quintessence of nature) whose energy is (a) recognised as being essential for the production and reproduction of people and food, but which is (b) thought to require subordination to culture and orthodoxy for fear that it will 'break loose' in 'smallpox', famine or death.

The second theme grows out of the first, and consists of the idea of a material, empirical, world - the world of the senses and of individual interest - assuming primacy over the transcendent universe constructed upon notions such as dharm and moksh. It has, of course, been one of the abiding concerns of Louis Dumont (in writings both on Western ideology and on India) to point to the radical discontinuity between homo hierarchicus, defined by holism, and homo aequalis, defined by individualism

and materialism. Much of this thesis has (following Dumont's explorations) been taken up with identifying manifestations in Singhara of the idea that the individual, his interests, and the material world which he inhabits, have to be kept subordinate to the whole which 'transcends' them. As far as the present chapter is concerned, the stories of the brahm and pandit, and of the virtuous inheritor of the kingdom, clearly contain this theme. So too does much of the symbolism surrounding the 'evil eye' (with its strong recognition of the dangers of the 'sin' of individual jealousy) and (again) the ideas about Gonds, who, as I have suggested, are regarded as threateningly individualistic and disturbingly free.

The third theme, which is closely related to the previous two, expresses the close links between 'sin', death, and the dead. I have suggested that death itself may, in a phenomenological sense (and not an eschatological one), be thought to be 'sinful', and that this idea may lie at the root of the pollution associated with mourners and menstruating women (as well, of course, as in the notion of moksh itself, which is surely nothing if not an assertion that perfect piety and dharm can conquer death). I have also explored the ways in which the dead and their spirits are regarded at best with ambivalence, at worst with terror.

The fourth and final theme incorporates the other three. It is the fear of uncontrolled power. Fears of yakshs, of 'giant' Gonds, of the youthful and low-caste celebrants of Holī, of demon ascetics like Haran Kashiap, and of the angry goddess, are all expressions of the deeper

fear that power outside the 'cooling' limits of dharm is fundamentally destructive.

The sociological significance of temporal power being ultimately encompassed by, and subject to, the "dharma which rules from on high" (Dumont 1970:78) is, of course, one of the features of caste society most rigorously worked out in Homo Hierarchicus. Implicit in much of the foregoing has been the suggestion that this subordination has another associated dimension - one which actually has very close functional links with the relations between Kshatriya and Brahman (or, in our case, Thākur and Brahman), between high caste and low caste, between ruler and legitimating priest, between arth (defined by Dumont (op.cit.:251) as "action conforming to selfish interest") and dharm - namely, the relation between dharm and its oppposite - its 'dark side' -adharm.

A postlude and bridge-passage

As we move towards the final chapter, to take up some of the threads we left at the end of chapter 2, we may pause to ask what relevance, if any, the cluster of ideas examined in this and the previous four chapters, have for the understanding not only of the traditional values of caste society but also for contemporary rural society in India.

No-one could, I think, deny the truth of Taussig's assertion (in another but quite comparable context) that:

"There is a moral holocaust at work in the soul of a society undergoing the transition from a precapitalist

to a capitalist order. And in this transition both the moral code and the way of seeing the world have to be recast" (1980: 3).

At its crudest, and keeping faith with Dumont's terminology, we may describe the nature of the ideological transition in modern Indian society in terms of the inevitable detachment of one particular set of ideas, founded on individualism and materialism, from another, founded upon holism and transcendence. To pretend that such a change can take place without the moral ferment to which Taussig refers is, surely, a dangerous delusion. Present developments on the wider canvas of Indian society as a whole may foreshadow the shape and nature of that moral ferment (and it was surely no idle fancy that prompted Dumont to conclude his essay on homo hierarchicus with a guarded reflection on the roots of totalitarianism). In the chapter which follows I shall attempt to discern, in the relatively undramatic ebb and flow of village politics, evidence of at least certain ideological conflicts and uncertainties - if not of a "moral holocaust". The key question seems to me to be whether or not the main features of the growing market economy, with all its political and social consequences, fit - as those of the traditional political economy did - under the 'mantle' of the 'legitimate' (the parameters of which have now been described fairly fully), or whether they are perceived to belong, with the insouciant brahm and the potentially uncontrollable yaksh, more naturally into the 'dark side'.

In this regard, there is a small printed picture, reproductions of which are commonly displayed and sold at

village markets and fairs, along with portraits of popular deities, local heroes and other memorabilia. A description of this provides a suitable finale to this chapter.

The central tableau of the picture depicts the dharm sabhā (the peaceful abode in heaven of those who on earth have followed their dharm correctly). Underneath this is a picture of the Vaitaranī nadī, the river of hell. Arranged around these two are eight representations, each in two halves, of the rewards, or 'fruits' (phal), of certain activities.

In the dharm sabhā Lord Krishn is seated on a throne. To his right stands a sage with a pair of scales in his hand. Behind him, carrying a heavy and spiky club, there stands a guard with fangs as teeth, and horns growing out of his head. His features are unmistakably tribal. Two ordinary-looking people are approaching Lord Krishn. They have just arrived from earth and they hold their hands in front of them in a gesture of supplication. The scene implies that the sage will weigh up their life's deeds favourably, and that Krishn will bless them. Underneath this tableau the couple are shown again, this time being pulled through the Vaitaranī (populated by a school of snakes and sea serpents) by two benign-looking cows.

Surrounding these two pictures are others of a more grotesque nature. These depict the 'fruits' of worldly sins. A merchant who gives short measure is rewarded by being bound to a tree and impaled by the trident of a devilish, and tribal-looking, figure. A second merchant who is shown overloading a bullock cart is forced, under his whips, to pull the devil's own chariot. Women and girls

who are shown being 'heated up' (garam girāne) are rewarded by being cut open and mutilated by ferocious looking devils, while another girl, engaging in 'illegitimate' sex, is burnt alive. The fruit of bribe-taking (riswat lene kā phal) is to be thrown to sea serpents. Stealing another's property leads to being ground upside-down in an oil presser, while those who sacrifice an animal are shown being sawn in half themselves. The fruit of taking too high a rate of interest (lālach kā phal) is to be chopped to pieces by a black and thoroughly tribal-looking devil.

It is a suggestive little picture.

CHAPTER 8VILLAGE POLITICS

One of the most perceptive commentators on rural politics in India, Rajni Kothari, professes considerable scepticism about what he calls "the dichotomous approach favoured by some cultural anthropologists ... who pose ... an ideal type contradiction between caste and politics" (1970:1-7). Analyses of contemporary village politics, he argues, should regard caste as no more than one factor amongst others in the organisation of public activity. "Caste", according to Kothari's view, "has been drawn out of its apolitical context and has been given a new status", as one amongst several principles for political organisation (loc.cit.). The value of his approach, Kothari claims, is that it seeks not to reify the oppositions of universalism and particularism, of Sanskritisation and Westernisation, but, rather, to integrate such oppositions within a single pragmatic frame of reference (ibid.:23).

Although there is much to be said for Kothari's view, and although he is certainly right in implying that the 'dichotomous' approach holds no monopoly of truth, he would, I think be quite wrong if he were to suggest that it had no value at all. My own view is that there is considerable analytical value in 'opposing' the ideas and values of the caste system with those associated with the practice of democratic politics. After all, the

latter is, self-evidently, both a relatively new phenomenon and also one which provides, so to speak, the stage upon which radically new ethics (linked with the pursuit of individual material interest and political advancement) are acted out. Thus, taking a fairly standard view of political action ("a man is engaged in political action whenever he behaves in such a way as to rally others to support a cause in which he is interested" (Leach 1973:29)) it would seem undeniable that caste ethics (defined in terms of holism and transcendence) are, on the face of it, diametrically opposed to 'political' ethics (defined in terms of individualism and materialism). Furthermore, it seems reasonable to argue that there are bound to be times (in the history not just of India, but of any traditional society which is modernising and politicising itself) when the old and the new ethics come into some kind of conflict. Such an ideological 'struggle' can, I believe, be seen to be at work in contemporary political life in Singhara and it is one of the purposes of this chapter to suggest how.

Political Background

United behind the undisputed leadership of the Thākurs, the residents of Singhara took an active part in the Satyāgraha campaigns of the late 1930s.¹ The struggles for Indian Independence in Jabalpūr District were organised, as they were elsewhere, by the Congress party, and the village Thākurs enthusiastically adopted

the Congress mantle. It may seem slightly paradoxical to us that they, as the traditionally dominant village landlords, should have done so, for one of the declared aims of the relatively youthful Congress at that time was, to use Gandhi's words, "to free the downtrodden from the burdens under which they are being crushed ... (by) ... landlords, zamindars ...(etc.)" (quoted from Ghose 1975:222). However the paradox was probably representative of the way the party was organised and managed in the region as a whole: although its slogans, sentiments and symbols may have been as radical and populist as this declaration of intent suggests they were, the Congress was, for the most part, built upon existing, traditional, structures of power. In 1939, for example, the 52nd session of the All India Congress was held on the banks of the Narbadā river near Jabalpūr and "a colossal statue of a peasant carrying a plough on his shoulders was set up at one side of the rostrum" (C.P.G. 1968:121), a symbol which probably appeared as radical in those pre-Independence days as more or less exactly the same one did in 1975, when it was used by an alliance of parties opposed to the Congress (see below). Populist as its enormous symbol may have been, however, the chairman of that 1939 session was Seth Govind Das, head of one of the region's most distinguished families, the 'Rājā' of Jabalpūr, and later one of the Congress party's most celebrated members of parliament.

In 1950, following Independence, Seth Govind Dās having been elected to the national parliament, the

Jabalpūr Collector nominated members to Singhara's first village council. Thākur Arjun Singh was, quite naturally, made sarpanch (council leader). Nowadays, Arjun Singh - 'Thākur Sāhab' - is the last of the Thākur family who carries with him an air of former greatness. Tall, thin, and very slightly stooped, he takes a daily walk from his large and comfortable brick house on the hill down to the village bazaar, nodding graciously and giving his blessings to passers-by as he goes. When he reaches the market square he visits the temple, and then sits, nearly always alone, in a tea-shop for an hour or so before walking slowly back up the hill. His gait is measured. He is a highly dignified man, and even now it is possible to savour a little of the manner of his and his family's leadership in earlier days.

Under the leadership of Thākur Sāhab, the 1950 village panchāyat contained four members of the emergent class of merchants - a Telī moneylender, a Sonār, and the sons of the first two non-Thakur mālguzārs (a Brahman and a Jain - see Chapter 1). The membership of the panchāyat was solidly Congress.

The first election (as opposed to nomination) to the village council was held in 1955. Of the new members elected, there were two who were later to prove politically important, Budu Rām Chaturvedi, the de facto leader of the non-Thākur Brahman community in the village, and Krishna Kumār Sonār, who professed allegiance to the Socialist party.² The council leadership fell to the established Jain member, as Thākur Sāhab had been mandated

to serve on the newly constituted janpad panchāyat. The new faces and change of leadership were significant for three reasons. First of all, the council had been penetrated by a member of a political party other than the Congress. Secondly, the presence of a second Sonār and, more importantly, the fact that a Baniā, rather than a Thākur, was made sarpanch, both underlined and gave political expression to the ever rising power of the new merchant class in the village. Thirdly, the election of Budu Rām was the first act of an unfolding drama which was later to result in a rift between the Thākurs and the other Brahmans. The fact remained, however, that, with the exception of Krishna Kumār, the panchāyat members continued to be Congress supporters and more or less loyal supporters of Thākur Sāhab (who, despite not being officially on the council, was still, indisputably, master of the village).

The next election took place in 1961. By this time, Budu Rām had increased his standing even more with the non-Thākur Brahman community, and had begun to play upon the distinctiveness between them and the Thākurs in such a way that a political split between the two groups began to appear. In retrospect, it can be seen that he was positioning himself to mount a challenge for leadership of the village. He had also developed a close friendship and political alliance with Gyāni Jain, who had been elected in place of his father, the ageing sarpanch of the previous council. Just as Budu Rām had emerged as leader of the non-Thakur Brahmans, so

Gyāni was emerging as the leader and spokesman of the village business community. But, despite the growing presence of these two and their respective clients, one of Thākur Sāhab's cousins was made sarpanch, the overall leadership of Thākur Sāhab himself still appeared to most people to be nearly as commanding as it had been previously, and the panchāyat continued to be predominantly Congress.

Thus, although the Thākurs had ceased to be the dominant clan they once had been, their apparent control of the political institutions in the village remained formally intact into the early 1960s. Indeed it may have appeared to an observer of the time that the Thākurs had successfully negotiated the economic changes of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, and that their former power as mālguzārs had been adapted and converted into control of institutions of the new democratic polity. But in 1963 it became quite clear to everyone that this was not, in fact, the case.

In the early 1960s the Congress party decided to set up local district committees to which members were to be elected by Congress controlled village panchāyats. In 1963, an election was held for posts in these committees. Thākur Sāhab put forward his cousin, who was opposed by Gyāni Jain. The panchāyat members voted, by a majority of one, for the latter. For only the second time in Singhara's history an important political office came to be held by a non-Thākur, and the panchāyat was revealed to be no longer the vehicle for continued Thākur control

over the affairs of the village.

Soon after this election, another one was held. This was to determine Singhara's representative on the janpad panchāyat, an office that has, ever since its inception, been more important in terms of the power and influence which flows from it, than that of sarpanch. Thākur Sāhab himself was the sitting candidate. He was opposed by Budu Rām Chaturvedi. Once again, by the smallest of majorities, Thākur Sāhab was defeated.

There were three main reasons for Thākur Sāhab's defeat in these two elections. Two of these have been implied already but it is worth underlining them again. The first was that the Thākurs were no longer holders of the mālguzārī rights which had been the economic base for their political dominance in the past. The locus of economic power and political influence had shifted away from them and had graduated to those 'new men', such as Gyāni Jain, who had established control over extensive trade and credit networks both inside and outside the village, and who had begun to flex their political muscles. The second reason flowed from the radical administrative changes which had taken place, a partial outline of which was given in Chapter 1. Broadly speaking, the boundaries of the 'village republic', to use a familiar phrase (Dumont 1970:311 and Srinivas 1955:11) had been eroded, and the administrative, economic and political arena had expanded out of all recognition. Singhara had been incorporated into the modern structure of state and nation. (The janpad panchāyat and the Congress party's district

committees were just two amongst many examples of the institutional links between the village and the wider politico-administrative community.) As has been very widely recognised by Indianists, the effect of such changes on the dominant castes and clans of villages such as Singhara was sharply to reduce their power (c.f. Srinivas 1962; Pettigrew 1975, Fox 1971, Kolenda 1977). This was the case in Singhara; it is one thing to control a village or an estate through a monopoly of the control of land there, it is another to maintain control over the greatly more complex networks of power which exist in a democratic polity. The third reason was that a series of events associated with building and other government-financed works in the village had been interpreted by many electors in Singhara in a way that was unflattering to aspects of Thākur leadership.

The emergence of factions

(a) Desertion from the Congress and the emergence of the Jan Sangh

Informants insist that 'party feeling', as they call it, was absent until after the 1963 elections. I suspect that this is not strictly true, but it does seem to be true that the defeats for Thākur Sāhab and his cousin were the signals for the open emergence of two distinct factions in village politics. One of these was, as it is

now, led by the victors of the janpad and the Congress committee elections, Budu Rām Chaturvedi and Gyāni Jain. The other came to crystallise around Thākur Sāhab. Although the latter remained as discreet as ever, letting others do the organising and managing, the two factions came to be known as Chaturvedi's party and Thākur Sāhab's party.

The two factions were more than mere groups of rival personalities within the Congress party. For the first time Singhara ceased to be politically unified under the Congress cloak. Budu Rām and Gyāni had wrested control of the local Congress leadership from Thākur Sāhab, and the latter responded not by publicly renouncing his Congress affiliation (he has always been a politician of consummate skill) but by privately turning to an organisation which seemed to offer him the opportunity for a counter-attack against those who had usurped his position.

The Jan Sangh party was first formed on a national level in 1951 by the merger of the Hindu para-military organisation, the Rāshtriya Swayamsevak ('national volunteer force') and the Hindu Mahā Sabhā. Its declared values are nationalistic in the extreme, and its members look back to a pre-Muslim India as being a 'golden age' of Hindu culture to which they would return.³ They have consistently taken a strongly pro-Hindu

stance in communal matters.

The party was first introduced to Singhara in the early 1950s by a Thākūr, named Chandra. Chandra has always been something of a political maverick, and for a long time he suffered considerable abuse from the village leaders, including those from his own clan. He has always lived, unmarried, in relative poverty. Nevertheless, Chandra endured the abuse courageously and, displaying a bold and somewhat idiosyncratic attitude to the niceties of gastronomic custom, he managed, slowly, to establish a political following amongst the agricultural labouring castes, particularly the Gonds, Ahīrs and a section of the Maharās; groups who previously had not been represented in the political councils and institutions of the village. In short, Chandra's unconventional activities took him out of the more conventional political arenas, and enabled him to cultivate support from those whose views and aspirations had previously gone unexpressed, unheard, and uncared for.

During the 1950s several regional organisers of the Congress party defected to the Jan Sangh, and by the early 1960s, when Thākūr Sāhab was defeated at the polls, the party had built up a viable organisation in the district and the state, and had, thanks to Chandra's work, made its presence felt in the village itself - although an official village committee of the party was not set up there until 1973.

Turning for a moment to speak of the present, the leading spirits of the Jan Sangh faction are nearly all Thakūrs. Arjun Singh's brother, Samar Singh, is the president of the party's village committee. Arjun's son is the 'presider' of the Navayuvak Mandal - the young men's committee - which, as we shall see, is an important locus of Jan Sangh activity. Arjun's cousin is chairman of the village committee of the local co-operative society, another body which is noticeably partisan in the Jan Sangh's favour. Chandra Thākūr remains a tireless, if still slightly badly treated, party organiser. He leads deputations to the District Commissioner, burns effigies of Congress leaders, starts short-lived hunger strikes in the bazaar, and carries the party's message to the small Gond villages in the hinterland.

(b) The 'new Congress' faction: its rise and its leaders

Support for Thākūr Sāhab seems to have fallen away sharply after the narrow defeats he suffered in 1963. A surprisingly large number of the villagers quickly declared their open support for Chaturvedi, Gyāni, and the new Congress leadership. Indeed, whole sections of the village did so. Amongst the most significant of these were the Untouchables and the non-Thākūr Brahmans. The impression from informants is that the 1963 elections were signs of a general belief in the village that the new Congress leaders were the harbingers of a 'new order' in Singhara. I have heard it said that Chaturvedi and Gyāni were seen to be the

agents of delivery from two centuries of Thākur rule.

Confirmation of the declining support for Thākur Sāhab, and the accompanying rise in support for Budu Rām and Gyāni, came with the 1969 panchāyat election. This was the first election to be held on a ward basis, and of the 12 members elected to the council seven were openly declared Chaturvedi/Congress supporters and only three were declared supporters of Thākur Sāhab. The two 'neutral' members were both Sonārs. One was the sarpanch of that caste, the other being Krishna Kumār, who is perhaps the 'Sonār' of the thesis title, who was made upsarpanch, deputy council leader. Although he and his caste fellows were, by now, nearly all members of the Socialist Party, and thus, in theory, supporters of neither Budu Rām's or Thākur Sāhab's faction, it was clear to all that their 'neutrality' was weighted conveniently towards the direction of the former. At that time, they had their own reasons for being opposed to the Thākurs. The rump of Arjun Singh's supporters in Singhara included members of the Thākur clan, faithful servant followers, and other clients from a cross section of castes in the village. As has been implied a growing number of daily labourers were also edging towards his side, although their voices remained, at that time, very muted.

The faction led by Budu Rām and Gyāni was clearly the dominant one in the village when I began field research (although, equally clearly, opposition to it was stirring). I thus turn to the language of the ethnographic present.

Budu Rām Chaturvedi, the leader of the Congress faction, is a large and imposing man. His house lies in a central position on one of the main paths of the village and is surrounded by small, tightly knit, houses, many of which are inhabited by Brahmans. Most, if not quite all, of five out of the ten main Brahman lineages live in this ward and although there is, strictly speaking, no ward inhabited exclusively by Brahmans, this one comes nearest to being so. Two of these five lineages are closely related to Budu Rām's own lineage, while a third has always been on intimate terms with it. Chaturvedi's presence is always conspicuous on religious and festive occasions. His younger brother is well known as a religious man, wearing the tilak of the Rāmānandī sect. Although clearly not as pious as his brother, one of Budu Rām's chief political assets is his status as a non-Thākur Brahman, and he derives, as I have indicated, much of his influence from being able to call upon the awareness of that community.

Because he is a member of the janpad panchayat, Chaturvedi is not an official member of the grām panchayat. This does not mean that he does not attend the meetings of the latter, nor that he takes in any way a less than prominent role when he does so. The official sarpanch, a lover of sweets, lemons, ganjā, card-playing, and romantic music, is the wealthy son-in-law of one of the most substantial former Thākur mālguzārs. Although he was identified with the Thākurs when he first came to Singhara in 1935, he chose, as did all except a very few

non-Thākur Brahmans, to follow Budu Rām after 1963. His partiality for the good life means that he is not a political innovator in his own right. He plays, as it were, the role of a figurehead to a vessel of which the helmsman is Chaturvedi. The vessel's engine-room is in the hands of Gyāni Jain.

Gyāni is probably the most powerful man in Singhara. Polished and sophisticated (without being able to speak English), with an impressive range of contacts in high places in Jabalpūr and Bhopāl, he is the man to whom Congress leaders and district officials go to get things done. As I have already recorded elsewhere, his wealth derives from his father's success at grain dealing in the first world war, and from the large clothing business which he and his family run. He is known as a generous supplier of food and other things to his clients, and is particularly ready to lend discreet support to less wealthy Brahmans. Apart from a sizeable proportion of the business community, whose support Gyāni may rely on, he has a range of political clients from other castes; Dhobīs, Darzīs, Domārs, and, of course, the majority of Brahmans.

Three important 'political' institutions

So far, reference has been made to the grām panchāyat, and to the two factions which presently divide the village. It is now necessary to consider briefly three further institutions which play important roles in

the political life of Singhara.

(a) The janpad panchāyat

The janpad panchāyat was established in the early 1950s, and its jurisdiction covers an area which includes some 100 village councils. It constitutes the highest administrative unit in the panchāyat structure, although proposals have existed for some time to create a panchāyat at one level higher (i.e. at district (zila) level). The janpad has seven sub-committees; public works, agriculture, education, tribal welfare, finance, administration, and a co-operative committee.

As one amongst several agencies of government, the janpad's presence is felt in various ways in Singhara. Education has already been mentioned. It also finances an Ayurvedic dispensary in the village which is staffed by a doctor from a neighbouring village. A cattle-pound employs one villager. A hostel for tribal schoolchildren employs two villagers, one as cook and another as water-carrier, and is supervised by a teacher.

From the point of view of the play of opposing factions, one of the most interesting features of the relationship between the janpad panchāyat and the political life of Singhara springs from the janpad's role in overseeing the operation of the local co-operative society. Speaking generally, co-operative societies in the district are run more or less independently from local government. Nevertheless, they are still ultimately subject to the various rules and regulations which are laid down by it.

Furthermore, the co-operative societies are sometimes used to distribute goods (such as grain and clothing) subsidised by government. In this role they are, of course, expected to work in close co-operation with the officers and agents of the local government agency immediately responsible for such distribution, namely, the janpad. In the early 1970s this co-operation was complicated by the fact that while the janpad was controlled by the Congress, the village committee of the co-operative society was in the hands of Thākur Sāhab's faction (largely because there had not been an election to the co-operative's committee since Thākur Sāhab's political demise).

(b) The Co-operative Society

The Vishnu Datt Co-operative Society, with its bank and headquarters in the local town of Barela, has already been referred to in chapter 2. There are three aspects of the workings of the Society which I wish to emphasise again here. The first is that amongst the declared objects of the Society are to operate 'fair price' shops for the sale of subsidised food and clothing, and to provide loans to farmers for the building of wells and the making of other agricultural improvements. The second is that although there is no 'fair price' shop in Singhara, the Society's village committee assumes responsibility for the distribution of the monthly ration provided by the state government in times of food shortages (as in 1974/5).

We will return to this below. The third is that the village committee of the Society is largely composed of members of Thākur Sāhab's faction.

(c) The Young Men's Committee

A Young Men's Committee (NavayuvakMandal) was started in 1970 by a young Brahman, closely related to Budu Rām. Being an enthusiastic musician he founded the mandal with the object of promoting religious music and dance programmes (bhajans, ramdhūns, kīrtans and so forth). By early 1973, however, the mandal had begun to develop a formal organisational structure and to assume an important political role and influence in village affairs. In the summer of that year a teashop was erected by one of Thākur Sāhab's nephews on land owned by the grām panchāyat. The building of this shop was itself controversial because, having readily given their permission, certain prominent members of the panchāyat tried to prevent its completion; failing to do so only after some of the mandal members threatened physical retaliation. Fairly soon after it was built, the teashop became the regular meeting place not only for mandal members but also for young Thākurs, and, then, for other members of the Jan Sangh party.

The main officers of the mandal in 1974 were as follows. The 'presider' was a close relative of Thākur Arjun Singh. The president was Krishna Kumār Sonār's younger brother, Rām Charan. The vice-president was Samar Singh Thākur's son. The secretary was a prominent organiser

of the Congress party - a teashop owner and district organiser of a trade's union. (The making of this man mandal secretary was a bold and imaginative political stroke by the leaders which never quite worked, as will be seen later.)

Politics in Action: Five Case Studies

A brief outline has been given of the emergence of the two factions, their leaders, party affiliations, and their followers. Four institutions of political importance have been mentioned, the grām panchāyat, the janpad panchāyat, the Co-operative Society, and the Navayuvak Mandal. We may now turn to consider politics 'in action', as it were, by looking at five case studies.

Case 1: Sweet teeth

There is a continuing conflict between the two factions over the issue of the distribution of the monthly ration. Villagers are uncertain about who the proper authority should be to take charge of the ration sale. One theory is that the Co-operative Society's village committee, which as I have indicated is made up entirely of members of Thākur Sāhab's faction, is the proper body. Another theory is that it is the duty of the janpad panchāyat, acting through the village council, controlled by Chaturvedi, to do so.

For six months or so, until early 1974, Chaturvedi and his officers were in charge of the distribution.

During this period members of the Society's committee spread a number of malicious rumours around the village accusing the distributors of unjust practices. They complained to agencies outside the village. As a result of an official enquiry, the Society's committee managed to wrest control of the distribution.

One reaction to this was that the village was suddenly flooded with ration cards which all looked as though they had been in use for several months, thus bearing a semblance of authenticity. One of the Society's officers publicly accused one of the leaders of the opposite faction of fabricating these. There were those in the village who felt that this was not altogether too farfetched a suggestion.

There followed a veritable flurry of accusations and counter-accusations, but the Society's committee retained its control over the ration throughout the spring and summer. However, after the 1974 rainy season, the grām panchāyat regained control once more, and in the months which led up to the 1975 by-election (see below) the ration sale and distribution became an increasingly burning political issue. The fact that a person was a follower of the faction whose leaders had charge of distribution was a clear advantage in obtaining rations. If a person was a member of the opposite faction, but was prepared to divulge information about the strategies and intentions of his faction, then that too tended to lead to the receipt of favourable treatment from the organisers. In short, the ration distribution became a classic example

of one of those 'struggles for prizes' so beloved by Bailey.⁴ In the months before the 1975 by-election the whole affair provided a great deal of fuel for the Jan Sanghis and their allies. As a means of providing cheap food for the poor the ration was, in most respects, a dead letter - for more rationed sugar seemed to find its way to the village tea shops than it did to needy individuals.

Case 2: Holī 1974

We may now turn to another, rather different, sort of case. This single event seemed at the time as if it were going to develop into a major 'party battle'. In many ways it was just that - but it was also more, as we shall see.

On the evening before the statue of Holikā is burnt, the young men of the village collect wood from practically anywhere in order to make the bonfire. No wooden structure, even if part of a house is wholly safe on this night of the year. It is a festival during which many customary rules are relaxed.

In the middle of the night of Holī in 1974, a large group of young men were roaming the village streets in high and menacing spirits. The atmosphere was volatile, as it is always on this occasion. The core of the gang belonged to Navayuvak Mandal. Having visited a number of houses, including mine, with shouts and stone throwing, they gathered outside the house of a wealthy Jain shopkeeper. Stones were thrown. The Jain opened his door (he claimed

later that a stone had hit one of his young nephews) and grabbed a young Kachchi. The latter was dragged into the Jain's house and a few minutes later was ejected back onto the street with his head bleeding profusely. Later that night, round the bonfire, there was talk of retaliation by the Kachchi caste and the mandal. During the rest of the night, and in the following morning, more stones and rocks were thrown at the house of the Jain, who barricaded himself inside. His septic tank was smashed, the tiles on his roof were destroyed, and his wooden doors were splintered. His statue was burnt in the street, and it was said that when he finally emerged from his house he would be severely beaten at the very least.

Up to that time the village leaders had not shown themselves at all.

The following evening a police sub-inspector arrived in the village from Barela. He was accompanied by two policemen. A meeting was held in Gyāni Jain's house at which all the village leaders were present, and where the Jain and the Kachchi both stated his side of the dispute. No decision was taken at this meeting on what action was to be taken to defuse the growing tension. The atmosphere in the mandal's tea shop was hard and bitter.

The following day a 'panchāyat' meeting was held in Gyāni's house, which was attended by a company of Jains who had come to Singhara from Barela to support their caste fellow. The Jain and the Kachchi were, once again, summoned to appear before this meeting. The decision taken was that if the Jain made a public apology to the

wounded Kachchi the case would be dropped. The interesting feature of this 'panchayat', like the meeting the previous evening, was that those who conducted it were not those of the officially elected grām panchāyat, but a broad collection of village elders from both factions in the village.

The following day another meeting was held in the temple, at which all the men of the village were present - either inside the temple itself or outside in the bazaar. The mandal members sat in a group. Once again the meeting was directed by a unified group of elders. The police maintained a low profile in a tea shop opposite the temple. The tension was acute.

The Jain and the Kachchi were called before the assembly, the former being asked to make a public apology. At first he refused, and appeared quite unrepentant. And then Chaturvedi proposed that the Jain pay a 'fine' of Rs 1000 to the (official) grām panchāyat, and that this body should then rebuild his septic tank, effluence from which was beginning to cause a serious nuisance. The Jain asked what was to happen to any surplus cash. This provoked general merriment, but a promise was made that a refund would be made. Thākur Sāhab then stood up and asked the Jain to make his apology. The Jain did so, and there was a spontaneous outburst of applause. An almost tangible sense of relief descended on the assembly. The affair was, quite suddenly and dramatically, over.

The three aspects of this case that make it noteworthy seem to be to me as follows. The first concerns

the participants in the dispute. It is clear that this event was more than a simple quarrel between a single Jain and a single Kachhi for it involved, on the one hand, the mandal as a collectivity, and, on the other hand, an impressive phalanx of Barela Jains. Furthermore, a lot of talk was heard about the behaviour both of the particular merchant directly involved and also about the monied men of the village as a whole. There was a great deal of discussion about greed and corruption. In short, the occasion contained some elements of a confrontation between rich and poor - in a sense an almost predictable confrontation considering the nature of the festival. The involvement of the Thākurs in the affairs of the mandal help focus on the element of alliance between sections of the village poor and the traditional landowning élite. (This was one of the key components of the official 'alliance' which achieved such success in the 1975 election). The second noteworthy aspect was that the dispute was settled not by the official village council but by a 'united front' of village elders. It is significant that there are certain times - fraternal arguments over the division of household property, for example - when the 'panchāyat' takes this more traditional form. Dumont's observations on this matter are relevant here. Having observed that much modern literature on contemporary rural India refers to the 'village panchāyat', while being vague as to what this institution actually is, Dumont observes that 'traditionally' the administration of the village was

"a matter for the dominant caste". Consequently, he argues, "it would be better to speak in this sense of the assembly ... of the dominants, rather than the village panchāyat" (1970:171). This "...meeting of ... four or five (village) notables ... possibly joined by more or less active spectators" is "very often ... appealed to ... to settle a dispute" (ibid.:172/3). This general description fits the present case well. The third point of interest concerns the role of the police. Villagers with whom I discussed the case, as well as the police themselves, observed that, generally speaking, the presence of the police amounted to an external threat to the integrity of the village as a whole. All agreed that, had the police taken a more actively interventionist role in the proceedings, the dispute would almost certainly have led to polarisation of the village on party lines.

Case 3: Fraternal tension, a party 'harvest', and one official's undoing.

The father of Ganesh Lāl and Chhoti Prasād died in 1964 leaving an estate of some 26 acres, in another village, unpartitioned and thus managed jointly by his two sons. Ganesh Lāl, the elder of the two brothers, maintained that the estate was his alone, and in consequence habitually kept the harvest from the land to himself. His younger brother, Chhoti Prasād, took the matter to court and a series of other arbitrators. At the time field research began the case had been dragging on for 10 years. As far as it was possible to ascertain, successive rulings

had been made in Chhoti Prasād's favour. Ganesh Lāl, however, refused to allow his brother access to the land.

In the middle of one night during the 1974 wheat harvest, Chhoti Prasād went to Ganesh Lāl's fields with a large company of hired labourers, a bullock cart, and a prominent Jan Sangh organiser. Between them they removed 700 kg of wheat.

The following morning Ganesh Lāl complained to the police at Barela, and later the same day a district official arrived from that town. This official ordered the immediate confiscation of the wheat from Chhoti Lāl's possession pending an enquiry into the matter. Since there were many who were familiar with the legitimacy of Chhoti Lāl's case, having followed the matter for so long, there was something of an outcry at this decision, and a great deal of talk was heard of the financial gains that had been secured.

The affair quickly became a cause célèbre. The leaders of the Jan Sangh faction came to the support of Chhoti Prasād, while the Congress faction lined up behind Ganesh Lāl. A Jan Sanghī went to Jabalpūr to marshal support amongst his party's hierarchy there, and a complaint about the behaviour of the official and his overly co-operative relationship with Ganesh Lal and the Congress leaders was sent by the Jan Sangh party central committee to the Deputy Inspector General of police and the Collector.

The case was resolved after the district official had been transferred to a post in Jabalpūr city which involved no field duties, and had been replaced in Barela

by another officer markedly less sympathetic to the Congress. The new official restored the wheat to Chhoti Lāl.

The one interesting aspect of this case concerns the relationships of patronage (and/or clientage) which links leaders and followers in both sets of factions within the village to agencies (police, administrative officers, party organisers and so forth) outside the village. The case illustrates the way in which these relationships tend to exist in an intensely competitive atmosphere, and how local disputes may set off a wide-ranging competition for the influence.

Case 4: Sodhans (again)

In the previous chapter, an exorcism of a Gondi sodhan was described, and I turn now to consider that event again. The 'victim' of the alleged sodhan, we may remember, was a young Brahman - the son of one of the few Brahman members of the Jan Sangh.

The day after the exorcism the alleged sodhan, a Gond woman, complained to the (Congress) sarpanch about the way she had been treated. With the help of the other two main Congress leaders, he reported the matter to the police, and informed the organisers of the exorcism that they were likely to be prosecuted under a section of the Indian penal code. Indeed, they publicly ridiculed the exorcists, arguing that sodhans and other such spirits did not exist and had no place in modern society.

Both the event itself, and the subsequent action taken by the Congress leaders, split the village into two. There were those, mainly Congress supporters, who sympathised

with the line taken by the sarpanch and the other Congress leaders. Others, mainly Jan Sangh supporters, lambasted the Congress leaders for being ignorant about sorcery, witchcraft and the work of sodhans. This latter view attracted a great deal of support, and the Jan Sangh party managed to make considerable political capital out of the affair. They argued that since the boy's quick recovery 'proved' the existence of sodhans as well as the effectiveness of those specialists who dealt with them. Interestingly enough not even the Gonds responded to the Congress leader's intervention.

It would probably be wrong to suggest that the Congress leaders were unmindful of the numerical importance of the votes of the Gonds. Nor would it be altogether fair to suggest that they were oblivious of the fact that the organisers of the exorcism were mainly Jan Sanghis. Indeed the event was only one amongst many used as excuses for factional strife. Of course the Congress leaders tried to use this occasion for their own political ends, calculating (mistakenly) that it would be to their political advantage to criticise the exorcists. However it would, I think, be wrong to be over cynical about their behaviour. In taking the matter to the police they may well have been motivated by some feeling (however slight) that exorcisms of this kind, involving potential violence as this one did, were anachronistic. At any rate that is how one of them explained it to me. The reaction of the Jan Sanghis was predictable. As was so often the case (and the event described next provides a classic

example of this) their activities bore the stamp of a kind of 'fundamentalism'. In invoking the widespread fear of sodhans, and other disturbing spirits, they were also appealing to very deeply held traditional sentiments. There is a sense in which by denying the validity of beliefs in the dark world of witches and evil spirits, the Congress leaders were questioning the traditional world itself. In a sense they were playing Galileo to an audience reluctant to accept his disturbing rationalism.

Case 5: The wrestling competition

A wrestling (kustī or dangal) competition was customarily held during the festival of Hari Talika. However, in 1974 the Congress controlled gram panchāyat, which had been less than enthusiastic in its promotion of village festivals and other functions during the years since its election, made no attempt to hold the competition. And so, acting under the influence of one of Thakur Sahab's closest relations, the Jan Sangh controlled Navayuvak Mandal took it upon itself to organise the event. The implication of their assumption of this role was immediately clear to many. The predominantly Jan Sangh mandal was effectively taking over a function which belonged properly to the village panchāyat. The importance of such a move should not be underestimated; the wrestling competition was to be an important occasion, and over a thousand spectators and combatants from the surrounding area were expected to attend. It was to be a showpiece for the village.

The mandal set up an organising committee. This

was chaired by one of Thākur Sāhab's relatives assisted by the only Congress office holder in the mandal, its secretary. Open disagreement between these two soon developed over the role that the Congress leaders of the village should be asked to play in the competition. Early on in the proceedings, two weeks before the wrestling was due to take place, the committee chairman proposed that one of the Congress elders should be asked to become the committee's president. Everyone understood that this was an attempt to humiliate this elder, for to become president of the committee would have involved him appearing in public as the figurehead of the mandal - a quasi-political body actively involved in opposition to him. The secretary saw the proposal for what it was and opposed it. On the day of the competition itself the two promoters again came into conflict over the same issue. The chairman proposed that the sarpanch and the other Congress elders should be invited by name to be guests of the mandal at the competition. Once again the secretary opposed this suggestion on the grounds that they could not possibly be 'guests', since as the leaders of the village, they were in fact the proper 'hosts'. The chairman pressed his point and dispatched the Kotwār to issue the invitations. The secretary, who had promoted the contest widely in surrounding villages as well as in Jabalpūr itself, promptly left the village and did not return for several days.

The afternoon of the competition was a vintage spectacle. The scent of Thākur machismo and mālguzārī splendour hung in the air. Thākur Sāhab's relative directed

the proceedings from a loudspeaker, the amplifiers of which relayed his voice all over the village. It seemed as though he did not draw breath for hours. Thākurs were there in strength and one prominent Jan Sanghi, who had suffered the abuse of the Congress leaders after the exorcism, controlled the spectators with a steel tipped lāthī (bamboo pole). But in the place of honour, on a sofa brought specially for him from the school, by the side of his relative, sat Thākur Sāhab. The Congress leaders came to watch, in a back seat for half an hour, but Thākur Sāhab sat throughout the afternoon. As of course had been the intention, the day belonged to him. We may reflect that we are in a milieu in which the symbols of deference are located in the folding of hands, in the touching of feet, in the serving of food, in the order of precedence in which one is served, and in the placing of persons on an occasion like this one. Indeed it may legitimately be argued, as I have tried to imply in chapter three, that wherever a public arena is constructed - at a marriage ceremony, at a musical entertainment, at a caste panchāyat, at a family meal, or at a wrestling competition - it is the arrangement of the actors that is the expression, par excellence, of the relations of power and status between them. There is no question in my mind that many of the spectators understood the meaning of the placing of persons that day. In terms of Singhara's particular history the contest belonged more to the 19th century than to the 20th. All that force, concentrated in and around the wrestling field, dispensed, so to speak, by the Thākurs. It was an

impressive and, once again, 'fundamentalist' show.

Case 6: The 1975 by-election in Jabalpūr Constituency

(a) External and Internal background

In 1974 and 1975 the Congress government and party suffered a series of setbacks throughout the country (precipitating the declaration of the State of Emergency in June 1975). The by-election in Jabalpūr constituency, held in January 1975 to elect a successor to Seth Govind Dās, whose seat in the Lok Sabhā had been made vacant by his death the previous year, was undoubtedly one such setback. At this election the Congress candidate lost heavily to a candidate supported by an alliance of parties, including the Jan Sangh and the Socialist parties, who united in opposition to the Congress under the symbol of a ploughshare (haldhar). In many ways the triumph of the Haldhar alliance in Jabalpūr in 1975 clearly foreshadowed the eventual nationwide triumph of the Janatā alliance in 1977.

Some of the more important national political developments, preceding the Congress defeat in Jabalpūr, were as follows. The 1974 U.P. state elections resulted in the Congress Party forming a ministry with 55% of the seats in the state legislature. Partly because the Congress had won only 33% of the vote, the result of the election was greeted with popular displeasure. This displeasure was echoed in Gujerat where President's Rule was imposed, after widespread disturbances against the Congress state government, following the raising of the university students'

hostel fees. In Madhya Pradesh itself, a state government election in Govindpūra, in Bhopāl, returned a Jan Sangh member, on an 'alliance' ticket, in a constituency widely thought to be a safe Congress seat. In the country as a whole the voice of Jayaprakāsh Nārāyaṇ was being listened to with increasing attention, while in April 1974 the nationwide railway strike was broken with a degree of ferocity that aroused strong feelings against the government. This was felt particularly strongly in Jabalpūr, which is an important railway town. Finally, the electoral popularity of the Jan Sangh party had been steadily increasing in Madhya Pradesh ever since 1952 (Baxter 1969:324), and this strength provided a firm base to the Haldhar, despite the fact that the alliance candidate was a member of the Socialist Party.

In Jabalpūr constituency, the Congress candidate was the grandson of Seth Govind Dās, the nephew of Jagmohan Dās (a prominent former member of the state assembly), and the great grandson of Gokul Dās (a former 'Rājā' of Jabalpūr). Coming from the most distinguished family of the region, Ravi Mohan Dās proved, not unnaturally, to be a catalyst for accusations that the Congress was playing dynastic politics. His opponent was a twenty-eight-year-old Ahīr student, Sarad Yādav. The two candidates were strikingly dissimilar. Ravi Mohan was an establishment figure, an obviously wealthy and privileged young man with an engineering degree from the United States, with no apparent previous experience in politics. By contrast, Sarad Yādav, was poor and clearly anti-establishment, a

man whose previous political activities had won him a two-year prison sentence under the Maintenance of Internal Security Act, and Defence of India Rules. He declared himself to be a revolutionary socialist.

Although politics in Singhara during the months before the election were but a detail in the larger canvas of politics in the constituency, it remains instructive to look at aspects of the election campaign from the viewpoint of the village alone. In a number of ways the defeat for the Congress in the constituency reflected the shifts of political alignments, sentiments and forces in the village itself.

(b) The making of an alliance

It will be recalled that Krishna Kumār Sonār was made vice-chairman of the grām panchāyat in 1969, and that his brother was president of the mandal. At the same time, his uncle, the sarpanch of the Sonār caste panchāyat, exercised considerable influence in the village (as he had done for many years). It will also be remembered that the Sonār caste was (and is) a closely-knit one, that its leaders were members of the Socialist Party, and that although they professed to be neutral with regard to the main division in the village, between Chaturvedi's Congress faction and Thākur Sāhab's faction, they tacitly supported the former against the latter. In 1974 their allegiance changed, and the reason it did so owed little to party officials.

The dispute which led to the forming of an alliance

between the Sonārs and the Jan Sangh faction may be recorded in general terms without identifying precisely the characters involved. It is worth recording because it gives some indication of some of the strictly local events and idioms upon which more formal alliances were contracted at higher levels.

Every market day a Chamār sold shoes from a small stall outside a Sonār's house. One day this Sonār ordered the Chamār to move away, complaining that the shoe stall was polluting. The Chamār refused to move, arguing that a drain separated the goldsmith's house from his stall. A violent dispute followed. Following this the Chamārs, collectively, complained to the police and a man was taken into custody. Aware of the importance of cultivating the political backing of the Untouchables, a village Congress leader offered his support for the Chamār and attempted to take direct action against the goldsmith. The attempt was (fortunately) badly bungled, and resulted in the goldsmith swearing his implacable hostility to that Congress leader. Furthermore, the Sonār caste as a whole reacted fiercely and decisively by giving their allegiance to Thākur Sāhab's faction.

Shortly after this incident, an alliance between the Jan Sangh and the Socialist parties (with some other smaller political groups) was arranged in the constituency in order to fight the election against the Congress candidate. In Singhara's case, the forming of this alliance merely set the seal on an alliance which had already taken place there.

We may now follow the fortunes of the Haldhar

and Congress parties as they fought out the election in the village.

(c) Campaigning styles

The campaigning styles in the village of the Haldhar and the Congress differed sharply from one another. The tone of the meetings of the former were noisy, exciting, and distinctly populist. Meetings of the Congress party were contrastingly low key, quieter and more orderly. Indeed, throughout the campaign it was the argument of the Congress that the Haldhar was an irresponsible and disorderly collection of recalcitrants with no policy except one of opposition to the government. I will attempt to give the feeling of these two approaches by describing two representative meetings.

A Haldhar meeting

The first Haldhar meeting held to recruit election workers was held in the house of an important member of the Thākur family with several officials of the Jan Sangh party from Jabalpūr and Barela present. The rich irony of one aspect of this meeting may be stressed. Here was an old mālguzārī family on the political stage once again. This time, however, they appeared not as members of a dominant clan, whose political supremacy was legitimated by custom and tradition, but as figureheads of what both they and their supporters made out to be a popular movement against the status quo.

The main part of the meeting consisted of five speeches.

The first speech, by one of the few Brahman Jan Sanghis, consisted of a tirade against the distributors of the ration. The argument was advanced that the rich were benefiting from the ration while the poor were not. The latter, to whom the harangue was clearly directed, were exhorted to "confront those responsible for the ration in the market place".

The second speech, by a Thākur officer of the village committee of the Jan Sangh, followed the theme of the previous one. He accused the Congress faction's leaders of secrecy and corruption, and argued that all the facts about the ration - how much of what commodities were distributed to whom, and so on - should be written clearly in a public place so that all could see that the distribution was fair.

The third speech was made by a party organiser. He started by re-iterating the view that the Congress leaders were less than equitable in their supervision of the ration. He then made the point that the Congress Party had once been "holy" (pavitra) but that it had been corrupted and misused by the present leadership. He informed the audience that all the Jan Sangh leaders had themselves been Congress workers, but that they had found it necessary to leave. The former leadership of Thākur Sāhab was praised.

The fourth speech, made by a low caste villager, consisted of a long and convoluted story about a queen whose sari was fouled by jackals and who planned to kill all the jackals in the kingdom in revenge. The jackals escaped their fate by standing up to the queen in a

united group. Bearing in mind the context of the speech, and the fact that it was made after the widely publicised events surrounding the railway strike, it needed only a small amount of imagination to identify the real characters behind the allegory.

The fifth speech, made by a district organiser, developed the themes of strength through unity and the corruption of government bureaucracy and the local Congress leadership.

The final speech, by an agricultural labourer, consisted of an impassioned statement about the high cost of food and a plea to the Hal leadership to ensure that the rate for daily labour was raised.

The meeting ended with the preparation of a petition to be sent to an outside authority alleging corruption and malpractice by the Congress leaders. The meeting broke up with cheers, and vows to go to jail if the need arose.

This meeting was, as others were, flamboyant and militant. It was populist in the sense that appeals for support were made directly to agricultural workers and to the village poor. The Congress Party was made out to be the party of privilege and corruption. It may only be remarked upon again that this populism was being orchestrated by former mālguzārs aided by a section of the present commercial élite, the 'Socialist' Sonārs.

A Congress meeting

The first large meeting of the Congress campaign in the by-election was held on the occasion of the opening

of a veterinary dispensary in the village. The guest of honour was a member of the state legislature.

The member arrived with a party of officials and administrators in a jeep accompanied by a police escort. Although they were several hours late, the main members of the retinue immediately withdrew to Gyāni Jain's house, where they were served sweetmeats by Chaturvedi and the sarpanch. When the needs of the officials had been satisfied, and they were busy with their pān, Thākur Sahab was called, and was handed a cup of tea on the balcony outside the guest room by Gyāni's son. It was payment in full for his behaviour at the wrestling competition.

Having refreshed themselves, the officials emerged into the bazaar and were conducted to seats prepared for them under a canopy specially erected on the site of the new dispensary. In front of them stood rows of benches, most of them completely empty. The villagers stood at a distance - some in the temple garden and others on the opposite side of the square. It was a striking display of diffidence on their part.

In his speech, the member promised to inform the state government of the needs of the poor in the village, saying that government sponsored work would be provided in this time of shortage. (Work on an all-weather road from the village to Barela started in December 1974, a month before the election). He also promised to increase the ration and to open a fair-price shop in Singhara. (No such increase and no such shop were apparent when I left the village several months later). He said that he would

press the government to waive the land tax (lagan) and spoke enthusiastically of an irrigation project, due to be completed in four years. The main theme of his speech, however, was that the opposition were hooligans (gundās) bent on bringing chaos and disorder to India. Just as the Chief Minister of Madhya Pradesh (who visited Singhara in January), the candidate (who visited Singhara twice), and all the Congress leaders in the village, were to repeat on later occasions, the member dwelt on the fact that the Congress was the party of government, was the oldest party in India, was the party which brought independence to India and victory in the Bangladesh war. The virtues of stability, continuity, democracy and order were stressed repeatedly.

After the meeting, in the evening, a romantic movie was shown in the village square.

The days immediately before polling were exciting - once again the adjective 'effervescent' comes to mind. Shortly before the day of the election, the great annual melā of Sankrānti was held on the banks of the Gaur river near Singhara. Sarad Yādav came, drew an immense crowd, and promised that he would "irrigate all this land, so that it would look like the hair of Lord Shiv". And on polling day itself he and the Haldhar secured a landslide victory.

Conclusion: Ideas, Interests and Ideas about Interests⁵

In his outline of a local election in Dewas, Mayer placed considerable emphasis upon the political significance of more or less private 'deals' between candidates and their supporters (1966: 97). The approach suggested by Mayer has subsequently been developed by others and there is now a fairly extensive literature on what are called 'quasi-groups' (Mayer, op.cit.), 'non-groups' (Boissevain 1968), 'factions' (Nicholas 1965 and Brass 1965), and other such ego-centred political networks. Enough has been said here, about the ration distribution, for example, to indicate the importance to an understanding of politics in Singhara of the insights and approaches generated by this work. Nevertheless it would, I think, be rather too optimistic to expect that explanations of the political process in the village - or, indeed, in rural India in general - could rest on the modes of analysis in which the 'manipulation' of, and 'transactions' between, followers by leaders played an exclusive part. Thus a cautious attempt will be made here to interpret what has been presented in terms not only of actors' immediate material interests but also of certain other underlying ideas and values which they may hold.

The central paradox of the politics of Singhara in late 1974 and early 1975 lay in the Haldhar alliance itself. Three categories of people, with seemingly very different interests, joined together to remove the Congress from power. These were the Thākurs (from the Jan Sangh

party), the Sonārs (from the Socialist party), and -most important of all - a sizeable majority of ordinary villagers. Underlying this paradoxical grouping of people was a similarly divergent set of ideas. In the first place, there was a package of radical, anti-establishment, and socialist ideas, propogated by a young, poor, relatively low-caste candidate who enjoyed endorsement and support from the 'revolutionary' Jayaprakāsh Nārāyan. In the second place, and in seeming contrast, was a set of attitudes and sentiments which, by being closely associated with the inspiring but essentially 'traditional' men of the former mālguzārī clan, were deeply backward-looking in character (i.e. precisely the sort of sentiments which the Jan Sangh party, throughout Northern India, has always been associated with).⁶ In the third place, there was the clearly opportunistic and self-interested sentiments and attitudes of the Sonārs (as well as several other village merchants who found a sudden interest in the Haldhar in the months before the election).

At one level, therefore, the Haldhar was the political vehicle for the advancement of the Sonārs and others (for whom Gyāni Jain and his allies were merely rivals in the political game). At a second level, the Haldhar provided the opportunity for the Thākurs to fight back against what they saw as the 'unholy' Congress alliance of one group of merchants and the Brahmans. At a third level, the Haldhar was no less than the expression of the heady blend of radicalism and traditionalism which was sweeping over much of India at the time. The problem is to explain the electoral appeal of this blend.

Our problem may be approached by examining the cluster of attitudes and feelings held by villagers about the two critically important groups in contemporary Singhara, the Thākurs and the businessmen. We may start with the latter.

Enough has been said, both in this chapter and chapters 1 and 2, to re-assert that the village merchants have truly 'come of age' in a political economy which is very significantly different from the 'traditional' political economy of the nineteenth century. The half-dozen, or so, commercial farmers and credit merchants who stand at the pinnacle of the present economic edifice exercise an influence over the village which is not dissimilar to that exercised by the great industrialists of the nineteenth century in Western Europe. And, rather like these, their material fortune has become the object of ambivalent attitudes and responses. On the one hand there are those, who have been described in chapter 2, who are attempting, often with success, to emulate the members of the commercial élite in capitalising on chances that an increasingly 'open' and caste-free market economy present. As former kāmīns and kisāns disengage from traditional caste-influenced structures of economic relations, new avenues and new aspirations appear to some of them within reach. To be sure, an old Brahman who possesses only a modest amount of unirrigated land, or a Gond labourer with no land at all, or a Domār with nothing but his baskets and his drums (and his untouchability) may not be able to turn the new conditions to their advantage. But the Darzī

with an eye for a good head of cattle, or the Dhobī with a sense of the potential of the ready-made clothes market, or the Brahman who perceives the rewards to be gained in the silver trade, may, indeed, enter the new order of material and individual competition successfully enough. But enough has also been said to suggest that, in addition to admiration and emulation, the business community in general and the leaders of that community in particular, attract some sentiments of hostility and resentment. The evidence for these feelings is extensive, and crowds in upon the observer from all directions. Much of it has been presented in this and other chapters, but it is useful to review a small part of it again in programmatic form.

- (a) The repeated complaints, by politicians and others, that the business community has become too powerful, and that their union with some of the Brahmans is a source of corruption. This theme is apparent in at least 4 of the case studies (including, of course, the election itself).
- (b) Attitudes to moneylenders, such as those implied by the sketch of one by a client p.142 and the allegories of the Brahman and Darzī actors.
- (c) The far from untypical observation by an old Brahman that "if the Sonārs get too powerful, they will be chased out of the village".
- (d) The passionate assertion, by a young Brahman, that the life and work of the businessmen are not subject to dharm.
- (e) A Sonār's sad reflection that it is always difficult

- for him to go outside his house for fear of jealousy.
- (f) The attempt by an ex-landowner of substance to find solace in alcoholism for acres lost to the moneylenders.
 - (g) The bland assertion by a young Brahman landowner that the fields his grandfather lost, after incurring gambling debts, to the first non-Thākur mālguzār are 'really' his and that he will get them back.
 - (h) The heavy silence of the men who, every Thursday, fill the moneylenders' courtyards in order to exchange the contents of tightly knotted bundles of silver ornaments for cash.
 - (i) The 'jokiness' of the moneylenders style of conversation and communication, which, seems like joking relations often do, sometimes seems pregnant with conflict.
 - (j) The regular complaint that the business community do not support village festivals and fairs to anything like the same extent as the Thākurs used to do.

And so on.

I am all too aware that this sort of evidence is impressionistic, and that writing about values and sentiments such as these is fraught with difficulty. Furthermore, it would be naïve to suggest that feelings of resentment against the rich and powerful are an entirely new phenomenon. Nevertheless, it might also be naïve not to perceive something new in the style of their modern expression. One can hardly imagine, for example, a Thākur mālguzār taking refuge from the jealousy of his subjects behind closed doors. Nor could one imagine the Thākurs diffusing hostility with the stylised jocularly and

effusiveness with which some of the bigger merchants often conduct their social intercourse.

The growing hostility towards those who now dominate the village economy may, of course, be seen as both a sign and a product of a general materialism and individualism presently gaining ground in the village. There is no doubt that villagers are becoming increasingly aware of being subject to an economic climate which to many of them appears harsh and overbearing. Such awareness proceeds hand in hand with a rising sense of the nature of the 'pure' economy and the place within it of the 'pure' individual (c.f. Dumont 1978: 53).

Another way of saying all this is that the traditional ideological edifice, in which power was subordinated by status, the individual by the whole, the material by the transcendent, is, increasingly, being counterposed by a new one which would turn these subordinations upside down.

It would, I think, be absurd to deny the force of the new ethics, values, and attitudes - although as yet they are far harder to submit to any kind of analysis than the ideas and values of the caste system. But it would, I think, be equally absurd to expect the traditional visions to be meekly pushed aside. As I have tried to suggest, they legitimate far too much for that.

And here we may turn to the Thākurs.

Certain members of the Thākur clan feel the loss of their lineage's power very keenly. This shows itself in all sorts of small, rather routine, ways. On

one occasion, for example, when the bride of a Kesharwani family was thought to have been insulted by members of a visiting barāt, a Thākūr elder admonished the miscreants loudly, authoritatively, and publicly. I met him in the fields the following day and he referred to the incident by beating his chest with considerable passion and saying "I am a Thākūr. This is my village. An insult against one of the village girls is an insult against me". The message seemed quite clear: as a Thākūr, he felt that he possessed some special authority to exercise judgement on village affairs. A similar sort of sentiment was expressed by a younger Thākūr who, during the festival of Holī, told me that (largely by virtue of being a Thākūr) he was one of the few people in the village to be able to control the colour throwers (and I think his claim was well founded). Again, the easy assurance with which the Thākūrs assumed control over the organisation of the wrestling competition may also be interpreted as a sign of their belief that they are the 'natural leaders' of such an event (with all that that implies).

But, clearly, it is not simply the Thākūrs alone who feel that they are, in some way, the legitimate leaders of Singhara. After all, in 1974/5 they became the figure-heads of a political organisation which attracted widespread popular support. Consider again aspects of the case studies. Firstly, the continuing ration fiasco was used by the Jan Sangh, and later the Haldhar, to point up the declining standards in modern public service, and to praise, in the same breath, the former leadership of the

Thākurs. Secondly, the Thākur-inspired support for Chhoti Prasād drew public sympathy, at least partly, because of the fairly widespread distrust and dislike of the close links between the Congress leaders and agencies, such as the police, outside the village. Given what was said earlier about the importance of the old image of the village as a 'safe' and 'self-contained' unity under the benevolent authority of the Thākurs, it is not hard to see why such criticism should arouse public sympathy. (It is highly significant that one of the main electoral platforms of the Janatā party in the 1977 election was the "decentralisation of power down to village level" (Stern, 1979:68)). Thirdly, the incident at the Holī festival of 1974 was full of resonances which may be interpreted as having to do not only with general feeling that the business class were mean, and unfit to hold as much power as they did, but also that the Thākurs (some of whom played a critical part in that episode) were altogether more suitable leaders.

Finally, consider the sodhan incident. In my view, this episode, taking place as it did at a time when 'party feeling' was running high, suggests, perhaps more than any other event, the 'smouldering nostalgia' for the old order which the Thākurs represent. Let us recall that one of the key elements in the mythology of the village is the conquest by the Thākurs over Dāru Shāh and his Gond forces, and that these latter are consistently portrayed as having been both destructive and anarchic. As I have described in the previous chapter, there is still a tendency

both to regard the Gonds as sources of danger, and to classify them along with other spirits and entities which would disturb the social order. Is it, then, surprising to find that, precisely when the social order is changing rapidly, one should encounter an enthusiasm for rooting out 'witches' - who may conveniently be made scape-goats (in sublimated form to be sure) for the strains which that change implies? As I have said, I think that part of the Congress leaders' opposition to the sodhan hunters was based on their feeling that such activity was, quite simply, not rational. Conversely, I also think that we may view the witch hunt as, in a sense, a revolt against such rationalism. In short, I would suggest that we may interpret this incident (amongst others) as an expression of a pervasive longing for the certainties of an old order - in which Gonds were really devils, Thākurs really rulers, and Brahmans really the kinsmen of the gods.

CHAPTER 9

CONCLUDING REMARKS

In this thesis I have tried to do two things which, by way of conclusion, may now be reviewed.

In the first place, I have attempted to offer some thoughts about the process of traditional legitimation. To this end, I have argued that the structure of ideas and values, which constitutes one part of what we know as the 'caste system', incorporates within itself explanations about (a) the nature and identity of individuals, and the elementary processes (such as birth and death) to which all individuals are subject, and (b) those social relations which constitute the other - the material part of the system.

To put this another way, one 'fact' I started out with was that of Thākur dominance in the ancien régime. The problem was how this dominance became legitimate. Early on, I took it as axiomatic that this particular problem was merely one aspect of the broader one of how ideas legitimate (i.e. give order and meaning to) 'facts' in general. Let me put this in yet another, more general, way. After the work of authors such as Hocart and Levi-Strauss,¹ few would, I think, take issue with the proposition that one of the central concerns of anthropology lies in the workings of the process by which superstructures 'pick up', as it were, elements of infrastructures, so as to arrange and order them in conceptual systems which give them meaning

(the process, that is to say, which translates 'facts' into 'ideas'). Dumont's and Pocock's assertion that "social facts are not only things, but things and representations at the same time" (1960:83) provided, for Indianists, a guiding statement of how this exercise might be carried out in the field of caste studies. I will now summarise the way I have followed these authors in the present work.

Much of the first chapter was taken up with examining the importance, to both the history and the mytho-history of the village, of the arrival in Singhara of the Singh family, of their assumption of control over the land, and their subsequent giving of both land and daughters (the one with the other) to families of Sadiupadi Brahmans. In various places I have also referred to other attributes and associations which were (and are) thought to distinguish the Thākurs from others. Notable amongst these were physical and natural force (the former being expressed in many ways, the latter being expressed particularly clearly during 'their' (i.e. the 'Kshatriya') festival of Dasahra).

Now, no-one would dispute that in the Indian milieu, any explanation of 'the king's' sovereignty must at least include discussion of the relation between 'king' and Brahman. Building up, therefore, from this key relation (which in Singhara's is replicated in the relation between the Thākurs and their Brahman affines) we may begin to construct a series of Hocartian equations and homologues thus:

Thākurs:Brahmans:: wife-givers: wife-takers::land:seed::
Goddess:Rām::physical and natural force:divine order

Such a scheme may perhaps be regarded on its own as a firm basis for Thākur sovereignty. However, as I have just indicated, it seems far more satisfactory to regard it as only the first step. As Gellner suggests (see Introduction) it is not just political dominance that requires legitimation, but many other facts of life as well. The purpose of the five central chapters of the thesis (3-7) was to show how the above scheme might be incorporated within a much more inclusive one. I have tried, therefore, to demonstrate that the structure of traditional legitimation includes (at least) the following elements:

(substances,	raw food:cooked food::blood: vermilion: :
temperatures,	
and directions)	faeces:water::left:right::hot:cold::land:seed::
(social	women:men::wife-givers:wife-takers::
categories)	low castes:high castes::Thākurs:Brahmans::
(ideas and	individual:whole::power (physical and natural
values)	force): status (divine order):: anomie: identity::
	goddess:Rām::chaos:order::dominance:deference::
	the material:the transcendent:: <u>adharm</u> : <u>dharm</u> ::
	impurity:purity::inauspiciousness:auspiciousness

There is nothing particularly original about this scheme², and it it remains a fraction of what it might be. Nevertheless, I would claim that I have considered each of its constituent elements, and the relations between them, sufficiently carefully, and from a sufficiently wide range of different contexts (c.f. Goody 1977: 220), to be able to justify and defend their arrangement in this form.

Two further important comments need to be made. The first is that, according to context, many of the elements on the left hand side of each half of the various equations

may be substituted by elements in the same position in other equations. It would make sense, for example, in the context of the spring festivals described in Chapter 7, to substitute 'raw food' for 'hot', or 'power', or 'low caste', or even 'Thākur'. Similarly, in the context of the marriage ceremony, it would make sense to substitute 'women' with 'individual', or 'inauspiciousness', or 'hot', or 'the material', or even 'chaos'. The same applies to elements on the right hand side of each half of the equations. Substances, social categories, and ideas 'stand for' others (there are contexts, for example, in which faeces stand for impurity, Thākurs stand for power, low castes stand for inauspiciousness, the individual (isolated from the whole) stands for adharm, and so on). But although such substitution may take place, it does so in a very particular and orderly way - for (and this is the second point) no element on the left hand side of any half of an equation may be substituted by another element whose place is on the right half of that, or any other, equation. Such a substitution would breach the principle, upon which the whole scheme rests, which (for want of another term) we may follow Dumont in terming hierarchy.

The second thing I have tried to do in this study is to outline some of the economic and social changes in Singhara during the past one and a half centuries or so, and to try and identify some of the consequences of these in the political activity of the village. The final observation to be made is that, as these changes gather momentum, some of the elements of our scheme are being

pulled out of shape and re-arranged in a way that is contrary to, the scheme's inner logic. For example, it is no longer so clear that the individual in contemporary Singhara is 'subordinate' to the whole (in the way that he was traditionally), or that dominance is 'subordinate' to deference, or that the material is 'subordinate' to the transcendent. Perhaps, therefore, we may represent the moral uncertainties of the social and intellectual life of Singhara today by adding one further and disturbing line (some distance away from the others) as follows:

whole: individual:: ought: is:: dharm: adharm:: Thākur: goldsmith.

INTRODUCTION: NOTES

1. The making of metaphorical associations between different phenomena, and the combining of elements in conceptual 'equations' (as Hocart called them) which express identity through homology are, of course, only two (of many) ways in which 'meaning' is made.
2. Berreman, for example, is particularly scathing about this line of argument. In a review of Dumont (1970) this author accuses Dumont (and by implication anyone who would dare to suggest that caste ideology is actually believed by members of low castes) of "... talking with, reading and believing Brahmans and their friends". He also asserts airily that "... the lowly have (been seeking) to escape their oppression for at least 2000 years" (1971: 515). Elsewhere Berreman offers us the thought that "no group of people is content to be low in a caste hierarchy" (1973: 17). Like Gough's Tanjore Pallans, who apparently "dismiss ritual theories with merri-ment" (1960: 54), Berreman's remote Himalayans, when confronted by the fieldworkers with Sanskritic theories "laugh ruefully" (1971: loc.cit.). As will be clear from my own work, I take a very different view of the power of ideas and values in caste society than these two authors do.
3. So extensive has been the discussion (in Contributions to Indian Sociology and elsewhere) of the transactionalist's strategy of removing culture from political

and social analysis that there is little need for further comment here. In his remarks on Bailey's 'Strategems' Pitt-Rivers expresses the crux of the matter nicely thus: "He (Bailey) has reached his generalisation ... not by abstraction but by reduction and (has) offered us a model of human behaviour shorn of all anthropological complications" (1973: 31).

4. Dumont records Weber's tracing of the links between trade and certain sects with approval, observing that "economic history is ... indebted to the history of the heresies" (1970: 166).
5. In Hindu metaphysics, Purusa represents "the eternal, uncaused and courseless Cosmic Spirit, universal soul, the animating principle of the world ... the counterpart of Prakriti ... referred to as female and symbolizing the cosmic, primordial substance, i.e. unevolved matter, or Nature before the evolution of natural things ... Prakriti is animated by Purusa, but all material things emanate from Prakriti" (Walker 1968: 263).
6. This is part of one, amongst some twenty, marriage songs, recorded during field research.
7. Mauss argued that amongst the general conclusions to be drawn from the study of gift-giving in traditional societies were that a "new morality" was needed which avoided the twin pitfalls of excessive individualism and excessive holism. "Too much generosity," he

wrote, "is as harmful to (man) and society as the selfishness of contemporaries or the individualism of our laws ... the life of the monk and the life of Shylock are both to be avoided. This new morality will consist of a happy medium between the ideal and the real" (1970 (1950): 67).

CHAPTER ONE: NOTES

1. According to Crooke the term bhūmiyā refers to "the special godling of the soil" (1926: 93). The term bhūmihar, or bhūmi, means landlord. The two terms are clearly homonymous.
2. This is the meaning of the real name of the village, not the pseudonym which I have given it.
3. Garha Mandla was one of several Gond kingdoms in central India at that time. Baden-Powell recorded that land tenure systems under Gondi rule shared "many features identical with the Hindu Rajas' dominion" and that Gond chiefs (such as, one may properly conjecture, Dāru Shāh) "were quasi-feudal chiefs". Doubtless such chiefs were sometimes subject to conquest and replacement by others - as in Singhara's case, for example. The evidence I have presented on the history of the village seems, thus, to indicate fairly conclusively that the Singhara Thākurs (appearing as they did in the last years of Garha Mandla's existence) were not untypical of many other "estate-holders, who whether called zamīndārs or jagīrdārs or any other comparatively modern revenue title (were) survivals of the old Gond kingdoms and feudal estates" (1892.II: 370).
4. Figure II refers to the first immigrants to Singhara of each caste. It is not meant to imply that whole

caste groups (or sub-caste groups) came to the village as 'ready-made' units. The question 'where did you come from before you arrived in Singhara?', which I asked in my census, elicited a wide range of responses, indicating that people came to the village very much as individuals from a variety of geographical directions.

5. "Sarwariya or Saryu-para" (i.e. Sadiupadi) "Brahmans are a division of the Kanaujiya" (i.e. Kanyakubja) "Brahmans" (Crooke 1896.IV: 293). For aspects of Kanyakubja and Sadiupadi Brahman social and kinship organisation c.f. Khare 1960: 348 ff., and Dumont 1966).
6. c.f. page 187.
7. I conducted a house-to-house census in the village which contained questions relating to respondent's name, age, caste, occupation, income, land, gotra name, caste panchayat, place of origin (of family) before settling in Singhara, house (by whom built and previous occupants), and household god.
8. C.f. Baden-Powell 1892.II: 98 ff., and Dumont 1970: 197/8, for example.
9. This may be rather too general a statement as it stands, for I am well aware that the raiyaṭwārī system contrasts with the type of system of land tenure outlined here. However, the emergence of local landlords and landlord-rights (of the sort described in Singhara's case) seems to have been a very general phenomenon in north India (c.f. Baden-Powell 1892.I: 130 ff. and II: 111). Thus the line of my argument may be allowed.

CHAPTER 2: NOTES

1. Wheat is sown, in the larger fields, with the aid of a wooden seed drill drawn by bullocks. Although Brahman farmers are expressly forbidden to plough, they take an active part in sowing; it is a fact of considerable symbolic importance as will be seen.
2. Neale writes, "... the abolition of the zamīndārī system and the reforms of land tenures" (by post-Independence governments) "was not a reversal of British policy, nor was it a radical change in the directions of policy. The reform measures were a continuation of a policy that had been going on for more than a century" (1962: 283).
3. c.f. Djurfeldt and Lindberg (1975: 142).
4. There are other reasons too: Singhara enjoys something of a reputation (not entirely undeserved) for a certain roué quality inhering in some of its traditionally wealthy residents. More than one high caste farmer has lost his fields as a result of alcohol, gambling and/or women.
5. There is a sense in which, in Singhara's case, the Thākurs alone fit the 'Kshatriya' model; but there is another sense in which the ideology of the 'Kshatriya' adheres to both Thākurs and the other Brahman families such as G's.
6. This is not merely a theoretical argument. It can quite easily be seen to be happening in contemporary Singhara.

7. It would be a simple matter to make out a good case to support this statement by comparing the respective life-styles of an upwardly mobile, middle caste, businessman and a traditional, high caste, land-owner.
8. A sharecropper may find it necessary to hire bullocks and ploughs and occasionally daily labour as well.
9. A landlord may be away from the village because he is also a salaried worker and is posted elsewhere. There are no 'absentee landlords' in the sense that Bêteille reports there are in Sripurām (1969: 114).
10. This explanation is an informant's.
11. Bremen, for example, records similar changes affecting the hali system in Gujarat. He writes of "... the disintegration of the hali system in terms of a changing labor relationship: a changeover from the bondage of servitude to the freedom of the day-labourers' existence" (1974: 78).
12. The nature of such a transformation as this has, of course, been described in a whole variety of ways, for a wide range of regions, by scholars such as Neale (1962), Bremen (1974) and Bêteille (1969) amongst others.
13. The type of medical treatment afforded by pandits and other Brahmans to private patients (for cash) cannot be said to be homeopathic, āyurvedic or allopathic; it lies outside any of these great medical

traditions and is rooted in the little tradition of the locality.

14. The Singhara Sonārs are known normally as Sonī, which is a name Russell notes as being one amongst several used by this caste in central India (1916. IV: 517). See my comments on the Tāmbhakār caste.
15. The term kāmīn is (occasionally) used in Singhara to refer to one who works for a patron (mālik) with whom he has a long-term relation and from whom he receives payment (at least partly) in kind. From Ramkheri, Mayer reports a more or less identical usage (1960: 63), while other writers have reported the use of a variety of terms (such as kām karne wala) for the subordinate partner in the so-called jajmāni system (Wiser 1936, Kolenda 1973, Aggarwal 1977). In Singhara the terms kisān and kisān ka kām seem to be more widely used to refer to such a worker and his work than kāmīn and kāmīn ka kām - although kisān, strictly defined, means 'peasant'.
16. The name Barhāī derives from the Sanskrit vardh: to cut; i.e. (wood) cutter.
17. c.f. note 15 above.
18. Nāī derives from the Sanskrit snāpita/snāpitṛ: one who bathes.
19. Until recently there was only one household of Nāīs in Singhara. In response to the open political support given by one of the members of this household

- to the Jan Sangh party (see Chapter 8), the then ruling Congress village administration invited another (unrelated) Nāī and his family to the village.
20. The co-operative consists of nine chūlhās. Each of these paid Rs 350 towards the yearly rent of the tank. Each family made approximately Rs 1,350 profit at the end of the year (1974).
 21. Although the theory of the 'jajmāni' system (which is an expression not actually used in Singhara) rules out competition between client castes, there is (as Srinivas (1977) has recorded) frequently a degree of competition in practice.
 22. This particular family is perhaps slightly better off than most Kumhār families - but not all that much so.
 23. The Hindi term bans and bansphor mean bamboo and bamboo breaker respectively. The term Basor is derived from both and is the name given to the caste of basket makers (Russell 1916, Vol. II: 208). Russell says that Dumārs or Dom Basors are a Basor sub-caste. Both Domār and Basūr are names used in Singhara. The former is used more commonly.
 24. In the first month of my stay in the village the grām panchāyat decided to shift the market place from the centre of the village to empty ground on the outskirts because they considered, quite justifiably, that the village square and the area surrounding

it was no longer large enough to accommodate the 200 'shops' and stalls that are erected there every Thursday. The plan was very quickly and efficiently scuppered by the business community.

25. 106 out of 206 according to a survey carried out on one market day. The other figures in this section come from that survey and are, I think, as accurate as they could be.
26. These sell sweets such as laddū, barfī, jalebī, ras gulā.
27. Loans made to cultivators made by the government through the Grām Sevak seem to go, more or less entirely, to pay back private creditors and seldom go towards the purchase of fertilisers or irrigation machinery.

CHAPTER 3: NOTES

1. For example; having observed the loss of prestige suffered by a clan/caste known to him whose members had eaten "...kachcha food in the fields instead of in the decent privacy of their own chaukas" (hearths), Blunt suggested that this type of food possessed strong associations with the domestic hearth and home (1931: 95).
2. Crooke observed that "...eating-time is a period of crisis when fascination or danger from evil spirits is specially dreaded" (1926: 282).
3. Although Marriott's (1959) paper was (it would seem) probably based on field data as detailed as Mayer's.
4. In this particular (1959) essay Marriott does not make it absolutely clear what he means to include in the category 'no food'. Based partly on observations made by him in his later (1968) paper (see text) and partly on my own direct experience, I will use the term 'no food', in the present work as follows. Strictly speaking the very lowest castes in a village hierarchy are seldom permitted to give, directly, any food to higher castes. However, as is noted in various places throughout, high castes do accept food which has been harvested (and touched in the process) by Untouchable agricultural labourers. Thus it may be argued that such castes do 'give' (in this rather special sense) such food - which may, formally, be termed 'no food' - to higher castes.
5. Karm means 'appropriate action'. The doctrine of karm relates to the actions performed by a man in his life,

and the 'rewards' (or otherwise) which accrue therefrom in his subsequent rebirths. Thus any person's well-being or suffering is held to be the result of former acts.

6. The structure of the commensal blocks presented here and the structure of the classical four- (or five-) fold varna ('colour') system are manifestly comparable, although the fit is not exact (partly because there are, strictly speaking, no Kshatriyas in Singhara). The important point is that the structural function of both the commensal blocks and the varna system is identical. Thus, while the varna system provides a framework to separate and unify (to 'exclude' and 'include') at an ideological level, the commensal blocks serve the same purpose in the practical world of food exchanges.
7. There is a strong feeling in the village that cooked food should be prepared and eaten at home (except when prepared on some special ritual occasion, or in the temple). I have heard it argued that those (low castes) who eat such food in the fields confirm their lack of status by doing so.
8. Asserting that this perspective was suggested directly (i.e. verbally) by his informants, Khare deployed a number of Hindu scriptural references to support this Maussian paradigm, while also paying fulsome tribute to Mauss himself (loc.cit.).
9. Hand worked flour mills (chakīs) are nearly always located outside the walls of houses in Singhara. The sound they make is one of the most familiar of all sounds in the village, as is the sight of women sitting together around a flour mill grinding wheat into flour. In the present

case the flour was ground at one of the two electrically powered flour mills in the village.

10. This could be illustrated in many different ways. For example, at various times (at the festivals of Dasahra and Akhtij to name but two) symbolic associations are ritually affirmed between grain seedlings and human fertility. Such seedlings are also symbolically endowed with healing properties.

CHAPTER 4: NOTES

1. This classification is based on a house-to-house census (see note 7, Chapter 1).
2. Some villagers argue that married women are simultaneously members of two kutumbs.
3. Different writers on this subject have expressed a variety of different views as to the exact nature of these rules.
4. I have not included this particular item of 'fine grain' information in my table of commensal transactions in Chapter 3. Such omissions (made in the interests of analytical simplicity) make no difference whatsoever to the argument advanced in that chapter.
5. I am indebted to Dr Tuvia Gelblum for finding me these references and for otherwise enlightening me on the classical referents and meanings of the term.
6. In a note on the festical, B.A. Gupte also refers to the presence of mān at Dasahra. He describes the cries of "srīmān" ("Your Honour") that a Maharaja's followers customarily chant during the festivities (1919: 188).
7. I am grateful to the participants of a lively seminar at L.S.E. shortly after my return from the field (in particular to Maurice Bloch, Robert Dodd and Verity Khan) for suggesting this line of thought. It may

readily be agreed that the idea of the essential unity of creation, preservation and destruction is a 'first principle' of Hindu thought, and that the portrayal of the goddess as repository of these themes combined is, therefore, not surprising in any way.

8. Bloch's essay has been a primary source of inspiration for this part of the analysis.
9. As is recorded in Chapter 5, one of the most potent demonstrations of sevā performed by a man during his lifetime is the supervision of the funerary rites of his father. The lighting of the funeral pyre, the collecting of the bones, the aiding of the digestion of the soul incarnate in the funerary priest, are all described as "giving sevā". They are demonstrations, par excellence, of filial piety: as in life, so in death, a son is bound to his father by an obligation to give sevā.
10. This principle is symbolised in Singhara's own history. The mān which the Thākurs gave their Brahman affines in their gifts to them of land and women (two 'substances' of supreme value) was reflected back (with spiritual interest) in the mān returned by the Brahmans to the Thākurs.

CHAPTER 5: NOTES

1. Domār women perform this task for members of all castes except the other three Untouchable castes.
2. According to the senior paediatrician at Jabalpūr Medical College, Dr Kaul, Pāsni is performed by the baby's MB (māmā) - rather than the baby's father, for example - throughout the district (personal communication).
3. There are, I think, good reasons for classifying the gift givers at Chauk as 'affines', although both phūā and māmā to the baby are, of course, that baby's kin. However it may be clear from my discussion in the previous chapter of these relations that I follow Madan in giving their affinal element significance.
4. People from the Untouchable castes and some Shudras are cremated elsewhere.
5. Quite apart from the rites performed in the village itself, members of all castes may carry out shrāddh ceremonies on the occasion of a visit to one of the centres traditionally associated with such rites (Allahabad, Benares, Gaya and Rameshwaram are all places to which villagers from Singhara journeyed for this purpose during the course of field research).
6. Members of the deceased's agnatic lineage are considered unclean (ashuddh) for ten or thirteen days from the moment of death. The restrictions that

normally apply to Untouchable castes apply to them during this period. Thus food may not be accepted from them, they may not be physically touched by outsiders, may not go to the temple and, in the case of Brahmans, may not perform any religious ceremony for others. They are enjoined to eat 'mild' food and to refrain from eating betel. They do not shave. These interdictions apply to Untouchable castes in the same way as they do to other castes.

7. There is a measure of ambiguity about where a soul goes after death. Sometimes villagers say that souls go to heaven. At others they say that souls join the ancestors. Such ambiguity is not unusual throughout Hindu India (Scott n.d.).
8. Until his death in 1978 it was customary for a 'holy man', regarded by many in Singhara as their personal (and collective) gūrū (teacher), to spend six months of each year in the village.
9. The divinities said by informants to be associated with the eight directions are Lakshmī, Shiv, Varāh (Vishnu), Garun, Pardman, Nerid, Govind and Janārdan (Krishn) respectively.
10. "... cow dung is ... an ingredient of the most purifying food: panc gavy (the five 'food residues' of the cow - milk, curd, ghī, urine and dung); here the excreta of an animal becomes a highly purifying food for human beings within the right handed rituals" (Khare 1976: 108).

11. Two views are held concerning the symbolic significance of the pinds at Das Gātra. The most widely held one is that each pind represents one of the days that have elapsed since the death. The other is that each pind represents a part of the body; every day after death a limb is made until, on the tenth day - at Das Gātra - all the limbs are made and the soul, before then considered to be without shape, becomes fully fashioned. The ten limbs that are supposedly recreated at Das Gātra consist of the five working parts of the body: hands, legs, penis, anus and mouth, and the five parts from which knowledge is derived: eyes, tongue, nose, ears and skin.
12. When the janeū is worn in this fashion (apsavy) it is said to be directed to the ancestors, while when it is worn from left to right (savy) it is said to be for the gods.
13. The eleventh day of each of the two halves of every month is regarded by some as a fast day, and is known as Ekādasī. Gupte reports that the auspiciousness of the eleventh day derives from the associations it has with Ekādasī, the (emaculately conceived female offspring of Brahma, Vishnu and Shiv. She is believed to have slain the giant Kumbh and be linked, for that reason, with the forgiveness of the sins of her devotees (1919: 44).
14. From classical sources, Scott tells us that the

vishvadeva represents the four quarters of space,
homologised with the remote ancestors (n.d.: 17).

15. One of these two pots is filled with water and the other, in which rests a lighted wick, with oil. They are said to provide light and nourishment for the soul as it hovers around the pīpal tree for the eleven (or ten, or thirteen (c.f. note 6)) days after death.
16. Inspired by a colleague's current work in the U.S.A., Madan has recently asserted that this particular opposition is as (if not more) fundamental to an understanding of caste society as is the opposition of pure and impure (personal communication).

CHAPTER 6: NOTES

1. The Domārs of Singhara are in the process of giving up what one of them describes as 'this dirty work'. The gift of left overs (jūthā) to an Untouchable after a feast such as the one described here is an important aspect of the ritual activity. A sweeper has recently been brought into the village partly in order to carry out this particular act.
2. Though it is actually prepared under the wedding canopy, the ingredients, along with the magar māṭī, are stored in a room in the lineage elder's house, of which the 'eldest wife' is guardian. Entrance to this room is strictly limited to members of the spouses gotra, as well as the husbands of its married sisters. (A married sister is sometimes said to belong to both her natal and to her husband's gotra). To enter the room these people have to ask permission from the 'eldest wife' and to take a purificatory bath before they do so.
3. There are numerous stories and rhymes about this relationship (c.f. Havelī 1943). Devar and bhābhī typically have a close and tender relationship. It is said that, on arrival in her married home, the only friend a woman has is her devar. He is one of the few people in front of whom a young wife may uncover her face and with whom she may talk freely. The relation between devar and bhābhī contrasts strikingly with that between jeth and bahū (husband's elder brother and younger brother's wife) which is one of extreme avoidance.

4. These two are said to be 'goin' ('friend') to each other, and a limited amount of sexual contact between them is not considered improper, provided this is expressed in a sufficiently 'joky' way. Villagers explain this jokiness by saying that long ago there used to be a system of exchange marriage, when men exchanged sisters. The demise of this system is said to be due to 'social development'. Nowadays, of course, exchange marriage is expressly forbidden. Even lower castes, who sometimes practice it, seem, sometimes, to consider it shameful. (While collecting a genealogy from a family belonging to an Untouchable caste, my informant pointed out a number of examples of sister exchange in his own family, adding that I must think his genealogy 'very bad').
5. Barāts frequently proceed by bullock cart. In this case the family was a wealthy one.
6. There is a caste, the Rao caste, whose sole ritual function it is to produce these poles for wedding ceremonies.
7. This little game is known as mandap turna. A bandānvāra, a string of mango leaves customarily placed on the mandap, is also placed on the door of the room in which the maiher is kept before it is cooked (see text).
8. At least two pandits and two Nais officiate at most marriages. One of these is associated with, and paid by, the bride's family, the other with the groom's family.
9. The wedding vows (sāth batchan) include the promise by a wife not to insult her husband, to co-operate with

him in business, not to go deep into the forest, and always to get permission from him before doing anything at all out of the ordinary.

10. It is said that if the bride's mother is on a diet of simple food for some reason, she may start once more on a diet that includes vegetables provided that her first meal is sent from her daughter's married home.
11. The raghu var is a small and highly decorated round earthenware pot which is associated with the couple's fertility. It contains rice, pulse, two bangles (which are worn by the bride and groom during the main ceremony), two small pieces of wood called sindorā and sindorī (described by the villagers as representing the male and female principles and/or children) and two necklaces which are also worn by the couple during the ceremony.
12. I am aware that this assertion runs counter to evidence and interpretations from elsewhere. Mayer reports from Ramkheri that Haldī is a purificatory, or cooling, rite (1960:228) while Beck tells us that in Coimbatore District, Madras, turmeric is associated with cooling rather than heating (1969:568). I can only say that informants from Singhara seem clearly and consistently of the opinion that turmeric in this context heats up the body. Moreover the tenor of the occasion suggests the creation of energy and heat, rather than cooling. (On my most recent visit to the village - in early 1980 - I checked my original interpretation of the Haldī rite with several informants. They all agree with me that the rubbing on of turmeric engenders heat!).

13. The ritual eminence of the bride's fire might seem to contradict the claim that women and wife-givers are invariably inferior to men and wife-takers. However, the argument advanced in this chapter is that the power and efficacy of the female principle is indeed acknowledged (if not actually worshipped) but that it is also thought that this power is potentially dangerous: hence the 'need' for it to be carefully controlled by, and made subordinate to, the forces of men and wife-takers.
14. Madan writes of affinal relations amongst Kashmiri Pandits as follows: "The relationship between wife-givers and wife-takers is, then, essentially and unalterably unequal, being grounded in a structural principle rather than in sentiment, personal morality or expediency" (1975:232).
15. I owe this insight to M. Bloch.
16. The existence of such actual hypergamous chains is not unfamiliar. Rajput lines are traditionally claimed to be "arranged in a hypergamous progression" (Mayer 1960:164), while Khare's claim that Kanya-Kubja Brahmans are spatially located in three zonal circles, the inner one being the 'purest', implies hypergamous chains from the margins inwards (1960:348).

CHAPTER 7: NOTES

1. It is generally believed in Singhara that sodhans have a bodyguard, Bir or Barā Deo. Barā Deo is said to come from Yamrāj Lok, the universe of Yamrāj, or Yam, god of death. Crooke says that birs are "heroes" and "malignant spirits of the dead" (Op.cit.: 326) whose powers are strongest on particular days of the year, amongst which are the nine days of goddess worship in the autumn (Ibid.: 424).
2. Buradkar reports similar attitudes to Gonds - for the same reason (1947: 128).
3. c.f. Chapter 4, p. 200.
4. I owe this remarkable insight (apart from a lot else) to Dr David Scott, of Leonard Theological College, Jabalpūr. T.N. Madan has observed that Rāvana in Delhi often looks like a Muslim (personal communication).
5. It is not being suggested or implied that sensual, worldly, individual interests, expressed as they are in the concerns of the householder, have no place in caste society: that would be nonsense. What is being suggested (partly following Dumont, Op.cit.: 273-274) is that what is threatening is the idea of a world in which such concerns come to dominate, rather than remaining ultimately subordinate to dharm.

6. As has been pointed out in various places, the symbolism of heat and cold plays an important part in a wide range of ritual contexts. In a recent article Kaushik has associated heat with life, anger, destruction, passion, disease, and the soul of the deceased, which, because of its life threatening capabilities, has to be 'cooled' with water libations. By contrast, she finds 'cool' to be associated with normal, timely, death (1976: 284). Beck has observed that "heat is associated with life and fertility. The energy which can both activate and nullify life is a kind of heat. This heat when taken alone, however, can be highly dangerous ... it must be encompassed or surrounded by cooling things" (1969: 553).
7. As the Holikā story is told in Singhara, Prahlād lacks any of the demonic qualities he has in several traditions of classical mythology (c.f. O'Flaherty, *Op.cit.*: 131-136).
8. The best known Nau Ratri festival is that which precedes the festival of Dasahra in the autumn (see Chapter 4). In Jabalpūr district the goddess is worshipped twice a year, with very much the same sort of ritual activities taking place on each occasion.
9. Bān is the name of a famous devotee of Shiv. The same word (bān) also applies to the sacred arrow

which Shiv used to destroy Tripurā (c.f. O-Flaherty, Op.cit.: 184).

10. In Chapter 2 I have recorded that, a little later in the year, during the festival of Akhtīj, which marks the beginning of the agricultural year with the symbolic first ploughing of the season, young girls perform pūjās in the fields. These pūjās are said to exercise an auspicious influence on the summer crop.

CHAPTER 8: NOTES

1. c.f. M.P.D.G. (Jabalpūr) 1968: 109-125.
2. i.e. the Samyukta Socialist Party (S.S.P.), formed by the merger, in 1964, of the Praja Socialist Party (P.S.P.) and the Socialist Party (S.P.) (c.f. Hartmann 1971: 83-108).
3. Puri writes of the Jan Sangh's support of Indian cultural traditions and its constant attempt "to re-establish some system which actually or substantially existed at one time but which has been largely displaced". She writes too of the party's attraction to "the profound and almost ceaseless appeal of the nostalgic past of the Hindus" (1980: 19).
4. c.f. Bailey 1969.
5. I take this sub-title from Bêteille's article 'Ideas and Interests' (1973) about which Madan has commented (quite rightly in my view) that one cannot distinguish between, or oppose, as neatly as Beteille appears to want to do in this context, 'ideas' and 'interests', since people always have ideas about their interests (personal communication).
6. In his examination of the manifesto of the Janatā party (in which, of course, the Jan Sangh played an important part) before the 1977 elections, Stern concludes that "the core of the programme (was) its desire to modernise the country without Westernizing it" (1979: 68).

CHAPTER 9: NOTES

1. "The dialectic of superstructures ... consists in setting up constitutive units ... so as to be able by means of them to elaborate a system which plays the part of a synthesising operation between ideas and facts, thereby turning the latter into signs. The mind thus passes from empirical diversity to conceptual simplicity and then ... to meaningful synthesis" (Levi-Strauss, 1966: 131).
2. Parry, for example, has an abbreviated model of the same type (1979: 6).

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