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The New Wind: Structure, Economic Change, and Worldviews in a North Indian Village

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Abstract

This thesis examines the relationship between caste, class, and ideology in a North Indian village in the context of rapid economic change. One of the primary questions that it addresses is whether the capitalist mode of production has encouraged the development of group formations that cut across the traditional lines of caste and kinship. The thesis offers parallel analyses of the social alignments present in a village and the ideological perspectives (worldviews) on which these alignments are based, as well as the ideological orientations of a number of individuals who have been chosen as representative of different social alignments, whether of caste or of class. I focus in particular on the fluidity of social groups and on the importance of the context for their emergence. The picture that emerges is one of extreme complexity but of overall coherence, in which structural relations, groupe experiences, individual experiences, and differing worldviews combine in an interactive process through which significant but subtle changes in village social formation are occurring. The research on which this dissertation is based was conducted during two periods of fieldwork in a village I am calling Neemghar. The dissertation is based on intensive participant observation and in-depth conversations.

Résumé

Cette thèse examine les rapports entre caste, classe et idéologie dans un village au nord de l'Inde dans le contexte du changement économique rapide. Une des questions fondamentales qu'on adresse est de savoir si le mode de production capitaliste dans la production agricole a encouragé le développement de formations de groupe qui coupent à travers les distinctions traditionnelles de parenté et de caste. La thèse analyse de façon parallèle les formations sociales présentes dans un village et les perspectives idéologiques (visions du monde) qui appuient ces formations, ainsi que les orientations idéologiques de certains individus tenus comme représentatifs au sein des différentes formations, que ce soit de caste ou de classe. Je me concentre en particulier sur la fluidité des groupes sociaux, ainsi que l'importance du contexte pour leur émergence. L'image qui ressort de cette recherche, image cohérente tout en étant de grande complexité, est une dans laquelle les rapports structuraux, les expériences de groupe, celles de l'individu et des visions du monde différentes interagissent dans un processus de transformation subtile mais significative dans la formation sociale villageoise. La recherche sur laquelle cette thèse se base a été conduite pendant deux périodes de terrain dans le village que j'appelle Neemghar. La thèse est basée sur l'observation participante intensive et sur des entrevues en profondeur.

Chapter 1

Introduction

Throughout much of the last decade, I have been attempting to develop an understanding of Indian Hindu society. Neemghar, the village of my ancestors and my parents, is best known to me, however. Neemghar is one of thirty villages which make up the Dholpura Block of Agra District, western part of Uttar Pradesh (a detailed profile of the village is presented in chapter 2).

During my second period of field research in 1990, I found Neemghar to be a village in flux. Farming was becoming increasingly entrepreneurial, the price of land was skyrocketing, new businesses were being developed, and new lines of communication were opening up. Barriers and boundaries of many different kinds—geographic, political, and social—were being broken down and refined. In some instances new social categories were forming; in other cases older ones were disintegrating or being reshaped. These changes affected everyone in the village. Yet the effects were not uniform. Various categories and even individuals within the same categories experienced the changes differently. Indeed, the dramatic differences in the ways people interpreted and responded to these changes are striking. These differences reflect fundamentally contrasting economic choices and strategies for adapting to the changes. Thus for example, while some villagers focused primarily upon the village itself in their pursuit of economic and political activities, others looked increasingly beyond its boundaries, seeking out new economic opportunities in urban as well as rural contexts; and while some strove to maintain their status and power through the traditional bonds of patronage and clientage, others were quick to break those bonds in favor of more contractual, short-term

relationships whenever possible.

This is not, however, to suggest the existence of any neat dichotomy between those who were traditional in their orientations and those who were modern. Rather, what one observed were different responses to the changing environment—all of them forward-looking in some respects and all of them informed by the past as well. While the responses available to individuals and groups were structured and limited by the socio-economic framework of the village, these responses also had a profound impact on social and political relations in the village. In order to understand the direction the changes in the village were taking and the lines along which new social categories were forming, one must understand the relationship between the strategic options and the socio-economic framework.

When one considers this relationship, what emerges is a complex, but coherent, picture of interactions among certain groups, key individuals, and institutions which, taken together, are critical in defining the socio-economic climate of the village. In this thesis I describe and analyze these interactions. Through this analysis I document the kinds of changes in social relations that occurred in Neemghar in conjunction with the economic changes of the Green Revolution. Of course, the Green Revolution did not occur in a vacuum. The economic changes that are associated with it have been accompanied by, for instance, political changes aimed at broadening popular participation in government, rectifying the inequalities and injustices that have been perpetuated by the caste system, and distributing land more equitably among the rural population. These changes include the institution of universal adult franchise, the elimination of caste as a legal category, the development of affirmative action policies in education and government for the members of the lower castes, and the imposition of land ownership ceilings and laws protecting

tenants' rights. Any analysis of changing patterns of social stratification in rural India must take into account these changes in addition to the economic changes of the Green Revolution. Thus, while these changes are not the primary focus of my analysis, they are incorporated in it.

Later in the chapter I will review some of the major approaches to analyzing the effects of the Green Revolution on Indian society and social structure, and I will offer some criticism that serves as the starting point for my own study. However, before examining debates that have been specific to the Green Revolution, it is necessary to critically review the major approaches to caste in India.

Theories of Caste

One of the most fascinating aspects of Indian society is the caste system, with its ranked endogamous groupings, its emphasis on purity and impurity, and its ambiguous relation of power to authority. The nature of this system, and the fundamental base on which it rests, has been the source of much debate among anthropologists. Three major schools of thought—the pre-Dumontian structural-functional approach, the Dumontian structural sociology of India, and Marriott's ethnosociological approach—have developed, since the beginning of the Green Revolution, around the relation of Indian cultural traditions to caste (Khare 1990).[1] The first school, taking a functionalist approach, treats the caste system as a system of social relations among closed status groups. Proponents of this school include Bailey (1963), Berreman (1979), and Beteille (1965, 1996). The second school, taking a structuralist approach, treats caste as a system of ideas. This school is centered in the work of Dumont (1980). The third school, taking an ethnosociological approach, treats caste as essentially transaction based. This school is centered in the work

of Marriott (1985, 1989).

While the functionalist and the structuralist schools begin by defining the critical features of the system as hierarchy, separation, and interdependence, they arrive at very different conclusions about the true nature of the system. The members of the functionalist school are concerned with social relations between groups. For them, caste is fundamentally a system of social stratification, comparable to other forms of social stratification—a class system, for example—although possibly unique in the degree of separation and closure among the strata. The questions they ask concern how castes act and interact as groups and how political, economic, and ritual relations are organized within the structure imposed by the caste system.

In contrast to the functional approach to caste, advocates of the structuralist approach, led by Dumont, abstract the ideological content of the caste system from social context. Thus, Dumont argues that it is almost impossible to define caste or subcaste in the sense of a real group because different groups emerge at different levels of the system. What is constant is not the units that comprise the caste system, but rather the principles that govern the arrangement of the units. Thus, underlying the diversity of the caste system that one finds throughout India is a unifying set of fixed principles, and it is for this reason that Dumont asserts that far more than a 'group' in the ordinary sense, caste is a state of mind (1980: 34; for a lucid and precise presentation of Dumont's major thesis, see Madan 1996; for a sustained effort to apply Dumont's major thesis, see Moffat 1979; for a critique of Dumont's major thesis, see, for example, Barnett 1977; Beteille 1986, 1987; Daniel 1984; Deliege 1988, 1992, 1993, 1994; Dirks 1987; Jaer 1987; Kolenda 1997; Marriott 1969; Mines 1988, 1994; Mines and Gourishankar 1990; Mitra 1994; Quigley 1995; Raheja 1988a, 1988b; Searle-Chatterjee 1994; Tambiah 1972, 1973; Unnithan

1994. But here I am not interested in reviewing Dumont's many critics).

Further, following Bouglé (1908), Dumont argues that the caste system can be reduced fundamentally to a single religious principle—namely, the one-dimensional hierarchy of relative purity and impurity, formulated after certain classical Hindu notions (see Dumont 1980, especially Postface).

> Bouglé had defined the caste system as consisting of hierarchically arranged hereditary groups, separated from each other in certain respects (caste endogamy, restrictions on eating together and on physical contact) but interdependent in others (traditional division of labor). Dumont stresses the importance of recognizing these three features or principles as mutually entailed, resting on one fundamental conception, for the atomization into simple elements is the student's need and not a characteristic of the system itself. What we need in order to transcend the distinctions we make is a single true principle (Madan 1996: 76).

Thus, in Dumont's view, the three fundamental characteristics of the caste system—hierarchy, separation, and interdependence—are all based on that key opposition, the binary opposition of the pure and the impure.

It is important to note that these two approaches to caste are not simply mutually compatible analyses of the same system from different perspectives—the functional and the ideological. Rather, they present radically opposing and irreconcilable understandings of the systems. The fundamental conflict of these viewpoints is clear in their different interpretations of the rise of the caste association—a formal organization of a single caste for the purpose of the social, political, and educational advancement of its members.[2]

Functionalists view the rise of caste associations as a sign of the breakdown of the caste system, for caste associations are autonomous political units competing with each other as equals for access to the same resources. Thus, while castes maintain their separation, they lose the other two fundamental characteristics of the caste system—hierarchy and interdependence—so that while castes as entities remain, the caste system does not.

Most members of the structuralist school agree that with the rise of caste associations there has been a transition in some cases from interdependence to competition among castes. In this situation, Dumont notes, each caste is no longer part of a whole, but is rather an individual confronting other individuals (1980: 227). At the same time, however, Dumont argues that this transition is not really an important one because it is concerned solely with the political and economic domains and not with the religious domains that encompasses them. Thus, he concludes, the change has occurred only in minor areas, while the fundamental system itself remains intact and unchanged.

There are problems with both approaches. In particular, the functionalist approach, which posits at least a rough congruence among the economic, political, and ritual statuses of each caste, cannot account well for the peculiar rigidities at the extremes of the system, where the high ritual status of the Brahmans and the low ritual status of the untouchables remain fixed, regardless of the political or economic positions of these castes. On the other hand, the structuralist approach can account well for little besides these peculiar rigidities. That is, by positing an absolute separation between status and power, with power subordinate to status, the structuralists account for the invariability of the high ritual status accorded to Brahmans and the low ritual status accorded to untouchables, but this theoretical position is less convincing for the middle ranges of the caste system where ritual, economic, and political status do seem to be interrelated.

This leads us to another major attempt to study the caste system: McKim Marriott's ethnosociology that grew out of a series of attempts spelled out over thirty years. With his early preference for interactional over attributional theories,[3] Marriott (compare 1959 and 1989) claimed to provide an alternative transactional approach to study and understand the caste system from within.

Marriott's ethnosociological approach incorporates some radical epistemological points of departure. After proposing an interactionist explanation of castes in India (see Marriott 1959), Marriott reveals, through a series of exercises (1968, 1976b, 1987, 1989), and through a series of analyses of caste ranking transactions on matrices (1959, 1960, 1965, 1968, 1976b), his preference for, and a dependence on, certain formal sociological tools, techniques, and three-dimensional representations of transactions; they correspond to "classical Hindu categories[, too,] while permitting interpretation of ethnographic findings" (Leavitt 1992: 11).

For Marriott, caste is essentially transaction based, and caste hierarchy is the result of the maintenance of ranking through transaction. As he himself acknowledges (Marriott 1998), Marriott's view of caste relations is illustrated in the mature (Marriott's word) model presented in Raheja's three-dimensional analysis of relationships, which I discuss below, in multicaste villages of Uttar Pradesh (Raheja 1988a),[4] the main findings of which are summarized in Raheja (1989; Raheja and Gold 1994) and in a tightly argued review article on caste, kingship, and dominance (1988b). By meticulous ethnography Raheja explores villagers' understanding that their transactions involve three variables—mutuality, hierarchy, and centrality.

Participants in a given action may stress the relevance of any one or more of these

> variables according to their perceptions and contextual purposes. Mutuality is thought to require and to create interpersonal openness by reciprocal sharing. Hierarchy is effected by asymmetric acts of feeding, serving, etc. Centrality is said and seen to be increased by those who dispose of inauspiciousness (asubha)—signs of potential evil, sin, and death—in the form of prestations (called dana). Those who accept dana—gods, Brahmans, priests, wife-takers, barbers, sweepers, et al.—are understood by their acceptance to be made peripheral and (if they cannot dispose of their receipts) inauspicious to, but not sharers with, or of rank below the donor (Marriott 1998: 7-8).

This model provides an important critique of Dumont's implication that the ideal of hierarchy is widely shared by diverse castes in Indian village society. Raheja replaces Dumont's emphasis on hierarchy—an idea benefiting Brahmans who are highest in ritual status—with an emphasis on centrality of the dominant caste[5]—an idea benefiting Ksatriyas in the village she studied (for a hostile reaction to Raheja's model, see Toffin 1990). In her examination of ritual gift-giving, Raheja discovered that it was centrality—not hierarchy—which was of most importance. She found that ritually high Brahmans, as well as ritually low Untouchables, like Barbers and Sweepers, were both given gifts by landholding Gujars (representatives of the Ksatriya varna) in order to remove inauspiciousness from the Gujar caste. In this Raheja follows her Gujar friends in emphasizing that Brahmans and Barbers and Sweepers were all alike in that they were 'vessels' for the removal of the inauspiciousness of the Gujar jajman (1988: 32). Rather than emphasizing the superiority of Brahmans to Untouchables, she emphasizes their similarity in relation to the landholding Gujar caste.

Raheja makes this argument by examining prestation rituals. At Gujar weddings, for instance, both Brahmans and Barbers and Sweepers have a ritual role. Raheja (1988a: 147, 1989: 85-56) argues that in accepting gifts, there is little hierarchical distinction between high—Brahmans—and low—Barbers and Sweepers—but rather a focus on both accepting the gifts for the well-being of Gujar householders. Raheja (1988a: 162-65, 1989: 83-84) discusses harvest rituals in similar terms. Both Brahmans and Barbers, she argues, receive a portion of the harvest in order to assure that the harvest will be auspicious and bountiful. Any inauspiciousness hindrances in the grain are transferred in gifts to Brahman and Barber recipients. In these harvest rituals, too, Raheja claims, it is the centrality of the Gujar caste, rather than the hierarchy of high caste over low, which is most important.

Raheja (1988a: 20-21, 1989: 97-98) argues, then, that Gujars see themselves as standing at the center of the village life. As landholders, they cultivate the land, providing sustenance not only for themselves but for the entire village as well. Raheja argues that "Gujars see themselves as having the role of sacrificer and protector of the village. When the Gujar caste's auspiciousness is assured, this ensures the well-being of the entire community. Her data indicates, she says, the centrality of gifts transferring inauspiciousness to their recipients and bringing about the auspiciousness, well-being, and protection of the person, the family, and the house and the village" (Raheja 1988a: xii).

Raheja goes further than this, however, arguing that this idea that Gujars are the center of village life and that only their well-being ensures the well-being of the village as a whole is shared by non-Gujar castes: "Gujars see themselves and are seen by all others as standing at the center of village life. They cultivate the land and through the many

prestations that they give to other castes, they not only provide the grain for village sustenance but bring about the well-being and auspiciousness of the entire village" (Raheja 1988a: 20-21). Raheja argues, then, that both Gujar and non-Gujar castes see Gujar as central and aim their ritual actions at preserving the well-being of the Gujar caste and, hence, of the village as a whole.

While Raheja (1988: 244-47, 166-67) does cite some interviews with both Brahmans and Untouchables which appear to indicate a focus on the centrality of the Gujar caste, her evidence is not persuasive for several reasons. Briefly: First, the fact that Raheja was allied with the Gujar caste in the village may have prevented her from getting to know other groups as well as she got to know members of the Gujar caste. She not only lived in a Gujar family but was also expected to act as a Gujar daughter. Given that members of other castes must have seen her as allied with Gujars in the village, it is likely that they may have told her things they expected Gujars to want to hear, mimicking the beliefs of the dominant Gujar caste. Second, Raheja's evidence of Untouchable beliefs is largely based on a very select group of castes—those who maintain their livelihood from ritual work for the dominant caste. Most of Raheja's consideration is devoted to Barber, Sweeper, and Washerman castes, and all her interviews indicating Untouchable acceptance of Gujar centrality are with these castes. While these service castes are ritually important, they are not as numerically important as the Chamars in the village, who earn their livelihood by doing agricultural labor for Gujar families.[6] Third, and finally, while the centrality of the Gujar caste may be the dominant principle in prestation rituals, it may not inform the understanding of Untouchable castes in their everyday lives.[8]

However, Raheja rightly moves away from a focus on hierarchy as the principle that is

embraced by all groups in rural Hindu society. She demonstrates that when a non-Brahman caste, like the Gujars, is the dominant landholding caste in a village, it is likely to embrace a principle other than hierarchy. Raheja provides an excellent description of her Gujar respondents' view of caste and documents that this view is different from the hierarchical one that is often seen as shared by diverse castes in Indian village society.[9]

A more detailed critique of these three schools is unnecessary here. Rather, my purpose has been simply to outline the terms and major questions of the debate that shaped much of the anthropological literature about India since the beginning of the Green Revolution. Explicitly or implicitly, most issues in Indian anthropology eventually rested and rest on some aspect of the positions formulated by the three schools, with caste continuing to be the key focus. For example, arguments about the appropriate unit of anthropological analysis in India also resolved in part around the issue of the nature of caste. One side in this debate argued that the Indian village, while not an entirely self-contained unit, nonetheless exhibits sufficient intra-village interdependence and separation from other villages to justify its choice as the unit of analysis. The interdependence that Marriott and others point to within Indian villages is based primarily on the social relations of caste and kinship, and thus the argument hinges on a conception of caste as a system of social relations. In contrast, Dumont and Pocock suggested that an obsession with defining a unit of study, as if this were the prior requisite to an analysis of the society (1957b: 26), has led anthropologists to attribute to the physical and demographic entity that is the village a sociological reality that it does not possess. Rather, Dumont and Pocock argue that territorial relations are invariably secondary to the two fundamental ideas of kinship—in the form of a pair of allies (brothers-in-law)—and caste—in the form of a pair composed of a superior and an inferior. The basic structure of Indian society, then, is

to be found not in localized social relations and interactions, but rather in the interaction and interrelation of these pan-Indian ideas, and a whole new approach to sociological analysis in India, based on the unity of India is suggested. This unity of ideas and values makes the entire Indian society the appropriate object of study (Dumont and Pocock 1957a). This is not to suggest that anthropologists should not take smaller subunits of the society as the immediate source of their data, but rather that they should analyze these data from the perspective of the fundamental relations that define Indian society as a whole. When anthropologists approach the study of Indian society in this way, the empirical diversity recedes in the background, and an almost monotonous similarity springs forth (Dumont and Pocock 1957a: 10). Here, then, the definition of caste as a system of ideas is a key element in the argument.

I will now turn my attention to examining how anthropologists and other social scientists have dealt with social and economic change in rural India, before the Green Revolution as well as after the introduction of its new technology.

Caste and Social Change

Long before the dramatic innovations of the Green Revolution, Indian society had experienced extensive and radical socio-economic changes. With colonization, Indian agriculture was increasingly integrated into a wider international market. A capitalist mode of production began to penetrate the Indian countryside as a more commercially oriented, cash-based economy became dominant. At the same time, administrative changes introduced by the British both increased the importance of the village as a clearly demarcated administrative unit and concentrated power in the hand of a small village elite (Kedia and Sinha 1994). Later, with Independence, the Indian government began its

efforts to establish a participatory democracy, based on egalitarian principles, through the introduction of universal adult franchise, the establishment of the democratic institutions of Panchayat Raj in the villages, and the legislative abolition of caste and untouchability.

The effects of these political and economic changes on rural social organization have been a focus of much anthropological work. Many studies have emphasized the effects of these changes on caste in particular, in part because caste has been viewed as so fundamentally antithetical to the development of capitalism (Sharma 1980, 1993; Weber 1992) and to economic and political modernization in general. As Vohra (1997) notes, given the caste system, India's success at modernization was rather unexpected. Thus, "the combination of thoroughgoing mysticism with rigidly ascribed status would seem to provide a singularly unpromising setting for modernization, for, whatever else the latter may consist in, it is generally agreed to involve a fundamental commitment to technological innovation and a degree of universalism in the allocation of occupational roles" (1997: 26, citing Fallers 1973: 109). Nor surprisingly then, many social scientists have been concerned with the relationship between caste and economic change and have centered on such questions as whether caste actually does operate as a barrier to modernization, whether the institution of caste is changing or even breaking down entirely in the context of economic and political change, and what the relationship is between caste status, political status, and changing economic position.

Some studies in this vein have created fairly sharp dichotomies between contrasting categories such as traditional versus modern, ascribed status versus achieved status, and economic relations based on status versus economic relations based on contract.[10] For example, Epstein (1962) analyzes two villages in the process of economic change. In one village the change has led to new and diverse economic opportunities, and the result has

been the development of a more modern social structure increasingly based on achieved status, wage labor, and a more cosmopolitan and entrepreneurial perspective. In contrast, the second village has experienced unilinear change that has served to support rather than alter the traditional social structure, with positions based on ascribed status, economic relations primarily based on hereditary ties, and little in the way of economic experimentation or entrepreneurship.

In a somewhat different approach to similar questions, Singh (1989) examines a village in North India to analyze the effects of increasing integration into the wider economic and administrative spheres of the state—in his terms, the economic and political frontiers. He concentrates particularly on the relations among caste status, economic position, and political power. He argues that in the past, when the village was more autonomous from the state, there was a congruence among these three spheres. With the integration of the village into the wider economy and political administration, however, this congruence became attenuated in some cases as the members of some castes of low status became wealthy and began to challenge the political power of the members of higher status castes. Singh argues that two different kinds of changes occurred under these circumstances. On the one hand, some castes, particularly those in the middle range of the caste hierarchy, were able to change their positions within the ritual hierarchy and thus maintain congruence among their caste status, economic position, and political power. With this type of change, the traditional social structure remains intact although the positions of specific castes within the hierarchy have changed. On the other hand, however, when the economic positions of certain castes changed, the castes no longer really fit into the traditional social structure of the village at all. Members of these castes increasingly looked beyond the village boundaries toward state apparatuses for economic

and political aid and validation. This was the case for one group of untouchables, who, upon bettering their economic position, were precluded from raising their caste status by the peculiarly rigid barrier that untouchability creates. It was also the case for a caste of distillers, although in this instance the localization of the caste system was the barrier to continued integration in the traditional village structure, for their economic activities brought them into a wider social context in which caste is irrelevant and the juridical authority rests with the Government. Thus, Singh concludes, localization and untouchability are the rocks against which beats the tide of the new economy.

Finally, in a study of changing patterns of social stratification in a village in Tamil Nadu, Beteille (1996) separates the categories of caste, class, and political power and analyzes the effects of economic change on each of these systems individually. Of the three systems, however, caste continues to provide the primary structure for social organization. In contrast, classes and class interests are not well defined, mainly because a single individual often simultaneously holds more than one conflicting economic position—that of a tenant and a landowner, for example—while the new democratic institutions through which political power might be realized continue to be weak. Thus, Beteille concludes that political relations continue to follow the lines of caste rather than class.

I have described these three studies to illustrate a common theme that runs through much of the anthropological literature on economic change in rural India. While the three differ somewhat in their approaches, they share a common orientation towards caste as the dominant structural feature of rural social organization, and their questions center on the effects of political and economic change on the caste system.

As rural economic relations continued to change, however, and particularly with the

rapid intensification of these changes during the early years of the Green Revolution, many scholars began to rephrase their questions. Purely economic concepts and categories began to replace caste as the central focus of analysis in the work of many social scientists.

I do not mean to imply a strict chronology here, however. Certainly, caste-oriented analyses have continued to appear in the literature up to the present, while analyses of more specifically economic categories, such as those I will discuss in the next section, are not new. My purpose is simply to outline some of the major themes that have arisen during the course of economic change in rural India, without attributing an historical priority to any one of them. At the same time, however, I do note that the emphasis on one set of questions over another at any given time is not random, but rather tends to be linked to particular historical contexts as well as to the vagaries of academic trends.

Economics and Social Change

The Green Revolution promised a great deal—abundant supplies of foodgrains and security against famine for the first time in India. Yet the technological innovations of the revolution were introduced into an agrarian social structure characterized by extreme inequality and exploitation. There was no assurance that the benefits of the Green Revolution would be spread evenly throughout the entire population, and, indeed, there was good reason to assume that they would not be. Moreover, it was widely recognized that the Green Revolution would itself lead to changes in agrarian relations, although predictions about the direction of these changes varied considerably. Some scholars took the grim view that levels of exploitation, disparities in wealth, and conflict between the haves and have nots would only increase with the innovations of the Green Revolution

(see the discussion in Hazell 1991; Vaidyananthan 1994). Others anticipated the evolution of agrarian society under the Green Revolution in much happier terms, with most of the population benefiting—albeit perhaps unequally—from the changes (see the discussion in Hazell 1991; Vaidyananthan 1994). Starting from either perspective, however, many scholars began to focus on specifically economic categories, asking who is better off and who is worse off as a result of the economic changes of the Green Revolution. Thus, relations of class rather than caste became a major focus of attention.

As with the study of caste, the study of class in rural India has been approached from a variety of perspectives. As Beteille (1974) has pointed out, studies of class, far more than caste, lend themselves to quantification. Thus much of the literature on class in rural India is based on macro-level statistical data from census reports and other rural surveys. This is particularly true of much of the analysis that has been presented during the course of the by now well-known modes of production debate. The debate, which began in the late sixties and continued for more than a decade, carried on primarily by Marxist scholars from India—with occasional entries into the fray by their European and American colleagues—in the pages of the Economic and Political Weekly, was one of the major discussions of agrarian social structure in India. The decade of the eighties saw a number of reviews of the debate, while in the nineties contributions have been in the nature of discussion and development of its specific aspects. The articles which constituted the corpus of the debate have been brought together in Agrarian Relations and Accumulation: The Mode of Production Debate in India (Patnaik 1990). The discussion was complex and often dense, and I can summarize it only briefly here (for an excellent history and review of the debate, see Currie 1984, 1992; A. Thorner 1982; Patnaik 1990d).[11]

The debate was triggered by a series of articles by D. Thorner (1980) in which he contrasted the widespread economic stagnation that he had observed in the Indian countryside in the fifties with the tremendous enterprise and willingness to experiment that he found among cultivators in the late sixties. Thorner argued that this change signaled the rise of a truly capitalist agriculture in India and that the entrepreneurial cultivators he had met formed a class of capitalist farmers. Thorner's article met with widespread criticism among Marxist social scientists in India. Many of them felt that his assessment of the changes was too positive[12] and that the capitalist farmers that he identified represented only a minuscule and insignificant portion of the population (Rudra, Majid, and Talib 1990).

Two major questions arose out of Thorner's articles and the ensuing criticism. First, what is the dominant mode of production in Indian agriculture today? Can it be characterized as capitalist, semi-feudal, or pre-capitalist, or does it take some other form that relates specifically to the Indian colonial experience? Second, what are the primary classes in rural India and how can they best be defined?

Discussion of the first of these questions began with an argument between Rudra (1990a; Rao 1990; Rudra, Majid, and Talib 1990) and Patnaik (1990a, 1990b) about whether Thorner's capitalist farmers exist. Rudra developed a statistical model through which capitalist farmers could be identified. The model is based on a set of five criteria including percentage of land given out in lease, amount of wage labor employed, amount of modern equipment, amount of produce sold in the market, and amount of cash profit per acre of land. Rudra looked for positive correlations between each pair of these criteria to identify capitalist farmers. He found no strong correlation, and he concluded that there in not a clearly defined group of capitalist farmers in India, and hence it is inappropriate

to talk of capitalist development. Patnaik (1990a) argues that Rudra's approach is ahistorical and nondialectic and that ultimately he bases his definition of peasant classes on the superficial statistical criterion of size of holding rather than examining the structure of the relations of production. In contrast, Patnaik looks at the level of surplus accumulation and reinvestment in agriculture to identify a capitalist mode of production and concludes that Indian agriculture is indeed becoming capitalist.

Others entered the argument with the contention that relations of production in India are best characterized as semifeudal (see Hazell 1991; Vaidyanathan 1994), based on high level of tenancy, extreme indebtedness of small tenants, a concentration of usury and landownership in a single class, and a dearth of accessible markets for small tenants.

Finally, a third position, first articulated in an important article by Alavi (1990a), points to the colonial experience of India and its integration into the world economy during the colonial and postcolonial eras and argues that a distinctive colonial mode of production—neither feudal nor capitalist—resulted in the context of this integration. One feature of this colonial mode of production is the existence of very large numbers of extremely small landholdings—below even subsistence levels—which creates a supply of cheap agricultural and industrial labor. As Dreze and Sen (1995) point out, however, it is not quite clear to which period of Indian history the colonial mode of production applies in Alavi's conception. Later, Alavi (1990b) modified his views somewhat, abandoning the concept of the colonial mode of production and arguing that under colonialism Indian relations of production were transformed into peripheral capitalism. By early eighties most of the protagonists in the debate over the mode of production in India agreed that some form of capitalism—albeit possibly deformed or peripheral—is the dominant mode of production in Indian agriculture at present.

In the matter of the second major question—what are the primary rural classes and how are they best defined—such consensus has never been reached. This second question has turned out to be even more problematic than the first, in part because the variability of social relations in rural India and the tendency of social categories to overlap result in an almost infinite array of possible social groupings. The result has been the presentation of a myriad class schemata by various scholars, with very little consensus about the criteria used to identify the classes. As with the modes of production arguments, although some local-level data has been used to support various positions, most of the analysis continues to be based on large-scale national and regional surveys (see, for instance, Dreze and Sen 1997).

Mencher (1994, see also 1974), addressing the question of why peasant organizations have not developed in the Chingleput District of Tamil Nadu as they have in Thanjavur District, divides the rural population of Chingleput District into six classes. These classes are based on various socio-economic characteristics such as amount of land owned and type of work performed in relation to the land. Thus, members of the landless class own no land and work as daily wage laborers, permanent laborers, or sharecroppers; poor peasants own a small amount of land but must supplement their income from it with occasional wage labor; middle peasants own enough land to be self-sufficient, occasionally employing laborers and rarely working as daily laborers themselves; rich farmers have enough land to produce a surplus, part of which they can store against a bad year and part of which they can sell to purchase consumer goods; capitalist farmers and traditional landlords all own sufficient land to generate a large surplus, and they are distinguished as subclasses of a single class by the way they organize production—rich farmers hire labor but also work on the land themselves, capitalist farmers hire labor but

do not work on the land themselves, and traditional landlords give out most of their land in various kinds of leasing arrangements; finally, Mencher identifies an indeterminate class of large landholders who own a great deal of land—more than 30 acres—but she does not describe their working relation to the land because there are so few of them. It is important to note that while Mencher does discuss the relations of the members of the first five classes to agricultural production, the fundamental criterion that she uses to assign individuals to classes is size of landholding alone. Thus, although she notes that the landless may work as daily laborers, permanent laborers, or sharecroppers—three very different relations of production—she does not distinguish among these three types of labor in defining the class. Similarly, although she divides the class of rich farmers, capitalist farmers, and traditional landlords into subclasses based on how they organize production on their land, she identifies all of them as members of a single class based on the amount of land they own.

Mencher uses census data and data from her own surveys to determine the relative strength of each of these classes in the district. She finds that over 40 percent of the population are landless laborers, and that the remaining cultivators are mainly poor and middle peasants. Only a very few people fall into the top three classes.

Patnaik (1990b, 1990c) provides a rather different formulation for identifying rural classes. In contrast to Mencher, she argues that schemes that rely heavily on size of holding to identify class position are misleading because they do not take into account the increasing concentration of the means of production that characterizes the development of capitalism in Indian agriculture. With this increasing concentration, size of landholding alone does not imply a specific organization of production. Thus, she argues: "Size of farm, even as a rough indicator of rich peasant status, is no longer good enough

in the present situation when techniques are changing and intensive cultivation by some groups is taking place. If production techniques are intensified then a farm may get smaller in terms of area, and at the same time get bigger as an economic unit, expand in terms of output and the extent of use of hired relative to family labour" (1990b: 70). Rather than looking at size of landholding alone, then, Patnaik argues that it is necessary to examine instead the way in which the process of production is organized. In order to do this she develops a labor-exploitation ratio based on how much labor is hired in or out by a household, how much land is rented in or out, and how much family labor is used. Using this ratio she identifies two exploiting classes, landlords and rich peasants, and two exploited classes, poor peasants and full-time laborers. She divides the landlords, rich peasants, and poor peasants each into two further subclasses, based on the dominant form of exploitation for each. Thus, for example, she distinguishes between capitalist landlords who accomplish the majority of their production through hiring labor rather than renting out land, and feudal landlords, who produce at least as much through renting out land as they do through hiring labor. Patnaik stresses that her scheme for identifying the rural classes focuses on the relations of production that members of the peasantry must enter into with one another.

Rudra (1990b), taking still another approach, agrees with Patnaik that relations of production must be considered central to the analysis of rural classes, but he argues that fundamentally classes are defined by class contradictions. Thus, not all relations of production define classes (Rudra 1990b: 251). He argues that by this definition there are only two classes in rural India—a class of large landowners and a class of agricultural laborers. Agricultural laborers include everyone who works for hire on the land—whether or not they own land—plus poor tenants who do not hire labor themselves. Large

landowners include those who lease out most of their land, those who hire labor for most of their land, and even those who work on their own land in addition to hiring labor. Rudra dismisses all of the rural population that does not fit into either of these two classes—that is, middle peasants who neither hire in labor nor work as laborers—arguing that they are not in a relation of contradiction to either the class of landlords or the class of agricultural laborers, and hence they do not themselves constitute a class.

Mencher, Patnaik, and Rudra provide just three examples of the various schemes that have been presented for defining a set of rural classes. Most of the others have fallen somewhere between the radical twofold division suggested by Rudra and the larger numbers of classes suggested by both Mencher and Patnaik. Each scheme proposes somewhat different criteria for establishing class divisions which, in turn, lead to somewhat different configurations of classes.

As A. Thorner points out:

> This lack of accord on the array of rural classes should not surprise us. Apart from marked regional differences, it would seem that the class configuration which one sees depends primarily on one's point of view Researchers trying variously to explain why a land reform has or has not actually been implemented; when agricultural development programmes work and when they don't; why particular candidates or parties receive the votes of specific village groups; where reform or revolutionary movements arise and spread, or where they are nipped in the bud; should obviously not be expected to come up with identical list [sic] of classes. There is not even a consensus as to the identity of the typical producer. (1982: 2064).

Certainly, the different perspectives and different aims on the part of the various researchers must account for some of the lack of accord that we find on the issues of rural class structure. Certainly too, given the great local variation found in rural India, it is quite possibly counter-productive even to attempt to come up with a single class structure that encompasses all of rural India.

Yet, there are other, more fundamental, problems as well in the analysis of rural classes and modes of production that we have examined. Most of the dynamics are carried out at the macro level, based on survey data that have been collected at the national, state, or, at best, regional level. Such a reliance on large-scale surveys tends not only to mask local variation, but also to encourage the formulation of highly abstract conceptual categories that often have more bearing on preexisting theoretical perspectives than on actual social relations. Thus, despite the emphasis by most researchers involved in the debate on focusing on relations of production rather than on categories defined by purely statistical measures, few analyses shed any light on these relations as they are actually experienced by the rural population.

Equally problematic, most of the analyses focus exclusively on economic issues, while issues of caste and culture are largely ignored. Yet caste is an integral aspect of rural Indian society, and an analysis of class that excludes it is surely incomplete. Indeed, as Kedia and Sinha note that the more recent research on agrarian relations has paid increasing attention to elements of consciousness and culture, with special reference to caste, they go on to argue that "one of the weaknesses of Marxist studies on India has been precisely a failure, perhaps even an unwillingness, to deal adequately with this basic facet of Indian society. This is one of the directions which future debate can most

fruitfully explore" (1994: 64).

While the modes of production debate was being waged by Marxists, others were becoming interested in rural classes as well. Beteille was one of the first anthropologist to study rural class relations in India explicitly. In a collection of essays on the topic (Beteille 1974), he argues that anthropologists have placed far too great an emphasis on caste in their studies of rural India and that this emphasis has led to a distorted view of Indian society.[13] Thus: "Detailed studies of caste at the local level have greatly enriched our understanding of social life in contemporary India. But too great a preoccupation with this problem has also led the social anthropologist to develop his own conception of Indian society, a conception which many have criticized as being narrow and one-sided. Social anthropologists have tended to relate all cleavages and conflicts to those of caste and to minimize or ignore the role of other factors in society" (Beteille 1974: 23). Because of this emphasis on caste, Beteille argues, castes have been taken as the sole units of interaction in Indian villages, while groups of any other kind have been ignored.

Yet, Beteille points out, there are ways to view the organization of Indian villages other than in terms of caste. In particular, very often the Indian village is clearly differentiated in terms of ownership, control and use of land so that in addition to peasant proprietors, subsisting mainly by family labour, there are other social classes above and below (1974: 25). It is important to understand that this differentiation, which is based on a system of class relations, is entirely distinct from differentiation by caste in Beteille's view. It is these relations—that center around the ownership, control, and use of land—that we must examine in order to understand class in rural India.

Two aspects of class are particularly important to Beteille. First, class must be viewed as a system of social relations, rather than as a set of discrete entities defined by

quantitative criteria. Beteille contrasts this anthropological view of class with the statistical view, frequently used in large-scale socio-economic surveys, and with the legal view, frequently used by economic historians. He criticizes the statistical view—which might, for example, group people into classes based on the quantity of land they own—both because it requires the false assumption that everyone who falls into the same statistical class must play the same social role and because it ignores entirely the social relations among the statistical classes, that is, the nature of the rights, duties and obligations which form the basis of their mutual interaction (1974: 33). He criticizes the legal view—which focuses on legally defined social categories covering wide geographical ranges—because it does not necessarily correspond at all closely to the social categories that actually exist and the system that really operates at the local level.

This leads to the second aspect of class that Beteille stresses: Class must be approached from the perspective of native categories. He argues that externally created conceptions of class categories, such as those used in Indian censuses, "derive from a conceptual framework which is appropriate to the study of industry but not to the kind of agriculture which is commonly practiced in India" (1974: 46). Rather than using such categories, then, one must examine the categories used by the people themselves in their own communities when they refer to the relations that center around the ownership, control, and use of land.

Beteille anticipates a possible objection to this approach on the part of some anthropologists, who will argue that "the distinction into classes does not correspond to divisions in rural society as perceived by the people themselves [and] caste rather than class represents the true divisions of this society" (1974: 33). He responds on the abstract level by arguing that people must sometimes perceive the divisions centered around the

ownership, control, and use of land as distinct from the divisions of caste because the two are not in perfect correspondence. He responds on the concrete level by using an example from West Bengal, noting that the people there do indeed use a set of terms—distinct from caste terms—to define relations centered around the land. These terms correspond closely to Beteille's conception of class, and he concludes that the native categories of the Indian villager, the categories in terms of which he thinks and acts, are not exhausted by caste; they also relate in significant ways to what we understand by class (1974: 49).

As different as Beteille's approach to class is from the various approaches taken by the scholars involved in the modes of production debate, it is open to some of the same criticism. In particular, Beteille too makes a radical distinction among the systems of caste and class. He treats each one as analytically discrete, and he assumes that there is no significant interaction, much less interdependence, among the two systems. Indeed, he seems to argue that one of the systems, caste, has been effectively analyzed already, and it remains for anthropologists and sociologists to turn their attention, finally, to the second. Thus, defining class as being fundamentally concerned with material interests, he makes the following appeal: "A careful sociological study of interests in agrarian societies needs very urgently to be done. Louis Dumont has examined Indian society in terms of its structures of ideas. We have made some progress in developing a sociology of ideas for India. There should be some place by the side of this for a sociology of interests" (Beteille 1974: 55).[14]

In an interesting article on class analysis in rural South Asia, Brow (1991) attempts to address some of the problems of the earlier analyses we have discussed and to develop a richer, more integrated approach to agrarian social classes. He distinguishes among three approaches to class in rural South Asia. The first of these focuses on indigenous

categories that approximate class. Citing Beteille as the primary proponent of this approach, Brow acknowledges that indigenous categories of class are relevant and, indeed, critical in historical analysis, but he argues that they may not be adequate as analytic categories for understanding the present class structure. Thus, he concludes that "people's images of their society are commonly beliefs; that is, they may not only reflect, but also distort, the underlying structure of their relations. It is not to be assumed, therefore, that indigenous categories constitute either an accurate or a comprehensive representation of social reality" (Brow 1991: 27).

The second approach to agrarian classes—the distributional approach—defines classes in terms of quantitative differences in the distribution of material objects. For example, membership in a class might be determined by the amount of land one owns or the amount of money one has. Brow dismisses this approach, arguing that it is merely descriptive and does not compel examination of the structure of relations established between the classes it distinguishes (1991: 27–28; emphasis added).

Finally, the third approach—the structural approach—focuses on the social relations between different groups. This approach, rooted in a Marxist tradition, distinguishes classes according to their different relations to the means of production and posits that the inevitably conflictual relation between the major classes is the primary impetus to social change. In Brow's view, this approach offers the best method for truly understanding agrarian relations. However, he notes that in practice it is extremely difficult to distinguish classes according to structural criteria because of complex and variable landholding arrangements and because of overlapping and cross-cutting relations to the means of production found within a single household or even within a single individual. These complexities have led to difficulties in many structural analyses, two of which are

particularly problematic. First, the structural categories that are used are frequently abstract and difficult to apply to specific, local situations. These categories "may be very useful in the formulation of broad generalizations and large scale comparisons, but they are not likely to be sufficient for the detailed analysis of class relations in any particular place and time. The analysis of local class structures, each of which has been constituted through a unique historical process, typically confronts a number of serious difficulties, both practical and conceptual, that challenge the clarity and coherence of such abstract schemes" (Brow 1991: 29). A second problem found in many analyses confronting such complexity is the tendency to replace structural criteria for distinguishing classes with distributional criteria that are thought to correlate with the structural criteria. Yet this substitution leads one back into all of the problems inherent in the distributional approach, for the postulated correlations are often far from perfect (Brow 1991: 31).

Brow suggests two steps toward a solution to these problems. First, he argues that class membership should be defined in terms of how individuals participate in the system of surplus appropriation. For example, a peasant who primarily farms his own land to meet his subsistence needs, but also occasionally works as a wage laborer, may be assigned to a class on the basis of the latter activity--if that activity is more critical to the larger system of surplus appropriation—rather than on the basis of the former activity. This method of defining class membership is useful, according to Brow, because it places the individual in the context of the larger social formation. Thus, the critical question becomes that of how the social formation as a whole is reproduced or transformed, rather than the assignment of particular individuals to particular classes.

Second, Brow argues for a less rigid application of structural concepts. That is, he suggests that concepts such as a capitalist mode of production are better understood as

ideal types in the Weberian sense rather than as descriptive categories that conform to an empirical reality, for when they are viewed as the latter, they tend to assign to the human actors in the system a mechanical and almost automaton-like role that belies any choice or intentionality in their actions. Brow cites recent critics of excessively structuralist interpretations of Marx in support of his argument. These critics argue against the mechanical subordination of the individuals who comprise a society to its social structure (see, for instance, Brewer 1990) and stress the power and efficacy of human action within the constraints of the social structure (see, for instance, Foster-Carter 1991). Thus: "This stress on human action reminds us that the subjects of history are not modes of production or other abstract entities, but human beings whose actions must be grasped in their lived totality, both individually and collectively. Social action is intentional, and is oriented to culturally constituted schemes of meaning and significance that include some image of the social order and its constituent groups" (Brow 1991: 35).

Brow does not mean to suggest, however, that one should not undertake objective class analysis unless the people under consideration actually group themselves into classes. Rather, his point is that the issue of class consciousness and class formation—that is, the transformation of a class in itself into a class for itself—must not be ignored in such an analysis, for no historical analysis of class relations that ignores or evades the question of consciousness can be anything more than very partial (Brow 1991: 36).

In this argument Brow has raised the fundamental problem of the relation between beliefs and social structure; the problem of how to combine an analysis of both that neither excessively devalues one in favor of the other nor makes one into the mechanical reflections of the other. Brow does not resolve this problem, but he points in the right direction in his closing paragraph: "One thing, at least, can be said in conclusion: analysis

of the two must be done dialectically. It is a problem of conceptualizing a complex social totality in which human action is capable of transforming the very structure that constrain it" (1991: 36).

By insisting on the importance of consciousness as a fundamental part of any class analysis, Brow raises a larger, more general issue, that of the relation between the two.[16] How do people's ideas and actions shape the larger social structure? How does the social structure constrain the ideas and attitudes through which people interpret their world and choose to act? In practice, ideas and social structure are frequently dealt with dichotomously in social analyses rather than in terms of their interrelations. Thus, we find in much of the literature a radical disjunction between the convictions and the social structural, the mental and the material, and the cultural and the social. Such dichotomies are problematic in any analysis, for, explicitly or implicitly, one member of the dichotomy almost invariably is taken as primary, while the other member is taken as secondary, merely reflecting the first or, in the case of the concept of false consciousness for example, obscuring its true features (cf. Geertz 1977: 143). I would argue, however, that such dichotomies are particularly problematic in the context of social groups. It is possible to envision, at least in theory, an isolated society in total stasis in which structural relations are reproduced continuously and identically from generation to generation. For such a society, it might be possible to separate structural relations analytically and to treat them as distinct systems. In the case of a society in the process of change, however, such a separation is misleading because changes in social structure are, inevitably, interactive. That is, changes in objective structural relations, people's understanding of and reactions to those changes, and subsequent changes in structural relations as a result of those reactions are interrelated in a complex, dialectical process

(Bourdieu 1977: 3; see also Sahlins 1981). Thus, an adequate approach to social change must address their interdependence.

Yet even scholars employing a Marxist framework, with its tradition of dialectical reasoning, often fail to fully explore the relationship between social structure and the two during the process of social change. Indeed, frequently they too fall into a kind of dichotomous thinking, with beliefs being either false consciousness which serves the interests of the ruling class and legitimizes the exploitation of the dominated classes (cf. Bourdieu 1979: 79; see also Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992) or true—that is, true class—consciousness.[16] Alternatively, as we have seen with some of the participants in the modes of production debate, some Marxist scholars in recent years have placed an excessive emphasis on structure while virtually ignoring human action and choice (Kedia and Sinha 1994).

In part, this intense concentration on structure may be the result of the wide recognition, in the wake of works by Frank (1967, 1969) and Wallerstein (1974), of the effect of the world capitalist system as a whole on economic development in the Third World. Thus, when the articulation of Third World economies into the larger world system becomes the focus of analysis, there is little room for the more particularistic aspects of convictions at the local level. The concept of the world economic system is an important one, and it had led to much valuable research. Nonetheless, as Hedge (1992) points out, the concept by itself may not yield a better understanding of local systems. Thus, he argues: "The widening of focus to include the structured dispositions of a world system of economic and political relations is neither new, avoidable, nor fatal: That it provides the key to understanding local structures is not demonstrated" (Hedge 1992: 190–91).

He concludes that a fruitful approach to class by anthropologists must include detailed analyses at the local level.

> Thus the most promising development is to define a special place for anthropology in the study of class, a place in which cultural processes are salient, and in which the particularity of 'component imperialisms' or 'local knowledge' (to be even-handed between Gough and Geertz) is accorded proper attention. Fine-grained analyses of class formation in the modern world have not reached the necessary degree of ethnographic specificity, but there is nowhere else for anthropology to go unless it is to become sloppy (or even good) economic history, or a monotonous recitation of the by now all too obvious fact of the importance of the world system (Hedge 1992: 191).

Alavi (1990c) argues that the over-emphasis on structure by some Marxists has been indicative of a move away from dialectical thinking toward a more scientistic and objectivist mode of analysis. In this mode of analysis, structures become reified, the sole object of study.[17] As a result of this approach, "the ['real man'] was lost to a generation of Marxists who could see no more than his shadow moving inexorably across the screen of history, his future already inscribed indelibly in that which was yet to unfold" (Alavi 1990: 165). As Alavi points out, this is far from Marx's original conception in which the premises from which we begin are the real individuals, their activity and the material conditions under which they live, both those which they find already existing and those produced by their activity (Marx and Engels 1963: 7, quoted in Alavi 1973: 24). Similarly, Kedia and Sinha cite Marx's statement that people make their own history, but

they do not make it exactly as they please, and add that in recent years we have heard much of the 'not-exactly-as-they-please' bit; it needs to be reasserted, and demonstrated, that none the less people do make history (1994: 55; see also Forster-Carter 1991).

Increasingly, then, there has been a recognition of the need to deal with the issues of consciousness in any social analysis and, particularly, in the context of social change. Several different approaches to this question have been taken in recent studies of rural South Asia. Although all of them have attempted to present a deeper, more dialectical analysis of social structure, their conclusions have varied considerably depending, in part, on what they have taken social structure to encompass. Some approach it primarily in terms of the perspective of the dominant caste. In this view, it, even if it is not entirely accepted by the members of the lower castes, rationalizes the hegemony of the dominant caste and thus serves as a barrier to the development of class. Little weight is given in these studies to conflicting perspectives either between or within castes. In one of the most ambitious and, ultimately, disappointing attempts to analyze the relationship between beliefs and social structure, Harriss starts from a very different perspective but arrives, in the end, at a similar position. From the beginning, he states that the relationship between the processes of material production of a society and structures is a major theme of his study (1992: 9), and he argues that much of the analysis of agrarian 'social change' that is associated with the 'Green Revolution' relies on a simplistic conception of structures, where it is seen crudely as a reflection of the material relations in which people are involved (Harriss 1992: 215). He rejects both Meillassoux's view of caste as a screen for exploitation (Harriss 1992: 215) and Beteille's separation between a sociology of values and a sociology of interests, arguing that each perspective makes the fundamental error of creating a false action. Instead, he suggests that action is integrally

related. Thus, in Harriss' view, only by comprehending the structure of caste can one begin to understand the behavior of the people, and by means of structural analysis it may be possible to explain forms of symbolic domination and so to understand the obstacles to the realization of class consciousness (1992: 217).

The structural analysis to which Harriss refers is the analysis that Dumont provides is Homo Hierarchicus (1980), for through this analysis "Dumont is able to show how caste appears coherent to Indians" (1992: 216). Harriss quotes Barnett, Fruzzetti, and Ostor (1976) who argue that this coherence develops around abstract concepts just as Western theories clings to abstract concepts (the individual, freedom, and so on). To understand these abstract concepts is to begin to comprehend how people participate in their own repression (quoted in Harriss 1992: 216). Thus, in Harriss' view, Dumont's structural analysis provides the link, explaining, for example, such apparently contradictory behavior as the continuation of commensal restrictions between untouchables and non-untouchables even when the restrictions have been relaxed among all other castes. Harriss adopts Dumont's analysis of caste whole cloth as the basis for his own analysis of social and economic change in northern India.

Aside from the issue of how Dumont himself would react to this use of his analysis,[18] there are serious problems with Harriss' approach. First, the view of caste that Harriss accepts is an extremely monolithic one. There is no room in it for competing views. In this respect, Harriss' approach is no different from that which takes caste to be simply a rationalization for exploitation. Second—and, again, this is true of the caste-as-as-mask-for exploitation school as well—the approach is fundamentally non-dialectical. Thus, while Harriss purports to explain specific, seemingly contradictory behaviors with it, he does not relate caste thinking dialectically to the changing relations of production. On the

contrary, he accepts Dumont's argument that structure is present or absent. It does not change (1980: 219). This implies, I would argue, that there is no continuous and dynamic interaction between material relations and caste—the former constraining and shaping the latter and the latter reproducing or changing the former—but rather that change is discontinuous and abrupt.

In contrast to these monolithic approaches, others have stressed both the existence of conflicting philosophies within a single society (Berreman 1979: Chapter 7) and the strategic use of different convictions by individuals in different contexts (Leach 1954; Scott 1977, 1987; Wolf 1997). Thus, in his classic analysis of political systems in Burma, Leach describes the oscillation of Kachin communities between two apparently opposing political systems—the gumsa system, based on a hereditary class distinctions, and the gumlao system, based on equality. Leach argues that it both reflects the social structure—either a gumsa or a gumlao community—and is used selectively by individuals to manipulate and change the social structure. Leach gives as an example of this strategic selection an ambitious Kachin who assumes the names and titles of a Shan prince in order to justify his claim to aristocracy, but who simultaneously appeals to gumlao principles of equality in order to escape the liability of paying feudal dues to his own traditional chief (1954: 8).

While Leach's concept of the strategic manipulation provides, I believe, a much better understanding of individual action and choice than the more monolithic conceptions discussed above, Leach tends to give the attitudes and ideas a determining role with respect to social structure. Thus he argues: "The question of whether a particular community is gumlao, or gumsa, or Shan is not necessarily ascertainable in the realm of empirical facts; it is a question, in part at any rate, of the attitudes and ideas of particular

individuals at a particular time" (Leach 1954: 286).

Wolf, in contrast, focuses on groups rather than individuals, on the one hand, and on the material relations of production on the other hand. Thus, he talks of an 'ecology' of collective representations formed by the multiple idea-systems that a mode of production gives rise to, and he argues that the construction of beliefes takes place within a field of options in which groups delineate their positions in a complex process of selection (Wolf 1997: 390). Stressing again the relationship between these options and the social structure, he concludes that we can no longer

> imagine cultures as integrated totalities in which each part contributes to the maintenance of an organized, autonomous, and enduring whole. There are not only cultural sets of practices and ideas, put into play by determinate human actors under determinate circumstances. In the course of action, the cultural sets are forever assembled, dismantled, and reassembled, conveying in variable accents the divergent paths of groups and classes. These paths do not find their explanation in the self-interested decisions of interacting individuals. They grow out of the deployment of social labor, mobilized to engage the world of nature. The manner of that mobilization sets the terms of history (Wolf 1997: 390–91).

Wolf's argument moves us closer to a conception that takes into account both the possibility of multiple perspectives on the one hand, and structure on the other hand. Yet, as Hedge notes, Wolf's position seems overly deterministic and allows precious little room for cultural creativity (1992: 192). Part of the problem stems, I believe, from two gaps in Wolf's thesis. First, by concentrating on groups alone, Wolf neglects the

relationship between the individual and the group. There is no consideration of the effects of different life experiences on the perspectives of individuals in similar structural positions. Yet surely such differences may have a profound effect on individual action in some cases. Second, there is no clear mediation between action and structure. That is, there is no indication of how people make choices among courses of action and how these choices in turn effect the social structure.

Bourdieu has attempted to provide a comprehensive framework that encompasses these relations by developing a theory of practice the objects of which are the dialectical relations between the objective structures to which the objectivist mode of knowledge gives access and the structured dispositions within which those structures are actualized and which tend to produce them (1977: 3; see also Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992). Of particular interest in Bourdieu's theory is the concept of habitus, which he defines as a system of lasting, transposable dispositions which, integrating past experiences, functions at every moment as a matrix of perceptions, appreciations, and actions (1977: 82–83; see also Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992). Habitus mediates between structure and praxis—thus, habitus, the product of history, produces individual and collective practices and hence history, in accordance with the schemes engendered by history (Bourdieu 1977: 82; see also Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992)—and the following dialectical process is set in motion: structures produce habitus which determine practices, which reproduce structures (Nash 1990: 203).

It is important to understand that the concept of habitus is not unitary. Rather, it operates on different levels. Thus, for example, one finds class habitus, the habitus of an epoch, group habitus, and individual habitus. This differentiation is important because it provides for the incorporation of the experience of the individual as well as the group in

the analysis of social action. Thus individual habitus, as distinct from group habitus, may be a separate and important determinant of social action in some situations—action that will in turn reproduce or change the social structure. Brow (1991), drawing on Bourdieu, notes the interrelation of individual interests—which we tend to think of as specific and goal oriented. Thus:

> The emphasis on strategic practice is not incompatible with the argument that people are disposed to favor one rather than another perspective by 'orientations' to their social situations that are themselves induced by determinate 'life experiences.' Bourdieu captures this in his concept of habitus. Among [the past experiences integrated by habitus], that of a particular class position is doubtless influential, as is that of early socialization. Differences, then, are used strategically in social practice but selection among multiple perspectives is itself structured, both by the interests in terms of which strategies are defined and by the dispositions, or orientations, that guide the perception of interests while being themselves shaped by experience of a determinate social formation (Brow 1991: 113–14).[19]

Bourdieu's formulation, by taking a dialectical approach, begins to build a bridge between myth and social structure. Three points that arise out of it are particularly pertinent here. First, there is a fundamental interrelation between myth and action (practice). Structural analysis, which relates myth to nothing other than itself and which seeks to establish the immanent logic of each symbolic production (Bourdieu 1979: 79), in short, which fails to relate myth to action, is inadequate and, ultimately, misleading.

Second, myth is not a monolithic category. In any social system there are a multiplicity of myths at various social levels—at the level of the individual as well as the level of different social groupings. Finally, individuals and groups select among myths strategically at different times and in different contexts, although, as Brow points out, this does not necessarily imply that their perceptions are uncluttered or that their interests are uniform. If consciousness is always active and ordinarily intentional, it is also often ambivalent and inarticulate (1991: 113).

Any analysis that is concerned with social change and, more specifically, with the formation of new social groups must take these three aspects of myth into account. Thus "comprehensive understanding demands the reinsertion of myth into the larger context of social action within which it is lived and practiced. Such contexts are always both multifaceted and unique, and the interactions among material relations, interests, and group formation take a multiplicity of forms that are not reducible to the simple kinds of formulation that would have any one of them determined by any other" (Brow 1991: 115).

The Fieldwork and Methodology

I lived in Neemghar during the period 1970–80, ranging in length from two months to two years, and covering a total time period of four and half years, and I have observed village affairs in the anthropological sense since 1988. I am qualified to play the roles of both insider and outsider because I have known this village in detail and I stand outside the socio-economic and power conflicts in the village. The added research advantage in the field is that I do not belong to any class background represented in the village, which facilitated my getting to know the forward, the backward, and the Scheduled castes

(terms defined in chapter 2) in the village. Usually, however, as Berreman (1985), among others, has persuasively shown, it is very difficult for a researcher to get to know all the castes represented in Indian villages.

I conducted the research on which this dissertation is based during two periods of fieldwork, with a gap of three months. The first was a three-month period in 1990. The second period was for seven and a half months in 1990–91. In all, this study draws from six visits to Neemghar during the period 1988–97, ranging in length from a few days to seven and a half months, and covering a total time period of sixteen months.

The dissertation is based on intensive participant observation and in-depth conversations.

While interviews may not accurately reveal how people act in their daily lives, private personal conversations can reveal the inner thoughts and feelings of individuals—their own ideas, not those of society and not the common ideas; they may be the only way to reveal some of the critical stances individuals take toward dominant cultural norms; and they are a useful way of understanding people's motives; whereas participation observation makes clear the larger context in which people live their lives.

I had conversations with 2 Baniyas (one of them is also my key informant), 11 Bhumihars, 6 Chamars, 9 Jats, 6 Helas, and 8 Kohars, and I was acquainted with 3 Ahirs, 3 Badhais, 5 Baniyas, 3 Bhangis, 6 Brahmans, 8 Bhumihars, 6 Chamars, 7 Dhobhis, 6 Helas, 8 Jats, 8 Julahas, 3 Khatiks, 11 Kohars, 2 Mallahs, 2 Muslims, 4 Nais, 8 Telis, 3 Tyagis, and 4 Sonars. They range from 20 to 75 years of age, and about seventy percent of the conversations were with men.

I had *serious*, in-depth conversations with Visnu and Phooldevi—both Banias; with Satyanarayana, Narayana, Surya, and Shankar—all Bhumihars; Rajendra and his wife

Lakshmi, Bhajanlal, Giraj, Dharmendra, Lakhoo, Raman—all Jats; Lala, Narmada, Kamlesh—all Kohars; Bhola, a Hela; and Rani, a chamar woman.

These informal and formal, open-ended, repeated contacts with individuals and my involvement with the community provided me with the opportunity of knowing the close and intimate workings of social groupings which I have tried to present in this study. Without such immersion in village culture, I could not have done this research. Life in villages does not conform to a simple pattern. One cannot understand what is going on simply by means of luck, intuition, casual conversation and observation, plus a few key informants.

Neemghar is a fictitious name, as are the names of neighboring villages and all personal names. I was very careful not to insist that any of my informants answer questions that they did not want to answer. In order to help protect confidentiality, local maps are not provided. Permission to use information about the villagers has been obtained from everyone mentioned in this study.

Conclusion

Much of the literature that we have reviewed, while providing some insight and deeper understanding into various aspects of social change in South Asia, has seemed inadequate and incomplete. In part, this is simply the result of the the great local variability that one finds in South Asia, which makes broad generalizations problematic. At the same time, however, we have also noted a tendency among many scholars to take a monolithic approach in which caste and class are treated as discrete categories, with one given primacy while the other is treated as secondary and superficial or are ignored altogether.

In the chapters that follow, I will attempt to present a more integrated analysis of group

formation in the context of changing economic relations in Neemghar. The picture that will emerge is one of extreme complexity, but coherent, in which structural relations, group experience, and individual experiences are combined in an interactive process through which significant—but subtle—changes in village social organization are occurring.

Notes

1. During the period from about the end of the Second World War to the mid-1960s—before the beginning of the Green Revolution, the theoretical concepts which attract most attention, namely those of Great and Little Traditions, stemming from Redfield and Singer (1956; Redfield 1955, 1962; Singer 1972), and of Sanskritization, associated with Srinivas (1952), strikingly downplay and even reject any serious attempt to distinguish the cultural values and institutions of upper and lower caste groups, much less those of classes. The culture of low caste groups is taken as being either representative of the Little Traditions relatively uncontaminated by the Great Tradition or else as being a poorly Sanskritized prototype of upper caste culture. This ultimately amounts to what Joan Mencher (1974a) has called a view from the top down, since upper caste culture is tacitly accepted as pervasively normative. The proponents of the three schools of thought, as we will see shortly, carry the argument one step further.

2. The topic of caste association is prominently connected with the early work of the Rudolphs (1960). Brass (1974, 1985, 1994); Breman (1989); Elliott (1970); Gould (1990); Hardgrave (1965, 1969); Hasan (1989); Irschick (1969), Kothari (1997); Oommen (1984); Rudner (1994); Weiner (1997), and others followed.

3. Others who counterposed interactional theories of caste ranking against attributional

theories of caste ranking are, for instance, Beck 1972; Berreman 1979; Hiebert 1971; Kolenda 1959, 1997; Stevenson 1954.

The topic of caste ranking was initiated by British ethnographers conncected with the Census of India—Risley, Blunt, and others, before being taken up by Marriott and others.

4. Given a careful citation of the studies of students, colleagues, and others, Marriott has developed a way of doing a sort of fieldwork via other people's ethnographies. By representing and synthesizing these, he produces a metaethnography of his own to support his theoretical formulations.

5. The concept of dominant caste was introduced by Srinivas (1959) and Mayer (1958) at about the same time. It continues to be useful. The jajmani system is usually integrated by a dominant caste. The concern with the jajmani system was stimulated by William Wiser in his book, The Hindu Jajmani system (1936), although, again, British officials had noted such a system (Neale 1957). The term, jajmani system, however, comes from Wiser. More recently, Benson (1976), Epstein (1962, 1973), Kolenda (1967), Raheja (1988a), and others have taken up the topic.

6. In Raheja's village there were only 3 Barber households, 2 Washerman households, and 17 Sweeper households, in comparison with 100 Chamar households (and 210 Gujar households) (Raheja 1988a: 19).

7. While Raheja (1988a: 81) does recognize the existence of several contextually shifting ideologies of inter-caste relationships, she nonetheless argues that it is prestation rituals which are the principal way intercaste relationships are constituted in the village she studied (Raheja 1988a: 24, 28).

8. Raheja's model is very relevant to my thesis given that two of the four individuals I discuss in the chapters that follow clearly represent dominant subcastes which are central

in the jajmani system although not necessarily at the top hiearchically.

9. The terms status and contract were introduced by Maine in his Ancient Law (1861; for discussion of these concepts, see Kuper 1988).

10. The mode of production is very relevant to my thesis, too, given that one of the primary questions toward which my analysis is aimed is specifically whether, as mentioned earlier, the increasingly capitalist mode of agricultural production that has developed during the Green Revolution encouraged the development of self-conscious, economically-based classes with a class consciousness that cuts across the lines of caste and kinship.

11. Alice Thorner suggests that it was the tone of Daniel Thorner's article, more than the content, that elicited such strong criticism. She argues: Thorner's positive, almost gleeful, description of the capitalist farmers disconcerted his left-wing Indian colleagues. They felt they had been betrayed by someone on whom they had come to count for sharp criticisms of official policies. Neglecting to read his explicit warnings of the long-run dangers inherent in the new business-like agriculture some of them assimilated him quite unjustly to the defenders of the so-called 'Green Revolution' (A. Thorner 1982: 1963).

12. Beteille does not exempt his own work from this criticism. He argues: Many of the village monographs have sought to understand specific institutional spheres such as economics, politics, kinship and ritual. But the shadow of caste has, so to say, hung over almost every one of them (1974: 41). Among the monographs he lists as examples is his own work, Caste, Class, and Power.

13. This apparent affirmation of Dumont's analysis of the ideology of India is rather startling, for I think that Dumont himself would argue that his analysis encompasses the entire social structure of India and that there is indeed no place for a separate sociology of

interests.

14. I am using social structure here in the broad sense to mean a system of social relations.

15. This dichotomy is set up and encouraged in part by Marx's distinction between a class in itself, which defines a category of people all of whom have the same relation to the means of production, and a class for itself, in which a sense of class consciousness and unity has developed among the members of a class. As Hedge (1992: 174) points out, Marxist scholars intent upon class analysis in contexts in which one finds only a class in itself, are tempted to ignore ideology altogether or to dismiss it with a superficial analysis of the false consciousness embodied in the dominant ideology. In the Indian context, Gough (1989) provides a good example of this kind of approach.

16. Bourdieu and Passeron (1990) make a similar argument against structuralist readers of Marx who employ an objectivist mode of thought that focuses solely on structural processes. For a succinct summary of this argument, see Nash (1990).

17. Dumont, after all, presents his work as an analysis of the entire social structure of Indian society, not just of an ideological component of it. For Dumont, the ideology creates the social structure, a position rejected by Harriss.

Perlin has noted that Harriss is not alone among Marxists in adopting this contradictory position: Many Marxist writers, when confronted by the enigmas presented by the type and scarcity of knowledge available on small-scale and ostensibly hierarchic pre-industrial settings, seem to take over, often uncritically, the full panoply of the culturalist perspective. John Harriss, for example, explicitly accepts the Dumontian interpretation of caste in his study of agrarian relationships; Kathleen Gough actually attacks a materialist reading of jajmani in favour of the tight moral world presented by culturalist theory. The

truth is that the Dumontian-type schema holds near undisputed sway, and while materialists like to state their belief that caste and jajmani may finally be located in material structures and explanations, a properly theoretical statement remains to be formulated. It remains mere faith, behind which lurks the reality of what we actually write and confirm: in the Indian setting we are but culturalists, pure and simple (1994: 388–89). He adds in a footnote: Ironically, within the narrow limits of the culturalist paradigm, there seems to be more dispute concerning the status of Dumont's particular theory than amongst Marxists (Perlin 1994: 389, n.1).

18. One may ask: Are these forces balanced? Are they equally important? Or is one more powerful? We do not know. We have to look at each case to find out.

CHAPTER 2

The Village

Profile of Uttar Pradesh

The state of Uttar Pradesh (UP) in northern India has had a significant influence on the social, economic, and political history of the country. Geography alone assures its position as its position as the agricultural heartland. UP comprises almost half the Gangetic plain, one of the most fertile tracts in the world. It is the most populous state in India, with a population of more than 139.11 million in 1991. The population density of 473 persons per square kilometer is more than one and a half times the national average. Almost one our of every six Indians lives in UP, although the state comprises only one-tenth of the country's land area (India, Office of the Registrar General, Census of India, General Population Tables).

Despite the wealth of its natural resources, UP remains one of the less developed states in the country. Per capita income in the 1990s was about Rs. 4,300, compared with the national average of Rs. 5,000 (Uttar Pradesh, State Planning Institute, Statistical Diary of Uttar Pradesh). More than 80 percent of its population is rural, as against 75 percent for the nation. Three-fourths of the work force earns its living from the land, compared with two-thirds for India as a whole (Singh 1997). Landholdings are small and fragmented; in the 1990s the average holding was less than 1 hectare (Uttar Pradesh, Board of Revenue, Agricultural Census of Uttar Pradesh).

Through its sheer size and numbers UP dominates the agricultural scene of the nation. In the 1990s it accounted for about one-tenth of the net cultivated area in the country but one-fourth of the total irrigated area. Its contribution to total foodgrain production was

over one-fifth, while its share in wheat and sugarcane production were more than 35 and 40 percent, respectively (Uttar Pradesh, Department of Agriculture, Uttar Pradesh Ke Krishi Ankre).

Profile of Agra District

Agra District, in western UP, is the location for the present study. Agra District experienced its first agricultural revolution, brought about by canal irrigation, in the mid-nineteenth century. In the mid-1960s it was part of the heartland affected by modern varieties of wheat and tubewell irrigation. By the late 1970s the second generation effects of the Green Revolution had begun to manifest themselves in the district.

Like other areas with fertile land and extensive possibilities for irrigation, the district is densely populated. In 1991 a population of nearly 2.8 million persons was concentrated on a land acre of about 3,900 square kilometers. The population density for the district as whole was 780 persons per square kilometer. Rural people then accounted for 69 percent of the population, giving Agra a population density of more than 500 persons per square kilometer. There was a tremendous spurt in urban growth in Agra District in the decade of the 1970s. Whereas the rural population grew at the annual compount rate of 1.1 percent, urban growth, at 5.6 percent, was more than five times as great. The latter was also considerably highter than the 3.1 percent growth rate experienced during the 1960s. Agra City, the headquarters of the district, is the only town with a population of about 0.5 million, it accounts for 58 percent of the urban population. Agra is a commercial and industrial center for the surrounding agricultural area.

Agra is located in west central India on the Upper Gangetic plain. The plain sits between two mighty rivers, the Ganges and the Yamuna, and hense is known as the Doab

or land between two waters. This area, described as the cultural heartland of India, is home to many important places of pilgrimage for Hindus including Benares, Allahabad, Hardwar, and Mathura, the birthplace of Lord Krishna. Mathura, one of the holiest centers of Hinduism is located a short distance from Agra (Bhardwaj 1973). In addition, the area contains many splendid architectural memorials from India's Sultanate and Mughal past, making it also of great significance to Muslims and everyone else.

Agra City, established in 1566 by the emperor Akbar, was once the capital of the Mughal Empire. During the reign of Shah Jahan (1628–58), one of Akbar's grandson, many magnificent buildings were erected, the most famous of which is the Taj Mahal. The Taj is the tomb of Shah Jahan and his adored wife Mumtaz, who died giving birth to her sixteenth child. Agra declined in importance when the Mughal capital was moved to Deli in 1658. The Taj, of course has never declined in importance and stands today as one of the seven humanly constructed wonders of the world. As a tourist attraction, the Taj Mahal brings in many tourists from all over the world every year which is one of Agra's major industries. In addition, Agra is an important center for the manufacture of cotton textiles, shoes, and rugs and serves as a regional collection center for the sugar produced on lands irrigated by the Agra Canal. It is a major rail-head, a postal hub and was formerly the administrative headquarters for the British United Provinces of Agra and Oudh (Robinson 1989). Agra is, however, not a beautiful city.

Agra is a 3 to 12-hour train ride from New Delhi, depending on the train and other mitigating variables such as civil unrest, the time of the year, the local circumstances between Agra and New Delhi and the number of times a passenger pulls the emergency cord to stop the train near his or her hut or village. Under the best of circumstances, it is a day-trip from New Delhi to Agra and back, which gives the city's populace a decided air

of impermanence as people come, see the Taj and leave. During the few months I spend every year, since 1988, in Agra, I have met few Westerneres who are there for more than a day or two. Agra can be a lonely city for a foreign researcher.

The Village

Neemghar is an agriculturally well-developed village. Neemghar is one of forty villages which make up the Dholpura Block of Agra District. Like most villages in Agra, Neemghar is compact and well-nucleated. Most of the population lives clustered together within a fairly small area, surrounded by the fields of wheat, cotton, and sugarcane. Three small, unnamed hamlets—two populated by members of the former untouchable castes and one by members of a low, but not untouchable, caste—are associated with the village. While these three hamlets are located at a slight distance from the rest of the village—0.5 kilometers to 1 kilometer away—they are considered to be part of the village both by the inhabitants of the hamlets and by the residents of the central village. Administratively as well, the central village plus the three hamlets together constitute a single unit.

Despite the fact that Neemghar is not a particularly large village, its position on the intersection of two bus lines gives its center an air of bustle and activity like that which is usually associated with large villages. Tea stalls, where one can buy snacks and cool drinks as well tea and coffee, line the main road. Vendors in other stalls sell flowers, incense, and fruits of all sorts to be given as offerings at the temple next to the bus stop. A string of bicycle and auto rickshaws and horse-drawn wagons (tangas) usually stands near the bus stop waiting to take people to nearly villages that are not on the bus line.

Although agriculture is the mainstay of the village economy, the centrality of

Neemghar's location has helped to encourage the establishment, within or near the village, of several non-agricultural enterprises as well. Four fancy stores in the village sell an assortment of commercial products—soap, toothpaste, pens, glass bangles, and the like—in addition to staples such as wheat flour, rice, oil, and spices. There are also two fertilizer shops, a medical shop which sells a wide—if erratic—range of drugs and tonics, a large commercial wheat mill, and three smaller wheat mills which process wheat into flour for local domestic consumption only. These shops are patronized not only by the villagers of Neemghar, but also, occasionally, by people from other villages where such goods and services are not available. In addition, two cinema halls are located just outside the village, and these attract large crowds of people from Neemghar and from neighboring villages every night.

Neemghar's location also encourages frequent travel by the villagers to other villages and Agra City. Agra is about 24 kilometers away. A paved road—the major bus route—connects Neemghar to the city. Buses along this road also go the market town of Fara (5 kilometers from Neemghar) and to Ramghar (the Subdistrict headquarters, 11 kilometers from Neemghar). A second road, also paved, runs perpendicular to the main road along one side of Neemghar. It connects the village to that of Dholpura, site of the Block headquarters, as well as to various other villages.

A variety of different forms of transportation that facilitate travel from place to place are available to villagers. Buses along the main road run fairly frequently, although they are crowded, noisy, and not entirely reliable. In addition, a number of commercial vans also run along the bus routes. While they are more expensive and more perilous than the buses—they are almost always crammed full, with people literally hanging out of the doors—people often use them when buses are not available. Several of the wealthier men

in the village own motor scooters or mo-peds and many more own bicycles. Finally, travel by foot to villages several kilometers away is not uncommon.

Men often make trips outside the village for business purposes, to purchase products not available in the village or available more cheaply elsewhere, to visit relatives or friends, because they own or lease land in another village, or, in the case of both male and female agricultural laborers, because work is available elsewhere. Wealthier women, who do not work as agricultural laborers, leave the village less frequently than men do, but they too make occasional trips with their husbands or other family members to visit relatives elsewhere.

Although the area around the bus stop is often referred to by villagers as the village center, it is actually located at one corner of the village. Both of the paved roads along which the buses run lie near the edge of the village, perpendicular to each other, and serve more or less as boundary markers. As one moves away from the noise and activity of the bus stand and into the residential area of the village, things begin to quiet down and take on a much more settled look. The main road through the village is broad and fairly straight, lined on either side by closely spaced houses. Narrower roads and footpaths branch off the main road, and these too are lined with houses. Neither the main road nor the other roads and paths through the village are paved. During the hot, dry summer months great clouds of dust are thrown into the air whenever a bullock-drawn cart or some other vehicle passes by, while during the monsoon season the roads and paths often turn into rivers of mud and mire.

At one end of the main road through the village is a temple dedicated to the god Rama. Attached to it is the small, single room that serves as the Panchayat (village council) office. Older men often sit in front of this temple for hours, especially during the

agricultural slow seasons, talking about crops, politics, and village affairs, while some of the younger men of the village may gather there for an hour or two in the afternoon and early evening to play chess (goti) and talk.

A larger, better maintained temple, dedicated to the god Krsna, lies at the other end of the main road. Unlike the Rama temple, the Krsna temple is associated with a considerable amount of land—about 40 acres—the income from which provides for the upkeep of the temple and for the salaries of a priest and other temple staff. In addition to the Rama and Krsna temples, there are six other Hindu temples of various sizes in the village.

Loudspeakers have been installed in two of the temples and at the Panchayat headquarters. Every morning at dawn, religious music, broadcast at top volume from the temples, carries across the entire village. Occasionally, political speeches by state and national leaders may be picked up by radio in the Panchayat office and broadcast over the loudspeaker for the village to hear. News of a more specifically local nature, however, is usually transmitted via a village informer, who walks through the village beating a drum and stopping at intervals to shout out his information.

There are three schools in the village—a pre-school for children aged three to six, a primary school, and a high school. The primary and high schools are located about 0.25 kilometer from the main part of the village, near the hamlets of the former untouchables. The pre-school, on the other hand, lies on the main road though the village in a fairly central location. The building in which it is located also serves as the headquarters for the Mehal Mandal (women's cooperative) of the village.

A small post office is located near the Panchayat office, and a veterinary center stands near the high school. The latter, however, is only occasionally open. Finally, the

headquarters of a Primary Agricultural Cooperative Credit Society , which serves members from Neemghar and from the neighboring village of Bandhupur, is located in Neemghar.

Although the village council has been trying to obtain government funds for the implementation of a protected water supply program, in which filtered drinking water would be piped to the village, at present there is no source of purified water, and most villagers continue to get their drinking water from man-made tanks. Many of the wealthier families have wells near their houses, which provide water for cleaning and washing clothes.

A drinking water tank lies at each end of the main residential area of the village, and a third drinking water tank lies between the two hamlets of the former untouchables. There is also a water buffalo tank, where the boys in charge of buffaloes wash the animals and often swim with them. Nowadays, one occasionally sees a tractor partly submerged in the tank as well, where it has been driven for washing.

Neemghar, like most villages in North India (and in India), is highly stratified both by class and by caste. The high degree of economic stratification in Neemghar is immediately apparent in the different types of houses one sees. There are three basic types of houses. Those belonging to the wealthiest families in the village are large, two-stories structure called Kothi. These houses, made of baked brick, have at least eight rooms in total. The rooms on the second stories of the Kothi are often used primarily for the storage of lentils, chilies, vegetables, and fruits, rather than as living areas, although usage, of course, depends in part upon family size and composition. The oldest Kothi in the village is roughly 60 years old, while the newest is still under construction. Several of the older Kothi are in a state of some disrepair, which attests, in some cases, to the

declining fortunes of the owners. In contrast, the four new Kothis look very modern and urban—almost as if they have been plucked from a city site and transplanted in the village—and they give a good indication of the rising economic status of their owners.

A second type of house is the simple tiled house. Such houses, called Pakka houses, are normally considerably smaller than Kothis, and they always have only one story. However, like Kothis, they are generally well constructed—also being made of bricks and/or cement—and weather-proof. As families expand, new rooms and entrances may be added to these houses so that they often resemble western urban town-houses, and at times it is difficult to tell where one unit ends and the next one begins. One such complex of domestic units, the first part of which was built at least 60 years ago, by now contains more than thirty related households, all strung together in a very confusing fashion.

Finally, the third type of house found in Neemghar is actually better described as a thatched hut, called Kacca houses. The walls of such houses may be made of wood and mud or of bricks and cement, while the roofs are made of straw, reeds, leaves, rushes, and so forth. These are the dwellings of the very poor, as is evidenced by their patched-together construction and their often rickety appearance. While some of them are fairly weather-proof, others provide only the meagerest protection to their inhabitants, especially during the rains of the monsoon.

Most cooking in the village is done over chulas, horseshoe-shaped cooking hearths made of mud and dung. Dried dung cakes provide the main source of fuel, supplemented by whatever bits of bark and twigs are available. A few of the wealthiest families use gas stoves for cooking rather than open hearths. This adds greatly to a family's prestige in the village, but it is quite expensive and inconvenient, requiring that one or two large canisters of gas be transported from the city each month. Thus, even those families who

have purchased gas stoves tend to use them sparingly and continue to rely primarily on more traditional cooking methods for everyday use.

Chapatis, a thin unleavened bread made from wheat, is the staple food for all families in the village. It is supplemented by curries of vegetables and lentils, by milk products such as curd, buttermilk, and ghi, and sometimes by rice. Most of the wheat that is consumed is grown locally, as are the vegetables and lentils. Milk is produced by local cows and water buffaloes, and people who do not own such animals buy milk and/or curd daily from those who do. Buffalo milk is preferred to cow's milk, except on ritual occasions, because it is generally much higher in fat content. Many people include some animal protein in their diets as well. Fish, caught in irrigation channels, is available in fairly abundant supply and is thus relatively inexpensive. Consequently, most families are able to add fish to their diets at least occasionally. Chicken eggs provide another source of animal protein and are consumed now and then even by fairly poor families. As one moves up the socioeconomic scale, one finds that families generally tend to consume all such forms of animal protein with increasing frequency. In addition, members of the wealthier families of the village occasionally eat chicken or goat meat as well. An exception to the practice of eating animal protein, however, is found among the members of the three highest ranking castes in the village—Brahmans, Baniyas, and Telis—all of whom are strict vegetarians, regardless of economic status.

Agricultural laborers usually eat three meals of fresh wheat bread each day. However, the wheat that they can afford is often poor in quality, and frequently they have only a small quantity of curry or curd to go with it. Non-laborers usually eat a lighter meal in the morning and wheat bread meals at midday and in the evening. Again, although there is no obvious evidence of malnutrition among any group in the village, as one moves up the

socioeconomic scale both the quantity and the quality of the food improve considerably.

In addition to house type and diet, the extreme differences in standard of living among people of various economic categories are manifested in other material differences. All of the Kothi and most of the Pakka houses have electricity, as dò some of the Kaccha houses. This provides current for lighting, and also, in the case of the wealthier households, for table or ceiling fans. A few of the very wealthiest families in the village also own other appliances that require electricity. Six such families own refrigerators and color televisions and three own electric food blenders and cassette tape recorders. In addition, a few of the more middle class families own radios.

There are seven telephones in the village. Two are located on the premises of local business enterprises—a flour mill and a fertilizer shop—one is in the post office, and the other four are located in individual households. Again, of course, only the very wealthy can afford the luxury of a telephone, and, indeed, only they are likely to have much use for one.

Another indication of affluence is ownership of various types of vehicles. Two families in the village own lorries, which they use for their sugarcane and gutka (tobacco) export business. Six families own tractors, which they use to plow their own fields and then rent out to other landowners in the village. Several of the large landowners also own motor scooters, motor cycles, or mo-peds. Although scooters are fairly common in the village, ownership of one still confers a high degree of prestige. In contrast, bicycles continue to be the most common form of transportation next to walking, and even fairly poor families may own one or have access to one.

Aside from the ownership of these modern luxuries, the main evidence of wealth outside of land is the possession of gold and silver, usually in the form of women's

jewelry. Among wealthy families, a quantity of gold in the form of bangles, necklaces, and earrings is always included as part of the dowry when a daughter of the household marries. Poorer women, whose families are unable to provide gold for a dowry, may be given heavy silver ankle bracelets instead. Both forms of jewelry serve as a kind of savings for a woman and her husband. If necessary, they may pawn some of the jewelry, or, less frequently, they may sell it outright to raise money. This is generally done in an emergency, however, because the selling of jewelry means a loss of security.

Wheat is the crop preferred by most farmers, both because it is very lucrative and because wheat bread is the staple food of the area. Of the 1,177 acres of cultivated land in Neemghar, 906 acres—77 percent of the total—is devoted to wheat. Two crops of wheat are grown each year. The first crop—the kharif crop—is planted in May and June and harvested in October and November. The second crop—the rabi crop—is planted in November and December and harvested in April. Pulses which have a fairly short growing cycle are generally cultivated on wheat land after each harvest, before the next planting of wheat.

Irrigation for the cereal crops is mainly by canals extending from the Agra Canal and the Yamuna River. In addition, some landowners supplement this water with water from tube wells that they have installed on their land. Although there has been some double-cropping in the area since at least 1950, it has only been in the last twenty to twenty-five years that water has been sufficient for almost all cultivators in the village to plant two crops of wheat.

Sugarcane is suited to the same kind of land as wheat, and, although it is not as profitable as wheat, some farmers divide their land between cultivation of the two crops. About 13 percent of the total cultivated land in the village is devoted to sugarcane.

Farmers choose to cultivate sugarcane in addition to wheat for a number of reason. First, because sugarcane is a year-long crop, some farmers feel that it is easier and less worrisome to cultivate than wheat. Second, during the last few years there have been several problems with large-scale pest invasions that have resulted in substantial losses in the wheat crop. As a result, many people prefer not to risk their entire agricultural production in wheat. Moreover, once sugarcane has been planted in a field, it should be replanted for at least two more years, because the production costs for the crop drop significantly over a three-year period. Finally, most important, the nearby sugar factory, which buys all of the cane that is grown in the village, will provide loans to farmers to cover the costs of production for the crop. The financing of agriculture is always a source of major concern to farmers in this area, and the prospect of easily accessible credit provides a strong incentive to farmers to plant cane.

The remaining 10 percent of the total cultivated land in Neemghar is devoted to cotton, millet, and oilseeds like mustard and peanut.

All of the major crops of the village are high-profit, cash crops. Very little is grown purely for subsistence needs. A few poor agricultural laborers have small plots of dry land on which they grow vegetables both for their own consumption and to sell in the village or in neighboring villages. Landowners with garden land also may grow a few vegetables in their gardens for domestic consumption, although they grow none for sale. However, given the highly profitable nature of wheat and sugarcane people usually prefer to use their land for those crops and to buy vegetables from peddlers who go from village to village selling such produce.

Land

Unfortunately, reliable figures on land distribution in Neemghar are not available. Because of the land ceiling and laws in support of tenants' rights, larger landowners tend to hide the amount of land actually in their control by registering it in the names of various family members or clients. Thus, in official land records where this bias should be apparent, one expects to find that the incidence of large landholdings is under-reported. Yet, even in the official land reports concerning Neemghar, we find a very skewed pattern of land distribution, with a disproportionate amount of the cultivated land concentrated in the hands of a few people. Two percent of the landowners (0.46 percent of the total village population) own 18 percent of the land. At the same time, 80 percent of the landowners own less than 2.5 acres each, which is considered marginal for the area, while 18 percent of the landowners own between 2.47 and 7.40 acres of land each.

A few families in the village, then, own a large proportion of the land even according to official figures, and in reality they control even more land than the official figures indicate.

Changes in the Agrarian Economy

High yielding varieties (HYVs) of wheat were first introduced in the village in 1962. Initially, only a few farmers tried them, but, as these early experimenters obtained substantial increases in yields, others began to adopt the new seeds as well. By the late sixties, virtually all of the village farmers were using HYVs, and today traditional varieties of wheat are no longer even available.

The almost universal adoption of HYVs and other technological innovations associated with the Green Revolution—the use of tractors, tubewells, and chemical fertilizers and

pesticides, for example—has resulted in significant changes in the agricultural economy and agrarian relations in the village. The effects of these changes on villagers have not been uniform. Rather, they have varied according to both economic position and caste. While most of the people I have talked to over the years—from all castes and across the entire gamut of economic positions—declare that they are better off materially than they were before the introduction of the Green Revolution technology, the benefits of the new technology have been unevenly distributed. In the paragraphs that follow, I will outline briefly the major changes that have occurred and their effects on agrarian relations. In Chapters 4 through 6 I will examine more closely the effects of these changes in relation to specific castes.

The most obvious of the changes brought about by the Green Revolution has been the increased profitability of agriculture for those farmers with sufficient resources to employ the new technology effectively. With the use of HYVs, yields have increased dramatically—doubling, and, at times, even tripling. Thus, the average yield under HYVs is as much as 30 bags of wheat per acre. In contrast, before the introduction of HYVs, the average yield was in the range of 10 to 12 bags of wheat per acre. Although costs of production have also increased—primarily because HYVs, unlike traditional varieties of wheat, require large amounts of chemical fertilizers and pesticides to flourish—the high yields have more than offset the increased costs in most cases. Thus, the yearly income and general level of wealth of the most successful farmers of the village has risen substantially.

One indication of how lucrative agriculture has become is the skyrocketing price of land. According to the villagers, as recently as ten years ago fertile land, used for the cultivation of wheat or sugarcane, sold for Rs 20,000 to Rs 36,000 per acre. Since then,

the price of land has more than doubled, and now good wheat land sells for Rs 45,000 to Rs 70,000 per acre.

At the same time that the price of land has risen, more and more land has come into the market for sale. The causes of the increase in land for sale have been twofold. First, in some cases small landholders who are unable to repay the loans that are increasingly necessary to finance agricultural production, have been forced to sell some or all of their land. Second, several farmers have been tempted by the inflated prices of land in the area and have sold land near the village in order to buy cheaper land in the neighboring states. (Usually the land that they buy is cheaper because it is not yet irrigated, and the farmers are betting on the development of better water supplies in the future.)

Given the high prices of land, it is generally only farmers who already own considerable amounts of land who can afford to buy the land that is put up for sale. Nonetheless, in recent years some smallholders—particularly those who have also managed to obtain some land in lease—have been able to save money to buy more land. Most of these less wealthy buyers , however, bought land several years ago when prices were lower than they are today. As land prices continue to rise, the prospects for smallholders to accumulate sufficient money to buy more land in the future are not good.

Another major change brought about by the introduction of Green Revolution technology has been the increasing reliance on credit on the part of most farmers in the village. With the new technology, profitable agriculture entails much more than just access to fertile land. In addition, the cultivator must be able to obtain chemical fertilizers and pesticides, a tractor or buffalo for plowing, and sufficient water for irrigation. Such inputs are expensive, and few farmers can afford to pay for them before they have harvested their crop. Thus, most agriculturists—both large- and small-scale farmers—

rely heavily on credit to finance agricultural production. Moreover, because the HYVs are much less hardy than traditional varieties of wheat, the timeliness of the application of fertilizers, pesticides, and water is critical. This, in turn, means that the ability to obtain credit in time to apply these inputs appropriately is equally critical. Indeed, it has been argued that in recent years, access to credit more than access to land per se is the primary determinant of economic and political power in areas that have been strongly affected by Green Revolution technology (Etienne 1993).

In general, the increased need for credit has placed a heavier burden on small landowners than on large landowners. Large landowners tend to have easy access to the cheapest forms of institutional credit—through government banks and cooperative credit societies—both because they have sufficient land to offer as collateral for loans and because they are likely to have personal ties to officers in these institutions who will expedite the procurement of loans. Indeed, these loans are so easy for large landowners to obtain and the rates of interest on them are so low that several of the wealthiest landowners in the village, who are able to pay for the costs of agricultural production out of their own pockets, nonetheless take the maximum loans available from banks and cooperative societies in order to lend the borrowed money to small landowners, tenants, and laborers at higher rates of interest.

In contrast to the large landowners, small landowners frequently must look beyond the institutional forms of credit to obtain loans. Although land may be used as collateral for loans from government banks and cooperatives, a small plot of land does not go far in the procurement of credit. Hence, small landowners are often unable to obtain sufficient loans at the lowest rates of interest, and, instead, they are forced to turn to private moneylenders. The rates of interest that private moneylenders charge are always higher

than the rates charged by banks and cooperatives, and, in the case of professional moneylenders from outside the village, the interest rates are frequently exorbitant—as high as 25 to 30 percent per year. As a result, small landowners are likely to make a profit through agriculture only in particularly good years—in terms of weather, pests, and so on—while a bad year or two can be devastating. Indeed, several small landowners who experienced bad years have been gradually pressed into increasingly marginal positions, eventually to join the ranks of the landless or virtually landless poor.

For small-scale tenants, who lease rather than own land, the problem of obtaining credit is exacerbated still further, for without any land that they can offer as collateral, they have absolutely no access to institutional forms of credit in most cases. They are forced to rely entirely on private loans, and, again, it is only in an exceptional year that they can realize any profit through agriculture.

The innovations of the Green Revolution, coupled with land reform measures enacted at the state and national levels, have brought about other changes in tenancy relations as well. First, just as the cost of buying land has risen sharply, so has the cost of taking land in lease increased dramatically. At the same time, many large landowners who at one time used to lease out some of their land now prefer to farm it all themselves because of the potentially high profits involved. Indeed, in recent years, large landowners have frequently taken additional land in lease themselves, thus increasing the competition for leased land. Moreover, those landowners who do lease out their land often only do so for the second, more vulnerable crop, which requires the use of larger amounts of fertilizers and pesticides and thus entails a higher cost of production, and which is generally riskier in terms of yield than the first crop. Finally, even those landowners who would prefer to lease out their land for both crops are leery of doing so because of various political

actions designed to protect tenants. These actions include land to the tiller movements, government advocacy of tenants' rights, and, most recently, a government crackdown on long-term, exploitative, absentee landlords. All of these actions have made would-be leasers reluctant to lease out their land for fear that they will lose it entirely. Those landowners who do continue to lease out land tend to change tenants from year to year or even from crop to crop and to avoid leasing land to tenants who might try to continue a leasing arrangement over time by calling upon the ties of kinship or caste. Thus, not only has the amount of land available for lease in the area decreased somewhat, but there has also been a change, to some extent, in the type of tenant to whom landowners are willing to lease land. We will return to this point later, in the discussion of specific castes.

The Green Revolution has brought about marked changes for agricultural laborers as well. In general, the overall effect of the Green Revolution has been positive for many landless laborers in the village, primarily because of a sharp rise in wages. In the past, before the introduction of double-cropping and HYVs, wages for male agricultural laborers in the area averaged between Rs 4 and Rs 8 per day. In contrast, wages now average between Rs 35 and Rs 40 per day, and that may climb as high as Rs 50 per day during periods when there is a heavy demand for labor. Wages for women—always lower than those for men—have shown a similar rise from an average of Rs 2 to Rs 3 per day to an average of Rs 20 and Rs 25 per day. At the same time, with almost universal double-cropping there is also a higher demand for labor throughout the year than there was in the past, with fewer days of idleness for laborers when there is no work for them in the fields. These two changes—the rise in wages and the increase in the number of days when work is available—have enabled most agricultural laborers to increase their real earnings despite inflation and thus to raise their standard of living somewhat.

This increase in income should not be overstated, however. Wages continue to be inadequate to tide laborers over slack periods in the agricultural cycle without borrowing money. Particularly for the completely landless agricultural laborers, the change in the standard of living is manifested primarily in their ability to buy more food of better quality rather than in an ability to save any of their earnings or to acquire property. Nonetheless, almost all the agricultural laborers that I know say that they are better off now than they were twenty years ago, because of the rise in wages and the increase in work.

Evidence of the positive economic change for agricultural laborers is clear in their increasing preference for work as daily wage laborers (khetihar majdoors) as opposed to work as annual farm servants (harwahs). Whereas khetihar majdoor work involves a clearly defined, wage-based contractual relationship, work as a harwah involves a much more open-ended, master-servant type of relationship. Thus, whereas a khetihar majdoor is paid a fixed daily wage in cash for explicitly defined hours of work, a harwah is expected to perform whatever work is demanded of him by his employer at any time and to support his employer when necessary in village disputes and in village politics. In return, the harwah expects to receive not only a yearly salary, paid partly in cash and partly in kind, but also occasional gifts of clothing and food for his family, small cash loans, some medical aid when necessary, and various gifts on special ritual occasions. In the past, the security of a position as a harwah was often felt to compensate for the lower wage and restricted freedom that goes with such a position. In contrast, today most adult agricultural laborers feel that they fare better economically, under conditions of greater autonomy, as daily wage laborers, despite the lack of security in such work. At the same time, many large landowners prefer the more straightforward, contractual relations with

daily wage laborers because they can calculate their costs of production more accurately and they will not be besieged with excessive (in their eyes) demands from harwahs in the event of a particularly good crop. Moreover, because landowners no longer rely so heavily on long-term ties of patronage and clientage for political support, the importance of harwahs for this purpose has diminished. Thus, the shift in preference for contractual labor relations over the more amorphous relations of patron and client is found among both agricultural laborers and hirers of labor.

It is clear, then, that the new agricultural technology has triggered significant changes in the agricultural economy and agrarian relations. High yields and high profits, inflated land prices and increasing pressure on land, increased demand for credit, changes in who leases land and in the terms of leasing, and changing relations between agricultural laborers and landowners are all linked to the innovations of the Green Revolution. A final trend, equally significant, must also be noted—that is, the increasing pressure towards economic diversification among the wealthiest landowners of the village. Given the limited supply of land and hence the limited opportunities for agricultural expansion, many of these large landowners are beginning to seek new areas in which to invest their profits from agriculture. This movement into new fields of enterprise, often involving an expansion into the urban, industrial economy, has reinforced changing attitudes toward social relations within the village and has encouraged a broadening of vision beyond the boundaries of rural life. Yet not all large landowners have shifted their focus towards new economic pursuits in this way. Rather, some have employed strategies focused more narrowly on agriculture and on the social universe of rural life to cope with the changing economy. As we will see in later chapters, tensions between landowners taking these two different approaches to the economic changes of the Green Revolution have played a

significant role in the struggles for power and in the formation of new social alignments that have occurred within the village. Before examining these new social alignments, however, we must first examine village social organization from the perspective of caste, for caste continues to be a salient and dynamic factor in village life.

Ranking

According to Brahmanical Hindu ideology, the ranking of castes is based on the relative ritual purity of each group. Several factors go into the determination of levels of ritual purity. One of the most important of these is the traditional occupation associated with each group. For example, the traditional work of Brahmans as priests places them at the top of the caste hierarchy, while the traditional work of the Chamars—the disposal of the dead cattle and the production of leather goods from their hides—is considered to be so defiling that Chamars are ranked close to the bottom of the caste hierarchy as one of the lower of the untouchable castes. Differences in diet, behavior during various ritual occasions, attitudes toward divorce and widow re-marriage, and dress also serve as indicators of different levels of ritual purity and help to maintain status distinctions among castes.

Interactions between various castes—particularly those concerned with the giving and receiving of food and water—are also important in defining and maintaining the caste hierarchy (see, for instance, Kolenda's corpus). A willingness to receive water or cooked food from a member of another caste is an admission of inferior status of that caste. Only when the members of two different castes consider themselves to be of nearly equal status will they share a meal together. Similarly, members of low castes may not be allowed to enter the houses of high caste members, or, if they are allowed to enter at all,

they may be barred from entry into certain rooms or areas—for example, areas where food is prepared—where the maintenance of ritual purity is considered to be particularly important.

A ranking pattern based on degrees of ritual purity and pollution implies an extreme fixedness or rigidity in the hierarchy that does not exist in practice. Rather, factors other than ritual purity—such as economic or political standing in the community—are also important in determining caste ranking, and these factors provide for a small measure of flexibility in the system. Thus, many scholars have described the process by which the members of a caste that has risen in economic or political status successfully raise their caste's position in the hierarchy by adjusting some of the objective criteria of caste ranking such as occupation and diet (see, for example, Beck 1972; Charsley 1996; Deliège1988, 1992, 1993; Gellner 1997; Lynch 1969; Moffat 1979; Quigley 1993, 1994; Raheja 1998; Shukra 1994; Srinivas' corpus). This process provides the possibility of at least some mobility for entire castes (though not for individuals) within the system of caste ranking. Yet even this small degree of flexibility is possible only in the middle ranges of the caste system. In contrast, at the top and bottom ends of the ranking scale—with the Brahmans and the untouchables—there is an almost complete rigidity in the system (Bailey 1957; Quigley 1993). In the face of this rigidity, which precludes the possibility of upward mobility for untouchables within the caste system, political movements among untouchables have often challenged the very legitimacy of the caste system itself (see Zelliott 1972).

Caste and the maintenance of caste boundaries continue to be very important in the social landscape of Neemghar. Nonetheless, the most extreme forms of caste distinction and discrimination of the past have largely disappeared. Children of all castes attend

school together, and, although intercaste friendships among young children are not the norm, neither are they altogether unusual. Members of most castes share common tanks for drinking water; most of the five wards into which the village is divided for election purposes are heterogeneous in terms of caste composition; and, while various areas of the village are occupied predominantly by one caste or another, it is not unusual for members of different castes to live next door to each other. My bua's (father's sister)—who belongs to the Baniya caste—neighbor, for instance, is a Brahman.

The two Harijan (former untouchable) castes of the village—Helas and the Chamars—provide an exception to this situation. They continue to live apart from the rest of the villagers in two separate and homogeneous hamlets. The two castes share a common tank for drinking water and never take water from the tanks used by non-Harijans. Conversely, non-Harijans will not take water from the Harijan tanks under any circumstances. However, Harijan children mix with children of other castes at school, and they may even sit on the porch of the house of a Brahman for the after-school tutorials that many children attend.

The population of Neemghar is divided into nineteen castes.[2] Table 1 lists these castes roughly in order of rank and gives both the traditional occupation and the occupation most frequently undertaken at present for each. Table 2 gives the population of each caste.

A word about the ranking of the castes is necessary. Over the years I have asked individuals in the village, at various times and in various contexts, from every caste represented in the village to rank the castes. Sometimes I talked to people in groups—which often led to lively discussion and argument over the placement of certain castes in the hierarchy—while at other times I talked privately, with single individuals. Sometimes

I simply asked people to list the castes of the village in hierarchical order, while at other times I also named castes that had not been mentioned by them and asked where they should be placed in the hierarchy.

Several interesting patterns of response emerged during these discussions, over the years, of caste ranking. First, there was a tendency, not surprisingly, for people to have very clear and strongly held ideas about the place of their own caste in the hierarchy and about the placement of castes close to their caste in rank, but to be increasingly vague and uncertain about—and even indifferent to—the ranking of castes further removed from their castes. Thus, for example, when my friend Ramesh, a Brahman man, was asked to list the castes in order of rank, he said: Brahmans and Baniyas. The rest are all equal. When I pressed him to elaborate, he responded: Jats, Bhumihars, and Tyagis are the same. Well, maybe they are a little different, but they will eat together, so they are more or less equal. Harijans are again different. Several weeks later, when we are again discussing caste, he gave me another ordered list of castes in the village—Brahmans, Baniyas, Sudras,[3] Helas, and Chamars—and he said: All Sudras are pretty much the same.

A second striking feature of the responses I received was the degree of disagreement over the ranking of the middle-level castes. While everyone agreed that Brahmans are at the top of the hierarchy and Chamars are at the bottom,[4] and that Jats, Bhumihars, and Tyagis are somewhere in the middle and rank higher than Kohars, there was no further consensus about the relative ranking of the middle castes. The relative position of Jats versus Bhumihars and the placement of various service and artisan castes were areas of particular contention. Compounding the difficulty of sorting out an absolute ranking scheme in the face of such disagreements is the fact that rules such as those concerning

commensality, which might be taken as indicators of relative status, are themselves often disputed. Moreover, the responses about caste ranking varied considerably depending on the caste and educational level of the people and on the contexts in which the conversations took place. Thus, for example, while a Bhumihar might claim an equal status with Jats when in the presence of a person of Jat caste, he would almost invariably claim a higher status than Jats if he was speaking to me privately. Indeed, after one long discussion with a multi-caste group in which it was finally agreed that Jats rank higher than Bhumihars, a Bhumihar friend pulled me aside and whispered: We are really higher than the Jats, but they have more money, implying that only by virtue of their economic superiority are Jats able to get away with a claim to higher ritual status. Other people, knowing that the government frowns upon caste and believing that I (and my family) did not subscribe to the caste concept, denied the importance of caste in the village altogether and refused to give any ranking at all.

Along with disagreement or occasional uncertainty among my informants about the placement of various castes in the hierarchy, there was also a tendency to omit certain castes—especially those with a small population in the village—from the ranking entirely. Of course, this is not surprising. In some cases a caste is represented by only one or two families in the village, and, particularly if its members are not involved in some specialized kind of work, they may play a very minor and non-prominent role in village life. Yet the frequent omission of many of the castes from the ranking scheme is also indicative, I think, of the importance of factors other than ritual purity and ritual status per se in peoples' conceptions of village social organization and the system of social stratification. Thus, the ranking scheme most frequently presented to me was as follows: Brahmans, Baniyas (only occasionally mentioned), Jats, Bhumihars, Tyagis (occasionally

mentioned), Kohars, Helas, and Chamars. Not only are more than half of the castes of the village omitted from this list, but all of the service and artisan castes are missing, including those like the Nais (barbers) and Dhobis (washermen) who continue to perform many of their traditional services for the village population. What the list does include are the top and bottom of the ritual hierarchy (the Brahmans and the two Harijan castes of the village) plus those castes that are economically, politically, and/or numerically predominant in the village. These, then, are the castes that come to the minds of most villagers when they talk about caste in the context of day to day life in the village.

It is clear, in light of the various conflicts and uncertainties I have described, that the presentation of an absolute ranking of the castes of the village would be inappropriate and, indeed, impossible. Thus, Table 1 should be understood as providing a general approximation of the ranking of the castes rather than a concrete and rigid order.

Varnas

Villagers often group individual castes into larger social categories. In Tables 3 and 4, I have shown two such groupings according to two different classification schemes, each of which is used by the villagers in some contexts. The first scheme, shown in Table 3, is based on the ancient varna system of classification. In this system, castes are grouped together into four categories called varnas according to ritual status and occupation. The four varnas, in order of rank, are Brahmans (priests), Ksatriyas (warriors), Vaisyas (merchants), and Sudras (servants). A fifth category of the ritually most polluted castes—the untouchables—also exists, although it is not included in the formal varna categories explicitly, except for the category of Brahman, which, in practice, serves as a caste category as well as a varna category. However, villagers do more frequently acknowledge

a further grouping of castes that is based on the varna scheme. In this grouping, the castes of the first three varnas are further combined under the broader category of twice-born (dvija) castes.[5] These twice-born castes are differentiated from the Sudra and Harijan castes by the villagers, although in practice the villagers only rarely refer to the category of Sudra.

The second classification scheme, shown in Table 4, derives from the grouping of castes by the British government and, after Independence, by the Indian government, into categories that are based primarily on economic criteria, although ritual status continues to be a component of these categories as well. The purpose of this classification scheme is to identify for protective legislation those castes that have been disadvantaged by extreme social and economic discrimination in the past. The first classification of this type was in the form of a list of Scheduled Castes—prepared by the British in 1935—that identified Harijan castes. Later, lists of Scheduled Tribes and Backward Classes [sic] were added. The category of Backward Classes designates castes that have very low status in the caste hierarchy—athough they rank higher than the Harijan castes—and whose members are, for the most part, economically depressed.[6] Legislation to reserve government jobs, seats in state and national legislatures, and positions in schools and to provide some kinds of finanacial aid has been passed for members of all three of these categories. A fourth category of castes—referred to variously in government documents as Forward Castes, Upper Castes, or Other Castes—designates those castes that are not beneficiaries of affirmative action laws.

Brahmans: Traditionally Brahmans are priests, while today they have a reputation for emphasizing modern education and secular occupations such as teaching and government

services.

Brahmans account for just under 4 percent of Neemghar's population, with 144 individuals in total divided into 26 separate household. Within the village they fall into three broad categories in terms of occupation and social roles. Some are priests. Thus, several of the families are associated with the various temples of the village and serve as their priests. In addition, the members of one family perform most of the important domestic rituals for the villagers, including those concerned with marriage, death, birth, and house-openings. These Brahmans are not associated with any specific temple in the village, but rather they perform their rituals in individual households.

Other Brahmans in the village are employed in secular occupations as administrators, teachers, and doctors. The village Munim (accountant) is a Brahman, as is the Post Master. The Post Master, in addition, claims some expertise in Ayurvedic and Western medicine, and it is not unusual to find long lines of people in front of the post office waiting for medical treatment along with those waiting to post letters. Many of the teachers in the elementary and high schools are also Brahmans. Because teachers are often transferred from school to school, several of these Brahmans are recent immigrants to the village rather than native residents. Their newness to the village and their perception of the temporary nature of their residence there is attested to by the fact that most of them rent their houses (or rooms in houses) rather than purchasing them and that they neither own land nor evince any interest in acquiring land in the village.

While several of the Brahman priests and administrators who are native to the village own some land, they are recognized chiefly for their non-agricultural pursuits. In contrast, a few Brahman families in the village are known particularly as large landowners. As such, they are not particularly distinguished by the villagers or in their

own behavior from the other landowners of the village who are mainly from the middle-ranking peasants castes.

Baniyas: Baniyas—the caste to which I belong—are traditionally a trading caste. Many of the Baniyas of Neemghar continue in this occupation today as the owners of small shops and tea stalls. All of these shops and stalls are fairly small-scale operations, however, and the Baniyas are not financially prominent in the village. With a population comprising only 2.3 percent of the total population of the village, they play a very minor role in the social and political life of the village.

Telis: The Telis are traditionally an oil-pressing caste of North India. There are 9 households of Telis in Neemghar, with 51 members in total, comprising just under 1.5 percent of the village population. The members of only one of these families engage in oil-pressing today, and even they only do so part time, devoting most of their energy to farming their 5 acres of land. The other Teli families in the village are either small-scale agriculturalists or owner of small shops.

Telis are ranked just after the Baniyas in the caste hierarchy by most villagers. They wear the sacred thread, indicating their twice-born status, they follow a strict vegetarian diet, and, in general, they behave in ways that indicate their high caste status. Nonetheless, they are not accorded quite the level of respect by members of the middle-ranking peasant castes that one would expect, given their high caste rank. Middle-ranking peasants tend to disparage the Telis, and some of them even question the validity of the high rank of the Telis. In part, this is probably due to the small population size of the Telis in the village and to their tendency to remain somewhat aloof from the rest of the villagers. Moreover, unlike the Brahmans and like the Baniyas, Telis hold no important positions in the village. As a result, they remain relatively unknown to the other villagers,

who thus tend to treat them with a certain skepticism.

Another factor also enters into the attitudes of the peasant castes towards the Telis, however. The Telis of Neemghar are suffering a significant economic decline. The fortunes of one of the Teli families in recent years illustrates this decline. Twenty-five to thirty years ago, the members of this family were quite wealthy, and at that time they build a large and luxurious Kothi (two-story house). During the course of the last twenty years, however, due to a series of unfortunate investments and to a rather casual attitude toward agriculture that resulted in a few years of poor harvest, they have had to sell most of their land. Today, they retain only a few acres of land, from which they are able to subsist comfortably, but far from luxuriously. Their Kothi, which they still own, has fallen into a state of increasing disrepair and dilapidation, providing graphic testimony to their financial decline. Any financial failure is looked upon with a certain amount of scorn by those members of the peasant castes (Jats, Bhumihars, Tyagis) who have prospered from the Green Revolution in recent years. Thus, they tend to look down upon the Telis in the light of their declining economic status, even as they acknowledge the higher ritual status of the Telis.

Karigars (Artisans):[7] There are five artisan castes or subcastes in the region—goldsmiths, blacksmiths, brass-smiths, stone masons, and carpenters. Together these five subcastes are known as Karigars. With increased industrialization, their traditional work has declined in value, and, with it, their social status.

In Neemghar, where two of the Karigar castes or subcastes are represented, the situation is complicated. The two subcastes are the Sunars (goldsmiths) and the Badhais (carpenters). Members of these two subcastes themselves generally argue that they all belong to a single community (that is, caste), the caste of Karigars. This single caste

designation is supported insofar as the distinction between Sunars and Badhais seems to be primarily based on the transient criteria of economic status and choice of occupation. Thus, the Sonars of the village are generally more prosperous than the Badhais and rely mainly on agriculture rather than on their traditional occupation for their livelihood. In contrast, all of the Badhais in the village earn most of their income as carpenters, with agriculture being only of secondary importance. It is not improbable that some Badhais families who have prospered, bought land, and forsaken their traditional occupation to become primarily agriculturalists, have come to be known as Sonars with the passing of time.

On the other hand, however, both the Badhais and Sonars are generally endogamous, which would argue for the appropriateness of treating them as separate subcastes or castes. Moreover, villagers of other castes almost invariably refer to the Karigars by their occupations designations, and, indeed, they tend to treat the designation of Karigars somewhat contemptuously. Thus, for example, when I asked one Jat (middle-ranking peasant caste) men whether Badhais are Karigars, he snorted and said: They call themselves Karigars, but a Badhai is a Badhai, right? Given the distinction between the two groups by most villagers and given their endogamy, I have treated them as separate subcastes in Table 1. However, it should be remembered that the boundaries between the two groups are not always clear, and that in many contexts the members of the two castes identify themselves simply as members of the single caste of Karigars.

Jat: The Jats are a middle-ranking peasant caste whose members are primarily agriculturalists. They are the most economically prosperous caste in the region, where they own about 80 percent of the fertile land. While generally maintaining a rural base, many of the most prosperous members of this caste have branched out into other

economic pursuits as well, and they have been particularly successful in contracting and construction.

Within Neemghar, the Jats are certainly one of the dominant castes. While they are not numerically the most populous caste in the village—with a population that is just over 19 percent of the total village population—they are the largest landowners in the village, and they control all of the important political and economic institutions of the village. Thus, the Sarpanch (village president) is a Jat, as is the Upa-Sarpanch (vice-president). Most of the members of the village Panchayat (council) are also Jats, and, in the cases where Panchayat seats are reserved by government regulation for members of particular castes, those seats are held by candidates who support the dominant Jats. The village cooperative credit society and the single temple in the village that has control over any sizeable amount of land are similarly controlled by the Jat leadership of the village.

While Jats own most of the land of Neemghar, and while most of the largest individual landowners of the village are Jats, members of the Jat caste in the village vary greatly in economic position, running the entire gamut from very poor landless laborers to extremely wealthy landowners.

Jats are considered—though they claim higher status—to be Sudras in the Hindu varna classification scheme, and, as such, they do not wear the sacred thread of the twice-born castes, nor do they engage in such high caste practices as vegetarianism. Indeed, those Jats who can afford to eat meat and eggs regularly take pride in doing so as an indication of their wealth. They claim that such eating habits make them strong and fearless, in contrast to Brahmans, Baniyas, and Karigars, whom they describe as weak, scrawny, and cowardly.

Nonetheless, the Jats do follow other behavior patterns in support of their fairly high

position in the caste hierarchy. One of the most striking of these is the partial seclusion of Jat women whenever possible. Wealthy Jat women never leave their houses unless accompanied by male relatives, or, on rare occasion, by several other female relatives. They may occasionally sit outside on the steps of their houses to gossip in the early evening, but even then, they retreat behind closed doors whenever a man of Jat or higher caste passes by. Poorer Jat women are, of necessity, allowed somewhat more license, but even they go out as little as possible, and they never work for wages in the fields or as domestic servants, as do women of lower castes. In rare cases, the young daughter of a very poor Jat family may be sent to work in the house of a wealthy Jat family, but even in this case, her remuneration is always in the form of daily meals and occasional gifts of clothing, medicine, and money, rather than in the form of fixed daily or annual wages. Such a relationship is generally terminated when the girl reaches puberty, and it is looked upon as the slightly shameful consequence of severe economic necessity.

With a fairly large population and with control over considerable economic and political resources, the Jats figure as one of the most socially prominent and politically powerful castes in the village.

Bhumihars: In Neemghar, Bhumihars account for 19.6 percent of the total population, just slightly more (0.5 percent) than the Jats. Like the Jats, the Bhumihars constitute a middle-ranking peasant caste whose members are mostly engaged in agriculture. In addition to their agricultural pursuits, several of the wealthier Bhumihars families are also known for their business concerns, particularly in the area of exporting sugarcane and tobacco from one district to another.

In terms of the caste hierarchy, the Bhumihars are ranked very closely to the Jats. They share similar habits of diet and ritual behavior, and members of the two castes will, on

occasion, inter-dine with one another. Bhumihar women, like Jat women, generally try to maintain some degree of seclusion when possible, and, again like the Jats, even the very poorest Bhumihar women will not work in the fields. Both Jats and Bhumihars say that both castes are good castes that are quite similar to each other. At the same time, however, Bhumihars have a reputation among other castes (and particularly among Jats) as being rather excitable and very prone to violence.

Although there are some wealthy Bhumihars landowners in the village, on the whole the Bhumihars are poorer than the Jats and are dominated by them. To date no Bhumihar has held any office of significant political power within the village. However, in recent years some of the wealthier Bhumihars of Neemghar have begun to challenge the political dominance of the Jats, campaigning vigorously for their own candidates for village offices, and they are indeed becoming a force to be reckoned with.

Tyagis: The Tyagis are a third middle-ranking peasant caste in the village. They will inter-dine with Jats and Bhumihars and are also considered to be a good caste by members of the latter two castes. Like Bhumihars, however, they have a reputation among non-Tyagis in the village for being prone to violence, and they are also known for their alleged unscrupulousness in business and politics.

While Tyagis are quite prominent and powerful in some parts of Uttar Pradesh, their numbers are small in the area under study. There are only 9 household of Tyagis in Neemghar, comprising 0.93 percent of the total population. For the most part, these families have migrated to Neemghar from other villages in order to find work. One such family rents the large, commercial flour mill of Neemghar, other families have come to fill government posts—the village clerk is a Tyagi, for example, while still other families have sought work as agricultural laborers or as domestic servants.[8]

Ahirs: The Ahirs are traditionally a pastoral caste whose members tend cattle and sell milk, curd, and ghi. There are only 4 households of Ahirs in Neemghar, comprising 0.77 percent of the total population. All of them are quite poor, and today their primary source of income is derived from daily wage labor in the fields.

Mallahs: The Mallahs are traditionally a caste of fisherman. Throughout Uttar Pradesh they are generally poor, and many of them now work primarily as agricultural laborers. There are only 2 Mallah households in Neemghar, with a total of 7 individuals.

Julahas: The Julahas are a weaving caste. With a total of 75 individuals in Neemghar, they comprise just over 2 percent of the total population. As a group, they are quite poor. Several of the Julaha families continue to practice their traditional occupation of weaving. None of them, however, owns the looms on which the weaving is done. Rather, the looms and other materials are supplied by a merchant from a nearby village who pays the Julahas on a piece rate basis for what they can produce. Most of those Julahas who are not engaged in weaving work in the fields as agricultural laborers. A few of them also own or lease very small plots of land they they cultivate as well.

Kohars: The Kohars are a caste of brick-makers and agricultural laborers. Although economically poor, their numberical strength—they comprise about 13 percent of the population in Dholpur Block—and their well-organized caste associations have given them some political leverage within the district. One Kohar MLA was recently elected from a village close to Neemghar, and, in general, the Kohars are becoming an increasingly prominent force in the politics of the block.

In Neemghar, Kohars constitute the most populous caste in the village. There are 223 Kohar households (995 individuals) in the village, accounting for 27.2 percent of the total village population. A few of the Kohars work primarily as brick-makers but most of them

are agriculturalists. While 60 to 75 percent of the Kohars own or lease some land, only a few families have access to enough land to support themselves with the income derived from the land alone. Most of the Kohars must rely on work as agricultural laborers for the bulk of their livelihood.

In contrast to Jat, Bhumihar, and Tyagi women, Kohar women work in the fields—both on their own land and as daily wage laborers. While this behavior is looked upon with contempt by members of the middle-ranking peasant castes, the poorer women from these castes do sometimes acknowledge that the extra income that Kohar women are able to earn gives the Kohars an advantage in the struggle to advance economically. Kohar children also contribute to the family income. Many boys begin to work full time as harwahs, tending water buffalo and cows, by the time they are nine or ten years old. Girls of the same age may work as domestic servants in the households of wealthy Jats or Bhumihars, although this practice has declined somewhat in recent years as the Kohars have begun to try to raise their caste status.

The overall poverty of most of the Kohars in Neemghar is readily apparent. Most of them have little in the way of material possessions. Their clothing tends to be poor, their diets are usually monotonous and rely heavily on low-quality wheat as the main staple, and their houses are typically small and dark, usually with thatched roofs, and often without electricity. Even the wealthiest among them do not have the fancy Khotis, the tractors, or the mo-peds owned and ostentatiously displayed by the wealthy Jats and Bhumihars of the village.

The low social status of the Kohars in the village is also apparent, both in the deference with which they are expected to treat members of the upper castes and in their physical separation from the rest of the village. All but 29 households of Kohars live in one or the

other of two homogeneous neighborhoods. These neighborhoods constitute clearly demarcated Kohar areas within the village. While the Kohars are not restricted from other parts of the village, they have their own temples and sources of government-rationed goods (kerosene, sugar, oil, and so on) within these two neighborhoods, and this enhances the sense of separateness from the rest of the village.

Despite the poverty and the low social status of the Kohars, however, there is a strong sense of community among them and an increasing level of political awareness. The economic changes of the Green Revolution over the past three decades have been, on the whole, more favorable to the Kohars than to the poorer members of the upper castes. This slight positive shift in economic fortunes coupled with a growing awareness of the potential power of their numbers in elections has begun to awaken in the Kohars a sense of strength and the possibility of taking an increasing measure of control over their own lives.

Dhobis: The Dhobis—traditionally a caste of washermen—account for 3.7 percent of the total village population. Most of the Dhobis in Neemghar continue to work as washermen at least part of the time. However, their population is too large for all of them to support themselves solely by washing clothes, and thus most of them supplement their incomes with work as daily wage laborers in the fields. In addition, 7 of the 25 Dhobi families own land, although none of them owns more than half an acre. In the busy periods of the agricultural cycle, when the demand for laborers is great and the wages are relatively high, many of the Dhobis cease to do washing altogether in order to work in the fields where they can earn more money. Then, during the agriculturally slow periods, they return to the washing of clothes once again.

Like the Kohars, the Dhobis are an economically disadvantaged caste of low social

status. Also like the Kohars, they display a fairly strong sense of caste solidarity. However, they are much less politically active than the Kohars—in part, no doubt, because of their smaller numbers. They generally support the dominant political faction of the village when they are unable to maintain a neutral position altogether.

Nais: The Nais are another poor, low-ranking service caste. Traditionally they are barbers, and most of the Nais in Neemghar continue to practice this occupation, supplementing their incomes, like the Dhobis, with work as agricultural laborers. There are only 12 households of Nais in Neemghar, constituting 1.6 percent of the village population. They play a fairly insignificant role in the social life of the village, and, like the Dhobis, they prefer to maintain a position of neutrality whenever possible in the face of factional divisions in the village.

The term Scheduled Castes refers to any of the formerly untouchable castes. Collectively the members of these castes are called Harijans.[9] There are four Scheduled Castes in Neemghar.

Helas: The Helas constitute the largest Scheduled Caste in Neemghar, with 308 members and 8.4 percent of the total village population. Most of the Helas are quite poor and derive the bulk of their incomes from work as agricultural laborers. Only 5 families own enough land to support themselves without supplementing their income from the land with other work.

The status of the Helas as former untouchables is clear in many respects. They live in a separate and homogenous community at a distance of about 0.5 kilometers to 1 kilometer from the rest of the village. They get their drinking water from a tank that is used only by the Helas and the members of the other Scheduled Castes. To my knowledge, they never use the drinking water tanks that are used by the members of the higher castes. They are

often forbidden entrance into the houses of members of higher castes, and, even when they are allowed inside, they are forbidden to enter certain rooms—cooking areas, for example—which are considered to be particularly vulnerable to pollution. Above all, they are expected to treat members of the upper castes with deference and respect and to maintain a suitable distance from them and an appropriate posture towards them. Thus, when I asked a Hela man about the effect of the government's prohibition of caste, he said that in the cities now there are no castes, but here in the village the upper-caste landowners still say to us: 'Distance! You must keep your distance'!

Despite their poverty and low social status, however, the Helas are by no means passive in the face of the continuing discrimination that they encounter. Throughout Uttar Pradesh, they have a reputation for being aggressive, politically very active, and quick to take advantage of government programs aimed toward the disadvantaged, and this is reflected in some ways in their behavior in Neemghar. Thus, for example, the Helas were the first to apply to the government for special housing loans targeted for the economically depressed, and, as a result, almost all of them now live in houses with tiled roofs.[10] While some of these houses are small and do not have electricity, they provide considerably better shelter than the thatched houses occupied by most of the poorest families in the village. Similarly, while the Helas continue to follow linguistic conventions and other behavioral mannerisms that signify inferiority to members of higher castes, they do not hesitate, unlike other castes, to confront higher caste landowners quite assertively if they feel they have been underpaid for their work or cheated in any other way.

Chamars: The Chamar caste—with 211 members and 5.8 percent of the total village population—is the other Scheduled Caste in the village with a significant propulation.

The members of this caste present quite a striking contrast to the Helas. Traditionally leatherworkers, now most of the Chamars, like the Helas, earn their livelihhood as agricultural laborers. Yet, unlike the Helas, they seem locked into the more traditional patterns of the caste system in the village. They are far more deferential and subservient to anyone of higher social status than are the Helas, they are much more inclined than the Helas to enter into patron-client relationships with the landowners of the village—always at the cost of having to display suitably humble and grateful behavior toward their patrons—and in general they have been unable to reap the benefits of government programs directed toward the advancement of the Scheduled Castes.

The differences between the Chamars and the Helas are apparent not only in the more submissive behavior of the Chamars toward members of the upper castes, but also in their living conditions. There is not a single tiled house in the Chamar hamlet. Even the few Chamars who have managed to achieve sufficient education to leave the village for a government job for some time, take up residence once again in thatched houses when they return to the village. Most of the houses are in a state of some disrepair and are far from water-tight, while a few of them actually only have three standing walls. The more extreme poverty of the Chamars relative to the Helas is also clear in their poorer clothes and in the paucity of other material possessions, even among the richest of them.

In part, the differences between the Helas and the Chamars may be due to the slightly smaller population of the Chamars. In part, these differences are also certainly due to different caste histories within the district and within the state as a whole. I will elaborate on these points further in a later chapter.

Khatiks: Traditionally the Khatiks are pig breeders, basket weavers, and midwives. In Neemghar, the 7 households of Khatiks continue to perform these occupations as their

primary sources of income. They are of very low social status, since their work with pigs and as midwives is considered to be fairly polluting. They are also somewhat feared by the other villagers, for they are believed to be skilled in witchcraft as well.

Bhangis: The Bhangi caste is the fourth Scheduled Caste in Neemghar. With only a single household of 3 members residing in the village, Bhangis are quite insignificant in village social and political life. I do not mean to imply that the Bhangis are not a part of the village in any sense. Of course they do have a place in the social structure of the village—albeit a lowly and much reviled one. Bhangis are sweepers by tradition, and the Bhangi family of Neemghar continues this occupation.

A few villagers, when asked about their caste, identified themselves only as Muslims. They appear as the last group in Table 1. I have not tried to fit them into the caste hierarchy for three reasons. First, there are so few of them that they are insignificant as distinct social categories or groups. Second, it was impossible to get any kind of consensus as to where they do fit in the caste hierarchy. Finally, and most important, all four families are converts, and in the day to day life of the village they are treated simply as members of whatever caste they have converted from. All cases of conversion that I know of are among Kohars, Helas, or Chamars, and the converts were certainly motivated at least partly by a desire to step outside the inequalities of the caste system. All of them continue to participate in Hindu rituals.

Notes

1. I use the term caste here to refer to the local endogamous, ranked groups called jatis by the people of the area. I do not use the term to refer to the broader, pan-Indian classification scheme that groups castes into the four varnas.

2. One of these groupings—the Muslims—are technically religious rather than caste categories. I will discuss their relation to the rest of the castes in the village later in the chapter.

3. Sudra is acutally a varna category rather than a caste. Traditionally, it includes servant castes whose male members do not undergo a ritual rebirth at adolescence. Sudra castes are ranked below the twice-born (dvija) castes whose male members do participate in a ceremony of rebirth at adolescence, but they are ranked above the Harijan castes. The Harijan castes are considered to be so ritually polluting that they are outside the varna system altogether.

4. The two groups ranked below the Chamars in Table 1 are such a small proportion of the population that few people mentioned them at all when they discussed caste ranking. Chamars were inevitably ranked at the very bottom of the caste hierarchy by them unless I specifically asked about the other two groups.

5. The male members of these castes are ritually reborn at adolescence in a sacred thread ceremony that marks the beginning of their religious studies. From the time of the ceremony until death, the men of these castes wear the identifying sacred thread across their chests. In contrast boys from the Sudra and Harijan castes do not undergo such an initiation rite.

6. The use of the term Backward Class is actually somewhat problematic. Originally, despite the reference to class, the term was applied to entire castes—including those caste members who were economically prosperous—rather than to individuals from any caste who were economically disadvantaged. However, the Indian courts have, at times, rejected caste by itself as an indication of backwardness except in the case of the Scheduled (Harijan) Castes. Nonetheless, in practice, the category continues to be applied

to specific castes that benefit from protective legislation. For the sake of clarity, I will use the term Backward Caste to refer to these castes.

7. The artisan castes are classified as Backward Castes by the government, largely because of their precarious economic position. However, in Neemghar their caste status is considerably higher than that of the other Backward Castes.

8. Tyagi women, like Jat and Bhumihar women, will not normally work in the fields or as domestic servants. One Tyagi woman—a widow—living in Neemghar, however, was forced by her extreme poverty to work as a domestic servant in a Jat household. She came to Neemghar in search of such work because she felt that it was too shameful to be so employed in her native village.

9. The term Harijan, meaning child of god was first suggested by M. K. Gandhi as a positive and non-offensive designation for the former untouchables.

10. Later, a group of poor Jats and Bhumihars applied for similar loans, but up to now, although they have received land for houses from the government, they have not received sufficient funds with which to build, and hence they continue to live in thatched huts.

CHAPTER 3

Kohars and Tyagis

The Kohar caste is classified as a Backward Caste. The caste meets both of the basic criteria of the Backward Caste designation—that is, it occupies a low position in the caste hierarchy, and most of its members are quite poor. Because the bulk of the Kohar population is economically disadvantaged, there is much less extreme economic stratification within the caste than there is among the Jats and Bhumihars. As we will see in this discussion of the Kohars, this fact has had important ramifications for the social and political roles of the Kohars at both the block and the village levels.

The Kohars are the most numerous of the Backward Caste members in Dholpur Block. Indeed, with about thirteen percent of the block population, they are the third most populous caste of the block, ranking behind only the Bhumihars (with about 18 percent of the block population) and the Helas (with about 14 percent of the population). Traditionally, the Kohars have been known as a poor caste of brick makers, although many of its members have always worked as field laborers instead of or in addition to brick making.

Since the fifties, the Kohars have become known as an increasingly militant caste in block level politics. A few block level Kohar caste associations were formed in the fifties, centering around the disproportionately low representation of Kohars in positions of power in state and local government. These various caste associations were coordinated by the leaders of the Niwai Brick Making Union in the fifties, and thus, Niwai village became known as an important center of Kohar leadership. Since that time, the caste leaders have followed a mixed strategy of confrontation and cooperation with whoever is

in power in their efforts to protect caste interests and to advance their own political positions. As with the Bhumihars, the Kohars have become increasingly aware of the strength in their numbers in the context of electoral politics, and this has encouraged them to become more and more aggressive in their demands for a share of political power at the block level.

The Kohars are the largest single caste in Nimai village, followed by the Bhumihars. Thus, it is not altogether surprising that a Kohar candidate won in the last election for member of legislative assembly, although the contest was very close. Neemghar and Nimai are part of the same block, and thus, this electoral victory for a Kohar has had a strong effect on Kohar caste members in the village itself. Not only has it increased their confidence in the efficacy of the electoral system as a means for advancement, but it has given them a tangible link to extra-village politics and hence a stronger voice at all political levels.

In Neemghar itself, the Kohar caste is the largest caste in the village, representing 27.2 percent of the total population. The low social status of the members of this caste is apparent almost immediately when one enters the village. Whereas the Brahmans, Jats, Bhumihars, and other caste members of relatively high status live for the most part in fairly integrated areas in the central part of the village, the Kohars are much more socially isolated. Thus, while Jats, Bhumihars, and Brahmans live side by side and maintain cordial and even somewhat neighborly relations with one another, the Kohars maintain a much greater distance from them, both socially and spatially.

The Kohars occupy two areas of the village. The bulk of the Kohar population (about 79 percent of the total Kohar population) lives on one edge of the village proper, separated from most of the rest of the village by a road. While this area is clearly part of

the village and not a separate hamlet, and while people of other castes live on the borders of the Kohar area, there is nonetheless a marked sense of separation from the rest of the village. This area is definitely a Kohar area in a way that is not paralleled by easily discernible Jat areas, Bhumihar areas, or Brahman areas.

A second, smaller segment of the Kohar population (about 21 percent of the total Kohar population) lives at a much greater remove from the main part of the village in what is effectively a separate, though unnamed, hamlet. There are two such separate Kohar communities in Neemghar because of some long-standing feud within the caste. However, from the perspective of the other villagers, both of the Kohar communities are essentially the same—although the larger one is considered to be somewhat more independent and aggressive politically.

The social isolation of the Kohars goes much deeper than a limitation on dwelling sites, however. Although everyone in the village is very conscious of caste, and although the most valued social relations are always intra-caste relations, members of the various Forward Castes do share some parts of their day to day social lives. Thus, for example, men from these castes often sit together in front of one of the temples, talking or occasionally playing chess during their spare time. Similarly, women may sit on their porches and exchange gossip with neighbors of other castes. Moreover, members of the Forward Castes share the same temples and shops and, to some extent, play similar roles in some of the village festivals. In contrast, aside from interactions related to their work, the social life of the Kohars is much more strictly confined to intra-caste relations. They have their own temple and shops within their neighborhood, and they are often excluded from certain kinds of ritual participation engaged in by members of the Forward Castes. Even when they use shops outside of their own area, they tend to keep to themselves and

do not engage in the kind of neighborly gossip that one frequently hears among members of the Forward Castes.

There are a few exceptions to this social isolation. The two wealthiest Kohar families are a little bit more involved in inter-caste relationships. One of them, in particular, has an ongoing and fairly close personal relationship with the members of a Brahman household. However, this relationship is frowned upon by most of the Forward Caste villagers, and, indeed, my phupha (father's brother-in-law) and several other people hinted to me say that there is something scandalous in its nature.

The vast distance that is generally felt between Forward Caste members and Kohars is apparent in the lack of knowledge about the Kohars exhibited by most of the members of the other castes. Indeed, many upper caste men are unaware that the Kohars even have a temple of their own, and I was frequently given erroneous information about their habits in general.

Like the Jats and Bhumihars, the Kohars share the sense of a distinctive identity among themselves. Indeed, their social isolation from the other castes of the village has, if anything, encouraged a stronger sense of community and caste solidarity among them than is found among the members of the Forward Castes.

An additional factor that contributes still further to a feeling of unity among the Kohars is the relative lack of economic differentiation among the members of this caste. While there are certainly a few households among the Kohars that are prominent for their relative wealth, one does not find the extreme economic stratification that one finds among the Forward Castes. Almost all of the Kohars are poor, earning their livelihoods through work as agricultural laborers supplemented, when possible, by the cultivation of small plots of land. These small plots of land are occasionally owned by the Kohar

cultivators, but, more often, they are taken in lease. For the most part, the income derived through this combination of wage labor and cultivation is sufficient to meet the subsistence needs of a family, but it does not generate any sizable surplus. A few Kohar families—15 to 25 families at most—also supplement their incomes through their traditional occupation of brick making. However, the income from brick making again is insufficient to provide much of an economic cushion beyond bare subsistence.

Even the wealthiest of the Kohars in the village do not have the means to adopt the kind of life style enjoyed by the wealthiest members of the Forward Castes. They have no kothi, no tractors, no motor scooters, no refrigerators, and so on—in short, they have none of the items by which the wealthiest members of the Forward Castes can be identified. Rather, the wealth of the richest Kohars is manifested by the ownership of some land, houses with electricity and tiled roofs, mosquito nets, and bicycles, and by the fact that the women of these households do not work as agricultural laborers in the fields of others. Certainly the standard of living and the level of economic security among these wealthy Kohar families is much higher than that among the poorest of the Kohars, but the gap between the richest and the poorest Kohars is much smaller than the chasm that separates the rich from the poor among the Forward Castes.

While the bulk of most Kohar incomes derives from wage labor, many Kohar families do have access to some plots of land through lease or ownership as well. Roughly about 68 percent of the Kohars do farm some land independently. However, in the majority of cases, these plots of land are far too small and infertile to provide even subsistence for the families who work them.

Even in those cases in which Kohar landowners have land that is reasonably well-located and fertile, the problems faced by Kohar cultivators are innumerable. As with the

small landowners and tenants among the Jats and Bhumihars, most of the Kohars have little to offer as security for the loans they need for cultivation. Hence, they too are often forced to turn to private moneylenders who generally charge excessively high rates of interest on loans, and again, only in exceptionally good years are they likely to make a profit, while a bad year or two can be an economic catastrophe for them.

Despite the difficulties encountered by the Kohars in agriculture, however, the overall effect of the Green Revolution has been positive for many leaders of the community. This has been true for several reasons. First, because so many of them rely on agricultural wage labor for at least part of their income, the rise in wages for agricultural laborers has been to their advantage. Second, the increase in the buying and selling of land in the area, particularly during the early years of the Green Revolution before land prices became too inflated, also benefited the Kohars. Although some of the Kohar smallholders have been forced to sell land because they could not repay loans, and the extremely high price of good agricultural land prohibits most Kohars from becoming buyers, a few of them have been able to save sufficient money to buy more land. Thus, the amount of land owned by Kohars and the number of Kohar families that own some land has increased over the last twenty years.

Finally, a third set of changes for the Kohars relates to the leasing of land. Again, the effects of the Green Revolution changes on the Kohar community have been mixed, but on the whole they have been positive. On the negative side, the increased profitability of agriculture, the land of the tiller movements, and government advocacy of tenants' rights have all contributed to a decrease in the amount of land available for lease in the area. This is a matter of great concern to the Kohars, many of whom hope to be able to save enough through the leasing of land eventually to buy land of their own. Indeed, the two

most common complaints I heard when asked about the major problems faced by the Kohars were that it is difficult to obtain land in lease and that it is difficult to obtain sufficient credit either to tide families over during periods in which there is no work or to buy seeds, fertilizers, and other agricultural inputs for land owned or taken in lease. Yet the very fact that these are the most frequently voiced complaints indicated that the Kohars do get some land in lease, and, indeed the Moratorium on long-term leasing, enacted in 1979, has actually worked in their favor to some extent. That is, landlords who wish to give their land in lease are less likely than in the past to give it to relatives or even to members of their own caste in many cases, for fear that it will be difficult to limit the length of time a single person or family continues to lease the land in the light of the demands of common kinship or caste. In contrast, landlords often feel that it is easier to lease to a Kohar family for just one or two seasons, without feeling any obligation to extend the leasing period if the family so desires. Thus, while a Kohar family may not lease land from the same person for long periods of time, there is at least some opportunity for the family to take on one short-term lease after another. In contrast, poor Jats and Bhumihars find that many landowners from their own castes are no longer willing to lease land to them at all. Thus, government attempts to regulate tenancy arrangements have not adversely effected Kohar tenants to the extent that they have hurt potential tenants from the higher castes.

Certain caste rules and aspects of caste ideology among the Kohars have also enabled them to take advantage of some of the economic changes more effectively than the poorer members of the Forward Castes. In particular, the rules of the caste concerning women have worked to their benefit. Whereas women from the higher ranking castes—Jats, Bhumihars, Tyagis, Baniyas, Brahmans, and so on—are prohibited from doing any kind

of agricultural labor—either for wages or on their own land—Kohar women routinely do such work. Among the wealthiest of the Kohar families women do not work as wage laborers, of course, but even in these families they frequently work in their own fields. The contribution that women are thus able to make to the family income often makes the difference between a family that is able to take land in lease and one that is not. Indeed, one of the most frequent complaints I heard from the men of poor Jat and Bhumihar families was that the Kohars have an unfair advantage over Jats and Bhumihars because Kohar women will work in the fields. Because Kohar families are thus more productive as a unit, they have the possibility of leasing land and eventually even buying their own land with the profits from leasing, while the poor Jat and Bhumihar families remain stagnant. The level of bitterness expressed by Jats and Bhumihars over this situation is really strong, and one often hears in discussions of this topic a mixture of scorn—that Kohar women demean themselves by such work—and envy—that Kohars have a better chance to improve their economic position because of the work the women do.

The Kohar caste is also differentiated from the Forward Castes in terms of the general caste attitude towards manual labor. Among the members of the Forward Castes, physical labor is viewed as demeaning. Certainly, the poorer male members of these castes often have to engage in physical labor—either on their own land or even as wage laborers—but such work is looked down upon and is avoided if possible. If a man of Forward Caste can afford to do so, he will always hire extra laborers rather than work himself or have his sons work in his fields. Men who are unable to avoid manual labor are often sneered at by the more fortunated members of their own castes. Thus, as one of the wealthier Bhumihar landowners put it, Bhumihars who engage in manual labor are small, small farmers—more like laborers than like upstanding caste men. In contrast, physical labor as a means

to advancement is much more respected among the Kohars. Part of this attitude, no doubt, is the result of their unfavorable economic position—most Kohars have no choice but to work as agricultural laborers, so they simply don't have the luxury of being able to sneer at such work. At the same time, however, even the wealthiest members of the Kohar caste in the village at least occasionally lend a hand in their own fields, and they are willing to perform tasks, such as carrying the evening milk supply home from the buffaloes, that few Jat or Bhumihar men would do if they could avoid it. This attitude towards manual labor has enabled Kohar men to work more productively and longer than many of their economic counterparts in the Jat and Bhumihar castes, who feel some pressure to withdraw from the labor force and become solely hirers of labor as soon as possible.

Along with the economic changes the Kohars have experienced in the last two decades, there have been political changes. As I noted earlier, in recent years the Kohars have become increasingly aware of the power of their numbers in electoral politics. This awareness has led the Kohars to become much more assertive of their political rights, and much more willing to make demands on the politically powerful in return for Kohar political support.

Most of the focus of this Kohar politicization, however, is outside the village. There has been relatively little change in the political position of the Kohars within the village. Despite their political gains at the extra-village level, the Kohars have made no significant inroads into the power structure of the village itself.

This lack of political mobility within the village by the Kohars is clear when one examines their position with respect to the three most important institutions of the village—the Panchayat, the cooperative society, and the landed temple. Whereas at the

block level and above the Kohars have experienced some success in electoral politics, they have been unable to use the power of their votes to break into these three village institutions. Kohars have stood for election to the boards of each of them, but they have experienced no notable success. Although a few Kohars have been elected to the boards of the Panchayat and the cooperative society—three to the Panchayat and two to the cooperative—their positions are nominal and carry virtually no power. Indeed, all of the Kohars elected to the Panchayat are women filling reserved seats, and, because of their sex, they rarely even attend Panchayat meetings, and they never talk at the meetings they do attend. The two Kohars on the board of the cooperative society are males. However, one of them is from the small Kohar hamlet that is located at the distance from the village and is known for its strong allegiance to the Jat faction in power in the village. The other Kohar board member is from another village altogether and rarely participates in the meetings or other business of the cooperative. I will discuss the elections to these boards and the Kohars role later. Suffice it to say here that everyone in the village, regardless of caste, openly acknowledges that the Panchayat and the cooperative society belong to the dominant Jat faction, and that positions on their boards bring the Kohars no status or power.

The situation with respect to the landed temple of the village is a little harder to sort out. Because of an ongoing dispute between the temple priests and the elected trustees of the temple over the distribution of temple funds, people were reluctant to talk about the temple board. Nonetheless, it is clear that the temple, like the Panchayat and the cooperative society, is effectively controlled by the dominant Jat faction of the village. Moreover, because of the low ritual status of the Kohars, the temple, far more than the Panchayat or the cooperative, can never be a viable avenue of political advancement for

them.

There are two reasons for the lack of political mobility at the village level among the Kohars. First, although Kohars say that there is more mixing among the castes today than there was a generation ago, caste barriers continue to be strong, and there continues to be a much greater social distance between the Kohars and the Forward Castes than there is among the members of the various Forward Castes. The increase in mixing among the castes is manifested more in the relaxing of rules barring Kohars from walking too close to Forward Caste members or from buying goods in the shops that the Forward Caste members use, than by any more intimate social relationships with members of the Forward Castes. The social isolation that results from the Forward Caste attitudes creates a wall between the Kohars and the Forward Castes. This wall makes any real social or political mobility within the village extremely difficult for the Kohars, despite significant gains in economic position among some members of the caste.

A second pressure against political movement within the village by the Kohars is to be found in the strong Kohar caste associations that operate at the block level. The importance of these caste associations to the Kohars becomes clear even in casual conversation with them. The associations are obviously pertinent to the daily lives of the Kohars in a way that is not true for the Jats, Bhumihars, or Brahmans. Whereas the members of these Forward Castes never spontaneously mentioned caste associations to me and never evinced much interest in them when the topic was raised or discussed, caste associations are a recurring theme in the conversation of many of the Kohars. The Kohars speak of them as a source of status and power. Given the history of powerful Kohar caste associations, it is not surprising that politically active members of the Kohar caste turn to these associations in the search for political efficacy and power, rather than to any village

institutions. Whereas a Kohar trying to gain political power and status within the village faces virtually insurmountable barriers, this is not the case at all at the level of the block. At that level, politicians of all castes court the Kohars vote, and factional alliances between Kohars and members of various Forward Castes are much more easily forged.

This is not to say that the Kohars take no interest at all in village-level politics. On the contrary, the Kohars did participate actively in the most recent Panchayat elections. Moreover, they participated by agreeing to an alliance with the members of the Bhumihar faction. Even in this case, however, their motive for supporting the Bhumihar faction had as much to do with politics at the block level as it did with politics at the village level, and their activities during the election were focused as much on external political relations as on internal political relations.

The general lack of political movement within the village and the social isolation of the Kohars has shaped a kind of social organization and a set of attitudes among the Kohars that differentiates them sharply from the Jats and Bhumihars. One aspect of this difference is the prevalence of middlemen among the Kohars. Most interactions between Kohars and the members of other castes—particularly the members of the Forward Castes—are mediated by some kind of middleman. For example, complaints by Kohars to the Sarpanch or other village leaders are usually handled by one man—a prominent Kohar shopkeeper and landowner who has no formal position in the village political structure. Similarly, when a Jat or Bhumihar landowner wants to hire laborers to work in his fields, he usually asks one Kohar laborer who in turn organizes a team of workers for the landowner.

Unlike any of the Forward Castes, the Kohars also have a firmly established system of caste discipline that is exercised by a group of caste elders. These elders are often called

upon to settle disputes within the caste. If they fail, the disputants are likely to take the matter to a source of authority outside the village rather than turning to the Sarpanch or the Panchayat board as members of the Forward Castes are likely to do.

While these elders are not elected or appointed, they nonetheless constitute a defined group. Thus, when various Kothar informants were asked to name the important leaders of the caste, the same list of six names was given over and over again. A few informants gave two or three additional names as well, but everyone included the six names in the list. When asked why these men are so important, their age, wisdom, and power to settle disputes were their most frequently mentioned attributes.

The importance of these elders and middlemen in the caste organization is both a function of the social isolation of the Kothars—the Kothars are loathe to turn to outsiders for assistance unless it is absolutely necessary—and a contributing factor to the continuation of that isolation—the elders and middlemen serve as alternatives to direct interaction with the members of the Forward Castes.

The attitudes and worldview of the Kothars have also been influenced by the political and social position of the caste in the village. Two almost opposing tendencies have been fostered. On the one hand, the Kothars as a group form a very inward-looking caste within the village. Their interactions with the members of other castes are limited, and their focus is primarily on affairs within the caste. Socially, this inward focus is manifested in their reliance on middlemen for inter-caste transactions, their reliance on members of their own caste for dispute settlement and counsel, and their strong distrust of people outside of their caste. Politically, this inward focus is manifested in their withdrawal from and cynicism toward most village-level politics. As we will see when we examine the Panchayat elections, although a Kohar candidate did contest for the

position of Sarpanch, most Kohars had absolutely no expectation that he could win, and they did not support him. Instead, they put their energies into an alliance that was oriented, from their perspective, as much toward block-level politics as toward politics in the village.

On the other hand, the Kohars also exhibit a very strong outward focus beyond the boundaries of the village. This is apparent in the importance they attach to their caste associations, in their tendency to turn to politicians and other officials outside the village to take care of their needs if they are unable to get the assistance they require from among their own caste members in the village, and in their heightened sense of political efficacy outside the village as they have seen the power of their votes in block-level elections.

Thus, whereas the Forward Castes of the village, particularly the Jats and Bhumihars, are very much oriented toward social and political relations within the village—inter-caste as well as intra-caste—the Kohars are isolated and withdrawn into their own caste within the village, even as they have expanded their horizons outside the village. Indeed, their rising sense of political potential outside the village has added to their sense of isolation from the mainstream of the village, as it has shown them that the opportunities for political and social gains lie elsewhere.

CHAPTER 4

Helas and Chamars

These castes are the lowest ranking castes in the village, and, as untouchables, their members have been subject to extreme discrimination, social isolation, and abuse, particularly in the past. There are four Harijan castes in the village. Taken together, these four castes have a population of 548 people, comprising 14.98 percent of the village population. 56.2 percent of the Harijans are Helas, 38.5 percent are Chamars, 4.7 percent are Khatiks, and the remaining 0.6 percent are Bhangis. Because the number of Khatiks and Bhangis is small—there is in fact only 7 families of the former and one of latter in the village—their importance in the social organization of the village is minimal. Therefore, I will consider only the Helas and Chamars in my discussion of the Harijan castes.

In some respects, the situation of the Helas and Chamars today is very similar to that of the Kohars. Like the Kohars, most of the Helas and Chamars are landless agricultural laborers, and their very low social position is coupled with an extremely weak economic position. Indeed, one finds even less economic stratification among the Helas and Chamars than is present among the Kohars, and, as a group, they are far poorer than the Kohars. Also similar to the situation of the Kohars, the low position of the Helas and Chamars in the caste hierarchy has created a barrier to their entry into the political institutions of the village in any but the most nominal sense. Finally, a growing perception on the part of some Hela and Chamar leaders of the power of numbers in electoral politics has encouraged the rise of a group of political middlemen within each caste who mediate between their fellow caste members and the members of the upper

castes. Some of these middlemen serve as brokers of votes at the block level and above, delivering blocks of Harijan votes to upper-caste politicians in return for economic and political favors for themselves and their constituents. Again, this is similar to the role of the middlemen we have seen among the Kohars.

At the same time, however, the Helas and Chamars do not simply represent a poorer, more oppressed version of the Kohars. Rather, their social situation differs qualitatively from that of the Kohars in two significant respects. The first difference concerns the social identity of the Helas and Chamars, both as it is defined by the members of the two castes themselves, and as it is defined by the members of other castes. Kohars usually identify themselves, and are identified by others, primarily as members of a single caste rather than as simply one caste in the set of Backward Castes. In contrast, in some contexts the Helas and Chamars are identified, by themselves and by others, simply as Harijans—that is, as part of the set of former untouchable castes. The identity of Helas and Chamars as Harijans has been a strong determinant of their political position at the block level and above. At the village level, on the other hand, their separate identities as Helas and Chamars have been equally important in shaping their social and political interactions with others.

A second factor that distinguishes the Helas and Chamars from the Kohars is the qualitative difference in caste status between the Backward Castes and the Harijan castes. The progression down the caste hierarchy is not a smooth one. Just as the separation of Forward castes from Backward Castes entails social barriers to interaction of a degree that does not exist among the different Forward Castes, so the barriers that separate the Harijan castes from all of the other castes in the village are even stronger and more clearly defined.

The gulf between the Harijans and the other castes of the village is indeed a wide one. As untouchables, the Harijans are treated qualitatively differently from any other caste in the village by all non-Harijan villagers. In the past their oppression was extreme, and they were barred from all but the most menial and humiliating interaction with the rest of the village. Today, although their position has changed—at least superficially—so that they no longer suffer the worst of the humiliations and indignities that used to be their lot, they are still viewed by the majority of the villagers as untouchable. They continue to be perceived by others as different at best, and, more often, as polluted and defiling, even as the number and kinds of social interactions between them and the other castes increase.

In this chapter I examine both of these factors that differentiate the Harijan castes from all of the other castes in the village. I consider how they have affected both the Harijans as a group, and the Helas and Chamars as individual castes, in their changing social and political roles.

There are 26 Harijan castes in Dholpur Block. The members of these castes together comprise 17.2 percent of the population of the block. The majority of the Harijans are Helas, who account for 77.5 percent of the Harijan population (13.7 percent of the total population) of the block. The next most populous Harijan caste in the block is the Chamar caste, whose members account for 15.9 percent of the Harijan population (2.8 percent of the total population) of the block. The remaining 6.6 percent of the Harijan population of the block is divided among 24 different Harijan castes. With such small numerical representation, these 24 castes taken separately are insignificant as political forces in the block.

Historically, at the district and block levels as well as at the village level, the Harijans have been an oppressed and impoverished group, with no political or economic standing.

They have been ostracized by the members of other castes and required to maintain an adequate physical and social distance at all times. The majority of them were landless agricultural laborers in the past, and most of them continue to be so today.

Nonetheless, after Independence, the social and political position of the Harijans began to change somewhat. The enactment of laws banning untouchability and prohibiting discrimination against Harijans helped to end the most blatant of the social indignities that the Harijans had suffered. For example, Harijans were no longer required to sit separately on busses, they were no longer prohibited from walking on certain village streets, and Harijan children increasingly intermingled with non-Harijan children in schools.

The advent of electoral politics also gave force to Harijan efforts to change their social position. The Harijans, like the Kohars, began to recognize the power of numbers in a political system based on universal adult franchise. At the same time, affirmative action through the reservation system, in which a certain number of political positions, bureaucratic positions, and university seats are reserved for Harijans, ensured the Harijans of at least some degree of participation in the institutions of government. These two factors gave the Harijan leaders both a sense of self-confidence and a certain amount of real political bargaining power in their dealings with other political leaders.

Moreover, as the value of control over blocks of votes became apparent to leaders and politicians of all castes, their attitudes toward Harijans began to change—at least overtly—as they competed to win the Harijan vote. This again helped to foster better relations—at least superficially—between Harijans and non-Harijans in general. Thus, Singh argues: "The electoral politics necessitated for the upper-caste land[owners] to seek Harijan cooperation in order to legitimize their traditional leadership roles in a

modern political framework. Therefore, they had to gradually change their behavior pattern towards the latter and this embarrassed the rest of the upper-caste sections. They too had to adopt a more docile posture in their day-to-day interaction with the Harijan laborers and harwahs" (1996: 192).

This is not to say that the Harijans moved into positions of real equality vis a vis members of the non-Harijan castes. Discrimination against Harijans continued and an underlying aversion to Harijans on the part of many non-Harijans remained deeply rooted. Nonetheless, the fact that laws against untouchability has been passed and that the leadership of India officially proclaimed the concept of untouchability to be socially and morally untenable gave the Harijans a legal and moral basis in their struggle to raise their social and economic position. At the same time, the strength of their numbers gave them a practical advantage in the political sphere.

While these changes have affected all of the Harijans of the block to some extent, however, the real political and educational gains made since Independence have been limited for the most part to a small number of Harijan leaders in the block. Often, those who have profited most from the changes in the political and social climate act as middlemen and political brokers for the majority of the Harijans who remain severely disadvantaged economically, educationally, and socially. In order to understand the position of this majority, one must examine the role of the Harijans in the context of village organization.

In the past, the Harijans of Neemghar were subject to an extreme set of social rules and prohibitions that rendered them outcastes indeed from the rest of village society. For example, Harijans were prohibited even from walking on the main street of the village, they were prohibited from buying food or tea at the village tea stalls, and they were

required to maintain a prescribed distance from any upper-caste villagers whom they encountered in passing. Similarly, even Harijan children who were permitted to attend schools with the children of other castes, were required to remain at a distance from the other children and from their teachers. Indeed, when the Harijan children wanted to show their teachers work that they had done, they had to throw their slates to the teachers rather than handing the slates to them, lest they pollute the teachers with their touch. Harijans who failed to abide by these rules often faced harsh punishment.

These rules and others like them are no longer enforced in Neemghar today, although many of the older Harijans in the village still remember them and describe them vividly. Certainly, in recent years, the social and legal pressures exerted by the Indian government against practices related to untouchability have discouraged many of the more blatant forms of discrimination against the Harijans. Nonetheless, the isolation of the Harijans from the rest of the village remains extreme. It is an isolation far more severe and more strictly enforced than that of the Kohars.

One aspect of this isolation is physical distance, and, indeed, the first thing one notices about the Harijan is their physical separation from the rest of the village. Like the Kohars, the Helas and Chamars each live in distinct areas, separate from the other villagers. However, whereas the area in which the majority of Kohars live is well within the boundaries of the village, the areas in which the Helas and Chamars live each constitute distinct—though unnamed—hamlets at some distance from the rest of the village. Moreover, it is clear from my conversations with various villagers that these hamlets are considered to be outside the village in some sense by non-Harijans and the Harijans alike. Thus, for example, I was often given directions by non-Harijans—Jats, Bhumihars, and Kohars in particular, and noy to forget my bua—that began: "Go out of the village toward

the area where the Harijans live." Similarly, Helas and Chamars whom I met leaving their hamlets frequently told me that they were going into the village.[1] In contrast, the unnamed hamlet in which the separate group of Kohars lived was never referred to in this way.

The physical isolation of the Harijans is paralleled by their social isolation. Like the Kohars, the Harijans are still today excluded from the village temples and from participation in most village rituals. They are prohibited from entering non-Harijan houses in many cases, and they are expected to behave with a great deal of deference and respect in all of their interactions with upper-caste villagers. Non-Harijans will not enter Harijan houses nor will they accept food or drink from the Harijans. The Harijans are not permitted to take drinking water from either of the two tanks used for that purpose by the other villagers. Rather, the Harijans are required to take drinking water from a separate tank used only by Harijans.

These rules and prohibitions, along with others like them, serve to separate the Harijans radically from the other castes of the village. Even more than any specific set of rules, however, it is the attitude of the non-Harijans toward the Harijans that serves as the single greatest barrier to any real change in the social status of the Harijans. Despite the relaxation of the most extreme rules of social separation that were once applied to the Harijans, despite the increased intermingling of Harijans and non-Harijans, and despite the moral and legal campaign against untouchability waged by the Government of India, the non-Harijans of the village continue to view the Harijans as fundamentally polluted and defiling. Thus, although the social rules that are applied to the Harijans today are really norms of behavior—how the Harijans are expected to act—rather than strictly observed and enforceable laws, and although breeches in the rules may, on occasion, be

ignored by non-Harijans rather than confronted by them, the stigma of untouchability continues, and the social status of the Harijans remains largely unchanged.

This attitude toward the Harijans, present even among those non-Harijans who claim to accept the government stance against untouchability, is manifested in a continuing aversion to any sort of physical contact or even closeness with Harijans. Thus, for example, although there are no longer laws specifying how closely a Harijan may approach a non-Harijan, Harijans are still expected to keep their distance. As the Harijans explained to me: It doesn't matter that these laws no longer exist. When we walk in the village the landowners still say to us, 'Keep your distance. You must keep your distance'.

This aversion to physical contact with the Harijans is also evident in the reactions I encountered among the non-Harijans of the village when I first began (in 1988) to visit the Harijan hamlets. Many of the non-Harijans, especially my bua (father's sister) and her husband, were very distressed by my visits. While they were willing to concede that as a foreigner I did not know the social rules, they warned me repeatedly against entering Harijan houses. Moreover, many people were reluctant to invite me into their own houses when they knew that I had just come from the Harijan hamlets.

Finally, the deep-rooted aversion felt by non-Harijans toward contact with Harijans is again indicated by the insistence on the part of the non-Harijans that the Harijans continue to use a separate tank for drinking water. This type of discrimination has been legally banned by the government, and most people in the village know that it is illegal.

As these examples illustrate, despite government efforts to abolish the practices associated with untouchability, and despite some changes in the patterns of interaction between Harijans and non-Harijans, the Harijans of Neemghar remain a group apart—discriminated against and sharply separated from the rest of the village. As the Harijans

have explained to me, over the years: The caste system is still strong and we are still Harijans. Today there is a little more mixing among castes, but things aren't going to get better gradually. The caste system won't simply fade away.

As we have seen in the discussion above, the non-Harijan villagers usually group all of the Harijan castes together conceptually, and apply a single set of social rules and attitudes to all of them. Among the Harijans themselves, however, the distinctions between Harijan castes are important, and a clear separation is maintained among the different castes. The rule against intermarriage between Harijan castes is strictly enforced, and interdining among Harijans of different castes is rare. Thus, one must examine the Harijan castes individually as well as a group in order to understand fully the role of each in the social organization of the village.

Helas

The Hela hamlet, consisting of 83 families, is located about three-fourths of a mile from the central part of the village. It is separated from the closest non-Harijan houses of the village by several fields of wheat. Although many of the houses in the Hela hamlet are tiled rather than thatched—the result of a government housing project—the general poverty of the Helas is obvious. Most of the children one sees running about are poorly dressed or naked, and inside most of the houses one sees little material property of any material value beyond a few cooking utensils and string cots. Only a handful of the houses in the hamlet have electricity, and only two of them have latrines.

The majority of the Helas subsist solely on the wages they earn as agricultural laborers. Indeed, during the busiest periods of the agricultural cycle, the Hela hamlet is practically deserted on most days because all of the able-bodied men and women have gone off to

the fields to work. By the same token, during the slack periods of the agricultural cycle, one usually finds the hamlet full of people with little to do even during the day.

Every year during those times when there is little demand for agricultural labor, the Helas rely on loans to meet their subsistence needs. Often large landowners from the village provide interest free loans to their Hela laborers during these periods of unemployment. However, Helas who take these loans are usually required to work them off by taking a cut in pay just when the wages for agricultural labor become high again. In other cases, Hela women who own a little jewelry—in the form of ankle bracelets, earrings, bangles, and nose rings—offer their jewelry as collateral for loans from professional moneylenders. Interest on these loans is high, however, and the borrowers frequently are unable to redeem their jewelry. Moreover, for most families, this jewelry represents the only form of savings they have to fall back on during times of particular hardship or financial need, and thus, its loss can be truly devastating. In either case—whether the Helas borrow from landowners or from professional moneylenders—they became caught in a cycle of debt and repayment from which the most they can eke out is a bare subsistence. Saving to the extent necessary to break out of this cycle is virtually impossible.

While most Helas derive their livelihood entirely from wage labor, some Helas do own small plots of land. Roughly about 35 percent of the Hela families of Neemghar own some land. While this figure may seem high at first glance, in fact the landholdings of most of these families are far too small and too infertile to provide anything close to subsistence for these families. Thus, wages from agricultural labor provide the bulk of the income for these families.

A second source of extra income for some Helas is to be found in the leasing of land.

Unlike the Kohars, very few Helas are able to lease land from individual landowners. However, most of the Helas in the community belong to a Field Laborers' Cooperative Society that was organized by the government about 15 years ago. Each year, the government leases roughly 20 acres of wasteland to this society at a very low price.

Unfortunately, despite the large quantity of land and the low price of the lease, the income derived through the laborers' cooperative society is small. This is true for several reasons. First, the quality of the land varies considerably. Some of it is actually quite arable—potentially excellent crop land—but much of it is not. A large amount of the land is railway land along the sides of the railroad track, and much of the remaining land is unirrigated. A second problem, even for the irrigated, fertile land, is the high cost of production for wheat. Often the laborers' cooperative society is unable to buy the expensive seeds, fertilizer, and pesticides necessary for lucrative high yields. Finally, the laborers' cooperative society is beset by many of the problems common to cooperatives. Thus, the land is leased to the laborers' cooperative society as a unit, and the members of the cooperative are required to farm it as a unit. All members contribute their labor, and, at the end of the season, the profits from the crop are divided evenly among them. There is much bickering over who is working too little, and, indeed, few of the members can afford to take time away from their paid work to take care of the laborers' cooperative society land, particularly because the final share of the profit per member is generally very low. Thus, again, while the members of the laborers' cooperative society add a little to their incomes through their membership in the cooperative, agricultural wage labor continues to be their most important source of income.

A few Hela families also own cows or water buffaloes. These families are able to supplement their earnings from agricultural labor with the money they earn by selling

milk or curd. However, this livestock is often of poor quality and inadequately fed. As a result, the milk it produces is also often of poor quality, and frequently cows and buffaloes stop producing milk altogether for some period of time. Thus, again, while this extra source of income may help a family, it is rarely sufficient to enable them to break out of the pattern of debt and repayment that is forced upon them by their primary role as agricultural laborers.

There are exceptions to this general poverty among the Helas, of course, but they are rare, and one certainly does not find the extreme economic stratification among the Helas that one finds among the members of the Forward Castes. Those families that do stand out as wealthy among the Helas have not achieved a standard of living anywhere near that enjoyed by the wealthier members of the Forward Castes. Only seven families in the Hela community are sufficiently wealthy to have acquired bicycles, mosquito nets, or other such amenities. The two radios and three table fans in the community belong to two of these wealthier families.

Of these seven families, five derive their relative wealth from land ownership. These five are the only families in the community who own more than three acres of land. However, even the wealthiest of these families owns only six to seven acres of land. Moreover, all of the landowning Helas—those with only small plots of land as well as those with more than three acres—acquired their land well in the past, before the price of land became prohibitively expensive. In the cases of the five wealthiest landowning families of the caste, each family saved some money from the sale of milk and curd, used that money along with wages from agricultural labor to lease land, and eventually, with the profit from the land taken in lease, bought land of their own. All of this required livestock, a great deal of hard work, luck, and lower land prices. There has been little or

no buying of land among the Helas since the price of land rose to its present levels.

The other two wealthier Hela families achieved their rise in economic position through education. By taking advantage of scholarship opportunities and reserved school seats, a member of each of these families was able to earn an advanced degree. One of these people went on to teach for many years at a school in one of the larger town near Neemghar. The other person is a woman who trained to be a nurse. She now works in a hospital in another town near Neemghar. While her family is certainly in a much better economic position than the majority of the Helas, it is noticeably less well off than the other six relatively wealthy Hela families.

The Helas of Neemghar were impoverished and discriminated against in the past, and they continue to be so today. Nonetheless, their position over the last thirty years has not remained static. The changes of the Green Revolution that have so profoundly affected the rest of the village have affected the Helas as well. As I argue elsewhere, the overall effect of the Green Revolution has been positive for many of the Kohars. It is interesting to compare their experience with that of the Helas.

One of the changes brought about by the Green Revolution that has worked in favor of many Kohars has been the rise in wages for agricultural laborers and the increase in the amount of work available. This, of course, has been an equally positive change for the Helas, most of whom rely primarily on agricultural wage labor for their livelihood, and most of them have been able to increase their real earnings despite inflation and thus to raise their standard of living somewhat.

While the rise in wages has helped all agricultural laborers, two other changes brought about by the Green Revolution that have helped many of the Kohars have not been as advantageous for the Helas. First, the Helas have not been able to take advantage of the

increase in the buying and selling of land in the area as some of the Kohars have been able to do. Virtually all of the Helas simply have been in too weak an economic position to accumulate the savings necessary to purchase land. As I noted earlier, the rise in the price of land in recent years has effectively blocked that avenue of economic mobility entirely for the Helas.

A second change that has also failed to work to the advantage of the Helas relates to the first. One of the ways in which some Kohars have been able to buy land is through the profits they have made by leasing land. As I noted, in recent years landlords often have preferred to lease their land to individuals who are not members of their own caste. This has meant that more Kohars are able to lease more land today than in the past. Unfortunately, this change has not reached down to the Helas as well. Very few Helas lease land from individual landowners in Neemghar.

The main cause of this difference between the Helas and the Kohars is poverty. Poverty among the Helas is more pervasive and more extreme than it is among the Kohars. Very few Helas are able to save enough even to begin to entertain the possibility of leasing land.

Even for the Helas who could possibly afford to lease land, however, two other factors militate against their ability to do so. First, the Helas are far more isolated and alienated from the village than the Kohars. Although the Kohars live in a very distinct, bounded neighborhood, and although they intermingle much less with the Forward Castes than the Forward Castes intermingle with one another, they are nonetheless part of the village, both physically and socially. The physical proximity of the Kohars to the other villagers enables them to know more people and more about what is going on within the village. Kohars who want to take land in lease can find out fairly easily who might be interested

in leasing land to them. Moreover, they are likely to be known, or at least familiar to potential leasers.

In contrast, the Helas are, in many respects, truly outside the village. Their physical distance creates both a symbolic and a practical barrier to the village. They know less of what is going on in the rest of the village because they are outside the channels of gossip that the Kohars are better tuned in to. They are also less well known to the villagers. Indeed, many of my friends from the Forward Castes knew even less about the Helas than they did about the Kohars, and much of what they told me about Hela habits was based on stereotypes and extreme hyperbole, with little relation to reality. Thus, it is much more difficult for a Hela to find out who might be leasing land, and, once a leaser is identified, to initiate negotiations with him.

Not only are the Helas less well known than the Kohars to the other villagers, they are much more negatively perceived as well. This is the second factor that works against the few Helas who might be in a position to lease land. Kohars are of very low rank, they face many forms of discrimination by the Forward Castes, and they are excluded from many aspects of social life in the village. Nonetheless, they are still perceived by the Forward Castes as belonging to the village, and, although lowly ranked, they are still a part of the Hindu varna system. In contrast, Helas tend to be viewed with suspicion, revulsion, and sometimes even fear by the rest of the villagers. Helas are considered to be so polluted that they are placed outside the varna system entirely. In the eyes of the villagers, they are virtually outside the village as well.

I do not mean to imply that the Helas are not a part of the village in any sense. Of course they do have a place in the social structure of the village—albeit a lowly and much reviled one—and the landowners certainly rely on them for their labor. However, the

approach of the non-Harijan villagers is to use them for whatever tasks they require and to avoid them as much as possible at all other times. Again, this attitude creates a serious barrier to any Hela who wants to enter into negotiations over the lease of land from a non-Harijan. While the barrier is not absolutely insurmountable—a few Helas have leased land from non-Harijan landowners—it certainly limits the ability of Helas to enter into tenant relations with non-Harijans. Thus, the only realistic source of leased land for the Helas is institutional—through the Field Laborers' Cooperative Society—rather than through personal relationships. As we have seen, profits from the laborers' cooperative are low. Elsewhere I noted two other features of Kohars life that differentiate them from the Forward Castes and work in their favor in the changing economic climate. These two features are present among the Helas as well, but they have had little effect on the economic position of the Helas. The first concerns the role of women. Hela women, like Kohar women, are not prohibited from working in the fields, and, indeed, their earnings as wage laborers are a significant part of most family incomes. Among the Kohars, the contribution a woman is able to make to a family income may enable the family to take land in lease. Among the Helas, however, the level of poverty is so high and mere survival so precarious that the economic contribution of Hela women in most families is crucial for subsistence alone.

Similarly, the attitude of the Kohars toward manual labor also differentiates them from the Forward Castes. Because the Kohars, unlike the Forward Castes, attach no stigma to manual labor, Kohar men often continue to work productively long after their economic counterparts among the Jats and Bhumihars have ceased to engage in physical labor. Again, however, while the Helas also have no caste-based prejudice against physical labor, their economic position is so disadvantaged that the issue of whether or not a man

has to continue to work virtually never arises.

Thus, despite some similarities in the economic and social positions of the Helas and the Kohars, the experience of the Helas in the face of a changing economic environment has been qualitatively different from that of the Kohars. Many of the factors that have enabled at least some of the Kohars to improve their economic position have not been similarly advantageous to the Helas.

The most significant positive effects of the Green Revolution from the perspective of the Helas have been the increase in the demand for agricultural labor and the corresponding rise in wages. Yet despite the rise in wages, the Helas remain caught in a cycle of debt and repayment, and their prospects for true economic advancement continue to be grim.

So far I have examined only the economic changes that the Helas have experienced in recent years. In order to understand their position in the village—and the way it is perceived both by themselves and by the other villagers—one must also consider the political changes that they have experienced. Again, it is interesting to compare their experiences with those of the Kohars.

In some respects, the political experiences of the Helas have been quite similar to those of the Kohars. Like the Kohars, in recent years the Helas have become increasingly aware of the power of their numbers in electoral politics. This has been particularly true at the block level, where the Helas, representing just a little over 14 percent of the block population, follow only the Bhumihars in numbers. Political successes at the block level and above have had an effect on the attitudes of the Helas in the village. They have become much more assertive of their political rights in recent years, and much more willing to make demands on the politically powerful in return for Hela—or Harijan—

political support.[2] Thus, for example, I witnessed a lively argument between a group of Helas and the Jat Sarpanch of the village over the daily wages the Helas were being paid by the village landowners at that time. The Helas demanded, quite aggressively, that the Sarpanch convince the landowners to increase their wages. Such assertiveness on the part of the Helas was unheard of in the past.

Nonetheless, despite a few such interactions with the Sarpanch, the Helas, even more than the Kohars, have focused most of their political energy outside the village. Within the village, the Helas continue to lack any real political voice, and, even though a few of them have run for local political office, they have made no significant gains at the local level.

Several of the reasons for this lack of political mobility among the Helas within the village are the same as those that account for the lack of political mobility among the Kohars. Again, many of the factors that negatively affect the Kohars are manifested even more extremely among the Helas.

Thus, for example, the caste barriers that continue to separate the Kohars from the Forward Castes operate even more strongly to maintain a vast distance—physical, social, and ritual—between the Harijans and the rest of the village. In the light of this extreme separation, real political mobility within the village is virtually impossible for the Helas. Moreover, the caste barriers that the Helas face are reinforced by economic barriers, since the impoverished Helas cannot hope to compete with the wealth of the politically dominant Jats and Bhumihars in an election. At the village level at least, money still buys votes, and the Helas clearly lack the financial means to win an election.

At the same time, the number of patron-client relationships between the Helas and

members of the Forward Castes has declined as fewer and fewer Helas are willing to work as harwahs. These relationships carry with them an obligation on the part of the client to support the patron in the factional fights and local elections that constitute village politics. As the number of these relationships has dwindled, the Helas have become increasingly disengaged from any real sense of involvement in village politics.

Moreover, while the Helas have witnessed some political success on the part of Harijans at the block level and above, they have experienced no comparable successes in any of the political institutions of the village. While two Harijans—one Hela and one Chamar—were elected to the Panchayat board and one Hela was elected to the board of the cooperative credit society, everyone in the village acknowledges that these are merely token positions, with no real power behind them. Harijan members of these board are expected to support the position of the dominant faction on all issues, and they do so. The Helas have neither the numbers nor the financial means necessary to achieve any real political gains through electoral politics at the village level. Thus, the Helas continue to view the political institutions of the village as virtually impenetrable.

All of these factors—the continuing caste barriers and economic barriers, the decline in patron-client relationships, and the impenetrability of local political institutions—have encouraged politically active Helas to focus their energy outside the village, where they feel that they have at least a chance at political influence and advancement. One finds evidence of this outward focus in the fact that the two most important political achievements of the Helas in the village—the organization of the Field Laborers' Cooperative Society and the government housing project—both came through institutional channel outside the village.

The history of strong Harijan caste associations at the block level and above has further

encouraged this outward orientation, for at these political levels, factional alliances with the members of other castes are much more easily forged. Moreover, at the block level, the Helas, as the second most populous caste in the block, have much stronger political leverage than they do at the village level, where they number as only the fourth most populous caste.

The similarities in the circumstances that have resulted in the outward focus of both the Kohars and the Helas are striking. Yet even at the level of block politics and above, the Helas face problems that are not shared by the Kohars. The fact that the majority of Harijans continue to lag far behind most other castes, both economically and educationally, limits the political efficacy of their leaders. Harijan leaders must constantly struggle against the dual problems of a relatively small economic base and a constituency that is largely illiterate and uneducated as to the workings and ramifications of electoral politics.

Moreover, the fact that the block and above caste associations are associations of Harijans, rather than of individual Harijan castes, creates both advantages and disadvantages for Harijan leaders. On the one hand, unifying all of the Harijan castes into a single association obviously maximizes numerical strength, and the main political bargaining chip of the Harijans is, after all, their numbers. On the other hand, however, inherent in a unified Harijan caste association is the potential for great divisiveness along caste lines.

Divisions among the Harijan castes have been a significant and continuing problem for the Harijans of Dholpur Block. Of all the Harijan castes in the block, the Helas have taken the greatest advantage of the legislative changes favoring Harijans. They have pursued the political and educational opportunities of the reservation system more

aggressively than most of the members of the other Harijan castes, and this aggressiveness, coupled with their numerical preponderance, has enabled the Helas to retain control over all four Zilla Parishad seats that are reserved for Harijans in the block. At the same time, they have generally led the other Harijan castes in the procurement of government loans, housing assistance, and scholarships as well.

The predominance of Helas in all of these areas has created a strong sense of rivalry and hostility between Chamars and Helas. Many Chamars are resentful of the aggressive behavior of the Helas—behavior that is often at the expense of the Chamars—and of the success that it has brought them. At the same time, many Helas are contemptuous of the Chamars, whom they view as being unnecessarily cautious and servile in their interactions with the members of other castes. At times these divisions have erupted into open feuds that have hurt the political position of the Harijans and the Harijan caste association as a whole.

These inter-caste rivalries between the Helas and Chamars at the block level are reflected at the village level as well. They are rooted, in part, in fundamental differences in attitudes between the member of the two castes. A comparison of the two castes in the village from the perspective of their different worldviews provides insight into the very different paths two groups in similar economic and social positions can take in the face of profound economic and social changes. By comparing the two groups one can develop a deeper understanding of the people of each caste, and begin to understand why the Helas, much more than the Chamars, have been able to take advantage of at least some of the legal and social changes that have occurred since Independence.

Chamar

The Chamar hamlet lies between the central part of the village and the Hela hamlet, about one-half mile from the village center. The hamlet consists of 46 families, with a total population of 211 people.

The social and economic situation of the Chamars is similar to that of the Helas, but even more extreme in every respect. The Chamar caste—traditionally a caste of leatherworkers—is virtually the lowest ranked caste in the village. Only the single family of Bhangis ranks below them. Thus, the Chamars, like the members of all Harijan castes, are reviled and avoided by non-Harijan villagers.

The low social status of the Chamars is matched by an equally low economic position. As in the Hela hamlet, the depth of poverty of the Chamars is obvious as soon as one enters their hamlet. Most children are ill-clothed and unkempt looking, and what little livestock there is seems underfed. While most families can afford three meals a day, the quality of their food is usually poor and frequently their meals are low in protein.

Only one Chamar family has a house with a tiled roof, and this is also the only house in the community with electricity. Most of the Chamar dwellings are rickety, thatched huts that provide only the slightest protection from the rains of the monsoon and the wet season. Some are only three-walled lean-tos.

Like the Helas, virtually all of the Chamars derive their primary source of income from work as agricultural laborers. However, many of them continue to be more closely tied to the wealthier landowners of the village than the Helas are. For example, several Chamars work as harwahs for the landowners. A few families supplement their incomes with work guarding the gardens of the wealthier village landowners or as rickshaw pullers. A few other families sell milk or curd from water buffaloes or cattle that they own. In addition,

one Chamar man works for the village Munim (accountant), collecting figures about land use so the Munim can determine agricultural taxes each year. This man also acts as the village crier—whenever there is news of a town market or a political event, he walks through the village beating a drum and shouting the message. Each time he relays a message in this fashion, he is paid a small stipend.

Basically, however, the Chamars rely on agricultural labor as their primary means of support, and they fall into the same pattern of debt and repayment that is found among the Helas. Land ownership among the Chamars is even less than among the Helas. Only six Chamar families own any land at all, and each of these families owns less than one acre of land. This land was mainly acquired through land grants under the British, and no Chamars have been able to buy land within the last fifteen years.

In short, the social and economic position of the Chamars is similar to that of the Helas, although the level of poverty among the Chamars is even more apparent and more devastating than among the Helas. Yet, despite the similarity of their positions, the Helas and Chamars are strikingly different in their attitudes and demeanor. These differences leap out as soon as one begins to interact with the members of these two castes, and they are almost startling in their degree. They have led the Helas and Chamars to develop very different kinds of relationships with members of the Forward Castes and hence very different roles within the village.

My first encounters with both Helas and Chamars in 1988 were very difficult. Long after I had become known to most non-Harijan members of the village, I continued to be an unknown quantity to the Harijans of both castes, and I was regarded with deep suspicion and mistrust. Developing a sense of rapport and confidence in view of these attitudes would have been difficult at best. Eventually, by visiting the two hamlets week

after week in 1991 with my cousin Visnu, I did begin to get to know people, but I continued to meet with a residue of suspicion and fear whenever I raised a topic that could be construed as controversial in any way.

The attitudes I met with are not surprising, of course. After all, I was an outsider, I often acted outside the bounds of normal etiquette and appropriate social behavior, I could not be fitted neatly into the caste hierarchy.

Initially, when I went into the Hela hamlet, people were unwilling to talk to me. At the same time, the suspicion with which I was greeted by the Helas was coupled with an attitude of assertiveness that occasionally bordered on hostility. In contrast to the Helas, the Chamars were always extremely deferential to me. From the very beginning, they acted delighted when I visited the hamlet. This behavior is representative of their demeanor toward non-Harijan villagers as well. Interestingly, perhaps because of this attitude, the Chamars are much more tied into the everyday life of the village than the Helas are. They are more aware of village gossip, and they are more likely to be included in the social and ritual cycles of the village. Thus, it is a Chamar who serves as the Munim's messenger and the town crier. Similarly, Chamars are more likely to be asked to work as guards in village gardens and fields. Finally, when a Hindu ritual prescribes that some portion of food must be given to a Harijan, it is usually a Chamar who receives the food rather than a Hela.

It is conceivable that the proximity of the Chamar hamlet to the village has played a part in the maintenance of a closer relationship between the Chamars and the rest of the village. However, it is also clear that the Chamars, unlike the Helas, continue to see relations within the village as those most important to their economic and social welfare. Thus, they have not sought support through channels outside the village to nearly the

extent that the Helas have. Instead, they have focused on the maintenance of ties with non-Harijans within the village.

These two contrasting approaches to the village represent two very different strategies for dealing with the profound social and economic changes of the last twenty-five years. While the strategies are not necessarily conscious choices at all times, they are certainly a reflection of the different worldviews of the members of each caste.

Unfortunately, the existence of these different attitudes has helped to encourage continued division between the two castes. The hostilities between Helas and Chamars at the block level—the result, largely, of competition for limited political rewards—is heightened at the village level. In the village, the Helas view the Chamars with contempt both for being so obsequious toward the other villagers and for being below the Helas in the caste hierarchy. The Chamars, in turn, view the Helas with resentment and anger both for taking the lion's share of the benefits of various government programs for Harijans and for maintaining an attitude of caste superiority toward the Chamars. This lack of unity among the Harijans further hinders their ability to achieve any real political advances at the village level.

Later we will see that similar kinds of attitudinal differences exist not only between the Helas and Chamar castes, but also within certain other castes in the village, where the tensions they cause have had a profound effect on recent political development in the village.

Notes

1. At the same time, however, the hamlets are also considered to be part of the village in some sense. Thus, the Harijans name Neemghar as their native village, while non-

Harijans include the Harijan hamlets as part of the village when asked how far the village boundaries extend.

2. Politicians—Harijan and non-Harijan alike—usually try to unite Harijans of all castes as a single bloc of votes. Their emphasis is on Harijan interests rather than on the interests of a single Harijan caste. Nonetheless, the Harijans are often divided internally along caste lines, and the hostility that sometimes accompanies this division can be politically devastating to them.

CHAPTER 5

Jats and Bhumihars

In this chapter I will examine the Jat and Bhumihar castes more closely, analyzing their roles in the economy of the village and the effects of the Green Revolution on those roles, and examining how and why these castes figure so prominently in the social life of the village.

Although I present an analysis of village social relations from the perspective of caste, I am also concerned to avoid any implication that each caste can be treated as a monolithic, undifferentiated whole. Thus, I also consider internal differences within the castes—differences that, as we will see later, are important in the definition of socially salient categories outside of caste.

The term dominant caste, first introduced by Srinivas (1955), has been used to describe a situation in which a particular caste in a village or region dominates the other castes of the area politically and economically. While a dominant caste is never of extremely low ritual status, it is not necessarily the highest ranking caste of the area. Frequently, dominant castes are middle-ranking peasant castes.

Factors of dominance include control over the major economic and political resources of the village or region and numerical strength. The dominance of a caste is likely to be particularly strong if the caste is the most populous caste in a fairly wide geographical area and if some of its leadership has received some degree of Western education. While these factors define the archetypal dominant caste, it is rare in practice that a single dominant caste presents all of these features (Srinivas 1955, 1959). Moreover, as Beck (1972) points out, two or more castes may compete for dominance within a single village

or region.

Applying the concept of the dominant caste to Neemghar, one finds a variant of the situation suggested by Beck. While the Jats have been and continue to be the dominant caste according to most of Srinivas' criteria, increasingly their absolute dominance is threatened by members of the Bhumihar caste. The rivalry between the two castes has been an important element in village politics in recent years, and political conflict is often described by villagers in caste terms alone.

At the same time, however, it is important to recognize the limitations of the concept of the dominant caste. In particular, one must note that often only a fairly small proportion of the members of a dominant caste wield significant political and economic power. Thus, membership in a dominant caste does not, by itself, imply high economic or political status for any particular individual. Partly for this reason, some anthropologists have questioned the validity of the concept altogether. They argue that the use of the concept ignores similarities that unite individuals of different castes and differences that separate individuals of the same caste—similarities and differences that may be far more important structurally than caste per se (for example, MacDougall 1989, 1990).

While to dismiss the concept entirely seems extreme—particularly given that villagers themselves continue to refer to the dominance of the Jats, speaking of Jat political parties and identifying the village as a Jat village—it is important to remember that the use of the concept entails a particular perspective, focused on caste. While this is an important perspective, it is not the only one. Indeed, as we will see later, much political competition that initially appears to be based on the struggle for dominance between the Jat and Bhumihar castes is, in fact, far more complex and includes important elements of class as well as caste.

Jats

Although the Jats comprise only about 6 percent of the total population of Dholpur Block, historically members of this caste have dominated block-level politics. It has only been in recent years that the Bhumihars, their main rivals in this sphere, have posed any real threat to the Jats. Similarly, in Neemghar itself, it has only been in recent years that the political and economic hegemony of the Jats has been challenged by a few of the wealthier Bhumihars of the village.

The Jats have achieved their high political standing in the block largely because of their strong economic position, which derives in turn from their location within the block. The block is divided into 40 villages which can be grouped (for our convenience) into three categories—the Non-fertile villages, the Less-fertile villages, and the Fertile villages (Singh 1996). The Non-fertile villages are located in the western part of the block. They are not suited for intensive cultivation of wheat, sugarcane, or the other major commercial crops of the block. The Less-fertile villages are located in the northern part of the block. They are somewhat less fertile and less well-irrigated than the Fertile villages. In contrast, the Fertile villages, which are located in the southeastern part of the block, include the most fertile lands of the block. The area is well-irrigated, providing an excellent environment for the cultivation of lucrative crops such as wheat, sugarcane, cotton. Most of the Jats of the block are located in these Fertile villages, where they own much of land, and, as a result, the caste as a whole is quite prosperous in the block.

The high profits generated from their fertile land have enabled Jats to enter other areas of the economy as well. Thus, as Singh notes: Using land ownership as the springboard, [the Jats] have taken to the industrial section in a big way. A large portion of the private industries located in the block belongs to the entrepreneurial Zamindars and estate

holders of Jat caste.... Politically, they enjoy the advantage and power analogous to that of the Baniyas at the State level (1996: 126).

This trend towards economic diversification and expansion into non-agricultural sectors of the economy is reflected in the actions of many of the wealthier Jat families of Neemghar. Given the scarcity of irrigated land for sale, and the skyrocketing prices of what little land is available, even those families who would prefer to use their profits from agriculture to increase their landholdings have had to begin to look outside the agricultural sector in their economic pursuits. Several such families have sought new economic opportunities through investments in one of the village flour mills, in the sale and distribution of fertilizers, and in the construction of a new and elaborate cinema hall close to the village. Contracting in the construction industry is also considered to be highly lucrative, and all of the very wealthiest Jat families in the village are involved in it to some extent. One Jat family even took over a soft drink factory, located some 30 kilometers from Neemghar. Although this latter undertaking turned out to be largely a failure, this kind of pursuit, as well as contracting in construction, is particularly interesting in that it is an activity that relies quiet heavily on urban contacts. As villagers become involved in such enterprises, they form increasingly strong and enduring ties with people in urban areas, both through business relationships and through kinship relations, as some members of a family migrate to the city to take care of business enterprises there. These relationships, in many cases, strongly affect those who remain in the village, both in their attitudes towards the village and in their behavior within it.

This high level of economic diversification is the domain only of the wealthy, however, and, although most of the wealthiest families in Neemghar are Jats, there is still a high degree of economic diversification within the caste. Indeed, some of the poorest, as well

as the wealthiest, families in the village are Jats.

The contrast between these two extremes—the richest and the poorest of the Jats—is striking. The wealth of the richest Jat families is evident in their consumption patterns. They are conspicuous consumers, investing in large, ornate houses, expensive clothing and jewelry, and a whole array of fancy modern appliances and luxury items. Thus, of the seven telephones in the village, five belong to wealthy Jat families, as do all of the six refrigerators and color televisions, and six of the seven gas stoves. One Jat family even has a pump and pipes that supply running water within the house, albeit sporadically—the only family in the village to enjoy such a luxury. In addition, one finds an assortment of radios, tape recorders, blenders, clocks, watches, and other electrical appliances in these wealthy Jat households. Along with such unusual appliances, one also finds the more common accoutrements of wealth which make the normally arduous life in the village somewhat easier and more pleasant—for example, fans for the hot summers, mosquito nets, and domestic servants to help with cleaning and cooking and to carry water. Finally, most of the wealthiest Jat families own at least one mo-ped or motor scooter, and four of the six tractors in the village belong to Jats as well.

Life among the poorest Jat families offers a stark contrast, for they have very little in the way of material possessions, and they eke out a very difficult and marginal existence. Indeed, they are often referred to by other Jats as people without anything. Their houses are small, thatched, and usually without electricity. Several such families own a tiny parcel of land and/or a water buffalo, but this property is never sufficient for the support of a family, and the meager income derived from such sources must be supplemented with wage labor on the part of the adult males of these households. Of course, these families do not have access to luxury goods such as radios or table fans, and usually even

relatively inexpensive items such as mosquito netting—a virtual necessity during the mosquito season—are beyond their means.

Certainly there are some non-Jat families in the village who are even poorer than the poor Jat families. Moreover, ties of caste and distant kinship with other Jats of the village may provide a slight economic cushion for the poor Jat families during times of great financial hardship. Nonetheless, life for these families is centered primarily on the more or less constant struggle to subsist, and the kind of life enjoyed by the wealthiest of the Jat families is a world apart—far removed from the experience or expectations of the poor.

In between these two economic extremes of the richest and the poorest Jat families is the majority of the Jats of Neemghar. Most of them are small landholders—owning anything from two and a half to several acres of land—who are generally able to subsist on what they produce but generate little or no surplus. Such families—especially those at the lower end of the scale—maintain a very precarious economic balance, in which any unforeseen misfortune—a serious illness or an infestation of the wheat crop by pests, for example—may be economically devastating. Indeed, even so simple and uncontrollable a matter as the birth of too many daughters—all requiring dowries in order to be married—may betoken a family's financial ruin.

Despite the great increases in yields brought about by the introduction of better irrigation, high yielding varieties of wheat, and chemical fertilizers and pesticides, many of the Jats in this middle economic range have suffered rather than benefited from the agricultural changes of the Green Revolution. Because the increase profitability of farming has led to soaring prices for land, small landholders have little possibility of amassing the amount of capital necessary to buy more land. Moreover, while in the past

many such families were able to supplement their own landholdings with land taken in lease, today it is more difficult for them to do so. Not only has the cost of leasing land risen and the amount of land put up for lease declined, but the fact of membership in the Jat caste works against these would-be tenants as well. Thus, because laws to protect tenants favor long-term tenants, many landowners are unwilling to lease out their land to the same tenant for more than one or two growing seasons in a row, for fear of losing their land altogether. As a result, Jat landowners are often more willing to lease their land to non-Jats than to Jats, because they will fall under less of an obligation to continue the leasing arrangement over a period of years if there are no ties to caste involved.

In addition to the problems of purchasing or leasing land, the problems of financing agricultural production even on land already owned are formidable. As the cost of agricultural inputs has risen and as access to credit has become increasingly important, most of the Jats with small landholdings must borrow money against their land to finance each crop. In several cases, such Jat families, faced with a poor harvest, a serious illness, or a large dowry to provide, have lost all or part of their land. Families such as these are being gradually pressed into increasingly marginal positions, and some will eventually join the ranks of the landless or virtually landless poor.

Nonetheless, despite the precariousness of their economic position, these Jats in the middle economic range are, of course, much better off materially than the poorer Jats. Their houses, while often rather small and dark, are well-constructed, with tile rather than thatched roofs, and they generally have electricity. Most of these families own at least one bicycle and one or two table fans, and the wealthier members of this group may own radios, watches, and other small luxury items.

The differences among the members of these three rough economic groupings of Jats

are great—not just materially, but also, I gather from my converstations with them over the years, in terms of life expectations and worldview. The economic and social opportunities open to the wealthiest of the Jats are almost limitless, and, as a result, many of these Jats have developed an expanded view of the world far beyond the boundaries of the village—a world that is virtually closed off to the poorest Jats, or, at best, seen through the distorting lenses of poverty and despair.

Despite these differences, however, there is a strong sense of caste solidarity among all of the Jats which unites them as a group and separates them from the members of the other castes in the village. Given the potential for intense conflict arising out of the extreme economic differences that separate the Jats, it is important to understand how this caste solidarity is maintained.

Three basic factors lie at the root of the Jat caste solidarity. One is Hindu ideology. Despite years of government exhortation to abandon behavior and attitudes based on the ideology of caste, despite economic changes which, at times, seem to be antithetical to caste and to encourage intra-caste tensions and fissures, and despite the increasing recognition of common interests among members of different castes who occupy similar economic positions, the concept of caste continues to be a potent ideological force. Thus, despite the vast chasm that separates the richest and poorest of the Jats, all Jats perceive a fundamental identity among themselves in opposition to all other castes in the village. This is more than simply an acceptance of a common social identity that assigns all Jats to a specific position in the social hierarchy created by the caste system. Rather, it entails a belief in a fundamental essence of Jat-ness that is distinct from that of all other castes—even those that are positioned quite closely to the Jats in the caste hierarchy.

Even the best-educated and most well-traveled Jats of my acquaintance—not men in

the village, but rather professors in a college in Agra, some of whom had traveled throughout India and even to other countries—occasionally gave evidence of this deep-seated belief, despite public positions proclaiming the evils of caste. This in not to imply that these men are insincere in their statements against caste. Rather, they are caught between two conflicting notions. While on one level they believe quite strongly that the caste system is a dangerous and destructive force in Indian society, on another level they find that they feel more comfortable with members of their own caste and that they prefer for their children to marry other Jats. While they do not necessarily fall into the negative stereotyping of other castes that one is likely to hear in the village, when questioned closely about why even in the college Jats tend to socialize mainly with Jats, they too generally refer to some vague and undefined differences between Jats and the members of other castes.

The unifying aspect of Hindu ideology is supplemented by a second factor in the village—the existence of kinship ties, however distant, that cut across the economic divisions within the caste and help to create a sense of unity among its members. Of the 154 Jat families in the village, 26.6 percent share the surname—passed down patrilineally—Sirohi, while another 20.1 percent share the surname of Sama. Indeed, 72 percent of the Jat families share one of the other six surnames. Representatives of every economic stratum in the caste can be found in each of these surname groups. Of course, many of the relationships indicated by common surname are quite distant and no longer traceable, and in such cases they are in no way jurally binding. While people frequently use kin terms—in reference if not in address—when talking about even such distant relationships, they say that such relationships are in a line (vanshagata) rather than real (sage). While only sage relationships generally entail clearly defined and legally

recognized rights and duties, vanshagata relationships may entail some sense of moral commitment and obligation. More important, in my view, however, is the general sense of common ties and unity such relationships create, especially among members of the lower economic strata of the caste vis a vis wealthier members of the caste. Thus, for example, even very poor Jat families, who have little in the way of tangible connection with wealthier members of the caste, were often very quick to point out to me that they shared a surname with, and hence were related to, some very wealthy family in the village. Sirohis took some pride in their relationship to Rajendra—one of the wealthiest landowners of the village—Samas pointed to their relationship to the Upa-Sarpanch of the village, and so on.

Finally, these ties of kinship are further augmented by ties of patronage—some kin-based and some independent of kinship—which again help to bind together Jats of different economic strata. Poor Jat families often develop special relationships with wealthier Jat families. Sometimes these relationships are fairly formal, as when a man is hired as a harwah (annual farm servant) by a rich Jat landowner. However, as the role of harwah has become less valued by both laborers and landowners in the changing agricultural economy, patron-client relationships between Jat families today frequently take on a less formal character. For example, a poor Jat family may send a young son, or, more likely, a young daughter daily to the house of a wealthy Jat family, saying by way of explanation that it is good for the child to be with the wealthy family and that the child can learn there. The child usually runs errands and does various other domestic chores, in return for which he or she receives meals and occasional gifts of food, money, and clothing. Most important, a bond between the two families is formed. The wealthy family is likely to offer loans or other types of aid to the poorer family in times of need, while

the poorer family, in turn, will generally ally itself as directed by the wealthy family in the factional disputes of the village, in addition to providing an inexpensive source of domestic labor.

These ties of patronage and clientage can be helpful to the poorer Jats, but they can be harmful as well. On the one hand, such relationships can provide an economic cushion for the poorer families in times of financial hardship. On the other hand, however, the potential for extreme exploitation of the clients is obvious, as they must rely solely on the good will and sense of moral obligation of their patrons to determine the extent of the support they will receive. Moreover, while the poorest Jats can never expect to gain anything beyond bare maintenance through their relationships with their patrons, the stress on common identity and unity as Jats which is encouraged by such ties may prevent those families from exploring new channels of economic opportunity. Thus, for example, Jat agricultural wage laborers are loathe to unite with wage laborers of other castes to demand higher wages, in part because Jats don't do such things, and to do so would be to identify themselves with labor, a category of people looked down upon by Jats. Similarly, because adult Jat women do not work for wages—and it is considered to be unseemly and un-Jat-like for them to do so—the poorest Jat families are unable to take advantage of the added income that women of other castes are often able to provide.

In many cases, the Jats with a small amount of land are even more hurt by the cultural constraints imposed upon them by the definition of Jat-ness. Because Jat women do not work in the fields, even on their own land, such families must hire more laborers than do the small landholders of some other castes. Moreover, they are in a constant struggle to increase their status within the caste by following the standards of good and successful Jat behavior whenever possible, even if it is economically disadvantageous to do for—for

example, by hiring extra workers so that the landowner himself will not have to engage in any physical labor and by providing enormous, and sometimes financially ruinous, dowries for daughters. Finally, these Jat families are less likely to be involved in any explicit patron-client relationships with the wealthier Jats, because such relationships are considered to be demeaning and a sign of true poverty. Thus, while severely limited in their behavior by the cultural definition of Jat-ness, and while often suffering economically in their endeavors to maintain an image as good Jats, such families have virtually no buffer against unexpected financial setbacks. A series of such setbacks can rapidly erode their precarious economic base and send them plummeting into the category of the landless poor.

While this discussion has been limited primarily to the village level, the same kinds of ideological pressures and patron-client ties operate to unite Jats at the block level as well. Thus, in the mid-eighties, a Jat caste association was organized in the district to encourage caste solidarity, particularly in block politics. Moreover, Jat industrialists of the block often establish caste-based relationships of patronage and clientage when they hire personnel for their enterprises. Again, the advantage is generally with the patrons. They prosper from these relationships financially, in that they are able to pay very low wages, while at the same time, they are able to use the relationships to inhibit the growth of any effective unions within the industry. Thus, for example, the Sri Mularam Motor Transport Ltd. of Gopalpur, which is owned by one of the leading Jat industrialists of the block, mostly appoints educated youth of rural Jat landed families on the recommendation of 'reliable' Jat patriarchs and pays very low salaries to them. But, the latter cannot demand higher salaries because of their socio-ethnic relationship with the Jat patriarchs, who recommended their appointments. Thus, the caste-based recruitment

pattern strangles trade unionism in the cradle itself and puppet unions exist only on paper. The sugar factory, in Pandari, owned by the Pal Zamindar [another very wealthy and prominent Jat family in the block], also adopts the same mode of employment. And the Zamindars make use of the employment potential of the factory for curbing trade union activities and strengthening their political faction...as they are directly involved in the block politics (Singh 1996: 207–08). Thus, the patterns of ideological suasion and patron-client bonds that help to maintain Jat solidarity in the village are reflected in the political and economic relations at the block level as well.

Bhumihars

The Bhumihars are the largest caste in the block—comprising about 19 percent of the total population—and their numbers work to their advantage in the political arena. They have been the primary rivals of the Jats for political power at the block level. At the same time, however, they are much weaker than the Jats economically, and hence have fewer resources at their command to utilize in their political struggles. Just at the economic strength of the Jat derives mainly from their location within the block—in the Fertile villages—so the relative economic weakness of the Bhumihars derives from their physical location. Most of the Bhumihars are concentrated in Less-fertile villages of the block, which are considerably drier and less fertile than the Fertile villages. Less of the land is irrigated, and, in general, the high agricultural yields and profits that are common in the Fertile villages cannot be achieved in the Less-fertile villages.

In the early years after Independence, the numerical strength of the Bhumihars did not offset their economic disadvantage vis a vis the Jats, and the Jats maintained control over most of the important political positions in the block. In recent years, however, the

balance of power has begun to shift, as absolute numerical strength has become more important in the political process. Thus, for example, while in 1962 only 1.3 percent of MLAs from the block were Bhumihars, by 1991 this figure had increased significantly to 6.4 percent. In contrast, over the same period of time, Jats went from accounting for 3.8 percent of the MLAs to accounting for 1.1 percent of them.

The situation of the Bhumihars at the village level, in Neemghar, is somewhat complex. Like the Jats, they run the entire gamut of economic positions, from the very wealthy to the impoverished. However, on the whole, they are less economically advanced than the Jats. Only three Bhumihar families enjoy an economic standing comparable to that of the wealthiest of the Jats, while a much greater proportion of the Bhumihars belong to the ranks of the landless or almost landless poor and must derive at least a part of their incomes as wage laborers in the fields. Indeed, when I asked various Bhumihars—both rich and poor—what the main differences between Jats and Bhumihars are, one of the most frequent answers I received was that there are many Bhumihars (or that Bhumihars have many children) but they have little money, while there are fewer Jats (or Jats have fewer children) but they have much money. In reality, the average Bhumihar family size is only marginally larger than the average Jat family size, with Bhumihar families averaging 4.93 individuals per household and Jat families averaging 4.53 individuals per household. However, there is a much more significant difference between the spread of household sizes for the two groups. Thus, while only about 25 percent of the Jat households in Neemghar include six or more individuals, a full 40 percent of the Bhumihar households include six or more people. On the other hand, while over half of the Jat households include fewer than 5 members, about 44 percent of the Bhumihar households are that small. Thus, one does find a noticeably greater number of large

Bhumihar families than large Jat families, and most of these families tend to be poor.

Despite the differences in family composition and in overall economic standing between the two castes, the Bhumihars and Jats are similar in many respects. Both are middle-ranking peasant castes, and they share many customs and attitudes in common. For example, members of both castes insist on high—and occasionally ruinous—dowries at marriage, and in both castes there is a strict prohibition against women working outside of the home, either for wages or in their own fields. Similarly, insofar as it is possible, adult Bhumihar women, like Jat women, are expected to remain within their own housing compounds, unless accompanied by other adult relatives, preferably males. Members of both castes generally observe Hindu rituals in the same way, and follow the same kinds of diet, dress, and overall consumption patterns. Thus, on the surface at least, Bhumihars and Jats are virtually indistinguishable. At the same time, however, there exist fundamental differences in the economic bases of the two castes that do differentiate them and that have had important ramifications for the political role of each in the village.

These economic differences are most apparent when one compares the wealthiest members of the two castes. Jat wealth is, for the most part, old wealth that derived initially from the land. As I noted earlier, it has generally been the ownership of sufficient quantities of fertile land that has enabled the wealthiest Jats to realize a surplus that can be used to explore other economic channels. In most cases, the wealthy Jat families of Neemghar today are themselves the descendants of wealthy landowners, and hence, the families have enjoyed a high economic standing for generations. Even in the two exceptional cases of wealthy Jat families who have acquired their wealth more recently, the initial surplus was generated from the land. In each of these cases, the family was able

to supplement its own relatively small landholdings with land taken in lease on fairly favorable terms from other Jats. With two seasons of particularly high wheat yields, both families made large profits which they then invested in land and in other, non-agricultural enterprises. Moreover, even these two families were descended from very prominent Jat families. Their initial lack of large landholdings was the result of successive partitions of a once large estate among sons.

In contrast of the Jat wealth, the wealth of the three richest Bhumihar families has been acquired much more recently and derives initially from non-agricultural pursuits. Thus, each of the families started out with little or no land. Two of them became engaged in exporting of sugarcane to other districts in the state, while the third was involved in the distribution of gutka. It was only after each of these families had made large profits through their business enterprises that they were finally able to invest in land. Interestingly, each of these families has preferred to channel its resources increasingly into agriculture when possible, rather than to expand the business that was initially so lucrative for it. In part this is doubtless because agriculture is seen to be much more secure than business, and hence, anyone who is able to invest money in land is eager to do so. At the same time, however, it seems likely that the desire to move out of business and into agriculture by the wealthy Bhumihars also represents an attempt on their part to gain social credibility and to integrate themselves more fully into the village, for no matter how profitable a business venture proves to be, agriculture continues to be the occupation most respected by the majority of the villagers.

This points to a second contrast between the wealthy Bhumihars and Jats. Unlike the Jats, the wealthy Bhumihars do not have a long history of high social status or even integration in the village. Indeed, two of these Bhumihar families actually migrated into

the village within the past twenty years. The third family, while belonging to the largest Bhumihar surname group of the village, has not really become settled into the village until recently. In this case, the father of the head of the current household owned a small amount of land in Neemghar, but derived most of his income from selling vegetables in various villages in the block and hence led a rather peripatetic life. The sons of this man, each of whom inherited about half an acre of land from him, also moved about a fair amount as they tried various means to better their economic positions. It was with money through exporting that he built a large house in Neemghar and became truly settled there. Even now, much of the land he has purchased is actually in his wife's native village, several kilometers from Neemghar, where the price of land is somewhat cheaper.

While these differences in economic base among members at the upper end of the economic scale offer the sharpest contrast between the Bhumihars and the Jats, there are contrasts at other economic levels as well. There are fewer small landholders among the Bhumihars than among the Jats, and those who do own a few acres of land tend to be at the lower end of the smallholder scale, barely eking out a subsistence from their own land. Conversely, there are far more landless or almost landless Bhumihars than Jats who must rely on wage labor for their subsistence. In material terms, the lives of these poor Bhumihars do not differ in any way from the lives of the poor Jats. Nonetheless, these landless or almost landless Bhumihars do face economic prospects that are somewhat different from those of their Jat counterparts because there is less possibility for them to develop intra-caste relationships of patronage and clientage given the relatively small number of wealthy or even solidly middle-class Bhumihars. Thus, many of the poorest Bhumihars rely solely on daily wage labor for their incomes.

Along with the economic differences that distinguish the Bhumihars from the Jats, there

are also differences in intra-caste relations and attitudes. The Bhumihars, like the Jats, exhibit some degree of caste solidarity across class lines. Thus, just as the Jats recognize a fundamental quality of Jat-ness that distinguishes them from the members of all other castes, so do the Bhumihars perceive a distinguishing quality of Bhumihar-ness among themselves that provides them with a unifying identity as Bhumihars. Yet, the other kinds of ties that help to maintain a sense of solidarity among the Jats are greatly attenuated among the Bhumihars. For example, while a few surname groups cover a large proportion of the Jat population and thus contribute to a strong sense of inter-relatedness among many of them, this is less true for the Bhumihars. Thus, while there is a total of only 27 surnames among the 154 Jat households of the village, there are more than twice that many—55 in total—among the 145 Bhumihar households. Moreover, although one Bhumihar surname—Paliwal—is shared by 36.6 percent of the Bhumihar households, no other single Bhumihar surname includes even as many as 5 percent of the Bhumihar households. Only 2.1 percent of the Bhumihar households share the surname Jedhe, which is associated with one of the wealthiest and most prominent Bhumihar families in the village. Conversely, whereas 26.2 percent of the Bhumihar households have a unique surname—that is, one that is not shared by any other household in the village—this is the case for only 6.5 percent of the Jat households. As a result of these differences, there is much less a sense of cross-cutting kinship ties that draw together households of different economic status among the Bhumihars than there is among the Jats. Similarly, while intra-caste relationships of patronage and clientage further help to unite Jats of different economic strata, this is less often the case among Bhumihars. Rather, Bhumihars must more frequently look outside of their own caste to establish such relationships—most often with Jats—and thus another factor that contributes to Jat caste solidarity across

class lines is quite limited among the Bhumihars.

One of my Bhumihar friends noting the weaker economic position and the diminished sense of caste solidarity among the Bhumihars, summed up the differences between the Bhumihars and the Jats as follows: The Jats are landlords. They have money. With money is power. The Bhumihars have many people, but many of them are poor, and there is little unity in the caste. Instead, there is much jealously between those who don't have money and those who do. The relatively weak economic position of the Bhumihars vis a vis the Jats coupled with their weaker sense of caste solidarity has had a significant effect on the role they have played in the village power structure. Until fairly recently, they have enjoyed little or no power and political influence in the village. Political rivalry was largely confined to different Jat-led factions, with Bhumihars generally taking sides based on their personal relationships with various Jats. Despite a population strength roughly equal to that of the Jats—715 Bhumihars in 145 households compared to 697 Jats in 154 households—the Bhumihars were unable to marshal their numbers to mount any significant challenge to Jat power. One Jat faction or another maintained control over all of the important institutions of the village—the Panchayat, the landed temple, and the cooperative credit society.

In recent years, however, changes in the economy and in peoples' perceptions of the nature of electoral politics have resulted in a slight shift in the balance of power within the village. While the Jats continue to control the main political and economic institutions of the village, the Bhumihars have begun to pose a more significant threat to the continuation of absolute Jat dominance. Several factors have been involved in these recent changes. First, a few Bhumihar families—those discussed earlier—have prospered greatly during the last twenty years and have entered the ranks of the wealthiest villagers.

One of these families in particular has become increasingly involved in village politics and has devoted much effort and, more important, much money to the strengthening of its political position. The ability of the family to do this in itself poses a new challenge to the dominant Jat leadership.

A second significant factor in the changing political relations of the village is the decline in the number and the change in type of patron-client ties that are found there. In the past, a retinue of loyal clients who were able to offer physical as well as moral support when necessary was essential to any village leader. In return, the leader was expected to care for his followers by providing them with work, loans, special meals and gifts on ritual occasions, and other types of aid. As agricultural production has become more intense and more commercially lucrative with the changes of the Green Revolution, however, many landholders and laborers have increasingly preferred to enter into clearly defined, wage-based contractual relationships with one another rather than the more open-ended master-servant relationships of the past. Consequently, there are fewer long-term patron-client relationships today than there were in the past, and those that do continue to exist tend to be less formal, and thus less morally binding, than past relationships. As a result, the maintenance of a constant body of supporters bound to a village leader by ties of reciprocal obligations and expectations is less common and less important than it once was.

Today, in keeping with a highly commercialized cash economy, what is more important for winning elections is the ability to buy votes on the spot with cash. This change has worked to the political advantage of the Bhumihars in two ways. First, those newly wealthy Bhumihars who are becoming involved in village politics are not disadvantaged by the lack of a long-term history of patron-client relationships. Second, as adult male

laborers increasingly prefer to work as daily wage laborers rather than as servants for a single master, more and more Bhumihars are terminating such patron-client relationships with Jat landholders and thus no longer necessarily owe their political support to Jats.

Finally, a third factor affecting village political relations has been a gradual change in the nature of the political process itself—and in peoples' perceptions of it—that has also worked to the political advantage of the Bhumihars. As people have become used to the notion of elections, there has developed a growing recognition of the potential power of absolute numbers in political contests. Thus, not only is there objectively a potential strength in the size of the Bhumihar population in the context of the post-Independence electoral process based on universal adult franchise, but the recognition of this potential by an increasing number of Bhumihars has acted as a force for Bhumihar solidarity by giving impetus to the notion of Bhumihar strength through Bhumihar unity.

It is important to understand, however, that although the economic and attitudinal changes I have discussed have had important political ramifications, their effect has been by no means absolute. Many aspects of village economic and political life seem to remain unchanged. Jats continue to control the bulk of the economic and political resources of the village, patron-client relationships continue to be maintained in many cases and new ones are formed, and political support continues to be based heavily on personal ties of various sorts. What one does see, however, are subtle shifts in the balance of power, changing nuances in the attitudes and behavior of various key individuals, and, at times, conflicting perspectives and ideologies vying with one another during the course of political contests.

Given the changes in economic and political balance in the village, it is not surprising that, for the first time, a Bhumihar contested for the position of Sarpanch (village

president) in the last Panchayat elections. Although he was defeated by a Jat candidate, the fact that he and his supporters were willing to invest significant amounts of time and money in the campaign is indicative of the growing sense of political strength among at least some of the Bhumihars. Moreover, although two other candidates contested for the position of Sarpanch as well—one Kohar and one Hela—the Bhumihar candidacy was the only one that the Jat leadership considered to be a real threat.

The growing political strength of the Bhumihar caste is even more apparent at the block level. The Bhumihars were the first of the peasant castes to form a block-level caste association—doing so before even the Jats—and, while two Jat-led factions continue to be the main rivals for positions in the block, the Bhumihars gradually have been gaining influence in these contests.

CHAPTER 6

ECONOMIC INTERESTS

As we have seen, caste continues to play an important role in the social organization of the village. People identify both themselves and others by caste; social relations and interactions are governed in large part by the caste ranking of the participants; caste allegiance and caste pride remain strong; and caste continues to create major barriers to social, political, and economic mobility among the members of the lower castes.

At the same time, however, other social categories and identities are important in village social organization as well. Indeed, what social identity people assume and how they are identified by others often changes according to context. Thus, for example, as we saw elsewhere, the Helas identify themselves simply as Harijans. This is only one instance of the fluidity of social identification one finds in the village.

The existence of salient social categories in addition to caste is not new, of course. The Hindu system of social stratification has always involved shifting categories—more or less inclusive depending on context. Thus, one finds the division between those who are twice-born and those who are not, the further division of these two categories into different varna, the divisions of castes within each varna, and, often, the further division of caste into subcastes. What is interesting in Ramanagar today, however, is the emergence of new social categories in addition to those just listed, that reflect the changing social and economic situation of the village.

An examination of these new social categories will provide us with a more complete picture of the social organization of the village at present and will give us greater insight into the directions that social change in the village might take. A consideration of the

fluidity of these categories—when and why people choose to place themselves or others in one category as opposed to another—will provide us with a clearer understanding of social relations in the village from the perspective of the villagers themselves.

There are essentially two types of social categories used by the villagers to distinguish among people. One type is caste-based; the other type is economically-based. The line between these two types of social categories is not always sharp, however. Thus, there is generally an economic component to the caste-based categories, and a caste component to the economically-based categories.

The primary caste-based social categories are groupings of several castes together—in particular, into the three categories of Forward Castes, Backward Castes, and Harijans. These categories are often used in institutional contexts. For example, information about membership in the cooperative credit society and about who receives loans from the society is usually recorded according to these categories.

Aside from such institutional contexts, however, the term Forward Caste is rarely used by the villagers themselves to designate a social unit within the village. The members of the Forward Castes themselves identify themselves and other members of the Forward Castes by specific caste, or to use categories that indicate common economic positions. Similarly, the members of the Backward Castes and the Harijans rarely group the members of the Forward Castes together under this category. Again, they generally identify a member of Forward Castes either by specific caste or as part of an economically-based category. Thus, the members of the Forward Castes taken together do not generally constitute a socially significant unit within the village.

In contrast, the categories of Backward Caste and Harijan have a more immediate and real meaning to the villagers, who use the terms in certain contexts to designate the

members of these two groups. The term Backward Caste is used by members of the Forward Castes primarily in the context of conversations about affirmative action program that favor the Backward Castes. The members of the Forward Castes are very much aware of—and resentful of—the reservation system that gives preference to members of the Backward Castes and to Harijans for some political and educational positions. Thus, in this context, the grouping of the members of the Backward Castes as a single social category has real political and economic substance behind it, and hence, it becomes a more meaningful social category than the category of the Forward Castes.

At the same time, however, members of the Forward Castes rarely identify specific individuals or groups of individuals within the village as Backward Caste members. Rather, they refer to members of the Backward Castes either by specific caste or by a category that indicates an economic position. Thus, as the level of village social and economic organization, the category of Backward Caste has less social relevance to the members of the Forward Castes.

Members of the Backward Castes themselves also use the term Backward Caste in reference to affirmative action programs, and they are very much aware of the advantages that Backward Caste status may confer in certain contexts because of affirmative action. Unlike the members of the Forward Castes however, Backward Caste members also sometimes use the term Backward Caste when they discuss voting patterns in elections at the block level and above. At these political levels, politicians sometimes use the category of Backward Caste as a rallying point to identify interests common to large blocs of voters. Thus, to Backward Caste members, the category of Backward Caste becomes a salient social category, with real political import, at these levels. At the level of the village, however, politics continues to be seen by members of the Backward Castes

more in terms of specific caste than in terms of larger groupings, just as it is seen by members of the Forward Castes.

Interestingly, I never heard a Harijan refer to the Backward Castes in any context. Even during conversations about affirmative action programs, the Harijans made no reference to the category of Backward Caste, although many of them were certainly aware of the ramification of these programs for Harijans. I am not sure why the Harijans ignored or were unaware of the category of Backward Caste, especially given that the system of reservations and other affirmative action programs encompass the Backward Castes as well as the Harijans. I suspect, however, that part of the reason may be that the Harijans of Neemghar are so isolated from the village and from the larger social world that they tend to divide the political universe into Harijans (or into Helas and Chamars) and Others. While some of them are doubtless aware that the affirmative action programs of the government apply to others besides Harijans, this may not seem particularly relevant in the face of the fundamental division between those who are Harijans and those who are not.

Of the three categories—Forward Caste, Backward Caste, and Harijan—Harijan is the category that is most widely used by the villagers in the everyday context of the village itself. Members of the Forward and Backward Castes often refer to the Harijans as a group. Indeed, they rarely distinguish between the two Harijan castes unless pressed to do so. Thus, for example, whenever I asked a non-Harijan to identify the caste of a particular Harijan, I was usually told simply that the person was a Harijan. Only after I asked for a more specific answer would I be told that the person was a Hela or a Chamar. The fact that the category of Harijan is so commonly used by the villagers is probably the result of both the physical and social distance of the Harijans from the rest of the village. Because

the members of the Backward Castes all live within the village, as an integral part of it albeit in separate neighborhoods, the members of the Forward Castes are inclined to distinguish among the specific castes in most contexts. In contrast, it is much easier for them to lump the Harijans together as a single category.

Most of the members of the Forward and Backward Castes also use the category of Harijan in the context of discussions about government programs aimed at affirmative action. Again, they are very much aware of the advantages that identity as a Harijan can bring with respect to obtaining government loans, scholarships, or political office.

The Harijans themselves, of course, attach great importance to the distinctions between Harijan castes, and in many contexts they identify themselves by specific caste rather than as Harijans. Yet, politically they identify very strongly with the category of Harijan, and in the context of discussions of political issues at any level—from the village level to the national level—they invariably speak in terms of Harijan interests. Even when divisive feuding erupts between the Helas and Chamars, they are very much aware that their political interests lie in their unity as Harijans.

Most of the villagers, then, are familiar with the three categories of Forward Castes, Backward Castes, and Harijans, and, indeed, the latter two categories in particular have sufficient political and economic weight behind them to make them very real and significant social categories to the villagers. Nonetheless, they are categories that were created outside of the village—the product of government programs and institutions that are familiar to villagers but do not usually effect their daily lives. The primary relevance of the categories to the villagers is with references to these government programs and institutions.

In contrast to these categories, the economically-based categories used by the villagers

are much more closely tied to their everyday lives. These categories cut across caste boundaries, uniting the members of several different castes according to common economic positions. Villages frequently use these categories to assign socioeconomic identities to people when such identities are more pertinent than caste affiliation.

The villagers divide their social world into two basic economic categories—Kisan and labor. In the simplest usage, Kisans are farmers—landowners with sufficient land to earn a livelihood from it. Anyone who is able to subsist on his land alone—without need to supplement his income through work as a wage laborer—can be called a Kisan. Labor, on the other, refers to those people whose primary source of income derives from work as daily agricultural wage laborers or a harwahs. Thus, anyone with little or no land who earns a livelihood by working for Kisans falls under the category of labor.

The word Kisan is a native term. Villagers use the word to identify both a category of people and individuals. Thus, for example, someone might say: That man is a Kisan, or those men in front of the temple are Kisans. In contrast, the villagers themselves use the English term labor when they refer to those who earn a living through agricultural labor. In this case, the term is used to identify a category of people rather than individuals. The singular—he is a laborer—is never mentioned. Rather, someone might say: That mans acts like labor, or Labor complains when wages are low.[1]

The categories of Kisan and labor cut across the traditional divisions of the village, uniting people of different castes in social units defined primarily by economic position. The terms are often used by the villagers instead of caste names to identify individuals or groups, and their use clearly reflects the importance of economic position—apart from caste—as an aspect of social identity in the village.

At the same time, however, I have so far presented the simplest and most

straightforward usage of the terms Kisan and labor. In fact, the social categories designated by these terms are not always defined by strict economic criteria alone. In some cases, caste and even social demeanor are used as additional criteria to define the membership of these social categories. Moreover, the terms Kisan and labor are used by different people at different times to designate a variety of social categories, and the identification of individuals as members of these categories varies considerably depending on context. Thus the social groupings designated by these terms are neither clearly bounded nor rigidly fixed.

To the members of the Forward Castes in the village, the definition of the category of Kisan encompasses caste categories as well as economic position. According to this definition, a Kisan must be a landowner and a member of a Forward Caste. A landowner who is a member of the Backward or Harijan castes—no matter how wealthy he might be—will never be considered to be a Kisan by the members of the Forward Castes. Moreover, because there are relatively few landowners with substantial holdings among the members of the highest castes—Brahmans, Baniyas, Telis, Sunars, or Badhais—in many cases the category of Kisan is narrowed still further, to designate only Jats and Bhumihars. This usage is frequent among the wealthiest Jat and Bhumihar Kisans of the village, and it entails an acknowledgment of the similar economic and social positions and the strong economic interests that they share in common.

The element of caste that is incorporated into the Forward Caste definitions of Kisan is clear from the responses I received from several Forward Castes friends when I suggested that the wealthiest landowner among the Kohars—a man with enough land to generate a sizable surplus beyond the needs of his family—could be called a Kisan. None of them would accept the designation of Kisan for the Kohar landowner, although they agreed

that his economic position was similar to many Forward Castes members who are Kisans. Their responses to my suggestion were all similar to that of a Jat landowner, who said: Yes he owns land and hires khetihar majdoor workers to work on it, but he is like a labor. He is not really a good person. In this context, to be like labor and not really a good person is to be from a caste that is not a good (that is, Forward) caste.

Usually, the term Kisan, when used by the members of the Forward Castes, refers to a landowner with sufficient land to generate a surplus beyond the subsistence needs of the landowner's family. At times, however, members of the Forward Castes subdivide the category even further, into small landowners (Chote Kisan) and large landowners (Bade Kisan). This division is used particularly by the wealthier members of the Forward Castes, in part, it seems, to reinforce the caste component of the definition and thus encourage a sense of kinship and solidarity among all Forward Caste landowners. In this usage, even someone who has only a small amount of land can be a Kisan of sorts—a Chota Kisan—as long as he behaves with the dignity and decorum of a member of a Forward Caste. In this context, behavior is a key element of the definition of a Kisan. Indeed, the term Kisan is sometimes used by the wealthier members of the Forward Castes to designate any member of a Forward Caste who shows a consciousness of and loyalty to his caste coupled with an attitude of deference and respect toward wealthier and more powerful fellow caste members. In contrast, those fellow caste members who are ill-mannered and demanding—that is, those who tend to agitate for higher wages—are either called labor or said to act like labor by the wealthier members of their caste.

Interestingly, however, Forward Caste members who are at the lower end of the economic scale—with little or no land—rarely speak of Chote Kisan. To them the term Kisan usually connotes only landowners with enough land to make them economically

and politically powerful. While these poorer members of the Forward Castes do not usually refer to themselves as labor, they do recognize that their economic position is closer to that of labor than to that of the wealthy landowners, and they do not tend to ally themselves with these landowners by referring to themselves as Kisan.

Like the poorer members of the Forward Castes, members of the Backward and Harijan castes rarely distinguish between Chote and Bade Kisan. To them, the term Kisan refers only to wealthy landowners. Caste is an important element in their definition of the term in some contexts; in other contexts it is not. Thus, for example, in any discussion of village politics, the term Kisan refers only to wealthy Jat and Bhumihar landowners—the politically powerful men of the village—when it is used by Backward and Harijan caste members. In contrast, in an economic context—for example, when wages for agricultural labor are being discussed—Backward and Harijan caste members use the term Kisan to refer to any landowner who is a hirer of labor, regardless of caste. Thus, in an economic context, Kohar and Harijan landowners with sufficient land would be called Kisans.

The use of the term labor is both more variable and more evocative than the use of the term Kisan. Like the term Kisan, labor may be used in a variety of ways by different people in different contexts. However, whereas the term Kisan may be used primarily descriptively and hence relatively neutrally in some contexts—used merely to indicate the social and economic standing of a specific individual—the term labor invariably refers to whole categories of people, and the use of the term always carries with it a variety of political and economic connotations. The connotations of the term labor may be positive or negative—depending on who is using it and in what context—but they are never neutral. Thus labor is often a much more politically loaded term than Kisan. The fact that an English word rather than a Hindi equivalent is used also suggests that the

term may refer to a more recently evolved social category.

To Forward Caste landowners—those who do not themselves work for others as agricultural laborers—labor can refer to one of three categories of people depending on the context in which the term is used. In some contexts, it is used to refer to anyone who works as an agricultural wage laborer. This usage is most common in discussions among Kisans about wages for agricultural labor. Use of the term in this way often entails a feeling of us against them—for example, they (labor) are asking for Rs 40 per day; we (Kisans) will offer Rs. 30. Thus, there is an underlying sense of two economically defined social categories vying with each other for competing interests.

This sense of opposition between two social categories with competing economic interests becomes even clearer in the second usage of the term labor by Forward Caste landowners. In this second usage, labor refers to Kohars and Harijans, plus any landless Jats and Bhumihars who refuse to act with the proper caste dignity and loyalty. Thus, as was explained to me by the Jats at several occasions: "labor does not mean everyone who works as an agricultural laborer. Labor means Kohars, Helas, Chamars, Dhobis, and Nais. It also means Jats and Bhumihars who are very poor and who act without manners. However, poor Jats and Bhumihars who work as agricultural laborers but who have manners are not labor.

This definition of the category of labor was used most frequently in my conversations with Forward Caste Kisans about the existence of a union of agricultural laborers. While no such union exists in Neemghar till today, the agricultural laborers of the village had become organized sufficiently to stage a strike at the time of the wheat harvest several years previously. All of the agricultural laborers from the Backward and Harijan castes participated in this strike, but only some of the agricultural laborers from the Jat and

Bhumihar castes participated. The Forward Caste Kisans I talked to about this strike always identified the participating Jat and Bhumihar workers explicitly as labor. In contrast, the Jat and Bhumihar workers who did not participate, were identified by caste, as Jats and Bhumihars.

Forward Caste Kisans also used this definition of labor when they spoke of the demands for higher wages that they frequently face from agricultural laborers today. They argue that these demands—excessive in their view—come primarily from groups of Kohars and Harijans, but also from a few troublesome Jats and Bhumihars. Those Jat and Bhumihar workers who agitate for higher wages are considered to be part of labor; those who do not are simply good Jats and Bhumihars.

Clearly, this definition of labor to include all Backward and Harijan castes and those Jats and Bhumihars who ally themselves with agricultural laborers from other castes is based on caste and behavior as well as on economic position. Thus, according to the Forward Caste Kisans, a good Jat or Bhumihar who acts as a Jat and Bhumihar and shows primary allegiance to his caste will never fall into the category of labor. Conversely, labor carries the connotation of bad behavior and low caste. An agricultural laborer who is a member of a Forward Caste will be considered to be labor only if he has betrayed his caste.

Generally, most Jats and Bhumihars who are agricultural laborers accept this negative view of the category of labor, and they do not use the term to identify themselves. Rather, they continue to identify with their fellow caste members, and they understand their primary allegiances in terms of caste. At the same time, however, when the issue of wages for agricultural laborers arises, as it often does during the busier periods of the agricultural cycle, they are increasingly likely to identify their common economic

interests with the agricultural laborers of other castes. During those periods, I have actually heard some of them refer to themselves as labor—not in the negative sense used by the Kisans of their castes, but in a purely economic sense defined by common economic position.

I would not argue that this recognition of common economic interests among the agricultural laborers of all castes indicates the emergence of a full-blown class consciousness on the part of the laborers. It is far too tenuous and short-lived in most cases, and caste allegiance continues to create strong barriers to the organization of unions across caste lines. Nonetheless, it does provide evidence of the increasing importance of certain social categories that are defined economically rather than by caste. The increasing importance of these categories is manifested further in the growing tensions among the members of the Forward Castes that arise as a result of conflicts between caste allegiance and economic interests.

While the economic aspect is primary in the first two definitions of labor as the term is used by the Forward Castes, the third definition of the term as it is used by them is primarily caste-based. According to this definition, labor includes all of the members of the Backward and Harijan castes and no one else. This usage arises mainly in political contexts, and it is used by all of the members of the Forward Castes, regardless of economic position. It is used particularly in discussions of local elections. In such discussions, people frequently talk about how labor voted or about how much money the various candidates paid labor in bribes. Although the poorest members of the Forward Castes are often treated similarly to the members of the Backward and Harijan castes during elections—their votes may be monitored, and they are frequently given bribes—they are never included in the category of labor in this context. Thus, in this third

definition, the category of labor is restricted to members of the Backward and Harijan castes, just as the category of Kisan is restricted to the Forward Castes.

To members of the Backward and Harijan castes, labor takes on one of the two meanings, depending on context. On the one hand, it is sometimes used in a primarily economic sense to include all agricultural laborers. The term is used this way most frequently during discussions of wages. It is also used in this way on the rare occasions when agricultural laborers' unions are discussed.

The term is also often used by the members of the Backward Castes interchangeably with a caste name. Thus, for example, Kohars often speak of the way labor voted in an election when they are in fact referring only to the Kohar vote. Similarly, Helas and Chamars use the term interchangeably with Harijan in the same context.

The use of the term labor interchangeably with caste may indicate a growing focus on common economic interests rather than caste as the defining feature of social position. This argument is supported by the fact that when the term is used in this way by Kohars or Harijans, its referent is usually rather ambiguous and fluid. Thus, although the primary definition is caste-based, people often broadened the definition to include all agricultural laborers when I asked them about it explicitly.

Unlike the members of the Forward Castes, the members of the Backward and Harijan castes do not link the definition of labor to behavior, nor does their use of the term have the negative connotations that it assumes in the usage of the Forward Castes. Rather, it is used primarily as an expression of common identity and common interests. Even when it is used to identify only a narrow, caste-based category, its economic orientation suggests the awareness of a broader unity.

As we have seen, there are several terms in addition to caste names that the villagers

use to identify individuals and groups of individuals. The meanings of these terms vary depending on who uses them and in what context. Thus, for example, an individual may be identified sometimes as a Jat, sometimes as a member of a Forward Caste, and sometimes as a Kisan. Similarly, another individual may be a Kohar in some contexts, a member of a Backward Caste in another context, and labor in a third context.

What do these different social categories and social identities tell us about the social organization of the village as it is seen by the villagers themselves? A picture of changing social and economic relations begin to emerge. People continue to identify themselves and others by caste, and they often use the moral pressure of caste affiliation and loyalty when it is expedient to do so. At the same time, however, new political and economic relations have increased the importance of social categories other than caste as well. In particular, categories defined by common economic interests that cut across caste boundaries have become more salient. Yet even these categories often include both economic and caste components in their definitions, and the two are frequently difficult to disentangle. How an individual applies these social categories at various times depends partly on context, and partly on the particular individual's understanding of his or her own interests. Some people tend to feel the ties of caste more strongly than others; others focus more on the economic aspects of any situation. In general, intra-caste tensions increasingly center around conflicts between caste loyalty and economic interests.

It is important to understand that there is no one true configuration of social categories that most accurately describes the village. All of the social categories and identities that I have described are equally valid—some predominate in one context; some predominate in another—and each different configuration of these categories and identities creates a picture of village social organization from a particular perspective.

CHAPTER 7

Bhajanlal and Rajendra and Dharmendra and Lakhoo

In order to highlight the common perspectives and attitudes that unite people within the different castes, in previous chapters I treated the castes as essentially monolithic with respect to intra-caste ideology. In fact, however, attitudes and relationships within the different castes tend to be quite variable and complex, and these differences have often been a source of social tension and conflict. This has been the case particularly within the two most powerful castes—the Jats and Bhumihars—and, more specifically, among the wealthier members of these two castes. The economic changes—both positive and negative—that they have experienced have exacerbated tensions among them as different families have adopted different, often conflicting, strategies for dealing with the changing economic and social environment. These different strategies are often supported by profound ideological differences—indeed, by radically different worldviews—on the parts of the various actors.

The tensions and conflicts that have arisen as the result of these differences in strategy and ideology among the members of the upper stratum of Jats and Bhumihars have been critical in recent political conflicts within the village. They have shaped new political alignments and have been at the heart of much of the bitter and continuing struggle for power within the village that has developed in the past few years.

In some respects, it is at first surprising to see this level of ideological conflict and tension among the members of what would seem to be a single, objective class—that is, among the wealthier Kisans of the village who certainly share many economic interests in common. One might expect, rather, to find greater ideological tension between Kisans

and labor, or among different caste groupings. While ideological tensions among these groups do exist, they have not, as yet, had the political weight of the ideological conflict among the members of the upper stratum.[2]

In order to understand this heightened ideological tension among the Kisans, one must remember that Ramanagar is in the process of great economic change, and, further, one must consider the nature of the change—a change toward the development of an increasingly capitalist mode of production. As Scott (1985) has pointed out, capitalism itself, especially in its early development, is a socially revolutionary and transforming force, and thus, it is not surprising that the ideological struggle we see at present occurs as much at the top—where changes in the very definition of the social rules are necessary—as at the bottom.

Scott, discussing economic and ideological changes in a Malaysian village in the context of the Green Revolution argues: If the ideological situation in Sedaka is at all characteristic of early capitalism, as I believe it is, then the usual argument about dominant ideologies will have to be fundamentally recast. Gramsci and many others assume that the big task for any subordinate class is to create a counterhegemony that will ultimately be capable of transforming the society. This position may have some merit for mature capitalist societies, where an elaborated ideology may already be in place. But it ignores the central fact that it has been capitalism that has historically transformed societies and broken apart existing relations of production. Even a casual glance at the record will show that capitalist development continually requires the violation of the previous social contract which in most cases it had earlier helped to create and sustain (1985: 346; cited in Kedia and Sinha 1994: 204; Scott's emphasis in original).

While Scott focuses on the ideology of the subordinate class, my point here is that the

breaking of the social contract that is occurring in Neemghar with the changes of the Green Revolution has met with resistance from within the dominant stratum both because it requires new economic strategies and because it requires a radical reorientation of worldview. As we will see, as various families adopted different economic strategies, based, in part, on their perception and understanding of the social rules—that is, on their worldviews—and as these strategies succeeded or failed, an ideological struggle in support of the different strategies was begun that continues and intensifies today.

The relation between economic strategies and worldview is a complex, dialectical one—involving a process in which worldview influences economic decisions, and these decisions have effects which in turn reinforce or reshape worldview. In this chapter, using case studies of a few wealthy Kisans—all close family friends—we will examine some of the differences in attitude and worldview that are found among the members of the upper stratum and explore the dialectical interaction between these different worldviews and alternative economic strategies.

The wealthier Jats and Bhumihars have begun to develop more heterogeneous social relationships. These relationships are heterogeneous in two senses. First, they are based on various kinds of ties—for example, some are based on contract, some on caste or kinship, and some on common class position. Second, they frequently involve inter-caste interactions that require the members of different castes to interact in ways which in the past primarily restricted to relationships within a single caste.

The transition to some of these different kinds of relationships—particularly those based entirely on contract and those involving new kinds of interactions between the members of different castes—has been neither easy nor universal. The families that are most inclined to participate in such relationships are generally some of the wealthiest and

most powerful families of the village. Even more important, however, they are the families that have been most successful in seizing on new economic opportunities outside the traditional domain of agriculture. In contrast, those families that have been less successful in adjusting to the changing economy and becoming involved in economic pursuits outside of agriculture have tended to resent and resist the development of these different kinds of social relationships.

In a sense then, one can divide the wealthier Jats and Bhumihars into two types based on these contrasts: those who tend toward an entrepreneurial approach to their financial pursuits and social relationships, and those who tend toward a more, traditional, conservative approach in their economic and social activities.

Two qualifications must immediately be added to the delineation of these types, however. First, I do not mean to imply by my use of the term conservative that those families who fall into this type are less forward looking or less rational in their outlook than the entrepreneurial types. Rather, I use the term to mean simply that these families have adopted a strategy of maintaining multiplex relationships based on ties that encompass more than purely economic concerns, and of concentrating primarily on agriculture—with little economic diversification—as the path they deem most promising for economic advancement. To what extent they have adopted this conservative strategy because they have been unsuccessful in economic pursuits outside the agricultural domain, and to what extent they have been unsuccessful in economic pursuits outside the agricultural domain because they have adopted this strategy is an issue that we will consider in this chapter.

The second qualification to this typology is that these types are not to be taken as rigid and clearly separated. All of the wealthier Jats and Bhumihars exhibit elements of the

entrepreneurial approach and elements of the conservative approach in their social and economic activities. Certainly, the dominance of one of these elements over the other in any given social relationship depends in part on the fundamental attitudes and values of the individuals involved, but it also depends on their perceptions of the particular situation at hand with respect to what is most advantageous and expedient for them at that time. Thus, the difference between the two types involves shifts in emphasis and degree, rather than an absolute, qualitative distinction.

Keeping these two qualifications firmly in mind, let us examine some of the differences in attitudes and action that have led me to distinguish between these two types.

All of the Jats and Bhumihars whom I have identified as entrepreneurial in outlook and perspective are landowners. By and large, they approach agriculture as a purely commercial venture. Their relations with their laborers, their decisions about when to borrow or lend money, and their decisions about giving or taking land in lease, are all based on their perception of agriculture as a business.

In addition to agriculture, most of them are also involved in non-agricultural financial pursuits, often centered outside the village. These pursuits cover a broad range of activities—for example, investments in commercial industry, contracting for urban constructions, and even the construction and operation of cinema halls. Such activities have contributed to the development of an expansive view of the world among these entrepreneurial types. They tend to look outward—beyond the confines of the village itself—to a world that includes urban as well as rural settings and business undertakings of many different kinds.

These entrepreneurial Jats and Bhumihars are often self-consciously modern in their orientations. Thus, for example, many of them are quick to purchase all kinds of

electronic gadgets—radios, tape players, and displays of flashing colored lights, for example—which they ostentatiously exhibit in their homes as evidence of their cosmopolitan tastes and experiences. In their conversations with me or with my family in my presence, over the years, the members of these families stressed their business-like approach to farming, their preference for economic transactions based on cash rather than on kind even within the village, and the importance and strength of their urban connections.

Most of these families have close relatives living in Agra and nearby cities, and frequent visits back and forth between the city and the village are common for all family members. Many of these people talk of eventually selling their land and moving to the city permanently, like my family has been doing slowly. Providing their sons with education that would enable them to find employment in the city and their daughters with husbands who have urban jobs is of major concern to them.

I do not mean to imply that these families are completely disengaged from village life, however. On the contrary, they continue to maintain a strong sense of identity with the village, as indeed do many of their relatives who have migrated to the cities. Thus, just as these villagers make frequent trips to the cities to visit relatives, so do their relatives make frequent trips back to the village—in some cases even going so far as to vote in village elections and to participate in some of the factional fights of the village. However, despite a continued involvement with the village on the part of these families, the boundaries of their universe are much wider than those of the more traditional families of the village, and their commitments to people and institutions outside the village run deeper.

In contrast to the entrepreneurial Jats and Bhumihars, those wealthy Jats and Bhumihars

who exhibit a more conservative, more traditional approach to the world tend to focus entirely on agriculture and the ownership of land as a means to advance economically. As a result, their universe centers much more completely on the village itself and on the rural areas surrounding the village, and much less on the cities. The men of these families may visit a city occasionally, but their trips are usually single-day jaunts in order to buy something that is not available in the village, visit a bank for a loan, or accomplish some other practical purpose. They rarely make such trips for social reasons alone, and, indeed, few of them have close relatives in the cities. The women of these families generally have little experience of the cities, and, indeed, they rarely leave the village at all.

At the same time, because these families are fully grounded in the village, they are inclined to maintain multiplex social relations with other villagers, based on complex and overlapping rules. Thus, for example, their relationships with the laborers who work in their fields often involve elements of patronage and clientage. These relationships encompass many more rights and obligations on both sides than are found in straightforward contractual relationships. They are also often more amorphously and ambiguously defined purely economically based relationships, with room for subtle negotiation and interpretation. While the entrepreneurial Jats and Bhumihars maintain some such relationships with members of their own castes, they tend to try to avoid these more complex relationships with the laborers who work in their fields.

The conservative Jats and Bhumihars also differ from the entrepreneurial types in their consumption patterns. They are no less inclined toward conspicuous consumption and ostentatious displays of wealth, but they tend to invest more in traditionally valued items—brass and stainless steel cooking utensils and ornate devotional objects, for example—than in the modern gadgets favored by the entrepreneurial types.

In general, then, the entrepreneurial Jats and Bhumihars are expansive in their worldview, interested in introducing modern innovations to their households, and involved in diverse economic activities in urban as well as rural contexts. The conservative Jats and Bhumihars, on the other hand, have a narrower worldview, focused primarily on village life and agriculture. They continue to maintain more multiplex relationships with a variety of people within the village, they are less inclined to experiment with modern innovations in their households, and they remain essentially uninvolved in any urban economic activities. Finally, while the families I have identified as entrepreneurial and those I have identified as conservative are all wealthy by village standards, the entrepreneurial families are, in general, faring well in the changing economic environment, following a strategy of economic experimentation and diversification. In contrast, the conservative families are, by and large, in a more tenuous position economically, as the high price of land limits the possibilities for continual economic expansion through agriculture alone. Those conservative families who have tried to branch out into other economic endeavors have generally failed in their attempts.

As I noted earlier, however, the contrasts between these two types are by no means absolute. Rather, it is best to think of them as the two extremes of a continuum. A few of the wealthy families of the village approximate each end of the continuum, while the majority of them fall somewhere in between. Indeed, the degree to which a family appears to be conservative or entrepreneurial often varies according to the particular circumstances of a situation. In order to understand more fully both the contrasts that differentiate the two types and the degree of fluidity between them, it is useful to examine a few representative families in more detail.

Rajendra

Rajendra, a 37 year old Jat, is one of the richest and most powerful men in the village. Through lease and outright ownership, he has control over at least 60 acres of land—a huge amount by village standards. He derives considerable profit from this land, growing cash crops.

In many ways Rajendra is a good—if extreme—example of the entrepreneurial Jats and Bhumihars in the village. He prides himself on his scientific farming, and his agricultural pursuits are strictly oriented towards the rational calculation of profit and loss. To him agriculture is very much like any other business.

Rajendra's orientation toward the market and the cash economy is evident in his choice of crops. While all large landowners in the village grow cash crops, Rajendra is one of the few of them who grows no vegetables at all for domestic consumption. He argues that it is more profitable to use every bit of available land for the growth of cash crops and to buy vegetables daily from peddlers or in the nearby markets. While this argument makes sense in strictly economic terms, most people in the village prefer to grow at least some of their own vegetables when they have the option to do so, rather than relying solely on cash purchases.

Rajendra's emphasis on the cash crop economy is also evident in his preference to pay for services in cash rather than in kind whenever possible, even when payment in kind is the standard, accepted form of payment. Thus, he is one of the few families in the village that pays the washerman in cash. Even the itinerant beggars who occasionally wander through the village are usually given a coin or two at Rajendra's door, rather than the more conventional handful of wheat flour.

Rajendra's relationships with most of the laborers who work for him also reflect his

business-like approach to agriculture and contrast with the relationships that many other village landowners have with laborers. In theory, of course, relations between daily wage laborers and landowners are strictly contractual, and laborers are neither required nor expected to perform tasks for landowners other than the tasks for which they are hired. In practice, however, there is some flexibility in the relationships between wage laborers and landowners. Often, certain laborers work repeatedly for a few landowners, and, in time, their relationships may become somewhat more personalized. Moreover, additional financial ties through loans or leasing of land, ties of caste, and ties of kinship may strengthen and complicate the bonds between employer and employee.

Not surprisingly, Rajendra tends to minimize such complicating ties whenever possible. He argues that because he maintains a strictly contractual relationship with his laborers, they work much more efficiently and productively for him than they do for employers with a more complex involvement with them.

I do not mean to suggest that Rajendra never enters into multiplex relationships with laborers, however. Certainly he has his share of relationships based on the somewhat vaguely defined and amorphous ties of patronage rather than on straightforward contract, and he does not hesitate to make demands of people based on such ties when it is to his advantage to do so. He is, after all, still very much a part of a society in which multiplex relations, entailing a myriad of rights and duties on both sides, continue to be the norm. However, ideologically he tends away from such relationships, and, even when in practice he falls into them, he continues to talk of going by the rules—that is, by the rules of contract—and of the value of clearly defined expectations and demands in one's relationships with others.

Rajendra's entrepreneurial orientation is clear in his non-agricultural pursuits as well.

He has invested in two business enterprises within the village in recent years—a flour mill and a cinema hall—and has expressed interest in broadening his economic undertakings still further, both within and outside the village. He has owned the flour mill in partnership with two other prosperous Jat families for about five years, and he is the managing partner. It is a small mill, used mainly for the milling of wheat for domestic consumption within the village.[3]

Rajendra's cinema hall, which he owns in partnership with five other people, is a much bigger undertaking. It was completed and opened, with much fanfare and celebration, in 1992 (?). It is the second cinema hall to open in the village, and it is one of the largest and fanciest I have ever seen in a village setting in India. Thus, much more than the flour mill, it is representative of the trend towards expansion, urbanization, and new economic pursuits on the part of some of the villagers. Rajendra and his partners take great pride in the size of their theater, in its modern equipment and seating arrangements, and in its superiority to the older theater that was already located in the village. Rajendra has often insisted to me that it is as good as any cinema hall in Agra.

To date, Rajendra has been very successful in all of his economic pursuits. Initially, profits from agriculture provided the capital necessary for the start-up investments in his non-agricultural enterprises. In turn, success in other areas has enabled Rajendra to invest even more heavily in land and in agricultural equipment such as tractors, weatherproof godowns for the storage of wheat, exceptionally strong and healthy bullocks, and so on. Everything about him indicates that he is a man of wealth and stature—his property, his house, his dress, his demeanor. More than that, however, everything about his lifestyle proclaims him to be a man who is outward looking—a man who is increasingly turning away from the village and looking beyond its boundaries towards the towns and cities. It

is this that makes him representative of the entrepreneurial type of landowner and differentiates him from other, equally wealthy men, who have continued their economic and social pursuits with a strong focus on the village. Thus, for example, Rajendra's house is filled with electrical appliances of all kinds. His is one of the six families in the village that owns a refrigerator and color television, and theirs was purchased, respectively, seven and three years before any of the others. His family also owns a radio, two tape recorders, several expensive clocks and watches, and a mix-master. In addition, they have a gas range, which they use daily for cooking. Although four other families in the village also have gas ranges, they use these ranges infrequently because of the expense and inconvenience of replenishing gas supplies.

In matters of dress as well, Rajendra's urban orientation is apparent. Like all men in the village, he is most comfortable in dhoti and kurta. However, except when he is relaxing at home or inspecting his fields, he dresses in pants and a tailored shirt. While such an outfit is not atypical among young men in the village who spend most of their time away at school, and although it is worn by most men in the cities, it is not standard garb for a wealthy village landowner. Even during the most formal ritual or political occasions in the village, I have not seen Rajendra wear the traditional white dhoti and kurta that most Kisans wear.

I do not mean to imply, however, that Rajendra simply emulates an urban lifestyle in a village setting. He has very real and strong family ties that involve him in urban life both economically and socially. The youngest of five children, Rajendra is the only one of them to remain in the village. His two older sisters are married to wealthy landowners in other villages, while his two brothers both live in Agra City, where each has established himself as a very successful building contractor. Although the three brothers keep

separate and independent households, they continue to maintain close familial ties. There is much visiting back and forth between the Neemghar household and the two Agra households. Indeed, Rajendra's youngest daughter has lived in the house of one of her uncles for the past six years so that she can attend an English-medium school in Agra. His oldest daughter—who attended school through the tenth grade in Neemghar—recently moved to her uncle's house as well, in order to attend college in Agra. In turn, three of Rajendra's nephews—the children of this middle brother—often spend a part of their school holidays in the village, and the children of his eldest brother also visit occasionally. Four years ago, one of the daughters of Rajendra's eldest brother was married to a man from the village, despite her urban background. While this man now has a government job in Bombay, his parents continue to own land in Neemghar and to live there for at least part of the year.

Rajendra and his brothers maintain close financial as well as social ties. Each of them inherited ten acres of land in Neemghar from his father, and each has added to that land through purchase. Rajendra farms all of this land, paying his brothers the going rate for leased land for their acres. The three brothers have also shared in some investments—in the purchase of building sites in Agra, for example—and have loaned each other money on occasion. Finally, although they are in no sense coparceners in a joint estate, they do occasionally comingle and collaborate on parts of their bookkeeping in order to minimize taxes.

In some ways Rajendra looks to Agra as his real home and sees his residence in Neemghar as a temporary one, in spite of his ties to the land there. This is clear not only in his willingness to send his daughters to Agra for their education, but also in his plans for their future and for his own. He is determined that both of his daughters will marry

well-educated job-doing boys with the prospect of employment in some major city. He has absolutely no interest in finding husbands for them who will pursue agriculture, no matter how prosperous they may be. When his daughters marry, he intends to give each of them half of his land as dowry (as well as an additional large sum of cash and gold). When he has thus rid himself of all of his land, he and his wife Lakshmi plan to move to Agra where Rajendra will become a financier. They will live off of the money he earns in this capacity in addition to the income from the flour mill and cinema hall.

Both Rajendra and Lakshmi speak with great anticipation and pleasure of the time when they will move permanently to Agra, and both, correspondingly, speak rather disparagingly of life in the village. Lakshmi, in particular, complains of the limited nature of village life. Like all Jat women of her economic status, she does, indeed, lead a restricted life, spending most of her time within the confines of her own domestic sphere. Yet Lakshmi carries the isolation that is inherent in the restrictions on women of high status to an extreme, in part, I think, as a way of disassociating herself from the village. While most women will occasionally slip over to sit on the steps of a neighbor's house and gossip for a little while during the late afternoon, when there is often a short lull in the domestic work, Lakshmi rarely appears on her own doorstep and never goes to that of a neighbor. Nor does she encourage neighbors to visit her, although a few of them occasionally do, despite her aloofness. She does, on rare occasion, go with Rajendra to visit the families of the other cinema partners or they come to visit her. These families are most like her own in terms of lifestyle, interests, and attitude, and she says that of the women of the village, she likes them best. However, she also asserts that her only real friend is her sister-in-law in Agra, and she avidly looks forward to the day when they will live close to one another and can spend much more time together.

The tendency to dissociate themselves from the village is also clear in Rajendra's and Lakshmi's attitudes toward village ritual. As Hindus, they perform all of the pujas that are required of them, and they contribute money and offerings of food to the various village festivals when called upon to do so. However, they rarely join in to watch or participate in village festivals, and they often speak of them disparagingly as being rather paltry and boring. However, their attitude was quite different during the times when they went to Agra for a festival. As I saw when I accompanied them to these festivals, they were active participants on these occasions, and they seemed much more emotionally involved in the events than they ever did in the village. Unquestionably, they prefer to celebrate ritual events in Agra whenever possible.

I do not mean to suggest, however, that Rajendra and his family represent a simple case of a family in the process of leaving the village altogether. Despite the urban ties, despite the aloofness from and disparagement of daily life in the village, and despite plans for the future, there continue to exist very real and compelling ties, both tangible and intangible, that bind the family—not only Rajendra, but his brothers as well—to the village. The most obvious of these ties, of course, is the ownership of land. The possibilities for highly profitable business undertakings are many in Agra, particularly if one is wealthy and well-connected. Nonetheless, no business offers the economic security of the ownership of highly fertile farmland. Thus, although Rajendra certainly intends to give all of his land to his daughters when they marry, it is hard to imagine that he will actually do so when the time comes. The fact that neither of this brothers has sold his land, and indeed, that each of them has bought more, gives an indication of the extent to which people tend to retain land when possible. It also raises some doubts as to the certainty Rajendra's plans for the future, and indeed, both of his brothers expressed skepticism to me that he

will actually carry through with his plan to give up his land and leave the village.

Ties of kinship also attach the family to the village. Rajendra's father was one of the five brothers, all of whom remained in Neemghar. Many of the sons of these brothers have also remained in Neemghar. While not all of them are emotionally close, they tend to support one another in the factional politics of the village, they address each other with kinship terms, and they share the perquisites and obligations of kinship during certain ritual events. In addition, several of them often turn to one another for support and involvement in various business ventures. Thus, for example, three of the six partners in the new cinema hall are descendants of Rajendra's father's father.

Rajendra and his brothers are also related to three important office-holders in the village—the Sarpanch, the Tahsildar (the village revenue collector), and the president of the cooperative credit society. These kin connections, coupled with their money and land, give the brothers tremendous political power in the village.

This power is strengthened by the broader, more amorphous bonds of kinship that they share with many of the inhabitants of the village. The family surname is Sirohi, which is one of the two numerically dominant surname groups among the Jats of the village. All people who share this surname claim kinship with one another, although often the common ancestor is so far in the past that the relationship cannot be traced. Sirohis run the gamut of economic positions in the village—from those who have virtually no property and lead economically marginal lives indeed, to the very wealthy landowners like Rajendra. A shared surname does not in and of itself entail specific, kin-based rights and duties between two individual. A common genealogical relationship has to be traceable in order for the perquisites and obligations to be in force. Nonetheless, people do at times invoke the kinship solidarity implied by a common surname when they are

seeking aid, favors, or political support. Thus, the fact that Rajendra and his brothers are Sirohis again provides them with a potentially strong power base in the village.

That this power within the village is still quite important to the brothers, despite their urban orientation, is evidenced by the fact that all of them—the Agra-based brothers, their wives, and their adult children—vote in Neemghar whenever there is a local election. Indeed, they generally arrive days in advance of an election in order to raise support for their chosen candidates. They are known to all of the residents of the village, who generally view them as members of one of the most politically, as well as economically, dominant families in the village.

The marriage of Rajendra's eldest brother's daughter to a man from the village is interesting in this context as well. The man is the son of the leader of the faction that opposed the faction supported by Rajendra and his brothers. Many of the villagers believe (and Rajendra himself hinted to me) that the marriage was at least in part politically motivated, the purpose being to foster a political alliance between the two competing factions.

The continuing connection of the Agra branch of the family to the village is clear in non-kin relations as well. Both of the brothers in Agra prefer to have the purohit (priest) from Neemghar perform important rituals for them in Agra, despite the extra expense it entails. Thus, for example, when one of the brothers built a new house (near my mama's) in Agra, he had that Neemghar priest and four assistants come to perform the rituals necessary for a house opening, rather than getting a priest from Agra. Similarly, most of the servants in the Agra households are from Neemghar and go back to the village occasionally to visit relatives there.

Rajendra and his relatives, then, provide an example of one type of response to the

economic changes and new opportunities that have arisen in the village over the last three decades. Both urban in orientation and yet still very much integrated into the sociopolitical life of the village, Rajendra has adopted an entrepreneurial approach to all aspects of his financial life. This approach, in turn, has affected all aspects of his social relations within the village.

While Rajendra provides a good example of the characteristics I include in the entrepreneurial type, most of the other wealthy Jats whom I would categorize as entrepreneurial exhibit some, but not all, of these characteristics. Taking Rajendra as an extreme example of the entrepreneurial type, then, it is interesting to compare him to an equally extreme example from the other end of the spectrum—an example of the conservative Jat landowner.

Bhajanlal

Facing Rajendra's house, separated from it by the main dirt road that cuts through the center of the village, stands another large, two-story house quite similar to Rajendra's house in age and general design. The house is occupied by Bhajanlal—another Jat landowner—and his family. The similarity between the two houses is not surprising—Bhajanlal's father and Rajendra's father began construction on their respective houses within three years of each other. At that time, according to both Bhajanlal and Rajendra, the two families occupied similar economic and social positions, enjoyed similar life styles, and shared a common set of attitudes and perspectives toward the world.

As the economic climate of the village has changed during the course of the Green Revolution, however, the paths of these two families have begun to diverge. As they have made different choices and adopted different strategies to deal with the economic changes

in the village, they have developed new perspectives and contrasting—often conflicting—worldviews. While, as we have seen, Rajendra provides an example of an entrepreneurial type, Bhajanlal exhibits a much more conservative and traditional approach in his dealings with the world.

On the surface, Bhajanlal still has much in common with Rajendra. He too is a man of wealth and some political stature in the village. Although he is not as wealthy as Rajendra, he nonetheless controls a substantial amount of land—about 45 acres—through lease and ownership. He grows commercial crops of wheat and sugar cane on most of his land, reserving only a few of his most fertile acres for other crops.

Like Rajendra too, Bhajanlal is interested in and involved in the politics of the village. He is closely related to the Upa-Sarpanch (vice-president) of the village Panchayat, and, in the last elections, he himself contested for and won a seat on the board of the cooperative credit society.

Finally, like Rajendra, Bhajanlal has two daughters. While one of these daughters is already married, the other is not, and Bhajanlal is very much concerned with the question of what kind of man would make a suitable husband for her. Whom this daughter might marry and how much dowry she will bring to the marriage are frequent themes in the conversations of all of the members of the family.

Despite these superficial similarities between Bhajanlal and Rajendra, however, the men are separated by underlying differences that are far more profound than those aspects of their lives that they share in common. In particular, there is a striking difference in their attitudes, perspectives, and demeanors that affects virtually every decision they make and every social interaction they participate in. In almost every aspect of his life, Bhajanlal takes a conservative and traditional approach that contrasts sharply

with Rajendra's entrepreneurial outlook.

Bhajanlal's conservative outlook is manifested first and foremost, in his approach to agriculture. Agriculture is not simply a business to Bhajanlal as it is to Rajendra. Rather, it is an entire way of life. This does not mean that Bhajanlal is less rational as a farmer than Rajendra, or that he is less concerned with calculations of profit and loss. On the contrary, like Rajendra, he concentrates on growing commercial crops, and he uses the latest technology and the best varieties of seed, fertilizers, and pesticides that are available to him in his farming. It does mean, however, that his role as a Kisan and his relationship to the land touches on every aspect of his existence—on his social relations as well as on his economic livelihood—and influences every decision he makes.

Thus, while agriculture is just one of several types of enterprises that Rajendra has invested in, for Bhajanlal it is his sole economic concern, and he has made no attempt to diversify into other areas of economic activity. His entire life has been oriented toward economic success in agriculture alone, and, indeed, he and the other members of his family have often suggested to me (and to my father) that there is something dishonest and not altogether admirable in any business activity outside of farming.

The difference between Bhajanlal's view of agriculture and that of Rajendra is also apparent in Bhajanlal's choice of crops. Although Bhajanlal is primarily involved in commercial crops, he also grows vegetables for consumption by his family. He acknowledges that it might make more sense from a strictly economic standpoint to grow only commercial crops and to buy the vegetables he needs for his family, but he expresses discomfort both at the thought of failing to meet his family's own domestic needs through his farming, and at the thought of depending so heavily on cash transactions alone.

Finally, the difference in approach to farming between Bhajanlal and Rajendra is clear in the very different kinds of social relationships that each has developed with agricultural laborers and with others involved with them through the land. Bhajanlal has developed a set of multiplex relationships with harwahs, daily wage laborers, tenants of his land, and those who lease land to him. These relationships are much more complex than comparable relationships developed by Rajendra, involving a myriad of rights and duties far beyond mere contractual obligation.

Thus, for example, in his role as landlord, Bhajanlal leases parts of his land to several different people. He has a distinct relationship with each of these people, and the terms of each lease are defined by the nature of each relationship. He rents one acre of land in Neemghar to Giraj—another wealthy Jat landowner—for cash payment. He receives half of the money from Giraj in advance, and the other half after Giraj harvests his crops. This leasing arrangement was instigated on Bhajanlal's part because he is always in need of cash for fertilizer, pesticides, and other agricultural inputs. It was instigated on Giraj's part because the land borders on his own land, and hence the lease provides an easy and efficient way for him to expand the amount of land he cultivates. The arrangement between the two men is handled in a very straightforward, business-like fashion, with no additional demands or claims on either side.

In contrast, Bhajanlal also leases one acre of land in Neemghar to Lala, a landless Kohar who used to work as a harwah for Bhajanlal. Lala pays for the lease with bags of wheat—the standard form of payment for leased land—but he pays several bags less than the going rate for each crop. Bhajanlal explains that he does not charge a full rent for the land because Lala is a good man who does not own much and who worked for Bhajanlal for many years. Moreover, Lala's wife occasionally helps Bhajanlal's wife and daughters

with domestic work, and, on rare occasion, Lala works in Bhajanlal's fields for a day or two. These work relationships are very informal, however, and neither Lala nor his wife are expected to be at the beck and call of Bhajanlal and his family.

Finally, Bhajanlal leases about 6.5 acres of land that he owns in another village to two Jat brothers who live in that village and are distantly related to him. Although Bhajanlal charges the brothers the going rate in bags of wheat for the land, he also gave them an interest free loan of Rs 2,000 before they planted the first crop so that they could buy seed and fertilizer. The first crop did not fare well, and the brothers asked Bhajanlal for another loan for the second crop. Bhajanlal decided to give them the loan; he expressed the fear that if he did not give them the loan and the second crop was also a failure, they would not ever pay the price of the lease, much less repay the two loans.

Bhajanlal's arrangement to lease land from another landowner also involves ties and commitments beyond those of a simple contractual relationship. The land Bhajanlal leases lies near the neighboring village of Rasoolpur and is owned by Satyanarayan, a wealthy Bhumihar landowner there. Despite the difference in caste between Bhajanlal and Satyanarayan, the two men are very close friends, acting more like relatives than acquaintances from different castes. The kin-like relationship that exists between the two men has extended to members of their families as well. Thus, for example, Bhajanlal's daughters call Satyanarayan caca (uncle) and behave toward him as if he were a real uncle. In recent years, when Bhajanlal has experienced some financial difficulties, Satyanarayan has loaned him money and decreased the amount that he must pay to lease the land in Rasoolpur.

Bhajanlal's leasing arrangements both with his tenants and with his landlord, shaped as they are by personal relationships and ties of kinship, contrast sharply with the leasing

arrangements undertaken by Rajendra. Whereas Bhajanlal exhibits a certain flexibility in the arrangements he makes depending on whom the leasing agreement is with, Rajendra's primary emphasis is on going by the rules in all cases. He shows far less flexibility and variability in his leasing arrangements than Bhajanlal. Thus, for example, even when he leases land from his own brothers, he insists on paying the going rate for the land—no more and no less—regardless of how the crops prosper.

Bhajanlal's relationships with the people who work for him—in the fields and in his home—are also very different from Rajendra's. Again, Bhajanlal's relationships are characterized by greater flexibility and variability and by a greater emphasis on fairly extensive rights and obligations on both sides.

Two women—one a Kohar and one a Chamar—who do domestic work for Bhajanlal's family provide good examples of these relationships. Narmada, the Kohar woman, works for the family most days, although she is free to work as an agricultural laborer for Bhajanlal or any other Kisan instead, and she often does so when wages for female laborers are high. On the days when Narmada works for Bhajanlal's family, they give her cooked meals for herself and sometimes to take home for her family. In addition, Bhajanlal occasionally provides her with wheat flour, vegetables, curd, leaves for thatching her house, and used clothing. He also gives her special meals on ritual occasions, and, when her husband was ill and unable to work, he gave her small gifts of money now and then. None of these payments and gifts to Narmada are part of a formal salary. Sometimes Bhajanlal gives her food, clothing, or other such things without her asking for them; sometimes he has given them when she asks for them; sometimes she asks and is refused. Yet the sense of obligation and responsibility on both sides is clear, and while the specific amounts of labor and payment to be provided are left undefined,

the existence of the relationship is never in question.

The relationship of Bhajanlal and his family to Rani—the Chamar woman—is similar to their relationship with Narmada. Rani works for them less frequently than Narmada, and, like Narmada, she does not receive a formal salary. Instead, she receives meals when she works and occasional gifts of food, clothing, thatching, and money. When a Hindu ceremony requires the participants to give food to a Harijan, Bhajanlal's family always gives the food to Rani. The relationship between Rani and Bhajanlal's family is flexible—Rani does not have to work for them on any given day, and they vary the amount they pay her depending on their own circumstances as well as on hers—but there are no definite rights and duties associated with the relationship that are acknowledged by both parties.

Bhajanlal's relationship with the daily wage laborers who work in his fields is, of course, much more formal than contractual. Like all of the other Kisans of the village, he pays them a fixed daily wage—the going rate in the village for whatever task they are doing—that he and the laborers have agreed on in advance. Yet Bhajanlal handles even these contractual relationships differently from Rajendra. Rajendra is fairly rigid about these arrangements, demanding that his workers perform their work exactly at the time they have agreed upon. Once the agreement has been reached, he permits no further negotiation over the scheduling of the work. He does occasionally provide small loans or advances to some of his workers, but always with the terms of repayment clearly defined and strictly adhered to. As always, his emphasis is on treating his farming as a business.

Bhajanlal, on the other hand, is much more inclined to allow for some flexibility with his workers after he has hired them. There is room of maneuver on both sides over when the laborers will perform the work and over when they will be paid for it. Similarly, when

Bhajanlal lends his workers money or pays them partially in advance, he often renegotiates the terms of repayment and the amount of interest at a later date. This degree of flexibility often leads to disputes between Bhajanlal and his laborers, as each party to the agreement tries to maneuver into a more advantageous position. In contrast, Rajendra almost never enters into such disputes. Yet the flexibility also encourages the maintenance of more complex ties between Bhajanlal and many of the laborers who work for him—ties that entail some sense of loyalty and obligation on both sides. Thus, for example, a laborer who requires medical care for himself or his family is likely to come to Bhajanlal for assistance. Conversely, several of the laborers who frequently work for Bhajanlal have accepted delays in their wages for as much as a weak when Bhajanlal has been in financial difficulties.[4]

Other aspects of Bhajanlal's life reflect his fundamentally conservative perspective as well. In contrast to Rajendra, with his urban orientation and his desire, ultimately, to leave the village for the city, the village continues to be the center of Bhajanlal's universe. His orientation and that of his family is entirely rural.

Thus, whereas Rajendra and his family have consciously disassociated themselves from much that goes on in the village—particularly the village festivals and the village gossip—Bhajanlal and his family actively participate in all aspects of village life. They strictly observe all of the village rituals—even those that Rajendra and other Entrepreneurial types look down upon as being backward and villagey—they participate fully in the village festivals, and they maintain a keen interest in village politics and village scandal. Indeed, in contrast to the detachment of Rajendra's wife Lakshmi, the women of Bhajanlal's household are avidly involved in the gossip of the village. Almost every afternoon they spend at least a few minutes on their doorstep, gossiping with their

neighbors and with women of lower caste who pass by.

At the same time, perhaps because they are so deeply engaged in the life of the village, Bhajanlal's family is far more observant of village convention than Rajendra's family. For example, they continue to maintain very traditional relationships with members of the Dhobi (washer), Nai (barber), and Chamar (leatherworker) castes. They continue to pay for services from members of these castes in kind rather than with cash, even though they acknowledge in the case of the Dhobis that they would get better service if they paid in cash; they have special ties to one family from each of these castes to whom they give prasad (ritual food) on appropriate occasions; and they rely on members of these castes for traditional services beyond their strictly occupational skills. For example, they have asked a barber to help them find a husband for their daughter, something that Rajendra would never do. Moreover, although Rajendra does sometimes give prasad to members of specific castes when it is ritually prescribed, he does so less frequently than Bhajanlal, and the act is largely perfunctory rather than based on any real relationships with the recipients.

The importance of village convention to Bhajanlal's family is also clear in the behavior of his unmarried daughter. At all times, she rigidly adheres to the social rules that enjoin her to stay within the confines of her house or yard unless she is accompanied by a male member of her household or a large group of women and to cover her face or hide behind closed doors whenever a man of status passes the house. Indeed, these rules are so strictly enforced in Bhajanlal's household that his daughter hired a rickshaw to get to the center of the village—a matter of only a few minutes walk—when she needed to take a bus to another village even though she was accompanied by her married sister. Lakshmi, on observing this behavior, ridiculed it as completely unnecessary and silly. While

Lakshmi's own unmarried daughters would not go out unaccompanied, the family is much more relaxed about the rules in general. Fewer people are required to accompany the daughters, and they rarely retreat or hide their faces when men of high caste pass within view.

Finally, the members of Bhajanlal's household—the women in particular—always express great concern about what others will say and think about them. Much of what they told me about others—especially anything negative they had to say—was related to me in whispers, with frequent admonishments not to repeat anything. In contrast, Lakshmi never expressed concern about who might be listening to her, and she made even her most scathing comments with no attempt at secrecy. Of course, it is precisely because Bhajanlal and his family have such a strong rural focus that they are so concerned with village convention and gossip.

Unlike Rajendra, Bhajanlal has absolutely no interest in urban life. He travels to Agra and nearby towns only when he must do so to get loans or to buy seeds, pesticides, and fertilizers. He certainly has no intention or desire to leave the village permanently. Rather, his firm commitment is to rural life, and his primary goal is to amass as much land and wealth as possible through profitable agriculture.

Bhajanlal's rural focus and his commitment to agriculture is reflected in the strategy he has adopted for the marriage of his youngest daughter. Although the marriage of a daughter to an educated, urban man brings status and prestige to a family, Bhajanlal has instead chosen to look for a young man who owns land in another village as a husband for his daughter. He has already married his older daughter to such a man. In part, this choice reflects his mistrust of the urban world. He argues that a young man from the city is likely to have a bad character and treat his daughter poorly. At the same time, however,

his primary concern is to find someone with as much land as possible given the dowry he is prepared to give.

Everything in the upbringing of Bhajanlal's daughter has been geared toward this kind of marriage. Because formal education is deemed of little value in such marriages, this daughter, like her sister before her, left school after she had completed only the seventh class. Since leaving school, she has spent her time learning to cook, sew, make pickles, and perform various other domestic tasks—skills that will be necessary to have as the wife of a rural farmer.

Rajendra, on the other hand, has adopted a very different strategy for the marriage of his daughters. His concern is to find young men for them who are well-educated with good prospects for prestigious jobs in the city. As a result, his daughters have spent little time learning domestic skills. Instead, they have continued their formal education. The lack of domestic training would not be a problem for her daughters, argues Lakshmi, as they can always get servants to cook and clean.

Differences between Bhajanlal and Rajendra

As we have seen, fundamental differences between Bhajanlal and Rajendra in their perceptions and understanding of the world and in the values they apply to it have led the two men to adopt very different strategies for coping with a changing environment and advancing economically.

By and large, Rajendra has fared well in his expansion into new areas of economic endeavor. At the same time, he has also done well in the realm of agriculture. He has applied the technology of the Green Revolution to his fields effectively, and his yields have been impressive. Certainly his insistence on less personalized and more

contractually defined relationships with workers and business partners alike has led to tension and even hostility between Rajendra and some of the other villagers. Nonetheless, he has been more successful than many of the more conservative landowners at maintaining an adequate and consistent supply of labor for his fields, and his business ventures have flourished. His family is economically well off now, and the future holds even greater promise for them.

Bhajanlal, on the other hand, has been much less fortunate in his choices. Like Rajendra, he has applied the technology of the Green Revolution to his fields. Nonetheless, his yields have tended to be lower than Rajendra's. In part, this is because his land is less well-favored; in part it is because his timing for transplanting, fertilizing, applying pesticides, and harvesting has not always been optimal. His failure to diversify into other economic pursuits, coupled with a few years of lower than average yields, have locked Bhajanlal into a continuing struggle against increasing debt. Moreover, this struggle is exacerbated by the fact that although Bhajanlal is well liked and respected by most villagers, he faces recurrent problems with laborers who fail to work on schedule, and with tenants who fall behind in their rent.

Thus, although Bhajanlal's yields have improved considerably during the past two years, his family's economic position remains tenuous. The family fortune have declined significantly over the past decade, and the future looks chancy at best.

In terms of values, behavior, and economic history, Rajendra and Bhajanlal represent extreme examples of the entrepreneurial and conservative types. Yet virtually every Jat and Bhumihar landowner in Neemghar who owns more than 5 acres of land exhibits enough similar characteristics to identify him with one or another of these categories.

In general, those landowners who can be placed in the entrepreneurial category have

fared better economically in recent years than those who belong to the conservative category. The entrepreneurial types have continued to accumulate wealth, power, and prestige, often at the expense of their conservative counterparts.

I do not mean to imply, however, that there is a single causal relationship between worldview and values on the one hand, and economic success on the other hand. Certainly not everyone in Neemghar who has profited through entrepreneurial behavior has entered into the role of entrepreneur and adopted the concomitant values easily or happily. Conversely, some of those who have wholeheartedly embraced an entrepreneurial perspective on the world have nonetheless found themselves to be locked into conservative patterns of behavior.

The interactive nature of the relationship between worldview and economic position becomes clearer when one examines the cases of some of the landowners who seem to straddle the entrepreneurial and conservative categories. As examples, we will consider two such landowners.

Dharmendra is another prominent Jat landowner. He is well known and liked throughout the village. He is the most important Kisan of the village, according to the members of every non-Jat caste. Dharmendra's prominence stems in part from his position for several years as the president of the village cooperative credit society. During his six-and-a-half-year tenure as president, he gained the respect and esteem of most of the villagers as a truly fair-minded and unbiased leader. Many people expressed deep disappointment when he decided not to run in the most recent election for the board of the society. His successor, whom Dharmendra supported, won the election by a very narrow margin, and although the new society president is a wealthy and powerful man, he has yet to acquire the level of esteem enjoyed by Dharmendra.

Dharmendra is a very successful farmer. He owns 21 acres of land himself—11 acres of sugar cane, 8 acres of wheat, and 2 acres of cotton—and he often leases additional acres of wheat land. His crops have prospered, his family's economic position is quite strong, and his prospects for the future are bright.

In recent years, Dharmendra has turned to entrepreneurial pursuits in addition to agriculture. Encouraged by Rajendra—one of his closest friends—he has invested as one of the partners in both the flour mill and the cinema hall.

In many respects, Dharmendra seems to fit quite neatly into the entrepreneurial category. Not only his economic undertakings, but much about his lifestyle in general identifies him with the entrepreneurial type. Thus, for example, like Rajendra, he is concerned to provide his children with a good education that will offer them an avenue out of rural agricultural life. Two of his sons are already attending school in Agra, and he plans to send his other two sons there eventually. He has great hopes that his eldest son will become an engineer. At the same time, although Dharmendra himself seems perfectly content with village life, his wife talks frequently of their relatives in the city and of the time whey they too will be able to leave the village.

In material terms as well, Dharmendra fits the entrepreneurial framework in many ways. Thus, for example, his household is one of five households in the village with a gas stove, and one of the six households in the village with a refrigerator. These items not only reflect Dharmendra's prosperity, they also suggest a willingness to experiment and to look beyond the boundaries of the village for new ideas and new patterns of behavior.[5]

Yet despite these manifestations of entrepreneurial behavior and lifestyle, Dharmendra is far from comfortable as an entrepreneur, and much of his behavior actually runs counter to that of the typical entrepreneur. Thus, for example, he has maintained complex

and multi-faceted relationships with representatives of most of the different castes in the village, and his relationships with the people who work for him resemble those of Bhajanlal far more closely than that of a more outward looking entrepreneur. Even in matters of dress—where one might think that his relatively young age (the same as Rajendra's) would influence him toward newer styles—he is happiest in the traditional dhoti and kurta. In general, then, Dharmendra's orientation continues to be toward the village, in contrast to most entrepreneurial types, and his interests are far more rural than urban.

How did such a man come to be involved in so many entrepreneurial enterprises? In part, the reason is simply that Dharmendra is an intelligent businessman who is concerned to maintain the wealth and status of his family. With four sons to provide for, he is aware that a reliance solely on agriculture is risky, particularly given the inevitable partitions of the family land after his death. Thus, as business opportunities have presented themselves, he has taken them up. Yet Dharmendra has not sought out such opportunities, and, on his own, he probably would have made choices closer to Bhajanlal's than to Rajendra's. However, the second—and decisive—factor that has impelled him into entrepreneurship has been his relationship with Rajendra.

Rajendra and Dharmendra were boyhood friends, and they have maintained a close relationship since an early age. Rajendra has always been the dominant party in the friendship, and in this role he has pushed and prodded Dharmendra into one successful business venture after another. At the same time, Dharmendra's wife has developed a friendship with and admiration for Rajendra's wife, and has adopted many of her aspirations. As a result, she too, has encouraged Dharmendra's entrepreneurial side whenever possible.

Thus, one sees in Dharmendra a man whose values and outlook remain fundamentally conservative, but who has been pushed—at times against his will—increasingly into the role of entrepreneur. This is not a case, then, of values shaping behavior, but rather one of a certain set of circumstances dictating actions that in turn have had an effect on Dharmendra's perception of the world. For indeed, Dharmendra has gradually begun to assimilate more entrepreneurial attitudes—hence his acquisition of more and more of the material items associated with the entrepreneur. Yet at times his old values clash with the new, and despite his wealth and status in the village, one sees him as a man in conflict, trying to strike a balance between his fundamental disposition toward a purely rural, agricultural life style and the economic opportunities that have pushed him into new modes of behavior and a more expansive view of the world.[6]

Another Jat landowner who straddles the two categories of conservative and entrepreneurial villager is Lakhoo, the Sarpanch of Neemghar. However, the way in which he does so provides a sharp contrast with Dharmendra.

Twenty years ago, Lakhoo was one of the wealthiest men in the village. He owned at least 30 acres of land, his wife and daughters were known for the quantity and quality of their gold jewelry, and the family was famous for the generous and elaborate feasts they provided to visiting officials and on ritual occasions. Gradually, however, through a combination of bad luck and mismanagement, Lakhoo's fortunes declined.

Lakhoo squandered his money by spending lavishly on feasts, hiring fancy cars to take him about, gambling, and borrowing money at exorbitant interest rates. At the same time, three of his five children are daughters, and he provided large dowries of both money and land for each of them. As a result of all of this spending and borrowing, Lakhoo began to lose land and other property. Moreover, Lakhoo was also involved in a law suit several

years ago in which he was accused of embezzling money from the Panchayat that was earmarked for housing for Backward and Scheduled Castes. He lost the suit and had to sell off much of his land in order to pay the fine that was imposed.

Thus, today Lakhoo owns only eight to ten acres of land, and he is struggling to maintain even that much. He is deeply in debt, and if his crops are poor at any time during the next few seasons, he will undoubtedly lose more land.

In an effort to recoup his financial position, Lakhoo has turned to several entrepreneurial ventures. Two of them are especially notable, both their scope and for their outcomes. A few years ago, he bought one of the four flour mills in Neemghar—the largest in the village. He and one of his two sons ran the mill, while his elder son worked in an office job in Umari. However, after about two years, the government took possession of the mill because Lakhoo and his son were unable to pay off a government loan. The government eventually auctioned off the mill, and it was sold to a family that does not live in Neemghar.

More recently, Lakhoo, with this two sons and two of his sons-in-law, has invested in a factory that manufactures soft drinks. At present, Lakhoo's elder son and Lakhoo's daughter's husbands run the factory together. Lakhoo's son gave up his job in Umari in order to manage the factory full time.

By the time I left the village in 1991, the soft drink factory was faltering badly. There had been repeated problems with equipment and conflicts with the workers in the factory over wages, and all of the investors were moving more and more deeply into debt. It seemed highly unlikely that the partners would be able to salvage the operation, and, indeed, foreclosure seemed imminent.

As Lakhoo had become involved in these business concerns, he has also adopted other

attitudes and behaviors common to the entrepreneurial types of the village. In particular, he has sought to move his youngest children into an urban setting—marrying his youngest daughter to an educated man with a job in the city, and educating his youngest son for urban employment—and he himself has become more cosmopolitan in outlook. Despite his deep political involvement in the village, he has increasingly begun to look beyond its boundaries for financial opportunities.

Yet despite an entrepreneurial approach to these aspects of his life, Lakhoo retains many of the behaviors and attitudes of the more conservative Kisans of the village as well. Most notably, insofar as possible he continues to maintain the role of patron of those who work for him. Moreover, as his business ventures have failed, he has increasingly fallen back on conservative attitudes in general, and on these patron-client ties in particular, as a resource to protect him from his financial problems.

In part, Lakhoo has been forced back into a more conservative role because his business ventures have failed. Yet, at the same time, his business ventures have been unsuccessful partly because he has been reluctant to give up the kinds of behavior that are appropriate to a large landowner in a small village, but are much less appropriate to someone who is trying to succeed in a business venture. Thus, for example, his continued reliance on patron-client relations often runs counter to his best business interests, and, indeed, such relations have been partly responsible for the failure of flour mill and the soft drink factory.

The cases of Dharmendra and Lakhoo illustrate more clearly the interactive relationship between worldview and economic position. Rather than finding a simple causal relation in either direction between attitudes and behavior on the one hand and economic position on the other hand, we find a complex interaction between the two. In the case of Lakhoo,

we find a man who is hampered in his entrepreneurial endeavors by his conservative outlook, while at the same time he is forced to rely increasingly upon that conservative orientation as he fails in these entrepreneurial endeavors. In the case of Dharmendra, we find a man who is torn by a conservative viewpoint that entails certain kinds of interpretations and actions in any given situation and his economic opportunities that frequently demand a very different set of interpretations and actions in the same situation. Gradually, Dharmendra's viewpoint is changing to correspond more closely to the economic choices he has made, but the change has been neither smooth nor complete, and the conflict this causes within him is palpable.

Part of my purpose in this discussion has been to provide at least a hint of the kinds of conflicts that these two different perspectives—the conservative and the entrepreneurial—give rise to. We have seen some of the internal conflicts individuals undergo in the face of these conflicting perspectives. We will later see the political consequences of these same areas of conflict between individuals.

We have seen that the changes of the Green Revolution, coupled with post-Independence legislation aimed at creating a more egalitarian participatory democracy, have initiated a process of change in the village both in terms of social organization and alignments and in terms of ideological orientation and outlook. While I have outlined these changes broadly in the preceding chapters, they can be brought more sharply into focus, and their force and direction delineated more clearly by examining in detail a single event—in this case, a village election—during which the social and ideological changes we have discussed crystallized dramatically. An analysis of the election will not only illustrate the changes that have occurred, but will also provide insight into the direction that the process of change might take in the future.

Two points must be noted before I begin the analysis. First, I am using the election not to describe the totality of village politics per se, but rather as a text or social document that serves as a paradigmatic illustration of the social relationships and patterns I have described.[1] Thus, following Geertz, in this approach a single naturally coherent social phenomena, a found event of some sort, is interpreted not so much as an index of a particular underlying pattern, as in most quantitative research, not yet again as the immediate substance of that pattern itself, as in most ethnographic work, but rather as a unique, individual, peculiarly eloquent actualization—an epitome—of it (1965: 153–54). Second, despite the fact that I do not intend for this analysis to represent a comprehensive examination of village politics, any analysis of election behavior in the village must inevitably at least touch upon the issue of factions, for much of the political behavior in Neemghar, like that in most Indian villages, takes place in the arena of factional conflict. Therefore, it is important to note how the approach taken here differs from other commonly taken approaches to factions.

Much of the literature on factions falls into one of the other of two theoretical schools. The first, exemplified in the work of Siegel and Beals (1960a, 1960b), emphasizes the disruptive aspects of factional conflict. In this view, factionalism represents a sort of Hobbesian state of nature in which overt, unregulated conflict...interferes with the achievement of the goals of the group (1960b: 108) and leads to the increasing abandonment of cooperative activities (1960b: 339). Siegel and Beals suggest that factionalism usually arises as the result of externally generated stresses that act upon potential sources of division with a group. A weakness of this approach lies in its failure to examine how membership in a faction is determined and how that membership is organized. Indeed, the definition of factionalism as unregulated conflict virtually

precludes consideration of these questions.

A second approach, exemplified in the work of Nicholas (1965, 1966) and Bailey (1969), treats factionalism as a particular form of political organization and emphasizes that factions may persist for many years. In this view, although factionalism still involves conflict, it is organized conflict among political groups. The key questions in this approach revolve around how faction leaders recruit followers and how political activity is organized.

Two aspects of this approach are particularly important. First, emphasis is on the vertical nature of factional alignment—that is, on the fact that factions generally cut across horizontal class lines and instead consist of leaders from top social stratum who recruit followers from all social strata. Second, given the vertical nature of factional alignments, factional conflict frequently—although not always—involves structurally similar groups of leaders and followers without any real differences in ideology. As Kholi notes, when factions are structurally similar, the faction model describes a segmental [conflict] rather than class conflict. Such conflicts…do not have an ideological expression, because rival factions, or faction leaders, fight for control over resources, power, and status as available within the existing framework of society (1994: 44). Thus, factional conflict rarely has any ideological component, and it is rarely oriented toward structural change.

While this second approach to factions takes us further in conceptualizing the nature of much political conflict in many peasant societies, it too is problematic in that it tends to take a rather narrow approach to the bases and forms of factional conflict. Frequently it entails the underlying assumptions that the goals and bases of all factions are the same and that the presence of factional conflict precludes the possibility of co-existing political

alignments that are now based primarily on vertical, non-ideological ties. Yet, particularly in the context of rapid and extreme social change, such as that brought about by the Green Revolution, factions may co-exist with other equally important forms of political alignments, and, at the same time, the nature and significance of the factions themselves may be changing. This, as we will see, is the situation we encounter in Neemghar. Thus, Kohli offers a more useful approach to factions in the context of rapid social change when he suggest that we might distinguish between the faction model as an organizing concept, enabling us to identify actual political alignments in peasant societies for analysis, and theoretical propositions and generalizations about the factional mode of politics in peasant societies. Our interest lies primarily in the former aspect. It allows us to identify actual alignments, whatever they may be, as a necessary preliminary step, so that we may then proceed to the next step of analysis by exploring reasons for observed alignments, identifying structural factors...which underly them and the immanence of change which inheres in structural contradictions. It provides us with a map of the pattern of social interaction and a statement of our initial problem....It eschews apriori statements about class power or about horizontal solidarity of kinship or caste or class, as alternative bases of political action. These are put before us in a problematic form which then constitutes our project for analysis (1994: 46).

Disputes

Neemghar has always been a very peaceful village, known throughout Agra District for its relative harmony and lack of strife. Certainly disputes arise, but they are usually resolved quickly and without continuing rancor.

This image of Neemghar as a relaxed, friendly, and peaceful village is held both by

outsiders familiar with the village and by the residents of Neemghar themselves. In Kheragarh, the Taluk headquarters, Taluk officials and members of the Kheragarh Cooperative Central Bank compared Neemghar favorably to most of the other villages in the block in terms of its non-contentious nature.

In Neemghar itself, people of all castes say that Neemghar is much more peaceful than neighboring villages. Arguments tend to be short-lived, and people rarely carry significant grudges over time. As my bhai (father's sister's son) put it: Since Neemghar is a village there are quarrels. There are quarrels in villages. But compared to other villages nearby, Neemghar is much more peaceful. People here are amiable.

Aside from the occasional quarrels between individuals over water rights or other aspects of daily life in the village, the most common time for rivalries to arise is during election campaigns—both local and national. During political campaigns, the dominant Jat Kisans invariably split into two competing factions. Nonetheless, until recently, these factions have always disappeared as a significant force in village life immediately after the elections, and the members of the rival groups have quickly reestablished amicable social relations.

However, according to the villagers, the transient nature of these factions has begun to change. Recent political rivalries are said to have been much more intense than in the past and to have continued beyond the elections that initially inspired them. Almost from the first day, in 1988, that I started to observe village affairs, I was aware of the polarization of the Jats into two factions. Indeed, during a festival in which I participated in the village, in 1991, many people told me that the factions that had arisen during the last two elections had effectively ruined the festival. Because neither side was willing to contribute money for the festival unless the other side contributed equally, little money

had been given in total, and, as a result, the celebration was much less lavish than it had been in the past. I was told that this type of intrusion of political rancor into the organization and conduct of the festival had never occurred before.

In general, members of the upper castes spoke quite freely to me about the factions, frequently using the English world party to refer to them.[2] These factions had first emerged about eleven months before I arrived in Neemghar in 1990, during the elections for the village Panchayat and for the position of village Sarpanch (president). The resentments engendered by the elections did not abate after the elections, and, indeed, the rivalry intensified six months later during the elections for membership on the board of the village cooperative credit society.

As I learned about the elections (out of general curiosity), I found that the number of parties that were said to compete during the elections and the characterization of the parties as caste-based, class-based, or as intra-caste factional rivalries varied depending on who was speaking and under what circumstances. What emerged clearly, however, was that although fights and factions are always a part of elections, the continuation of the divisions well beyond the elections was indeed unusual for Neemghar.

Why were the antagonisms during the elections for the Panchayat and cooperative credit society so much more intense than usual, and why have they continued long after the elections were over? How can one interpret the different political alignments and configurations that were described to me by different people. The answers to these questions can be found, I believe, both in the economic and social changes that have occurred within the Jat and Bhumihar castes and in the changing relationships between upper-caste landowners and lower-caste agricultural laborers. After I have described the function of the Panchayat and the events of the recent elections, I will discuss the

political ramifications of these changes in more detail.

Governing Council

The Panchayat board is the governing council of the village. It is responsible for maintaining village roads and lighting, guarding the water tanks, building latrines, repairing village-owned buildings, and, in general, overseeing the maintenance and upkeep of village-owned buildings and property. In addition to these primary responsibilities, the Panchayat may also become involved in special projects for the development of the village. One such project that has been recently completed is the construction of a new school. This kind of special project is usually undertaken in conjunction with regional or district government units, such as the Block Development Office or the Zilla Parishad (district council).

The Panchayat obtains money for its primary maintenance functions from taxes on houses, vehicles, entertainment, and provisions, and from license fees. In addition, it often receives extra funding through grants from the Block Development Office and the Zilla Parishad for the special projects it undertakes.

The annual budget for Neemghar's Panchayat is large. In 1991 it was already well above Rs. 50,000. With added income from tax on the new cinema hall and with a grant that Neemghar was to receive from the Block Development Office, the projected budget for the coming year was more than Rs. 80,000.

The Panchayat board consists of thirteen people—twelve regular members plus the Sarpanch of the village. A member of the board is elected from each of the twelve wards into which the village is divided. The Sarpanch is elected by the entire village.

The present Panchayat board consists of five Jats (including the Sarpanch), three

Kohars, one Brahman, one Bhumihar, one Dhobhi, one Hela, and one Chamar. The three Kohar board members are women—the only women on the board—and their positions on the board are explicitly reserved for women. Similarly, the Hela and Chamar board members each occupy positions that are reserved for members of the Scheduled Castes.

In theory, membership on the Panchayat board confers both status and power on the members. They gain status as respected village leaders who give direction to the village and who can serve as a mediating force in the face of disputes or problems that arise within the village. They gain real power in their control over the considerable amount of money involved in the Panchayat budget and in their control over certain jobs within the village. Members of the board are expected to vote on the budget each year and to attend monthly meetings to review expenditures, discuss new projects, hire staff when needed, and deal with any problems in the village.

In practice, however, this status and power is not evenly divided among the members of the board. Indeed, the lower-caste members of the board—the Kohars, Dhobhi, Hela, and Chamar—act more as supplicants for their castes than as active participants on the board who negotiate with other members to work out an acceptable plan for disbursing Panchayat funds.

This attitude toward the Panchayat is particularly clear among the three Kohar board members, who are disadvantaged by their gender as well as by their caste. None of these women feel that they can speak at Panchayat meetings because it would be inappropriate for a woman to do so. Indeed, one of them refuses to attend the meeting altogether. As she explained to me: The other board members are Jats. They are men. They are important people. How can I go to a meeting? I am too shy to go and talk. If there is a very important meeting, my husband goes. Although the other Kohar women

occasionally attend Panchayat meetings, they too bring a male relative—in one case a husband, in the other case a husband's brother's son—to do whatever talking is necessary. Alternatively, sometimes one of these women—by far the most outspoken and assertive of the three—goes to the Panchayat secretary to tell him what the Kohars need. For example, through the secretary she has been trying to get the Sarpanch to agree to build a women's latrine in one of the Kohar neighborhoods. However, she would never go directly to the Sarpanch or to the other board members with her request. She says: Because I am woman, I can't ask the wealthy landowners or the Panchayat members for anything. I can't talk at the meetings. I can't ask the board members directly. I can only let the Panchayat secretary know what we need.

Even when a Kohar man attends a Panchayat meetings in place of one of the three female board members, he rarely takes an active role in the meeting. More frequently he merely signs the roster stating that he has attended the meeting and then leaves.

The situations of the Hela, Chamar, and Dhobhi board members are similar. They too are uncomfortable participating actively in meetings, and like the Kohars, they frequently leave the Panchayat meetings immediately after signing the attendance roster. Indeed, they often skip the meetings altogether. In the latter case, if any important decisions are made during a meeting, the Panchayat secretary visits each one of them later and has them sign off on the decisions.

In general, the lower-caste members of the Panchayat board do not seem to have gained much status from their positions as Panchayat board members, and, indeed, none of them are considered to be leaders by the other members of their castes. This is not surprising, given that they cannot achieve any real power through serving as members of the Panchayat board. Although caste leaders usually are involved in persuading individuals to

stand for election, they themselves recognize that serving on the Panchayat board, in a position other than Sarpanch, is basically a nuisance.

The upper-caste members of the board take a more active role in the Panchayat and are more respected, yet even they do not reap the benefits of power and prestige from their positions that one might expect. Many of them were asked to run for a position on the Panchayat board by a small group of the wealthiest and most powerful landowners of the village. These landowners, by providing money and influence, were instrumental in the election of the Sarpanch and most of the Panchayat board members, and it is understood that the Panchayat will follow their wishes with respect to any decisions it makes. Indeed, in practice Panchayat meetings are held only sporadically, and often they serve simply to rubber-stamp decisions that have already been made by the Sarpanch and the wealthy Kisans who support him.

Moreover, as is the case with the lower-caste Panchayat members, the upper-caste members of the Panchayat—with the exception of the Sarpanch—are not viewed as leaders within their own castes. Certainly, most of them are from respected families, some of which were wealthy in the past, but, at present, they are mostly small- to middle-scale farmers. None of them enjoy the level of wealth experienced by the large-scale landowners and successful entrepreneurs of the village.

Thus, to understand the politics of the Panchayat and of the village as a whole, one must look beyond the boundaries of the Panchayat board itself to examine the behind-the-scenes maneuverings of those who truly control the board.

The Panchayat election marked the beginning of a period of intense political activity in Neemghar. This intensity did not begin to abate until after the election for the cooperative credit society, which was held six months later.

Elections at any level always create a certain amount of excitement and antagonism. Yet everyone in the village agreed that the strength of the feelings that were aroused during the Panchayat election far exceeded those that have developed in other elections. There are several reasons for this increased intensity. First, this was the first Panchayat election to be held in Neemghar in ten years. Elections for the Panchayat had been scheduled during the intervening years, but they had always been canceled by either the state or the national government before they were actually held. Second, the current Sarpanch had been in power for twenty-two years, and this was the first time during that period that he and his followers were facing a potentially serious challenge. Finally, the nature of the challenge to the Sarpanch was, in some respects, very different from the factional rivalries of the past, and it reflected the substantial social and economic changes that have taken place in Neemghar during the last two decades.

From the beginning, the focus of the election campaign centered on the contest for Sarpanch. Only three other seats on the board were actually contested. Candidates for the remaining nine seats ran unopposed. The candidates for the three contested seats were sponsored by the two most promising candidates for Sarpanch, and the results of the contests for the three positions basically followed from the results of the contest for Sarpanch—whoever won the position of Sarpanch would win the three board seats as well, and this would ensure that the balance of the board was with the Sarpanch.

Four people contested for the position of Sarpanch: a Jat, a Bhumihar, a Hela, and a Kohar.

Jat

The Jat candidate for Sarpanch—Lakhoo Sirohi, the incumbent Sarpanch—won the

election easily, with almost 60 percent of the vote. At the time of the elections, he had already served as Sarpanch for twenty-two years.

Lakhoo comes from a family with a history of status and power in Neemghar. His caca (father's brother), Raman, held the positions of Sarpanch for many years before Lakhoo, and indeed, a member of the family has held the position almost continuously for the past 50 to 60 years. Moreover, Lakhoo is also related to the Tahsildar of Neemghar as a parallel cousin—his father and Tahsildar's father were brothers. Finally, as a Sirohi, Lakhoo is related to some of the wealthiest and most prominent landowners in the village today. For example, Rajendra, the entrepreneurial landowner is distantly related to Lakhoo, as is Giraj, the president of the cooperative credit society. These wealthy landowners were among Lakhoo's strongest supporters during the elections. Indeed, Rajendra and Giraj both contributed heavily to his campaign, and Rajendra's house often served as the headquarters for informal meetings and strategy sessions.

As I noted earlier, Lakhoo himself used to be one of the wealthiest landowners in the village—with landholdings that may have surpassed even those of Rajendra—but he is no longer a wealthy man. Rather, he has experienced a severe economic decline, and, in his attempts to recoup his economic position, he has straddled between the two extremes of entrepreneurial and conservative Kisan. In his numerous business ventures, he has attempted to take an outward-looking, entrepreneurial approach to his situation. Yet, in many ways, his attitudes and behaviors continue to reflect a conservative orientation. Moreover, as his business ventures have failed, one after another, the balance of his attitudes and behaviors has increasingly been forced back toward the conservative side. Thus, although he continues to seek entrepreneurial opportunities outside the village, his demeanor and interpersonal relations within the village are primarily those of a

conservative Kisan.

In terms of his demeanor, he maintains the appearance of a conservative, wealthy Kisan, always wearing the traditional kurta and dhoti whenever he leaves his house. His manner is haughty and even imperious, particularly in his deàlings with laborers.

In terms of his interpersonal relations, Lakhoo has tried to maintain traditional ties of patronage and clientage with many of the agricultural laborers of the village. In fact, however, because of his declining economic position, his efforts to draw upon these ties for support are no longer as successful as they were in the past. Thus, for example, in the past, when he had more property, he often gave wheat and fuel to laborers to help tide them over during hard times. In return, he expected, and usually received, political support and willing obedience when he asked for extra work from them. Now, however, he is less and less able to give the same kind of assistance to the laborers. Nonetheless, he continues to expect obedience form them—an obedience that they are less and less willing to give. As a result, relations between Lakhoo and the agricultural laborers—particularly the Kohars—have become strained. Indeed, many people—both landless laborers and landed Jats—told me that laborers no longer respect Lakhoo as they used to. Even my mausi's (mother's sister's) son—who occasionally came to see me in the village and knew little about Neemghar initially—noticed these strained relations. When I asked him why he felt that, he gave me an example: The last time I came here I heard a laborer thundering at the Sarpanch Lakhoo. The Sarpanch had asked him to go to the fields and the laborer said that the Sarpanch always asks him to go to the fields, and he didn't want to. Doubtless, the strain in the relations between Lakhoo and the laborers has been exacerbated by the law suit against Lakhoo over Panchayat funds and the laborers' suspicions that Lakhoo continues to embezzle money that rightfully belongs to them.

Lakhoo's precarious economic position made him very dependent on several wealthy Jat landowners during the Panchayat elections. Votes are routinely and openly bought during village elections, and thus, contesting for office is an expensive proposition. As the Munim (village accountant) pointed out when discussing the election: An election is only a money problem. If a politician has enough money, he will be elected. In the case of Lakhoo, this money came primarily from a few wealthy Jat supporters.

Bhumihar

The Bhumihar candidate for Sarpanch—Narayana Jedhe—placed second in the contest, with almost 25 percent of the vote. Although he lost to Lakhoo by a wide margin, he actually fared surprisingly well in the election, given his background and social position.

In almost every respect, Narayana offers a sharp contrast to Lakhoo. Whereas Lakhoo comes from an old and distinguished family that has lived in Neemghar for as long as anyone can remember, Narayana is a relative newcomer to the village. Whereas Lakhoo has suffered an economic decline for many years and fights a constant battle to maintain his precarious financial position, Narayana is one of the newly rich of the village. Finally, whereas Lakhoo presents himself within the village as a conservative, traditional Kisan in terms of dress, bearing, and social interactions, Narayana displays all of the trapping of modernity that are associated with the entrepreneurial Kisan. Indeed, almost the only point of similarity between Lakhoo and Narayana is in the supporters they attracted during the election campaign. Both candidates received support—though of different kind and degree—from Jat landowners.

Narayana was born in a small, out-of-the-way village, about 3 kilometers from Neemghar. Seventeen years ago he moved to Neemghar from his native village. He was

followed to Neemghar by one of his brothers a year later and by another brother a year after that.

When Narayana first came to Neemghar, he had virtually nothing—no land, no livestock, and not even a house of his own. During his early years in Neemghar, he was so poor that his family often ate only one full meal a day. Yet, despite these disadvantages, he was able to amass considerable wealth over the course of his seventeen years in the village.

Initially, he had been attracted to Neemghar in part because of its location at the intersection of the two main roads. He used this location to his advantage, establishing an extremely lucrative business exporting sugarcane to other areas of the state. Five years after he arrived in Neemghar he was able to begin to buy land, and within thirteen years he had acquired about forty acres. In addition, he bought a lorry and a tractor, built a large house, and provided his daughter with a substantial dowry. Thus, by the time of the Panchayat election he was a man of considerable economic stature.

In terms of behavior and outlook, Narayana resembles the entrepreneurial Kisans described earlier. Although he has withdrawn substantially from his business concerns and devotes himself primarily to agriculture, he continues to view himself as a man of business, and he prides himself on his scientific and business-like approach to agriculture. Similarly, he has acquired many of the material items associated with a modern, entrepreneurial household. In addition to his tractor and his lorry, he and his son each own a motorcycle—far more impressive than a mere mo-ped or motor scooter—his wife cooks on a gas stove, and his daughter has married an engineering student.

Narayana's two brothers and their families, who also moved to Neemghar, have not been as spectacularly successful as Narayana, but the bonds among the three families are

strong. One of the brothers, Shankar, is a gutaka merchant. He buys gutaka from the area around the village of Umari and sells it in Agra and neighboring cities. Like Narayana, Shankar has been able to buy some land since he came to Neemghar—fifteen acres in all. He also owns a lorry. However, he has a larger family to support—with five children—and thus, while he is fairly wealthy by village standards, he has not been able to achieve the financial position of this brother.

Narayana's other brother died when he was still a young man. His widow and her children continue to live in Neemghar, with some support from Narayana and Shankar. In addition to providing financial assistance, Narayana adopted one son from this family.

Between the wealth of Narayana and Shankar, and their continuing support of their third brother's family, the entire extended family of Jedhe has gained increasing prominence in the village during the last ten years. This position is consolidated further through their alliance with the Chaudhuri family, another prominent Bhumihar family in the village. This alliance is maintained through marriage, adoption, and mutual business interests. Narayana is married to the younger sister of Surya Chaudhuri, and he has adopted his wife's sister's daughter. Furthermore, for many years Narayana's partner in his business was Surya's brother, Rajkumar.

During the Panchayat election, Narayana received primary political support from his brother and the prominent Chaudhuri families and from a new Bhumihar landowners. All of these supporters—with the exception of one Chaudhuri household—are on the rise economically. However, only one is currently as wealthy as Narayana. As a result, unlike Lakhoo, Narayana paid many of the expenses of the campaign himself. While this placed a heavy financial burden on him—estimates of his expenditures range from Rs. 25,000 to Rs. 40,000—it also put him in a stronger position vis a vis the other leaders of the party

than the position of Lakhoo in relation to his primary supporters.

Hela

The Hela candidates for Sarpanch—Bhola Yadav—placed third in the contest, with about 9 percent of the vote. He had no expectation of winning the election when he entered the contest, and his support came entirely from members of the Harijan Castes.

Bhola immediately stands out from most of the other Helas in the village. He is one of the wealthiest men in the Hela community. His house is large, with a tiled roof. It is one of the few houses in the community that has electricity. He owns two of the three table fans and one of the two radios in the community. He dresses well—always in western-style pants and shirts.

Bhola acquired his wealth through education. By taking advantage of scholarships and school positions reserved for members of the Scheduled Castes, he was able to earn an advanced degree. Then, until his retirement two years ago, he taught at a school in a nearby town, thus achieving a level of economic prosperity and stability enjoyed by few other members of the Hela community in Neemghar.

Because of both his education and his relative wealth, Bhola has become one of the leaders of the Hela community. Indeed, his name was invariably mentioned by Hela informants whenever my cousin asked them to name caste leaders. At the same time, however, unlike Lakhoo and Narayana, he is not well-known outside the members of the Scheduled Castes in the village. Although many upper-caste recognized his name when I mentioned it, they often took several moments to place him. Without prompting from me, they frequently omitted him altogether from their discussion of the election. Moreover, when they did speak of him in the context of the election, they rarely mentioned him by

his name. Rather, they simply referred to him as the Hela candidate. In contrast, they almost always identified Lakhoo and Narayana more specifically by name or nickname.

Unlike the campaigns of Lakhoo and Narayana, Bhola's campaign was based fundamentally on caste. He made almost no effort to seek votes from people outside the Harijan Castes, and he spent virtually no money on the campaign.

Kohar

The Kohar candidate for Sarpanch—Kamlesh Maurya—placed last in the context, with a little less than 6 percent of the vote.

In many ways, Kamlesh is the most difficult of the four candidates to describe for the rather surprising reason that he is such a nonentity. Unlike his opponents, he is not well-known either within his own caste or by the members of other castes. He is neither rich nor poor relative to other members of his caste—owning 1 to 2 acres of land; at 51 years of age he is neither very young nor very old; he was never mentioned by anyone in the village as a leader of his caste. He is not by nature very interested in politics, and when pressed about why he chose to run for the position of Sarpanch, he replied simply that the caste leaders had asked him to.

At first it seems quite remarkable that the Kohar leaders would ask such a person to run for Sarpanch, particularly given the size of their population and their increasing recognition of the voting power that comes with such a population size. Indeed, the Kohars of Dholpur block recently experienced a concrete demonstration of the efficacy of their numbers in electoral politics when a Kohar from a village close to Neemghar was elected as an MLA. Yet, as I will discuss later in the chapter, the nomination of a non-candidate by the Kohar leadership—that is, a candidate with no interest in politics and no

particular stature within his caste—makes perfect sense in the context of the Kohars' view of village politics and their concomitant electoral strategies.

Although many people insisted that caste is the primary determinant of voting behavior, it is clear from this breakdown that the voting was not simply along caste lines. Nor can one trace the pattern of voting to simple relations of patronage and clientage. Rather, the pattern of voting suggests a far more complex picture, in which the members of various social groupings and alignments were motivated by several different understandings of and attitudes toward the election. Indeed, in some cases even within a single group or faction, individuals were motivated by very different, and sometimes conflicting, attitudes and goals. Alternate strategies consonant with these different attitudes and goals were employed by the members of the various groups involved in the election.

In order to unravel the complexities of the selection and to understand its relation to the social changes within the village, it is useful to examine it from the perspective of three different groupings: the Jats and Bhumihars; the Kohars; and the Helas and Chamars.

The major battle in the Panchayat election was between Lakhoo and Narayana. Narayana was the only candidate who posed a serious threat to Lakhoo, and together the two candidates received 85 percent of the total vote. Moreover, in contrast to the Hela and Kohar candidates, Lakhoo and Narayana each received votes across several different castes. Finally, the deepest and most enduring antagonisms of the election centered around their candidacies.

It was clear from the beginning of the campaign that either Lakhoo or Narayana would win the election. As one Jat—himself a politician—explained: Voting in elections is influenced by three things: personal prestige, the ability to distribute money among laborers, and caste. Of the four candidates, only Lakhoo and Narayana exhibited strength

in all three of these areas. They were the only candidates who had the social status of significant landowners and were well-known throughout the village; they were the only candidates with the resource to spend a significant amount of money on votes; and finally, they were the only candidates from the most dominant castes of the village.

In many ways, the contest between Lakhoo and Narayana seems like a continuation of the factional politics that has always existed in the village. Factions always develop during elections. In the past, most of the factions revolved around shifting alliances within the Jat caste. For example, ten years ago, during the last Panchayat elections, the major factional conflict was between the Sirohis and Samas—both prominent Jat families. Before that, two other Jat families, the Kunzrus and Deols, had challenged an alliance consisting of Sirohis and Samas. Similarly, in the contest between Lakhoo and Narayana, each candidate was supported by an alliance of several prominent families who provided financial assistance, advice, and influence. Lakhoo received support from several Jat families—mainly Sirohis, Samas, and Deols. Narayana received support from both Jat and Bhumihar families—the Bhumihar Jedhes and Chaudhuri and the Jat Passeys and Kunzrus.

The political machinations of the factions in the past and present also appear to be similar. In the past, the strategy of each faction was to control blocks of votes by calling upon the bonds of kinship and clientage, by offering food, money, and other kinds of assistance, and by cashing in an old debts and obligations. During the recent Panchayat election as well, each faction vied to amass votes from laborers and small landowners by offering money and promises for future aid and by calling upon the ties of kinship and caste.

Yet despite these similarities, there are fundamental differences between the recent

Panchayat election and elections of the past—differences that account for the intense and continuing personal antagonisms that arose out of the recent election and highlight the social and economic changes that are taking place in the village.

The first, and most obvious, difference between the recent election and elections of the past is found in the rise of the Bhumihar. In the past, factional conflicts always pitted one group of Jats against another. Certainly, people from other castes allied themselves with one faction or the other, but the leadership of the factions always rested solely with the Jats. In contrast, in the recent election, the wealthy Bhumihars were, for the first time, in a position to challenge the dominance of village institutions by the Jats. Clearly the economic changes that have enabled some poorer families to rise rapidly and dramatically into stronger economic positions have laid the groundwork for changes in political relations as well.

It is important to note, however, that these new factional alignments do not constitute a single division along caste lines—Jats versus Bhumihars. Rather, the leadership of Narayana's faction is an inter-caste alliance consisting of two Bhumihars—Narayana himself and one of the wealthy Chaudhuris—and two Jats—Satyanarayana Passey and Ganesh Kunzru. By all accounts, the focal point of this alliance is Satyanarayana, an entrepreneurial Jat who has not yet attained great wealth but who is clearly on the rise economically. Recently he has been involved in several successful business ventures, and he has been able to invest in his son's education as an engineer. Like Narayana, Satyanarayana has a reputation for fast dealing with questionable get-rich-quick schemes, and, indeed, their alliance seems to be built, in part, on a common outlook and approach toward the world. Thus, while Narayana and Satyanarayana are not united by ties of caste or kinship, their alliance is cemented by similar dispositions and a common

entrepreneurial orientation.

A second fundamental difference between elections of the past and the recent Panchayat election is also linked to the changes in economic relations within the village. One way or another, elections have always been partly bought. In the past as well as in the present, political leaders provided extra financial assistance, food, and promises of future aid to their constituents during the time of elections. Lakhoo is known for the feasts he used to give for his supporters when elections were near. In the past, however, this assistance was just one small part of an ongoing economic and political relationship between the leaders of each faction and most of their followers. Ongoing, long-term ties of patronage and clientage linked factional leaders to many families of laborers within the village. Sometimes these ties were based on kinship relations; sometimes they were based on the relationship of master to harwah; and sometimes they were based on very informal arrangements in which it was understood that political support would be given in return for occasional gifts of clothing and food in addition to assistance during times of hardship.

In contrast, today, when ongoing ties of patronage and clientage between laborers and Kisans have become the exception rather than the norm, elections tend to be bought more directly with simple cash payments. Laborers and poor landholders are paid for their votes, and whoever is offering the most money per vote is likely to win. Indeed, almost everyone I talked to—both Kisans (including the leaders of each faction) and laborers—attributed Narayana's loss in part to the fact that he paid less per vote than Lakhoo did. For example, when one landless Bhumihar explained to me why she and her husband voted for Lakhoo she said: Both Sarpanch Lakhoo and Narayana gave us money. But the Sarpanch gave us Rs. 40 and Narayana only gave us Rs. 20, so we voted for the

Sarpanch.

I do not mean to imply that ties of patronage no longer play any role in elections, however. Relations of patronage and clientage do still exist, and the party to each side of such a relationship calls upon the obligation of the other side when it is expedient to do so. However, as these relationships have become more attenuated and shorter term, they have also become less reliable as a source of political support. A wealthy Jat Kisan who pointed out that there are fewer harwahs today than in the past, offered the following summary of the situation: A harwah votes for whomever his master tells him to vote for. But will khetihar majdoors you never know. They have no loyalty. They just vote for whomever pays the most.

According to many Jat and Bhumihar Kisans, the effect of this emphasis on immediate cash payment for votes has been to encourage laborers to become even more independent and assertive toward the Kisans, thus reinforcing the shift away from long-term patron-client relationships. Indeed, a frequent complaint among the Kisans is that because laborers no longer feel loyalty to specific Kisans, they have begun to increase their demands, playing one faction off against the other and thus escalating the tensions between factions still further.

The differences in the composition of the leadership of the factions and in the way many votes are obtained distinguish the recent election from elections of the past and both illustrate and reinforce the socioeconomic changes that have occurred in the village. Moreover, they account for a certain amount of the tension that arose during the election between Kisans and laborers on the one hand and between the two factions on the other hand. Yet these differences do not, in themselves, account for the intensity or for the continuation of much hostility and tension long after the election was over. In order to

understand the depth of the feelings generated by the election, it is necessary to examine certain tensions that developed within Lakhoo's faction. As I will show, these tensions mark an incipient line of fissure within Lakhoo's faction and represent a potential conflict far more powerful and divisive than that between the two factions.

Although Rajendra—the archetypal entrepreneurial Kisan—dominates the leadership of Lakhoo's faction, virtually all of the more conservative Kisans of the village support the faction as well. In particular, Bhajanlal—the conservative Kisan—and his cousin (father's brother's son) have taken the lead among the more conservative Kisans as supporters of Lakhoo.

Given the difference in life-style and outlook between Bhajanlal and Rajendra, it is surprising at first that they have united in support of Lakhoo. Yet, as one examines their very different interpretations of the election, it becomes clear that their support has been motivated by very different and somewhat conflicting goals.

For Rajendra, the election was primarily an issue of power and status. It was an issue of power in that control of the Panchayat gives access to a wide range of economic and political resources and confers the power to make decisions about such things as the use of village funds and the disposition of certain local jobs. In addition to control over internal matters concerning the village, dominance over the Panchayat also provides the opportunity to develop external links to the broader political world. Thus, whoever controls the Panchayat has access to a variety of powerful people outside the village who hold positions at the Taluk, district, and state levels of government.

The election was an issue of status to Rajendra in that a position of leadership confers great prestige. Indeed, when I asked Rajendra's wife why Rajendra had worked so hard for the election given that he plans to leave the village some day and that he himself has

never run for office, she replied: It is a matter of prestige. If our party controls the Panchayat, the cooperative credit society, and the temple trusteeship, then we are great people.

Several Jat Kisans share the leadership of Lakhoo's faction and the benefits that derive from controlling the Panchayat. However, Rajendra dominates this leadership, and he, in particular, gains by Lakhoo's continuation in the office. Because of both his wealth and the influence of his brothers who maintain close ties to Neemghar, Rajendra effectively controls Lakhoo. When an important decision about the village is to be made, Lakhoo invariably turns to Rajendra for advice; when a problem arises within the village, Rajendra is always consulted, and frequently he determines the resolution; finally, when prominent outsiders such as the Block Development Officer or the Samithi President or my mama (mother's brother) come to the village to see Lakhoo, they always conduct their meetings in Rajendra's house with Rajendra present.

Given Rajendra's control over Lakhoo, I was puzzled initially as why Rajendra did not simply run for the position of Sarpanch himself. It would seem that such a move could only solidify his power and increase his status still further. His response to my questions about this subject is illuminating for what it indicates about his relationship to Lakhoo and his understanding of the politics of the village. According to Rajendra: No one in my family has ever stood for elections. It is too much of a nuisance. We are more interested in the contracting business and in farming; in making money and becoming financially great. During the last elections Rajendra's brothers and their families came from Agra. We all voted. We all gave out money to labor for votes. We caused the Sarpanch to be elected. We have the power. We tell the Sarpanch what to do. But the Sarpanch is just a big peon. To be a Sarpanch would be a great nuisance. In this village the Sirohis have

great influence. Everything is ours. The temple, the Panchayat, the cooperative society are all ours.

The Sarpanch, then, in Rajendra's view, is little more than a figurehead who can be relied upon to do as he is told and to take care of the trivial details of office.

In keeping with this view of the Sarpanch and the election, Rajendra saw the campaign of Narayana and his followers as a simple threat to the dominance of his own faction. Thus, despite the fact that Narayana is a Bhumihar and was supported by other wealthy Bhumihars, Rajendra did not view the contest as a struggle between castes. Rather, in his view, Narayana's faction was no different from the Sama faction that had threatened the Sirohi faction several years previously. Rajendra was always quick to point out that two of Narayana's main supporters were Jats, and he did not differentiate greatly between Lakhoo and Narayana. In his eyes, both were Kisans, both were supported by other Kisans, and whichever side won the election would gain control over certain village resources as well as increased status. All things being equal, Rajendra preferred to support a Jat and a Lakhoo, but the primary issue was power, and he supported the candidate he could control most effectively.[4]

To Rajendra then, the rise of Narayana's faction did not represent a change from the normal pattern of factional conflict during elections. As a result, the threat he perceived from Narayana's faction was not deep-seated, nor was the hostility he felt toward the faction of long duration. Within several months of election, he was already back on reasonably good social terms with most of the members of Narayana's faction, even going so far as to attend the feast that Narayana gave in celebration of his daughter's marriage.

Rajendra's relaxed attitude toward the factional conflict engendered by the election is even more apparent in his relationship with Narayana's primary supporter, Satyanarayana

Passey. About a year before the election, Satyanarayana's son married Rajendra's elder brother's daughter. The marriage had been arranged by the two families. At no time was the relationship between the two families threatened or even strained by the election. Indeed, shortly after the election the families were able to laugh about having been on different sides.

Bhajanlal interpreted the election conflict and reacted to it very differently from Rajendra. To Bhajanlal, Narayana and the members of his faction represented a fundamental threat to Bhajanlal's basic worldview and to the nature of village life. Narayana, as an entrepreneurial type par excellence, with only recent ties to the land, represented a movement away from the old relations of patronage and clientage, away from a stress on land and on the continuity of rural life, and towards a more outward-looking, broader view of the world. Thus, while Rajendra saw the rise of Narayana's faction as a continuation of past patterns of political conflict, to Bhajanlal it represented a complete divergence from old patterns to a new and much more threatening pattern of social relations. In contrast, Lakhoo, from Bhajanlal's perspective, represented traditional, conservative values and continuity with past patterns of village life.

Bhajanlal interpreted every aspect of the election from this perspective. For example, when he explained why he supported Lakhoo so vehemently, Bhajanlal invariably contrasted the character and style of Lakhoo and Narayana. Thus, he always described Lakhoo as a good person, a person deserving respect, and a person who has given much to the people of the village.[5] In contrast, he characterized Narayana as bad, coming from bad family, dangerous, and capable of much fighting and even murder if things did not go his way.

Although Bhajanlal contributed as much support for Lakhoo's campaign and solicited

as much support for him as possible, Bhajanlal's role in the campaign and his position within Lakhoo's faction were marginal compared to Rajendra's. Indeed, Bhajanlal himself acknowledged the primacy of Rajendra's role in the election. Nonetheless, he was emphatic in his insistence that Rajendra and Lakhoo share power equally within the village. Whenever I asked him for evidence in support of this view, he described the huge feats that Lakhoo had held in the village in the past, despite the fact that Lakhoo has not given such feasts in years. He also argued that important outsiders go to Rajendra's house not because Rajendra is so powerful, but rather simply because Rajendra's house is large and centrally located.

Bhajanlal's insistence that Lakhoo continues to be powerful, despite all evidence to the contrary, is not surprising, given his view of the election. Rajendra is far too similar to Narayana and his followers for Bhajanlal to accept him as the true leader of Lakhoo's faction. To do so would be to acknowledge changes in the village that threaten Bhajanlal's entire worldview. This is the same threat that he perceived in the candidacy of Narayana.

Because Bhajanlal felt so fundamentally threatened by Narayana's candidacy, the hostility he felt towards Narayana's faction was deeper and longer lasting than the hostility felt by Rajendra. Long after the election was over, relations between Bhajanlal and the leading members of Narayana's faction continued to be tense and strained. For example, unlike Rajendra, Bhajanlal refused the invitation to attend the feast Narayana gave to celebrate the marriage of his daughter. Similarly, whereas Rajendra considered Satyanarayana's family to be eminently suitable to intermarry with and was entirely comfortable with the ongoing relations between the two families, Bhajanlal spoke of Satyanarayana in the same disparaging terms he used for Narayana. Thus, he described

several nefarious business ventures that Satyanarayana had engaged in, most of which involved cheating and betraying several Jat Kisans from the village.

It is clear then, that the continuing hostilities among the Kisans of the village that I observed several months after the election do not represent a simple conflict between the two factions. Instead, Lakhoo's faction is itself showing signs of division, with only some of its members—Bhajanlal and other conservative Kisans like him—continuing to express hostility and anger toward Narayana's faction. In contrast, members of Lakhoo's faction like Rajendra, who tend to be more entrepreneurial in their approach to life, have put the conflict behind them. They are at ease with the Kisans who joined in support of Narayana, and they have re-established good social relations with these Kisans.

The line of fissure that is beginning to develop within Lakhoo's faction is based on fundamentally opposing attitudes and values which, in turn, are dialectically related to fundamental differences in economic strategies. Should this fissure eventually grow into an explicit split between the members of the faction, as seems quite probable, the ensuing conflict is likely to be far more disruptive and basic to the village then the current division between the factions.

Kohars

As I have shown, from the perspective of the Jats and Bhumihars, the contest for Sarpanch was basically a two-way race between Lakhoo and Narayana. Neither of the other candidates received a significant number of Jat or Bhumihar votes, and, indeed, the Kohar and Hela candidates were rarely mentioned at all my Jat and Bhumihar friends.

Surprisingly, this was also true among the Kohars. Only about 20 percent of the Kohars voted for Kamlesh, the Kohar candidate, while the remaining 80 percent of the Kohars

split their votes between Lakhoo and Narayana. Moreover, like the Jats and Bhumihar, most Kohars failed to mention Kamlesh when discussing the election, or mentioned him only in passing. Clearly, then, the main focus of the election from the perspective of the Kohars as well was the contest between Lakhoo and Narayana.

About 55 percent of the Kohar vote went to Narayana, while 25 percent of the vote went to Lakhoo. Almost all of the Kohars who voted for Lakhoo live in the separate Kohar area at some distance from the center of the village. The Kohars in this area have always been poorer and less aggressive than the Kohars who live closer to the center of the village, and they have always supported Lakhoo. On the other hand, virtually all of the Kohars who supported Narayana live in the Kohar area close to the center of the village, as do the majority of the Kohars who supported Kamlesh.

The Kohars who supported Lakhoo generally give two reasons for their behavior. First, they argue that Lakhoo is a good man and that he has helped them in the past during times of need. They did not trust any of the other candidates to be so giving. The fact that these Kohars are, for the most part, poorer and more dependent economically on the Kisans of the village than the Kohars near the village center doubtless contributes to this view of Lakhoo. Second, they point out that Lakhoo spend much more money buying votes among them than did Narayana. Some of these Kohars received money only from Lakhoo. Others received money from both Lakhoo and Narayana, but received more from Lakhoo.[6]

The reasons for support of Narayana by so many of the Kohars near the village center are less obvious. The primary factor cited by these Kohars themselves is their intense dislike of Lakhoo. They argue that Lakhoo has never been willing to do anything for their community, and they accuse him of stealing funds that were earmarked as aid for the

Backward Castes.

While these feelings about Lakhoo provide some explanation for the failure of the Kohars to support him, they do not explain why the Kohars failed to support Kamlesh as well. Why did so many Kohars—including all of the Kohar leaders—support Narayana, and, moreover, support him to such an extent that they often failed even to mention the existence of Kamlesh when they discussed the election with me?

The answer to this question it twofold. First, the leaders of the Kohars recognized that their chances of exerting any influence over the Panchayat election would be increased if they could create a broad base of support, consisting of more than just Kohars, for a single candidate. Narayana and two of his Jat supporters met with several Kohar leaders and suggested an alliance between labor—meaning primarily Kohars, Helas, and Chamars—and Narayana's faction. The Kohar leaders agreed to this, and, mediating between Narayana and the members of their caste, they elicited support for this alliance from most of the Kohars who live in the area near the village center. At the same time, however, the Kohar leaders did not fully trust Narayana. As a result, they nominated Kamlesh as well, to serve as insurance against any collusion between Lakhoo and Narayana. If the two of them came to any kind of agreement before the election, the Kohars could withdraw support from Narayana and support their own candidate instead. Kamlesh's candidacy was also encouraged by Lakhoo's faction, but for a very different reason. Lakhoo's supporter hoped that the introduction of a Kohar candidate would divide the Kohar vote still further, as, indeed, it did.

The second and, I believe, determining factor involved in the Kohar support for Narayana concerns political alignments beyond the village, at the regional level. As I argued earlier, as the Kohars have come to recognize their potential strength in electoral

politics, and as some of them have begun to advance economically, they have increasingly looked outside the village boundaries to a wider political arena where they have a better chance of developing a political voice of their own.

The politics of the Dholpura Block in which Neemghar is located centers around two rival factions. One of these factions is led by two brothers—Harish Singh and Paresh Singh—while the rival faction is led by Banwari Pipal. All three of these men are Jats, and all are wealthy. The two Singh brothers together own hundreds of acres of land, the major interest in a sugar factory, and two shoe factories in the area. They are known throughout the region as the Dholpura Zamindars. Pipal's wealth is primarily in land, and he also owns a spinning mill. He is the founder of Pipal College in Dholpur, and he is still known by his title as the Munsif of Kadipur, a position he held for many years.

Despite the similarity in their backgrounds, Pipal and the Singh brothers have very different personalities and styles of interaction. The Singh brothers are known for their aristocratic and caste-oriented behavior. Most of their political network building is centered on ties of kinship and caste, and they have a reputation throughout the area for being unresponsive to the needs or rights of the members of the lower castes. They are viewed as primarily representing the interests of the landed peasant castes in the region. In contrast, Pipal is frequently noted for his support of the lower castes. Members from every caste describe him as less caste-conscious than the Singh brothers. In the past he has supported Tyagis, Bhumihars, and Kohars in addition to Jats for various positions. Recently, he was instrumental in the election of a Kohar from a village close to Neemghar, to the position of MLA. He is also seen as being less aristocratic and more accessible than the Singh brothers. In particular, he has a reputation for actively taking an interest in his supporters, providing employment and other assistance to them when

possible.

The rivalry between Pipal and the Singh brothers has dominated the area for many years. Not only have they each sponsored candidates for every important position in the area—MLA, Block President, Zilla Parishad President, and President of the Kheragarh Cooperative Central Bank—but they also have been involved in village-level elections, frequently coming to the support of village factions in return for support from these factions in regional and state elections.

Although neither Pipal nor the Singh brothers were directly involved in the recent Panchayat election in Neemghar, the force of their rivalry was felt nonetheless. Everyone in the village knew which regional-level faction Lakhoo supported and which faction Narayana supported. Lakhoo allied himself with the Singh brothers, as he has done in the past; Narayana allied himself with Pipal. These alliances, in turn, influenced the distribution of support for each candidate, as the village Munim made clear in his summary of the situation: There are two groups in every village, those who support the Singh brothers and those who support Pipal. The reason people here support the Singh brothers is that all the Sirohis are distantly related to them. But, because the Singh brothers are Zamindars, they won't give aid to labor. On the other hand, Pipal is very helpful to the common people; to labor. He does not think of caste. That is why he is popular with labor. If someone comes to him for help, he picks up the phone and tries to help, regardless of their caste. In that way Pipal is closer to the public than the Singh brothers are. Even here in Neemghar, labor mostly supports Pipal.

The fact that Narayana was linked to Pipal was a critical factor in the Kohars' decision to support him. Aside from Pipal's general favorableness to labor, his support of a Kohar candidate for MLA has created enthusiastic support for Pipal among most Kohars in the

area. At the same time, the distant kinship tie between Lakhoo and the Singh brothers has only reinforced their dislike of Lakhoo. As one of the Kohar leaders explained to me: We support Pipal. Most people in this village support him because he had no caste feeling. Besides, he supported Nagar, a Kohar, for MLA. On the other hand, the Singh brothers have contact with Sarpanch Lakhoo.

For the Kohars then, the Panchayat election was more important as a means for maintaining external political allegiances than as means for achieving greater power within the village. In this light, the strong Kohar support for Narayana and the relative lack of support for Kamlesh is understandable, for to support Narayana at the village level was to support Pipal at the regional level. At the same time, the ability of the Kohar leaders to forge an alliance with Narayana betokens at least the possibility of a stronger position for Kohars within the village in the future. As I will discuss in the next section, this was not a possibility shared by the Helas and Chamars.

Helas and Chamars

The voting behavior of the Helas in the Panchayat election was quite straightforward and underscores their separation from the rest of the village. Virtually all of the Helas supported Bhola, the Hela candidate for Sarpanch.

According to the Kohar leaders, at the beginning of the election campaign the Helas agreed to unite with the Kohars in their alliance with Narayana. The Kohars, taking a class-based position, argued that the Helas and Kohars are all laborers sharing common concerns and problems. A united approach to the election would best serve their mutual interests.

The Helas, however, were suspicious of this position from the start, questioning the

motives of the Kohars and the willingness of Narayana's faction to aid the Hela community in any way once the election was over. As one of the wealthier Helas in the community argued: Narayana and Lakhoo are the same. Why should we vote for either one? Will either of them look to our needs? Lakhoo never comes here. He only comes at the time of the elections, for votes. He never comes at any other time. There are no water taps here; there are no latrines for women. Lakhoo has not done anything here. He has given us nothing. He only comes for the vote. Would Narayana be different? He is a Kisan too. Fundamentally, the Helas recognize that they had no possibility of acquiring any real influence in the village. As a result, as the elections drew near, Bhola decided to stand for the position of Sarpanch himself. He ran more as a token—to make a statement of Harijan solidarity and strength—than with any expectations of actually winning the election or affecting its course.

The Kohars were angry over the secession of the Helas from the union of laborers and viewed it as a betrayal by the Helas of their common interests. At the same time, however, the Kohars did little to try to change the situation. They simply stood by their assertion that laborers should be united, without making any attempt to negotiate or even meet with the Helas. The Helas pointed to this behavior as proof of their argument that caste continues to be the dominant factor influencing social relations in the village and that the divisions between castes are far more important than any common economic interests among the members of different castes. While the Hela leaders sought an inter-caste alliance with the Chamars—centered on the caste-based issue of Harijan unity—they perceived an impenetrable caste-based barrier between themselves and the non-Harijan castes. Thus, according to Bhola: Even though the government has outlawed caste, the caste system is still prevalent. It won't simply fade away. Voting will always be

along caste lines. People want to elect people from their own castes so that they will get favorable treatment.

In Bhola's view, while Harijans may unite around their common caste position, unity along class lines, across the barrier of untouchability, is unrealistic.

Although Bhola and the other Hela leaders did seek the support of the Chamars on the basis of their common Harijan identity, for the most part their efforts failed. Only about 5 percent of the Chamars voted for Bhola, while the remaining 95 percent voted for Lakhoo. The contrast between the behavior of the Helas and Chamars sheds further light on the differences between the two castes. As I noted previously, the Helas as a group tend to be somewhat better off economically than the Chamars, more assertive, and more aggressive about looking beyond the village for government assistance in education, housing, and employment. Most of the Helas work as daily wage laborers, and few of them have enduring ties—economic, social, or political—to anyone from the village outside their own caste. In contrast, the Chamars tend to be poorer, less assertive, and more dependent on the Kisans of the village for assistance. Chamars are more likely than Helas to establish ongoing relationships with one or another of the wealthier Kisans, either formally, as harwahs, or informally in a more amorphous patron-client relationship. All of the village services that are traditionally performed by Harijans are performed by Chamars.

These differences between the Helas and Chamars—differences that parallel the differences between the two neighborhoods of Kohars—account for the difference in voting behavior between the Helas and Chamars. The Chamars, who are much more closely tied to the village than the Helas, feared the consequences of voting for Bhola. One of the few Chamars who did vote for Bhola explained the situation as follows:

The Sarpanch won the election only because of money. He bought votes. Bhola should have won. He is a good person, and the Sarpanch bought votes. Also, the people of this community fear the Kisans. We are dependent on the Kisans for work, and the Kisans let us take grass and dung from the fields for cattle feed and fuel. If we don't do what the Kisans tell us to do, they won't let us take grass and dung anymore. They will take us to court for trespassing. Therefore, we have no power. Even though we have the vote we have no power. The Kisans have all the power.

Given this view of relations within the village, it is not surprising that most Chamars voted for Lakhoo. In contrast, the Helas, who have succeeded in breaking away from some of these more traditional bonds of dependency, have begun to look outside the village for more promising paths of advancement. They see no hope for improving their position within the village itself.

The Panchayat election was the first village-level election that had been held in Neemghar in the last eight years.[7] During the campaign political alliances were mapped out and issues articulated. Six months after the Panchayat election, a second election was held to elect members of the board of the village cooperative credit society. The campaign during this election was even more intense than the campaign during the Panchayat election, and the conflicts were more bitter. There are three reasons for the intensification of conflict during the cooperative society election.

First, some of the antagonisms that developed during the Panchayat election continued to fester and deepen during the six months leading up to the cooperative society election. This was particularly the case with respect to the hostilities between part of Lakhoo's faction and Narayana's faction.

Second, by the time of the cooperative society election, a certain amount of political

regrouping had occurred, and critical alliances had solidified. In contrast to the Panchayat election, in which four parties entered the contest, in the cooperative society election only two parties competed—one representing Lakhoo's faction and one representing Narayana's faction. The majority of the Kohars aligned themselves more firmly with Narayana's faction, while Bhola and the other Hela leaders more or less accepted an alliance with Lakhoo's faction. With only two political parties competing instead of four, political antagonisms were even more focused.

Finally, competition in the cooperative society election was particularly intense because control of the cooperative society offers even more power than control of the Panchayat. With the dramatic rise in the cost of agricultural production that has accompanied the Green Revolution, access to credit has become critical to successful farming. Indeed, when I asked villagers, in 1988 and since then, to identify the biggest problem they face in their lives, the most common answer by far among owners and leasers of land—large- and small-scale farmers alike—was the ability to obtain credit on a timely basis. Thus, control of the cooperative credit society—a major source of credit within the village—can confer a great deal of power. Even in villages such as Neemghar, in which the cooperative credit society is honestly administered for the most part, few people who rely on the cooperative for credit care to take the risk of challenging those who control it.

During the cooperative society election, the eleven-member board were elected by the entire membership of the cooperative society, 1,458 voters in all. The cooperative credit society actually includes members from the neighboring village of Bandhupur as well as from Neemghar. However, the Neemghar membership dominates the cooperative in every way: over 79 percent of the members reside in Neemghar; the cooperative's office is in Neemghar; and control of the board has always rested with members from

Neemghar. In the recent election, only one of the six seats on the board that were not reserved for Scheduled Castes went to a member from Bandhupur, and he was a candidate who had been selected to run by Lakhoo's faction.

In order to become a voting member of the cooperative credit society, one must pay a minimum of Rs 25.50 to purchase a share in the cooperative. Normally, only landowners, who can secure a loan by using their land as collateral, join the cooperative. However, a year before the election took place, membership in the cooperative began to grow radically. By the time of the election it had increased by almost 40 percent. This increase was the result of the activity of the factions in the election, as each side bought memberships for landless villagers in order to obtain votes. Narayana's faction fared relatively poorly in this vote-buying endeavor, however, both because the members of his faction are poorer than the members of Lakhoo's faction to begin with, and because they had spent a great deal of money already on the Panchayat election. Thus, by the day of the cooperative society election, almost 38 percent of the members of the cooperative society were Jats—many of whom had been signed up a members by Lakhoo's faction—while only about 7 percent of the members were Bhumihars. Almost 24 percent of the members were Kohars, and about 12 percent were Helas and Chamars.

Three of the six seats on the board that are not reserved were contested heavily by Narayana's faction. Nonetheless, in the end, all six of the unreserved seats went to candidates supported by Lakhoo's faction. Of the five reserved seats, two went to candidates who live in Bandhupur. Rajendra assured me that they would never attend board meetings and that they would simply sign any papers that were brought to them. Two of the other reserved seats went to Kohars who live in the Kohar neighborhood that have always supported Lakhoo. The final reserved seat went to Bhola. While Rajendra

claimed that Bhola had agreed to unite with Lakhoo's faction, Bhola explained to me that he could get favorable treatment for Helas by holding a position on the board of the cooperative society.

Perhaps the most interesting twist to the cooperative society election is that Bhajanlal and Ramdas, a good friend of Bhajanlal's with a similar background, each ran for and won a seat on the board. Neither of these men had originally intended to run. However, Rajendra and Lakhoo nominated them. According to Bhajanlal, Rajendra and Lakhoo pleaded with him to run, arguing that they needed some good Kisans like himself to offset some of the faction's other candidates, like Giraj, who are disliked by many people, particularly laborers.

I was puzzled at first by this choice of Bhajanlal and Ramdas as candidates, and by the way Bhajanlal described Rajendra's behavior in their meeting. Given the tensions between Rajendra and Bhajanlal, it is hard to understand why Rajendra wanted Bhajanlal and Ramdas to run. Moreover, Rajendra is more inclined to issue orders than to plead. However, a likely solution to this puzzle is that Rajendra asked the two men to run primarily to maintain unity within the faction in the face of increasing dissatisfaction, and even hostility, toward him among the more conservative Kisans like Bhajanlal and Ramdas. By nominating the two men, Rajendra could be confident that the conservative Kisans would continue to support the faction, just at they had supported it when Lakhoo ran for Sarpanch. At the same time, however, Rajendra did not intend to relinquish any real power to Bhajanlal and Ramdas through this maneuver. From Rajendra's perspective, their position, like that of Lakhoo, was to be more symbolic than real.

This interpretation of Rajendra's behavior is supported by the fact that after the general election, the members of the board of the cooperative society elected Rajendra's choice—

Giraj, an entrepreneurial Jat who is related to Rajendra—as president of the board, much to Bhajanlal's chagrin. As a result, although Rajendra's maneuvering was successful in the short run, the tensions between the conservative and the entrepreneurial Kisans in the faction, which first became apparent during the Panchayat election, continue.

Notes

1. I might have never been able to write this chapter without the long discussions on village affairs in general, and in particular on local elections, over the years, with my cousin (father's sister's son) Visnu Agrawal. He is a doctoral student in political science at Agra University.

2. There are four such parties in the village. Villagers identify them all as parties and thus as similar entities. However, as we will see, two of them are typical factions in the sense of vertical alignments with leaders who recruit followers from all social strata, while two of them are based more on horizontal alignments and hence do not conform to the most common definition of a faction.

3. Obviously, given the secret ballot, there is no record of votes by caste. Thus, the figures in the table are estimates arrived at by my cousin Visnu. In order to arrive at these estimates, he asked several people from each caste to give them their best estimates of the breakdown of the vote by caste. He selected informants for this purpose who were deeply engaged in the election campaign and therefore were likely to have fairly accurate knowledge of the voting behavior of various groups.

The estimates he received fell into two groups. In the first group were estimates by informants who insisted that voting was strictly along caste lines—that is, all Jats voted for the Jat candidate, all Bhumihars voted for the Bhumihar candidate, and so on. Given

the distribution of the total vote, these estimates are clearly inaccurate, and he did not use them in his derivation of the caste-wise distribution of votes. In the second group were estimates by informants who gave him a percentage breakdown of the distribution of votes within each caste. These were the estimates he used to arrive at the figures in the table.

He checked the percentages he was given by various informants against each other and found that they were, for the most part, quite consistent with one another. Where there were minor discrepancies, he went back to each of his informants for clarification. He also obtained a rough tally of the total votes for each candidate from the Panchayat secretary and the Sarpanch. He compared the estimates of the votes by caste against the totals for each candidate to obtain a final cross-check of the estimates and to ensure that his caste-wise breakdown is indeed consistent with the total votes received by each candidate. Thus, although the figures in the table are not precise, I am confident that they provide a good approximation of the actual voting behavior that occurred.

4. This is not to say that Rajendra was adverse to using caste as an issue when it served to his advantage to do so. Indeed, he used the issue of caste very effectively among poor Jats as an argument for supporting Lakhoo. However, his own interpretation of the election and the factional conflict it evoked did not center on caste.

5. Interestingly, Bhajanlal described Lakhoo in these terms only during discussions about the election and politics. On other occasions, he often spoke disparagingly of Lakhoo, accusing him of stealing village funds and cheating laborers, and generally depicting him an untrustworthy. Indeed, on one occasion when Lakhoo invited me to accompany him to the Block headquarters for a meeting, Bhajanlal warned me to be careful of my money when I was with Lakhoo and never to lend any of it to him. However, in the context of

the election, Bhajanlal saw Lakhoo as the only candidate who embodied the conservative, rural values that Bhajanlal himself holds, and hence, in that context, Bhajanlal continued to see Lakhoo as a good man.

6. I never had any indication from anyone that giving out money for votes by a candidate guaranteed that the recipients of the money would vote for the candidate. Indeed, many people—particularly poor Jats and Bhumihars—told me that they accepted money from both Lakhoo and Narayana. Several Kisans complained that laborers take money from anyone who is giving it out and then vote as they choose. Nonetheless, receiving money from a candidate does tend to influence people in his favor. Moreover, many people who received money from both Lakhoo and Narayana seemed to take it for granted that they should vote for the candidate who paid them the most, and they expressed surprise when my I questioned that assumption.

7. The election held eight years earlier was for membership on the board of the village cooperative credit society. The last Panchayat election had been held ten years ago.

CHAPTER 8

Conclusion: The New Wind

The various groups and categories that are found in Neemghar can be grouped into three distinct types. Two of them are formed primarily, in theory at least, on relations of equality and centered on interests common to all members. The third type is formed primarily on relations of inequality. The first two types have been strengthened by the economic and political changes discussed earlier. In contrast, the third has become somewhat attenuated in the face of these changes.

The first type is caste-based. In this type, members of one or more castes unite around caste-specific interests that are common to all of them. They cut across the economic differences that exist within a caste and focus on the political and economic advancement of the caste as a whole. Caste associations provide a good example of this kind of alignment, and they often function as powerful vehicles of political mobilization.

In Neemghar, this first type is apparent in the occasional unity found among the Harijan castes. Thus, in certain contexts the interests of all Harijans, as members of the Scheduled Castes with certain legislated economic and political rights, override the divisiveness inherent in the caste divisions among them. Bhola, the Hela candidate for Sarpanch, attempted to build this caste-based type focus during the election campaign, recognizing that the common identity of the Helas and Chamars as Harijans could provide a strong political base for him. Thus, in his campaign, he focused on the issue of Harijan solidarity and Harijan uplift, and he stressed the distinction between the Harijans and the members of all other castes. Most Chamars, however, resentful of what they perceived as Hela dominance in Harijan politics and, in many cases, responding to the obligation entailed in

relations of inequality and hierarchy, refused to support Bhola. Thus, his efforts to create a unified Harijan interest failed in this case.

This type of category can be found among the Kohars as well, particularly in their focus on Kohar caste associations as a source of power and in their corresponding orientation toward caste-based political activity outside the village. In contrast, it is less common among the members of the Forward Castes. Although a sense of caste identity remains strong among the members of all castes, and although Jat and Bhumihar leaders may call upon caste loyalty to elicit support from caste members, the significance of purely caste-based focus as the basis for political action among the members of the Forward Castes remains relatively small. Instead, leaders among the Forward Castes tend to derive political support from other kinds of social categories.

There are three reasons for the predominance of caste-based focus among the lower castes in Neemghar. First, despite the constitutional ban on caste as a salient social category, much of the post-Independence legislation that targets disadvantaged castes for special political and economic treatment has actually encouraged a continued emphasis on and identity with caste groups. Second, with little economic strength to draw upon among members of the Backward and Harijan castes, the obvious source of political strength for these caste groups is in their numbers. Thus, caste solidarity becomes a potent rallying force through which to organize electoral support. Finally, the social isolation experienced by the members of most Backward and Harijan castes has also encouraged the development of caste-based focus. As we have seen, in Neemghar the Kohars tend to be physically and socially isolated from the Forward Castes of the village—with their own neighborhoods, temples, and stores—while the isolation of the Harijan castes is even more extreme. As the social category of relations of inequality and

hierarchy have become somewhat weaker, this social isolation has supported an increasing focus on caste-based focus in electoral politics among the lower castes.

The continuing emphasis on caste as the basis of social interaction has tended to discourage the development of a sense of class consciousness among the members of the lower castes—a consciousness based on the recognition of common economic interests with others in similar economic positions, regardless of caste. Nonetheless, one does find social categories in Neemghar that are based on economic rather than caste groupings, and these form the second type of social categories. This type of category tends to be both more subtle and more transient than those that are caste-based. Thus, while the existence of economically based categories may be taken as an indication of an increasing class awareness, class development remains, for the most part, in an incipient form.

At the broadest level, we see the beginnings of this type of category in the increasing social salience of the categories of labor and Kisans. While these categories continue to include a caste component, they are primarily economically based categories with membership defined according to the relations of production. The strike for higher wages that was instigated by many of the agricultural laborers of the village several years ago, and the unified response to the strike by most Kisans, provide examples of categories based explicitly on these categories. Although caste as well as class actually entered into most individuals' decisions about whether to join the strike, the rhetoric of the strike—the terms upon which it was organized—focused entirely on economic categories.

Similarly, the widespread support among the members of the lower castes for the block-level faction led by Banwari Pipal stems, in part, from the rhetoric of class that Pipal employs. Thus, he portrays himself as a man of the people, uninterested in the

distinctions of caste and primarily concerned with protecting the interests of the little guy. Many of my Kohar and Harijan friends used similar language to describe Pipal and to explain their support for him, and even those among the Forward Castes who do not support him often use the same terms to describe him. While issues of caste undoubtedly enter into decisions to support one or another of the block-level factions—indeed, Kohar support for Pipal is centered as much on Kohar solidarity and uplift as it is on the broader aspects of class—the terms of the factional divisions are increasingly those of class rather than caste.

Finally, we see the same intertwining of caste and class in the alliance between many of the Kohars and Narayana, the Bhumihar candidate for Sarpanch, during the village elections. On the one hand, the Kohars supported Narayana rather than the Kohar candidate in part because Narayana himself supports Pipal's block-level faction, and the Kohars view Pipal as the block leader more sympathetic to their needs and most likely to help them advance as a caste. On the other hand, the Kohars themselves, when trying to draw members of the Harijan castes into the alliance, spoke in terms of common class interests that should unite them all. Although the Kohars were unsuccessful in their attempts to elicit the support of Harijans in this case, and although one can see an element of strategic manipulation in their use of class terms in this context, the fact that these terms were used at all indicated an awareness of unifying economic interests. It should be noted, however, that this awareness is found less often among the poorest Jats and Bhumihars, who generally tend to stress caste identity over class identity within the context of the village.

Among the wealthier members of the Forward Castes there is also evidence of the development of economically-based social categories, and, indeed, these categories

appear to be strengthening, while purely caste-based categories appear to be weakening. On a broad level, the potential for such categories is clear in the diminishing importance of the distinctions between Jats and Bhumihars among the wealthiest Kisans. Wealthy Jats and Bhumihars interact freely and frequently, interdine, attend one another's weddings and other ceremonies, and share many of the same concerns and interests. In many contexts, their identity as wealthy Kisans overrides their identity as members of particular castes.

A more specific example of economically-based categories among the wealthier Kisans occurred during the village elections, for the coalition of leaders behind the candidacy of Narayana was based on ties of class and shared economic interests rather than on ties of caste. Thus, the coalition was composed of wealthy Jats and Bhumihars with a common, entrepreneurial outlook and approach. On the other hand, the coalition of leaders behind Lakhoo's candidacy offers a striking and telling counter-example. In this case, the coalition consisted entirely of wealthy Jat Kisans. However, despite this homogeneity of caste, the coalition was fundamentally less stable than that behind Narayana, precisely because of conflicting economic interests and approaches among the members of the coalition. This conflict, exemplified in the hostility and tension between Rajendra and Bhajanlal, centers, in essence, on a basic struggle between two alternative economic courses—the one entrepreneurial, diversified, and outward-looking; the other conservative, homogeneously agricultural, and focused squarely on village life. These two different economic courses are, in turn, linked to very different definitions of the social and moral universe, and it is over these conflicting definitions that the internal struggle within the coalition is being waged explicitly.

There is evidence that this conflict will ultimately lead to the development of an

absolute fissure within the coalition. Thus, while Rajendra and his supporters quickly reestablished friendly relations with the members of Narayana's faction after the election, Bhajanlal and his supporters continued to express great hostility toward them. Indeed, by the time I left the village in 1991 it seemed highly probable that a realignment of the two factions was in progress, with the new factions likely to pit entrepreneurial Kisans against conservative Kisans. Such a division is, at heart, economically-based in the sense that the entrepreneurial and conservative economic approaches entail very different kinds of productive relations and thus different kinds of social and economic organization. Thus, the conflict between the entrepreneurial and conservative Kisans is a conflict of economic interest as well as ideology, although the terms in which it is presented are primarily ideological and moral—what constitutes good and bad social behavior, for example—rather than explicitly economic.

In contrast to both caste-based and class-based categorie, the third type of category in Neemghar is based on hierarchy and dependence. Although such categories continue to be potent in some contexts, in general they are becoming weaker and less important. Those categories that do continue to inform social action tend to be of far shorter duration than they were in the past and to entail narrower rights and obligations on either side. Thus, for example, the roles of harwah and master are adopted less frequently, and relations between Kisan and laborer are increasingly contractual. These changes are exemplified in the manner in which Narayana's and Lakhoo's factions solicited votes during the election campaign. Rather than attempting to establish (or re-assert) relations of patronage and clientage, Kisans simply bought votes outright for cash payments. Even in those cases in which some relation of patronage and clientage still exits, votes were bought for the same price as was paid to non-clients. In general, while individuals—both

patrons and clients—tend to assert vertical ties when it is to their advantage to do so, the moral force of these ties has become diminished on both sides.

The changes in patterns of social categories that are occurring in Neemghar involve both new social concepts and new ways of thinking about established categories. Thus, new perspectives and orientations have accompanied the changes in social categories. These changes in ideology have been neither radical nor universal, however. There has been no discontinuous shift from one all-encompassing understanding of social reality to another. Rather, the changes consist in the introduction of new and alternative ideologies and orientations that compete with, but have not entirely replaced, the pre-existing ideological framework. Indeed, much of village social interaction in general, and the events of the village elections in particular, can be viewed not only as socioeconomic struggles among various social groups with competing interests, but also as struggles over new and old values.

This struggle is clearest at the locus of power in the village, among the wealthiest Kisans. Two areas of change have been particularly important. First, there has been a broadening of worldview—a shift in orientation—among the entrepreneurial Kisans, to encompass a larger social universe outside the boundaries of rural agrarian society. Rajendra exemplifies this broadening of worldview, which is manifested by a decrease in concern for the health and well-being of the village as whole, a lack of interest in village festivals, a corresponding increase in the valuation of urban ties, and a scientific approach to social relations of production with an emphasis on simple contractual ties rather than on multiplex and diffuse relations with laborers. This broad perspective contrasts with the narrower worldviews of conservative Kisans like Bhajanlal, who focus squarely on relations within the village as primary, who view the welfare of the village as a whole as

fundamental to their own welfare, and who perceive outsiders, and, particularly, those from urban contexts, as fundamentally untrustworthy and threatening.

The second area of change concerns the development of new definitions by the entrepreneurial Kisans of what constitutes socially acceptable behavior. These new definitions conflict with those used by the more conservative Kisans to evaluate social behavior. Thus, for example, in Rajendra's view, a good Kisan is one who accepts and abides by contractual obligations and pays for labor and for agricultural inputs in a fair and timely fashion. Conversely, a good laborer is one who performs the work that has been agreed upon in a timely and efficient manner and who does not make demands on the Kisan outside of the terms of their contract. Rajendra refers to this kind of behavior on both sides as going by the rules—the rules being the rules of contract. In contrast, Bhajanlal's definition of a good Kisan is based on the assumption that most relations with laborers involve some sort of long-term and diffuse ties of patronage and clientage. A good Kisan, in his view, then, is one who honors the obligations inherent in his role as patron and who generally sees to the well-being of his laborers insofar as possible. Conversely, a good laborer will show loyalty toward the Kisans he works for and will exhibit some flexibility both in what work he is willing to perform and in when and how much he will be paid for the work.

The shifts that have occurred among the entrepreneurial Kisans are mirrored, though imperfectly, among some of the members of the lower castes. Thus, for example, most Helas, like the entrepreneurial Kisans, have developed an orientation away from the village as a whole. However, while this outward focus, for the entrepreneurial Kisans, has much to do with economic choices, for the Helas it is related primarily to their political and social position as Harijans and to a correspondingly caste-based focus. The outward

orientation of the Helas is manifested in their increasing reliance on institutions outside the village for economic and political support. Similarly, whether by choice or out of necessity, the Helas have, for the most part, accepted the contractual nature of daily wage labor, and thus they tend to apply the same rules that Rajendra does in defining their relations with the Kisans who hire them. This is not to say, however, that they accept the terms of the contracts that the Kisans offer as fair. On the contrary, complaints about the inadequacy of wages are frequent among them. Rather, the point is that they accept the idea of a contractual relationship, in which the terms of the working relationship are explicitly articulated and adhered to. Evidence of this acceptance of the practice of contract is found in the increasing willingness on the part of many Helas to stand up to Kisans whom they perceive as breaking contractual agreement—for example, when a Kisan demands extra work from a daily wage laborer as if he were a harwah—and in their increasingly independent and assertive demeanor. Indeed, much of the Hela reputation for aggressiveness in the village stems from this unwillingness to behave with the humility and deference of grateful clients, and many Kisans complained to me that Helas no longer treat them with the proper respect. As one Jat Kisan lamented: Today the Helas will show anger at a Kisan if they think they have been cheated. They will yell at him and speak badly. In the past they would never have dared to behave this way.

Interestingly, these two ideological orientations of the Helas—their outward focus and their emphasis on relations of contract—tend to pull them in two opposing directions. While the outward focus is based primarily on their caste position, and thus fosters their sense of identity as Harijans, the emphasis on contractual relations tends to reinforce their sense of identity as agricultural laborers and thus to encourage the development of a sense of class consciousness outside of caste. As we have seen, each of these identities

becomes salient for the Helas in different contexts.

Many Kohars exhibit orientations similar to those of the Helas. They too have developed an outward-looking perspective that goes beyond the village and is focused primarily on their caste identity. At the same time, many of the agricultural laborers among the Kohars, like their Hela counterparts, have adopted corresponding rules of contractual relations with Kisans. As a result, they present themselves as independent and assertive, and they generally express little interest in developing relations of patronage and clientage with Kisans.

Despite the similarities to the Helas, however, the Kohars present a more complex and differentiated picture. In part this is the result of their higher social status. Because the Kohars, unlike the Helas, do not face the virtually insuperable barrier of untouchability, they perceive themselves as having at least a chance for economic advancement within the village. Thus, their orientation away from the village, with its emphasis on caste associations and political empowerment for the caste as a whole, is tempered by an orientation toward the village among some of them who have social and economic aspiration within the village. At the same time, the possibility of advancing economically within the village has encouraged some Kohars—particularly those who lease land from upper caste villagers—to continue to value and foster relations of patronage and clientage that they view as important in maintaining leasing arrangements.

In contrast to the Helas and Kohars, the Chamars have maintained a much more conservative perspective for the most part, similar to that of the conservative Kisans. They tend to be oriented primarily toward the village, and, despite the social isolation that is imposed by their status as Harijans, most of them are more integrated into the ritual cycle of the village as a whole than either the Helas or the Kohars are. Chamars are also

far more inclined to try to maintain patron-client ties with upper-caste Kisans than the Helas or Kohars are, and this tendency is manifested both in the deference and humility with which the Chamars generally approach the Kisans and in their great willingness to enter into ambiguously defined and multiplex roles—such as the role of harwah—with Kisans. Indeed, the humble and subservient demeanor of the Chamars toward the Kisans provides a strong contrast to the assertiveness of the Helas and Kohars.

This is not to argue that the Chamars passively accept their low status and subservient role, however. On the contrary, in the absence of members of the upper castes, they express their resentment of the humiliations that are inflicted upon them, and they speak bitterly of the continuing caste oppression they endure. Yet, even when they express this resentment, they generally speak from the perspective of a conservative ideology of patronage and dependence, stressing the obligations of the Kisans toward those who serve them. Thus, whereas the Helas and Kohars often argue aggressively for their rights when they encounter treatment that they consider to be unjust, the Chamars more frequently turn to a timid moral suasion in the face of such treatment, emphasizing their positions as dependents. The more conservative attitude and demeanor of the Chamars has been a source of much tension between the Chamars and the Helas and has created an obstacle to the development among the Chamars of a political consciousness and mobilization around their identities either as Harijans or as agricultural laborers.

I do not mean to suggest that there is a neat ideological continuum in Neemghar however, with the entrepreneurial Kisans and the Helas at one end, adopting an outward focus and an emphasis on contractual relations; the conservative Kisans and Chamars at the other end, adopting an inward, village-centered focus and emphasizing more traditional patron-client ties; and the Kohars somewhere in the middle, with some

members of the caste leaning one way and some the other. Nor do I intend to suggest that those who adapt most quickly and efficiently to the socioeconomic changes adopt new perspectives to rationalize the changes, while those who are slower or less successful in adapting to the socioeconomic changes hold steadfastly to a more conservative ideology. In reality it is far less absolute and the relationship between it and socioeconomic position is far more complex and dynamic than such a broad synopsis would suggest. It is to this relationship that we now turn.

As we have seen in Neemghar, new modes of organizing, interpreting, and rationalizing social reality have arisen to accompany the new patterns of social relations and categories. Yet there is no simple, causal relationship between the two. Rather, there is a dialectical interaction between the two, with each shaping and being shaped by the other. The economic and political changes have brought new kinds of social relations and thus have set the context for new perspectives, while at the same time, the perspectives of the villagers have shaped the form of the changing social relations.

This dialectical process is apparent in Neemghar in the conflict and struggle among the wealthy Kisans, which appears, on the surface, to be a conflict over fundamental values, but is, in fact, equally a conflict over alternative forms of economic organization. Similarly, we see the dialectic between the two in the development of new social identities that reflect at once an ideology of caste and concrete, legislated changes in political organization. The ideology of caste reinforces, and yet also reshapes, the changes in political organization, while the political changes reinforce and simultaneously modify the ideology. Finally, we see the dialectical process in the tentative awakening of a consciousness of class among some Kisans and some laborers, as changes in the relations of production are supported by new perspectives which are, in

turn, reinforced and modified by continuing economic changes. Thus, there is a constant interweaving and interaction between the two interests.

It is clear from our analysis of Neemghar, however, that the conflicts of values and material interests that are occurring in the village are not expressed as straightforward struggles pitting class against class or even caste against caste. Rather, the situation is made far more complex not only by the cross-cutting, and sometimes conflicting, material interests of class and caste, but also by contrasting perspectives and orientations. For not only do the members of different groups within the village tend to adopt different perspectives, but even within a particular group, in which a specific orientation may predominate, it tends to be quite flexible. Indeed, individuals often adopt different principles and rationales strategically to suit specific contexts.

In Neemghar, examples of this type of strategic application abound. One finds it among entrepreneurial Kisans who, when making extra demands on agricultural laborers, do not hesitate to refer to the rights and obligations of patron-client relationships as justification for their request; one finds it again among Helas who, when asking Kisans for loans or other types of aid, may adopt the submissive and subservient demeanors of loyal clients; finally, one finds it among Chamars who, when asked by Kisans to accept modified payment plans for the work they have done, may argue vehemently and vociferously against the breach of the contract for a fixed, daily wage. In each of these cases, a stance that best fits the interests of the individual for the situation at hand is adopted, although it may be quite contrary to the attitudes and values more frequently expressed by the individual.

At the same time, however, value is not infinitely flexible. Villagers are not operating in a Machiavellian world in which they are willing to adopt any position for the sole

purpose of conscious manipulation. For, even as value is used strategically to justify particular actions, it also functions at a deeper level as the means through which people organize and structure their experience and thus make it comprehensible. In this latter sense, value can be thought of as a worldview—that is, an underlying perspective that people bring to bear on their social experience as they give meaning to it and evaluate it. This worldview serves as a screen through which people filter experience as they define and interpret it.

Like Bourdieu's concept of habitus, worldview in this sense is determined at all social levels—that of the individual as well as that of the group. It is determined at the individual level in that it is shaped, in part, by one's individual life experiences. Thus, although people of similar social status generally share similar worldviews, individual differences may persist as the result of quirks of temperament and personal history. We have seen such differences in Neemghar in the very attitudes and perspectives of Rajendra and Dharmendra, despite their similar socioeconomic positions. At the same time, however, worldview is also shaped by one's social status and position, as defined by caste, class, sex, and age. Finally, worldview—whether at the individual or the group level—is always formulated in terms of socially-defined norms and values. While these norms and values may not be unequivocally accepted by all of the members of the society, they are, nonetheless, socially recognized.

Worldview, then, is multifaceted not only in the sense that different groups may adhere to different understandings and assessments of the world, but also in the sense that it is determined and expressed at different social levels. The recognition of different ideological levels is important for two reasons. First, the incorporation of individual as well as groups experience into the analysis of social action provides insight into the array

of individual choices and perspectives that we find even within a given group. Second, by examining the development of individual as well as group worldview, one discerns a mediating force between action motivated solely by individual self interest and action motivated solely by the interest of the group. Thus, recalling Brow: "the emphasis on strategic practice is not incompatible with the argument that people are disposed to favor one rather than another ideological alternative by 'orientations' to their social situations that are themselves induced by determinate 'life experiences'" (1991a: 73).

We have seen how different 'orientations' can help to determine very different courses of action even among the members of a single caste and class.

Moreover, the relationship between the development of worldview and the actions people take is itself dialectic. Thus, the new choices individuals make and the new behaviors they adopt may encourage a reshaping or reorientation of their own values. These changing values, in turn, may suggest other options and new forms of action, and a continuing process is set into motion. We have seen this dialectic at work in the struggles of Dharmendra and Lakhoo, as each straddles between two conflicting sets of values and two modes of social interaction. For each of these men, their actions have shaped and transformed their values, even as their values have shaped their actions.

For as new values and forms of social behavior arise, new forms of social identity emerge. The process is intricate and multifaceted, involving both material relations and competing interests among individuals and groups. It is only by examining the dialectical interactions between the material and the worldview at all social levels (that of the individual as well as that of the group) that we can begin to understand the complex process of socioeconomic change.

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