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CASTE AND RITUAL IN A MALWA VILLAGE

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Thesis submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

in

the Australian National University.

Lucknow  
January, 1960



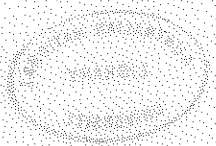
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January, 1960

This dissertation is my original work  
being based on field research which I  
carried out in Potlodi (Malwa, India)  
from March, 1955 to April, 1956, as a  
Research Scholar of the Australian  
National University.

*K. S. Mathur*

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5 OCT 1960

This dissertation is an original work  
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from March, 1958 to April, 1960 as a  
research scholar of the Australian  
National University.

*[Handwritten signature]*



VILLAGE BELLE

A young Khati Bhaat girl.

T A B L E S & C H A R T S

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PART ONE

INTRODUCTORY

## CHAPTER I.

### INTRODUCTION.

Caste is of fundamental importance to Hindus and to students of Hindu society and culture. Caste constitutes the basic element of Hindu social structure. It channelises, to a large extent, the activities, relations and incentives of the people. India is widely known as the classic land of castes, and the word 'caste' is universally associated with India and her people.

Even non-Hindus, it is said, have not escaped infection, and a number of scholars have drawn our attention to the fact that Muslims and Christians in India are divided into caste-like groups (Hutton, 1951, p. 173; Ansari, 1957).

It is a unique feature of caste society that it denies equality of social status to all sections of the society. The basic structure of such a society is the hierarchical arrangement in which clusters of castes occupy different levels, and with the exception of the top and bottom levels, each such level is higher or lower than other levels in the hierarchy.



Caste in India has a history of more than a millenium. During this period, a number of important political changes have taken place. More than one-tenth of the country's population has been converted to Islam and at least another one-twentieth to Christianity. Both these religions are unitary, monotheistic and zealously equalitarian, and both were backed by the Governments of the day in the country, viz., Muslim and British, respectively. The synthesis of Hindu-Muslim and Hindu-Christian religious thought has resulted in the growth of a number of reformative sectarian movements. Some of these were initiated and led by medieval saints like Kabir, Dadu, Nanak, Raidas, Rama Nand and Chaitanya. These are known as bhakti movements (devotional cults) and the fundamental idea behind them is the social and religious equality of all men, the anti-thesis of the caste system. During the 18th-19th centuries, there were such movements as the Brahma Samaj led by Raja Ram Mohan Roy and Arya Samaj led by Swami Dayanand Saraswati. The former is a Hindu version of Christianity, the latter is a Vedic revivalist movement.

The caste system has endured all these innovations, and it continues to orient social action in terms of its theory of inequality of status. Caste society has persisted in spite of political and legislative



pressures brought upon it.

It is but natural that on a subject of such importance, there should be a very large and varied bibliography. Much has been written about the origin and development of the caste system. Recently, Mandelbaum claimed that he had compiled a list of more than five thousand published works on the subject. Studies of the different aspects of caste are still going on.

The literature on caste can be arranged in three broad categories. The credit for focussing our attention on caste belongs to the early European writers on India. For them, it has been a curious thing -- which the Hindus possessed and they did not. What did strike them as strange was the rigour of the social divisions, the bases on which they were made, and the thorough-going way in which they applied to all phases of life. It was interesting and exciting, and reference had to be made to it in letters, diaries, journals, reports, documents of state, travel accounts and books written by the Europeans back in the sixteenth to the nineteenth centuries. Many of these made it their business to study caste seriously. We have some excellent accounts of caste customs by Baines, Bougle, Bouquet, Crooke, the Abbe Dubois, Farquhar, Hocart, Hutton, Ibbetson, O'Malley, Senart, Thurston, to quote only a few of the many

eminent writers. Their observations are those of detached lookers-on; their spirit has been one of serious enquiry and sympathetic understanding. They had lived for long years in India and their accounts are first-hand, objective and reliable.

In the second category we might include all such works as look at caste — not as it exists in contemporary societies — but as it has been referred to and portrayed in Sanskrit and Pali literature. In this connection, mention may be made of the works of such Indologists as Max-Muller, Kane, Ghurye, Ketkar, Eliot, Radhakrishnan, Coomaraswamy, G.T. Garrat, Monier-Williams, and H. Zimmer. These portray the ideal rather than the reality of caste in India.

Then there are writers on caste whose main purpose has been to demonstrate the damage caste has done to Hindu society, to condemn it root and branch as an evil growth, and to plead for its complete abandonment by Hindus. It is significant to note, however, that most of these have advocated abolition of caste — not as an end in itself — but for the removal of the social incompetences the system heaps on some under-privileged sections of the society. This, many believe cannot take place, unless the entire social system is changed. Prominent among such attackers on caste have

been social reformers of status, such as Raja Ram Mohan Roy, Swami Dayanand Saraswati and Mahatma Gandhi. Attacks on caste are the order of the day with a secular welfare democratic government in the country, vowed to the democratic principle of equality among castes, creeds, sects and religions.

Recently, there have been studies of caste of another type. They have mostly been carried on by professional social anthropologists and sociologists who have lived in villages and have written illuminating first-hand accounts of village life. These provide much new information and fresh perspectives for the study of caste. More important of such village studies are: of Shamirpet by Dube, of Rampur by Srinivas, of Mohana by Majumdar, of Rampura by Oscar Lewis, of Kishangarhi by Marriot, of Ramkheri by Mayer, of Bisipara by Bailey, and of Senapur by Opler and Singh.

To be correct and precise, our conclusions must be based on long-term observations and investigation in a small community which an individual can handle by himself. Conclusions based on such studies are, in main, strictly local or at best, regional. But they do possess a certain over-all importance, since local or even regional communities are not autonomous isolated social groups but rather parts of a bigger and broader social

system. The regional sub-patterns are both influenced by and influence the national pattern. This has been a very important process in the making of contemporary Indian society.

#### The Problem.

The task I have set to myself in the present study is an analysis of the function of Hindu religion in the integration of caste society.

Hindus believe that their social system is divinely oriented, prescribed and controlled. That is why regulation of behaviour in accordance with traditional caste rules is considered to be the most important part of their religious life by the Hindus. In Hindu India, the priestly class or the Brahmins have been regarded as the custodians of religion. The Brahmins occupy a pre-eminent position in Hindu society, and it was this feature of the social system which led the earlier European observers of the caste system to regard it "as an artificial creation, as a device of a clever priesthood for the permanent division and subjection of the masses, or even as the creation of a single law-giver." The Abbe Dubois spoke of it as the ingenious device of Brahmins, made by them for their own self interest. We cannot be certain about the origin of the system, but even if the origins of the caste system were,

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as Nesfield maintains, totally independent of religion, "they have undoubtedly received a religious sanction since" (Hutton, 1951, p. 170).

The influence of religion on the caste system was recognised and referred to by several other writers on the Hindu social system. Hocart regarded the caste system as originating in ritual. Bonnerjea explained caste as due to primitive belief in magic, with which he credits both Aryan and pre-Aryan (1931). Rice ascribed the origin of caste to totemism and the taboos which commonly accompany it; he emphasized, in this connection, the holiness of the kitchen and the principle that food is a ready conveyor of injurious qualities in totemistic and primitive belief (1937). Oldenberg thought that caste had evolved from class, guild and tribe, segregated into permanently separate groups by heredity and by restrictions on marriage and commensality and a fear of pollution (1897, quoted in Hutton, 1951, p. 178-179). The importance of the mystical concept of pollution — "the chief principle on which the entire system depends" (Ketkar, 1909, p. 121) was also stressed by Ketkar, Ghurye (1950), S.C. Roy (1934), Srinivas (1952) and Stevenson (1954).

To sociologists and functional anthropologists, the role of religion in social organization was never in doubt. In primitive and peasant societies, religion plays

a very important role in the integration of the society. According to Durkheim religious ritual is an expression of the unity of society and ~~that~~ its function is to 're-create' the society or the social order by reaffirming and strengthening the sentiments on which the social solidarity and therefore the social order itself depended (in Radcliffe-Brown, 1952, p.165). Radcliffe-Brown thought that "an orderly social life amongst human beings depends upon the presence in the minds of the members of a society of certain sentiments, which control the behaviour of the individual in his relation to others" (1952, p. 157).

For social anthropologists, the problem is that of the social function of religion — "how does religion contribute to the existence of society as an ordered and continuing system of relationships amongst human beings?" (Radcliffe-Brown, in Foreword to Srinivas, 1952, p.v).

There are two diacritical features of the Hindu social system: (i) organization of society in terms of endogamous castes, and (ii) stratification of the castes. In local usage, the word for what we commonly refer to as caste is jati. It is a group based on birth; only a person born of full members can be a full member. His privileges and obligations are those of his caste. In order to keep his caste, he has to observe certain traditional rules in respect of his food, occupation, and

his relations with other castes with whom he interacts. Castes are hierarchically arranged, and castes in the lower strata are considered to be and treated as inferior to castes in the upper strata.

How does the religion of the Hindus contribute to the existence and persistence of caste society? This it does by providing (i) a 'philosophy' for the social system, in the form of doctrine and myth, a philosophy which seeks to explain the inequality between castes, and (ii) the rites, that is, ceremonial actions and ritual prohibitions which dramatise the social system and transmit the sentiments from one generation to another.

It is a characteristic feature of popular Hinduism, i.e., the religion of the rural folk, that there is greater emphasis on 'living a proper life' than on such formal aspects of religion as worship and prayer. Religious traditions lay down with meticulous care how a person should behave and live in order to lead a proper life. The traditions one is most concerned with for guidance in one's life and behaviour are the traditions of one's caste or jati (i.e., his jati-dharma). These prescribe for the caste rules for proper (dharmic) living in every day life, and prohibit what is traditionally considered to be improper for the caste. Living a proper (or religious) life includes: eating proper food in the proper way, marrying the proper person at the



proper time by proper means, pursuing the proper occupation, giving and receiving proper gifts and alms to and from proper persons, and in general behaving and living in a way which is considered to be proper for one's caste by the traditions.

This Study.

This study was undertaken by me as a Research Scholar of the Australian National University, Canberra (A.C.T.) in the Department of Anthropology and Sociology. The School of Pacific Studies of which the late Professor S.F. Nadel was the Dean was in 1954 interested in village studies in India. A Research Fellow of the same Department, Dr. Adrian C. Mayer, had started work in a village in the Dewas District (of the then State of Madhya Bharat, India). This lies in the cultural region called Malwa, (Skr. Malava) which stretches from the Gwalior hills in the north to the Narbada in the south and from Bhilsa in the east to Mandsaur in the west. Dr. Mayer's research theme was caste and kinship with an emphasis on the secular criteria of status evaluation in the rural Hindu society of Malwa.

Malwa has a geographical and historical importance. It is almost the only fertile and jungleless strip of plains connecting the two broad physical divisions of the country, viz., the North India plains and

the Deccan plateau; it may be regarded as the "gateway to the South". The two national highways connecting North India with the South (one through the desert of Rajasthan and Western Malwa to the Konkan coast, the other through Baghelkhand and Bundelkhand and Eastern Malwa to the Deccan) cross through Malwa (see Spate, 1957, p. 579). This has been so since time immemorial. From the very earliest times, Malwa, or Avanti janapada as it was known in the times before Christ, has been the arena of considerable political activity in India. The land has constantly changed hands. It has rightly been described as "the invariable appanage to the domains of every monarch, native or barbarian, who became the master of the Gangetic plain" (1931 Census, Vol. XX. pt.1, p.3). Perhaps the fertility of the soil of Malwa and the consequent richness of the country was much known then as it is now and attracted invaders and colonists, both foreigners and from inside the country. Mauryas, Scythians, Guptas, Huns, Rajputs, Muslims and then Marathas, one after another came waves of outsiders who eventually settled down and became part of the local population. They have, however, left their stamp on the socio-cultural life of Malwa. Sir Jadunath Sarkar writes that Malwa was one of the most notable provinces of India during the Hindu and early Muslim periods of our history, and its influence on Hindu culture was of an abiding character.

This was a major consideration in the selection of Malwa as the region of my field-study. The fact that Malwa is a Hindi-speaking region made it possible for me to do field-research there without having to learn a language. Also important was the presence of Dr. Mayer in the same region. Here was an opportunity for co-ordinated work and that is how Prof. Nadel wanted it to be. I would take up the ritual aspect of social structure in rural Malwa. This then was to be the scope of my field research.

For some time I had been interested in the study of religion. In 1950-52 I had done some work on the tribal religions of the people of Dudhi (Mirzapur, U.P.) and Jaunsar - Bawar (Dehradun, U.P.) with a view to studying the role of religion in the integration of society. It was fascinating, and when Prof. Nadel indicated that he would like me to study ritual and social structure in an Indian village, I immediately accepted the assignment.

I reached Indore, the summer capital of the then State of Madhya Bharat, in the heart of Central Malwa, in February, 1955 and set out to find a 'suitable' village where I could settle down to approximately a year's field-work. The village had to be situated in the heart of Malwa in order to have as representative a community as possible. This almost delimited it to the districts

Rajgarh, Shajapur, Ujjain, Indore, and northern Dhar.

A second consideration was the size of the village. For this I adopted the generally accepted lower and upper limits of 800 and 1,500 persons, respectively. The composition of the village population, from the point of view of age, sex, religion and caste was also important. Villages nearer towns and cities could not be taken for several reasons. Such villages are heavily effected by urban contacts which deruralise the customs and habits of their people; proximity of industries attracts the adult male population to the city, unbalancing the normal age and sex distribution of the village; again, the emphasis normally laid on ritual tradition as the basis of life shifts to such criteria as wealth, political power and education. For these reasons, the village had to be beyond the influence of cities, towns and district headquarters and off the main railway and roadway routes. I wanted as few non-Hindus (Muslims, Christians, tribals) in the village as possible, and lastly, I wanted a village which would have many of the representative castes of the region. For my purposes it was desirable that the village should contain castes of all the main ranks and occupations.

Central Malwa does not have many villages with a population of about one thousand. Most of the villages in this region are small in size. Potlodi village seemed

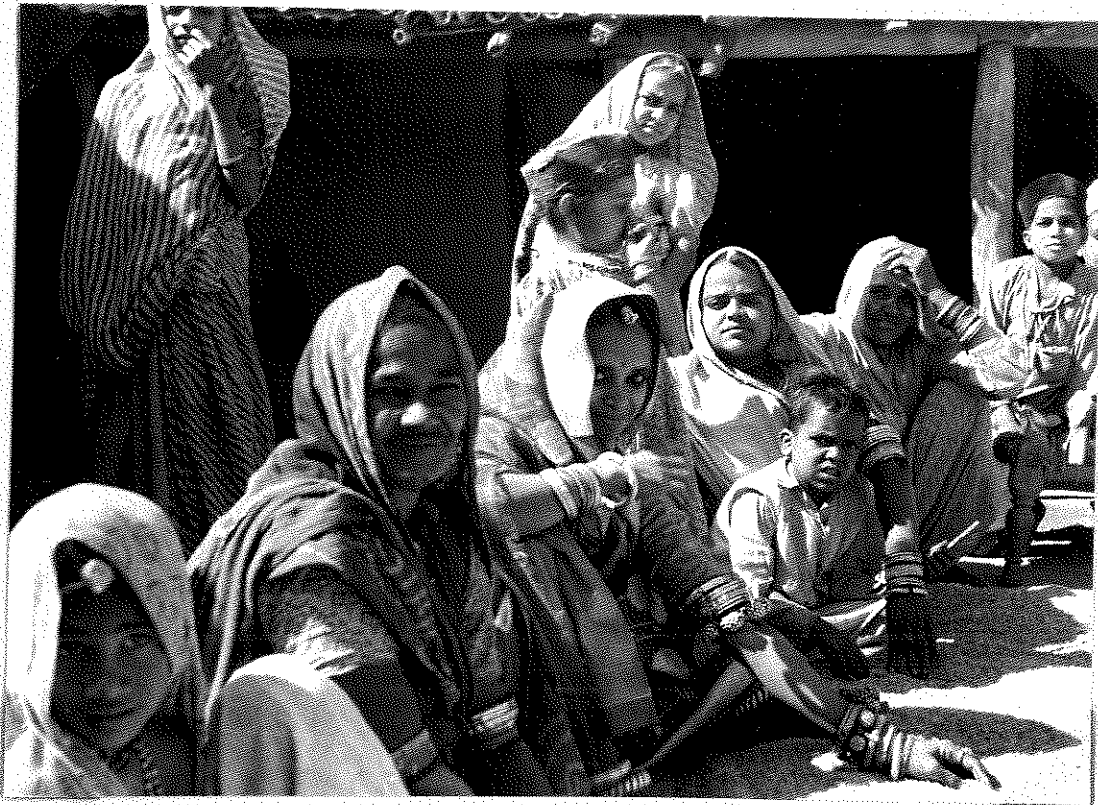
to fulfil most of my requirements. It had a population of about 1,100 people, the number of non-Hindus in this total was only 32; it had no members of scheduled tribes living in it; it contained 28 caste groups belonging to all the major ranks and representing most of the common occupations. Its nearness to a great and ancient centre of all-India Hinduism, viz., Ujjain, gave it added importance. Moreover, it was till 1948 a border village in the feudal state of Sindhia. It was in a Sindhia enclave in the neighbouring Holkar State. It was part of a jagir given to a Maratha Brahmin by the Gwalior Court, and it had been in their possession for over a century when in 1953, Zamindari and Jagirdari were abolished by an Act of the Legislature of the newly-constituted Part B State of Madhya Bharat in the Indian Union. The over-all result was that in 1955, Potlod was a relatively conservative village community moored in its sacred traditions, which had yet been uneffected by the new trends of political and social liberalism, industrial development and modern education, where relations were still largely organized on the age-old traditional bases. It presented a good field for the exploration of the role of popular Hindu religion in the social life of rural folk.

A small but moderately comfortable house was available in the village. I could thus live right in the heart of the village and observe my subjects at close

quarters. I could participate in their every day life. This I found to be helpful in gaining access to them, for I was not a 'regular visitor living outside' but one of them sharing the discomforts of their life with them. This appealed to them, for it was something which no other 'outsider' had ever done before.

There was little difficulty in my being accepted by the people of Potlod village. Being a Hindu myself, I belong to a caste. My caste was one of the first things they enquired about, and as soon as it was known, my position in the social life of the village was fixed. The fact that my wife accompanied me helped in the establishment of my bona fides. Malwi, the spoken language of the Malwa region is a dialect of Hindi which is our mother tongue. It is slightly different from the U.P. Hindi in accent and its vocabulary contains words from Gujerati and Marathi. It was thus a matter of a few weeks only for us to learn the village dialect and to be able to converse with the people in their own tongue. But even on the day of our arrival in Potlod, I remember well, we could make ourselves understood and could ourselves understand something of what was said to us. Language was never a barrier between the village people and ourselves.

For collecting data during the field research, I made use of the standard techniques used by field



SOME 'CLEAN' CASTE WOMEN OF POTLOD

Village women have their own gatherings, usually in the afternoon, when they grind flour or clean cereals and chat.

anthropologists. Since we lived in the village itself, I could observe the people in almost all walks of their everyday life. In April-May, 1955, I took a door-to-door census of the village. This helped me acquaint myself with all the people of the village and paved the way for those informal interviews during which I gathered most of my basic data. In villages, it is quite usual for men to gather late in the evening after the meal and chat. In the local dialect such gatherings are called baithaka. Popular sitting places in Potlod are: the workshops of the two blacksmiths and carpenters and the two tailors, the three shops, the house of the village patel, and the courtyards of the village temples. These evening gatherings provided excellent opportunity to discuss a point with a number of people and see them thrash it out among themselves. Such discussions brought out obscure cases and village scandals, about which, in normal conversation, the people might have been unwilling to talk.

The rainy season is perhaps the best time from the point of view of the investigator. During this period the people are not able to move out much due to the downpour and the knee-deep mud in paths and lanes. Baithakas continue sometimes for the whole day, and for a change from the monotony of their everyday life, people are willing to listen and talk about anything.



During the second half of my stay in the field, I found it possible to have formal interviews with the people, discuss freely with them matters pertaining to their social and religious life. They did not object to my recording, at times verbatim et litteratim, their statements. At this stage, some of them actually expected me to do so.

I found the event centered technique to be a useful tool in collecting data particularly about inter-caste relations. In village life important events of this character are: feasts given to celebrate weddings, sacred-thread giving, the first shaving of a child's hair, and the conclusion of the mourning period after death; festivals, fairs, and caste panchayat meetings to discuss the improper behaviour of a casteman. An analysis of the event and the circumstances that brought it about helped me reconstruct the traditional rules and the extent to which they were obeyed in the village society.

I did not make much use of the questionnaire technique except as an interview guide. Only during the last month of research (April, 1956) did I draw up a questionnaire and collect information on its basis from a sample of my informants. Through this, I sought information about religious cults, divination, oracles, and ideas about deities. The questions were suggested to me by Dr. Freeman and Dr. Mayer.

I had feared — and my fears have been proved right — that there are serious methodological difficulties in working in one's own society and analysing one's own culture. It is true that I had never lived in Malwa before and for several weeks in the beginning, I had some difficulty in following the Malwi language. Malwi, however, is only a dialect of the Hindi language. Hindi is also the medium of instruction in most of the primary and secondary schools of North and Central India. Thus the people of Potlod, particularly the young men who had some schooling, had no trouble in conversing with us right from the first day of our stay in Potlod. Many of them were of great help to us in learning the local dialect, and at the end of about ten weeks, both my wife and I found we could understand and converse in Malwi fairly well. From then onwards, our position was like "just one of them".

The situation had its benefits as also some handicaps. The benefits are obvious and are well known to anthropological field-workers. It meant we could go anywhere in the village and see almost every thing that was going on. People would not stop doing their work or talking if we were around. Very soon, they took us for granted. And if on any significant occasion, we could not be present, our absence was felt. I was requested to accompany marriage parties; groups of villagers

visiting their relations in other villages or going to fairs invited me to accompany them. We were invariably invited to all feasts and ceremonies in the village and practically nothing of consequence happened of which we were not informed. Many such events we were compelled to miss, but even those we attended left us very little time to do the every day domestic work. I had to sit up till the early hours of the morning almost every day to write the day's experiences in my field diary and make the necessary recordings about enquiries and interviews.

Perhaps the greatest difficulty in field work arising out of "full participation" of the field-investigator is in respect of the maintenance of objectivity, so essential in any anthropological enquiry. The problem becomes all the more serious for a student of religion if he happens to know a good deal about the traditions and scriptures of that religion and about the scripturally prescribed ways of performing the rites and ceremonies. If, then, he finds that the people he is studying observe these in a different way (from the one scripturally prescribed), he has a tendency to become a sympathiser or even a guide and reformer rather than an observer as he is expected to be.

Inconvenience is also caused by the automatic fixation of the investigator at a particular place in the

caste hierarchy. According to the rules of the system, he cannot mix equally with all castes. With some he may be quite free, whereas his relations with others, notably the 'untouchable' castes are difficult. There are difficulties in getting suitable informants from all castes. In the total information obtained, there is thus a more than proportionate share obtained from the 'clean' castes.

These are only a few of the many difficulties felt by a field-investigator working in a society which is culturally, socially and linguistically similar to the one to which he himself belongs. Objectivity is difficult to maintain, and he has to strive constantly to keep before him the aims of objective research.

This Thesis is organized into four Parts. In Part One, I have introduced the region and the village community in which investigations were carried out. Here are given the geographical environment of the region, its topography, climate, flora and fauna, the historical background, land and land tenure, and the present political and administrative set up.

Part Two is titled Social Structure of the Village. I present an account of the various structural systems that go to make rural society in Malwa. For any single village these are: the kin system, the caste system, and the village community. Of these three, my concern is, for most part, with the second, viz., the caste

system. Here, as throughout this work, I have relied mostly on local ethnography and have introduced material from elsewhere primarily for comparative purposes.

In Part Three is given a fairly detailed analysis of the belief system of Potlod Hindus. The beliefs are based on the classical scriptures. It is, though, devoid of the higher reaches of philosophy and logic whose place is taken by the simple belief and devotion characteristic of a rural people. This is a significant difference between what are widely known as classical Hinduism and popular Hinduism.

How the ritual beliefs of the Hindus of Potlod orient their social action is the theme of Part Four of this Thesis. Whether in marriage where each caste acts, for all practical purposes, as a world in itself, confining all marital relations within itself, or in dining and the acceptance of food and drink, in visiting and in other aspects of social participation, and in the pursuit of occupations for the sake of making a living, these ritual beliefs provide the social prescriptions and prohibitions in respect of behaviour. Most of these are almost universally obeyed since the sanctions and penalties are too heavy and stringent to be lightly ignored.

Acknowledgements.

This research project was undertaken while I was working as a Research Scholar of the Australian National University, Canberra (A.C.T.) in the Department of Anthropology and Sociology. The whole programme was financed by the A.N.U., and I must record my indebtedness to the authorities of the Australian National University for this assistance.

The programme was supervised from the beginning by the late Professor S.F. Nadel. I had the good fortune to sit for hours with Professor Nadel in his office and discuss with him in detail all aspects of my work. In the field, I continued to receive his guidance through letters till his sudden and tragic death on 14th January, 1956 at Canberra.

The supervision of my work had already been taken up by Dr. J.D. Freeman. I had the privilege of long discussions with Dr. Freeman. A good deal of the data was presented in a partially analysed form at a series of seminars at the A.N.U. From my discussions with Dr. Freeman and from the seminar discussions, has emerged the plan of the present work. I wish to express my deep sense of gratitude to Dr. Freeman for his able guidance and sympathetic advice.

To Dr. W.E.H. Stanner and other members of the Department of Anthropology, A.N.U., who attended my

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To my teacher, Professor D.N. Majumdar, I am most indebted. Professor Majumdar taught me anthropology and made me a social anthropologist; his ungrudging help and guidance has always been available to me.

To the then Government of Madhya Bharat, and particularly to the district authorities of Indore district, I am thankful for the help they gave me while I and my wife were in the field.

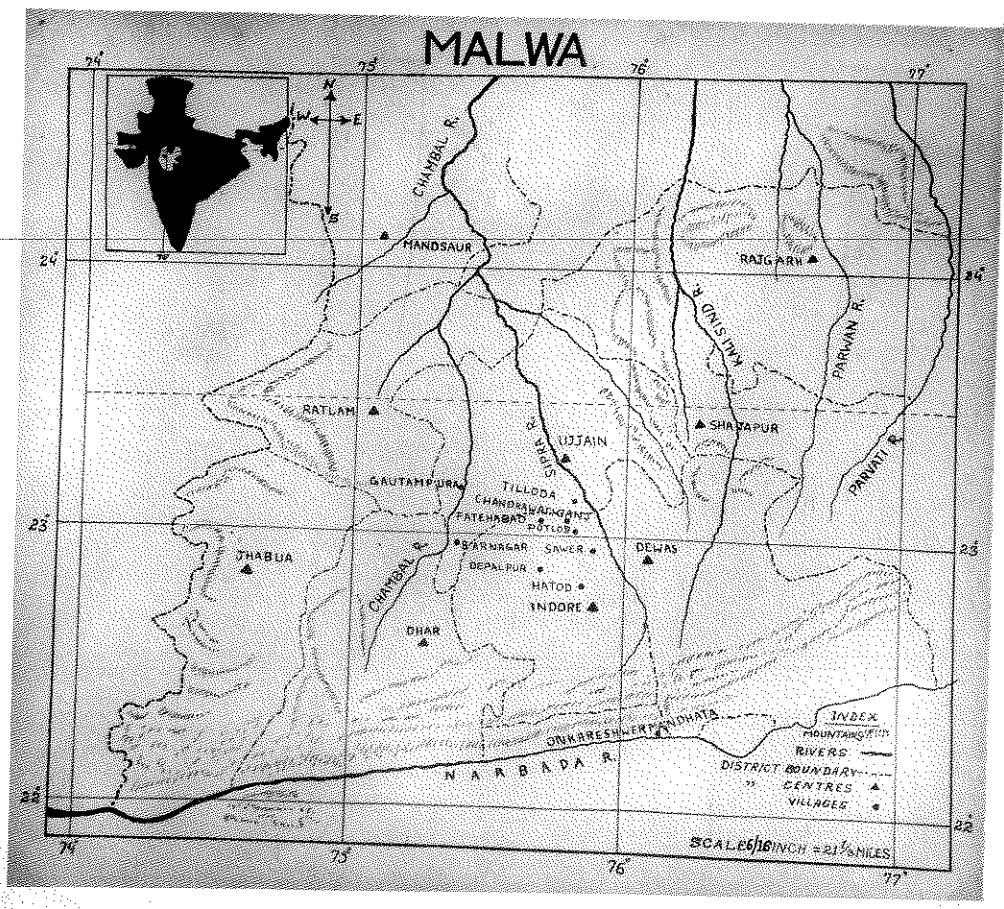
I wish to acknowledge the help given me by my many friends, prominently Professor G.S. Bhatt, Dr. K.N. Sharma, Dr. S.S. Srivastava, Sri R.D. Singh and Sri Gopala Sarana.

Last but not least, I have to express my gratitude to the people of Potlod, particularly to my chief informants Pandit Saatananda Dube, Ram Prasad Bhat,

Shivjiram Mondloi, Patel Bapusingh Chauhan, Amarsingh  
Rathor, Babulal Jain and Ambaram.



# MALWA



## CHAPTER II.

### MALWA — THE COUNTRY AND THE PEOPLE.

Malwa is the folk name of the country which is now included in the districts of Indore, Ujjain, Dewas, Dhar, Ratlam, Shajapur, Rajgarh and parts of the districts of Mandsaur and Shivpuri in the state of Madhya Pradesh in Central India. It is a table-land, bounded on the north by the Vindhyan scarpland of Gwalior hills, on the east by river Betwa which flows by the ancient monuments at Bhilsa, on the south by river Nerbada and the plains of Nemar, and on the west by river Ghambal which separates Malwa from Gujerat.

Malwa is a plateau with a mean elevation of about 1,600 ft above sea-level, at places rising to 2,000 ft. "The highlands are formed of vast rolling plains, bearing scattered over their surface, curious flat-topped hills characteristic of a table-land... Big trees are scarce, except in hollows and surrounding villages of old foundation. The fertile black cotton soil with which the plateau is covered bears magnificent crops, and the tract is highly cultivated. Where no grain has been planted, the land is covered with heavy fields of grass, affording excellent grazing to large herds of cattle which roam over

them. During rains, the country presents an appearance of unwonted luxuriance. Each hill clothed in a bright green mantle, rises from plains covered with waving fields of grain and grass, and traversed by numerous streams with channels filled from bank to bank. This luxuriance, however, is but short-lived, and within little more than a month after the conclusion of the rains, gives place to the monotonous straw colour which is so characteristic of this region during the greater part of the year. Before the spring crops are gathered in, however, this yellow ground forms an admirable frame to set off broad stretches of gram and wheat, and the brilliant fields of poppy which form a carpet of many colours round the villages nestling in the deep shade of great mango and tamarind trees " (Imp. Gaz. of India, Vol. IX, p. 324).

The Vindhya are an important mountain range. From the physical point of view, the range has a marked effect on the climate of Malwa; it directs the rain-bearing south-western Monsoons from the Arabian Sea into the plateau region and gives Malwa a good rainfall, the eastern districts in the region getting more rainfall than the western districts; it acts as a water-shed, and all the rivers and streams in Malwa, Chambal, Sipra, and their tributaries flow northwards through the region.

From the cultural view point, Vindhya has always been associated in the imagination of the people

as the oldest mountain range in India, and the abode of numerous minor godlings of the Hindu pantheon. In the Vindhya hills are situated some of the temples and shrines of great religious importance to the Hindus of Malwa in particular and Hindus of India in general. At many places, annual fairs are held, attended by Hindu villagers from all over the Malwa region.

The plateau of Malwa is intersected by valleys formed by the rivers Chambal, Narbada, and their numerous tributaries. One of the important tributaries to the Chambal is the river Sipra on which the sacred town of Ujjain is situated. All along these rivers, particularly at their confluences, are located centres of pilgrimage believed to be sacred by Hindus of Malwa and a few by Hindus all over India. Gotampura on the Chambal and Maheshwar on the Narbada belong to the first category of pilgrimage centres, whereas Ujjain on the Sipra and Onkareshwar Mandhata on the Narbada are pilgrimage places of all India importance.

#### Climate.

The climate of Malwa is of typical Monsoon type. All all over northern and central India, the year is popularly divided into three seasons, namely, summer, the rains, and winter. Summers extend over the months of Chait - Jeth. Average day temperature during the summer months is 90 deg.F.; just for a few days, it rises to

100 deg.F. or slightly above. Summer evenings, however, are cool and pleasant.

The rainy season commences with the first showers of Asadh, and extends up to the middle of Kuar. The rain comes with the south-west Monsoon winds from the Arabian Sea. The average annual rainfall for Malwa ranges from about 40" in the western districts, to about 65" in the eastern districts. Indore and the immediately surrounding area gets an average of 55" per year. Most of the rain falls within these three months of the rainy season. During this season, average day temperature is below 80 deg. F., but seldom falls below 70 deg. F. Nights are somewhat cooler.

Winter is the longest of the three seasons, extending for about five months (mid-Kuar to Phagun). The weather is most delightful during these months; the average day temperature ranges between 60 deg. F. and 70 deg. F., though on some nights in the year, it falls to 50 or even 45 deg. F. There is an occasional winter shower during the months of Poos and Mah, and this is believed by the cultivators to be helpful to the early summer crop of wheat and gram.

As might be expected in a region with fairly stable weather and climatic conditions, like Malwa, the life and activities of the people are closely linked up with the cycle of seasons. Agriculture is the main occupation of the people of Malwa, and the region is well known

in India for its great fertility of land and prosperity in cultivation. The fixed annual rituals and festivals, as I observed these among the Potlodi Hindus, are bound up with important seasonal events, farming activities and the like. For instance, marriages are not celebrated during the rainy season, when communications are dislocated and marriage parties and guests cannot easily move from village to village. One of my informants told me: "the presiding gods of marriage go to sleep with the first showers of Asadh, and wake up only after the rains are gone, in the month of Katik. How can there be any marriages during this period, when the gods who have to be propitiated at the ceremony are fast asleep?"

During the rainy season almost the only ceremonies are those magical rites which are designed to give ritual protection to growing crops, and to cattle and kinsmen against the danger of floods and snakes. Should the rains fail to come at the regular time, it causes great worry to the people: crops will dry up and there might be a famine. Rites are then performed invoking the rain god to send the moisture laden clouds and relieve the sufferings of the people. Agricultural activities, again, are intimately associated with rites and ceremonies; the tilling of land, sowing of seeds and harvesting of crops — all are preceded by worship and prayer for the successful growth of crops. The important festivals of Holi, Akhati, Dewali, Dasehra and Mata poojan are held



during the busy agricultural season. Each of these festivals closely follows the harvesting of a new crop, which has to be ceremonially offered to the gods before being used for every day consumption.

### Soils.

The soils in Malwa may be classified in three ways: by composition, position, and the capability for bearing certain crops. Fields nearer the village enjoy greater facilities for manuring and irrigation. These are highly valued by the cultivator, and are used for sowing such crops as sugar cane, potato, maize, and tobacco, which require not only intensive manuring and irrigation but also tender personal care and vigilance during the entire period of their growth. In fields situated at a distance from the village, on the other hand, such poorer crops as maize, gram and barley are usually sown.

In this region, the chief classes of soil are: Kali matti (black soil), bhuri matti (brown soil), and bhatori or stony soil. The black soil, popularly known as 'black cotton soil', is extremely fertile. According to geologists, this was formed by the weathering of the rocks which constitute the Deccan trap. The other two are lighter soils with a greater proportion of sand in them. All three types of soil, however, are sufficiently retentive of moisture to bear most of the crops without irrigation, but care is taken to cultivate cotton in strips

of dense black soil. The bhuri soil is considered to be particularly suitable for the cultivation of such crops as wheat, gram (Cicer arietinum), til (Sesamum indicum) and other unalu crops (early summer crops, sown in Katik, and reaped in Chait). Comparatively poorer soil is used for the cultivation of the syalu crop, consisting of millet (Andropogon sorghum), maize (Zea mays), Urad (Phaseolus radiatus), moong (Phaseolus mungo), batla (Pisum sativum), moong-phalli (Araclis Hypogoea), and others (the early winter crop, is sown in Asadh, and reaped in Aghan).

#### Historical Background.

The ancient name of the country now called Malwa is Avanti. It was one of the prominent janapadas of Northern India, and has been mentioned on numerous occasions in the Mahabharata. There is strong Puranic evidence to show that Avanti in the post-Mahabharata period was ruled by the Haihayas, perhaps of mixed descent, who were responsible for the destruction of the aboriginal Naga power in Western India; they had one of their capitals at Avantika or Ujjayini, identified with modern Ujjain on the Sipra (Pusalkar, in Majumdar & Pusalkar, ed., 1953, pp. 325 - 326). The Haihayas were later defeated and extinguished by the Aryans under Parasurama. Avanti is classed as one of the sixteen great states in



North India in the sixth century B.C. (Law, in Majumdar & Pusalkar, ed., 1953, p. 13), and one of the four great monarchies in India when Buddhism arose. 'Pali canonical texts mention Ujjeni (sk. Ujjayini) as the capital of King Chanda Pradyota of Avanti in the time of Mahavira and Buddha' (op. cit.).

Avanti was annexed by Chandragupta Maurya and it continued to be an important state of the Mauryan Empire. Ujjain is mentioned in rock edicts of that period as one of the four sub-capitals of Ashoka's empire, at each of which a prince of the royal blood ruled as a Viceroy (Mookerji, in Majumdar & Pusalkar, ed., 1953, p. 79).

A hero of many myths and traditions, the mighty slayer of the Sakas and the founder of the famous and much prevalent Vikrama era, Vikramaditya is believed to have ruled Avanti with his capital at Ujjayini in the first century B.C. He rescued the sacred town of Ujjayini from the alien Sakas and to commemorate this event, founded the Vikrama Era in 58 B.C. (see Majumdar, in Majumdar & Pusalkar, ed., 1953, pp. 154 - 158).

The name Malwa was given to this part of the country, probably by the republican Malavas, a tribe who formerly lived in south Punjab and Rajasthan. The Malavas have been mentioned as valiant fighters in Indian and Greek sources of the time of Alexander. In the first-second century A.D., the Malavas seem to have migrated

southwards, possibly pressed by Sakas and other foreign invaders from the north-west, and settled in western central India. Sircar has expressed the opinion that around 532 A.D., during the reign of Yasodharman, the country included in the ancient janapadas of Avanti and Akara or Dasarna was renamed Malwa after the Malavas who colonised and ruled it (in Majumdar & Pusalkar, ed., 1953, pp. 164 - 165).

Bhoj of Dhar or Dharanagari is reputed to be a successor of Vikramaditya, eleventh in descent. He changed the seat of government from Ujjain to Dhar, where it continued till transferred to Mandu by the Muslim conquerors of Malwa (Malcolm, 1880, vol. 1, pp. 20 - 21).

In 1234 A.D., shortly after the establishment of Afghan power at Delhi, Iltutimish, the Slave Sultan, invaded Malwa. His forces captured Bhilsa and advanced to Ujjain which was sacked; the Muslim army demolished the famous temple of Mahakal and other temples and shrines, and plundered the town, but the country was not occupied. (Haig, in The Cambridge History of India, 1928, vol. III, p. 55). For the <sup>next</sup> half century, Malwa was left in peace, and in 1305 A.D. only do we hear of another Muslim King advancing his armies into the rich plains of Malwa. That year Ala-ud-din Khilji sent one of his trusted generals on an expedition to Jalore, Ujjain and Chanderi in Malwa. As he advanced, he was opposed by Raja Koka; the Raja's

forces were defeated and routed. 'This victory made the Muslims masters of Ujjain, Mandu, Dhar, and Chanderi' (op. cit., p. 110 - 111). But the country could not be completely subdued since Hindu princes and chiefs, in almost every district, opposed the progress of the invaders (Malcolm, 1880, vol. 1, p. 23). Malwa was finally conquered by the Muslims during the reign of Firuz Shah of Delhi (1351 - 1388 A.D.) who appointed Dilawar Khan Ghuri as the Governor of Malwa. Taking advantage of the disturbed conditions at Delhi caused by the invasion of Timur (1398), he declared his independence, though he never assumed the style of royalty. A great and powerful king of the Khilji dynasty of Malwa was Hushang Shah who rebuilt the fortifications of Mandu and consolidated the kingdom of Malwa. During the 15th century, the Khilji kings of Malwa were continually at war with the Muslim kingdom of Gujarat and the Hindu princes of Rajasthan, but there was peace in the countryside and considerable building activity ensued. Finally, in 1531, Mahmud II, the last king of the Khilji dynasty of Malwa, was defeated by Bahadur Shah of Gujarat. His capital, Mandu, was captured by the Gujarat armies, and thus came to an end the rule of Khilji dynasty after nearly one hundred and fifty years of its establishment in Malwa.

About this time, a new power from the north-west had appeared in northern India. In 1526, Babur the Moghul

had conquered Delhi and declared himself the King of Hindustan. In 1535, Humayun invaded and captured Mandu but had to withdraw from Malwa due to the rebellion of his brother in the north. Taking advantage of this, Mallu Khan, an ex-officer of the Khilji kings and ruler of the fief of Sarangpur, reduced to obedience other fief-holders in Malwa and established himself as the independent king of Malwa with the royal title of Qadir Shah. He was defeated by Sher Shah Suri who had driven Humayun out of India and declared himself King of Delhi. Humayun recovered his throne in 1555, but died soon after, leaving Malwa in the possession of the viceroys of Sher Shah who had now become independent kings of Malwa. In 1561, Akbar's armies invaded Malwa, and captured Mandu; the ruler Baz Bahadur was driven away, and Malwa became a province of the Mughal empire.

For the following 138 years, Malwa remained a loyal province of the Mughal empire. There was peace in the country, the people were prosperous and there were few disturbances. During the later half of the reign of Aurangzeb, however, the storm broke over Malwa, this time from the south. 1699 was the first year in which bands of Marathas entered Malwa and plundered some villages in the southern districts. For nearly 50 years, Marathas invaded and plundered the rich province of Malwa, till the region eventually passed into regular Maratha

possession in the middle of the 18th century (Sarkar, Aurangzeb V, p. 382).

During this period, there was complete breakdown of regular administration in Malwa, and taking advantage of the anarchy that prevailed, many Rajput zamindars and jagirdars declared their independence and carved out full-fledged states for themselves. Many of these were wiped out during the onrush of the Marathas that ensued, and some were later given protection and recognized by the British. Prominent among such small Rajput states were Shivpuri, Ahirwada, Amjhera, Kotah, Jhabua, Banswada, Ratlam and Badnawar (Singh, 1936).

By 1732 A.D., the Mughal rule in Malwa had completely broken down. Even the great Mughal Emperor was becoming a puppet in the hands of Maratha generals, and in 1741, he was persuaded to bestow on the Peshwa — the head of the Maratha Confederacy — the authority to collect revenue over the province of Malwa, which thus passed into defacto Maratha control (Singh, p. 210).

Earlier, in 1734, Malhar Rao Holkar, a leading general of Peshwa's armed forces, was granted the district of Maheshwar and nine villages from Indore district by the Peshwa, by way of a personal jagir. Holkar came to Malwa and established himself in his jagir at a village called Indore. This land-grant marks the beginning of the modern Holkar state of Indore. A few

years later, Udaji Pawar of Dhar withdrew from central Malwa, and the Peshwa, thinking it not advisable to let the affairs of a fertile and important province like Malwa remain in the hands of Holkar alone, nominated Ranoji Sindhia to work jointly with Malhar Rao Holkar. Ranoji soon rose to the front rank of Maratha chiefs, acquired possessions in Northern Malwa and founded the Sindhia state of Gwalior.

The Marathas lost the battle of Panipat to Ahmad Shah Abdali (1761). The shock of the catastrophe was felt in far off Malwa where many local Rajput princes revolted against the Marathas. They were subdued ruthlessly by Holkar. The Maratha power in Central India reached the meridian of their glory in the time of Madhoji Sindhia, 'who possessed a formidable army organized by French officers and made himself the virtual ruler of northern India. It was he who made the titular Moghul Emperor, Shah Alam II his puppet and utilized the fiction of Moghul sovereignty to establish Maratha supremacy through the north. By 1792, Madhoji Sindhia had established his ascendancy over the Rajputs and the Jats and his power and splendour in northern India were absolute' (Menon, 1956, p. 224). Madhoji died in 1794. Bad days were ahead for the Sindhia state. During the reign of Madhoji's successor, Daulat Rao Sindhia, the Sindhia State of Gwalior met with a series of disasters, culminating

in a treaty of subsidiary alliance with the British in November, 1817. Malcolm observes that the Sindhia was 'compelled to purchase peace by the sacrifice of his finest possessions in Guzerat, Hindustan and Bundelcund' (Malcolm, vol. 1, p. 113).

During the first two decades of the 19th century, Holkar was also in trouble. In 1805, after several battles with the British armies, Holkar had to conclude a treaty of peace and amity with the British Government. But further disturbances ensued and in 1818 Malhar Rao II entered into another treaty, called the treaty of Mandsaor, surrendering his sovereignty to the British Government. Thus ended the power of the Marathas in Malwa, though they retained their domains and titles under the aegis of the British Government till the transfer of power by Britain in August, 1947.

On 15th August, 1947, India became an independent Dominion in the British Commonwealth of Nations. On the same day, several hundred Indian princely states acceded to the Dominion, having previously signed the Instrument of Accession. Among these were the Holkar State of Indore, the Sindhia State of Gwalior, Dewas, and nearly twenty other states which together constituted the Central India Agency. By this act, they became part of the Dominion of India having surrendered to the Dominion Government their responsibilities in respect of defence, foreign affairs,

and communications.

In May, 1948, these States were persuaded by the States Ministry of the Central Government to form a Union. Gwalior, Indore, Dewas Senior, Dewas Junior, Ratlam, Alirajpur, Barwani, Jhabua, Khilchipur, Narsingarh, Sailana, Sitemau, Jobat, Kathiwara, Mathwar, Rajgarh, Nimkhera, Jamnia, Jaora, Kurwai, Muhammadgarh, and Pathari were integrated into the Madhya Bharat Union (see Menon, 1956, Chap. XI).

In 1955, the Government of India appointed a States Reorganization Commission to recommend the reorganization of states on linguistic basis. In accordance with the recommendations of this Commission, a new state was created comprising of the British India Province of Central Provinces & Berar and the Union of Madhya Bharat. The new state, called Madhya Pradesh was inaugurated on 1st November, 1956.

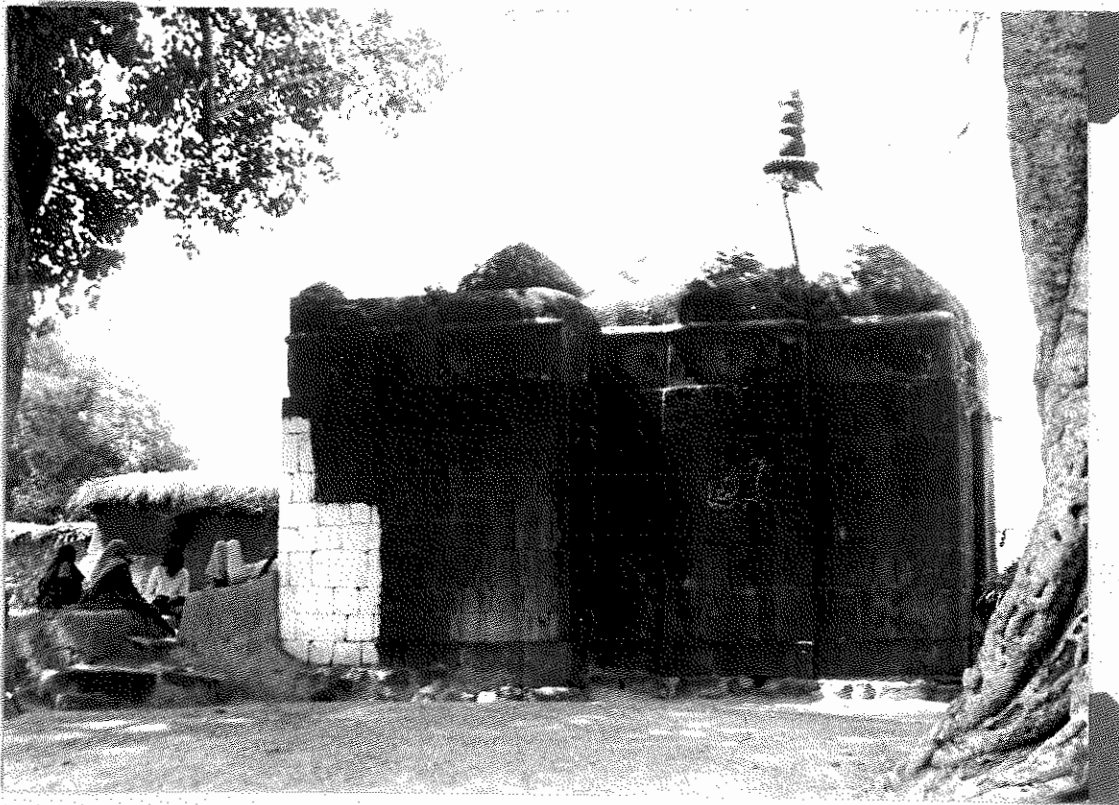
#### The Village.

Potlodi village lies in the central part of this region. It is situated about 27 miles north-west of Indore (the capital of the former Holkar State), and about 17 miles south-west off Ujjain which is a famous all India pilgrimage centre (Dowson, p. 325) and the seat of one of the most famous Siva-lingam (Phallic-shaped image of Lord Siva) known as Mahakala, 'the Great Time'



(Dowson, p. 193). Ujjain also has been described as the 'Greenwich' of ancient Hindus', since "Hindu geographers calculate their longitude from it, making it their first meridian" (Dowson, op. cit.).

A branch line of the Western Railways connects these two major towns of Malwa (viz., Indore and Ujjain). Potlod village lies by this track, and is connected to a small railway station on this line, namely Fatehabad-Chandrawatiganj, by a three-mile long unmetalled mud road. It is a poor road, passing through cultivated fields, and interrupted by a small stream on which there is no culvert. This road is for most part just a few feet wide. Similar mud paths link Potlod with other nearby villages. Saver is a big village, the head-quarters of the subdivisional administrator (tehsilder), and a grain market (mandi), situated at a distance of about 8 miles south-east of Potlod. A metalled road connecting Ujjain and Indore passes through Saver. All the mud paths linking Potlod with surrounding villages, the railway station Fatehabad-Chandrawatiganj, and the roadways station Saver are usable by wheeled transport during fair weather (November - June) only. During the four months of the rainy season (July - October), the numerous streams in the neighbourhood swell up and disconnect such pathways, and then only pedestrian traffic and animal and human transport is possible.



THE SIVA TEMPLE

Situated on the north-western fringe of the village habitation, this temple is said to have been built in the year 1136 Vikram Samvat (A.D. 1079).

No definite historical records relating to the founding of Potlod are available. There is, however, mention of several events of local importance in the books of caste genealogists. Every caste in Malwa has a caste of Bhaat, or Genealogist attached to it. The Bhaat maintain family records in their books (called pothi) and also record any events of especial significance. In some cases, these records are known to contain genealogies up to twenty generations. The bhaat's pothi are believed to be fairly accurate. It is believed that the bhaat is under a professional obligation to write the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth.

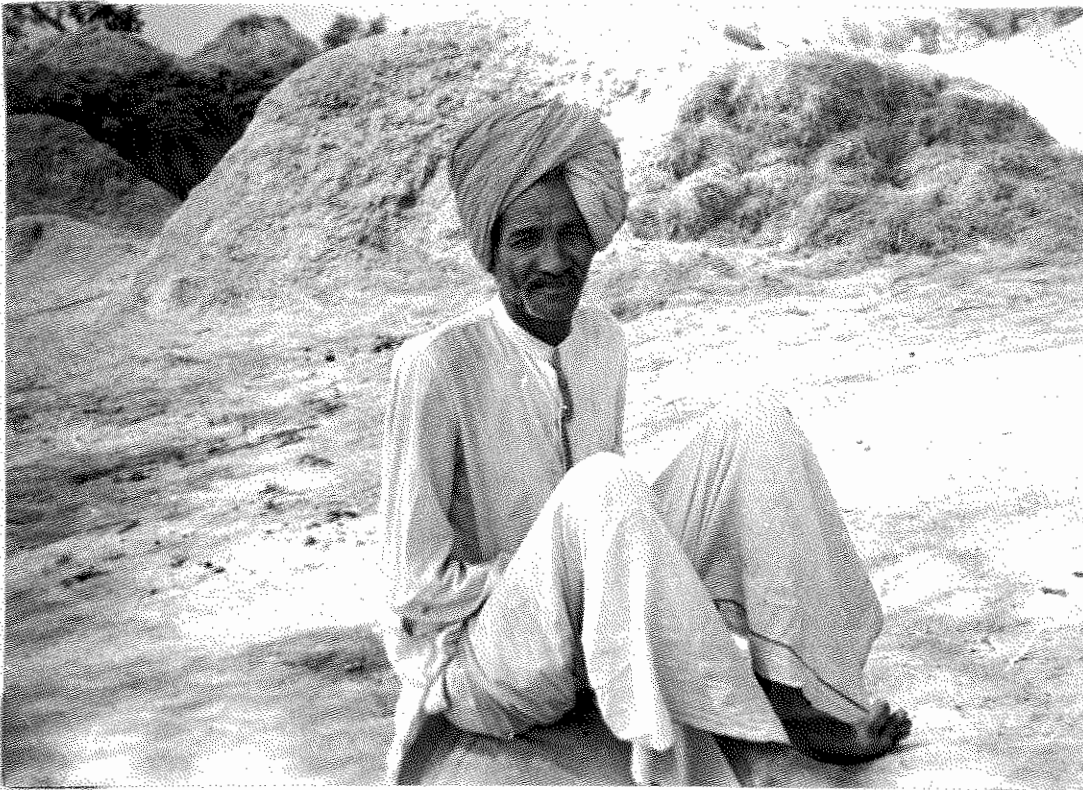
A Siva temple on the north-western fringe of the village is said to have been constructed in the year 1136 Vikram Samvat (that is, A.D. 1079) by a village headman who belonged to the Anjana caste. No persons belonging to this caste live in Potlod at present. It is said that they were driven away by conquering Rajput families. There are, however, several neighbouring villages with large local concentrations of the Anjana caste, and a few of these have village headmen from the Anjana caste.

The Rajput, according to the Bhaat's books, arrived in this village in 1371 V.S. (A.D. 1314), and captured it after defeating the village headman and driving his family away. Since then the village seems to have been under Rajput feudal lords, even though they

might have ruled the country in the name of the Muslim Kings of Malwa and Gujarat (during the 15th-17th centuries A.D.), to whom they owed a probably nominal allegiance. Unbroken Hindu temples and images of gods and goddesses bear evidence to a continued Hindu influence in the village administration.

About 580 years ago, a caste of cultivators (Khati) is believed, according to the genealogists' books, to have been brought and settled in the village by the Rajput rulers.

It is during the late 18th century A.D. that we get other written records making mention of Potlod village. These records are in the nature of land deeds and sanad (title deed) issued by the ruler to his feudal lords and to the village headmen. Sometime in this period, the Sindhias conquered the region around the village from the petty Rajput chieftains and amalgamated it in the Sindhia State. In accordance with the administrative custom of the day, estates were granted to the principal chiefs of the army, nobles and personal servants of the ruler. Such jagir (or estate grants) carried with them full authority for local administration, revenue collection, and justice. In the year 1948 the Sindhia State was merged in the newly formed Part B state of the Indian Union, called Madhya Bharat. In this administration, the jagirdar's (owner of the estate) position was that of a local administrative officer in charge of his estate and directly responsible



THE PATEL OF POTLOD VILLAGE

He is a Chauhān Rajput whose ancestors are said to have conquered Potlod in the 12th century A.D. Since then, headmanship of the village has been in his patrilineage.



to the District authorities.

In 1953, the Madhya Bharat government, by an Act of the newly formed state's legislature, abolished all private estates, and the estate villages were brought under the regular administrative machinery of the state.

Politically, the village is now part of a tehsil (administrative sub-division) of the Indore District of Madhya Pradesh. The local administration is carried on by a village headman (patel), appointed by the government for the collection of land revenues, a keeper of land records (patwari), a chowkidar (village watchman) who is also expected to keep birth and death records, and an elected gram panchayat (village council) for day-to-day village administration. A regional nyaya panchayat (council for justice) composed of elected representatives from a group of neighbouring villages administers justice in respect of petty revenue and criminal cases. There is, in addition, a kendra panchayat (central committee) embracing ten or more neighbouring villages and composed of the nominees of the village councils. The central committee is expected to assist the administration in planning for development works and in executing the approved plans.

#### The Village Habitation.

Potlod village is situated on a mound, overlooking

its fields, the railway track, and neighbouring villages to its west and north-west. On its west and south, it is surrounded by a shallow stream which dries up during the summer months, but is not fordable during the rains. On its north-east, it is bound by a pond which also dries up during dry summers.

On the other sides, the village touches the fields which fan out to the boundaries of neighbouring villages. These village boundaries are not always well demarcated and established. At the periphery, usually a stretch of uncultivated grazing ground is left: this is called kankar. There is some oral evidence to show that in the old feudal days when each village was an autonomous political unit, village headmen kept armed guards to defend their village kankar, and the violation of its kankar was treated as an act of hostility against the village. In the case of Potlod, these village boundaries are precisely defined, being established by a treaty between the Holkar and the Sindhia States. Potlod village lies in a Sindhia enclave surrounded on three sides by Holkar State villages, and thus on three sides, the boundaries of the village also happened to be the boundaries of the Sindhia State of Gwalior; on the fourth side, the railway track separates it from village Fatehabad.

The landscape of the country around Potlod village is typical of the Malwa plateau. Big trees are scarce, and the country around abounds in thorny bushes,



kikar (accacia Indiana) and a variety of date-palm tree (Phoenix dactylifera), and occasional groves of mango, tamarind, mehua (bassia Latifolia), and nim (Melia Indica) trees. Kikar wood is used for the manufacture of agricultural tools by the village carpenter, while the stalks and leaves of the palm are used for basket making and mat weaving by two 'unclean' caste groups of Potlod.

The land around Potlod village is especially well fitted for cultivation which is the basic occupation and the primary source of living for most of the village folk. The land is level and fertile, top-layered with the famous black soil, and the climate is ideally suited for the cultivation of wheat, cotton, gram, linseed and similar crops. As a result, the tract is highly cultivated.<sup>1)</sup> Uncultivated land is covered with heavy grass which affords excellent grazing to the large herds of cattle, sheep and goats which roam over them. There is very little banjar or barren land.

#### Land and Land Tenure.

The total land in Potlod is about 7,795 bighas.<sup>2)</sup> Of this, waste land, shrub land, and the dry stream beds account for more than 1,200 bighas; the habitation area, together with pathways, land owned by railways, cremation ground, and temple compounds occupies nearly 320 bighas; nearly 6,100 bighas of land is under cultivation, and the



rest — approximately 175 bighas, is classed as grazing ground.<sup>3)</sup>

In 1953, as said above, jagirs and zamindaris (feudal land holdings)<sup>4)</sup> were abolished by an Act of the Madhya Bharat Legislature, and most of the land came to be owned by the State (excepting the personally owned and cultivated land of the Jagirdar). By another provision of this Act, cultivators were given the option of purchasing the land they were cultivating, by paying, to the State, an amount ten times the annual land revenue. Most of the total land in Potlod has, thus, come to be owned by the resident cultivators (5,532 bighas out of a total of 7,795 bighas); 1,563 bighas is owned by non-residents; the latter figure includes the Jagirdar's personal land, and land owned by persons who have now emigrated and settled elsewhere. About 700 bighas are owned by the State; this includes pasture land, land under stream beds, pond and wells, pathways, habitation areas, cremation ground, railway land, boundary land, and so on.

#### The People.

Potlod is a predominantly Hindu village. Out of a total population of 1,062, according to a census of the village I took in May, 1955, 1,037 are Hindus, 2 Jains,<sup>5)</sup> and 23 Muslims. The Hindu section of the population is composed of caste groups, 28 in number. Each

caste group has a distinct name, and its members are bound together by ritual ties; each caste has a tradition of its own, is usually associated with a traditional calling, and members of a caste group lead a distinctive social life. Traditionally also, some of the caste groups are regarded as 'ritually unclean', and some others as 'ritually untouchable'.

In Table 1, is given a list of the caste groups that constitute the Potlod village community, arranged in order of their numerical strength in the village. Opposite the name of each caste group, I have shown the traditional calling of the caste, and its size in the village population.

TABLE 1.

THE CASTE COMPOSITION OF POTLOD VILLAGE

(31st May, 1955)











Name of Caste.	Traditional Calling.	Number of Members.
1. Khati	Cultivator	420
2. Rajput	Warrior, land owner	100
3. Mali	Gardner cultivator	75
4. Malwi Balai	Cloth weaver, field labourer village watchman	64
5. Nath Jogi	Mendicant	44
6. Bhambi	Cloth weaver	41
7. Bagri	Mat weaver	38
8. Desha Chamar	Leather worker	34
9. Bargunda	Basket maker, hunter	25
10. Purabi Thakur	Land owner	24
11. Malwi Chamar	Skinner, tanner, leather worker	20
12. Malwi Kumhar	Potter	15
13. Gujerati Kumhar	Potter	15
14. Gujerati Lohar	Blacksmith	14
15. Gujerati Balai	Cloth weaver, field labourer	14
16. Gujerati Chamar	Skinner, tanner, leather worker	13
17. Darji	Tailor	13
18. Nai	Barber, messenger	12
19. Brahmin	Priest, astrologer, teacher	11
20. Vairagi Vaishnava	Mendicant, temple priest	11
21. Dhobi	Washerman	8
22. Malwi Lohar	Blacksmith	6
23. Dholi	Drummer	5
24. Gosain	Mendicant, temple priest	4
25. Khati Bhaat	Genealogist to the Khati caste	4
26. Teli	Oil Presser	3
27. Palliwal Bania	Trader, shopkeeper	2
28. Bhangi	Scavenger	1

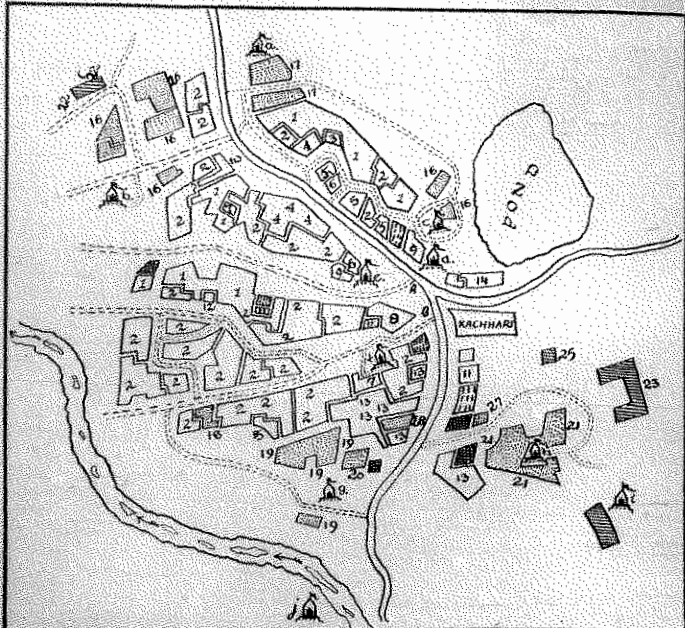
Legend: Cl. 'ritually clean' castes;  
 UCl. 'ritually unclean' castes;  
 Unt. 'ritually untouchable' castes.

**POTLOD**

DISTRICT INDORE, MADHYA PRADESH (INDIA)

Dwelling Houses of

	Central Lane	<p>'VILLAGE AREA'</p>		Jains
	Village Lanes			Clean Castes
	River			Unclean Castes
	Religious Shrines			Untouchable Castes
	Pond			Muslims



- |                      |                        |                            |                           |
|----------------------|------------------------|----------------------------|---------------------------|
| <b>CLEAN CASTES*</b> | <b>UNCLEAN CASTES*</b> | <b>UNTOUCHABLE CASTES*</b> | <b>RELIGIOUS SHRINES*</b> |
| 1 Rajput             | 16 M. Bala             | 22 G. Chaman               | a. Siva Temple            |
| 2 Khatik             | 17 Nath Jogi           | 23 D. Chaman               | b. Nalka Shrine           |
| 3 P. Bania           | 18 Dhobi               | 24 M. Chaman               | c. Sitala Shrine          |
| 4 Brahmin            | 19 Bagri               | 25 Ishangi                 | d. Rama Temple I          |
| 5 P. Shakur          | 20 Baagunda            |                            | e. Krishna Temple         |
| 6 Nai                | 21 Bhambi              |                            | f. Rama Temple II         |
| 7 M. Lohar           | 26 G. Balal            |                            | g. Shrine of Bagri Caste  |
| 8 G. Lohar           | 27 Teli                |                            | h. Matt Shrine            |
| 9 Valmaji            | 28 Dhobi               |                            | i. Shrine of Village      |
| 10 Gosain            |                        |                            | deities                   |
| 11 Darji             |                        |                            | k. .. of Ram Deo ji       |
| 12 K. Bhaad          |                        |                            |                           |
| 13 Mali              |                        |                            |                           |
| 14 Kumbhar (M)       |                        |                            |                           |
| 15 G. Numbhar        |                        |                            |                           |

At Farking  
BII ..



Ground Plan of the Village Habitation.

The area covered by the residential quarter in Potlod is about 31 bighas. The village habitation is not laid out according to any deliberate plan. As we shall see, however, there is a crude pattern in the distribution of castes and services over the residential area. The natural boundaries of the village — the stream and the pond — permit extensions to take place only within a limited area.

An unpaved street, about 10 to 15 feet wide, lies almost across the village habitation, running north-south on the northern edge of the village for some 250 yards; it turns eastwards and then to the south-east for about one-quarter of a mile, and then southwards for another 300 yards or so, before merging with the beaten path that connects Potlod with neighbouring villages. This will be referred to as the Central Lane and has been shown by a double broken line on the village map.

As we enter the village from the north-west (from the direction of the Fatehabad-Chandrawatiganj Railway Station) and proceed southwards on the Central Lane, we find to our left an old temple in black stone dedicated to Lord Siva. Nearby are several huge peepal trees and an old well. Adjacent to the Siva temple are small mud-houses of the Nath Jogi caste. To the right of the Lane are spacious, corrugated-iron roofed houses belonging to

land-owning Khati cultivators.

Further down the Lane, a narrow bylane goes westwards. On this bylane are located two houses belonging to the Nath Jogi caste, and a ward of about 25 houses belonging to Balai and Gujerati Chamar castes. At the end of this lane is located the shrine to goddess Kalka, and then it opens out into half a dozen khalas (barns or threshing grounds).

Further down the Central Lane, there are houses belonging to wealthy Khati and Rajput cultivators. Turning east-ward, we come to a couple of houses belonging to the Brahmin of the village. On the other side of the Lane are two houses of the village barbers. A narrow lane breaks off from the Central Lane at this stage, heading towards the village pond. On this bylane are situated about a dozen Rajput, Palliwal Bania, Purabi Thakur, and Khati houses.

After this, the Central Lane widens, till it reaches the village square. On one side of the square stands a temple dedicated to Lord Krishna; on other sides are several houses belonging to rich land-owning families of Purabi Thakur, and Khati castes. Almost in the middle of the village square stands a stone tablet with a crude and faded inscription, called 'cheera'. This is regarded by some as the foundation stone of the village.<sup>6)</sup>

A major bylane forks off the Lane at the square (shown on the map as Forking I). This leads to the garhi

(fortress) of the Rajput headman of the village (known as the village patel). The patel's house stands in its own compound at a height of about 20 feet from the lane-level, with crude stone stairs leading to the big gate of the compound. In the same compound are also located the dwellings of several other Rajputs, belonging to the patel's lineage. On the other side of this lane are houses of Khati cultivators.

A little farther down the Central Lane are situated the workshops-cum-houses of blacksmiths and carpenters, and on the left of the Lane, a small stone building housing the Jain temple. A few yards farther down the Lane is situated a spacious temple to Lord Rama (shown on the map as Rama Temple I).

Here, another major bylane breaks off to the south-west (shown on the map as Forking II). This side of the village is predominantly inhabited by the Khati castes interspersed with families belonging to the Dhobi, Khati Bhaat, and Darji castes. About 100 yards from the Central Lane, down the Forking II, stands a small temple to Lord Rama (shown on the map as Rama Temple II).

Attached to the Rama Temple I is a small dwelling house for the temple priest and a compound about 50 ft. square. On the open platform outside the temple is a small but prominent sthan (place, or seat) of Hanuman. On the other side of the temple compound is a small shed to

house the shrine of Bhawani Mata. Behind the Bhawani Mata's shrine are the houses of one lineage of the Malwi Kumhar caste.

Near the Rama Temple I compound, the Central Lane turns south. The first building on the left of the Lane is the spacious house of the ex-Jagirdar of Potlody, known as kachhari (or court). Opposite the kachhari, is one of the 4 village shops, kept by a member of the Jain community. (Of the other three shops, one is located on Forking I, just near the patel's house, and two in the Khati ward). Adjacent to the kachhari is the seat of a Muslim pir (saint) known as pirasthan.

Further down, on both sides of the Central Lane are situated houses of the Khati and Mali castes, the dwelling of the village drummer (Dholi), and the village liquor booth. About ten yards before the termination point of the Lane, a narrow bylane breaks off to the left leading to the Bhambi ward.

On the south side of the habitation area are houses of Mali cultivators, Muslims, two clusters of houses belonging to the Bargunda and Bagri castes, and houses of the Gujerati Kumhar caste.

At a little distance from the main habitation area, to the east of the village, is a row of Malwi Chamar houses, and a little further away, a cluster of temporary sheds belonging to the Desha Chamar caste. Behind the kachhari, but standing aloof is the small straw hut of the



village scavenger.

On the north-eastern side of the village, on the bank of the pond, is another small ward of the village habitation. In the middle of this ward stands a house in which is located the shrine of Sitala Mata (Smallpox Mother), and attached to the shrine is the dwelling house of her priest and oracle who belongs to the Malwi Balai caste. Two other Malwi Balai houses are situated a little away from the shrine.

This rather elaborated description of the ground plan of Potlod village is intended to bring out the somewhat crude but neat layout of the village habitation. The houses of the different castes are so distributed that the village servants live almost in the middle, and can be easily accessible to the entire village. Thus, the houses of the Brahmin priests, Vairagi Vaishnava and Gosain temple priests, Lohar, Kumhar, Darji, and Nai are situated in the heart of the village. Temple priests usually live in small dwellings attached to the temples at which they serve.

It also serves to bring out an aspect of the social structure of the people. I have already pointed out that all castes are divided in three broad divisions on the basis of their ritual purity. These divisions are: 'clean', 'unclean', and 'untouchable', and the social distance between these three divisions is reflected in the physical distance from one another at which they must live.

The 'unclean' and 'untouchable' castes are not allowed to associate with the 'clean' castes of the village. The former must not live in houses situated in the midst of the 'clean' caste houses; the neighbourhoods of 'unclean' or 'untouchable' castes are believed to contaminate the 'clean' castes. The result is that castes belonging to these two divisions, namely 'unclean' and 'untouchable', must live outside the main village habitation in separate wards.<sup>7)</sup>

We have seen that there are several such out-village wards in Potlod. There is a Balai ward on the north-western edge of the village. The Nath Jogi live in a small ward by themselves near the Siva temple. Another small Balai ward is by the side of the village pond. On the southern outskirts of the village residential area are located several wards of 'unclean' and 'untouchable' castes. The Bhambi live in <sup>a</sup>ward, in which also reside the single Teli family and two Muslim families. The Malwi Chamar, the Desha Chamar, the Bargunda, and the Bagri, all live in separate ward-like clusters of houses. The village Bhangi lives in a hut away from the main village habitation. The Chamar dwellings even face away from the village habitation: the sight of dead animals being skinned and the stench of tanning is unbearable to the 'clean' castes.



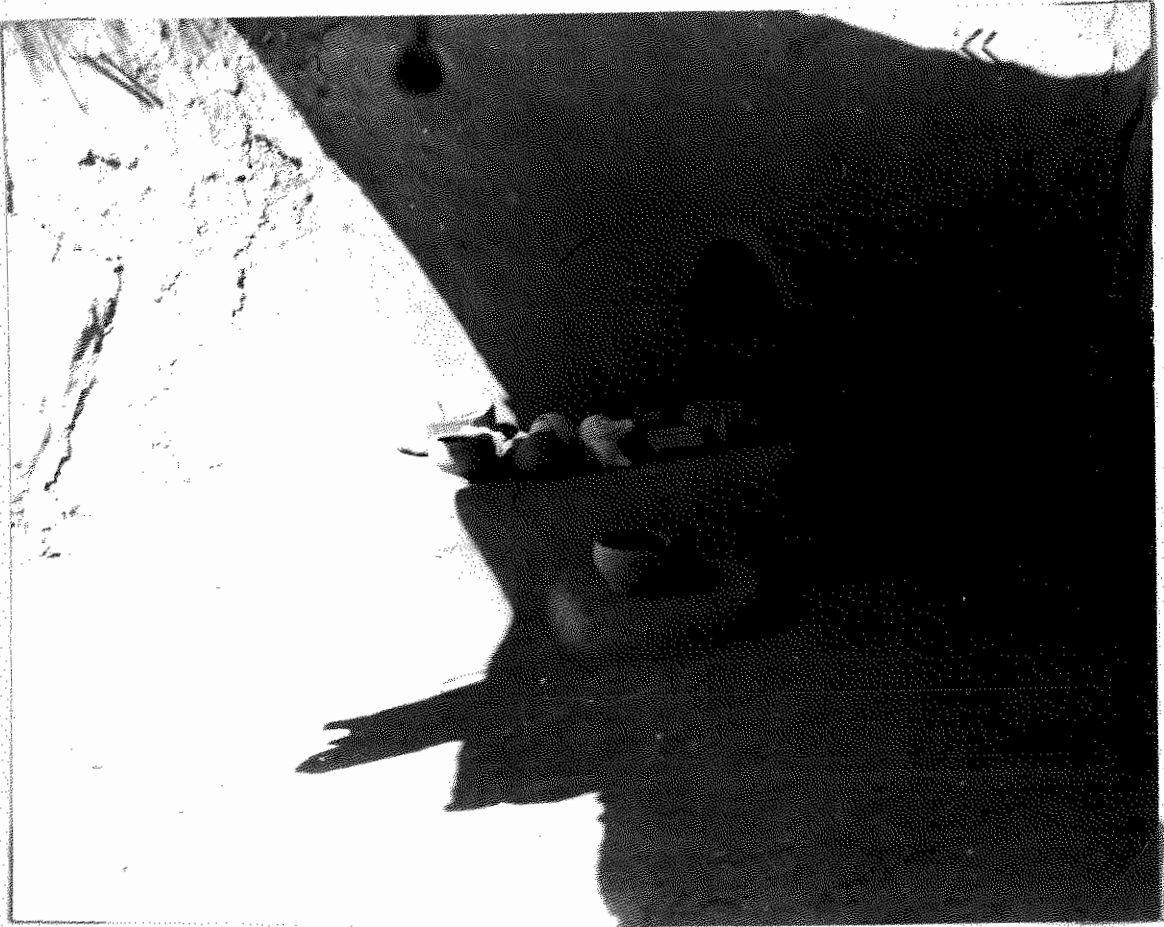
NAG MAHARAJ

These stone images stand on a raised platform in a field just by the village pond. Milk and coconuts are offered at this shrine.

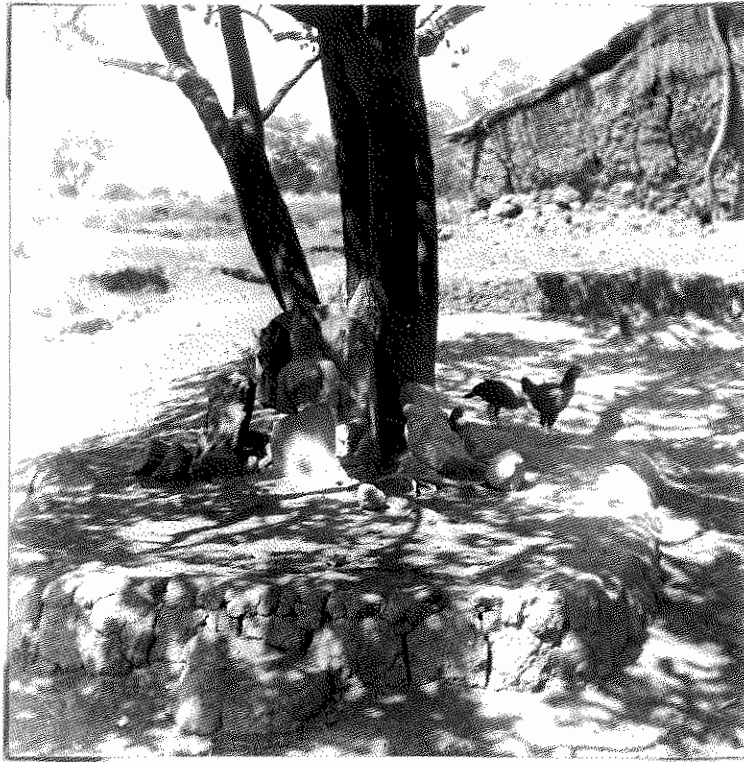
Temples and Shrines.

The distinction between a temple and a shrine is based on the same principle of ritual purity that separates the 'clean' castes from the 'unclean' and 'untouchable' castes. Temples are dedicated to the principal deities of all India Hinduism, such as Rama, Krishna, Shiva, Ganesha, Hanuman, and the like. The images of these deities must be appositely installed in a properly erected house, and worshipped everyday in the prescribed manner by a priest belonging to one of the 'clean' castes, usually a Brahmin or one of the temple priest castes. Nobody except the priest is allowed to touch the image, and the 'unclean' and 'untouchable' castes are prohibited from entering the temple premises by express sacred laws of Hinduism.

Shrines, on the other hand, refer to houses in which are lodged the images of the 'lesser' deities and local godlings, such as Sitala, Bhawani, Chamunda, Kalka, Bheru, Sati, Mari, Nag, and the like. The deity, in a shrine, is generally represented by a heap of stones, in contrast to the delicately carved images of the principal gods. The shrine itself is a small hut. There are usually no regular priests attached to it, nor is there any daily routine ceremonial in honour of the deity. However, the most important characteristic of the shrine, to distinguish it from the temple, is that it is open to, and



THE SHRINE OF RAM DEO JI IN THE BHAMBI WARD



THE CASTE DEITY OF THE BAGRI UNDER A NEEM TREE

approachable by all castes.

There are seven prominent shrines in Potlod village; six of them are located in wards inhabited by 'unclean' and 'untouchable' castes. Most of these deities are also associated with particular castes; a member of the caste serves as priest at the shrine of his caste deity, and the caste group observes a ritual cult of the deity. The shrine of Sitala Mata (Smallpox Mother), for instance, is located in the Balai ward by the village pond, a Balai serves as priest and oracle to the goddess, and every year in the month of Kuar, the Balai observe a nine-day festival in honour of Sitala. The shrine of Ram Deo Ji, a deity of the Bhambi caste, is situated in the Bhambi ward, and a man of the Bhambi caste serves as priest and minstrel at this shrine. The Desha Chamar have the shrine of their caste deity, Bhawani Mata, in a small hut situated in their ward; the deity is served by a Desha Chamar, who observe a seven-day festival of the goddess in the month of Chait, Kalka Mata's shrine stands on the westernmost end in the village habitation, just opposite the Balai Chamar ward. A Nath Jogi serves here as priest, and a Gujerati Chamar as oracle to the goddess. Mari Mata is regarded as the caste deity of the Malwi Chamar, and her small shrine is built under a tree immediately behind the Malwi Chamar row of houses outside the village. Another small shrine dedicated to the caste



THE BALAI DIVINER

He is the priest at the shrine of Sitala Mata  
where he holds his seance.



deity of the Bagri caste is situated in the cluster of Bagri houses, and a woman of the caste offers occasional oblations at the shrine; once a year, in the month of Kuar, the Bagri sacrifice a goat at the shrine, and believe that the caste deity looks after the welfare of the caste.

The only prominent shrine in Potlod village which is not located in an 'unclean' or 'untouchable' caste ward is the shrine of the village deities. This shrine stands on the southern side of the village, across the stream which runs by the habitation area. Its priest belongs to the Mali caste. Once every year, during the festival of Dasehra (in the month of Kuar), a goat is sacrificed to the village deities, and once every ten or twelve years a big fair is held at the site, attended by all the people of Potlod and neighbouring villages.

I do not wish to give the impression that the 'lesser' deities and local godlings are worshipped only by the castes whose respective caste deities they happen to be. In fact, all these deities are believed by the people of all castes to be associated with disease and death, which ravage the community unless the deities are propitiated with sacrifices and appeased with prayers. For this reason, their propitiation is an essential part of the domestic ritual cult of all castes, 'clean' castes included.

Water Supply.

There are several sources of water supply for Potlod village. The stream which borders Potlod on two sides supplies clean water for at least four months in the year (November - February) before it dries up. The village pond contains stagnant rain water, not suitable for drinking purposes, but used for bathing, laundering clothes and washing utensils. There are two old bavdis (big wells with steps leading down to the water level); one is about half a mile to the south-east of the village, and the other about the same distance to the north-east. These bavdis supply drinking water to the village people all the year round; their water is also used for bathing and washing, laundering clothes, and so on. A tube-well was constructed in 1939 by a Khati cultivator on his land outside the village habitation, for irrigating sugar cane and potato crops. Some of the villagers use its water for domestic purposes as well. Construction of two wells within the village habitation was undertaken a few years ago by the Village Council, but, work on them was given up since neither yielded any substantial supply of drinking water. These are falling into disrepairs and water from these is used only by a few for purposes of bathing or washing utensils and garments.

The present situation is that most of the village people for most of the year use water of the two

bavdis for domestic and drinking purposes. Water from these bavdis is drawn and used by all the castes of the village, including the 'unclean' and 'untouchable' castes. This is a somewhat unusual situation in an otherwise orthodox village community in which traditional social relations have not been violently disturbed by the forces of a changing age.<sup>8)</sup>

#### Village Sanitation.

Formally, village sanitation is the responsibility of the Bhangi. He is expected to sweep the lanes clean every morning. For this he enjoys the privilege of begging for food every morning and evening from all 'clean' and 'unclean' caste houses in the village. From each house, he usually gets one or two loaves of bread and some vegetable or pulse curry. Every morning, the housewives sweep and clean their houses and dump the refuse in the lane in front of their respective houses, and this is collected by the Bhangi and burnt outside the village habitation.

To me, it appears, however, that sanitation and personal hygiene in the sense in which we understand these, are not known to the people of Potlod. There are no latrines in the village and no proper arrangements for the disposal of excreta, animal dung or domestic refuse. Usually people go to the fields immediately outside the

habitation area to ease themselves. Children usually excrete in the lanes and sometimes, even elders do this if no one is looking. Animal dung and refuse is dumped around houses and is allowed to pollute the atmosphere.

Nor are there any bathing places in the village - private or communal. People bathe and wash in the village pond or in the stream or on the steps of the baydis. It is not that it is not possible for village people to have the 'luxury' of private latrines or bathrooms in their houses. More than half the houses in the village are big enough to accommodate a small latrine or bathroom and it is certainly possible for houses and lanes to have drains; but it is not the custom in the village to have these; it is not a part of the traditional house plan in the village.

Similarly little care is given to personal hygiene. Soap is not widely used - either for bathing, washing or for cleaning garments. No doubt poverty is an important factor, but here again, I consider that there is more to it than appears on the surface. I think that when the average villager bathes or washes or washes his garments, he does not do so in order to clean his person or clothes. Most people just stand and pour a bucketful of water on their heads or dip their clothes in the water and spread them to dry. I think the main idea behind these activities is 'to cleanse' rather than 'to clean', i.e., the ritual aspect is much more important than the

purely hygienic one. The two need not go together: garments boiled, cleaned, washed and ironed by the Dhobi are considered to be 'impure' and not suitable for being donned on ritual ceremonials since the Dhobi is of an 'unclean' caste and consequently his touch pollutes the clothes. Dirty clothes, however, simply dipped and dried are used on these occasions. Similarly, before he observes a rite, a man will bathe, in a most perfunctory fashion, rather than wash himself clean in a hygienic way. The result is that most houses and people are not clean from a sanitary point of view and being unclean and unhygienic is not considered to be a disqualification so far as social status is concerned; and since social status is all that really matters, the average villager is not worried about sanitation and hygiene.

#### The Dwelling Houses.

Three types of dwelling houses are considered to be indigenous to the village. These are: firstly, the spacious houses of the wealthy land-owners, secondly, the average sized houses of the cultivators, and lastly, the small huts of the poor menials. All these are built from material available in the village or its neighbourhood, and by village workmen. There is a fourth type of house, the idea of which has obviously been imported from neighbouring cities; this is the house with walls made of baked

bricks and plastered with cement, and roofed with corrugated iron sheets. The materials for the construction of such houses, known as 'pacca building', have to be imported from the cities, and the houses are constructed by workmen from the towns. Such houses are becoming very popular, and are regarded by the village folk as a symbol of the secular status and wealth of their owners.

Of the three traditional types of houses, the first two are built around a timber framework erected by the village carpenter. The walls of the house, in both types, are made of dried bricks and coated with mud and clay. The first type of house is roofed with tiles made by the village potter, and is popularly known as kelu, or kavelu (or the tile-roofed house). Houses of the second type are roofed with straw and reeds and strengthened with a kind of sticky yellow clay found in the neighbourhood of the village: this house-type is known as ora.

The third type of house is a typical poor man's dwelling made easily from cheap easily available materials. The walls are made of mud, and the house is roofed with stalks and leaves of the palm tree and is given a thin coating of straw and clay. Such houses have to be reconstructed or at least greatly repaired each year after the rainy season. These are known as tapra, or tapri.

Ground Plan of Dwelling Houses.

It is rather difficult to arrive at a general, or even fairly general, ground plan typical of all houses in Potlod village. The kelu type of house usually stands in its own compound; it has several rooms, a separate kitchen, a granary, a store room, and separate living apartments for men and women, and usually a separate outhouse for cattle. The ora has usually two apartments, one for cooking and eating, and the other for sleeping and storing household affairs. Commonly, such a house has an outer verandah with steps leading down to the village lane. In most houses of this class, there usually is a shed for cattle. The tapra most often consists of a single apartment, which is living room, kitchen, store house, and cattle shed all combined in one. The cooking hearth is on one side in the room; the family's grain is stored in earthen jars; there is very little or no furniture; the family members sleep on floor mats in the room, or outside in the village lane.

None of the dwelling houses in Potlod has a latrine and only a few have some crude type of bathroom; for easing themselves, people go out to the fields; they bathe at the stream, pond, or bavdis.

Territorial Unity of the Village.

The lay out of the village makes its physical



unity immediately obvious. Houses cluster together forming a somewhat compact habitation area. Village lanes are lined by the walls of adjoining houses or house compounds and unite the various parts of the village. The lanes open out into each other, so that the wider one is recognizably the main artery (called the Central Lane), connecting Potlod with neighbouring villages. The village is generally entered by way of this or one of the other lanes; they lead to a central open area, known as the village square, where most of the shops and temples are situated, and where important meetings of the village community are held.

Potlod village is situated on a mound, and is girdled on two sides by a stream. The nearest villages -- Chandrawatiganj to its north-west, and Khera to the east -- lie at a distance of at least two miles. These and other neighbouring villages are separated from Potlod village by well defined and known field boundaries. There is no bridge or culvert on the stream, and there are no all-weather roads linking Potlod with the outside world. The result is that during the rainy season, when streams swell and mud paths become muddy pools, inter-village communications are broken and the isolation of the village is complete for nearly three months.



- 1) The fertility of the soil around Potlod village may account, to some extent, for the smaller size of household groups. In an infertile region, the lesser productivity of land may prevent family and land partitioning, since the produce from a small tract of land would not be sufficient to maintain a household group. On the other hand, in a fertile region, the productivity of the soil may not hinder fragmentation of land holdings, since a small plot of land is sufficient to maintain a family.

Again, with the close proximity of the industrial town of Indore, one might have expected large scale city ward emigration of village population. Migration statistics from Potlod, however, do not show any such tendency. Perhaps this is due to the prosperity of the average cultivator, who is reluctant to leave his land and village.

- 2) Bigha is the commonly used land measure in Malwa. One Malwi bigha is equal to approximately three-fifths of a standard acre.
- 3) Not all the land is uniform from the point of view of revenue levy. According to feudal custom, 175 bighas of cultivable land was granted to places of worship in the village and to the estate servants (like the oil-presser, barber, blacksmith, drummer, potter). This was known as inam land, and no rent or revenue was levied on it. After the abolition of Jagirdari and Zamindari in the state of Madhya Bharat, in the year 1958, the system of granting inam lands was abolished, and the inam lands were converted into rent paying land. Grants to religious institutions have, however, been excepted. Thus, in Potlod, the only rent free land at present is that granted to temples, shrines, and a Muslim saint's grave (a total of 63½ bighas). These figures are based on the land records kept by the village patwari.
- 4) Jagirdari & Zamindari: System under which private estates are owned by feudal lords and big land owners. Such grants were made by the ruler to his kinsfolk and principal nobles who were then regarded as the hereditary owners of their estates.

Under the Zamindari system, the land owner had the right to collect revenue on his estate land from the tenant farmers; part of the land revenue he was required to deposit in the state treasury. In addition, he was virtually free to levy occasional taxes on his tenantry, such as 'marriage tax', 'tax for the purchase of animals', and forced gifts on occasions of festivals.

The Jagirdar (that is, the estate owner under the Jagirdari system) had much wider rights over his estate and tenantry. He had the right to collect revenue, but he did not have to deposit a part of it in the state treasury; the Jagirdar also had magisterial powers in his estate, and he could decide all civil and criminal cases (short only of murder cases which were dealt by the ruler himself). The Jagirdar kept a small army of servants and retainers, quite often trained and armed, and was expected to serve the ruler in times of the state's needs.

- 5) An explanation, I believe is needed here to show why I have excluded the Jains from the main discussion of this thesis. The history of Jainism shows that the Jain movement was born about twenty-five centuries ago, and its leader was a Kshatriya prince called Mahavir. Prince Mahavir, like Prince Gautama who later became the Buddha, renounced the worldly life and Hinduism, in order to become a jinandriya (from the skr. words 'jin', 'to conquer', and 'indriya', i.e., 'physical senses', the compound means, 'one who has conquered his physical senses'), and his followers were known as Jain. Thus, Jainism, like Buddhism, is distinct from orthodox or classical Hinduism.

The present day Jains live as a community by themselves. They are not divided into any caste like groups, nor do they regard themselves as just a caste among the large number of Hindu castes. They have their own priests and chaplains, and their own way of living and worshipping; they have their own gods and temples, and are regarded by themselves as well as others as distinct from caste Hindus.

- 6) The Rajputs of Potlod have a different story about the village - 'cheera'. The following story was

told to me by the Rajput patel of Potlod:

"One of our great-great grand-fathers called Bhopasingh was a powerful and widely respected man. He was regarded as their leader by Rajputs of twelve neighbouring villages. On the occasion of a caste feast in a somewhat distant village Bhopasingh was insulted by another Rajput, a local chief with a big retinue. Bhopasingh left the feast without dining and with a vow to be-head this local chief who had been courageous enough to insult him. With a selected band of followers, he waited for the local chief's party. There was a grim fight, but Bhopasingh kept his vow and carried off the decapitated head of his foe. This was ceremoniously buried in the heart of the village, and a stone tablet with an inscription was erected at the spot to commemorate this heroic deed".

- 7) According to Ghurye, the 'unclean' and 'untouchable' castes were living outside the village even in the days of Manu, by explicit orders of the sacred and secular authorities.

Dr. Ambedkar, a prominent leader of the 'untouchable' castes in India, has pointed out in his book Untouchables that these people were made to live outside the main habitation areas in villages because they were 'broken men', and not because of any ritual notions. Dr. Ambedkar has based his argument on a historical study into the origin of untouchability in India (see Ambedkar: The Untouchables).

Most writers on caste in India, however, have not accepted Dr. Ambedkar's thesis in this respect (cf. Hutton, 1951, Appendix A.). On the basis of intensive enquiries among the people of Potlod village, it appears to me that the 'unclean' and 'untouchable' castes are made to live outside the village habitation, not because they are thought to belong to a different racial or communal stock (as 'broken men' surely would) but because of their ritual impurity perpetuated by the pursuit of unclean and polluting callings.

- 8) Normally, 'unclean' and 'untouchable' castes are not allowed to draw water from the village wells from

which 'clean' castes draw water. If there is a stream near the village, the former have to use it at a lower point (see Hutton, 1951, Appendix A; also Mukerjee, 1951, pp. 7, 10).

PART TWO

SOCIAL STRUCTURE OF THE VILLAGE

## CHAPTER III.

### KIN GROUPS & VILLAGE COMMUNITY.

#### The Family in Potlod.

The smallest unit of the village community is the household, or domestic family (known as ghar or kutumb). It is a residential, or territorial group, as only those persons who live in the same house are treated as members of the group; it is also a commensal unit, since all members of the household family partake of common meals cooked at the same family hearth. The household family is also the smallest economic group in the community; its members work together at the family occupation, cultivating in their fields or working in their workshops; even where they work separately as labourers for fixed wages, household members pool their earnings and have a common family budget and expenditure. Ritually too, the household is a unit, and each household group observes many of its own domestic rituals by itself. The members of a household group are always intimately related by ties of kinship and affinity.<sup>1)</sup> The household group is usually a virilocal nuclear family or a patrilocally extended family. All these criteria --

common residence, domestic economy, commensality, ritual and kin affiliation enter into the definition of the household, or domestic family as it exists in Potlod.

The total number of households in Potlod is 212. Of these 10 are single-person households and 202 household families in the village. These range in size from two persons (22 cases) to seventeen persons (1 case). The numerical composition of the households of Potlod village is shown in the following table.





155 of the 212 households, that is, approximately 73% of the sample, fall within the range of from three to seven persons per household. The mode is five persons (37 cases), and the arithmetical mean 5.2 persons per household. The table shows a considerable range in size of households. This variation in size shows that the household includes family groups at several different stages of development — from households consisting of a single married couple (10 cases), to households composed of three consecutive generations (22 cases) and four generations (2 cases). In the sample are thus included, besides elementary families and extended families, incomplete families (married couples), broken families (widowed parent and children), elementary families with an additional member who is a kin relative, and families of siblings.

In Table 3, the 202 household groups (212 less 10 monad households) have been classified according to the number of generations they contain, and for each category the main type or types of genealogical composition has been shown.

TABLE 3.

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THE GENEALOGICAL COMPOSITION OF THE HOUSEHOLDS IN POTLOD  
(MALWA).

(May, 1955).

Number of genera- tions in the house- -hold.	Fre- quency.	Approxi- mate per- centage.	Main type or types of genealogical composition.
One	14	6.9%	Married couples, without children (10 cases).
Two	110	54.5%	i) Parents with children (78 cases); ii) Widow or widower and children (19 cases).
Three	76	37.6%	i) Grandparents, child and spouse or children and spouses, and grand- children (22 cases); ii) Grandparent, child and spouse or children and spouses, and grand- children (49 cases).
Four	2	1 %	Great-grand parent, child and spouse, grand-children and spouses, and great- grand children (2 cases).
	202	100.0%	

The Joint Family.

The social ideal of a household family in Potlod village community is that of a patrilineal patrilocal extended family, or kutumb, consisting of at least three generations of agnatic male kin, their spouses and children. Perpetuation of the patriline is considered to be the sacred duty of every male member of the kutumb.<sup>2)</sup> Towards this end, he is expected to marry and beget a male child, since it is only through a son that the patriline is continued and ancestors get their offerings. From this point of view, a sonless family is believed to be ritually incomplete, and a couple who are without male offspring try to adopt a heir who then becomes eligible to perform the ritual duties of a born son. If they have a daughter, she may be married to a man who comes and lives with his affines. Such a man is called gharjamai (daughter's husband who lives with his affines). The son born of such a union is adopted by the mother's father, and the former then performs the death rites and makes the annual ancestral offerings in the name of his mother's parents. Such a person usually inherits property from his mother's father. For a childless couple, the only way is to adopt a male heir, chosen usually from amongst the near agnatic kin of the man (or alternatively his sister's son), who then performs the ritual duties of a born son, inherits

the dead man's property and continues the patriline.

Daughters of the family are married out at an early age, usually before the onset of menstruation and go to live with the household families of their husbands soon after attaining puberty. As a rule, they do not possess any rights over the property of their paternal family, save by an express will. According to Hindu ritual concepts, a girl becomes the property and member of her husband's family and lineage, to which she is transferred at marriage. Her interest in her natal family is at best secondary while her marriage continues. Such rights are vested in the male members of the kutumb, and held in trust by the eldest of them, who is known as the karta dharta (one who does the work and is responsible) of the family. In the absence of any adult male in the household, such rights may be temporarily exercised by the eldest female member of the kutumb.

Tradition prescribes that the kutumb should maintain the widows and orphans of its male members, and provision is also made for the support of widowed, deserted, or divorced daughters of the family and their children. The kutumb family is thus, traditionally, of considerable size. At any one time, persons belonging to three or even four generations might be found living together. Thus a married man might go on living with his parents and

and grandparents and their collaterals, and fission would normally occur only among third cousins, that is, descendents of a common father's father's father. (For descriptions of typical joint families, see: Mukerjee, 1926, pp.33-34; Mandelbaum, in Anshen, 1949, pp.93 - 95)

The family situation observed in Potlod village (in 1955-56) is very different from the social ideal described above. Figures reveal that more than 60% of the household groups are composed of elementary families, consisting of parents and their unmarried children, including incomplete families ((as defined in Outline of Cultural Materials, (59) Family; p. 86)), and broken families, that is, consisting of a widow or widower and his or her unmarried children.

Separation from parents is still considered to be improper, and a normal village man is expected to continue to live in his extended family, during the lifetime of his parents, at least of the father, sometimes in spite of strong pressure from his wife and other domestic quarrels and provocations.

In Potlod, there are 21 cases of parents living together with their married sons, 4 cases of widowed fathers living with their married sons, 38 cases of widow mothers living in the same household with their married sons. On the other hand only 3 cases are found where married sons are living separately from their parents or

father, and 5 cases of married sons living apart from their widow mothers.

After the father's death, the family lands, property, and house are normally partitioned among the male siblings. It is then for them to elect to continue living together as a joint family, or to live separately in elementary families. The general tendency is for the latter alternative, and in only 5% of the 202 households in Potlode, were married siblings found living together as a household group.

The segment of a household family which breaks off from the parent body starts as an independent unit, quite often as a household consisting of only husband and wife. It gradually expands as children are born to the couple. When sons grow up, are married, and continue to live with their wives in the paternal household, it once again becomes an extended family. Thus continues the process of expansion and fission in the household family.

#### Kula.

An important social group based on the principle of consanguineal kinship is the kula or bansa (from Sanskrit 'yansha'). The bansa is a type of patrilineage which comprises of the descendents of a single named ancestor in a continuous male line.

Females are not recognized as full members in the Malwi bansa or kula. Before her marriage, a girl is considered to be a member of her father's kula. On her marriage she is formally transferred to her husband's kula and integrated as a member of her husband's kula by means of a ceremony held a few days after her arrival at her husband's house. She is taken out in a procession to the village well where she draws up a pitcher of water and this water is ceremonially offered to the household deities by the bride. Male elders of her husband's kula sip a little of this water and give her gifts. This ceremony marks her acceptance in her husband's lineage. She continues to be a member of her husband's kula till her death or divorce. If she dies as a member of her husband's kula, a woman is given honours and mourned due to a full member of the kula. If a divorce takes place, her association with her husband's kula is broken and she is restored, in this respect, to her pre-marital position.

An important domestic deity in Potlod is the mai mata, also known as kula deota or 'deity of the kula'. On many important domestic ceremonial occasions, such as a wedding, first hair cropping, or a sacred thread ceremony, the kula deota must be worshipped. On all occasions when the kula deota is worshipped at the annual worship of the Devi (mother goddess) in the month of kuar, and at the worship of the ancestors on occasions of weddings in

the house, participation is restricted to the male members of the kula, their wives and unmarried daughters.

In Potlod, the bansa or kula relatives are sometimes alluded to as the 'shaving relatives' (mundian sambandhi). This refers to an important funerary custom, prevalent in some form among Hindus all over India. The death of an adult male member of the bansa is mourned by the whole bansa. Whether they live together or not, members of the bansa observe death pollution for a fixed number of days, usually ten or thirteen; during this period, they refrain from celebrating any festivals or feasts, and are not expected to eat good food or wear clean garments. To show respect and affection to the dead and demonstrate their consanguineal kinship, all male members of the bansa or kula have their head hair shaved on the third day of the funeral. Similar ceremonies are observed at the death of a wife of a male member, who, for this purpose, is treated as though a full member of the bansa. Members of a married woman's natal family demonstrate their kin relationship with her by organizing what is locally known as the gorni feast on the third day of her death. To this feast, only married daughters of the family are invited.

There are no fixed rules regarding the generational depth of the bansa. I was told that it largely



depended upon the memory of the parties concerned. On the average, relatives within five to six generations from living persons are considered as members of the same bansa, or 'shaving relatives'.

#### Marriage.

One of the most important events for a family is the marriage of one of its members. Its structural importance to the family lies in the fact that a marriage is "essentially a rearrangement of the family social structure" (Radcliffe-Brown, 1950, p. 43). Marriage is one of the most important processes whereby families lose or gain a member. The Hindu view of marriage is that it is "in essence a ritual and a formality, of course, very important, through which an individual has to go, to be able to start his or her life in the Grihasthagrama, that is, the householder's life" (Prabhu, 1954, p. 150).

Among the Hindus, marriage is considered to be one of the samskara; the samskara are religious rites performed at different stages in life and "are conceived to impart purification, fitness or excellence to the individual concerned" (Kapadia, 1959, p. 141). It is, therefore, a social and religious duty which all members of the society ought to perform. Lord Manu is popularly quoted as having said that "to be mothers were women

created, and to be fathers men; therefore, the Vedas ordain that dharma must be practised by man together with his wife" (Manu, ix, 96). Then again, perpetuation of the patriline is believed to be the sacred duty of every Hindu. Towards this end, he must marry and beget a son.<sup>3)</sup>

It is a widely held belief among Hindus that one's progeny are considerably connected with and instrumental to happiness both in this world as well as hereafter. Manu wrote: "He only is a perfect man, who consists of his wife, himself and his offspring", and an early commentator on the Sacred Book of Manu is quoted as having written: "That man who does not win a wife is really half, and he is not the full man as long as he does not beget an offspring" (see Prabhu, *ibid.*, pp.151-152).

The birth of a son, in particular, is conceived of as contributing to helping the father to execute his obligations which are due to dead ancestors. By performing the prescribed yearly ceremonies in the name of dead ancestors, a person is believed to fulfil the obligations due to the dead (pitririna). It is one of the three main socio-religious obligations, each of which every Hindu considers himself duty bound to fulfil, the other two being the obligations to one's teacher (rishirina) and to the gods (devarina). Thus, elderly bachelors are rare in the community, and elderly spinisters practically unknown.

So great is the importance attached to marriage in Hindu social practices that elaborate customs and ceremonies are prescribed by the scriptures and these are followed in the spirit and the letter. In villages, particularly, people take great care not to violate the scriptural rules and customs regarding marriage.

#### Age at Marriage.

Towards this end, it is held that marriage should take place early in life. Not very long ago, infant marriage was practised practically all over India. In the case of girls, the rule is specific and explicit: they must be married before they attain menarche. Indeed, girls were usually married before reaching six or seven years of age. I was told by Pandit Ramanand Dube of Potlodi that according to Sastras, a girl who continues to stay in her father's home more than three years after attaining menarche, is called a sudra, that is, a ritually low type, and the father or guardian of such a girl who is not careful enough to give her in marriage in proper time, incurs the sin of abortion (killing the foetus) every time the girl menstruates (see Manu, ix, 93). Cases have been known where persons who did not marry their daughters before menarche have been penalized or even excommunicated from their castes.

The orthodox attitude in this respect is

represented in a popular saying that when she is eight years old, a girl is like a gauri (that is, a maiden eligible for marriage and cohabitation), while by the time she is ten, she is a rohini (that is, fit for motherhood), and those who hold a girl of ten years back from motherhood suffer in the hells.

The situation has somewhat changed during the last couple of decades or so, so that even in orthodox villages like Potlod, one comes across a milder attitude toward unmarried but matured girls and their families. From Potlod, I collected 75 case histories of girls married during the years 1954-56. Of these girls, as many as 17 were married after menache and nine said they were not sure if they had had their periods before their marriage or started immediately after. Moreover, out of 56 unmarried girls in the village of five years and above (on 1st May, 1955), nine were past the menache and had been having their periods for some time. Of these nine, one was a Brahmin, three Rajputs, and five Khatis. There was not a single unmarried girl from any of the artisan, Sudra or Untouchable castes who had passed the age of menache. The general attitude of the village people towards these matured but unmarried girls is one of mild ridicule and sympathy rather than that of harsh ostracism.

### Marriage Regulations.

The selection of a marriage partner among the Hindus is subject to a number of rules which specify whom one may, or may not, marry. These rules are not uniform all over India, nor are they always the same even for all castes in a confined region. Each caste has its own minor peculiarities which distinguish it from others.

Broadly speaking, marriage regulations may be classified under the two heads, endogamy and exogamy. The first defines an outer circle outside which a person may not marry. The second draws an inner circle inside which marital relations are prohibited.

### Endogamy.

The most important rule governing Hindu marriage is endogamy or the rule of marriage inside the group. According to traditional belief, each caste is regarded as a small world, within which certain important social rules apply. It has been variously held that the rule of endogamy expresses a desire to maintain racial purity or occupational monopoly or economic privileges or group solidarity of a caste. One thing that is certain is that the rule of endogamy is considered to be ritually

sanctioned and is observed with great stringency. I was informed in Potlod, and this is substantiated from my personal knowledge of cases from other parts of the country, that violation of this all-important marriage-rule results in the excommunication from their caste of the parties concerned. Not a single case of inter-caste marriage was reported in Potlod and the people were sure no transgression of the sacred rule had taken place within living memory.

#### Exogamy.

Much more complicated are the rules of exogamy. These prohibit a person from marrying with certain of his caste members related to him by bonds of kinship — real or fictitious. The following types of relatives are prohibited from inter-marrying: (i) sagotra relations, that is, those who belong to the same gotra, and (ii) sapinda relations. Again, for purposes of selection of spouses, the village is treated as an exogamous unit.

#### The Principle of sagotra exogamy.

Most castes of Potlod village are subdivided into exogamous sections called gotra or got. The word gotra means 'cowshed' in Sanskrit and is believed by Sanskrit scholars to denote house or clan attached to particular Vedic rishi (sage) after whom the gotra took

its name (Prabhu, 1954, p. 157).

Locally, the word gotra or got is taken to mean the exogamous subdivision of a caste. It is considered to be immaterial whether the gotra or got name is after one of the ancient sages, or is totemic or territorial in character. Most of the gotra in the Khati caste, for example, are named after some plant, animal or natural object, such as, Ghuraodia - 'rubbish heap', Amlaodia - 'the myrobalan fruit', Bilwaliya - 'the Bel tree' - (Aegle marmelos), Jalodiya - 'water', Bhainsaniya - 'buffalo', Tumraodia - 'pumpkin', Khajuria - 'hedgehog'.

Some of the 'unclean' castes of the village have gotra named after some famous Rajput clan or one of the Brahmin castes. The names Chohan, Rathor, Parmar, Sisodiya, Bhati, Jaday, all names of famous Rajput clans, are frequently found associated with different caste groups, some of them 'clean', such as Lohars, Kumhars, Nai, and others 'unclean', such as, Nath Jogi, Balais, Bhambi, Chamars. The Malwi Balai have a got called Bahmniya.

There are several possible explanations for the existence of such gotra names among these castes. As Blunt has pointed out, it is possible that some Brahmin or Rajput in the past might have taken to the trades of the Nai, Kumhar, Balai, Bhambi, or Chamar, and founded sections in these castes. This view is shared by Father



Fuchs who has given numerous instances, based on folk traditions, of Rajput or Brahmin joining the Balahi (or Balai) caste, and founding gotra after them (1950, p.30). Another explanation for the occurrence of such names in 'unclean' castes is that the sections concerned took the names in compliment to their teacher or master to whom they were attached for generations. Stevenson has pointed out that sections of 'unclean' castes may change their gotra names, in favour of names borrowed from 'clean' castes, as a step towards attaining higher ritual status (1954, pp.61-62). Among the castes under discussion, this appears to be a remote possibility in as much as the gotra sections with Rajput or Brahmin names are in no other way socially different from the other sections of their respective castes.

The gotra is essentially a patrilineal category. It consists of persons believed to be descended from a common mythical ancestor. Neither the name of the gotra progenitor nor the precise periods at which he lived are known, nor is it possible for all gotra members to trace definite genealogical links among themselves. In Potlud, the gotra relationship serves little purpose other than the regulation of marriage relations. The gotra name is used as a patronymic suffix, and marriage between persons bearing the same gotra name is prohibited. It must be pointed out that the occurrence of common gotra names in



different castes does not in any way bind such groups; gotra is essentially caste linked.

The gotra is an exogamous unit. Marital relations within the gotra are considered to be sinful and Dharmasastras have prescribed elaborate penances for one who violates the rule of gotra exogamy (Kapadia, 1959, pp. 127-128). Among the people of Potlod in general, I did not find any awareness regarding such penances; only the Srigaur Brahmin who are fairly well versed in the Sanskrit scriptural lore know about these. For the rest, it is just a marriage rule which is not normally violated, and should not be transgressed. But the people are not aware that there are any definite sanctions against the transgression of the rule of gotra exogamy. No cases of sagotra marital relations are known to the people of Potlod.

#### The Principle of sapinda exogamy.

The principle of gotra regulates marriage between agnatic kin, even though the gotra kinship is hypothetical, being based upon a mythical ancestor and descent from him of the surviving members of the gotra. There are also rules which prohibit marriage between cognatic relations. Every caste has its table of prohibited kin which includes, in addition to the agnates, certain cognatic relations. Among the Brahmins, these are called the rules

of sapinda.

The Sanskrit word pinda means the 'funeral cakes offered to the manes'. According to this definition, all those persons entitled to offer pinda to a group of ancestors are sapinda relations, and marriage among these and their immediately direct descendents is prohibited by Hindu tradition and custom. By another definition of the word pinda, as 'physical particle of the body', sapinda means persons related through inheriting particles of the same body, that of the common ancestor. Both these definitions, however, point to a group of persons, closely related by bonds of kinship, among whom marriage is prohibited. These prohibited relations extend to a certain number of degrees in one's paternal kin, and to a lesser number of degrees in the maternal kin.

According to these rules, persons who are sapinda of each other cannot intermarry. The Brahminical rules of sapinda exogamy lay down that persons upto the sixth generation on the father's side and upto four generations on the mother's side shall be treated as sapinda and prohibited from marrying each other. "Begin from the bride or bridegroom, and count, exclusive of both, six or four degrees upwards, according as their relationship with the common ancestor is through the father or mother, respectively, and if the common ancestor is not reached within those figures on both sides, they are not sapinda."

(Ramkrishna, 1911, Vol. 1, pp. 27-28). Such is the importance attached to the sapinda rules, that they have been retained as a condition of a valid marriage in the Hindu Marriage Act of 1955. For purposes of this Act persons related within five generations of the father's side and three generations on the mother's are treated as sapindas and marriage between two persons so related is void, unless permitted by local custom.

In Potlodi, only the 'clean' castes are familiar with the principle of sapinda exogamy and observe it as such. The Sudra and Untouchable castes are not familiar with the term sapinda or the principle of sapinda exogamy. Among them ('unclean' and 'untouchable' castes), the rule is to avoid i) persons belonging to one's own got, ii) persons belonging to one's mother's brother's got, iii) persons belonging to one's father's sister's kula, and iv) persons belonging to one's mother's sister's kula. A general rule is to avoid giving a daughter in marriage to a lineage from which a bride has previously been accepted, and conversely, to avoid taking a bride from a lineage to which a daughter has previously been given.

#### Village Exogamy.

The rule of village exogamy is not imperative like the rule of caste endogamy or gotra exogamy, for

example, but a very large section of the village prefers to have its affinal relations outside the village.

There are, in all, four cases of in-village marriage in Potlod — two in the Khati caste, and two among the Mali.

Most of the caste groups in Potlod, however, find it wrong on principle, as also impracticable due to the small size of the biradari (that is, the locally resident section of the caste). Quite often the latter is also a kin group, and intra-kin group marital relations are considered to be incestuous.

By tradition, all the people of the village belonging to the same generation or age grade treat each other as brothers and sisters, and such a fictitious kin relationship is demonstrated on occasions of certain festivals, such as Rakhi in the month of Sawan and the Ram nam ritual observed in the month of Jeth. At the Ram nam ritual, the young wives in the village contract a ritual brother relationship with the young men of the village. A small group of men and women come together to hear the sacred mantra (incantation) from one of the village temple priests; these men and women are then known as guru bhai or guru ben (brothers and sisters by virtue of their being the pupils of the same spiritual teacher). The ritual of Rakhi strengthens the brother-sister relationship when

village girls tie a sacred coloured thread on the wrists of the village boys. These ritual bound relations then treat each other as near kindred.

There is another factor considered by the people as responsible for the stress on village exogamy. "If I take a wife from the same village, her affiliation to my household and lineage is never satisfactory, since her attachment to her natal kin is a barrier which a woman can seldom overcome". Such a feeling was expressed by a large number of persons belonging to different castes and age groups, and marriage in the same village is not considered to be desirable by most of the people.

#### Divorce and Remarriage.

A commonly held view is that Hindu marriage is a life-long union of the couple, indissoluble under any circumstances. We are told that a man is free to marry as many wives as he pleases but that a Hindu woman is allowed to marry once and only once in her life time, and that she must serve her husband as if he were a god even though he be a drunkard, debauch, criminal or an impotent throughout his life time (cf. Dubois, 1897, pp. 210-211; O'malley, 1934, pp. 146-148; Crooke, 1906, pp. 316-317.) Such a view was usually supported by Hindu Law and decisions of British Indian law courts (cf. Roy, 1911, pp. 292-293.)

That this is not exactly so will be clear from a careful analysis of the scriptures or of customs prevalent in contemporary society in the community under study. Divorce or dissolution of marriage is not favoured by the Dharmasastras, but it is not absolutely prohibited. These sacred writings consider marriage to be a more or less permanent relationship between the husband and the wife, and only in highly exceptional cases is a divorce or dissolution of marriage permitted by Hindu scriptural rules.<sup>4)</sup>

Ethnographic data on the subject give us a picture which is somewhat different from the conventionally held one. There are a very large number of castes in all parts of India which permit the dissolution of marriage on certain grounds and the remarriage of widows and divorced women as a customary practice. Mandelbaum tells us that as late as 1891 the census authorities in Madras estimated that the marriage of widows was permitted and practised by about sixty percent of the population of that province (op. cit., p. 104). For the Central Provinces (now called 'Madhya Pradesh'), Russel and Hiralal have given a long list of castes which permitted their women folk to divorce their husbands even on very minor pretexts, and in which remarriage of women was a regular feature sanctioned by the customary law of the people.

My data from Potlod show that in all the castes represented in this village, except the Srigaur Brahmin and the Palliwal Bania, dissolution of marriage is permitted and no barrier is placed on the remarriage of the women. In Central Malwa, there is a large number of castes popularly known as 'natra' castes'. Natra is the local form of secondary marriage for women (Roy, 1911, pp. 291-293), and there is a good deal of difference in the social and ceremonial aspects of biyah or lagan (first marriage) and natra. Whereas biyah is the approved ceremonial form of marriage, natra is simply a conventional device for the remarriage of divorced women and widows. But even natra has its ritual idiom; a Brahmin priest officiates at the brief natra ceremony and thus gives religious approval to the otherwise simple social ceremony. It is interesting to note that in Malwa, the Rajput are a natra caste.

Generally it is found that a woman seeks the dissolution of her marriage only if she has set her heart upon a young man of her choice. The first step she usually takes is to go and live in her parental house and she refuses to return to her affinal house even when invited. Such a refusal indicates her desire to settle elsewhere. In such a condition, the groom's people approach the caste elders for a settlement of the issue. The girl is asked to return all the ornaments presented to her at

the time of the wedding by the groom's people, and her guardian (that is, her father or brother) is required to sign a paper that in future she will not advance any claims against her former affines. This paper is called faragati (from Persian faraghat, meaning freedom from pressure) and is witnessed by caste elders from both the parties concerned. If a man wishes to divorce his wife, he simply sends her to her natal home and does not communicate with her for a year or so. He then complains to the caste elders about her behaviour, that she was not a good worker, or that she was fond of idle gossip, or that she wasted a lot of money, or that she had relations with another man, and asks for a faragati. In such cases, he may have to surrender his claim to the ornaments his people presented her at the time of the wedding. Generally, there is no trouble in arranging a dissolution, and if either of the parties does not want to live with the other, the caste community deems it fit to separate them so they can settle elsewhere.

After this the girl is free to 'go in natra' to her paramour, who is usually required to pay a few hundred rupees to her natal guardian by way of compensation. There is practically no difference in the status of a wedded wife and one acquired by natra, and as such no stigma is attached either to her or to her children by the second husband.



Sometimes, divorce or faragat is granted on grounds which are obviously flimsy. I remember a case from the Khati caste (which happened during our stay in the field) where a girl wanted to divorce her young husband on the plea that he looked very young and small. The elders agreed with her and granted her faragat. In another instance, a Rajput divorced his wife on the plea that she used to talk a lot and did not look after him well. Then there was a very interesting case of a young Mali whose wife divorced him since she thought he could not earn a living. I was told there had been cases of faragat where the wife wanted to live for longer periods with her parental kin and the husband objected to this; in one case the wife did not have her periods properly and the husband thought there was something wrong with her; in another case, the woman used to beat the domestic cattle and the husband beat her in turn, so she went to her natal home and refused to return. Suspicion of barrenness and infidelity are common grounds for divorce. But it was found that quite a number of petty domestic quarrels and squabbles led to tension between the couple and eventually resulted in divorce.

#### The Village Community.

Potlod is a village, one of India's five hundred thousand villages. The village has a physical structure

which is obvious even to a casual observer, and it has a history and an administrative record of its own. The question I would next like to consider is: Has the village a social structure of its own or is it simply part of a wider national or regional structure? This question has methodological significance, particularly in view of Redfield's concepts of the 'little community' and 'civilization'.

I think the village is a structural system, one of the several structural systems in which most Hindus are involved. It has a well defined territorial basis which typically, changes little over time. Indeed, the words of Charles Metcalfe remain very largely true: "Village communities seem to last when nothing else lasts. Dynasty after dynasty changes; revolution succeeds revolution. Hindu, Pathan, Moghul, Maharatta, English were all masters in turn, but the village community remains the same" (quoted in Crooke, 1906).

Henry Maine regarded the village all over India as the centre of communal life. It is, according to Sir Henry, "the least destructible institution of a society which never willingly surrenders any of its usages to innovation. Conquests and revolutions seem to have swept over it without disturbing or displacing it, and the most beneficent systems of government in India have always been those which have recognised it as the basis of

administration" (1861, p. 153).

Potlod is a well defined structural entity. The principal units of this structural system are the households and the caste communities.<sup>5)</sup> The village people possess a sense of village unity which is reflected in their behaviour with their fellow villagers which is different from that with people from other villages. The various caste communities in the village are bound by ties of occupational, economic and ritual interdependence.

The village is a tightly knit community in which every one knows practically every one else. Relations are direct, personal and face-to-face, and a great deal of experience is shared by all the people of the village.

Most of the people of Potlod are, in one way or the other, dependent upon the land and agriculture. Agriculture may thus be regarded as the basic economic activity of the people, and a factor that binds them together into a village community, irrespective of their castes or kin affiliations. Thus, the cultivators not only live together in the same compact local village, but they also work in field with common boundaries. The people of Potlod are neighbours in houses, in fields and threshing places (called kala), and they use the same village grazing grounds, wells and pond, irrespective of

the caste they belong to.

As already noted, the village community is constituted of a number of caste communities occupying different positions in the hierarchy. The solidarity of the village community is manifest in the organization of the caste communities as functional units in the village, in the pursuit of economic activities and for certain ritual purposes.

I shall explain what I mean by the functional relationship of caste communities in the village community. Every single village in a predominantly agricultural region (such as Malwa) has a basic structure of occupational units: there have to be one or more land owning groups (castes of cultivators), artisans, castes that serve the village community and menial castes. In the busy agricultural seasons, members of the servant or menial groups also provide agricultural labour to help the land owning cultivators. The artisans, servants, and menials work for the cultivators of the village, are maintained by the land owning cultivators by grants of freehold and rent free land, and by seasonal payments in grain, in exchange for services rendered to the latter by the artisans, servants, and menials. The relationship is tradition bound and is strengthened by the ritual interdependence of the castes.

With reference to the caste composition of Potlod,

the basic occupational structure of the village community is represented in the following Chart.

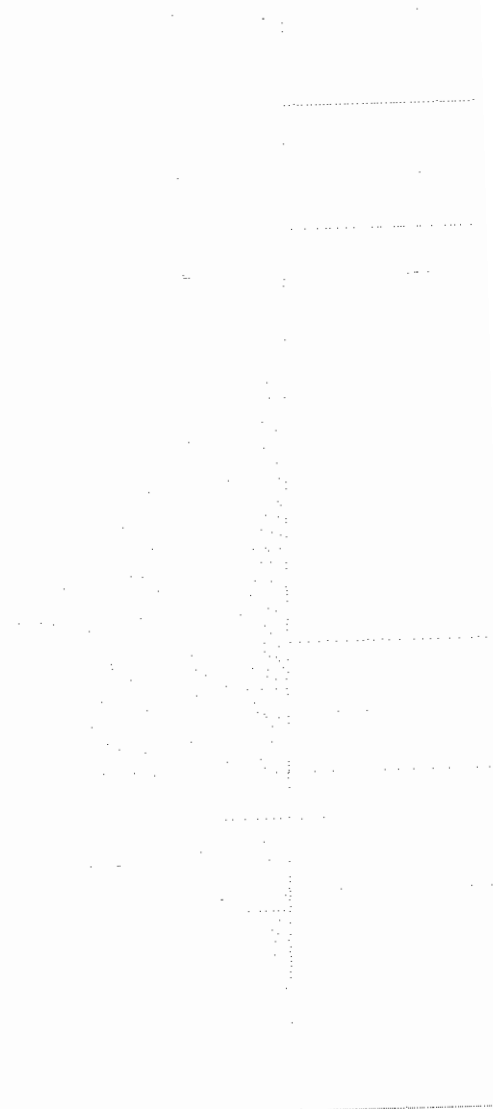


CHART 1.

CHART ILLUSTRATING THE BASIC OCCUPATIONAL STRUCTURE OF  
POTLOD VILLAGE.

Ritual pu- rity divi- sion of castes.	Land own- ing culti- vator castes.	Artisan castes.	Castes that serve the village community.	Menial castes.
'Clean' Castes.	Rajput Purabi Thakur  Khati  Mali	Darji Malwi Lohar & Gujerati Lohar Malwi and Gujerati Kumhar	Sriganur Brahmin  Palliwal Banias Vairagi Vaisnava Khati Bhaat     Nai Gosain	
'Unclean' & 'Untouch- able' Castes.		Teli Bhambi Malwi & Gujerati Balai  Bargunda Bagri Malwi & Gujerati Chamar Desha Chamar	Nath Jogi Dholi	Dhobi     Bhangi

The unity of the village is reflected also in the preference for village exogamy. In ritual too, there is a certain emphasis laid on village unity. The village has a shrine to its 'village deities' (gram deota) who are worshipped by all the people of Potlod once every twelve years. The deity is also propitiated whenever there is an epidemic among the people of the village or their cattle. On such occasions, the various entrances to the village receive ritual attention. During such rites as are performed if rains fail, the sense of village unity is most obvious, when all the people of the village (including non-Hindus) come out to propitiate the rain god.

The sense of village community feeling is also expressed in another ritual context. On the occasion of ~~life cycle rituals, namely, birth, marriage, and death,~~ certain essential ritual services are rendered by some of the artisans, servants, and menials, and even if a cultivator employs labour from another village, for agricultural and other secular activities, he is bound to employ the village artisan, servant, or menial to perform the required activity.

Such a structural functional unity of the village has been described as 'vertical' solidarity -- that which unites several horizontal layers each of which is a caste community (Srinivas, 1952, p. 32).



POTLOD WOMEN AT A TRINKET STALL IN A WEEKLY MARKET

People from Potled buy and sell goods in weekly markets held at Chandrawatiganj and other neighbouring villages.



All India Hindu Social System.

I hope I have not given the impression that the village is a cultural and social isolate, like a primitive tribe. The total self-sufficiency of a village in matters economic and political was a fiction created by a number of ill-informed European Civil officers of the nineteenth century. The village social system in India has always been an integral part of the system of the cultural and linguistic region in which it is situated, which again is a part of the all India Hindu social system.

Members of a village community are also members of castes which are in most cases not confined to a single village but are scattered over a number of villages in the region. The horizontal solidarity of a caste thus breaks through the vertical solidarity of a village community. Again, since a village is treated as an exogamous unit, spouses have to be selected from villages other than one's own.

Economically also, the village is not an isolated unit. Quite a number of every day requirements of the village people are imported from outside the village. People from the village go out to serve in neighbouring villages or even towns, and during busy agricultural seasons, labourers from outside the village are invited to help the villagers in their agricultural operations.

The surplus farm produce is sold in the markets which are periodically held in neighbouring villages or at the regular grain markets in neighbouring towns. The people of Potlod buy and sell goods in the weekly markets held at Chandrawatiganj and quite a few villagers regularly visit Indore or Ujjain markets.

It is, however, in the field of religion and social customs that the relations of the village people with the rest of the country are most marked. The common past, common sentiments, value system, and the overall integrative force of Hinduism link the village with the all India Hindu social system in general, and with the regional socio-religious system in particular.

Hinduism represents a socio-religious system evolved in a social and cultural framework much wider than the village community. The ways in which the village community has adopted the religious system to its own conditions or needs are essential for an understanding of the inter-relationship between the village socio-religious system and the all India Hindu religious system.

Considering the fact that the kin and marital economic, political and religious relations and affiliations of a village people extend beyond the boundaries of the village, a number of social anthropologists, who have worked in Indian village communities, have expressed the view that the village community is not a structural

unit and that "the structural unit is larger than the village" (Smith, in Srinivas, et. al., 1955, p. 159).

Certainly the village is not an absolute 'isolate' (if there ever can be an absolute isolate in a living social reality!). "It is integrated", as Majumdar says, "with the total social system of the country" (1958, p. 325) or with the "all-India Hinduism" (Srinivas, 1951, pp. 212.....).

Foot Notes

- 1) We exclude the ten households (eight Hindu and two Jain) in the village from our consideration. Single-person households cannot be called 'groups' but it may be of some interest to see how they subsist in their social and economic life.
  
- 2) The story of sage Jaratkaru (from the Mahabharata) is popularly told to emphasize the point. Jaratkaru was a bachelor sage. One day he chanced to see his forefathers hanging in a pit suspended by a single thread. They were all men of virtue and they told Jaratkaru that their pitiable plight was due to his prolonged bachelorhood, since that left no hope for continued oblations for them in future. They told him that the primary duty of an adult sane minded man is to marry and procreate so that his ancestors do not suffer from lack of proper offerings and oblations. This story is taken as a myth to discourage prolonged bachelorhood.
  
- 3) In Sanskrit the noun for son is putra. Etymologically, it means 'one who rescues from the hell named Pu'. So great is the fear of torture in the hells that every orthodox Hindu wishes to have a son of his own; if, for some reason, he cannot beget one, he must adopt a boy as his son, to perform the essential ritual services for him after his death.
  
- 4) For a fuller discussion on the scriptural position regarding divorce and dissolution of marriage, see Prabhu, 1954, pp. 192 - 195.
  
- 5) I have differentiated between 'caste' and 'caste community' on grounds of the territorial spread of the group. A caste is spread over a

number of villages in a cultural and linguistic region, whereas by the word 'caste community', I have denoted that section of the caste which lives in a single village. In the local dialect, this group is called biradari.

## CHAPTER IV.

### THE CASTE STRUCTURE.

In this chapter, I propose to discuss the structure of Potlod Hindu community in terms of what is known as 'caste', the unique feature of Hindu social structure.

But before I introduce the formal structure of the caste groups in Potlod village, their hierarchical (or near hierarchical, if considered in reference to a single caste) arrangement, and examine the basis for the hierarchy, I think it would be appropriate to discuss the criteria and methodology of caste identification. In other words, what is needed is a definition of the word 'caste', as I propose to use it in this analysis.

The word 'caste' (or rather the Portuguese word casta from which the word caste has been derived) was first used in 1563 by Garcia de Orta. It signified breed, race or kind, and referred to the "distinct races or castas (among the Hindus) of greater or less dignity, holding the Christians as of lower degree, and keep them so superstitiously that no one of a higher caste can eat or drink with those of a lower" (Yule & Bernell, quoted by Hutton, 1951, p. 47).

The most interesting and complete descriptions and

definitions of 'caste', however, come from the Census officers of the Indian Empire, from 1881 onwards. Denzil Ibbetson, on the basis of the census of the Punjab in 1881, gives the descriptive definition of a caste as a group of people who practise a particular occupation hereditarily, and who "seek preservation and support of the principle by the elaboration from the theories of the Hindu creed or cosmogony of a purely artificial set of rules, regulating marriage and intermarriage, declaring certain occupations and foods to be impure and polluting, and prescribing the conditions and degree of social intercourse permitted between the several castes" (Report on the Census of the Punjab, 1881, pp. 172-6). In his theory of caste, <sup>Sir</sup> Denzil has attached the greatest importance to occupation: "the whole basis of diversity of caste is diversity of occupation..... When a caste, or a segment of a caste gives up its hereditary traditional occupation and takes up a new one, a new caste is born" (op. cit.).

Nesfield expressed much the same opinion in his Brief View of the Caste System of the North-Western Provinces and Oudh, substantiated from the facts collected during the census of the United Provinces of Agra and Oudh, 1881. (Both the names refer to the same province of British India. In the Indian Republic, the province has been renamed as 'Uttar Pradesh'). Nesfield regards

occupation as "the sole foundation upon which the entire caste system of India was built up" (Nesfield, op. cit.).

Sir Herbert Risley was appointed Commissioner for the Indian Empire Census of 1901. On the basis of ethnographic and enthnological data specially collected during the census operations, he defined caste as "a collection of families or groups of families bearing a common name; claiming a common descent from a mythical ancestor, human or divine; professing to follow the same hereditary calling; and regarded by those who are competent to give an opinion as forming a single homogeneous community. The name (of a caste) generally denotes or is associated with a specific occupation. A caste is almost invariably endogamous in the sense that a member of the large circle denoted by the common name may not marry outside that circle" (Risley, 1915, p. 68).

M. Senart gave a similar definition of caste in his Les Castes dans l'Inde. Senart described a caste "as a close corporation, in theory at any rate rigorously hereditary; equipped with a certain traditional and independent organization, including a chief and a council; meeting on occasion in assemblies of more or less plenary authority, and joining in the celebration of certain festivals; bound together by a common occupation; observing certain common usages which relate more particularly to marriage, to food and to questions of ceremonial pollution;



and ruling its members by the exercise of a jurisdiction the extent of which varies, but which succeeds, by the sanction of certain penalties and above all by the power of final or revocable exclusion from the group, in making the authority of the community effectively felt" (Risley, *op. cit.*, pp. 68-9).

These definitions of caste, based on all India observations and designed to suit conditions all over the country, are rather too wide and diverse, and are not closely related to the facts on the ground in any given area. As I hope to be able to show, it is not possible to define caste as an occupational group, in the first instance. Ideally it might be so, but the present social situation does not warrant such a limitation to caste groups. In fact, we shall see that many of the castes in Potlod have altogether given up their traditional callings; members of many more castes follow other callings besides their traditional callings; all these, however, continue to remain the same caste. Moreover, even in the traditional ideal situation, alternate callings were approved for the same caste and in many cases, actually taken to (Srinivas, <sup>in Marriot, ed.</sup> 1955, p.3).

Tradition, in fact, prohibits the adoption of certain callings by a caste, rather than confines it to a single occupation. Thus, for example, every man of a Brahmin caste did not or does not have to be a priest,

astrologer, or a student or teacher of scriptures; he may take to arms, to administration, to cultivation of the land, or to the fine arts, without having to lose his caste, as many Brahmins in fact do. His choice, however, is restricted in respect of occupations that are considered to be filthy, unclean or impure, and not suitable for his ritual status, occupations such as scavenging, skinning or tanning, leather work, laundering, barbering, blacksmithing, toddy tapping, and liquor brewing. Baines sums up the situation by stating that "the occupation again, which is common to the caste is a traditional one, and is not by any means necessarily that by which all, or even most of the group make their living" (Baines, p. 11).

Risley's definition is more of a general description of caste than a sociological definition. There are several groups scattered all over India which bear the same name, e.g., Lohar (Blacksmith), or Nai (Barber), and have the same or similar myths of origin from an ancestor; they follow, or at least profess to follow, the same occupation; but they are not a group in any sense of the term. The Lohar in U.P., for example, have little affinity with the Lohar in Malwa, in Gujerat, or in the Punjab. Each cultural region has its own castes, even though the names are the same or similar all over India.<sup>1)</sup> As such, there are no all India castes, but only certain caste names superficially common to the whole country, such as Brahmin,

Bhangi, Chamar.

Another definition of caste was given by Ketkar in 1910. He defined caste as "a social group having two characteristics: (i) membership is confined to those who are born of members and includes all persons so born, and (ii) the members are forbidden by an inexorable social law to marry outside the group" (Ketkar, p. 15). This definition brings out, what to my mind are, the two most important characteristic features of caste, viz., hereditary membership, and rigid endogamy. (see also Blunt, 1931, pp. 1-2; Ghurye, 1950, p.2; and Rose, E.B., 14th ed., v.4, p. 977).

Many of the social groups in Potlod village, which I consider to be 'castes', have a tradition of recruiting their members from other castes. In Potlod two such 'recruiting castes', viz., Gosain, and Vairagi Vaishnava, are ritually 'clean', while several are ritually 'unclean', viz., Nath Jogi, Balai, Bhambi, Bagri. (see also, Russel and Hiralal, 1916, v.2, p. 105; and Fuchs, 1950, pp. 7-8) Intensive and detailed enquiries, however, revealed that none of these groups had any history of external recruitment, within the memory of any one living (also, Mayer, 1956, p. 119). In practice, thus, all caste groups observe only one principle of recruitment to their castes, that is birth. Only those persons are considered as members of a caste who are born into it and are of parents who belong to the same caste.



The second characteristic feature of caste is endogamy. All castes, by definition, are endogamous groups, which impose a ritual prohibition on their members marrying out of the caste. In fact, the endogamous character of castes was hardly ever questioned, though some of the earlier authorities ascribed caste endogamy to the occupational or racial unity of the caste. It was Westermarck's view that endogamy is the essence of the caste system (Westermarck, 1921, v. 2, p. 59).

It is necessary at this stage to examine the rules of hypergamy and hypogamy, which are incompatible with the rigid observance of the rule of endogamy. Of these two principles of marrying outside one's own group, hypergamy is known to have been sanctioned in the Laws of Manu as anuloma (skr., literally, 'with the hair', i.e., according to the system). While the rule of endogamy was regarded as the best and most suitable for the higher varnas, they were permitted to take wives from the varna lower than that of their own. Thus, Brahmin were allowed to marry Kshatriya, Vaisya, and in special circumstances, with Sudra women; Kshatriya men could marry Vaisya, or Sudra women, and the Vaisya were permitted to take a Sudra woman for a wife. The off-spring of the mixed hypergamous unions were allowed by Manu the rites and duties of the twice-born<sup>2)</sup> (Ghurye, 1950, p. 97).

The principle of hypogamy -- the reverse of hypergamy -- though never sanctioned by Manu and other

Hindu law givers, is known to have been in practice during what is called the 'Classical Age' (1st to 5th centuries A.D.), when the Sanskrit law treatises were being compiled. This principle of marriage was condemned by Manu as pratiloma (skr. literally, 'against the hair') — not considered to be suited to the social system. Men who married women of varna higher than their own, and the progeny of such unions, were regarded as ritually unclean and outside the pale of the sacred law of Hindus (Ghurye, Op. cit., p. 56).

In the present day Hindu society, hypergamy and hypogamy are rarely practised on the caste level. It is true that in some parts of the country, some castes are mentioned who practise caste hypergamy and hypogamy. In some parts of the Punjab hills, we are told, a man may take a wife from a caste lower than his own.<sup>3)</sup> Similarly, in Malabar, the younger sons of the Nambudri Brahmins consort with Nayar women.<sup>4)</sup> Hutton has also made reference to cases of hypergamous unions obtained among several castes of Bengal and Assam, and among the Rajputs (Hutton, 1951, p. 52-3). Most of these are probably isolated cases, and may be treated as exceptions to the general rule that all castes are endogamous. Regarding the Rajputs, Hutton has himself given an explanation: the Rajputs, as a whole are divided into a large number of exogamous clans (yansha) of which some are regarded as of

higher rank than others, while generally speaking the Rajput of the west are regarded as of purer blood and better standing than those of the eastern India. Thus, Rajput hypergamy operates on the vansha or clan level rather than on the caste level (Hutton, op. cit.). Elsewhere too, hypergamy is practised, but on the intra-caste rather than the inter-caste level. For example, the Kanyakubja Brahmin of U.P. are divided into twenty sub-divisions called biswas arranged in a hierarchical fashion, and those of the higher biswas can take brides from the lower biswas, but higher biswas girl cannot be married into lower biswas families.

In Potlodi village, no caste groups are known to practise caste hypergamy or hypogamy, and great stress is laid by all caste groups on the observance of the rule of endogamy by their members. Any person who ventures to transgress this is put out of his caste, and is permanently excommunicated if he or she does not atone for the wrong deed. To illustrate, a Khatri must marry a girl born of Khatri parents, while a Rajput must seek his partner from amongst the Rajput, and so on, the principle being clearly laid down that marriage must be arranged within the caste group.<sup>5)</sup>

A stumbling block in the definition of caste is the concept of what is known as a 'sub-caste'. Indian census writers and others have made profuse, and to my mind often vague and illogical, use of the term 'sub-caste'.

Risley describes the sub-caste thus: within the circle of an endogamous caste, "there are usually a number of smaller circles each of which is also endogamous" (Risley, op. cit., p. 68). According to Ketkar, "the words 'caste' and 'sub-caste' are not absolute but comparative in signification. The larger group will be called a caste while the smaller group will be called a sub-caste. A group is a caste or sub-caste in comparison with smaller or larger" (Ketkar, op. cit., p. 15).

We see that one of the major criteria for differentiating a 'caste' from a 'sub-caste' is its numerical strength. Both are endogamous groups. In his article on Caste in the Encyclopedia of Religion & Ethics, Edward Gait advanced two main reasons for the retention of the twofold phraseology and against the procedure of treating all sub-castes as real castes, thus accepting endogamy as the definitive criterion of caste identification. Gait writes: "It cannot be endogamy, for that would elevate all sub-castes to the rank of castes. This would not only be contrary to native feeling on the subject, but would also be highly inconvenient in practice, as it would create a bewildering multiplicity of castes" (Gait, E.R.E., v. 3, p. 234). The second objection can be met by asserting that the difficulty to the census enumerator is having to cope with a large number of castes — should all sub-castes be treated as real castes — would be more than



counterbalanced by the convenience of having a precise definition of the word 'caste', not only to sociological investigators, but to the administrators and census workers as well.

Gait's first objection is much more important, and if, as he says, the native feeling is contrary to defining caste as an endogamous group, it would not be proper to dismiss the social reality for the sake of a precise definition. I shall, therefore, present a brief picture of Hindu society as it appears to the 'native' himself.

The 'native feeling' in the matter of caste identification can best be analysed with reference to my own field data. In Potlodi, there are several groups which have the appearance of being castes. These groups are: Lohar, Kumhar, Balai, and Chamar. All these are what Risley called 'functional or occupational' castes (1915, pp. 76-78), i.e., an occupation traditionally pursued is the diacritic of each of these groups: the Lohar are blacksmiths, the Kumhar are potters, the Balai are weavers, and the Chamar are skimmers, tanners and workers in leather. Each of these groups is known and recognized by others.

On closer scrutiny, I found that each of these groups was divided into two or more sub-groups. There were, e.g., two sub-groups of Lohar, viz., the Malwi



Lohar and the Gujerati Lohar. Similarly, the Kumhar and the Balai were divided into two sub-groups each, and the Chamar into three. Further enquiries revealed that each of these sub-groups — and not the group — was endogamous, that each had its own traditional rules of commensal and dietary relations and other forms of social interaction with the rest of the village community, and that each possessed its own distinctive way of behaviour — both in everyday life and on ceremonial ritual occasions. In their own native expression, it was the sub-group which had a name; each was called a 'jati'. The local part of a jati is called biradari.

We thus see that it is the jati, i.e., the endogamous group which is recognised by the people as their most important social group. It is in the context of jati that people order their life and behaviour patterns.

#### The Jati.

It is common knowledge even to the illiterate village folk, that Hindu society is divided into four varna (or classes) and a fifth class of 'untouchables' outside the varna system and further that these varna represent the priesthood and literati, nobles and soldiers, cultivators and traders, servants, and menials respectively. The first three of these varna, viz., Brahmin, Kshatriya, and Vaisya are regarded as dwija or

'twice-born' on account of the symbolic rebirth which forms an essential part of their initiation ceremonies (upanayana sanskara). In the fourth varna, viz., Sudra, are included people who are assigned to serve the dwija varna; but these are in no way treated as 'untouchables'. The fifth group of people who are regarded as ritually 'untouchable' are assigned lowly and unclean jobs. This is known as 'the system of the four varna (chaturvarna vyavastha), and is quite similar to the fourfold division of society found in many ancient societies of the world (see Hocart, 1950, p. 127; Dutt, 1931, v.1, p. 39).

The fabric of the present day Hindu rural society is constituted, however, not of the varna but of the smaller closed groups called jati. Semantically varna (from the skr. root yra, 'to describe or distinguish') as a group is based on 'distinctions on the descriptive level' — distinctions of colour, occupation, residence, morals, etc., whereas jati (from the skr. root ja, 'to give birth to') is a type of grouping primarily based on the birth or heredity of a person.

Jati is a corporate group the members of which regard themselves as of the same blood and ritual status. The ritual purity of the jati is maintained by prohibiting all external recruitment to jati membership. Thus only a person born of jati members can be a member of the jati,

and every person must take a spouse from the same jati. Violation of this all-important rule of jati endogamy results in the expulsion of the persons from their respective jati. The jati normally practises or professes to practise its traditional calling or callings, and enjoys a certain degree of cultural, ritual, and juridical autonomy (Srinivas, 1952, p. 24; Masson-Oursel, p. 78; Hutton, 1951, p. 48; Ghurye, 1950, pp. 20-22).

The total number of jati in the whole country, at an approximate estimate, would be more than ten thousand. According to Ghurye, the number of jati in each linguistic cultural region is about 2,000, (Ghurye, op.cit.), some of these no bigger than fifty families.

It is true that many or most of the jati possess certain distinctive features apart from hereditary membership and endogamy, such as traditional callings, group symbols, and rituals of avoidance in relation to other jati. But I submit that the most important and most common characteristics of a jati are its hereditary membership and endogamy. It is in this sense of a jati or endogamous group that I propose to use the word 'caste' throughout this analysis and discussion.

#### Stratification of Castes.

The jati or caste represents a horizontal division of the society. Each caste, or group of castes, forms

a distinct stratum in the society, and each stratum is regarded as superior in ritual purity to some other and/or strata, ~~and~~ inferior to certain others. The total picture is that of a hierarchy in which every caste occupies a specific place. I must, however, note that the 'hierarchy of castes' is not neatly defined except in the top-most and bottom sections. All castes do not stand in a neatly defined relationship of superordination or subordination to all other castes. For most castes, there are some castes whose ritual status is higher, some whose ritual status is lower, and some that stand at the same (or nearly the same) level of ritual status. The hierarchy thus, is not a hierarchy of individual castes, but rather of clusters of castes.

Every single caste is spread over a number of villages in the region, and the members of the same caste living in different villages are bound by what Srinivas has called 'horizontal solidarity' (Srinivas, 1952, p.31). Segments of a caste, although living in different villages are bound together by lineal and affinal ties, and this solidarity is manifested by occasional caste gatherings, on occasions of marriage or funerary feasts, or to discuss the breach of some caste rule by a caste member.

#### Varna and Caste.

In theory — backed by religious and mythological

belief, society is broadly divided into five classes (four varna, and a fifth group of non-varna 'untouchables'). This fivefold division of society constitutes what may be called a 'formal hierarchy' (cf. Mayer, 1956, p. 136), in as much as each caste tries to fit itself in one of the five broad divisions (in order to indicate that it is part of the 'varna' system, and thus bona fide Hindu). The primary purpose of such an attempt on the part of the people themselves is the standardization of status in terms of classes that are of all India import (viz., the varna). Such an arrangement is also convenient to outsiders (i.e., people from outside the region who are not familiar with the local caste names) in assessing approximately the ritual status of a local caste in terms of a concept with which they are familiar. From our point of view, the varna system thus serves as a crude frame into which the castes can be arranged for the sake of sociological analysis.

The packaging of castes into broad varna compartment is not, however, neat and clear cut. There is little difficulty so far as the first varna -- Brahmin is concerned. All the different castes which belong to the Brahmin varna are well known, since the Brahmin have everywhere maintained their ritual aristocracy and aloofness. The last two varna, viz., the Sudra and the Panchama or

'untouchables' also are fairly easily distinguishable. Castes belonging to both these divisions are treated as ritually unclean by the other castes, and this is manifest in the dietary observances of the people. No cooked food nor water touched by a Sudra or an 'untouchable' is accepted by any caste of the dwija varna. Then again, the Sudra castes are easily distinguishable from the 'untouchable' castes: the former do not spread ritual pollution by their physical contact, as the latter do.

The real difficulty of arrangement and gradation is in the case of castes belonging to the middle ranks, that is to say, castes which are neither Brahmin, nor Sudra, nor 'untouchable'. Such castes assign to themselves the varna status of either the Kshatriya or the Vaisya. In a few cases, the alignment is on clear lines, and is acceptable to all or most of the castes, as for example, in the case of the Rajput<sup>6)</sup> and Palliwal Bania caste groups of Potlod village. These are accepted as of clear and unambiguous Kshatriya and Vaisya varna status, respectively. In other cases, the varna status claims of the castes are contested and denied by other castes. For example, the Khati as a caste claim a Kshatriya status on the basis of their myth of origin,<sup>7)</sup> but their claim is opposed by the Rajput. Similarly, the Bhaat, the Lohar, the Kumhar, and the Nai castes claim Kshatriya status on the basis of the Parasurama myth (Dowson, pp. 230-1).

This is explicitly denied by other castes. The Rajput mock at such an assertion and often say: "in Kaliyuga everybody claims to be a Rajput." Interestingly enough, however, they (the Rajput) include some of these aspirant castes (Malwi Lohar, Malwi Kumhar, Nai, etc.) in the circle of full commensal and food participation, that is to say, not only do they dine together, but they accept food and drink cooked or touched by others in the circle. This is taken to be an implicit and virtual acceptance of their claim to Kshattriyahood by the Rajput, because, as I hope to show in another chapter, commensal and dietary relations are the main indicators in real life of a caste's ritual status vis-a-vis other castes.

I have included these castes, viz., Lohar, Kumhar, Khati, Mali, Nai and Darji in the 'Kshattriya' division, but separated them from the Rajput and Purabi Thakur castes by a dotted line. These former may be regarded as 'Pseudo Kshattriya'.

From the subjective statements of the caste members, thus, such a classification of castes (into broad varna divisions) is possible. I propose to adopt such a classification as a tentative scheme for the gradation of Potlod castes. We can then examine the characteristic group behaviour and interaction - patterns of the castes - in respect of their inter-relations in the village community, commensal rules, dietary observances,

occupational restrictions and prohibitions, exhibition of deference and demeanour,<sup>8)</sup> and analyse the influence of these factors in the evaluation of the caste status.<sup>9)</sup>



TABLE 1.

THE HIERARCHY

Ritual Purity Division.	Rank Group.	
DVIJA	I	
	II	
	III	
ANFYAJA	IV	
	V	
UNTOUCHABLE		

The Castes in Potlod.

Of all the castes in Potlod village, the Srigaur Brahmin are the most pure in their everyday behaviour, and, therefore, the ritual status of this caste is considered higher than that of any other caste in the village. In their commensal rules, dietary observances, occupation, dress and bearing, the Srigaur Brahmin are, by far, the most sanskritized of all castes in Potlod village, and regarded by everybody as belonging to the Brahmin varna. The Srigaur are strictly vegetarian, teetotal, and non-smoking; they are well versed in Sanskrit and traditional religious lore, and officiate at domestic rituals and sacraments of all the families belonging to Ranks I - III; they are astrologers, and with the help of the patra (Hindu Almanac), determine the mahurat (auspicious moment) for ritual performance and sacraments. The astrological service of the Brahmin is available to all castes.

The Rajput, as the descendants of the traditional and historically known defenders and rulers of the country, are classed as belonging to the Kshatriya varna.<sup>10)</sup> According to the written accounts composed by the bhaat (bard, chronicler, and genealogist) of the Rajput caste, a family of Agnivamshi Chohan Rajput (one of the clans belonging to the Fire Line of Rajputs<sup>11)</sup>)

arrived in this village about the 12th century A.D., drove away the inhabitants and occupied the village. Since then, their bhaat say, the men belonging to this family have been ruling the village as village headmen, in the name of Rajput, Muslim, or Maratha rulers of the region. Even today, the village patel (headman) is drawn from this family, and this practice was accepted by the Madhya Bharat Government after the amalgamation of the constituent Princes' States into a State of the Indian Republic. Also living in the village are the descendants of two other clans of Rajput -- Solanki and Rathor -- who followed the Chohans into the village. The Potlod Rajput caste has all these prestige acquiring traits. Besides, it owns considerable land in the village. The Rajput do not observe many dietary restrictions: they drink wine, habitually and by principle eat meat and the caste is not exclusive commensally, and has included in its 'commensal ranks' other castes of comparatively lower ritual status, like the Nai (barber), Malwi Kumhar (potter), and Malwi Lohar (blacksmith); moreover, the Rajput have accepted and practise the essentially un-Brahminic custom of allowing divorce and remarriage to their womenfolk (natra).

Almost equal in status to the local Rajput are the Rajput immigrants from Avadh in Uttar Pradesh. These are locally known as Purabi Thakur. In Potlod, the caste

is regarded as ritually inferior to the local Rajput for two main reasons: firstly, it is drawn from Avadh which lies to the east of Malwa, and for that reason is considered to be the domain of ritually inferior castes;<sup>12)</sup> and secondly, the Purabi Thakur families are comparatively recent immigrants in Potlod, they have been in the village for only the last four decades or so.

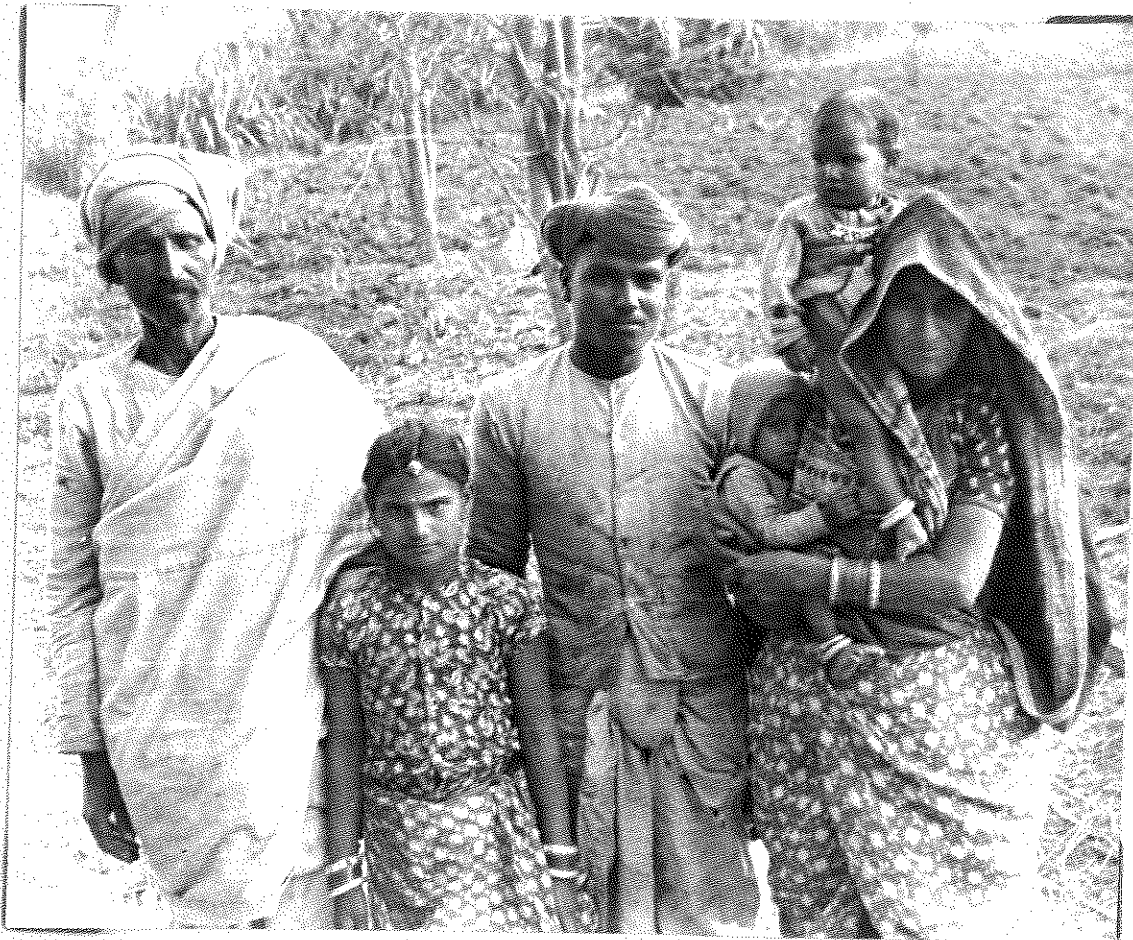
There are three households belonging to the Purabi Thakur caste in Potlod village. The first of these arrived in 1918, the second in 1922, and the third as late as 1946. At least two of these have been extremely successful in life; both are materially well off, and a man from one of these was the Jagirdar's bailiff (Kamdar) for a number of years. In spite of this, they are not considered to be equal to the Rajputs by the people of Potlod. Probably this is due to the fact that the Purabi Thakur have not yet fully adopted the Malwi customs and manners nor given up their original ways of living, and as such, they do not belong to the Potlod village community in the fullest measure. In a highly traditional Indian village, the fact that a small pocket in the village community has a way of living different from that of the community is itself sufficient to lower the status of that dissentient group.

In the same varna rank have been included all those castes which claim Kshatriya varna status, but are

not fully accepted as such by the Brahmin, the Rajput, and several other castes of the village. Their claim for Kshatriya status rests on their respective bhaat's chronicles which trace the origin of the castes from some obscure Kshatriya king or ruler.<sup>13)</sup> There is little variation in the stories, and the Rajput reaction tends to be one of disbelief in the legends — mockingly expressed in the oft-repeated saying: "in the Kaliyuga everyone calls himself a Kshatriya."

The castes of this sub-rank ('pseudo Kshatriya') are cultivators, and artisans whose craft is considered to be ritually pure. Together they constitute more than half the population of Potlod (574 out of a total of 1037). Within a limited range of the sub-rank, all these castes have contradicting opinions about the others, and each claims a status higher than others of the sub-rank on different grounds: the Khati, Darji, and Gujerati Lohar castes are vegetarian and teetotal; the others — Mali, Bhaat, Malwi Kumhar, Gujerati Kumhar, and Nai contend they are entitled to dine with the pure Kshatriya Rajput caste.

Among castes of this sub-rank we come across conflicting ideals and bases for hierarchical position. We saw how each of the two clusters of castes in this sub-rank advance claims for a ritual status higher than the other. The vegetarian teetotal group, composed of Khati,



A. PROSPERUS KHATI FAMILY



Darji and Gujerati Lohar castes argue that the practice of 'sanskritic' Hindu customs gives them a higher ritual status. The other cluster consists of castes which are included in the commensal circle of the Rajput; their claim is that since they are accepted as 'pangat partners' by the Rajput, their ritual status is higher than that of castes who are not accorded this privilege.

It is an interesting aspect of Hindu social organization that both inclusion and exclusion in respect of commensality and food acceptance may be instrumental in raising a caste's ritual status. In sanskritization, exclusion is the normal course; a caste desirous of rising on the ritual status scale shuts its door, so to say, and refuses to dine with a number of castes whom it previously considered as equal and hence eligible as 'pangat partners'. In doing this, it follows in the footsteps of the Brahmin castes who are commensally most exclusive. The Khati provide an instance. I was told that till about a decade ago, the Khati used to dine in the Rajput pangat. At present, the Khati are an exclusive commensal group. Their behaviour is obviously influenced by the Brahminic ideals which prescribe exclusive commensality for each caste.

Malwi Lohar, Malwi Kumhar, Gujerati Kumhar and Nai castes provide an instance for the other process, viz., inclusion in the commensal circle. The ritual status of

these castes has risen because they are accepted as full pangat partners by the Rajput. This has resulted in the formation of a 'block' within the caste structure. Elsewhere, I have called it the 'Rajput Block'. We can say it is almost a sub-system within the caste system.

A paradox here is that some major values of this Rajput sub-system are just the opposite of general sanskritic values of the caste system.

The castes of this 'block' are meat-eating and liquor-drinking by principle and habit; they propitiate a number of non-sanskritic deities (such as Bheru, Kalka, Chamunda) by offering them animal sacrifices and liquor; they are relatively liberal in their dealings with the 'unclean' and 'untouchable' castes, many of whom they allow to enter their houses there to serve as menials; they do not harshly disapprove of their menfolk having extra-marital relations with women of other castes including the 'unclean' and 'untouchable' castes. Their attitude and behaviour, in general, is more liberal than that of the Brahmin influenced castes of the other cluster. In this they follow the customs and practices of the leading caste of the 'block', viz., the Rajput.

Perhaps the fact that the Rajput have been the rulers in this part of the country for many centuries has been responsible for the stabilization of this 'block' and tolerance of their attitude and ways of living by the Brahmin, in spite of the rather contradictory nature of



the values and ideals of the two, viz., the Rajput and Brahmin.

There is historical evidence that the Rajput, like the Brahmin, have always been trying to expand their own distinctive area of influence. This they have done by different methods than those followed by the Brahmin. The Brahmin always gave other castes to understand that they themselves were the cream of the society and occupied the highest position in a world which was finely graded hierarchically. Sanskritization thus meant in effect the acceptance of the ritual superiority of the Brahmin and agreement by the other castes to serve them. The difference in ritual status between the Brahmin on the one hand and all the other castes on the other hand is symbolically demonstrated in their mutual relations. One of the major ways of expressing this is in the field of food acceptance: all other castes accept — as a privilege — all types of food cooked and touched by the Brahmin; the Brahmin, on the other hand, are extremely fastidious in accepting food from other castes. They do not accept boiled food from any other caste, and they accept fried food and water from only certain other castes.

On the other hand, the Rajput have been more liberal and democratic in their relations with castes lower than themselves. Instead of insisting on limited acceptance of food and water, the Rajput freely accepted

food, etc., from a large number of castes. These latter were treated as equals in everyday social relations by the Rajput, and this is probably responsible for the very high degree of cohesion and in-group feeling we find among the castes of the 'Rajput block'.

The Palliwal Bania regard themselves as belonging to the Vaisya varna, and are accepted by others as such. There is only one Palliwal Bania household in the village who live by cultivating land rented from others. They show a high degree of exclusiveness in their commensal relations, are strictly vegetarian and teetotal in their dietary habits, wear the sacred thread (janoi), and in general, live a life which is highly sanskritized, modelled on the Brahminic notions of purity and pollution.

The position of Rank IV in the total social system is fairly well marked and clear. This is the group of 'unclean' castes, said to belong to the Sudra varna, which according to the varna theory originated from the foot of the Cosmic Man and whose duty it is to serve the three higher varna. Traditionally, these castes have ritually impure crafts or services as their trades, such as those of the oil-presser, the drummer, the weaver, the washerman, the hunter and trapper, or the maker of baskets and floor mats. Many of the castes have given up their traditional callings,<sup>16)</sup> and taken to cultivation, mostly as landless labourers. All these are

meat-eating and liquor-drinking castes, very low in the scale of Sanskritization. Within the rank, there is hardly any definite status for the constituent castes.<sup>17)</sup> In their relations with the dwija castes of Ranks I - III, these Sudra castes suffer from several disabilities, social and ritual: food or drink touched by them is considered to be polluting and as such unfit for consumption by the 'clean' castes; they are not given an equal seat in 'clean' caste houses and have to sit on the floor, outside the doorstep; they are not permitted to enter the verandah of the village temples, but have to stand in the outer courtyard; they are not included in the village feasts, and participate only as servants in village rituals; lastly, as a reflection on their 'unclean' ritual status, they are not served by a Brahmin priest, and have to be content with a priest of lower status or one of their own caste. But they consider themselves to be, and are accepted by all others, as higher in ritual status to the castes of the Rank V whose diacritic is their ritual untouchability.

The castes of the Rank V - Desha Chamar or Mochi, Malwi Chamar, Gujerati Chamar, and Bhangi are considered to belong to no varna; they are avarna (outside the varna system), chandala (utterly degraded), and achhuta (untouchable). Castes of this rank are prohibited from living in the main village habitation, and have to live



in humble huts at a distance, they are not permitted to enter any houses, not even climb the door steps of houses or temples, they are not engaged as servants — domestic or field, since their very touch leads to ritual contamination, and only very lowly and ritually impure occupations are open to them (such as skinning dead animals, tanning skins, working in leather, scavenging, cleaning public roads and places, and looking after the cremation ground); they must live very humbly, remain at a distance if they participate at all in a common assembly (including meetings of the Village Council),<sup>18)</sup> address the higher castes in a fashion which reflects their lowliness and eternal impurity, and refer to themselves in very derogatory terms. Efforts were made by Mahatma Gandhi for bettering their lot; he gave them the collective name 'Harijan' (meaning children of God) instead of the degrading title achhuta (untouchable), and it is by this term (Harijan) that they prefer to call themselves and to be referred to by other people.

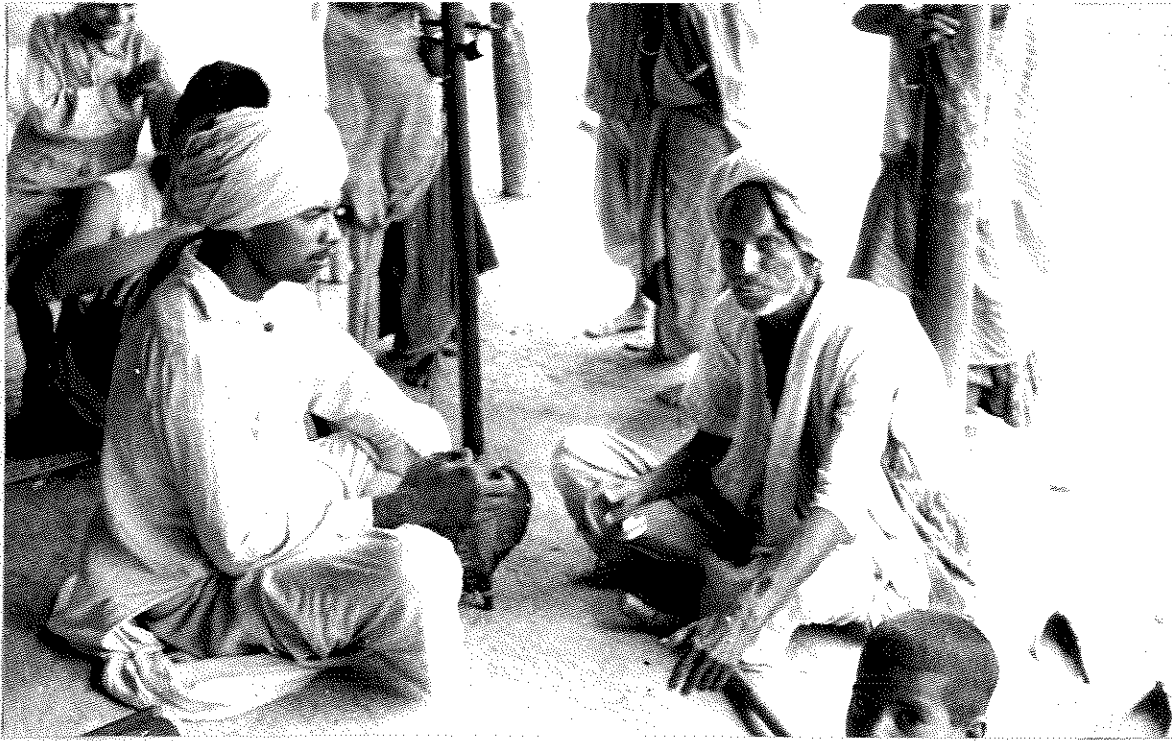
#### The Sectarian Castes.

I shall now refer in brief to the three groups excluded from discussion so far — the Vairagi Vaishnava,<sup>19)</sup> Gosain,<sup>20)</sup> and Nath Jogi.<sup>21)</sup> These, strictly speaking, do not belong to any of the varna, but are religious sects. The locally resident families of these belong to the

gharbari (family oriented) branches of these sects; there has been no history of external recruitment to these sects in Potlod village; all are endogamous like other castes; have definite and clearly laid down commensal and dietary restrictions, and follow only those callings that are regarded as ritually pure; in short, they have accepted all the characteristic features of caste, and these are visible in their every day behaviour. As such, these have been included in the 'hierarchical list' of castes in Potlod village, but I have placed them in a separate column, rather than in the same column with the other castes because of their sectarian character.

Constant effort, it appears, has been, and, is being, made by these sectarian castes to sanskritize their customs, and thereby obtain a higher place in the ritual status scale. And the present ritual status of each of these can be understood in terms of the extent of sanskritization achieved by the particular group.

The Vairagi Vaishnava are the highest on the ritual status scale, and for this reason, have been placed on level with castes of Rank II.. Male members of this caste serve as priests at temples of Vishnu and his incarnations, Rama, and Krishna; the caste is strictly vegetarian and teetotal, and rigidly follow the Brahminic notions of ritual purity and pollution, but because they practise natra (divorce and remarriage for women), the caste is considered as ritually low.



NATH JOGI MENDICANT SINGERS

Gosain is a saiva sect; they worship Shiva as the greatest god, and the Gosain of Potlud are deputed to officiate as priests at the local Shiva temple. The Gosain, like the Rajput, are meat-eating and liquor-drinking by habit, but the ritual position of this sectarian caste is lower than that of the Rajput, since the former bury instead of cremating their dead.<sup>22)</sup>

The Nath Jogi are traditional worshippers of the Mother Goddess, to whom they offer animal sacrifices; again, they practise the physical austerities of voga, bury their dead, and freely consume animal flesh and spirituous drinks. For these reasons, they occupy a position inferior to the dwija castes, but because of their being a religious sect of priests, are considered to be above the Sudra castes.

Foot Notes

- 1) Even in a single village, there may be living two castes of the same name and professing to follow the same traditional calling. In Potlod, we find two castes each of blacksmiths, potters, weavers, and skimmers & tanners. Both castes bear the same name, differentiated only by prefixing to the caste name the name of the caste's region of origin — Malwa or Gujerat, (viz., Malwi Lohar, Gujerati Lohar; Malwi Kumhar, Gujerati Kumhar; Malwi Balai, Gujerati Balai; Malwi Chamar, Gujerati Chamar).
- 2) Applying the rule of caste hypergamy to our local situation, we should have expected the allowance of matrimonial relations between different castes, e.g., between a Srignaur Brahmin man and a woman of any other caste, or between a Rajput or Khati man and a woman of some such caste as Dholi, Teli, Balai, or Chamar. In Potlod, however, any such union would be regarded as sacrilege and contrary to all caste and religious traditions and practices.
- 3) cf. Ibbetson, Denzil, 1881, in Risley, 1915, p.416.
- In many parts of India, there is prevalent a popular belief that the people of the Himalayan regions are to be avoided since their customs, and practices are not those of catholic Hinduism. Manu is quoted as saying that in the Himalayas live many tribes who are degraded due to the fact that they mix promiscuously with one another and neglect their religious observances. All over the trans-Himalayan and cis-Himalayan regions from the Hindu-kush to Sikkim live people whose ways of life are dissimilar from those of their plains neighbours. In Nepal, according to Haimendorf, hypergamy — rather than endogamy — is the rule of marriage.
- Inspite of the fact that many of these groups are named after the all India castes, such as Brahmin, Rajput, Jogi, etc., I do not think we can accept these as Hindu castes. These are probably in a



stage of transition from a tribal to a caste structure (or as Majumdar claims, from a 'fluid caste' to a 'rigid caste' structure). These have been referred to as vratya, i.e., those who did not pursue in their everyday life, the ritual customs and observances of the Aryans, and were, for that reason, considered to be degraded and unclean even though possessing a high secular status.

- 4) cf. Hutton, 1951, p. 14.

Hutton has shown in the Census of India 1931, Report, Vol. I, part I that this is a peculiar instance of sanctioned extra-marital relations, required by the unique character of Kerala society. Again, this is an instance of hypergamous sexual rather than marital relations.

- 5) A number of explanations have been given to account the universality of the practice of endogamy among the Hindus. Edward Westermarck thinks that endogamy is "chiefly due to racial or national pride and lack of sympathy with, or positive antipathy to individuals of another race that greatly differ from each other in ideas, habits and civilization generally" (1926, p. 54). He goes on to say that caste endogamy is a product of the clash of races and cultures in prehistoric India which resulted in the formation of colour groups (varna, Skr., meaning 'skin colour' or 'complexion'). He writes further: "It is said that even now caste largely corresponds to race, and that in Northern India at least, the social status of a caste is indicated by its physical type" (ibid., p. 63). Endogamy is thus conceived of as a device used by castes to maintain their respective levels of racial purity.

A somewhat different explanation is given by Ketkar. According to him, "sometimes a section of the society becoming a hereditary class like the Brahmins and desiring to become exclusive does not deign to marry outside the class. Endogamy in this case is due to vanity and want of affection between the different layers of the society".

Majumdar thinks it is possible to give a functional explanation for caste endogamy. It is a ius connubii — a social rule or convention which governs inter-marriage with the purpose of maintaining caste solidarity. A caste is a well knit social group with certain distinctive social ideals and values and patterns of living, and the behaviour of the caste members is expected to be so oriented as to perpetuate this distinctive social tradition of the caste.

Caste endogamy is a ritual phenomenon of great importance. To the village people, it is part of one of their most important dharma, that is, the jati dharma. Jati dharma (or the ritual rules of the caste) require that a person takes a spouse from the same caste. This in itself is a ritual act, a sacrament. It involves elaborate ritual ceremonies which cannot be performed unless the couple belongs to the same level of ritual purity, that is, the same caste. It is also a means to the correct and rightful performance of other ritual acts which a person is expected to execute in his life, such as, other sacraments and domestic rituals. For this reason, endogamy belongs to that category of rules of dharma which are considered — by the consensus of public opinion in the village — to be absolutely essential for a person to follow, since its non-observance makes him ritually impure and, therefore, means for him the loss of his caste status.

- 6) Some of the Rajput are not accepted as 'true Kshatriya' by some people. The argument given is that the only Kshatriya that survived the great massacre of the warriors by Parasurama belonged to the Solar or Lunar Lines; the Fire Line Rajput are descendents of other castes and even tribes which were consecrated to fight the demons and purified in sacred fire, at the great sacrifice at Mount Abu. The latter, thus, are not 'true' or 'original' Kshatriya. "All Kshatriya were killed by Parasurama ages ago; how can you find true Kshatriyas in the modern days?" "Rajputs and true Kshatriyas were killed in the numerous battles with the foreign invaders. The present claimants to the title are mere dasaputra" (born of hypogamous unions between Kshatriya women and

low caste or slave men). These are some of the standard arguments given by the anti-Rajput elements in the village population. Such an argument, however, is put forward only by some individuals, and the general consensus of opinion is in favour of accepting the Rajput as full and true Kshatriya.

- 7) The Khati are a caste of cultivators, most of them land holders. The caste is strictly vegetarian and teetotalist. Its size in the total village population (481 out of 1037) enables the Khati to be self-contained, and occasionally flout the village conventions established by the ruling Rajput house. Their success in cultivation and frugal habits have put the caste in a better economic position than Rajput. The Khati regard themselves as more sanskritized than the Rajput (Khati is vegetarian and teetotalist; Rajput both meat-eating and liquor-drinking; both practise divorce and remarriage), and because of their vegetarianism and teetotalism, are on better and closer terms with the Brahmin caste of the village. This combination of several factors — dietary, economic, and factional — has largely been responsible for the Khati claim that their ritual status is higher than that of the Rajput caste. Of course, the Rajput do not agree to this, nor do the other castes allied to the Rajput such as the Nai, Kumhar, Lohar or Thakur; the Brahmin are not sure, but their behaviour towards the Khati definitely shows their liking for the latter.

The Brahmin in Potlod are on better visiting and dining relations with the Khati than they are with the Rajput. At a wedding ceremony in a Brahmin house in May, 1955, I witnessed a number of Khati being invited to dine by the Brahmin at his house, but this privilege — because a positive privilege it is to be invited to dine at a Brahmin house — was not extended to many Rajput. During the rainy season in 1955 (June - August), a number of Brahmin from other villages visited Potlod. By convention, they should have stayed with the patel of the village — a Rajput, as his guests. They, however, preferred to stay with other private villagers; in three cases out of five, they stayed with a Khati, in the other two cases, with a Darji

who also are vegetarian and teetotalist. An old Brahmin who was on a begging-tour of the neighbourhood voiced their feelings, I believe, when he said: "a Brahmin should always prefer to stay and dine — even a little uncomfortably — at a place where purity of food and living is obtained. The Khati are poor and a bit stingy, but they are purer so far as food habits are concerned than the meat-eating and wine-drinking Rajput".

- 8) These will be discussed in detail in subsequent chapters.
- 9) These factors, together with other customs like virgin-marriage, prohibition on widow remarriage, observance of orthodox Hindu festivals, rituals and sacraments, worship of classical Hindu gods and goddesses instead of native and local deities, etc., constitute a complex for which Srinivas has used the term 'sanskritic values' (1952, p. 30, also 1956, pp. 481-496).
- 10) Baden-Powell, 1896, p. 187.
- 11) See Todd for a complete list of Rajput Lines and clan names, vol. I, pp. 97 - 145.
- 12) Karve, 1953, p. 143: the status of Rajput clans, whatever origin they may claim, becomes lower the farther east and the farther from Rajasthan the regions in which they live. Thus, for example, Rajput from Uttar Pradesh are inferior in ritual and social status compared with the Rajput from Rajasthan or Malwa. The reason for this difference in status (as given by Rajput of Rajasthan)

is that wherever the Rajput have gone in the course of their migrations, they have taken brides from local people, and are thus considered to be of mixed origin, and therefore impure and inferior in status.

- 13) The legend has for its theme the destruction of Kshatriya Kings and ruling houses by a Brahmin hero named Parasurama (Rama with the Battle Axe), in the pre-Epic days. Enraged by the misconduct and arrogant behaviour of one of the Kshatriya kings, Sahasra Arjuna (Arjuna with a thousand arms) who had murdered the father of the Brahmin hero, Parasurama took a vow 'to clean the earth of Kshatriya seed'; he waged a relentless war against the ruling houses, and killed all those Kshatriya who rose against him in arms. (Dowson, 1950, p. 280). For fear, some of the Kshatriya abandoned their kingdom, arms, profession and warrior identity, by taking to other occupations. Some took to cultivation, some to barbering, some to pottery, and so on, claim the different castes. The Khati chronicle says that 108 direct descendants of King Arjuna took to cultivation; of these 108 branches, 84 came and settled in Malwa more than a thousand years ago, and these 84 branches of the forgotten royal line are believed to form the 84 gotra of the Khati caste.
- 14) See also Mayer, 1956, p. 136, (in the S-W Jr. of Anthropology, vol. 12, no. 2).
- 15) An important caste rule is that all castes dine in separate rows. Even when people belonging to more than one caste sit together to dine, they sit in separate rows with a little distance between two rows. Each such row is called a pangat, as also is this system of dining. Thus 'pangat partners' denote persons who are entitled by caste rules to sit in the same unbroken row for communal dining.



- 16) Two 'castes' of this rank do not possess any traditional occupations in the sense other castes do. These are: Bargunda (also known as Kaikadi or Kaikari) and Bagri (also called Badhak or Badhik). Both are groups which originally belonged to 'criminal tribes', and whose local branches have been rehabilitated and settled in villages by the Government, and forced to take to peaceful and non-criminal vocations for their living. The Bagri are notorious for kidnapping women and children and recruiting them to the Bagri caste. For these reasons, both these groups may be treated as quasi-caste groups, as distinct from the general occupational castes. See Russel and Hiralal, 1916, vol. 2, p. 49, and vol. 3, p. 296; also Report of the Criminal Tribes Act Enquiry Committee (1949-50) sections, 40 and 95.
- 17) About the Sudra castes of Malwa, Malcolm wrote: "None of these families will eat or intermarry with the other. Here, as in other parts of India, they follow the usages and professions of their fathers. Everyone.....has his bhat or bard who preserves the genealogy, and gratifies his vanity with the tales of his ancestor" (Malcolm, vol. 2, p. 170).
- 18) Even at the formal meetings of the Gram Panchayat, the scheduled caste member of the Panchayat (a Malwi Chamar by caste) was made to sit at a distance from the other ('clean' caste) members. This was so inspite of the fact that he was a full member of the Panchayat, elected to the reserved scheduled caste seat. The Panchayat is a democratic organization set up under the aegis of a democratic government which is consciously trying to remove the disabilities from which the scheduled castes suffer. Moreover, in a council of five members, the scheduled caste member carries a valuable vote. All these, however, seem to have had little influence on the social position of the scheduled castes. The member himself did not seem to mind sitting by himself a little away from the rest.

- 19) The Vairagi Vaishnava (skr. Vairagin - 'subduing all earthly desires') are a sect of Vaishnava ascetics founded in the 11th century A.D. by Ramanujacharya, whom all Vairagi regard as their spiritual ancestor. The Vairagi are Vaishnava, i.e., they worship Vishnu (or one of his incarnations) as the greatest god.

See ERE, vol. 2, p. 337, article on Beragi by Crooke.

- 20) The Gosain sect was founded by Shankaracharya (8th-9th century A.D.). They are Shaiva, i.e., worship Shiva as the greatest god.

See ERE, vol. 5 , article by Crooke.

- 21) The origin of the Nath sect, variously known as Gorakhnathis, Gorakhpantthis, or Kanphata Yogi is involved in great obscurity. They regard themselves as spiritual descendants of Guru Gorakhnath, after whose name the sect is known. The Nath pierce the ear-lobe and wear a ring on the ear, and are known as Kanphata (with split ear-lobe). See ERE, vol. 12, pp. 883..., article by Tessiton.

- 22) Burial of the dead is considered to be a non-sanskritic custom, suitable only for the non-Hindus or for those who have renounced the worldly life.

**PART THREE**

**THE HINDU VALUES OF LIFE**



## CHAPTER V.

### THE BASIS OF SOCIAL ACTION.

According to Hindu belief, this life by itself alone would have no meaning; it has meaning only as a link in a chain of births extending from the past into the future. In the words of Ramanand Dube of Potlod village, "a wordly existence is a stage of transition from past existence towards future wordly lives. Life is a process. It does not start with a child's birth; it does not end with a person's death. Birth and death are merely landmarks in one of a series of phases of worldly existence. When a child is born or a person dies, there is merely a shift in his position. It is like an actor acting on the stage, then going behind the curtains and changing, and then reappearing on the stage in a new garb. But he is the same man. Lord Krishna said in the Gitaji that just as a man discards old clothes and wears new ones, the soul discards worn and torn physical bodies and assumes new forms".

This belief in the continuation of life despite births and deaths, creation and destruction is at the base of the Hindu social and metaphysical thought. It is

expressed in such popular sayings as "He who has come will go, and he who has gone will come again", or "This universe is a circular passage; we keep on moving but we move in circles; this is an endless process".

An important corollary to the theory of transmigration is the belief in the immortality of the soul. The soul is called jiva (life-substance) or atma (one's spirit),<sup>1)</sup> and is considered to be a part of God who is called Paramatma (the Supreme Spirit). The soul, we are told, is immortal and eternal; it cannot be cut by sharp-edged weapons nor burnt by fire nor drenched by water; it does not experience any pain or pleasure.

The people of Potlod do not claim to know at what moment the soul enters the physical body or when exactly it leaves. It is invisible, but Pannalal Darji thinks that "the jiva enters the body while it is still in the making; it animates the foetus in the womb and makes it grow; without the jiva, nothing would grow; the jiva or atma leaves the body — its 'terrestrial abode' — at death or decay, to fly away and leave the plant, animal or man dead; it then enters some other physical body, and so the cycle of births and deaths goes on". Kala Bai, an old Rajput woman added: "the jiva is the instrument for animation, and devoid of it, the dead or decayed body quickly disintegrates into the five elements out of which it is said to have been created; earth,

water, fire, heaven, and wind. But death does not affect the jiva; for it, death is merely like the shedding of old and rotten garments and the donning of a new garb".

Each individual soul, the people believe, has to go through a large number of worldly existences or 'incarnations'. Said Ambalal Lohar: "According to the holy Puranas, each jiva has to pass through 8,400,000 different births and deaths. But all these need not necessarily be human. As a matter of fact, the Puranas say, that it is rare for a jiva to be born into a human body. Most of the eight million and four hundred thousand lives are lived in the form of insects, such as flies, mosquitoes, and other lowly forms of life. Unending, this cycle of births and deaths goes on, until either the full quota of lives for a soul is exhausted (which comes only at the end of creation) or the jiva acquires such punya (spiritual merit) that it merges with the Supreme Soul — the Paramatma or God Almighty. But such a merger of an individual atma with Paramatma comes only once in a millenium or so; it is a very rare phenomenon." 2)

The transmigration of souls is governed by a cosmic law, known as the doctrine of karma. It is the law of the universe controlling births and deaths. In terms of the law of karma alone is it possible for us to

understand why some souls are born as animals, others as insects or birds and others as human beings. It accounts for the divergence in the physical forms the same soul might take in its different worldly lives. As Ram Singh Chohan said, "karma alone can explain why some persons in this world are happy, successful, physically well built, and, in general, occupy a high position in life, while others are born deformed or become disabled, poor, wretched, and miserable in their low station in life."

The word karma is from the Sanskrit root kri, meaning 'to do'. Literally then, the word karma means 'that which is done' or 'action'. The doctrine has for its basis the very popular notion that all action has its reaction, and that the type of reaction is causally connected to the type of action. Shivji Ram, a Khati young man told me: "Nothing is more plain and easily understandable to us agriculturists than the phenomenon that we reap what we sow. Similarly, if we are told that a good deed is rewarded and a bad action punished, it is really quite simple and logical. After all, that is justice, and God is just. Therefore, the doctrine of karma which means the inevitable working out of action in a new life has wide and popular appeal."

Considered together, the two concepts of

transmigration of soul and karma are taken to mean, as Shiv Charan Dube — an old Brahmin of Potlod village said, that the form and destiny of one worldly existence is determined by the behaviour of the individual jiva in its previous worldly existences of incarnations. The idea is that a man's body, character, capacities, temperament, his birth and station in life, his wealth, and the whole of his experience in life, of pleasure or of pain and misery, taken together form the just recompense for his deeds, good and bad, of earlier existences. Every act necessarily works itself out in retribution in a subsequent rebirth. The expiation works itself out not only in a man's passive experience but also in most of his actions. And then, these new actions form new karma, which must necessarily be expiated in another life. And thus, the cycle of karma and reincarnation goes on, almost never ending.<sup>3)</sup>

Some complication in the popular mind is created by the problem: is the destiny of an individual soul predetermined in all its aspects and activities, or is it at all possible for an individual to participate, even to a limited extent, in the working of the forces of natural law? In other words, does the individual possess any power to shape his own destiny, or is he simply a passive tool in the hands of the powerful forces of fate?

The people of Potlod are divided in their views on this matter. Some feel that karma is a cruel and cold divine law and men are not able to influence its working. "Even action in the present life is controlled by past karma", they say. "How then is it possible for a man to act independently? All this talk about a man doing as he pleases does not make sense". Cases are quoted of persons who have been doing good karma all their lives and who yet find themselves in perpetual trouble and misery, whereas people who have never bothered about good karma flourish and succeed in the world. It is significant to note that such an opinion is commonly held by poor and illiterate folk.

Some people hold a different view in this matter of individual liberty to act. Most of such people in Potlod are well read in the Hindu scriptures, and one or two have read a few English books on the philosophy of karma. Ramanand Dube quoted Lord Krishna as saying in the Gita that man had the right of doing karma (karmanve vaadhikaraste) which will determine his soul's future worldly existence and the form of station therein. Ajodhya Prasad Thakur quoted S. Radhakrishnan: "The cards in the game of life are given to us. We do not select them. They are traced to our past karma, but we can call as we please, lead what suit we will, and as we play, we win or lose. And there is (individual) freedom --

freedom of action."

All my informants, however, agree on one point, viz., that good karma leads to punya or spiritual merit, and bad karma results in the accumulation of paap, or sin. In popular belief, the karma and its reaction for every individual is controlled by an elaborate system of what may be called 'divine accountancy'.

The people say that in the court of Yama -- the Lord of Death -- there is a clerk whose name is Chitragupta. (The name means 'Invisible Writer'). He is said to record in his books all the actions performed by every individual in the universe. Nothing is hidden from him. He even records a man's thoughts. For each good thought, or karma, the individual gets a 'merit entry', and for each wicked thought or deed, he is given a 'demerit entry'. When a person dies, his soul is taken to the court of Yama, and Chitragupta is asked to read the record of his thoughts and actions in his worldly life, and to balance the account. If his acts of merit outweigh his sins, he is sent to heaven and is later reborn in the world in a better form of life; however, should the 'demerit' side prove to outweigh the 'merit' side of the ledger, the soul is condemned to hell-fire and is later reborn in a baser form and station of worldly life.

Baba Haridas Vairagi quoting from the

Upanishadas, said: "As the jiva moves out of the body, life is extinguished; a man's knowledge and actions and his consciousness of former births and deeds is extinguished. His jiva, or atma is influenced by his conduct and behaviour, that is, his karma. He whose deeds have been good becomes good; he who has done evil deeds becomes evil himself. By holy deeds, he becomes holy; by sinful ones, sinful. It is for this reason that they say that a person consists merely of desires; as his desire is so his will; as his will so his deed, and as his deeds, so will be his evolution."

This leads us to our third and most complex concept, that of dharma. All that is dharma is good and right, and conversely, all that is not dharma (or a-dharma) is bad, wicked and wrong. In the popular mind, dharma is a synonym for 'righteousness, goodness, virtue' and is an attribute of "all that is true, all that is austere and pure, and all that has divine beauty and virtue." (satyam, sivam, sundaram).

Perhaps the nearest English equivalent to the word dharma is 'good and righteous conduct'. According to the karma theory only dharma, i.e., good thoughts, knowledge, conduct and behaviour lead to the acquisition of spiritual merit and its worldly rewards, prosperity, well being and virtue.



Sources of Dharma.

The sources for the derivation and statement of the principles of dharma are many. There is a vast store of spiritual wisdom, divine knowledge and logical analysis in the sacred literature of the Hindus. This is mostly in Sanskrit, the liturgic language of the Hindus, and consists of the Vedas, Brahmanas, Upanishadas, Epics (the Ramayana and the Mahabharata), Samhita, Aranyakas, Sutras and Smritis, the Nitis, the Puranas, and the Dharmasastras. To the ordinary villager, most of these are neither available, nor intelligible. Even the village Brahmin who can read and understand bits of Sanskrit does not have the knowledge, or the time to cultivate such knowledge for the understanding of the higher philosophy of dharma contained in these books.

Ideally, it is prescribed that the Brahmin should read, understand, and analyse the Vedas and other religious literature and interpret this to the other castes. According to the theory of the divine creation of the four varna, contained in the Purusha Sukta in the hymns of the Rig-veda, the job of the Brahmin varna was to read and write, teach and preach, offer and officiate at sacrifices. The Brahmin were obliged by this tradition to undergo a life of study,

meditation, and penetration into the mysteries of God and dharma; in exchange for a life of study and benefit to the community, the Brahmin were supported by the rest of the community — by the grant of freehold and rent free lands, alms and regular gifts. The Brahmin still swear by the theory of divine creation of the varna system and wish to perpetuate the privileges accruing to them. The special grants still continue (as I have shown earlier), but the Brahmin have given up their former pursuit of higher philosophy and divine knowledge. The present day rural Brahmin is so busily occupied as to have hardly any time for devotion, the study of religious literature or the pursuit of meditation and spiritual wisdom.

Among the people of Potlod village, I found recognition of three sources for the statement and interpretation of dharma. The first of these consisted of myths and legends (katha), which have largely been borrowed — in toto or in a modified version — from the Puranas and the Epics. There is, for example, the myth of Savitri - Satyavan, very popular among the women, which narrates the story of a righteous woman who revived her dead husband and acquired from the god of Death three boons, the first for long life and prosperity for her husband, the second for a son and heir for her father, and the third for the lost throne of her father-in-law.

Then there is the myth of King Nala and his queen Damyanti who lost their everything in a game of dice, but regained everything they had lost through righteous action in which they persisted even in the face of severe odds. Then there is also the myth of Jaratkaru, an unmarried sage who was told by his suffering ancestors to marry and beget a son so they could be assured of continued oblations. And there are the numerous legends connected with the exploits of Rama in his conquest over the rakshasa king Ravana, including the story of how Rama killed a Sudra ascetic for which deed he was given the title of 'Defender of the Social Order' (Maryada - Purushottama). There are stories (from the Mahabharata) of the five Pandava brothers and their queen Draupadi who suffered innumerable privations in spite of their righteous conduct, but who defeated the forces of a-dharma (un-righteousness) in the Great Battle of Bharata by perseverance and righteous karma. There are the very popular legends about Hanuman, who, because of his service to Rama, and because of his practising great physical austerities, was made immortal and the 'highest of the lesser gods' (Mahabir). He is one of those deities whose worship is very popular with villagers of all castes. He is worshipped by the offering of a coconut on most festival days and in times

of distress and trouble. Widely known also is the myth of Ganesha, or Ganapati who was given the singular honour of being worshipped first on all ceremonial occasions in recognition of his wisdom and devotion to his father, Lord Siva.

All these stories, myths and legends have their morals. And the morals are emphasised when the particular myth is narrated on specific ritual occasions -- the birthday of a god (such as, Rama Nomi, Krishna Atham, Ganesha Chhoth), the anniversary of some one or other of his or her valiant deeds (for example, Dashera -- the day to celebrate Rama's victory over Ravana), or a religious rite the existence of which depends upon the moral of the myth concerned, for example, on the day when Monday coincides with the fortnightly New Moon Day, women of Brahmin and certain other 'clean' castes keep a fast for the whole day, and in the evening break the fast after worshipping the Moon and Death gods. The specific aim of this rite and fast is the effort by the fasting women, through physical austerities and worship, to prolong the lives of their husbands. Many of these myths are celebrated in songs (called bhajan) which are sung during the performance of rites, and also on other occasions.

Of all the sacred books popular in the village community, perhaps the most important is the Ram charit

Manas, the Sacred Lake of the Works of Rama, a modified version of the Ramayana. It is in Hindi, written in verse by a seventeenth century poet-saint, Tulasi Das. The book is divided in eight cantos, and portrays Rama as an ideal man, in his familial, social, and kingly relations, and is recognized as an incarnation of the god Vishnu. The way he lived and acted is regarded as a model of righteous conduct and behaviour; everything he did was in order to live according to dharma, and to uphold dharma. The Ramayana by Tulasi Das has become extremely sacred to, and popular with, the common people. It is read by almost everybody who can read Hindi, and for those who cannot, it is read by professional priest minstrels. Both reading the book and listening to it are regarded as acts of dharma.

A second book, quite popular with the educated villagers, but rather less known to others, is the Bhagvadgita, popularly known as Gita or rather Gitaji (to give it ritual honour by suffixing 'ji'). The Gita is in Sanskrit verse and is divided into eighteen chapters. The book contains the message delivered to Pandava Arjuna by Lord Krishna on the eve of the Great Battle of Bharata. The very theme of the book is the doctrine of karma, dharma, and rebirth, and the ways suggested by Lord Krishna for the emancipation of the human soul from the cycle of rebirth and karma.

Both these sources for the statement and interpretation of dharma, viz., the Purana myths, and the two sacred books (Ramayana and Gita), are more popular with the Brahmin and other 'clean' castes (of the 'Kshatriya' and 'Vaishya' varnas). With the Sudra varna and untouchable castes, these are both less known and less popular.

The third source of dharma, however, is one which is universally accepted by all castes, the final and supreme authority in all practical matters. The nature of dharma, the people say is extremely complex, more so for ignorant, unread, and untutored minds. The principles of dharma are unfathomably deep, and so, for all practical purposes, the average common man should generally follow the path trodden by his ancestors and predecessors, in accordance with the best available traditions of the class, or caste to which he happens to belong. Tradition is thus the best and most important source of dharma, one which takes precedence over all the other sources, literary or mythical.

Traditions vary from region to region, and from caste to caste. Naturally, then, the tradition that a person draws upon is the tradition of his particular caste. Even the myths from the Epics and Puranas uphold a man's right to adhere to his caste tradition, howsoever degrading it might appear on the surface. A

story quite well known in the village community and often narrated by elders is that of the hunter and the Brahmin.

A Brahmin, vain of his knowledge and superior varna, was told by his teacher to go and learn from a hunter-butcher the secret of dharma. The Brahmin was surprised: how was it possible for the hunter-butcher, who killed animals and sold their flesh, and who did not know a word of the sacred literature, to practise dharma, and to preach dharma to a man of the Brahmin varna. The hunter told the Brahmin that though he was a hunter-butcher by caste and trade, a man of a low and 'unclean' caste, he scrupulously observed his duties: he followed the trade of his caste, even though this involved butchering innocent animals for food, lived truly and honestly as a member of his caste group, gave alms according to his mite, and worshipped his caste deities regarding them as manifestations of the highest God. He strictly adhered to his caste traditions, and that was the reason why in practice he pursued dharma and did good karma. Being born in a particular caste -- high or low in the hierarchy -- is not in a man's hands; that is determined by his destiny, which in turn is formed by his karma in his last worldly existence. But having been born into a particular caste and station of life, it is incumbent upon a person to live righteously in

accordance with the traditions of his caste, for that, and that alone is his dharma. To abandon the duties related to one's caste and profession is considered to be both shameful and sinful; to hold to the karma suited to one's caste is certainly in keeping with the principles of dharma. Because karma carried out in this manner, and this alone, does not pollute the individual soul, even though the karma (particular to one's caste) happen to be unclean or polluting. The physical uncleanliness and pollution that arise from such karma are considered to be mere atonement for past karma. Only if the atonement is properly and fully carried out is it possible for the soul to attain a higher form and station in life in the next worldly existence. If, on the other hand, a person shirks carrying out duties fitted to his caste and station in life, he will be deemed to have acted in an un-righteous way, and he will have to suffer for it in future worldly existence.

#### The Principles of Dharma.

The principles of dharma may be classified in three broad categories. These are shown in Chart No.2.

Certain codes of moral conduct are of universal application in Hindu India. Everywhere, respect has to be shown to elders. Respect towards elders is



demonstrated in several ways. The most common of these is the general Hindu way of greeting elders. When a person meets an elder kinsman, be it at his house or in the village lane, he salutes the latter by bending the upper part of his body and touching the elder's feet with his hands, at the same time uttering 'pailagi Ba!' ('I touch your feet, Sir !). To unrelated elderly persons of the village, one shows respect by simply uttering the salutation without the accompanying gesture. Women are expected to show respect for their elders by covering their faces with a veil in the presence of the latter and avoiding them in everyday life. On ceremonial occasions, she is expected to salute her elders — of both sexes — by touching their feet with both hands, and then placing her hands on her forehead.

Younger men are always expected to greet elders first, in the prescribed fashion. Similarly in their speech and behaviour with elderly people, young persons have to observe certain rules of social etiquette. For example, they have to avoid laughing aloud, expressing opinions unless they are asked for and making jokes. In talking with elderly people, even unrelated, one has to avoid addressing them by name, but by a suitable kinship term, such as Ba (sir), Ma (mother), Dada (brother), or Bai (sister).

"Moral rules of behaviour", said Ram Chandra Khati, "require a person to be kind towards those younger than himself, respectful towards elders and friendly with equals. He should be obedient and patient in his dealings and decent in his manners. To help a person in need is a social virtue and a man who is willing to help even his enemy is respected by everybody. Lastly, he should be a believer and should honour and respect gods as if they were his elders. He should visit temples and observe appropriate fasts and feasts required by his social traditions".

All these moral principles, which constitute the first category of rules of dharma, may be considered positive rules or injunctions which should be followed in order to have a normal and healthy life in the community. For the individual, these serve as avenues by which he gains punya or spiritual merit for his soul; he who conforms to these rules of behaviour, so to say, gets a 'merit entry' in his karma register, the fruits of which he expects to reap in latter lives. In the present worldly life, he is regarded as a virtuous or holy man and commands the respect of every body in the community. On the other hand, non-conformity to these rules results in a person's moral degradation and disregard in the community, and is believed to get him a 'demerit' entry in his karma register.

In the second category of the principles of dharma are included all those rules of behaviour and rites the aim of which is the acquisition of extra merit and moral advancement for the individual who practises them. In this category of rules of dharma are included, in the words of Girdhari Mali of Potlodi, such phenomena as alms giving to Brahmins, mendicants, temples and the needy, construction of temples, cowsheds and bathing places on rivers, wells and tanks and special devotion to the gods, Brahmins and cows — the three things most sacred to all Hindus. Ratan Lal Bania said for all those who desire to earn extra punya, there are several traditional paths to follow; such persons may pursue divine knowledge through the reading of scriptures, and meditation and self-concentration; they may perform special worship (pooja) and sacrifices (yajna) in the name of the gods; they may visit famous religious centres in their region and in far-off parts of the country and bathe in the waters of the seven sacred rivers to wash off their paap, and earn punya. These are all considered to be pious acts, and he who performs them not only amasses spiritual merit for the next existence, but also gains prestige as a righteous man in this world.

These rules and rites are optional. Like the injunctions of the first category, the correct observance of these special rules and rites is believed to lead to

the acquisition of additional spiritual merit for the devotee's soul. The difference between these rules and the rules of the first category lies in the consequences that are believed to result from the non-observance of the sacred rules. Whereas non-conformity to the positive injunctions of the first category leads to sin and ritual blemish and the consequences attendant thereon, the non-performance of the rites and actions of the second category does not lead to any degradation of the person concerned, in this or in any after-lives.

The third category of the principles of dharma consists of rules that are considered absolutely essential for a person to follow. These are in the nature of negative rules or prohibitions and are concerned with what a person must not do. These prohibitions are based on popular notions about purity and pollution. These notions are believed by the people to have a ritual sanction, they are deeply rooted in mystical beliefs and supernaturalism, and have, therefore, been termed 'ritual rules' as distinct from 'moral rules'. The distinction, as we shall presently see, is in the sanctions and in the consequences that result from non-conformity to the two types of rules (cf. Radcliffe-Brown, 1952, pp. 172 - 173).

The everyday social actions of a person are governed by these ritual prohibitions. These rules, for

example, prescribe whom one may marry and decree whom one shall not marry; they guide the commensal and dietary behaviour patterns of people, and they also prescribe the rightful ways in which people may earn their living. (The prohibitions in respect of marriage, eating, pursuit of occupation and other every day activities in society will be discussed in Part III of this thesis).

Correct observance of these prohibitory ritual rules, or what may be called 'negative compulsives' (Majumdar, 1947, p. 95), the people believe, acquires a 'merit entry' for the person in his karma register; thus he is able to avoid, as Panna Lal Darji said, ritual blemish, the fire of hell, and a bad form and station in future worldly lives. Non-observance of these rules gives the transgressor a 'demerit entry' with all the consequences that follow. So far these prohibitions are similar to moral injunctions.

The most important function of the rules of ritual prohibition, however, lies in another field. These rules are based on certain mystical notions about purity and pollution. Transgression or violation of these rules is believed to pollute the person. This means that should a person commit ritually prohibited acts, he becomes ritually impure; and this results in the loss of his normal group status; his expulsion

(temporary or permanent) from his caste.

The process of readmission to <sup>his</sup> caste of an expelled member is controlled by religious and social traditions. It consists of three different acts: admission of his guilt by the expelled man, his penance, and penalization by the caste community, and finally his re-acceptance by the symbolic act of co-dining.

The purpose of penance is to wipe the ritual taint off the person. To the fear of the ritual taint is added the more concrete fear of the ritual pollution that a person is believed to contract in transgressing any ritual prohibition; the very performance of the act degrades him from his normal group ritual status. He becomes not only polluted but also polluting, and as such a potential danger to the entire community. The social function of penance is, thus, to remove the ritual pollution and restore the person to his normal group ritual status. In this sense, it is a purificatory rite, and its performance by the violator of the taboo is insisted upon by the social groups to which the individual belongs, viz., his family and caste, and the village community to which he belongs.

THE DIFFERENT PRINCIPLES OF DHARMA

Kinds of Action.	R E A C T I O N			
	in the present life		in after-life	
	Obser- vance.	Non-ob- servance	Obser- vance.	Non-ob- servance
<p>I. <u>ENJOINED</u></p> <p>Piety, kind- ness, decent be- haviour, alms- giving, helpful- ness, worship and prayer, ob- servance of prescribed fasts, feasts and festivals. (<u>'MORAL'</u>)</p>	REGARD	DISRE- GARD	MERIT	DEMERIT
<p>II. <u>ENJOINED</u> (<u>OPTIONAL</u>)</p> <p>Devotion to gods, attain- ment of divine knowledge, spe- cial worship, sacrifices, pilgrimages and bathings.</p>	REGARD	-	MERIT	-
<p>III. <u>PROHIBITED</u></p> <p>Marriage against caste rules and taking and consuming food in ways not approved by caste rules. (<u>'RITUAL'</u>)</p>	REGARD AND RE- TENTION OF NOR- MAL GROUP STATUS	DISRE- GARD AND DEGRA- DATION FROM NORMAL GROUP STATUS	MERIT	DEMERIT



From the view point of their observance, the principles of dharma are grouped by the people under the following heads:

- (i) sarva sadharan dharma, or general rules of dharma meant to be observed by all Hindus in the community;
- (ii) iati dharma, or caste dharma based on individual caste traditions;
- (iii) kula dharma, or rules of dharma common to a kula or patrilineage;
- (iv) vishesh dharma, or special rules;

and

- (v) aapad dharma, or rules of dharma meant to be observed in times of trouble.

Every Hindu is a member of his village community, which is itself part of the regional (Malwa) community and of the all India Hindu community. This aspect of a person's religious behaviour is conditioned by the principles of what is known as sadharan dharma (dharma for all, or common dharma). Principles of all India Hinduism, and local and regional religious cults constitute this common dharma. It thus involves participation in the worship of the gods (some of whom are purely local godlings, whereas others are gods of the all India Hindu pantheon), observance of certain rites and festivals common to all the people, and abiding by tenets common to



all Hindus, such as the sanctity of the cow and certain other animals and plants, and superiority of the Brahmin and holy men.

Jati dharma is by far the most important set of rules. A person is born into a caste, and it is considered to be meritorious for him if he dies an honourable and truthful member of the caste, that is to say, if the person obeys all rules of caste carefully, so as to avoid conflict with his caste and its elders, and thus escapes the severe penalty of excommunication. It is considered to be the most singular discredit and dishonour for a person to be expelled from his caste; for this means that he has not been observing the rules of his caste, and thus not conforming to the jati dharma that was prescribed for him by destiny, a person's birth in a particular caste having been dictated by his destiny and his karma in his last worldly existence. Not observing the rules and duties of one's own caste means a 'demerit entry' in after life, and a stock of bad karma for the next worldly existence. In terms of this life, it gives rise to a state of ritual pollution which continues to taint the offender till it is atoned for by means of ritual purificatory observances. Only then does the community re-accept the person and restore him to his normal group ritual status.

Each kula, or patrilineage has its own ritual

cult. They have their daily observances, elaborate, as in the case of the Brahmin, Vairagi or Gosain households, or just nominal, as among the other castes of Potlud. There are a number of other domestic rituals connected with changes in the form and membership of the household and lineage, viz., birth, adoption, marriage, and death. To keep the unity and solidarity of the household and family intact, ideal interaction patterns between different types of relations in the family and lineage are invested with mystical and moral force. All these ritual concepts and observances constitute a person's kula dharma, or that aspect of his dharma that is dictated by the tradition of the family and lineage in which he happens to have been born.

There are special rules of dharma framed with a view to exempt certain persons and age-groups from the pursuit of the common rules of dharma. Children, insane and disabled persons, and very old persons are not expected to understand and observe all the rules of dharma. These are, therefore, absolved from the obligation of conforming to the action-pattern set by rules of dharma. The king or local chief and the master of scriptures is not always bound by the more general rules of righteous conduct. For each such special social role, there is a distinct set of rules, prescribed by tradition and sanctioned by religion.

All the rules of dharma are suspended when a person goes out of his 'cultural context'. Thus, for example, when a villager goes to cities or travels over long distances in trains and buses, he is not so punctilious as when in his village. He has to eat at public foodshops and hotels; he may have to sit next to an 'untouchable'; in government offices and law courts, he has to deal with people whose caste and ritual status he does not always know. I know of a large number of cases from Potlodi — and my personal knowledge from elsewhere, substantiates this point — of otherwise orthodox and religious minded persons behaving, in these circumstances, in a manner which is definitely contrary to the accepted general rules of dharma.

In Hindu scriptural traditions, a person is permitted to overlook the rules of dharma if he is in great trouble. Cases are given where famous sages and learned men ate impure food for the sake of saving their lives. Similarly, rules of common dharma do not bind a sanvāsi, that is, one who has renounced the worldly life. Rules of dharma are believed to apply to only those who live as regular members of conventional society.

For the Hindu villager, his village constitutes the conventional type of society, in which he lives for a major part of his life. The rules of righteous conduct

with which he is familiar refer to and obtain in that conventional social situation. The town or city, with its industries and offices, and mechanised life is a different type of social entity; the pattern of life is different; the social and cultural situation is largely changed. The general and popular view is that the actions of a person in a socio-cultural context which is not his own are not to be considered his normal social actions, and that, therefore, he is not to be judged on the basis of the former. What he does in the city is no business of his caste community in the village, so long as his actions do not infringe the solidarity of the social groups to which he belongs.

The word dharma is from the Sanskrit root dhr, meaning 'to hold'. The etymological meaning of the word, thus, is 'that which holds a thing and maintains it in being'. For example, fire glows, radiates heat and light; it burns to ashes most objects which come into contact with its flames, and thus it "holds" itself as fire; without these qualities, it would not be fire. This, then, say the learned, is the dharma of fire. Similarly all the rules of conduct and behaviour which help a person maintain his social and ritual position, in this worldly life and in forthcoming lives, together constitute his dharma.

In the social sense, dharma -- or dharam as it is popularly known to the people of Potlod village -- is composed of all those elements, moral rules and ethical codes, beliefs, concepts and theories, rites and observances, that are designed to hold together the social system. The social function of dharma is to hold together, maintain, and perpetuate a given social order. It is thus that all such phenomena, as, for example, superstitions, myths, magical and liturgic formulae, norms of etiquette and conduct, social injunctions and prohibitions, and legal codes which aim at strengthening the current social order and counteract disruptive tendencies -- both from within and without the system -- constitute dharma. The dharma of a social group is the law of its existence; it is the way the social group maintains itself as an integrated group. According to the Hindu view of life, it is only righteous action -- righteous in a given context -- that can serve this purpose -- of perpetuating a social order. And thus dharma comes to be equated with and mean all 'righteous belief and action', that is, a proper way of living and behaving in society.

Dharma is the Hindu scheme of values. The Hindu belief is that dharma is the law of the universe, and society the manifestation of the divine law. Most village Hindus believe that if the tenets of dharma are not properly adhered to, the prescribed rites not

performed in the right way, and the taboos or ritual avoidances not observed, in short, if the dharma is allowed to decay, there is bound to be chaos and disorder, and society will come to an end.

- 1) In higher philosophy, distinction is made between jiiva (that is, life substance, or empirical self) and atman (that is essential, or vital self).

See Morgan, 1953, p. 118.

In popular belief, however, this distinction fades away, and the two words jiiva and atma (or atman) are thought of as synonyms, and used as such.

- 2) This state of merger of a soul with God is known as moksha or mukti, that is, salvation. After attaining moksha, a soul is never born again; for it, the cycle of transmigration has come to an end; the very identity of the soul is lost in the Supreme or Cosmic Soul. This is the highest level of spiritual attainment for an individual - salvation for the soul.

Moksha, however, is believed to be too high an attainment to be achieved by a common mortal. To the common man in the world, therefore, transmigration is a process his own soul must go through.

- 3) Farquhar has quoted Oldenberg as saying that the doctrine of metempsychosis (transmigration and karma) is post-Vedic having originated in the 7th or 8th century B.C. The Vedic Aryans, it appears, believed in a land of ancestors (pitri-lok) to which the souls of all sanctified persons went after their death. The belief in transmigration, according to some, is a borrowing from the Dravidian and tribal religions of the Indian sub-continent. The popular version of the theory is a mixture of the classical doctrine of metempsychosis and karma with a touch of the Vedantic philosophy. In the classical theory, the process of karma is regarded as automatic, and there is no thought of a soul of a higher order. In the popular doctrine, as we have seen, the concept of a Supreme Soul or Param-atman comes in, and ways and means are introduced for the 'emancipation' or salvation of the individual soul to procure a release from the process

of transmigration and karma and merge with the Supreme Soul. This is only one of the numerous instances where the popular belief has synthesised with classical streams of thought.

(ERE, Vol. II, p. 742 - 743; also Garbe in ERE, Vol. 12, p. 434).



## CHAPTER VI.

### THE HINDU 'RITUAL' IDIOM.

The people of Potlod consider the third category of the principles of dharma, viz., the ritual prohibitions, to be the most important from the point of view of their normal everyday behaviour. The correct observance of the positive injunctions of dharma is believed to earn spiritual merit for the individuals concerned. But the non-observance of the ritual prohibitions not only brings ritual blemish to the person, it also pollutes him, thus creating a social problem. Naturally, therefore, the community is more concerned about the correct conformity to these rules by its members than it is, for example, in respect of his karma or even his 'moral' behaviour.

The fundamental feature of Hindu social organization is caste or jati. The social position of a person in respect of his activities, rights and obligations in the local community is decided by his caste. Caste is, at it were, the index of social status. Loss of caste status, therefore, creates a serious situation, both for the individual and for the community as a whole. And since the entire system is bound up with notions

about ritual purity and pollution, the greatest effort a person makes during his life time is to see that he does not become so polluted as to lose his caste status. Stevenson writes: "The existence of a central core of common beliefs about pollution, and their acceptance at the present day even by those low status groups who suffer most from the ritual status system, is amply demonstrated by the uniform nature of the action taken to modify behaviour when such a group is attempting to rise in ritual status, and the narrow range of criteria by which behaviour is modified" (1954, p. 49). This part of our discussion is, therefore, devoted to an analysis of the concepts of ritual purity and pollution as they are understood by the people of Potlod. I shall then consider how these concepts affect the life of an individual and of status groups or castes.

Hindus regard purity as the supreme virtue. Of the three major attributes of God and dharma, viz., satvam (truth), sundaram (beauty), and sivam (purity, auspiciousness), the last is the most important. A thing, person, action, or belief is righteous (or according to dharma) if it is truthful, if it is beautiful, but above all if it is pure and auspicious. Gods exist (as gods) only because of their greater purity; the moment they become impure, the gods fall from their godhood. A popular Puranic myth tells how Indra — the

mighty Lord of the Heavens, the wielder of the most powerful weapon of all creation, that is, the vaira or thunderbolt, was dethroned as a result of his fall from purity for killing a Brahmin, and on another occasion for seducing the charming wife of a sage. He had to perform purificatory rites before he could be restored to his godhood and his kingship of swarga (one of the heavens). In his normal every day life, a person must be pure to be able to execute his daily duties and live as a normal member of his community. He should not eat, or transact his every day business, visit temples or perform rites and ceremonies unless he be ritually pure.

It is essential at his stage, I feel, to state that a distinction is made by the people between (a) physical uncleanliness and ritual impurity, and (b) physical cleanliness and ritual purity; and to clarify the relationship between the physical condition of an object or person and its ritual state. It is interesting to note that this distinction is present in people's minds, and is expressed by them in their talk, despite the popular use of the same term for both physical condition and ritual state. On the other hand, a clear cut distinction between the two is made in the liturgic terminology expressed in Sanskrit, which is the language of most of the sacred literature of the Hindus and also the language in which the incantations recited at rites

and ceremonies are composed.

In the every day speech of the common village people, the term safa or sucha is used to mean both the condition of physical cleanliness and a state of ritual purity. Similarly, the term ganda is used to denote physical dirt or uncleanness as well as a state of ritual impurity. The meanings vary in accordance with the context of the speech. Below I quote several sentences from statements given by people in Potlod to explain the variation in the meanings of these terms.

"The village Bhangi is fond of dressing well. He remains safa (that is, physically clean)".

"The priest is a bad man; he keeps the temple room ganda (that is, physically dirty)".

"Food or drink touched by a Harijan is ganda (that is, ritually impure)".

"Clothes washed by a Dhobi, even though safa (that is, physically clean) are ganda (that is, ritually impure), but garments simply dipped in water and dried in sun are safa (that is, ritually pure), even though they might be ganda (that is, physically dirty) in appearance".

"We cultivators have to work in the fields; we are always ganda (that is, physically dirty)".

"A woman in her periods is gandi (feminine of ganda) or impure".

In Sanskrit, however, there are two different

sets of words used to denote physical condition and ritual state. The term pavitra means ritually pure; its opposite is apavitra, meaning ritually impure. Physical cleanliness is described by the word swachchha, and aswachchha means physically dirty and unclean. These terms are used mostly by those Brahmins and men from other priestly castes and sects who are well-versed in Sanskrit and scriptural lore. Here, the distinction between the physical condition and the ritual state is sharply defined in the terms themselves.

My contention is that irrespective of whether a person uses the popular or the classical terms in his speech, he is aware of the distinction between the physical condition and the ritual state. In the absence of precise terminology in the folk dialect, he generally uses the same word for both, but, in his mind, the distinction is clear and unambiguous.

Generally speaking, an unwashed and dirty state is also an impure state. Dirt itself is an impurity, and consequently, dirty and physically unclean objects or persons are usually considered to be ritually impure as well.

Physically clean things, however, are not necessarily ritually pure. It is true that physical cleanliness is a prerequisite of ritual purity. For example, when a person wishes to perform a rite or



ceremony, first of all he takes a bath and dons clean garments. Only after that may he pass through the other purificatory stages and attain that state of ritual purity which is essential for the correct performance of ritual acts. Yet a bath is not always purificatory. The confined mother is given a massage and bath every day beginning from the day the baby is born; persons in mourning are not required to forego baths and clean garments. And yet, for the period of the pollution, (called sutaka), they continue to be impure. Thus, we may say that physical cleanliness is an essential step towards the attainment of ritual purity, but physical cleanliness is not necessarily followed by ritual purity. On the other hand, physical uncleanliness is almost always followed by ritual impurity and pollution.

To the Hindu, the objects of the entire physical world are either intrinsically pure, neutral, or impure. Intrinsic purity and impurity are attributes of physical phenomena. Trees and plants, fruits and leaves, animals, birds and insects, metals and minerals, river and water, even time and place are pure or impure. That is to say, some of these, such as the cow, the banana and mango fruits, the pipal (Ficus religiosa) and bargad (Ficus Indica) trees, gold, the sweet basil plant (Tulsi) and its leaves, Ganga jal (water of the river Ganga) and the water of most rivers are intrinsically pure. Certain other things, such as the pig, iron, the domestic fowl, the babul (Accacia Indiana) and khajur (Borassus flabellifer) trees, stagnant water in general and water of certain special rivers are considered to be intrinsically impure. 1)

All human beings belong to the neutral category. According to the Hindu theory of samskaras, all men are born impure. It is through the performance of the prescribed samskaras or sacraments that their birth taint is removed. Different sacraments are required to be performed in distinctive ways by different castes. For example, the Brahmin are required to perform at least nine samskaras in strict vedic fashion; the Kshatriya and Vaisya castes have to go through only six, and these are performed in the easier and less austere

shastric style; whereas the Shudra and 'untouchable' castes perform only three samskaras and these have to be executed without a Brahmin officiating or the chanting of sacred Sanskrit mantras (incantations) (See Ghurye, 1950, pp. 13 - 14).

In contemporary village India, these differences have become very sharp between different jati or castes, and consequently highly stratified. Each caste in Potlodi, for example, possesses its own special rituals and sacraments and these are sometimes performed in distinctive ways for each caste.

Intrinsic purity and impurity are understood as universal polarities. An intrinsically pure thing can, under no circumstances, become impure, and by the same rule, an intrinsically impure thing can never be purified.

The objects in the 'neutral' category are deemed to be highly sensitive, but they are relatively sensitive to impurity and resistant to purity. Thus, all intrinsically impure things impurify 'neutral' things or persons by contact. On the other hand, not all pure things purify. The number of pure things which are also purifying is strictly limited. Such extraordinarily pure things as fire, Ganga water, and products of the sacred cow are used as cleansing or purificatory objects, to wipe off impurity or pollution and restore the thing or person to normal ritual status.

Fire is believed to be the most important and



potent purificatory agent, and is widely used (by all castes, and all over India) for cleansing defiled objects. Pots and pans when polluted are fired or rubbed with burning ashes to cleanse them. Fire is also used as the worldly receiver of all oblations and offerings made in the name of the gods and ancestors, and is believed to purify and transfer their shares to the appropriate gods or ancestors.

Besides fire (or agni), surya (sun) and Ganga jal (water of the river Ganga) are other important purificatory agents. 2) After the period of ritual pollution during confinement, the mother and her newly born babe are ceremonially brought out of the confinement room to see (skr., 'darsan') the sun god and worship his heavenly glowing body. Every morning the Brahmin and the priest, and in fact all pious minded Hindus, bathe and look at the rising sun and make offerings of water to the sun god, in order to wash away the night's pollution and purify themselves for morning worship and the day's work. The sun is distant, but mere darsan of his golden disc and shining rays purify certain types of impurities in men. For the cleansing of mental impurities and pollution in particular, the darsan, dhyan (Skr., meditation) and puja (Skr., worship) of the sun god are especially beneficial. The very dhyan of surya is believed to protect men against pollution and the fear of impurity and ghosts.

The waters of the river Ganga are considered to be very sacred, and able to cleanse all worldly defilements. The Ganga, which is anthropomorphised as a goddess by Hindus all over India, is believed to have issued from the toe of Lord Vishnu, who gave the sacred waters to Bhagirath — an ancient prince of the Solar Dynasty of Kshatriyas — in order to wash away the mortal remains and sins of his ancestors who were burnt by the wrath of a sage whom they had offended (cf. Dowson, p. 108; Morgan, p. 113). The mythical legend of her origin and association with pious acts and austerities performed by sages and kings on her banks have given the Ganga a sacred aura, and immersion in her holy waters is believed to lead to the acquisition of great spiritual merit and the washing away of defilement, impurity, and — so some believe — even of sin. For this reason, Hindu pilgrims travel to the Ganga from all parts of the country. With them, they carry the ashes and bones of their forefathers to be immersed in the holy waters so that their souls may become purified and attain spiritual merit. Pilgrims to the Ganga bring back with them in brass containers water and sand from the sacred river, and these are stored as precious objects for the purification of things and persons. All along the route of the river are situated sacred places of all India religious importance. Hardwar where the Ganga comes down from the Himalayas into the

plains of Hindustan, Prayag or Allahabad where other holy rivers, viz., the Jamuna and the Saraswati join her in a sacred confluence, Kashi or Banaras, and Nawadwip where the Ganga joins the sea are the more prominent centres of pilgrimage for Hindus all over India.

Along with Ganga, several other rivers in India are endowed with holiness by traditional Hinduism. There are seven sacred rivers — Ganga, Jamuna, Saraswati, Narbada, Kaveri, Godawari, Sindhu (or Indus) (Morgan, p. 112). But for the common villager of Potlod in Malwa — as in fact to people all over the country — even minor rivers and streams are sacred. And to these the people commonly flock for ritual bathing on certain sacred occasions — astrologically calculated — and for purificatory purposes.

For the people of Potlod village, such a river is the Shipra. The Shipra rises in the Vindhya hills and joins the Narbada near Dhar in Central Malwa. The river is sacred to the Hindus of Malwa all along her course from the source to this confluence. Temples are built along her course, and especially where other rivers join her or where she joins the Narbada. Particularly sacred is the town of Ujjain on the bank of the Shipra, made holier by the mythological and historical legends associated with the town (Dowson, p. 325). It is an important pitha-sthana ('place of a seat of deity'), and

is one of the four places in India where is held one of the four twelve yearly kumbha congregations sacred to all Hindus.<sup>3)</sup>

These three major purificatory agents, agni, or sacred fire, surva or the sun, and the Ganga, are represented in everyday domestic rites by the kitchen fire, an earthen lamp, and clean water from a stream, well, or tank, respectively. The original natural powers (conceived as gods) are too strong and potent to be excluded from any rites and ceremonies. But they are believed to be rather distant and not easily available to everybody, and hence the widespread use of their symbols instead; no rituals are considered to be complete without their use.

In all puja (worship), clean water sanctified with the proper mantra (ritual incantation) is used for the cleansing of the worshipper; he sips a few drops and sprinkles a few more on his head and body. This, combined with the pre-worship bath, is believed to purify the worshipper, externally as well internally, and qualify him for the performance of the puja. An earthen lamp is lit and kept alight during the puja -- it is regarded as a bad omen if the lamp goes out; the lamp is waved around the image of the deity, or around the face of the subject of the puja (as for example, during birth, first hair shaving, or marriage ceremonies). The aim of this



rite is to ward off impurities and malignant spirits. Finally, no puja is considered complete without ritual fire in which offerings are made in the name of the appropriate god, spirit or ancestor. All Hindu sacraments must be performed before a domestic fire, which is believed to be the representation of Agni - the Fire god, who is, as already noted, believed to be the worldly representative of the entire pantheon of Hindu gods and spirits.

In addition to these three major purificatory agents, there is a fourth one which has become particularly important to the village folk due to its easy availability and its connection with the sacred cow. This is known as pancha gavya, a mixture made of five products of the sacred animal, viz., milk, curd, ghee, urine and dung. This is believed to possess a strong cleansing potency, and is widely used for the purification of persons polluted by the breach of ordinary ritual prohibitions, (such as acceptance of food from a prohibited caste), for which permanent excommunication from the caste is deemed too stringent a punishment. Cow dung is also used for the cleansing of polluted ground, the kitchen hearth and cooking utensils, or for the purification of the ground on which a rite has to be performed, a kitchen hearth on which food offered at a puja is cooked, or utensils which are to be used in the cooking.

The easiest and simplest of all purificatory measures, however, is an ordinary bath and change of clothing. A bath every day is deemed to be a necessity for an adult, in order to wash away the impurity and pollution caused by the natural working of the human body and the secretion of liquids and emissions such as perspiration, saliva, urine, faeces, semen, menses. I found that every morning most of the Hindus of Potlode took a bath and changed into clean clothes. Every time he sits down to eat, a man washes hands, feet, and face. On festival days and occasions of puja, he takes a bath and changes into washed garments. Both these actions — bathing and changing one's clothing — are considered to be essential prerequisites to every ritual performance. This is another important aspect of all India Hinduism which is an integral part of the ritual complex of the Hindus of Malwa and Potlode village (cf. Morgan, p. 164).

We see that physical uncleanness is usually approximated with ritual impurity; there are exceptions, however. As I pointed out earlier in this chapter, when dirt attaches to a man's physical body, ordinarily his nature and soul cannot be pure. And thus, in general, an unwashed state is regarded as an impure state, and taking a bath and changing into clean washed clothes purifies a person and temporarily raises his personal ritual state. A bath and change of clothing, has thus come to be

considered the most essential prerequisite of any type of purification, whether it be purification from such involuntary pollution as is caused by the natural working of the human body, such as menstruation or parturition, or such events as death, or voluntary pollution caused by the breach of one of the numerous taboos (cf. Stevenson, 1954, p. 52). At the conclusion of a period of pollution, a man is given a bath and change of garments, which purifies him from the taint of pollution and restores him to his normal ritual status.

One of the fundamental beliefs concerning purity and impurity is that the human body is the storehouse of impurity, and its normal natural working causes impurity or pollution. During the course of its natural working, the human body — like all animals — emits certain fluids and excrement. All these human emissions are considered to be impure and polluting. Like most Hindu beliefs, this belief in the impurity of human emissions and secretions is rooted in Sanskrit scriptures, and therefore, forms part of the all India ritual idiom of the Hindus. As such, the Hindus of Potlodi village share it with Hindus all over the country.

All human emissions are treated as ritually impure, whether breath, spittle, nasal mucus, semen, menses, urine, faeces, sweat, or bodily grease, though each of these transmits pollution to a different degree



(Dubois, 1924, pp. 183, 188, 239; Hutton, 1951, p. 174; Srinivas, 1952, p. 103). Breath, spittle, sweat, bodily grease, and nasal mucus, for example, are considered to be minor impurities, and though a person is prohibited from putting his finger in his mouth or nose, or wiping his perspiration or bodily grease while dining, serving food, or performing a ritual act, a simple wash is deemed sufficient to cleanse him from such a taint. Urine, faeces, and semen are impurities of a more serious nature and pollution caused by their contact is required in the normal course of events to be properly cleansed away with water. If, however, a person who is in a state of ritual purity (above normal from his ordinary individual state) comes in contact with these polluting objects, for example, while he be performing rites or ceremonies, he becomes degraded from such a state of extraordinary purity; he has to undergo cleansing in order to reattain the former state of ritual purity and continue the ritual service he was performing. It is for this reason that the people in general, and the Brahmin, temple priests, and ritual officiants in particular, have to attend to their calls of nature early in the morning, and take a bath immediately after to wash away the impurity. The same reason is given for the ritual bath and change of garments which precedes all religious observances.

Menses are considered to be the most impure



of all human emissions. A woman is considered to be impure for the three or four days (or for as long as the flow lasts) of her periods, and she becomes pure and attains her normal ritual state only after a bath and change of garments on the final day.

When a young girl reaches the menarche, a story is usually told to her by some elderly woman of her household. The god Indra once killed a Brahmin priest who was helping the demons (rakshas) against the gods (devata). The sin of killing a Brahmin, however, was great, even for Indra, and he had to abandon his throne and seek shelter in the sea for fear of brahm hatya ('sin of kill-a Brahmin'). The gods, left leaderless in their fight against the demons, approached Brahma -- the Lord of Creation -- and sought his advice. Brahma was pleased with their prayers, and agreed to divide Indra's sin in four parts. One quarter of the sin he transferred to certain trees; these trees secrete juices<sup>or</sup> gum, and both the wood of such trees and the gum are to be treated as ritually impure. A second quarter of the original sin Brahma gave to sea water which had sheltered Indra; the sin appeared on the surface in the form of foam; both the foam and sea water are considered as impure objects. The third part of the sin was given to women; this part of the sin manifests itself in menstruation during which period a woman is impure and has to be avoided. Indra

performed austerities and sacrifices and thus wiped off the remaining quarter of the sin. This is why, the girl is told, women are impure during their periods.

On the first day of her menstrual period, a woman is of the same ritual state as the killer of a Brahmin; on the second day, her state is that of a Chandala (an untouchable); on the third day, she is akin to a washerwoman, still impure. For these three days, she must not cast her shadow on any man, and must not cast eyes on her husband. She must not go near temples, shrines, seats of godlings and spirits, or the household kitchen. She must not bathe in the stream. She must live quietly and retiringly for these three days, covering her face and lying in a secluded corner of the house. She must not touch any person or household things; she is usually given a rag to sleep on and another to cover herself. She may be allowed to touch her child if she has to suckle it, but the child must be bathed immediately after being touched by her.

On the fourth morning, the woman should go to the pool or stream early in the day. She should discard her menstrual rag in some bush, bathe with her clothes on, and put on clean garments. Then she is pure again and may take up her household duties once more.

But a woman during her period must on no account participate in, or even attend a ritual.

performance. If in the midst of a ceremonial, she discovers that she is in her periods, she must immediately withdraw, lest she makes impure the other persons and things around and thus brings the wrath of the gods upon the household. This is said to be the main reason why girls are married much before they attain the menarche. According to orthodox belief, if a girl is not married before puberty, her parents and even ancestors are tainted with pollution which is believed to be equal to that of drinking menstrual discharge. At present, however, such an extreme form of this belief is not shared by any persons in Potlode village, but an unmarried girl who has attained the age of puberty is generally the cause of ridicule to her parents and family.

Ritual prohibitions during the menstrual period vary in their intensity and rigidity of observance from caste to caste. Thus, in general, the cleaner and purer the caste, the more rigid is their observance of such taboos. Thus, other things being equal, the caste which follows these ritual prohibitions with greater rigidity is considered to be purer than the castes which do not. The observance of ritual prohibitions during menstrual periods is an important issue of what is known as 'Sanskritization', and all such castes as desire to rise in the ritual caste hierarchy impose these taboos upon themselves.<sup>4)</sup>

The natural normal working of the human body creates impurities. But the cessation of the natural working of body -- human or animal -- also is a source of grave impurity to all those who come in contact with it. The ritual impurity of a corpse is a phenomenon we come across not only in Hinduism but also in many other religions of the world. Impurity is regarded as an attribute of all death and decay, and all that comes in contact with death -- or the dead body -- are deeply polluted. All those persons who accompany a corpse to the cremation ground are believed to be polluted by contact with the dead body, and on their return from the funeral, they have to take a bath and change garments before they may enter the village precincts or their houses.

For the members of the household group and for the entire lineage (kula) of the dead person, the state of impurity lasts for several days. The Hindus of Potlod village believe that such impurity sets in at the moment of daag (fire set to the funeral pyre, cremation), and lasts for a period varying from ten to thirteen days, varying from caste to caste.

For this period of pollution, all the members of the kula are polluted, that is, they fall from their everyday ritual state, and are not entitled to perform or participate in any auspicious ritual observances (which, as stated before, can be performed only by a

person in a heightened state of ritual purity). During this period, they are not touched by outsiders — even their castemen, and they have to be austere in their food habits; they must not drink liquor, nor eat meat and spicy food, nor chew betel leaves and tobacco. The death pollution does not apply to the daughters of the kula or their progeny, not even unmarried daughters, since they are not acknowledged as full members of the kula. Only if the cremation and other funerary rites of a person are performed by his daughter's son or sister's son (as is usually the case with persons who have no son or sons of their own, and with persons who keep gharjamai and adopt their daughter's son or sister's son) does the death pollution attach to the cremator but not to his natal kula (since he performs the rites only as an adopted member of his mother's father's or mother's brother's kula for the specific purpose of performing the funerary rites and offering oblations to the dead).

The chief mourner is the man who sets fire to the funeral pyre of the dead person. He is usually a son or a son's son or another male member of the dead man's kula. He lays the corpse on the pyre of wood, pours ghee on it, and sets fire to it; after the pyre is burnt, he throws the last chip of wood or dung cake into it (this is believed to symbolise the severing of all connections with the physical body which has been burnt to ashes;



henceforward, all the relations with the dead are with his spiritual self or soul), and shortly afterwards extinguishes the fire with water from the nearby stream. Every day during the period of mourning he has to offer oblations of milk to the dead in the cremation ground. On the third day after cremation, he collects the ashes and bones for immersion in sacred waters. Ujjain is less than 20 miles distant from Potlod village, and most of the Potlod Hindus take the ashes to the holy Shipra river for ritual immersion. The chief mourner offers rice balls (pinda) to the dead on the bank of the river, performs the immersion rite and returns home for the final ceremonies.

During this period he does not shave nor wear clean washed garments; he has to observe the food taboos in common with his kula, only more rigidly, and he is required to sleep on bare ground or a plank of wood. He must not touch anybody and is not to be touched, even by his own wife, children or kula men.

On the last day of mourning (usually the tenth or thirteenth after cremation), all the members of the kula take a bath and offer final oblations and gifts to the dead. This ceremony is locally called ghanta ('gift giving to the dead'), and the gifts are accepted by the domestic priest of the caste concerned on behalf of the dead. The house is cleansed with water and cow

dung, earthen vessels are broken and metal pots purified with fire and hot ashes. Death pollution is thus removed off the dwelling place.

The kula members, including the chief mourner, shave and bathe and may don clean washed clothes. The pollution is now over, and to symbolise the end of pollution and the restoration of the kula to the normal ritual state of their caste, they all sit down to a feast with the rest of the caste community. This is known in Potlode as the nukta feast. They all chew betel leaves and tobacco and smoke together, and resume their everyday routine of life.

Animal carcasses spread the same type of pollution as human corpses. In the latter case, however, the pollution is caused by touch of the carcass, and all those who voluntarily or involuntarily come into contact with the carcass are considered to have been polluted. Usually such pollution, for the average common man, is very ordinary in its nature, and is cleansed with a simple bath and change of clothing. For those castes, however, who habitually deal in the removal of carcasses, or skinning of dead animals and tanning of skins, pollution comes to mean a permanent hereditary taint of untouchability.

Another principle of all India Hinduism which is incorporated by the Potlode Hindus in their religious system is the sanctity attached to the life principle and the

belief that the destruction of life in any form leads to sin and ritual demerit in the after life, and physical impurity in this life. The belief that all souls, whether in animal or human form, are the same from the point of view of life in them, is rooted in Sanskrit scriptures and is specifically annunciated by Lord Krishna in the Gita. Thus a person who destroys innocent life commits a sin, whether he kills an animal, bird or man. The hunter who shoots, the fisherman or trapper who catches fish or birds, even the hangman are all impure persons (even though the last-named hangs persons who have been proved guilty of the commission of heinous crimes, by orders of the society and state). If a person kills another, even though in self defence, or for the protection of other innocent persons, he is polluted by the blood of the victim, and has to atone for his deed. The atonement usually varies with the varna status of the victim. The killer of a Brahmin, for example, has to undergo more severe atonement and purification than the killer of an untouchable.

In the animal world, the cow is regarded as the most sacred, and is of special ritual concern to all Hindus. By orthodox village standards, the cow is regarded as a goddess, as an embodiment of the gods in the Hindu pantheon. In the myths, cow is associated with Lord Krishna who is popularly known as Gopala ('Cowherd'). The sanctity



attached to the cow is demonstrated by the extraordinary purity of her products — milk, dung, urine; these are not only pure things but also purificatory agents. At least two of the important annual festivals common to many Potlud Hindus have cow worship as their ritual core. The festival of Gobardhan which falls on the sixteenth day in the month of Katik, on the morrow of the great all India festival of Lights (Dewali) is essentially a festival of the cattle (literally, 'prosperity for cows'). On this day, the villagers observe a holiday; they decorate their cows and cattle and rub oil on their bodies and horns; the cattle are fed first of all in the morning, and they are given green fodder, oil, and sugar. Cows are worshipped with the respect due to a goddess.

The other festival of cows falls in the same month of Katik, on the 23rd day. This festival — called Gopashthami ('cow eighth') is common only to the Hindus of the three higher varna, (that is, Brahmin, Kshatriya, and Vaisya). On this day, the women keep a day-long fast, and worship cows in the evening and offer them sweet food. They believe that if the cow is well treated and worshipped, she can bestow boons of wealth, sons and prosperity upon the worshipper.

No wonder the killing or harming of an animal of such spiritual virtue and purity is considered to be sinful by all Hindus, and therefore polluting. If a

person kills, flays, or injures a cow, or deals in her skin or hide, or eats her flesh, intentionally or unintentionally, he is polluted and has to undergo severe atonement and purification to wash away the impurity and sin. The atonement is in the nature of pilgrimage to a tirth ('bathing place on a sacred river to which pilgrimages are made for the expiation of sins'), and the performance of a special ceremony, at which a miniature cow made of gold or silver is given to the officiating Brahmin priest, along with corn equal in weight to the dead cow. The people of Potlod go to Gotampura, about twenty miles to the west, for this purificatory ceremony. This is followed by a feast to mark the reacceptance of the sinner now purified, in his caste. Castes whose traditional occupations bring them in regular contact with the skin or hide or flesh of the cow or cattle, such as the Chamar, the Mochi, and the Bhangi are believed to be tainted with hereditary impurity, and hence unclean and ritually untouchable.

Certain other animals are considered to be sacred in varying degrees, but much less sacred than the cow. Monkeys are regarded because of their physical resemblance to the god Hanuman who happens to be one of the prominent village deities, believed to be a great helper and a remover of obstacles. Cats are treated with awe because of their supposed association with the small pox goddess (Sitala Mata) and her brother, the dangerous Guna Baba.

There is a ritual prohibition on the killing of both these animals, but the traditional ritual expiation for a killer of monkeys or cats is not so severe as that for a cow killer. All that the former has to do is to give a miniature figure of the animal in gold or silver to a Brahmin, after which he may take a bath, offer further alms according to his means, and resume his normal everyday life. The killing of a monkey or a cat is sinful, and leads to ritual demerit in after life; the killing of a cow or cattle is both sinful and polluting; the sin has to be expiated by a proper pilgrimage and alms, and the impurity or pollution has to be removed with the help of fasts, ritual baths, and feasts to the caste.

Seeds are believed to possess life, and the presser or crusher of seeds (particularly oil-seeds) is considered to have been polluted by the destruction of the life principle (jiva) in the seeds. The Potlud Hindus believe in this theory and make use of it to explain the ritually unclean caste status of the Teli (Hutton, p.74).

All human beings, as said earlier, are believed to belong to the intrinsically 'neutral' category. That is to say, they are neither intrinsically pure nor intrinsically impure and are sensitive to both purity and impurity. Of course, as we shall see, they are more sensitive to impurity and the pollution caused by it than to purity.

The analysis of notions of ritual purity and pollution in their relationship with society has to be on two different levels, viz., the intra-caste level and the inter-caste level, or in terms of what Nadel called the 'internal order' and the 'external order' of groups (1951, pp. 176).

I shall first take up the role of notions of purity and pollution in the internal order of castes.

The jati or caste is a status group and all members of the same jati are considered to possess the same ritual status. From an individual's point of view, his normal ritual status is thus the same as the ritual status of his caste.

To illustrate, a person born, for example, into the Bhangi caste (scavengers and sweepers) has his status, activities and behaviour largely determined for him; this is in terms of the status, activities and pattern of behaviour considered to be suitable for the Bhangi caste as a whole; members of other castes look upon him as a Bhangi, and he enjoys the privileges, observes taboos, and suffers from social barriers, in common with his natal group, the Bhangi caste.

It is true that in principle an individual is allowed to deviate from the patterned activity and behaviour of his caste group; thus a person may renounce his worldly ties, become a meditator (sadhu) or a wandering

mendicant (baba), and thus acquire some ritual merit (punya) through leading a life of piety and asceticism. This, however, is not considered to be practical, for two main reasons; firstly, the acquisition of such a merit does not help an individual in this life, but is believed to pave the way for a better status only in his next incarnation; secondly, renunciation involves severance of all worldly ties, separation from kinsfolk, and from the shelter and protection provided by the caste group. For these reasons, the path of renunciation is considered to be a very unpractical one by most people, even by those belonging to very degraded ritual levels as do the 'unclean' and 'untouchable' castes.

During the 1½ years of my stay in the field, I did not come across a single case of renunciation of the worldly life. Nor did any of the people remember any such incident having ever taken place, in this village, or elsewhere. Even the mendicant sects, like Gosain, Vairagi and Nath, have a tendency towards becoming caste-like groups by stopping external recruitment and observing endogamy. Close interrogation from members of such castes as Chamar, Bhangi, Balai, and others of the 'unclean' category revealed that none of them could envisage individual existence apart from the group (caste) into which each was born. 'It was my bhagya (fate, destiny)' is the answer to such queries, even though a person is very



much unsatisfied with the treatment meted out to his caste by others. Efforts have been made to raise the status of a caste as a whole (for example, in the case of the Bagri, who claim Chandravamshi Kshatriya status, and are trying hard to puritanise their life, on the model of the Brahmin), but none by an individual to raise what may be called his 'personal ritual status'.

To live as a normal member of his society, an individual must, therefore, observe the rules of living, eating and marrying prescribed by his jati or caste; he must remain a social person, integrated into the pattern of his group behaviour (cf. Stevenson, 1954, p. 47).

As shown above, certain types of pollution are of an involuntary nature. The natural functioning of the human organism, the secretion and discharge of matter in different forms, such as, saliva, urine, excreta, semen and menses, and death and decay — all these pollute the normal human being. The pollution caused by these natural processes is considered to be of a mild nature since all human beings, as a matter of course, have to suffer from its effects.

The other class of personal pollution is that which is caused by certain acts of omission or commission relating to ritual avoidance; this is voluntary pollution and is considered to be a serious affair so far as the sanctions which apply to these acts are concerned.

A person is said to be in a state of ritual

purity while he is performing a religious observance, such as puja (worship), havan (sacrifice, fire offering), vrata (fast), japa (repetition of a mantra or the name of a deity), or dhyan (meditation). In performing these, he has to have purity of body and of mind. To attain these, a person has to go through a lengthy procedure. He has, first of all, to take a bath in clean water and don clean garments. He then sits at the place where the religious observance is to be performed and which has already been cleaned and plastered with cow dung. He sits facing east; he is expected to think of nothing else and to concentrate on the worship. He recites certain prescribed mantras in Sanskrit or the officiating priest does so on his behalf; he is then required to sip some sanctified water and sprinkle a few drops on his body and around him, reciting mantras all the while. This whole procedure is believed to purify him and thus prepare him for the religious observance. Purity of mind, people believe, is cultivated by regular reading of or listening to scriptures and concentration of mind and senses in religious activity. This state of purity, however, is purely situational, and as soon as the religious observance is over, the person automatically reverts to his normal ritual state. Thus, whereas pollution can be contacted involuntarily, accidentally, as well as deliberately, and if not cleansed, continues to taint the person who is polluted, purity can be attained only deliberately and consciously



and only for brief periods.

The nature of pollution is believed to be such that contact with impurity automatically pollutes a person and he continues in a state of pollution until he is purified. During this period of pollution he imparts impurity to all those 'neutral' things and persons which come into contact with him. This is, however, a purely temporary state and is not to be confused with the nature of the intrinsically impure objects. Unlike the latter, a polluted person can be cleansed with the help of purificatory objects and ritual incantations, and thus restored to his normal state.

This situational and purely temporary state of purity or impurity of 'neutral' human beings may be called 'acquired purity' or 'acquired impurity', to distinguish it from 'intrinsic purity' and 'intrinsic impurity', respectively. Persons with acquired impurity transmit pollution like intrinsically impure things, but acquired purity is not transmittable. Thus in the 'neutral' world, acquired impurity overcomes acquired purity.

From the individual's point of view, acquired ritual purity, normal state<sup>5)</sup> (which is the same as caste status), and acquired ritual impurity constitute a sort of scale. His everyday ritual position is a point from which he moves up or down depending on whether he is in a state of ritual purity or impurity.

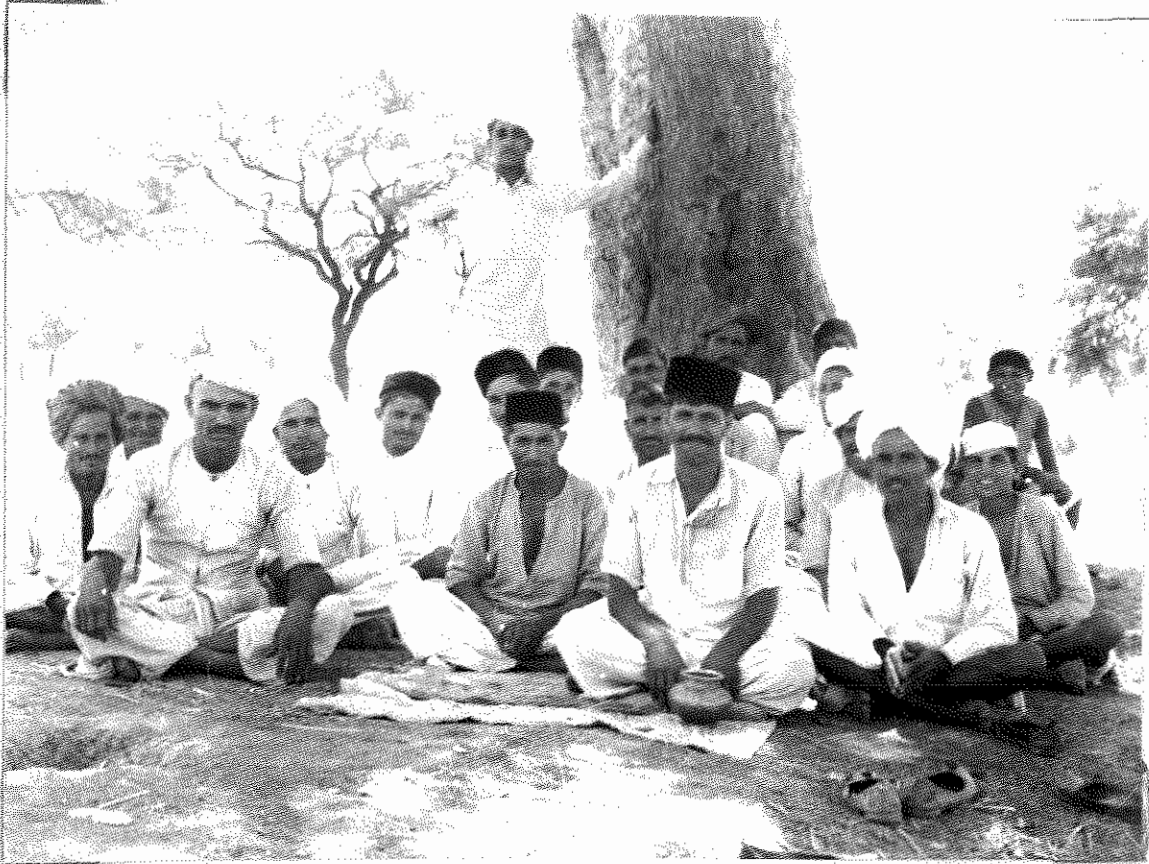
Contact with impurity is not always voluntary,



nor does it always lead to sin, or a 'demerit entry' in the person's karma stock. It is only when a person's actions directly violate the ritual rules of his caste or community that he is considered to be seriously affected by the contact of impurity.

The concepts of purity and pollution are well defined and universal in Hinduism, but their strict application in the life of a person is conditioned by the rules of his caste. Thus, for example, even though excreta or urine are considered to be polluting, the scavenger regularly comes into contact with them. This act of his, however, does not pollute him personally, that is, it does not degrade him from his normal ritual state, though the same action would pollute and degrade a person belonging to any other caste, for example, a Brahmin, a Lohar, or even a Chamar. Similarly, the Chamar's business of skinning dead cattle and tanning their hides does not pollute and degrade him personally, but men from all other castes would suffer from the serious consequences of pollution if they ventured to touch a dead animal.

One of the main purposes of the rules of pollution then, is to contain a person within his caste or jati and to keep him well integrated within this natal status group. The rules of pollution that matter most to an individual are thus those that relate to his marital and sexual life, commensal and dietary relations, food habits, pursuit or occupation, association and physical



A KHATI PANCHAYAT IN POTLOD

The young man standing at the back is their bhaat. A lotful of water is kept, and speakers at the meeting have to swear in the name of Ganga by touching the water.

contact, and to the killing — deliberately or accidental — of certain animals which are regarded as sacred. An infringement of these rules immediately pollutes him and degrades him from his normal ritual state. It then becomes the business of his caste community to investigate the circumstances of that infringement; if it is purely incidental, they usually take a very mild view of it and only a perfunctory penance and penalty is regarded as sufficient to restore him to his normal state. On the other hand, if the caste community are convinced that his transgression is deliberate, it becomes a serious affair and is considered by a council of the caste community (biradari panchayat) in consultation with the village headman. Such council meetings are usually held in one of the village temples. The sanctity of the temple and the presence of the deity are believed to give a supernatural and spiritual touch to the entire proceedings. The accused is given an opportunity to explain himself to the council. There are loud and occasionally bitter discussions, but in the end, the participants usually come to a unanimous conclusion. If the guilt of the accused be accepted, he is given a harsh punishment, though it varies according to the nature of the offence and the standing of the individual concerned. A poor and humble man is usually let off with a nominal penalty, but for the same offence, a rich or haughty man might be asked to give a large feast or pay a fine of several hundred rupees.

The decision of the caste community council is final and there is no appeal against it.

During my stay in Potlodi, there were seven cases of such violations of caste rules. Four of these were minor and were considered to be trivial by the caste communities of the polluted men. Of the four men involved, two were Khatri, one Rajput and one Mali. All these four cases happened during the busy agricultural season. As I gathered from the proceedings of the respective councils, these men took, obviously by mistake, the food and water that was kept by their low caste field servants. Now when the cultivators work in their fields, they take food tied in a piece of cloth and water in a pitcher and place it in one corner of the field. At noon, they all stop work for lunch. The accused submitted that being in a hurry, they had by mistake eaten food kept for their servants. In all four cases, the councils accepted the statements of the accused and let them off with simple punishments and promises to be more careful in future.

The other three cases were more unusual and interesting and below I give brief accounts of these.

#### CASE 1.

In June, 1955, Shiv Prasad Khatri was accused of eating food touched by a Balai and of polluting others deliberately after he was himself polluted. Shiv Prasad disclosed that he had by mistake taken the food kept in

the field for his Balai servant. When he came to know this, he was afraid, but being an astute man, he invited several other castemen to dine with him and thus extended the circle of pollution to a larger number of people who were all degraded from their normal state and thus expelled from the caste. When, eventually, the whole thing was known, the caste community council were put in a very embarrassing position. They could not very well penalize all the polluted men numbering more than a dozen, but at the same time, they could not let the matter stay as it was. After several days of discussions and deliberations in which Khatis from other villages also partook, they decided to reaccept all the polluted and expelled people of the caste. In the case of Shiv Prasad, a serious view was taken and he was meted out with the severe penalty of a huge caste dinner and a fine of five hundred rupees.

#### CASE 2.

One day in December, 1955, Ramu Balai was coming back to Potlod from another village driving the bullock cart of his master — Kanhaiya Lal Khati. The bullocks were tired and thirsty and just outside the village one of them died. Ramu was charged by his caste community of killing an animal of the sacred bovine family. He submitted that before the animal died, he had separated it from the yoke, so that, technically speaking, the animal had not been killed but rather died a natural

death. He produced some village boys who were playing outside and had witnessed the whole incident. But since a sacred animal had died by his mistake, Ramu was asked to go on foot to Gotampura (about 20 miles from Potlod, a sacred spot on the Chambal river) and offer a cow made of wheat dough. This was taken as a sufficient penance to restore Ramu Balai to his normal ritual state.

CASE 3.

The third case was brought before the Council in May, 1956. Bhartar Singh Chohan was alleged to have had illicit sexual relations with a Muslim woman. The Rajput council of Potlod said they had warned Bhartar Singh on a number of occasions, but he had not heeded them. Now his actions had become popular gossip in the village and young boys had even composed songs ridiculing Bhartar Singh. The council thought Bhartar Singh had brought into disrepute the fair name of the Rajputs. He was summoned to the Krishna temple one evening by the elders of the caste and was expelled from the caste. They asked him to give up his relations with the Muslim woman, and as a penalty for his misconduct, pay for repairs to the temple and the cost of its flooring with marble. Bhartar Singh refused to comply. (At this stage in the dispute, I left the village. Later, I learnt that Bhartar Singh had yielded to pressure and accepted the verdict of the caste council by paying the penalty and promising to

behave well in future, he was allowed to resume his normal membership of his caste.

When a person is polluted, he is automatically degraded from his normal ritual state. This throws him out of the social orbit for the period of his pollution. During this period he is avoided by his own castemen and treated as a persona non grata by other castes of the village. If, for example, the polluted and degraded person happens to be a Brahmin priest, he is not invited by other castes to officiate at their domestic rituals during the period of his pollution. If any one did invite him to a feast or to perform a ceremony, and if the polluted priest accepted the invitation and attended the feast or ceremony, the other party becomes polluted and liable to expulsion from his own caste.

On the group level, the notions of purity and pollution determine a caste's ritual status, that is, its position in the hierarchy of castes. The mythical tradition of origin of a caste and the social behaviour of its members are important determinants of its place in the hierarchy. This ritual character of the Hindu system distinguishes the Hindu caste from 'caste' elsewhere in the world as, for example, in certain South American societies or among Indian Muslims. The Hindus believe their society to be divinely ordained in terms of the varna system. Social inequality is explained in terms of the



religious concepts of karma and transmigration of souls; the notions of purity and pollution keep the system going in proper order.

Being a system with ritual considerations at its base, pre-eminent position is given to the Brahmin to whom are assigned, by scriptural traditions, all priestly tasks, pursuit of spiritual knowledge and the interpretation of the scriptural texts. The Brahmin is believed to be the only one able to hold direct communion with the gods. In certain respects he is treated as a god himself and honoured as such.

The non Brahmin castes are required to follow the ideal created by the Brahmin, in their everyday living, and those whose behaviour is 'like that of the Brahmin' are considered to be nearer the Brahmin than are others.

The position of the Brahmin in social precedence is at the top of the hierarchy. It represents a fixed point, in reference to which the positions of other castes are determined. In general, castes whose behaviour and ways of living are more like those of the Brahmin and who, for this reason, are considered to be near the Brahmin in the hierarchy, enjoy a higher ritual status than castes which are relatively less Brahminic and consequently more distant from the Brahmin in the caste hierarchy.

Each caste is required by traditional social



norms to keep to its level in the interest of maintaining a social equilibrium. Towards this end, it has to be very selective in its relations with other castes of the local or regional community. Elsewhere, I have shown that social exclusion and not inclusion is the typical Brahminic rule. Following this rule, each caste models its social relations with other castes.

Here again, the interplay of the notions of purity and pollution is visible. Those actions which involve a very high degree of pollution, such as those connected with sex and reproduction, are almost invariably restricted to one's own caste. Endogamy is thus taken to be the most important rule of caste, so important that it is generally used as a diacritic of caste grouping. Such actions as commensality and acceptance of food touched or cooked by another person, which involve a high degree of pollution (but not so high as in the cases of sex and reproduction) are circumscribed by severe ritual prohibitions; these state what a man must not eat, with whom he must not eat and from whose hands he must not accept food, water, tobacco, other fluids and edibles. The prohibitions which restrict mutual visits and friendship, occupational cooperation, participation in festivals and ceremonials, etc., are less diverse than the food taboos. In the following chapters, these are discussed in some detail.

I have earlier pointed out that the normal ritual

status of every single member of a caste is the same as the group ritual status of that caste. For this reason, it is possible for members of the same jati or caste to marry freely among themselves (subject to exogamous restrictions) or dine freely at each other's house and partake of food and drink in common. Among members of the same caste, there are few restrictions on free interaction.

Rigid restrictions on external recruitment to a caste and caste endogamy are devices to maintain the ritual equality of all members of a caste. Particularly is this true of all ritually 'clean' castes where, I was told, no external recruitment is ever possible, and a person who marries outside his caste is excommunicated.

In the case of some castes, there is a popular tradition of external recruitment, though, I should point out that the people of Potlod are unaware of any such recruitments in the near past. About the Nimar Balahis (or Balais), Father Fuchs writes that they recruit persons from 'higher' castes who have been excommunicated from their own castes for the breach of some ritual rules of behaviour. The procedure of recruitment, as given by Father Fuchs is rather interesting. Elders of the caste sit and bathe on a cot under which the recruit is made to lie; he is drenched with the water and then he is made to drink wine from the same cup from which the elders themselves have drunk previously. This signifies his symbolic

acceptance as a member of the caste. The Chamars, we are told, used to recruit persons of higher castes to their own caste by having them eat beef from their own plates. This reminds one of tribal customs of recruitment where the newcomer is expected to taste a few drops of blood from the veins of the tribal elders and partake of food from a common plate; when "he becomes of the same blood" as the rest of the tribe. The function of caste endogamy, it seems, has been the maintenance of ritual purity in the iati.

SCALE OF POLLUTIONVoluntary

<u>Details of Pollution.</u>	<u>Purificatory Measures.</u>
Accidental physical contact with things or persons impure.	Bath.
Deliberate physical contact with things or persons impure.	Bath and payment of penalty to caste.
Accidental eating, drinking or smoking with an unclean caste person, or eating food, etc., belonging to latter.	Bath, feast provided for local caste group.
Sexual <sup>6)</sup> intercourse (for men) with a non-caste woman.	Bath, feast, verbal atonement.
Deliberate eating, drinking, smoking, etc.	Bath, feast provided for local caste group, payment of penalty, verbal atonement.
Sexual intercourse with a non-caste man (for women).	Bath, feast to caste, penalty, physical atonement.
Accidental killing of monkey or cat.	Bath, donation of a miniature of animal to Brahmin.
Deliberate killing of monkey or cat.	Bath, donation of a miniature of animal to Brahmin, and physical atonement.
Accidental beef eating (or meat eating and liquor drinking for castes that abstain on ritual grounds).	Bath, feast, penalty, verbal atonement.
Accidental killing of a cow, ox, or calf.	Bath, feast, penalty, verbal atonement.
Deliberate beef eating (or meat eating and liquor drinking for castes that abstain on ritual grounds).	Bath, feast, heavy penalty, physical atonement.

<u>Details of Pollution.</u>	<u>Purificatory Measures.</u>
Deliberate killing of a cow, or calf.	Bath, feast, heavy penalty, physical atonement, pilgrimage and donation of a miniature of animal to a Brahmin.
Marriage with a non-caste person (in a caste of equal status).	Dissolution of marriage, bath, physical atonement, feast, heavy penalty.
Marriage with a non-caste person (in a caste of different status).	Dissolution of marriage, bath, physical atonement, feast, heavy penalty. The punishment is more rigorous than in the last instance.

#### Involuntary

<u>Details of Pollution.</u>	<u>Purificatory Measures.</u>
Sweating.	Daily bath.
Salivation.	Wash.
Urination.	Wash.
Excretion.	Wash.
Semen Ejection	Bath.
Menses (the woman must not be touched).	Bath with clothes on, on termination of period.
Parturition (the members of the family must not be touched).	Bath, and cleansing on termination of prescribed time limit.
Death (the members of the patriline must not be touched).	Bath, and cleansing on termination of prescribed time limit.

## Footnotes.

- 1) In classical Hindu tradition, trees, animals and birds, metals and minerals, rivers, even temples, time and earth are graded into varnas, according to their pure or impure character. (see Rose, 1919, p. 526; Ketkar, 1909, p. 122; Roy, 1934, p. 153; Srinivas, 1952, p. 75).

- 2) The following couplet from Tulsidas Ramayana is widely quoted in support of this point:

Samrath ko nahin dosh gusain,  
Ravi, pavak, Sursari ki nain.

meaning:

"The mighty do not have to suffer; like Sun, Fire and Sursari (which cleanse impurities but do not ever become impure themselves)"

N.B. The Ganga is called Sursari, that is, the river of the gods.

- 3) The other three places are Prayag, Nasik, and Kumbhakonam.

- 4) The Bagri are a case in point. It is an 'unclean' caste, low down on the caste hierarchy. In the fall of 1955, a printed circular was issued by the all Malwa Bagri Mahasabha. This body was formed by some educated members of the Bagri caste with the express purpose of trying to raise their status. Their contention is that the Bagri are Chandravamshi Rajputs (Rajputs of the Lunar Line) who were degraded for allying with the Muslims against their Rajput brethren during the 16th-17th centuries.

The circular exhorted the Bagris to give up their degrading customs and adopt the Sanskritic ways of living, in order that they may reattain their lost Rajput status. Among the seven most important directives was one which required Bagri women to



abstain from doing domestic work during their periods and to seclude themselves "as the women of the clean castes did".

Non-observance of menstrual taboos is considered to be an unclean caste custom; it is one of the causes of their low ritual status. For an upward movement on the caste hierarchy, therefore, it is considered essential for a caste to give up the unclean castē customs and take to the clean caste or Sanskritic customs.

- 5) M.N. Srinivas has used the word 'status' in this context (1952, p. 106). I have, however, preferred the use of the word 'state' in its place. Status denotes, sociologically speaking, a relatively longer lasting social position, whereas the word 'state' simply means 'condition'. When a person purifies himself in order to perform worship or a sacrifice, his ritual status does not change. There is only a temporary change in his state. Similarly, when he is polluted, his ritual status does not change as such; only for a temporary and short period his personal state undergoes a change.
- 6) Prostitution does not pollute a man since the prostitute has no caste. It is believed to be an immoral act but not a polluting act.

**PART FOUR**

**RELIGION & SOCIETY**



## CHAPTER VII.

### INTER-CASTE RELATIONS.

In a previous Chapter, I referred to two important elements in the Hindu caste system, viz., endogamy and hierarchy. Ketkar writes: "the classes, races, and occupations exclude themselves from other groups while there is an understanding that one group is superior to the other" (1910, Vol. 1, p. 27). Thus, from the marital point of view, each caste is a distinct entity separate from all other castes. From the evidence I was able to gather in Potlodi and from neighbouring villages, and on the basis of my personal experience and observations elsewhere in India, I would assert with confidence that marrying within one's own caste is generally considered a sacred rule which must not be violated. The Hindus regard marriage as one of the samskaras (sacraments) which are believed to purify man from the impurities of his physical birth, but "if contracted outside the caste, it is a sacrilege" (Ketkar, op. cit., p. 17). Endogamy may, therefore, be regarded as the diacritical characteristic of grouping in the caste system.

In our present discussion, the importance of

rules of endogamy lies in the fact that these rules place a serious limitation on the operation of the hierarchy, since each caste is an endogamous unit, the pattern of superordination and subordination of castes is not manifest in one of a person's most important social actions, viz., marriage.

The other characteristic of the Hindu caste system is its hierarchical stratification. This type of social stratification presupposes feeling of superiority and inferiority or superordination and subordination in its component units. Castes of the upper strata regard themselves and are regarded by others as superior; this is demonstrated in their everyday interaction pattern. Among these are: (i) the adoption of distinctive titles and sur-names, (ii) the mode of greeting, and (iii) seating arrangements at communal gatherings such as the village panchayat meeting or all-village festivals. Thus Brahmin are respectfully addressed by others as Pandit ji (learned sir), or Maharaj (king of kings), the Rajput as Thakur (lord) or Patel (headman), the Bania as Lala (big man), the Khati as Chowdhry (chief) or Mondloi (petty lord), and the Bhaat as Rao ji (fief-holder). For the servant and menial castes on the other hand derogatory terms are used, such as, khwas (servant) for Nai, kujat (of a bad caste), Chamar (immoral, stingy, intemperate), kunjira (quarrelsome), Bhangi (of unclean

habits), and sudra for all menial castes.

Similarly, when two persons meet and greet each other, the mode of greeting reflects their relative caste status. The one belonging to the relatively lower caste greets the other person first by some such phrases as pai-lagi (I touch your feet), parnam (respectful greetings) or namaste (I bow to you). To this the other person (belonging to the relatively higher caste) responds by saying aasirhad or khus\_raho (live well).

On occasions of communal gatherings, care is taken by everybody to accord due prestige to others. Brahmin and Rajput are always given the place of honour and a patient hearing when they speak. Members of other 'clean' castes sit in a body whereas members of 'unclean' and 'untouchable' castes sit a little away from the main body and are expected to be patient listeners only. Rarely do they speak or assert themselves, and even when their opinion is sought, they usually ditto what is agreed upon by the other superior castes. In all aspects of the village communal life, persons belonging to the servant, menial, and 'untouchable' castes show their inferiority in their interaction with higher castes.

The popular opinion is well represented in the following words of Ketkar: "The precedence given to a caste is not given by man; it is absolute, and the order is supposed to be known and fixed, and ought not to be

otherwise" (ibid., p. 20).

A characteristic feature in the hierarchy of caste is the pre-eminent position held by the Brahmin. Tradition assigns to Brahmin alone the pursuit of spiritual knowledge and the interpretation of the will of God to other lesser mortals.

The pre-eminent and fixed position of the Brahmin on the hierarchy represents a fixed point in terms of which the ritual positions of other castes can be judged. Thus, a caste nearer the Brahmin on the hierarchy is in general more Brahminic and, therefore, its ritual status is higher than that of castes which are distant from the Brahmin and relatively less Brahminic.

For an individual caste, however, not only its position in the hierarchy in relation to the Brahmin is important but also its position in relation to the other castes with which it happens to be living in the same village community. Knowledge of his position is essential to guide the members of a caste in their everyday social interaction, in commensal and dietary relations, and in mutual visiting and contact relations.

We may then view these interaction patterns as useful indicators of a caste's position in the hierarchy. Such indicators serve to illustrate details of the

hierarchy and to determine the position of a caste in the hierarchical structure. They manifest and dramatise the hierarchy, and thus perform the very useful function of strengthening the hierarchy.

Formal verbal statements about the ritual status of a caste, by its own members or by others, give a normative pattern, a social pattern as each caste wants it to be or thinks it should be. The interaction patterns from which the indicators are abstracted are real and refer to situations that actually obtain in a given society. A comparison of the two sets of data should give us an idea of how far rules are obeyed, and the extent to which the normative is reflected in the real.

#### Food Habits of Castes.

The food habits of a caste play an important role in the determination of its ritual status. Food is eaten; that is, it comes into contact with the internal organs of the person who eats it. In this way, it is believed to transmit its purity or impurity to the eater in an intense and direct way.

In general, all meats are believed to be impure, and therefore, polluting. Life is regarded as an extremely sacred phenomenon and its destruction is, therefore, not only sinful but also impure and polluting.

For this reason, the killing of animals for the table is considered to be irreligious and the eating of foods containing the flesh of animals is equally if not more irreligious and improper.

According to popular opinion, some meats are more impure than others. For example, chicken, domestic pork and non-scaly fish are considered to be more impure than venison, mutton, wild pork and scaled fish. Beef, even if of a dead animal, is believed to be highly impure and polluting. I was told by Babu Singh Rajput that flesh of hunted animals such as deer, the rabbit and the wild bear is not so impure as the flesh of butchered animals; domestic pig and fowls are more impure since they are scavengers which eat faeces, carrion and village refuse; the cow is the most sacred of all animals, and the harming, flaying or killing of a cow or eating its flesh, are all regarded as sinful and polluting in the extreme.

On the basis of this classification of foods, it is possible to divide all castes under two headings: vegetarian, and non-vegetarian. It must be pointed out that group behaviour and not individual behaviour in respect of food habits is considered in such a division. A caste which is flesh-eating by tradition and principle is thus considered to be non-vegetarian, even though some members of the caste may be staunch vegetarians. For instance, the Khati Bhaat are a non-vegetarian caste, but

the family of this caste resident in Potlod are strict vegetarians.

The non-vegetarian division may again be subdivided into: those who eat only good flesh, i.e., mutton, venison, etc.; those who also eat domestic fowls and pork and non-scaly fish; and those who eat all kinds of flesh including beef and flesh of dead animals.

The following chart shows the castes of Potlod village arranged in terms in these divisions.

## CHART 4.

THE FOOD-HABITS OF CASTES IN POTLOD

Vegetarian castes.		Non-Vegetarian castes.
Srigaur Brahmin	a) those who	Rajput
Palliwal Bania	eat game-	Purabi Thakur
Khati	birds, veni-	Khati Bhaat
Gujerati Lohar	son, wild	Mali
Darii	pork, mutton)	Malwi Lohar
Vairagi Vaisnava	and scaly	Malwi Kumhar
	fish <u>only</u> .	Gujerati Kumhar
		Nai
		Gosain
		Nath Jogi
		Dholi
		Teli
	b) those who	Bhambi
	eat <u>in</u>	Dhobi
	<u>addition</u>	Bagri
	<u>to the</u>	Malwi Balai
	<u>above also</u>	Gujerati Balai
	domestic	Bargunda
	pork and	Bhangi
	fowls, and	Desha Chamar
	non-scaly	
	fish.	
	c) those who	Malwi Chamar
	eat <u>all</u>	Gujerati Chamar
	kinds of	
	flesh in-	
	cluding	
	beef and	
	flesh of	
	dead ani-	
	mals (i.e.,	
	animals not	
	specifically)	
	killed for	
	their flesh).	



Alcohol is also regarded as an impure food. G.M. Carstairs (1954, pp. 221 - 222) has pointed out that the ban on alcoholic drinks is due to the fact that they are intoxicants, but that there is some inconsistency in the ritual rules so that Brahmin and other vegetarian and teetotalist castes are free to consume bhanga, charas and other such intoxicants. H.N.C. Stevenson thinks that "the polluting character of alcohol rests not upon intrinsic impurity, but upon the clear connexion between its consumption and the loss of inhibitions and mental control, since mental control is one of the paths to spiritual release, and any threat to it is a spiritual as well as a social threat" (1954, p. 55).

An analysis of the food-habits of castes in Potlodi village reveals the following:

- (i) all meats and alcoholic drinks, with few exceptions, are considered to be impure and polluting; certain 'clean' castes, therefore, prohibit their consumption;
- (ii) beef is believed to be highly impure and polluting, and is prohibited by all 'clean' and 'unclean' castes; all beef-eating castes are untouchable;
- (iii) vegetarian and non-alcoholic food is regarded as satvik or pure and its consumption is considered to



be a characteristic feature of ritual cleanliness;

(iv) mutton, venison and alcoholic drinks are treated as rajas food (i.e., lowly but not wholly impure food); these are the common foods of those 'clean' castes which lay claim to 'kshatriya' or royal status, and also all 'unclean' castes;

(v) almost all castes which are traditionally vegetarian and teetotalist are 'clean' castes; all castes which eat beef are 'untouchable' castes; but there are 'clean' as well as 'unclean' castes which eat meat and drink alcohols.

#### Commensal Relations.

As indicators of the hierarchical position of castes, commensal and dietary relations are of the highest importance. Here I am in agreement with A.C. Mayer who has pointed out that this is "the main aspect of group ritual status.....the arena for major disputes when castes try to change their status" (1956, p. 120). This is also the case when

the personal ritual status of individuals is in dispute <sup>1)</sup> (cf. Ketkar, 1910, p. 24; Senart, 1930, p. 38; Ghurye, 1950, pp. 7 - 10).

In their everyday life, the people of Potlod village confine their dining relations to their own caste groups, and it is largely on occasions of feasts that inter-caste dining relations come into being. On such occasions all members of a caste sit in the same unbroken line (pangat), signifying their commensal equivalance. As a rule, all castes sit in separate pangat, leaving several feet of open ground between all these pangat to show the commensal inequality of the castes concerned. There are some exceptions, though, to this rule, the major one being in that of the Rajput, who include several other castes in the same pangat. In Potlod, the castes included in the Rajput pangat are: Khati Bhaat, Mali, Malwi Lohar, Malwi Kumhar, Gujerati Kumhar, and Nai. Other exceptions to the rule of dining in separate pangat are in the case of the Balai and the Chamar castes. The two Balai castes -- Malwi Balai and Gujerati Balai --

recognise full commensal unity, and demonstrate this by dining in the same pangat. So do the Malwi Chamar and the Gujerati Chamar castes.

Another distinction in this connection is made between the ritually 'clean' castes on the one hand, and the ritually 'unclean' and 'untouchable' castes on the other. There are no common feasts between these two divisions of castes. Castes of the 'unclean' and 'untouchable' divisions are regarded as 'servant castes', who must dine only after the 'master castes' have taken their meals. Thus, the effective distinction in commensal relations is made only among castes of a single ritual purity division. Among the 'unclean' and 'untouchable' castes, the custom is to invite only fellow caste members to a feast (with the exception of the Chamar and Balai castes), and on no occasion would members of two or more castes of these divisions ('unclean' and 'untouchable') be found dining together, even in separate pangat, (again with the exception of the Balai and Chamar castes, referred to above).

Dietary Relations.

I have distinguished commensal relations from dietary relations; persons are said to be commensal or commensally related 'if they eat at the same table' or if they eat in the same pangat; but even if two persons are not commensal, they may have dietary relations, that is, they may have a mutual or one-way acceptance of food, drink or tobacco.<sup>2)</sup> Thus, whereas the commensal circle of a person is narrow and normally includes only his fellow caste men, his dietary relations are spread over a wider area.

Two distinct factors emerge from the analysis of dietary relations of the people of Potlod village. These are: (i) the group ritual status of the castes concerned, that is, the givers and the acceptors; and (ii) the ritual purity of the type of food given or accepted.

The group ritual status of a caste is its position in the hierarchy of castes; it "rests wholly upon behaviour patterns linked with mystical beliefs in general, and mainly upon behaviour linked with a particular corpus of belief concerning purity and pollution" (Stevenson, 1954, p. 46). The group ritual status of a caste is thus determined by a complex of factors, such as, the caste's myth of origin, food and commensal habits, its traditional occupations, and marriage customs and prohibitions.

In general, internal pollution is considered to be more dangerous than external pollution (cf. Stevenson, *ibid.*, p. 57). And since both food and drink are internally absorbed, consumption of polluted food and drink leads to a higher degree of pollution than does touching it. That is mainly why great care is taken in accepting food and drink only from those castes whose ritual status is unambiguously known, and preferably from those who are known to be higher on the ritual purity scale.<sup>3)</sup>

The ritual purity of the food given or accepted is also a factor of great importance in all inter-caste dining relations. Certain types of food (for example, kachcha food) are regarded as very pure, and consequently highly pollutable;<sup>4)</sup> others prepared with special ingredients (for example, pakka food) are less pollutable; there are still others, for example, green fruits and vegetables with peelable skins, which are regarded as the least pollutable (Blunt, 1931, p. 89; Ghurye, 1950, pp. 8-9; Hutton, 1951, p. 74 - 76; Stevenson, 1954, p. 56). This is so since these last can easily be washed to remove touch pollution, and the skin can be peeled off.

The interplay of both these factors, viz., the ritual status of the castes concerned in the transaction, and the ritual purity of the food given or accepted, results in the elaborate and intricate dining, drinking and

smoking relations observed in the village community. I shall discuss, in brief, these relations in respect of the different types of food, or methods of drinking water and smoking the pipe or cigarette.

### Kachcha Food.

Kachcha food (literally, 'unripe' in Hindi) refers to food cooked in water and salt, such as rice, lintels, or griddle cakes made of various kinds of flour. This is the usually daily meal of all classes of the people in Potlod. Foods of this class are believed to be the purest, and logically the most pollutable of all foods.<sup>5)</sup> As a rule, a caste accepts kachcha food only from those castes which it considers as ritually purer and higher in ritual status, and in certain exceptional cases from those whose ritual status is equal to its own; it refuses kachcha food from all those castes whose ritual status it considers as lower (cf. Ketkar, 1910, p. 24; Ghurye, 1950, p. 7 - 9). Thus caste A accepts kachcha food from caste B whose ritual status is definitely higher than that of A, but B does not accept kachcha food from A; caste A gives kachcha food to caste C whose ritual status is definitely lower than that of A, but does not accept such food from C. Between castes whose ritual status is equal or almost equal or not definitely established, there is usually no giving or

taking of kachcha food. An exception is in the case of the Rajput block of castes, and also in the case of the Balai and Chamar castes who have a two-way acceptance of kachcha food.

#### Pakka Food.

Pakka food (literally, 'ripe' in Hindi) refers to food fried in ghee (butter-oil) or other vegetable oils.<sup>6)</sup> These foods are regarded as less pollutable because of their having been fried in ghee - one of the products of the sacred cow's milk. And since protection from impurity is the object of all food taboos, the circle of acceptance of pakka food is wider than that of kachcha food. Thus a caste accepts pakka food from all those castes from whom it accepts kachcha food, and also many others whom it considers as equal or even lower in ritual status, so long as they are regarded as ritually 'clean'.<sup>7)</sup> It is due to this wider acceptability of pakka food that it is served at feasts to which more than one caste has been invited, and offered to deities at domestic rituals, so that a large number of persons can accept the prasad (residue of food offered to a deity).

#### Water.

Rules regarding the acceptance of drinking water from another caste are, on the whole, similar to



Table 5.

## INTER-CASTE DIETARY RELATIONSHIPS IN POTLOD

(1955-56)

Caste.	Serve food to		Accept fo
	Kachcha	Pakka	Kachcha
1. Srigaru Brahmin	All Castes	All Castes	-
2. Vairagi Vaishnava	4 - 28	All Castes	1
3. Rajput	4 - 11, 17 - 28	All Castes	1, 4 - 8, 11
4. Mali	3, 5 - 11, 17 - 28	All Castes	1, 3, 5 - 8, 11
5. Malwi Kumhar	3, 4, 6 - 11, 17 - 28	All Castes	1, 3, 4, 6 - 8, 11
6. Gujerati Kumhar	3 - 5, 7 - 11, 17 - 28	All Castes	1, 3 - 5, 7, 8, 11
7. Nai	3 - 6, 8 - 11, 17 - 28	All Castes	1, 3 - 6, 8, 11
8. Malwi Lohar	3 - 7, 11, 17 - 28	All Castes	1, 3 - 7, 11
9. Purabi Thakur	17 - 28	All Castes	1, 3 - 8, 11
10. Gosain	17 - 28	All Castes	1, 3 - 8, 11
11. Khati Bhaat	3 - 10, 17 - 28	All Castes	1, 3 - 8
12. Khati	18 - 28	All Castes	1
13. Gujerati Lohar	17 - 28	All Castes	1
14. Darji	17 - 28	All Castes	1
15. Palliwal Bania	17 - 28	All Castes	1
16. Nath Jogi	-	-	1, 3 - 15
17. Dholi	-	-	1 - 11, 13 - 16
18. Teli	-	-	1 - 15
19. Dhobi	-	-	1 - 15
20. Bhambi	-	-	1 - 15
21. Bagri*	22	22	1 - 15
22. Bargunda	-	-	1 - 15, 21
23. Malwi Balai	24	24	1 - 15, 24
24. Gujerati Balai	23	23	1 - 15, 23
25. Malwi Chamar	26	26	1 - 15, 26
26. Gujerati Chamar	25	25	1 - 15, 25
27. Desha Chamar	-	-	1 - 15
28. Bhangi	-	-	1 - 15

\* Bagri women do not accept any food or drink from any other caste.

those regarding the acceptance of food, but with a greater tendency towards laxity. The vessel containing water and the drinking vessel affect the question; water brought in a metal or alloy vessel by any ritually 'clean' caste is acceptable to all clean castes, the Brahmin including; but water brought in clay vessels is subject to the same restrictions as apply to the acceptance of kaccha food.<sup>8)</sup> The drinking vessel is almost always a brass pot (lota), and the Brahmin at least always prefer to drink from their own lota.<sup>9)</sup> No two castes drink water from the same lota, unless it be cleaned with sand or ashes following each usage.

#### Smoking.

Rules regarding smoking are stricter. Seldom does a man smoke with anybody but a caste fellow, or with castes with whom his caste is on fully reciprocal commensal relations (for example, in the Rajput 'allied' group), even though the smoke is inhaled through cupped hands, the native pipe (hukka) or cigarette (bidi) not touching the lips. Smoking rules, in general, follow the rules governing pakka food, with the modification: that certain vegetarian castes (castes of Group III in the Chart to follow) do not smoke in common with meat-eating and liquor-drinking castes (of Group II in the same Chart).

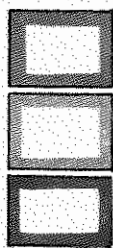
Green fruits and Vegetables, and Parched Grain:

Both these articles of food are treated as virtually the least pollutable. This is so for different reasons: green fruits and vegetables are washable in water which cleanses any impurity which might have touched them through contact with ritually 'unclean' castes; again, these are consumed after their skin, which alone comes into contact, has been peeled off. Parched grain is considered to be on the same level of pollutability, since the open fire on which it is parched is believed to cleanse all its impurity.<sup>10)</sup> These two types of food are acceptable to all castes from a very wide circle of castes, including the ritually 'unclean' castes, but excluding the 'lowliest of the lowly' — the castes of the 'untouchable' group.

The relations between the different castes of Potlodi village regarding acceptance of food, drink and tobacco can roughly be demonstrated by grouping the castes in several categories. The following chart shows such a schematic arrangement of the castes in the village.

COMMENSAL AND DIETARY RELATIONS OF CASTES  
IN POTLOD VILLAGE (1955-56)

GROUP I <u>Srigaur Brahmin</u>										
GROUP II (A)					GROUP III					
<u>Rajput</u>	<u>Malwi Lohar</u>	<u>Khati Bhaat</u>	<u>Mali</u>	<u>Malwi Kumhar</u>	<u>Gujerati Kumhar</u>	<u>Nai</u>	<u>Palliwai</u>	<u>Pania</u>	<u>Vairagi</u>	<u>Vaishnava</u>
GROUP II (B)										
<u>Surabi Thakur</u>					<u>Gosain</u>					
GROUP IV					GROUP V					
<u>Nath Jogi</u>	<u>Dholi</u>	<u>Teli</u>	<u>Bhambi</u>	<u>Dhobi</u>	<u>Malwi Balai</u>	<u>Gujerati Balai</u>	<u>Bargunda</u>	<u>Desha Chamar</u>	<u>Malwi Chamar</u>	<u>Gujerati Chamar</u>
<u>Bagri</u>								<u>Bhangi</u>		



'Clean' castes  
'Unclean' castes  
'Untouchable' castes

Free inter-caste commensality for castes on both sides of broken lines. Vertical unbroken lines separate castes which have no commensal relations (and limited dietary relations in Groups I, II and III only). Horizontal unbroken lines separate castes with only one-way dietary relations: castes above the line serve food to castes below the line, but do not accept from the latter.

— indicates castes which are vegetarian and teetotal  
 — .. .. .. eat meat (not beef) and drink alcohol  
 — .. .. .. beef also and drink alcohol

On the basis of their dietary relations and food habits, the castes of Potlod village are arranged in five groups; since there are no native names for these groups, I shall call them Group I, Group II, Group III, Group IV and Group V. As we shall see, however, some of these groups coincide with the 'ritual purity divisions' of castes (as given in Chapter II). Groups I, II and III taken together make the ritually 'clean' division, castes included in Group IV are the same as the ritually 'unclean' castes, and castes of Group V are considered to be ritually 'untouchable'. There is only a one-way acceptance of food between castes of Groups I, II and III on the one hand and castes of Groups IV and V on the other.

All castes of Group IV and V accept both pakka and kacheha food from all castes of Groups I, II and III. The women of Bagri caste (in Group IV) are an exception to this rule; they do not accept any food from any caste, including the Brahmin. (The case of the Bagri women is discussed later in this chapter). Castes of Groups I, II and III, however, do not accept food (except green vegetables, fruits and parched grain) from any caste of Groups IV and V. There are no dietary relations between Group IV and Group V.

In Group I at the top of this hierarchical arrangement distinguished by dietary relations and food

habits, is the Srigaur Brahmin caste. From this caste, all the castes of the village (with the exception of Bagri women) accept all kinds of food. The Brahmin, in turn, do not accept kacheha food from any other caste in Potlod, and accept pakka food only from the castes of Groups II and III only.

Group II is composed of meat-eating and liquor-drinking 'clean' castes, in contrast to vegetarian and teetotal castes of Group III. Group II is headed by the Rajput who were once the traditional feudal lords and principal landowners in this village, and in Malwa in general.

This Group has been broken in two sub-groups. In Group II(a) I have included all those castes who are on fully reciprocal commensal relations with the Rajputs, and among themselves. These are popularly known as castes of the Rajput pangat (since they all sit down to dine in the same unbroken line). For all practical purposes, these may be regarded as 'allied' castes. I have called these 'castes of the Rajput block' or simply as 'Rajput block'. Their ritual status, however, is not considered to be equal. Malwi Lohar, Gujerati Kumhar and Malwi Kumhar and Nai are regarded as the ritually lower partners in the block. This is due to their being 'servant' castes, particularly the Nai who render bodily

service (not only shaving and the cropping of hair but also massaging, with or without oil, and giving baths), and are addressed by the derogatory term khawas (personal attendant). But all these castes have close traditional connections with the Rajput whom they serve, and so they are allowed to dine in the same unbroken line.

M.N. Srinivas is of the opinion that it is mainly due to political expediency that Rajputs have accepted certain lower 'clean' castes as their commensals and encouraged them to claim equality with Rajputs (1956a).

The two castes of Group II(b), Purabi Thakur and Gosain, are regarded as somewhat lower in ritual status, and consequently not allowed in the Rajput pangat; both sit in separate groups to dine. The reasons for their exclusion from full partnership in the Rajput block are extra-dietary. The Purabi Thakur are considered to be less pure and lower in ritual status than the Rajputs of Rajasthan and Malwa as 'belonging to the eastern regions' (see Karve, 1953, p. 142); the Gosain are excepted since they bury and not cremate their dead, burial regarded as essentially a non-Hindu custom. Both these castes accept kachcha food from all castes of Group II(a), whereas the latter accept only pakka food from the former. Among themselves, both observe kachcha food taboos, and accept only pakka food from the other.

Group III is distinguished from Group II because

castes therein observe kachcha food taboos from all castes but Brahmin, and also because they are vegetarian and teetotal. Each caste of this Group is exclusively in its commensal relations; each regards only the Srigaur Brahmin as definitely higher in ritual status, and thus each accepts kachcha food from the Brahmin only. The socio-ritual ideal of this Group is the Brahminic ideal of exclusion in contrast to the Rajput ideal of inclusion (see Chapter IV for a fuller discussion of this point). All these five castes accept only pakka food and water from castes of Group II, and from the other castes of their own Group. Each caste, confines group smoking, like kachcha food-eating to its caste men only.

Castes of Group IV are ritually 'unclean', in distinction to the ritually 'clean' castes of Groups I, II and III. This distinction is expressed by the fact that castes of Groups I, II and III do not accept any food (except green fruits and vegetables, and parched grain) or water from their hands, nor do they smoke with them. All the castes of this group, with the exception of Malwi Balai and Gujerati Balai, are entirely separate in their dietary relations; each dines in a separate nangat, and does not accept any food, water or tobacco from the others. An exception is that men of the Bagri caste <sup>11)</sup> accept pakka food from Nath Jogi, Dholi and Teli castes.



The two Balai castes — Malwi and Gujerati — are fully reciprocal in their commensal relations; they sit in the same pangat to dine, freely accept all food and drink from each other, and smoke together.

Castes of Group V are not only ritually 'unclean', they are also ritually 'untouchable'. Castes of Groups I - IV do not accept any edible touched by members of Group V. They in turn, accept food (both kachcha and pakka) and water only from castes of Groups I - III. Two castes of this group, viz., Desha Chamar and Bhangi, confine commensal and dietary relations within the caste; the other two, viz., Malwi Chamar, and Gujerati Chamar, are fully reciprocal in their commensal and food relations.

So much ritual importance is attached to food and ingestion that all activities connected with the cooking and handling of food (including the place where the food is cooked, the utensils in which the food is cooked or eaten and the water with which it is cooked) are considered to be ritually sensitive and the individual is expected to be particularly meticulous/<sup>in</sup>guarding against pollution.

Purity and avoidance practices are especially manifested in the kitchen. In a village remote from urban civilization like Potlod, the average domestic

kitchen is just a secluded corner in the interior of the house. It is dark and dingy, dirty with soot from the open hearth on which the village housewife cooks the family's meals. Once in a while it is plastered with mud mixed with cow dung; the latter being used because of its purificatory character. The cooking and dining utensils, usually of brass, copper or bronze, are stored on a slightly raised mud platform on one side of the kitchen; on the other side on another small, raised platform are kept the water containers; these are called gharas or pitchers and are usually made of clay. Every morning the women of the house go to the village well to fetch water for the day's needs. In well-to-do houses, particularly of the Rajput caste, water is fetched and supplied by a Kumhar family. The Kumhar, however, does not touch the domestic pitchers; he fetches water in his own pitchers and pours it from outside the kitchen, into the domestic pitchers. It is believed that the passage of water through air is a purifying process (Stevenson, 1954, p. 54). For the same reason, the Brahmins and most other 'clean' caste men drink water by pouring it into the mouth from the drinking vessel.

The kitchen is believed to be a sacred place and its sanctity is jealously guarded. Normally, none other than the householders and close relatives are

allowed to enter a kitchen. Technically speaking, there is no ban on entry into the kitchen by any member of the same caste; in practice, however, this is not encouraged. Persons in a state of temporary pollution, even those belonging to the same family, are not allowed to enter the kitchen, or to touch the domestic utensils and water containers. Women during their periods are particularly prohibited from entering the kitchen, touching any pots and pans or cooking food for other members of the family.<sup>12)</sup>

The sanctity of cooking food is demonstrated on a number of occasions, for example, after her marriage, when the bride comes to live at her affinal house for the first time, she is expected to cook a kachcha meal which is partaken of by all the members of the household and their locally resident kin. Only after this symbolic acceptance of the girl as a bride in the family may she take up the regular domestic duties of the village housewife.

The reconstruction or repairing of a house are always followed by a ceremonial sanctification of the kitchen. This is done by plastering it with a mud and cow dung solution and performing a burnt sacrifice in the name of the household deities in the kitchen.

An interesting situation is created if a thief

is known to have broken into the house. Since the caste of the unknown thief is not known, the kitchen has to be purified, early in the morning, before the family's meals are cooked at the household hearth, earthen pitchers have to be discarded and metal pots and pans are purified by putting fire in them.

As noted earlier, the kitchen, the water pitchers, and the household utensils for cooking and dining are all ritually vulnerable. That means that if a person from a ritually lower or higher caste enters the kitchen or touches the pots and pans, either he or the kitchen will be polluted, depending upon which of the two is purer than the other. Impurity in this respect overcomes purity. If a Brahmin, for example, enters a Rajput kitchen or comes into contact with their pots and pans, he is polluted. On the other hand, if a Brahmin's kitchen is violated by a person from another caste, the kitchen becomes polluted. For this reason, no caste permits individuals other than those of the same caste to enter the kitchen or touch the domestic pots and earthen pitchers.

#### Prohibitions on Inter-caste Social Intercourse.

Free social intercourse between persons belonging to different castes is prohibited by caste rules.

These rules are with reference not only to the marital and commensal behaviour of a person, but also to such everyday and obviously commonplace activities as visiting or greeting, attending a meeting or participating in festivals and ceremonies, worshipping at the village temples, or mere physical contact. Relations in all these spheres are guided by the respective positions on the hierarchy of the interacting castes and both the absolute and the relative ordering is taken into consideration.<sup>13)</sup>

Ordinarily, persons belonging to 'clean' castes do not enter the 'unclean' or 'untouchable' caste wards in the village. If the services of the latter are required, they are summoned through a Balai or some other servant. Even if a 'clean' caste person does visit a person belonging to one of the 'unclean' or 'untouchable' castes, he stands at a little distance and shouts for the latter. Both the 'clean' and the 'unclean' castes are particularly averse to visiting houses of 'untouchables' such as the Bhangi or the Chamars.<sup>14)</sup>

When an 'unclean' or 'untouchable' caste man visits a 'clean' caste house, he is treated with a certain contempt, which, however, is seldom taken to be so by the latter, since he has become accustomed to such behaviour. He is not allowed to enter the house, no seat is offered to him; he usually sits on the naked

ground just outside the threshold. The same treatment is meted out to an 'untouchable' if he visits a person belonging to an 'unclean' caste.

'Clean' caste persons may and do visit other 'clean' caste houses. Such everyday visits are in connection with business matters, in the course of rendering specific service, to visit the sick, or merely in a routine and friendly way. There are, however, certain rules of etiquette which should always be observed. These rules require that a man of higher caste should always be honoured, irrespective of whether he be guest or host. He must be greeted first and he should only raise his hand or simply nod in acknowledgement. When guests and host sit down, they seat themselves with consideration to caste rank. A cot is often used as a bench. The upper portion of the cot, where a sleeper puts his head, is reserved for those of higher caste.

Similar restrictions are imposed on inter-caste participation in communal festivals and domestic ceremonies. In festivals in 'clean' caste houses all 'clean' castes participate on an equal basis. Members of 'unclean' castes may be allowed to participate but only in the capacity of servants, whereas 'untouchable' castes are invariably excluded from participation. In 'unclean' and 'untouchable' caste festivals, members of the 'clean' castes are not invited nor would they accept

an invitation if one were issued;<sup>15)</sup> again, each caste confines participation to caste members alone and in exceptional cases to their 'pangat partner' castes, if any, and to personal friends from other castes.

I was able to observe more than fifty festivals and ceremonies, both in 'clean' caste houses, and in houses of 'unclean' and 'untouchable' castes. Gan-Gour is a festival celebrated twice a year (once in the month of Baisakh and a second time in Sawan); on the occasion of this festival married women of all castes make clay images of Gauri — the mother goddess and worship them for four days. On the last day, the images are taken out in procession and finally ceremonially immersed in the village pond. On these occasions, 'clean' caste women jointly organized the worship, the procession and the immersion ceremony. Women of 'unclean' and 'untouchable' castes performed the ceremonies privately and individually. On the festival of Rakhi (in the month of Sawan), village girls of the 'clean' castes tie the coloured thread (rakhi, skr. 'raksha bandhan', meaning the 'protective thread') on the wrists of their male siblings and all other young men of the village whom they address as brothers. These 'spoken' brothers and sisters need not belong to the same caste but they must all belong to the castes in the 'clean' ritual purity division. In the other two divisions, these relations,

again, are confined to single caste.

The wedding of a young Rajput named Dulha Singh Chohan, took place in May, 1955. Dulha's father, Baba Singh, is a rich land-owner and he invited all the 'clean' caste men from the village to attend the marriage ceremony. The acceptance of this invitation carried with it the obligation to give gifts as baan to the groom; but all of those invited attended the ceremony. No invitation was sent to any of the 'unclean' or 'untouchable' castes. Those persons who were attached to Baba Singh's house as servants or menials participated as such and all others who cared to go to his house were given food and drink. They were not, however, required to do this and they did not participate in the 'gift-giving' ceremony.

• I shall briefly mention two further cases: one of these concerns a mortuary feast in a Bhambi house, the other a marriage in a Bagri house. In 'clean' castes, these are occasions for inter-caste feasts. Since, however, both the Bhambi and the Bagri are 'unclean' castes, participation was confined to their respective caste groups.

The basis for all these prohibitions and restrictions on inter-caste social interaction is, to my mind, the fear of pollution which is the pivot of so many Hindu ritual beliefs. Pollution, it is believed,



emanates from all impure things and persons whose very physical presence is thought to contaminate the pure. Thus the higher is the degree of impurity in a thing or person, the greater is its power to contaminate or defile, and the more is it avoided and excluded from the course of social interaction. The 'unclean' castes are thought to be only mildly impure and as a result, there are not many barriers on 'clean' castes interacting with them. Thus members of 'unclean' castes commonly serve as the domestic and personal servants of 'clean' caste members and uncooked foodstuffs handled by such servants are acceptable to all 'clean' castes.

The degree of impurity from which the 'untouchable' castes suffer is very great, and consequently they are altogether excluded from ceremonials and avoided in everyday social intercourse. So severe indeed is the pollution that they are believed to emanate that even physical contact with one of them is avoided by even 'unclean' castes, and they are forbidden from touching any sacred place, thing or person.

Till recently, the ritually 'untouchable' castes were subjected to severe disabilities and discriminations. They could not enter public temples, draw water from village wells, attend the schools and public assemblies. In certain cases they were "debarred from using public conveniences, such as roads, ferries,....."



(Hutton, 1951, p. 194).

In southern India, there is some evidence to show that many castes were regarded as polluting by proximity, and were not allowed to approach within certain distances of Hindu temples and dwelling houses or even the person of the Brahmins. Hutton has quoted Jonathan Duncan (1807), Francis Day (1863), J. Wilson (1877) and A. Aiyappan (1937) to show that there has been in existence in parts of southern India a very definite scale of distance pollution (1951, p. 78 - 81). Certain castes were thus treated as not only untouchable but unapproachable. A 'clean' caste Hindu who had become polluted by contact with or by proximity to one of the polluting castes was required to purify himself by bathing and wearing washed garments before he could assume his normal everyday duties.

The rigours of pollution, particularly contact and distance pollution, have lessened considerably during the last three decades or so. The democratic-liberal forces that have been working in the country hand in hand with industrial progress and the opening up of the countryside seem to be responsible for those changed attitudes and variations in the value patterns of the people (see Hutton, *ibid*, p. 78; Cohn, 1955, p. 67).

Ceremonial Service Relations.

Another aspect of inter-caste relations in a village community is that of the services rendered by some castes to certain other castes of the village. These services are of two kinds, those rendered as part of the everyday life and activities in the village, and those rendered on special occasions such as marriage, birth, and death. These might be called routine and ceremonial services, respectively.

Routine service relations are organized within the framework of the village occupational structure. Each caste is associated with a traditional occupation and members of that caste are obliged to pursue that occupation. In the case of agricultural castes as against the artisans, menials and village servants, these relations are governed by a traditional service tenure, variously known as the jaimani or baluta system (see Dube, 1955, pp. 58 - 60; Gould, 1958; Wiser, 1958).

Under the head 'ceremonial services', I include only those services rendered by a caste which are unconnected with the traditional calling of the caste. Thus, even if the members of the caste give up their traditional calling and take to some other vocation, they continue to render the ceremonial service. The

Dhobi caste group of Potlod village is a case in point. Elsewhere, I have shown that the Dhobi of Potlod have given up laundering which is their caste's traditional occupation, they own land which they cultivate and have become full time agriculturists. In spite of this, they have not given up certain traditional ritual services which they have always rendered to the 'clean' castes.

Hindu ritual conventions demand that all married women, whose husbands are alive, should fill their own hair-partings with vermillion (sindur). Sindur is thus taken as the symbol of happily married state (subag or sobhagva) for a woman. When she is married, a girl wears sindur for the first time and it is a popular custom that this is done by a married Dhobi woman whose husband is still alive. It is a widely held belief that if a Dhobi woman donates sindur to a bride, the latter would enjoy a life-long state of subag. Donation of sindur to a bride belonging to one of the 'clean' castes is thus a ceremonial service that the Dhobi render, and the Dhobi continue to render this service even if they have given up their traditional calling of laundering soiled garments.

A few of the artisan castes render similar ceremonial services to 'clean' caste people. Brief details of these are given in the following paragraphs.

In popular Hindu belief, iron is attributed with a potency to ward off evil, and since the Lohar traditionally deals in iron, men of this caste play an important role in domestic rituals and ceremonies. When a male child is born, the Lohar present a choora or kara (bangle made of iron), a kairauta ( a small iron case in which to store kajal or lampblack) and a small knife. The bangle is put on the wrist of the boy and the knife is kept at his bed side. Both these, it is believed, ward off evil spirits and protect the child. At a marriage, the Lohar presents the bride or the groom with a kankan (a small iron ring which together with several other things, such as turmeric and a rag of red cloth, is tied on the wrist of the bride or groom). All these things must be supplied by a man of the Lohar caste.

Similarly, at a marriage ceremony in a 'clean' caste house, the pata (wooden planks on which the couple sit during the ceremony) and the marbwa (the central wooden pillar for the marriage booth) must be made out of fresh-cut wood by a man of the Sutar caste.

The Kumhar make pots on their wheels. Both the wheel (called chak) and the Kumhar are believed to be invested with ritual power so that none but a Kumhar is allowed to handle the wheel. So great is the ritual value attached to the Kumhar that he is called upon to

perform the inauguration of the marriage ceremonial. He digs up some clay and supplies it to the house in which the marriage is to take place. This clay is believed to be sacred and is used by the women folk for making an almirah (called kothi) for storing grain. These kothis and the grain stored in them is dedicated in the name of the goddess of wealth. The people believe that those who store their foodstuffs in this way are always prosperous and are seldom short of food.

These ceremonial service relations are found to be more durable and long-lasting than the simple and routine occupational service relations. On the basis of casual observations in neighbouring towns and cities, I would say that quite often the ceremonial service relations survive the impact of city life which has almost every where demolished the occupational structure of castes. This is probably so because these services are symbolic in character and are not grounded in the hierarchical prejudices which characterise other aspects of the inter-caste relationship pattern.

I have given above an analysis of the social rules in matters of commensality, acceptance of food, drink, and smoke, participation in festivals and such other communal activities, and mutual visits. The question one might ask is: how far are these traditional rules of behaviour obeyed and what actually takes

place?

We have seen that these rules are most detailed and serve as guides for what actually takes place. Tradition demands that they should be obeyed and direct observation shows that they are faithfully obeyed to a very high degree.

As has been said above, these rules are framed with reference to the Hindu theory of purity and pollution, which, I have suggested, is the basic factor in determining inter-caste relations. Are there any other factors which can be said to be determinants of behaviour in inter-caste relations? Mayer has referred to several such factors (Mayer, 1956, p. 125 - 126). These are (i) caste size in the village community, (ii) the place of residence of the castes, (iii) concurrent obligations, (iv) economic capacity, and (v) factions in the village community. These, writes Mayer "are the considerations which may influence the host when he asks himself 'whom shall I invite to the feast?'" (Mayer, op. cit.).

Caste size is apparently an important factor. Castes with bigger local concentrations may be expected to be self-contained and thus have a somewhat lesser tendency to invite persons from other castes, in comparison to castes with smaller local concentrations. Can it be that people from larger castes more often invite

and visit only their caste men, whereas people from smaller castes invite other castes of the village and are not self-contained in this matter?

My data from Potlod tells a different tale. During the period of research, I had the occasion to observe some 28 feasts; of these, 18 were wedding feasts, 8 funerary feasts and 2 others. Their castewise distribution is shown in the following table.

Caste.	Number of feasts given (1955-56)		
	Wedding feasts.	Funerary feasts.	Others.
Brahmin	1	-	1
Rajput	3	1	1
Khati	7	4	-
Mali	1	1	-
Nai	2	-	-
Nath Jogi	1	1	-
Bhambi	1	1	-
Bagri	2	-	-
Total.	18	8	2

In Potlod Rajput, Khati and Mali are castes with proportionately larger numbers; the other castes have small local populations.

At the feast given to celebrate his daughter's wedding in July, 1955, Ramanand Dube (Sriganur Brahmin) invited the other Brahmin family of Potlod (who are



agnatic kinsmen), the Falliwal Bania family, nearly a dozen Khati families, the family of the Chohan Rajput natal, a family of Rathor Rajputs, and the Purabi Thakurs. The families of the Nai, the Kumhar, the Lohar, the Balai, the Bhambi, the Dholi and the Bhangi who are attached to Ramanand Dube's house as servants were also fed. Ramanand Dube was very well-to-do and he could very well invite and feed the whole village. But he did not. He said it was a waste of money and that he would invite only those with whom he was friendly. I must note that many people, mostly Rajputs, criticized this action of Ramanand Dube and said that he was a conceited and unsocial man.

Of the five Rajput feasts, four were given by well-to-do families and, at these invitations were sent to all the houses of the village. The fourth ( a wedding feast) was given by a poor Rathor Rajput who invited only a few Rajput families and went round apologising for his inability to invite others.

Eleven feasts in all were given by Khatis during the period. Of these eleven hosts, only two were well-to-do, five ordinarily well off, and the rest four were poor. Of the first two (i.e., well-to-do host families), only one invited all the families of the village belonging to all castes with<sup>the</sup> exception of the

Dholi; the other invited only the Khatis, the Khati Bhaat, some Rajput families, and fed the usual servants attached to the host family -- the Nai, Kumhar, Lohar and Bhangi. At the other nine Khati feasts, the number of invitees was small; not even all the Khati families of Potlod were invited, but in every case, the Khati Bhaat family was invited, and in each case a few non-Khati families of Potlod were also invited; the invitees were all from 'clean' castes. At no Khati feast was the village Dholi invited, for he had quarreled with the Khatis of Potlod and they had decided to boycott him.

Of the ten hosts belonging to the Mali, Nai, Nath Jogi, Bhambi and Bagri castes, only two -- a Mali and a Nai -- were ordinary middle class families, the others were poor. At the Mali feasts, only Mali, Kumhar and Nai were invited. At the Nai feasts, a few families from each caste of the village were invited. At the feasts in Nath Jogi and Bhambi houses only their respective caste men were invited. At the Bagri feasts, the Bargunda were also invited. I find it difficult to substantiate the argument that castes with larger local populations become so self-contained that they never invite the smaller castes, and that the smaller castes more often invite members of other castes.

The three factors which I think are important determinants of intercaste relations are: concurrent

obligations, factions, and economic capacity. On formal occasions such as the feasts, or in informal everyday life, these three factors determine individual actions. Beside their own caste men, people have a tendency to invite or visit those with whom they are on friendly terms, to whom they are obliged or by whom they themselves have been invited. I noted that during the baan ceremony on occasions of weddings, sacred thread giving (Janoi) or first hair cutting (maan or mundan), lists are prepared of all those who attend and give gifts. Reciprocal invitations, and gifts are made on the basis of these lists. The principle of reciprocity involved here is popularly known as bvohar. At 'clean' castes feasts or ceremonies, 'unclean' and 'untouchable' castes are invited only as servants and fed separately; no gifts are accepted by 'clean' castes from 'unclean' and 'untouchable' castes, but at 'unclean' and 'untouchable' caste weddings and ceremonies, 'clean' castes are invited and are expected to give gifts.

Among people from other castes of the village who must be invited to feasts and ceremonies are one's guru-bhai and guru-ben (ritual brothers and sisters, respectively) and their families. Such relationships are forged between young men of the village and the newly married brides who are married into the village community. In the month of Jeth on the full moon day, several

such boys and girls listen to the guru-mantra (ritual incantation) from their preceptor (guru) and are then declared ritual brothers and sisters. These relationships are honoured during their life-time by the persons involved and often by their children as well.

Clearly, these factors are of a different order from those that underlie the theory of purity and pollution. It is significant that they do not replace the traditional rules of inter-caste relations. On the other hand, their operation is limited within the broad framework provided by the rules of purity and pollution. In villages, even friendship is usually within one's own caste, or between persons whose castes have some sort of eating, drinking and visiting relations under the traditional rules.

- 1) Hutton regards commensal taboos as the "keystone of the whole (caste) system", and also that "the custom of caste endogamy is more or less incidental" to commensal and food taboos, and that "the taboo on marriage is the necessary and inevitable outcome of the taboos on food and drink" (Hutton, 1951, p. 71).

On the basis of Hutton's argument, one would expect, as a logical consequence, only those castes to inter-dine which also intermarry. Empirical evidence, however, does not support such a hypothesis. There are groups of castes which freely inter-dine (see for example, the Rajput 'allied group', the 'Balai group', and the 'Chamar group'), but each caste strictly confines marital relations within its own fold. This, however, does not diminish the importance of commensal and food taboos, since they do constitute the most important 'test' for the ritual purity of status of a caste (Ghurye, 1950, p. 7).

- 2) By the phrase 'accepting tobacco' here and in subsequent analysis of food taboos, I mean accepting the native pipe (hukka) or cigarette (bidi) already smoked by another caste fellow. Since, however, the hukka or bidi is always smoked with cupped hands forming a funnel for the intake of the smoke, the pipe or the hukka or the bidi does not actually touch the lips of the smoker.
- 3) For this reason, all Hindus generally accept food cooked and served by a Brahmin, since the ritual status of the Brahmin castes is unambiguously higher than that of any other castes. The result is that Brahmins are employed as cooks in many houses and food shops in cities and towns; on the occasion of feasts particularly, Brahmins are invited to cook and serve the meals. This ensures that the food is ritually pure and may be accepted by all castes without any fear of losing their caste.

- 4) By the word 'pollutable', I mean "subject to pollution". As a rule, the greater the purity of a thing, greater its pollutability. Thus 'pollutable' (that which is subject to pollution) is different from 'polluting' (that which pollutes).
- 5) James Frazer has quoted a passage from the Satapatha Brahmana which shows that the ancient Brahmin considered rice-cakes cooked with water as ritually identical with human flesh. From this, Hutton infers, and I think rightly, that it is the combination of grain with water that gives the sacred character to the kachcha food ((Frazer: Golden Bough (1914), viii, (Spirits of the Corn and the Wild), p. 89; Hutton, 1951, p. 74)).
- 6) It appears that the inclusion in this category of foods fried in vegetable oils is a latter addition. The extension of the original idea of frying foods in ghee to frying them in vegetable oils is a typical instance of the 'elastic realism characteristic of Hindu thought' (Stevenson, 1954, p. 56), necessitated by the rising cost of ghee and its consequent unavailability to the poor.
- 7) All castes are divided into three broad categories on the basis of their group ritual purity: 'clean', 'unclean', and 'untouchable' (analogous to the three divisions of varna, viz., dwija, including Brahmin, Kshatriya, and Vaisya, Sudra, and avarna i.e., those who are believed to be outside the system) (See Chapters II & III).

It is true that there do occur individual deviations from the ideal pattern of caste behaviour, particularly in respect of food avoidances. But status, as Stevenson has pointed out (1954, p. 56, fn.), may be judged not in terms of actual deviations but in the terms of ideals observed in principle by each group. Empirical evidence

shows that a very high percentage of people actually follow the ideal pattern of behaviour prescribed by their caste traditions.

- 8) It is difficult to account for the distinction between metal and clay pots in respect of their pollutability. Unfortunately, I did not think of this point till it was too late for me to make enquiries in the field.

A possible explanation is given by Stevenson (ibid., p. 55) who thinks that there is a "possible correlation between porosity and pollutability, which would account for the fact that most porous utensils, for example, those made of earthenware, are held to be more likely to carry pollution than those made of brass, because they cannot be kept as clean".

- 9) For this reason, all Brahmin — and most of the other 'clean' caste men — carry their own lota while on a journey. Moreover, all persons serving drinking water in cities and at railway stations are Brahmin from whom everybody can accept drinking water.

- 10) Stevenson (1954, p. 56) has classified parched grain with pakka food. My data, however, shows that parched grain belongs to the more widely acceptable class of foods, which includes green fruits and vegetables, rather than to the pakka food class. The grain-parchers happen to belong to 'unclean' castes, or even Mohammedans, and nobody really seems to enquire about the caste status of the seller of parched grain. On principle, too, open fire and flame is believed to 'burn pollution and cleanse', more than milk, ghee or any other purificatory object does. Hence the distinction between the two classes of foods.

11) Bagri women regard themselves as purer than their menfolk. There is a tradition popular among them that they are Rajput women of Chandravamsha (the Lunar Line) who ran away with their low caste servant men after their menfolk had been killed in a battle with the Mohammedans. Bagri women are priestesses to their clan goddess, whom men of the caste are not allowed to serve. For these reasons, they say, they are exclusive in their commensal and dining relations. A similar tradition has been recorded by Majumdar among the Tharu of U.P. (Majumdar: Fortunes of Primitive Tribes, 1944).

12) This rule in respect of menstruating women is not always strictly obeyed. My data from Potlod show that only the Brahmin and Palliwal Bania obey it punctiliously; the Rajput, Purabi Thakur, Darji, Malwi Lohar, Gujerati Lohar and Vairagi Vaisnava observe the prohibition only casually, and the rest do not observe it at all. In practice, this rule can be obeyed without much inconvenience in the joint family where there are usually more than one women and thus during the periodic disability of one woman, another can take up the work. In a nuclear family household, this facility is not available. Most people are poor and cannot afford to keep a servant for cooking meals. In such cases, the job of cooking falls on the men of the house, or otherwise, the rule is neglected and women continue to do their normal everyday domestic work. Again, it is not one of those rules the violation of which results in loss of ritual status and caste for a person. As the Khati say, it is dirty and it defiles, but it is not definitely polluting, and hence the widely varying attitudes of different caste towards the observance of menstrual taboos. Further, its breach is not easily observable.

13) I may briefly restate here the position in respect of the two aspects of the caste hierarchy,



viz., the fixed and the relative.

The fixed aspect of the hierarchy is demonstrated in what I have called the 'ritual purity divisions'. These are three, viz., the 'clean', the 'unclean', and the 'untouchable' in the descending order; castes in the third order are lower than castes in the second and first orders, and castes in the second order are lower than the castes which are considered to be 'clean'. This is a fixed ordering.

The relative ordering of castes is largely within these fixed divisions, that is to say, it operates only in respect of castes belonging to the same 'ritual purity division'. For example, all the 'clean' castes expect a certain type of behaviour from all 'unclean' and 'untouchable' castes. Within the 'clean' division, however, inter-caste behaviour is governed by the recognition of superordination or subordination among the castes. The Malwl Lohar regard the Brahmins, the Palliwal Bania and the Rajput as their superiors and the Kumhar and Nai as their inferiors. The Lohar, therefore, expect the same type of behaviour from the Kumhar and the Nai as they themselves are willing to accord to those who are established as their superiors. Superordination and subordination is demonstrated by recognised and standardised behaviour patterns.

- 14) I recount an interesting personal experience in this respect. In April, 1955, when I was taking a census of the village Potlod, I was asked by an elderly Rajput if I intended to go to the houses of the Bhangi and Chamars in the village, in connection with my enquiries. I said, "Yes, of course; what is the harm?" He got confused and said there was no harm in my doing so, but that I could easily send for the Bhangi and the Chamars and that there was really no need for me to take the trouble. He tried to persuade me that it was improper and even added a threatening note that I might suffer for it. Eventually, I even persuaded several of my young regular informants (two Khatis, two Rajputs and one Khati Bhaat) to accompany me to the 'untouchable'



SATYA NARAIN KATHA

All castes of the village are invited and participate in this katha. It is a powerful leveller of social inequalities.

caste wards. They thought it a most novel experience and even the elders tolerated it, but to the end of my stay in the village, many continued to think of my behaviour as exceptional.

- 15) An exception to this general rule is in respect of the Satva Narain Katha. The villagers feel that it would be sinful on their part if they refused to attend the recitation of the Katha (mythological narrative), even in an 'unclean' caste house. This Katha is becoming very popular; it is narrated by a Brahmin or a Vairagi Vaisnava and may be organized by any person belonging to any caste. There is, however, a distinction made in the venue of the Katha; if it is organized by a 'clean' caste man, he does so at his house, whereas if organized by an 'unclean' caste man, the Katha is held in the compound of one of the village temples to enable every body to attend. The Katha is generally regarded as a powerful leveller of social inequality and as one of the agents of the democratic process in Indian villages.

## CHAPTER VIII.

## CASTE AND OCCUPATION.

Caste and Traditional Callings.

One of the most characteristic features of caste -- and one that is immediately apparent to the field observer -- is its association with occupations. Quite often this is expressed in the caste names. Take, for example, such cases as Kumhar (Potter), Darzi (Tailor), Lohar (Blacksmith), Sutar or Barhai (Carpenter), Nai (Barber), Chamar (Skinner and Tanner), Teli (Oil-presser), Gujar (Cowherd), Gadariya (Shepherd), and so on. These names are commonly found all over India, though in different regions, castes usually add the name of the region as a first part of the caste name, such as Gujerati Chamar, Malwi Chamar and Desha Chamar, Gujerat, Malwa and Desha being the names of the regions from which these three castes come.

It was this common occupational name which I believe to be responsible for the confusion in caste definition and identification. Risley, for example, considered this occupation name to be indicative of a caste's solidarity. Thus, he treats "Brahmin priests; the

Chamars and Mochi workers in leather, the Churhas, Bhangis, and Doms scavengers; the Dosadhs village watchmen and messengers," etc., as castes. (Risley, 1915, p. 76). To my mind this method of caste identification is faulty and non-scientific, for it would doubtlessly be wrong to classify all groups possessing the same name as a 'caste', particularly, as the name is an occupation name, and in India, there is a tendency to call people by the name of the trade they pursue, such as barafwala (ice-seller), bakonwala (butcher), bania (shopkeeper). However all the ice-sellers, butchers or shopkeepers do not as group members have social relations with one another. Caste based social relations are patterned by the rules of the endogamous group to which the ice-seller, butcher, shopkeeper, tailor or potter belongs.

Blunt and Hutton have adduced some evidence to show that change of occupation by a section of a caste brings about a change in the social and ritual status of the seceding section. (Hutton, 1951, p. 51; Blunt, 1931, p. 229 - 252). It breaks away from its parent group. What is important, however, is that the seceding group does not, and is not allowed to, join the caste whose occupation it takes up but forms a new endogamous group, developing its own traditions and ways of social action.

Take, for example, Blunt's case of Kayastha Darzis in Uttar Pradesh. This group was Kayastha in origin; at some stage, it took up the trade of tailoring,



as a result of which it severed itself from others of the Kayastha caste, but it did not join, matrimonially, commensally or otherwise, the local Darzi caste. It became a distinct social group, practising endogamy and establishing its own distinctive rules of dining, greeting, etc. In general, fission and not fusion has been the characteristic feature of the process of caste formation. Only in recent years have there been cases of fusion of castes into a larger caste, largely due to political awareness and expediency.

The nominal association of caste with occupation is not the only link between caste and the pursuit of trades. Each caste -- that is, endogamous social group -- is traditionally associated with a certain occupation which is considered to be the traditional occupation of the caste. In a very large number of cases, as shown above, this association is reflected in the caste name. Even if the caste name does not express this link with its traditional calling, it is universally known as established by tradition. For example, the caste names Srigaur Brahmin, Rajput, Khati, Bhangi, Bhambi, Bagri, Bargunda do not show any association with specific occupations; each of these, however, does possess and pursue a traditional calling; the Brahmin are domestic priests, the Khati are farmers, the Bhangi are scavengers and keepers of the cremation grounds, and so on.

Indeed this link between caste and occupation is so important that Nesfield, one of the earliest writers on caste in India, on the basis of his observations during the Census of India, 1881, built his classification of castes solely upon occupation. Nesfield wrote: "function,<sup>1</sup> and function only, as I think, was the foundation upon which the whole caste system of India was built up " (pp.34).

Most of the recent writers on caste in India have recognised this caste occupation link. Majumdar regards it as one of the main planks on which the social stratification is obviously based (1958b,p. 285). Authors on village communities in India have shown that caste and the pursuit of occupations are closely linked. (Srinivas, 1955, pp. 1 - 2; Dube, 1955, pp. 36 - 37; Mayer, 1956, pp. 127 - 130).

In Table 1 (Chapter II), I gave a list of the castes in Potlodi with the numerical strength of the caste in the village community and the traditional callings of castes. In Table 5, I give the total number of adult men from each caste group, those who are engaged in the pursuit of the traditional calling of the caste, either exclusively, primarily or subsidiarily, and those who have altogether given it up for some other occupation.<sup>2)</sup> Later, I propose to discuss the cases of non-conformity to traditional callings and the causes that have brought about such a situation.

TABLE 6.

## RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN CASTES AND TRADITIONAL OCCUPATIONS IN POTLOD VILLAGE

(1955-56)

Caste Name.	Traditional calling.	Number of Adult Men.				
		T O T A L	Following traditional callings.			Not following traditional callings at all.
			Exclu- sive- ly.	Prima- rily.	Subsi- diari- ly.	
Khatri	Cultivator	122	113	-	-	9
Rajput *	Warrior Cultivator	32	26	-	-	6
Mali	Cultivator Gardner	19	19	-	-	-
Malwi Balai	Weaver	18	-	-	-	18
Bhambi	Weaver	11	-	-	-	11
Desha Chamar	Leather worker	7	1	3	1	2
Purabi Thakur *	Warrior Cultivator	5	4	-	-	1
Malwi Chamar	Skinner Tanner	3	2	1	-	-
Malwi Kumhar	Potter	4	2	1	-	1
Gujerati Kumhar	Potter	3	2	1	-	-
Gujerati Lohar	Blacksmith	4	-	4	-	-
Gujerati Balai	Weaver	4	-	-	-	4
Darji	Tailor	2	-	2	-	-
Gujerati Chamar	Skinner Tanner	1	1	-	-	-
Nai	Barber	5	2	3	-	-
Srigaur Brahmin	Priest Astrologer	3	-	3	-	-
Dhobi	Washerman	2	-	-	-	2
Malwi Lohar	Blacksmith	1	-	1	-	-
Dholi	Drummer	1	1	-	-	-
Khatri Bhaat	Bard and Genealogist to Khatri caste	1	-	-	1	-
Teli	Oil Presser	1	-	-	-	1
Paliwal Bania	Shopkeeper	1	-	-	-	1
Bhangi	Scavenger	1	-	1	-	-
Gosain	Mendicant Temple priest	1	-	1	-	-
Vairagi Vaishnava	Temple priest Mendicant	3	-	3	-	-
Nath Jogi	Beggar	13	-	6	7	-
Bargunda	Basket maker	6	-	6	-	-
Bagri	Mat maker	9	-	4	5	-
		233	173	40	14	56



- \*) The traditional calling of Rajput and Purabi Thakur castes: According to the varna-traditions, the profession of the Kshattriya varna has been described as "protection", which included fighting in war and governing in peace. There is, however, evidence in the legal, literary, and religious books, and this is borne out by active living tradition in villages, that in peace time, the Kshattriya cultivated the land, at least the large mass of Kshattriya who were not connected with administration and the regular defence systems did so. Rajput traditions in Potlod affirm they have been tillers of the soil for centuries.

With the establishment of peace and security in the country, and the transfer of the responsibility of defence and administration to an alien body, viz., the Government, the primary function of the Rajput and Kshattriya ceased to exist (at about the middle of the 19th century A.D.). Ever since then, they have been nothing but cultivators. Hence, I found it suitable to designate them as 'warrior cultivator'.

The Purabi Thakur occupy the same position in U.P. as the Rajput in Malwa and Rajasthan. And, thus, the same arguments apply to their being designated in the same way as Rajput.

This probably is one of the factors influencing their declining social status, and claims for superior status by castes like Khati, Darzi, Gujerati Lohar and Palliwal Bania.

On the basis of this data, we can say that most of the caste groups in Potlod village still continue to pursue their respective traditional callings. The caste groups that have given up their traditional callings altogether are: Malwi Balai, Bhambi, Gujerati Balai, Dhobi, Teli and Palliwal Bania. The Khati Bhaat follows his occupation only subsidiarily. The caste groups from which only a few adult men have taken to alternate callings are: Rajput, Khati, Purabi Thakur, Desha Chamar, and Malwi Kumhar.

It will become clear that only those castes have given up their traditional callings whose members no longer find these callings profitable. This is the case with the Balai, Bhambi, and Teli, and to a certain extent with the Bhaat castes.

The demand for the genealogist and bard is on the decline. "He is a costly luxury of past age" said Ram Chandra Khati. "He charges you for everything: for visiting your house, attending ceremonies, registering births and marriages in his register; and what do you get in exchange: nothing but stories about your ancestors to satisfy your vanity; and he charges you heavily, sometimes as much as fifty rupees for a single visit!" Again his occupation as bard and herald has become less important in an age when many people can read and write.

The Balai and Bhambi weavers and Teli oil-pressers lost their traditional occupation because of

economic and industrial developments in rural areas. I was told that weavers used to buy cotton from local cultivators, weave coarse cloth on their handlooms, and sell it back to the villagers. Similarly, the Teli bought oil-seeds and sold the oil which he had pressed in his wooden mill worked by a pair of oxen. In the twenties of the present century, cotton textile and oil-pressing industries were established in neighbouring cities (Indore and Ujjain), and cheap mill made cloth and cleanly and cheaply pressed oil became available in the village markets. As a result, the traditional weavers and oil-pressers found it uneconomical to carry on their traditional callings and gradually had to give them up altogether. The history of the weavers and oil-pressers serves to bring out some interesting aspects of the effects of industrialization on caste occupation relationship.

The cases of the Dhobi and Palliwal Bania have different explanations. Both these castes are represented in Potlod by a single family<sup>each</sup>, and it would be wrong to make any generalisations on the basis of their behaviour. The Dhobi family immigrated and settled in Potlod about 45 years ago (in or about the year 1915). After a year or so of service as washermen, they found the pursuit of their traditional occupation uneconomical. In the village,<sup>people</sup> wash their garments themselves, and only a few can afford

to pay regularly for the services of a washerman. So the Dhobi decided to give up laundering clothes, and became farm labourer; after a few years, he took some land on lease and cultivated it; during the war years (1939-45) when the costs of farm produce became very high, the family accumulated wealth, and in 1946, bought the land they had until then cultivated on lease, thus becoming land owning cultivators.

The Palliwal Bania, on the other hand, is a poor man who found it difficult to amass sufficient capital for a shop, and further there were already two shops in Potlod, financed by well-to-do merchants from a neighbouring village. He was thus not able to start a new shop, and so became a cultivator.

#### Alternate Occupations.

Ideally, members of a caste are expected to hold to their traditional calling. This, according to Hindu traditions, is the only correct and right way for them to make a living. In practice, however, such factors as the economic unsuitability of the occupation or personal inclination lead to deviations.

The occupational structure, again, is not so rigid as to prohibit such non-conformity in respect of traditional callings. As I hope to show, later in this chapter, there are certain "open" occupations, the pursuit



of which is permitted to all castes, from the highest Brahmins to the lowest 'untouchables'. Secondly, the traditional rules governing caste occupation relationship only are restrictive in certain respects, that is, while they prohibit a caste from taking to certain callings they do limit it to a single trade or occupation. These factors I believe, are responsible for the limited occupational mobility of certain caste groups in Potlodi village and have enabled them to take up occupations other than their traditional ones.

In Table 6 I have indicated the occupations actually taken up and followed by those who have abandoned their traditional callings.

TABLE 7.

SHOWING ALTERNATE OCCUPATIONSPART I

Caste Name.	Total number of adult men not following traditional callings.	PRESENT AND NON-TRADITIONAL OCCUPATIONS			
		Culti- vation.	Farm labour- ing.	General labour- ing.	Shop- keeping.
Khati	9	-	-	6	3
Rajput	6	-	6	-	-
Malwi Balai	18	-	17	1	-
Bhambi	11	-	7	4	-
Purabi Thakur	1	-	1	-	-
Desha Chamar	2	-	2	-	-
Malwi Kumhar	1	1	-	-	-
Gujerati Balai	4	-	4	-	-
Dhobi	2	2	-	-	-
Teli	1	-	-	1	-
Palliwal Bania	1	1	-	-	-
	56	4	37	12	3

PART II

Caste Name.	OCCUPATIONS NOW PRIMARILY FOLLOWED.	
	Total number of adult men following their traditional calling only subsidiarily.	General labour- ing.
Desha Chamar	1	1
Khati Bhaat	1	1
Nath Jogi	7	7
Bagri	5	5
	14	8
		6

It is necessary for me to point out at this stage a fact which I regard as fundamental to the understanding of the occupational role of castes: the fact that the practice of agriculture is largely considered to be open to all castes. There are, no doubt, 'cultivator castes', such as the Khati, Mali, Kulmi, Anjana (the last two are not found in Potlodi, but are living in neighbouring villages), but agriculture is in no sense a caste monopoly, and all castes, down to the very lowest untouchables (castes of Rank V; see Chapter II) may practise cultivation.<sup>3)</sup> That most of them did so even during the days of feudal authority in Malwa is evidenced in the service tenure requirements of the various artisan and servant castes. A majority of these non cultivator castes, such as priests, artisans, and community servants, practised their caste vocation in conjunction with agriculture. Usually, land was granted to them rent free in exchange for the specific services they were required to render to their feudal lord.<sup>4)</sup> Agriculture may thus be regarded as an 'open' occupation which could be and was pursued by any caste irrespective of its ritual status and position in the caste hierarchy. (Birt, 1909, p. 22).

#### Hierarchy of Occupations.

Just as there is a 'formal' caste hierarchy



in respect of commensality, the giving and taking of food and drinks, etc., there is also a hierarchy of occupations.<sup>5)</sup>

The following Chart shows such a hierarchy of occupations. Only those occupations have been included in this Chart that are pursued or professed (as traditional callings) by the people of Potlod village.

CHART 6

THE HIERARCHY OF OCCUPATIONS IN POTLOD VILLAGE  
(1955-56)

	Domestic Priesthood.	Temple Priesthood.	Teaching.	Astrology.
	Land-owning		Ruling	
U P D R E	Trading	Shop-keeping	Money-lending	
	Agriculture		Cattle-rearing	
	Tailoring	Blacksmithing	Carpentry	Pottery
	Barbering			
	Begging (from 'Clean' castes only)			
	Begging (from all castes)			
'I M P U R E'	Drumming	Oil-pressing	Cloth weaving	
	Basket making		Mat weaving	
	Laundering soiled garments			
'V E R Y I M P U R E'	Skinning & Tanning		Leather work	
	Scavenging			

At the top of this hierarchy of occupations come <sup>the</sup> type of callings prescribed for the Brahmin by the Varna theory. A Brahmin should be a domestic <sup>or</sup> temple priest or an astrologer, or a teacher and scholar well versed in religious and cultural lore. All these callings are considered to be very pure, and not involving any occupational pollution. These are known as satvik or ritually pure callings (Satvik is from the skr. root Sat meaning 'good, pure').

The second sub-category of occupations are those considered to be suitable for the castes of the middle ranks in the ritual purity scale; these do not involve any definite and voluntary pollution, but they are not as pure as the satvik callings. Administration, justice giving, and fighting come at the top of this category of occupations. All of these involve killing, injuring or harming some living beings even though the administrator, judge and warrior are expected to be righteous in their deliberations and stand for a just and humanitarian cause. Even the Brahmin, however, regard these as noble professions, since their purpose is to protect the good and righteous against the sinful and unrighteous.

Trade and shop-keeping come next on the hierarchy of occupations. Both these involve immoral if not positively impure habits and activities. "A

Bania must necessarily lie, if he wants to prosper" is an oft-quoted proverb. "A shop-keeper" said Ratan Lal Jain, himself a petty shop-keeper, "is frequently dirtied, having to deal with such things as grains, spices, salt, sugar, jaggery, and oils. Besides, in his business, he has to deal with customers belonging to all castes and ranks and to accept money touched by them."

The next sub-category of occupations consists of the crafts and cultivation, in the economic sense, the 'actual producers of real wealth': tailoring, blacksmithing, carpentry, and pottery, all these crafts are considered to be ritually pure though lowly callings. The blacksmith uses bellows made of hide and the carpenter and potter kill the insects in the wood and clay they respectively work with. Cultivation of the land is considered by the orthodox, to be unworthy since <sup>the</sup> plough or harrow injures the earth (which is treated as Mother; she is popularly referred to as Dharti mata, i.e., mother earth) and the living organisms in her bosom.<sup>6)</sup>

The barber's occupation comes next. It is considered to be more lowly than the crafts or cultivation. Barbering is concerned with human hair which is a form of bodily substance and hence not polluting in the same way as bodily emissions; however, a barber also massages the limbs of his patrons, and so his calling is regarded as lowly though not unclean.<sup>7)</sup> To maintain his ritual purity the barber serves only the 'ritually clean'

castes.

Begging is not highly regarded but there is nothing impure about it, but only so long as a person begs only from ritually 'clean' persons and accepts only 'ritually clean' things. Hindu religious tradition permits Brahmins and ascetics to beg for a living, even if the latter lead a family life and work as cultivators or labourers. But on no account must they accept alms from 'ritually unclean' castes, and they must not accept impure things as alms. This vitally affects the ritual status of the beggar. In Potlod village, the Brahmin, Gosain, and Vairagi Vaisnava beg for alms only from 'clean' castes and accept gifts of grain, uncooked food stuffs, new cloth or money, and because of this are considered to be pure and ritually 'clean' themselves. On the other hand, the ascetic Nath Jogi beg for alms from all 'clean' and 'unclean' castes (they put the limit at 'untouchable' castes), and are, for this reason, treated as 'ritually unclean'. The Bhangi also begs, but he not only accepts alms from all 'clean' and 'unclean' castes, he also accepts cooked food (including flesh foods) and even leavings from plates; for this reason (together with others), he is assigned a very low place on the hierarchy of occupations. (The Maha Brahmin who accepts funerary gifts is also considered as of "low ritual" status, because of his acceptance of gifts that have been in association with death).

The drummer's occupation is 'ritually impure', for it brings him in contact with animal skin (which covers the large drum, called dhol); the drummer also works for and begs from all 'clean', 'unclean' and 'untouchable' castes.

The oil-presser crushes seeds to extract oil for his living, thus destroying intentionally and directly the life principle in the oil-seeds. The life principle is regarded as sacred, and for this reason the Teli's occupation is considered to be 'ritually impure'.<sup>8)</sup>

Cotton cloth weaving is an 'impure' occupation, because the weaver has to use the bow with its string made of animal tissues.

Much more 'impure' is the work of the washerman who has to handle soiled garments, including clothes worn by people during periods of ritual pollution such as menstruation, child birth and death. The washerman, however, does not serve 'unclean' and 'untouchable' castes.

Basket weaving and mat making are 'impure' trades because they involve handling of leaves and stalks of the palm which is believed to be intrinsically impure.

Skinning dead animals and tanning their hides is a 'very impure' calling because it brings the skinner and tanner into direct physical contact with death and decay. The leather worker is slightly less impure since he does not skin dead animals or tan the hides but deals in only tanned leather. Similarly the scavenger's work

is 'very impure' since he has to remove night soil in addition to handling animal carcasses, castrating calves, (thus depriving an animal belonging to the extremely sacred cow family of its reproductive capacity), accepting alms and plate leavings from even 'unclean' castes, and accepting part of a dead person's shroud.

What, it may be asked...



What, it may be asked, is the criterion for this grading of occupations? Is it based on the skill involved in the trade, or the economic gain that accrues from its pursuit, or some such secular criteria as power and wealth which the follower of the trade acquires, or do we have to look elsewhere to find the basis for the hierarchy? The answer to this, I believe, lies in the terms used by the people of Potlode to distinguish the occupations higher in the hierarchy from those at lower levels. For instance, 'domestic priesthood' or 'teaching' are not referred to as 'more skilful' occupations, or as occupations that yield wealth, but rather as 'purer' <sup>9)</sup> occupations than the rest. Similarly, occupations on the lower scales of the hierarchy are called 'impure' occupations. The purity or impurity of occupations is determined in terms of the notions about pollution and purity, which govern the conduct and behaviour of ordinary village Hindus in their individual and social lives and that of groups in inter-group behaviour.

There was a general consensus of opinion among my informants from all castes that all work is either pure or impure; the determining factor is whether the things handled during the course of a job are pure or impure. Human emissions and dead things are considered to be impure all over India, and hence all those jobs that involve handling or contact with these impure things



are considered to be impure. Casual or accidental contact with impure things results in temporary pollution such as a person accompanying a dead body to the cremation ground or a woman in the periods suffer from. Should, however, the contact with impure things become regular and occupational, the occupation itself becomes an impure one, and it imparts its impurity to all those persons who pursue it regularly.

Similarly, there are pure occupations which involve regular professional contact with or handling of pure objects. Priesthood, domestic and temple, or teaching or astrology are considered to be extremely pure callings; land owning, shop-keeping, tailoring, carpentry and smithy, cattle-rearing, pottery are all pure callings, though as we have seen some are purer than others. The pursuit of pure callings does not entail any regular and occupational contact with impure things.

Some of the intrinsically impure occupations, I was told, are considered to be very impure. An old Brahmin, Ramanand, gave the distinction between 'impure' and 'very impure' callings in the following words: "There is a very large number of occupations which involve regular contact with dirt and impurities, and which, for this reason, are treated as 'impure', that is, their pursuit pollutes a person; there are, however, some where there is greater and more direct handling of impure and polluting objects; the occupations of both the drummer and the

Chamar involve contact with and handling of dead animal's skin; the Dholi beats a drum covered with animal skin, and the Chamar skins dead animals and tans their hides. Both are impure, since, however, the Chamar is called upon to touch the dead animal, skin it, and cure the skin, his occupation is more impure than that of the Dholi who merely beats his drum; similarly, the Dhobi washes soiled garments including clothes worn by women during their periods and parturition, but the Bhangi actually removes by hand human excreta; the latter's occupation is more impure than that of the former."

In this way, all occupations are thought of by the village people as arranged in a hierarchy, a definite place being assigned to each. And since this placement is made in terms of the notions of ritual purity and pollution, each occupation may be said to possess a specific 'ritual position'.

I have already shown, earlier in this chapter, that each occupation is linked up with one or more castes who pursue it, or profess to pursue it, as their traditional calling. I have also shown that the position of a caste on the caste hierarchy is determined by and is indicative of its ritual status. It may then be said that the ritual position of an occupation must approximate to the ritual status of the caste or castes who pursue it as a traditional calling.

It is but a corollary of the above said rule that the pursuit of 'pure' occupations is limited to dwija or 'clean' castes; these ritually clean castes alone are entitled, broadly speaking, to follow the pure trades as their regular occupations. Similarly, only the antvaja or 'unclean' castes may follow the 'impure' trades as their traditional callings. For the same reason, the 'very impure' trades and jobs are assigned to castes which are considered to be 'ritually untouchable'. 10)

Restated so as to appear as ritual prohibition 11), this rule would mean that 'ritually clean' castes are prohibited from taking to 'impure' or 'very impure' callings; 'ritually unclean' castes are forbidden to follow both the 'pure' and the 'very impure' callings; and castes that are considered to be 'ritually untouchable' must not pursue callings or trades which are 'pure' or 'impure'.

There appear. . .

There appear to be two different aspects of this 'impurity' or 'purity' of occupations. The first I have stated above. This can be seen in the following chart.



PURITY OR IMPURITY OF OCCUPATIONS.	'RITUAL PURITY DIVISION' OF CASTES WHO CAN FOLLOW THESE AS TRADITIONAL CALLINGS.
'Pure'	'Ritually Clean', i.e., <u>Dwija</u> castes
'Impure'	'Ritually Unclean', i.e., <u>Shudra</u> castes
'Very Impure'	'Ritually Untouchable', i.e., <u>Avarna</u> or <u>Chandala</u> castes

The important exceptions to this general rule are in respect of land cultivation and cattle-rearing. No doubt there are castes whose traditional callings are cultivation or cattle-rearing (such as Khati, and Mali castes). Both these, however, are considered to be un-specialised and 'open' callings, and all castes, irrespective of the nature of their traditional callings, can own land and cattle, or take land on lease or rent, or cultivate land and rear cattle (see Churye, 1950, p. 16; in Marriot, etc., Srinivas, 1955, p. 3).

Secondly, occupations are relatively 'normal', 'too pure' or 'too impure' for different castes, and this

aspect is applicable on a much narrower level than the above mentioned concept of the intrinsic ritual position of occupations. We have seen that most of the occupations are caste linked, that is, they are suitable or 'normal' for particular castes, and unsuitable or 'not normal' for all others. Thus for some castes the same occupation is normal, that is, the ritual status of the castes approximates to the ritual worth of the occupation, while for others, it would be 'too pure': while for still others, the same occupation might be 'too impure'.

I shall demonstrate this by taking a single occupation and examining its ritual value for the different castes. For this purpose I shall take a 'craft' occupation that is pure, though not especially so in its nature. Blacksmithing as an occupation is 'normal' or suitable for the Lohar or 'blacksmith' caste; it is this caste's traditional calling, and all members of the Lohar caste are required to be blacksmiths. But this occupation is also 'normal' or suitable for other castes whose ritual status and traditional callings are of the same ritual order, such as Sutar (carpenter), Darzi (tailor) or Kumhar (Potter). Thus, no harm (from the ritual view-point) will come to a Sutar blacksmith, Darzi blacksmith, or Kumhar blacksmith, and such a person would continue to enjoy his normal ritual status and all the privileges and obligations connected with it. There are, however, other castes for whom blacksmithing would be an unsuitable, that

is, ritually 'not normal', calling. Such, for instance, would be the case with the Brahmin, and other non artisan castes, such as Rajput or Khati or Vairagi Vaisnava, all of the 'ritually clean' category of castes. From their point of view, blacksmithing, though intrinsically 'pure', is a relatively 'impure' calling, the pursuit of which would lower their ritual status and mean the loss of caste. For the Nai, (whose occupation itself is intrinsically pure), however, blacksmithing is relatively 'pure' calling which he cannot take to.

With castes whose traditional callings are intrinsically 'impure' the inter occupational mobility is still more restricted. In this category, each caste regards its traditional calling as superior to the traditional callings of other castes of the same category. The Teli, for example, thinks that his traditional calling of oil-pressing is relatively purer than those of the Bhambi, Dholi, Dhobi, Bagri or Bargunda; the Bhambi thinks his is the purest of all 'impure' callings, and so on. Decidedly all castes of this category regard their traditional callings as intrinsically 'purer' than those of the castes of the 'ritually untouchable' division whose traditional callings are intrinsically 'very impure' (so impure as to render the castes that pursue them ritually 'untouchable'). This is taken to be so by all the castes of the village.

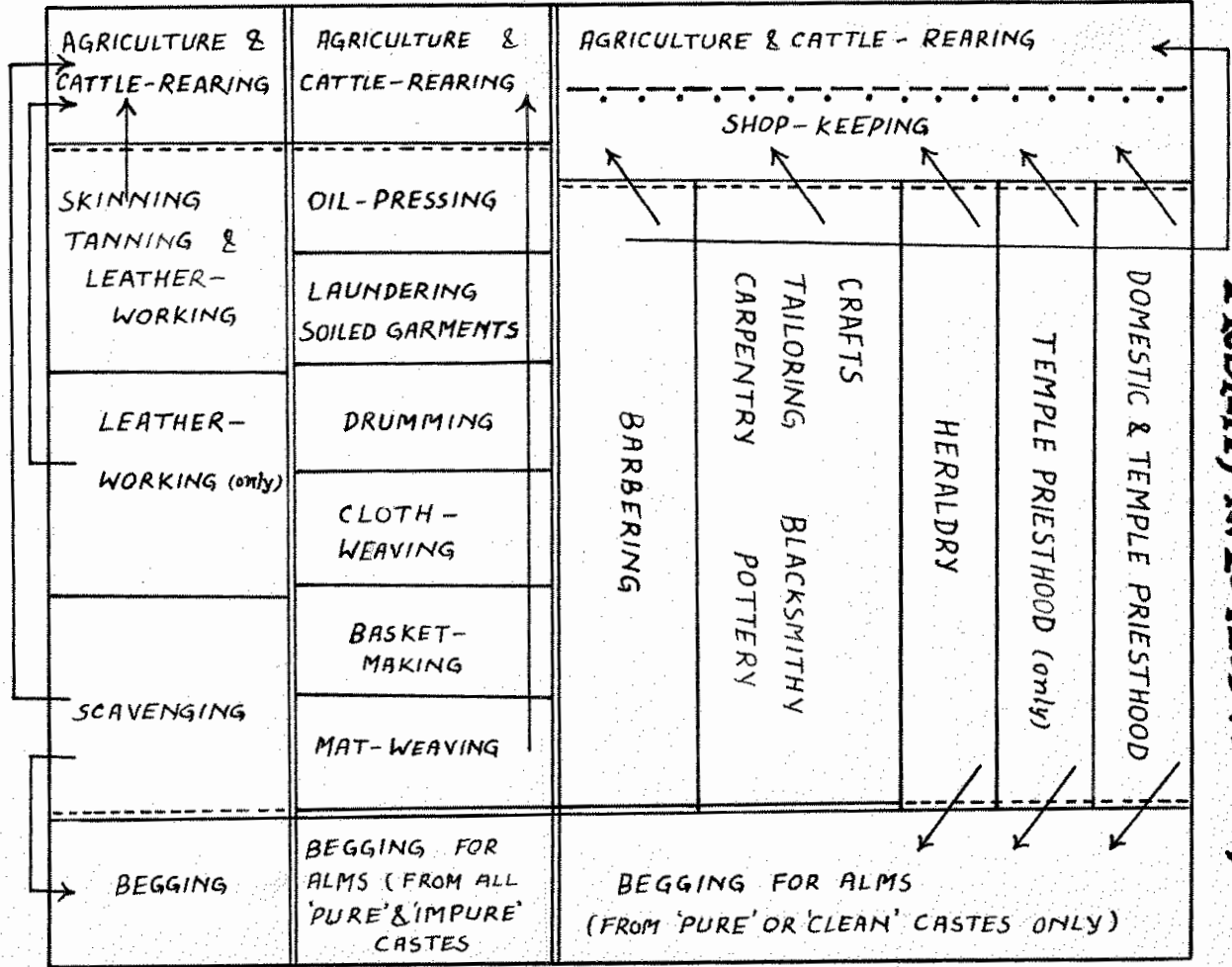
Within their own class, however, castes

belonging to the 'highly impure' occupation category, each caste considers its calling as relatively 'pure' compared to that of the others of this class. Thus, for instance, a Bhangi would not change his traditional calling with that of a Chamar even though there might be material gains. In his own turn, the Chamar would treat scavenging as a relatively impure calling which he would not take up for anything.

The ideal pattern of inter occupational mobility of castes as conceived by the people of Potlod village is shown in the following Chart.



# PATTERN OF INTER-OCCUPATIONAL MOBILITY IN POTOLOD (1955-56)



———— No Mobility Possible  
 - - - - - Only one-way Mobility Possible  
 (Indicated by arrow in the Chart)  
 . . . . . Both-ways Mobility Possible.

'VERY IMPURE' OCCUPATIONS      'IMPURE' OCCUPATIONS      'PURE' OCCUPATIONS



In an orthodox community like Potlodi village, castes are normally expected to follow their respective traditional callings, or, in exceptional cases, the alternate occupations approved in their ritual idiom. Dharma (that is, rules for righteous conduct and living) require members of a caste to stick to their caste's traditional or hereditary calling or callings. To abandon this in pursuit of another, though more lucrative and materially gainful calling, is thought to be wrong and improper. Even if, however, people do give up their traditional callings and take up others as their means of living, this has to be strictly within the ritual purity frame work which I have already elaborated. Again agriculture and cattle-rearing are exceptions to this general rule.

An institution which acts as a check on the unrestricted choice of occupations by castes is the caste panchayat. This is an ad hoc body composed of all the adult men of a caste. The normal business of the panchayat is to offer guidance to its members in their commensal, dietary, marital and sexual and other social relations with other members of their own caste and with other castes. It is generally considered to be one of the important functions of the caste panchayat to see that none of its members indulges in activities which might lead to pollution. It is the business of the panchayat to see that its members earn their living in the traditionally prescribed way. In the case of artisan and menial castes,

particularly, these caste panchayats tend to become guild-like in their nature. (cf. Dube, 1955, p. 60; Mukerjee, ed. 1935, Chapter XII). also 1939, p. 52).

In villages caste panchayats are very strong, and, by and large, succeed in maintaining a virtual monopoly by the caste over the caste trade. Where a caste group in a village community is numerically small, such panchayats usually embrace several nearby villages. This is so, for example, in Potlod and its neighbouring villages. The Nai Panchayat includes members of the Nai caste in fourteen neighbouring villages beside Potlod. The Darzi Panchayat of which the Darzi of Potlod are members embraces all Darzi living in villages within a radius of ten miles of Potlod.

It is interesting to note that caste ties normally cut across political and state boundaries, and even though the princely states of Holkar and Sindhia were seldom on very good terms, caste relations in a bordering village (that is in Potlod, which, as I have already shown, is situated in what was an enclave of the Sindhia in the Holkar State) are known to have been as smooth as in other interior villages.

A caste panchayat tries to maintain a monopoly over the caste trade in two ways. It refuses permission to its members to take up occupations other than the traditionally approved ones. This refusal is backed by the threat of expulsion from the caste and even of excommunication for life for all those who transgress the caste

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tradition and ruling of the caste panchayat.<sup>12)</sup> Secondly, a caste panchayat acts as a barrier to other castes taking up the traditional calling of the caste. This it does by appealing to the panchayat of the transgressor to punish the latter for the infringement of the trade monopoly enjoined by tradition, and by appealing to the village community and the village headman.<sup>13)</sup> On the whole, the methods employed are peaceful and persuasive, but there have been reports of cases where agitation and violence have been resorted to throw out a usurper and restore caste monopoly over the trade.

However, the system in which the artisans and servants are tied to their 'patrons' leaves little ground for transgressions of this nature. Each family of artisans or servants is attached to a number of families of cultivators and land owners; the affiliation is usually hereditary, but may also be bought and sold or pawned like negotiable goods.<sup>14)</sup> New immigrants and settlers are divided by the artisans and servants among themselves by mutual arrangement. But new families belonging to the artisan or servant castes cannot immigrate and settle in the village without prior permission of both the village headmen.<sup>15)</sup>

- 1) The use of the word 'function' by Nesfield is not in conformity with the definition of 'function' in modern social anthropological literature. (See Radcliffe-Brown, 1952, pp. 178 - 187). Nesfield used it in the sense of 'occupation'. In the same sense it has been used by Risley, Majumdar, and most other writers on caste in India, and Nesfield's theory is still known -- incorrectly I think -- as the 'functional theory' of caste. In the present discussion, I have avoided the use of the word 'function', except in its accepted sociological sense, and have used the words 'occupation, trade, calling' as synonyms.
  
- 2) In order to decide whether or not members of a caste pursue their traditional calling and if they do, whether they do it exclusively, primarily, or subsidiarily, I have taken recourse to simple statistics. This was done by ascertaining the source of livelihood of each household in the village. Since normally only adult men are bread winners in this village -- and in most Indian villages -- this was relatively easy. I enquired whether for making a living a given adult man followed his caste trade and that alone, or if he pursued another calling whether the traditional calling took precedence in time and income, or if some other occupation took precedence over the traditional calling in time and income.  
  
In another Table, I have shown the alternate occupations taken up by those adult men who follow their traditional callings only subsidiarily, or do not follow them at all. This should demonstrate the extent of the adoption of non-traditional callings, in practice, in an otherwise orthodox village community.
  
- 3) There are traditional and scriptural sanctions for this practice. See Sukraniti, quoted by Ghurye, p. 102.
  
- 4) Such land as was granted rent free by the Jagirdar to artisans and village servants in exchange for professional services is known in Malwa as inam land.



In the year 1955, the Madhya Bharat Government abolished the system, and levied uniform rent on all land including land grants by ex-Jagirdars. Devasthan land (land attached to places of worship), however, continues to be rent free. The following table shows the ownership of what was once inam land by castes in Potlod:

Caste.	<u>Inam</u> land in Bighas.	<u>Devasthan</u> land in Bighas.
Mali	4	-
Srigaur Brahmin	24	9
Malwi Balai	31½	1
Gujerati Balai	1½	-
Malwi Lohar	5	-
Nai	13½	-
Vairagi Vaishnava	-	33
Malwi Kumhar	7½	-
Gujerati Lohar	4	-
Gosain	-	7
Teli	6*	-
Dholi	3½*	-
Nath Jogi	7½	-
Malwi Chamar	½	-
Gujerati Chamar	½	-
Bhangi	2½	-
<b>TOTAL.</b>	<b>111</b>	<b>50</b>

\* indicates land under non usufructory mortgage, and not in possession of the owner.

- 5) It is interesting to note that this hierarchy of occupations is known and recognised more widely than the 'formal' hierarchy or even the commensal hierarchy. Perhaps this is due to the fact that the relative purity or impurity of occupations and trade is much more apparent, and hence more widely known, than the relative purity or impurity of castes as such. There is also a well established scriptural tradition in this respect, based on the sacred smriti laws of Manu, Yagnavalakya, Narada, and others. Moreover, whereas the hierarchy of castes is determined by a complex of factors (termed 'sanskritic values' by Srinivas), the hierarchy of

occupations is determined by a single factor, viz., the purity or otherwise of the occupation. For these reasons, I believe, I found in Potlodi, a general awareness about and a wide recognition of the hierarchy of occupations. People seem to be much more clear and definite in their minds about this than about the other hierarchies referred to above.

- 6) For this reason, an orthodox Brahmin does not cultivate land. If he owns land, he either gives it on lease to tenant farmers, or he employs servants to till the land, thus shifting to these persons the sin which is believed to fall on tillers of the soil.
- 7) In some parts of India, the barber's calling is considered to be impure and his touch polluting, (e.g., Srinivas, 1952) and a person is required to bathe after a shave or hair cut. Not all castes do even that (Srinivas, 1955, p. 22). But the very fact that everywhere the barber is allowed to shave or massage men of even the highest caste indicates that though lowly, his calling is not considered to be 'ritually unclean'.
- 8) A very interesting, and I think important variation in respect of the Teli has been reported by Mayer who worked in the same region at about the same time as I did. Mayer writes: "Oil-pressing is regarded as a somewhat demeaning work, being messy though not actively polluting; its exponents would be placed roughly equal to barber and potter". (1956, p. 128). Is the variation merely local? I think not.

I put this question to some of my informants at a group interview, and from the discussion that ensued, I decided that the variation might be due to the fact that both the oil-presser and the oil-seller are designated by the same Hindi term, Teli. Now, oil-selling is considered to be ritually different from oil-pressing. The oil-seller does

not kill the life principle in the seeds as the oil-presser does. Thus, whereas oil pressing is considered to be a 'ritually impure' calling and the oil-pressing Teli an 'unclean' caste, the oil-selling Teli is treated as a 'clean' caste, even though lowly and dirty.

- 9) The exact word used in the village to designate occupations in the higher levels of the hierarchy is saaf, meaning 'clean'. On enquiry it was found that it did not refer in main to physical cleanliness involved in the pursuit of the occupation is an important consideration; it refers to what may be called 'ritual purity' (pavitra in Sanskrit). Hence, the use of the terms 'pure' and 'impure' in this context.
- 10) This statement would have no analytical value if we presupposed that the ritual status of a caste is determined by the traditional occupation of the caste, as Nesfield and other followers of the 'functional theory of Caste' would have us believe. In that case, the pursuit of a trade would be the cause and the ritual status of a caste its effect. To my mind, it appears that a dynamic process like caste in India embodies a complex of factors rather than a single factor, in this case, the traditional occupation. As I hope to be able to show in this thesis, myths of origin, dietary observances and prohibitions, marriage and death customs and rites, rules of initiation and a number of other considerations in addition to the pursuit of an occupation, are responsible for the determination of a caste's ritual status. In this light, the above stated analysis will demonstrate the precise relationship between a caste's ritual status and the pursuit of an occupation or occupations by its members. It would also bring out the complications involved if a caste takes to trades the 'ritual position' of which does not approximate to its 'ritual status', and which, by this reason, fall outside its ritual gamut.
- 11) It is, I think, typical of Popular Hinduism that rules of behaviour are mostly stated as ritual

prohibitions rather than simple positive prescriptions. Thus, instead of saying 'speak the truth', a person is told 'do not speak a lie', or 'do not violate the rules of your caste', rather than 'observe the rules of your caste'. Hindu mythology is full of anecdotes which demonstrate the futility of man's desire to experiment with the rules of religion. Violation of these sacred rules, it is shown, leads to sin and acquisition of bad karma, and is punished by divine wrath. It is thus that these rules of behaviour are known to the village people as taboos or ritual prohibitions, and they are internalized by the people as such.

- 12) What usually happens when a section of a caste takes up an occupation other than the caste profession (and the 'open' occupation, or one considered by the caste to be equal in ritual purity to its own)? The occupation it takes up is either ritually purer than the caste profession, or it is less pure. If it is purer, the new section refuses to have anything to do in the way of commensal or marital relations with its parent body. In course of time, usually it emerges as a distinct endogamous group (jati or 'caste'), somewhat higher on the hierarchy of castes than the parent caste. If, on the other hand, the occupation taken up by the dissentient section is less pure, it is expelled by the caste, and is forced to remain a separate endogamous group, lower than the parent caste in the hierarchy. The Desha Chamar or Mochi are an instance of the first (upward) process. This section of the Chamars gave up the skinning of dead animals, the tanning of hides and eating of the flesh of dead cattle. They are now a separate caste and claim a ritual status higher than the Chamar. see Russel & Hiralal, 1916, p. 244).

Of the second process (degeneration), there are numerous instances in the literature on caste. (see Hutton, 1951, pp. 89-90; Risley, 1915, p.77). *Notes*, 1933, pp. 46-48).

- 13) An exception is in the case of the Bhangi, who beside his traditional work of scavenging and sweeping, took up drumming for some castes of the village. This arose because of friction



between the drummer (Dholi) on the one hand, and the Khati caste on the other. Two years ago (in April 1953), the Dholi had trouble with some Khati families over the making of payments on marriage occasions. The Dholi complained that he was paid less than his customary dues, and refused to work for the Khati in the next marriage season, unless they agreed in advance to pay him as he demanded. This was not agreed to, and a drummer from a neighbouring village was invited by the Khati for two consecutive seasons (1954-55). In the spring marriage season of 1955 (April-May), the Khati as a caste decided to boycott the village Dholi, and to engage the services of the village Bhangi for playing the drum on all occasions, as far as they were concerned. The Dholi appealed to the village Patel, who refused to mediate in the matter. Obviously, the Patel did not want to antagonise such a large and influential caste as Khati is in Potlod, even though many in village thought that the action taken by the latter was not in conformity with the traditional service rules. In this case, the Dholi originally belonged to a distant locality and had few supporters in neighbouring villages. Secondly, he was a bad tempered fellow, and no one in the village was happy with him, and thus in his dispute with the Khati and the Bhangi, very few people took his part. Thirdly, the Khati as a caste are influential in this village and in neighbouring villages, and a decision taken and enforced by them is virtually unchallengeable, so long as it does not affect the other major caste groups. And fourthly, in the changing social situation, very few people really care to take notice of such an insignificant change, particularly so as it barely touches their daily lives. This, however, may be considered to be another indication of the slow and gradual break down of the ritual values that formed the basis of occupational specialisation. I have already quoted the cases of the village Bhambi, Balai and Teli caste groups who have given up their traditional callings in favour of others materially more profitable. These are instances where secular values have been prized above ritual values.

- 14) A majority of the patron artisan/servant relationships in Potlod village are hereditary. The present Dholi is there by virtue of having 'bought the village' (i.e. occupational rights over the

village community) from his wife's brother, some ten years ago (in about 1944). The village Bhangi pawned 'the village' to another Bhangi in 1952, and redeemed it in 1955 after paying off the debt. One of the Nai is a recent immigrant who came and settled in 1953; he was invited and settled in the village following the serious illness and consequent occupational disability of two of the village barbers. (cf. Srinivas, 1954, p. 15).

- 15) Migration statistics for Potlod village show that the inter-village mobility of the practising artisan and servant castes (excluding the Bhambi, Balai, and Teli) has been very low compared to the mobility of the agricultural and labour classes. During the last 50 years, 54 households have emigrated from the village; of these only 6 belonged to artisan or servant groups (one Darzi, one Dhobi, one Kumhar, one Dholi, one Lohar, one Nai); most of these had to leave the village for reasons other than professional conflicts or dissensions: the Darzi due to a scandal, the Dhobi due to lack of work, the Dholi sold his 'business', the Nai got seriously ill and went out to Ujjain town for treatment and has not returned, the Kumhar and Lohar did not practise their mutual crafts, and became labourers. Of 51 households that immigrated and settled during this period, only 5 belong to this group of castes, viz., one Kumhar who is a cultivator, two Darzi who came in to fill the vacancy caused by the flight of the village tailor, one Nai called in to fill the gap created by the occupational disability of the barbers and one Dholi who bought the 'business' from his predecessor.

## CHAPTER IX.

### CASTE VARIATION IN RELIGIOUS RITUALS.

We have seen that there is considerable variation in the social ideals as well as the everyday social life of different castes. In their dietary habits, living conditions, means of earning their living, and rights and privileges in the communal life of the village, variations are well-marked. These variations, I have tried to demonstrate, are primarily due to the varying ritual status of the castes. And ritual status is determined in terms of the mystical notions of purity and pollution.

There are similar variations in the religious life of the different castes. In the fasts and festivals they celebrate, the rites of passage they solemnize and the deities they worship, variations on caste basis are visible.

Most of the village Hindus, with the exception of the Brahmin and a few others, have no fixed time for daily worship. The exceptions are: males belonging to the two Brahmin families and the single Palliwal Bania family, one Rajput who is a very old man, men belonging to the Vairagi Vaishnava and Gosain castes who are temple priests,

two Khati old men, and one old man belonging to the Gujarati Lohar caste. For men of the Brahmin, Vairagi, Gosain, and Palliwal Bania castes, daily worship is an imperative, enjoined upon them by their jati dharma. They are required to go through the upanayana (janai) ceremony at the age of ten to twelve, and wear the sacred thread thereafter.

The early morning daily routine of these men is like this: they get up early in the morning before sunrise, go out to the fields to defecate (in Sanskrit this is called saucha kriva, i.e., 'the process of cleansing'), clean the mouth with a nim twig, bathe and don clean garments; then they wipe and clean the place of worship and perform pooja in the traditional style; they conclude the morning pooja by offering libations of water to the rising sun and chanting the sacred gavatri mantra.

The other four men (one Rajput, two Khati, and one Gujarati Lohar) who perform some kind of morning pooja every day are old men. They say that they spent, like others, their youth in worldly pleasures, and it is that in their old age, they must remember the creator and try to improve their Karma. The caste composition of those who perform pooja every day is shown in the

following table.

<u>Caste.</u>	<u>No. of persons.</u>
Brahmin	3
Vairagi Vaishnava	3
Palliwai Bania	1
Gosain	1
Rajput	1
Khati	2
Gujerati Lohar	1
<u>Total.</u>	<u>12</u>

Similarly, the number of persons who visit a temple every day is very small. I checked the daily temple attendance in Potlod over a month (December 1955). Analysis of these attendance lists revealed that the number of devotees regularly visiting any one of the four temples in Potlod village was in no case more than ten. The caste composition of the regular visitors to the temple in this period is shown in the following table. All the visitors were men.

<u>Caste of visitors.</u>	<u>Temple</u>				<u>Total</u>
	<u>Siva.</u>	<u>Krishna</u>	<u>Rama I</u>	<u>Rama II</u>	
Brahmin	-	-	-	1	1
Palliwai Bania	-	1	-	-	1
Rajput	1	2	1	-	4
Khati	2	1	2	5	10
Mali	-	-	3	-	3
Malwi Kumhar	-	-	1	-	1
Gujerati Lohar	-	-	1	-	1
Malwi Lohar	-	-	-	1	1
Nath Jogi	2	-	-	-	2
Nai	-	1	-	-	1
<u>Total.....</u>	<u>5</u>	<u>5</u>	<u>8</u>	<u>7</u>	<u>25</u>



We find that out of a total of 1,037 Hindus in Potlod, 37 spend some time every day in the pursuit of religion, either performing pooja in their own houses or visiting one of the village temples. This analysis reveals two remarkable facts; they are: (i) no woman from any caste was found who performed pooja or visited a temple every day; and (ii) with the exception of the Nath Jogi (who are a sectarian caste), no persons belonging to the 'sudra' or 'untouchable' castes were found performing the daily pooja or visiting a temple every day.

The scriptural position in this respect is that women and sudra are considered to be incapable of the pursuit of divine knowledge and religion, and therefore, debarred from these. The people of Potlod do not seem to be aware of such prohibitions, however. They say there are practical difficulties in the way of a woman or a member of one of the 'sudra' or 'untouchable' castes performing the traditional pooja or visiting a temple every day. Some reasons given to me by some elderly women of Potlod why women cannot be regular worshippers are: (i) for most of their life, they remain unclean for a few days every month when they have their periods; (ii) they do not get sufficient time from looking after children and domestic business; and (iii) their primary duty is to serve their husbands and children.

About the sudras, the general opinion among 'clean' castes is that there is no real barrier for a sudra performing daily worship and visiting a temple regularly, and that they (i.e., the sudras) are themselves responsible for their 'irreligious' behaviour. The sudras have other explanations: some say they have to work hard to earn their living and thus they do not get sufficient time, money or energy for what they call 'the luxury of worship and religion'. Others say that there is no real necessity for everyday worship and devotion; to them religious worship is like medicine which is to be resorted to only in times of calamity. "When we are in trouble", I was told by an elderly Balai man, "we make vows and promises to the deity, and when the trouble is over, we fulfil those promises by ceremonially worshipping the deity. The deity is usually our own caste deity, but in urgent cases, we may appeal to the great deities of Hinduism, like Hanuman". Such a view about the use of religious worship is shared by most of the young and able bodied men of all castes. A few educated young men belonging to the sudra castes asserted that they would like to go to the Hindu temples and worship there if they were allowed to worship in the same way as 'clean' caste Hindus were. This, however, was disallowed by the 'clean' caste Hindus.



Gods and Deities.

The Hindus of Potlod say they worship all the major gods and goddesses of the Hindu pantheon. Such an assertion is made by members of all castes, 'clean', 'unclean' and 'untouchable'. I collected lists of deities they worshipped from a sample of informants drawn from all the castes in the village. Names of deities which are present in all the lists are: Rama, Krishna, Siva or Mahadeva, Surya, Hanuman, Ganesha, Satya Narain, Nag, Sitala, Bheru, and Sati. In the lists given by informants from the 'unclean' and 'untouchable' castes were mentioned some names of deities which were absent from the lists drawn up by 'clean' caste informants. They are Ram Deo Ji, Bhawani, Kalka, Mari, Bari, Phoolmati, and Lal Begi. There are shrines dedicated to all these deities in Potlod.

The Brahmin informant mentioned the names of Ganga, Indra, Parasurama, and Agni also. The Rajputs said they worshipped Ajaypal Maharaj who was represented by a slab of stone (palva) on the south-eastern fringe of the village habitation. The Lohar informant included in his list of deities the name of Vishwakarma (literally meaning, 'He who made the universe') also; and the Kumhar said they worshipped Prajapati (literally meaning, 'The Lord of peoples') every time they fired their earthen pots; the Falliwal Bania said Lakshmi (the goddess of wealth)



was the special deity worshipped by his caste. The Vairagi Vaishnava said that in addition to the Vaishnava deities (Rama, Krishna and Hanuman), they worshipped Baba Haridas who, they say, was the preceptor of all Vairagi Vaishnava. Similarly, the Nath Jogi said they worshipped their first guru, Gorakhnath.

It appears to be only in principle that all Hindus - 'clean', 'unclean', and 'untouchable' - profess to worship all or most of the deities of classical Hinduism as also the local godlings. In practice, however, each caste sticks to a few deities. They are more frequently worshipped by members of that caste and less frequently by other castes. Thus Vaishnava deities - Rama and Krishna - are worshipped more often by the Brahmin and other vegetarian 'clean' castes, like Falliwal Bania, Khati, Darji and Gujerati Lohar, and less often by those castes who in principle partake of meat and alcoholic drinks. It is significant to point out here that all over Malwa and Western India particularly, vegetarian food is spoken of as vaishnava food, and non-vegetarian food is referred to as Rajput food.

The Rajput and other castes of the Rajput block worship Siva more often. These castes are also referred to as the Saiva castes.

In 'unclean' and 'untouchable' castes, the limits are further narrowed down. Here, almost each

caste has its own deity, who is sometimes referred to by the people as their caste deity or caste deity. Sitala is the caste deity of the Malwi and Gujerati Balai; Ram Deo Ji, of the Bhambi; Bhawani, of the Desha Chamar; Kalka, of the Gujerati Chamar; Mari, of the Malwi Chamar; Bari, of the Bagri; Phoolmati, of the Bargunda; and Lalbegi, of the Bhangi.

The Hindu conception of deity is that it is a form — one of the numerous forms — of the Supreme Force. Each caste (having a caste deity) regards its caste deity as the most important and prominent form of the Supreme Force, even though, it recognizes that other deities are also forms of the same Supreme Force.

As might be expected, there are variations in the procedure of pooja offered to the different deities. These are particularly striking in the matter of food offered to the deity, the caste of the officiating priest, and the hymns or incantations recited in honour of the deity.

Each deity has its own favourite food which is generally offered to it by the worshipper. Most of the gods and goddesses of classical Hinduism are believed to be fond of sweet food, milk and milk preparations which are offered to them at their pooja. Siva is also a vegetarian god: he is believed to be fond of narcotics other than alcoholic drinks, though; and devotees to Siva offer

him bhang and ganja and partake of the narcotics themselves. Ram Deo Ji is also a vegetarian and teetotal deity. On the other hand, Bhawani, Kalka, Sitala, Mari, Bari, Phoolmati and Lalbegi are deities who are believed to be extremely fond of animal sacrifice. The character of Bheru varies according to the food habits of the caste with whom he is associated. By the vegetarian castes, a coconut is offered to him, whereas the non-vegetarian castes offer in his name sacrifice of a he-goat.

The caste of the priest also varies. The Brahmin serve only the Vaishnava gods and officiate at those rituals only where these deities are worshipped. Moreover, they serve only the 'clean' castes and the Nath Jogi. Vairagi Vaishnava and Gosain priests do likewise. At rituals observed in honour of other deities, the regular priest of the deity concerned officiates. The priest is generally drawn from the caste whose caste-deity the god or goddess happens to be.

The nature of the incantations or hymns and the language in which they are spoken varies in accordance with the caste of the priest. Only the Brahmin, Vairagi Vaishnava and Gosain priests are eligible to chant scriptural incantations in Sanskrit. The others have to be satisfied with hymns in the local dialect. For every deity, there are different Sanskrit incantations and Hindi hymns and these have to be recited on

appropriate occasions.

'Fixed Rituals'.

Fasts and feasts form an important part of the religious life of village Hindus. They may be called 'fixed rituals', because the occasion and date for their performance is fixed on the local calendar; they are observed as seasonal festivals. Their number is strikingly large, and their distribution over the year very irregular. Not all of them are observed by all castes of the village.

Given below is a chart listing the regular festivals observed by the Hindus of Potlod, the month and date on which each is observed and the castes who observe it. The dates on which these festivals are observed are reckoned in terms of the Hindu calendar. The months of the Hindu year are lunar months. Only the festival of Makar Sankranti also known as Til Sankranti is celebrated on a date reckoned in terms of the solar calendar. The festival marks the transit of the sun at the Tropic of Capricorn, and is popularly believed to be the beginning of the day of the gods and the night of the demons. Makar Sankranti may thus fall either in the lunar month of Pous or Magh. The festival is observed by 'clean' castes only, who bathe in cold water and give alms of rice and pulse grain to the Brahmin and temple priest.

Hindu months, according to the Gregorian calendar, would be:

Local Name.	Hindu Month. Sanskrit name.	Corresponding month of the Gregorian Calendar.
Chet	Chaitra	March - April.
Baisakh	Vaishakha	April - May
Jeth	Jyeshtha	May - June
Asadh	Ashadha	June - July
Sawan	Shrawana	July - August
Bhadon	Bhadrapada	August - September
Kuar	Ashvina	September - October
Katik	Kartika	October - November
Aghan	Margashirsha	November - December
Poos	Poushya	December - January
Magh	Magha	January - February
Phagun	Phalguna	February - March

These festivals are so arranged that they are bound up with important seasonal events, farming activities and the like. It will be found from the calendar of festivals that there are a large number of festivals in the month of Chet, Bhadon, Kuar and Katik. All these are busy agricultural months when some crop or the other is being harvested and prepared for consumption. In an agricultural country like India where the lives of the peasants are tied up with crops and monsoons, it is logical that festivals should coincide with important seasonal events; change from winter to spring (Holi), first monsoon showers (Ganga dashmi in Jeth), conclusion of rains (Dashera), first wheat harvest (Akhati), and first rice harvest (Mata poojan in Kuar).



NAG PANCHAMI

Nag Panchami is one of these few 'fixed rituals' which are observed by all castes of India in the rainy month of Sawan. The image of a serpent is drawn on the house wall and worshipped.

Month.	Fort- night	Date of the fortnight.	Festival.	Cas
Chet	1st	poonam	Samvatsar	Brahmin
	2nd	ekam to nomi (9 days) ekam to teej (3 days) nomi	Mata Poojan & Bari Gangor* Ram nomi	Desha C 'Clean' 'Clean'
Baisakh	1st			
	2nd	teej	Akhati	'Clean'
Jeth	1st	ammavas	Bar mavas*	Purabi T
	2nd	satam dashmi poonam poonam	Bar satam* Ganga dashmi Bheru pooja Ram nam	Purabi T All cast All Caste 'Clean'
Asadh	1st	gyaras gyaras	Dev soni Hariya Goondiya*	'Clean' 'Clean'
	2nd			
Sawan	1st	ammavas ammavas	Hariya Goondiya* Dewasa*	'Clean' 'Clean' &
	2nd	panchami poonam	Nag pooja Rakhi	All Cast All Caste

Month.	Fort-night.	Date of the fortnight.	Festival.	
Bhadon	1st	'teej 'atham	'Hariyali* 'Krishna janam	'Clean 'Clean
	2nd	'beej 'teej 'choth 'panchami 'chat 'dashmi 'gyaras 'chodas	'Bhai beej 'Hartalika* 'Ganesha pooja 'Rishi panchami 'Hal chat 'Teja ji ki Jatra 'Dol gyaras 'Anant chodas	'All Ca 'Clean' 'Clean' 'Clean' 'Clean' 'All Cas 'Clean' 'Brahmir
Kuar	1st	'ekam to ammavas(15 days)	'Pitar paksha	'Clean'
	2nd	'ekam to nomi (9 days) 'teej to nomi (7 days) 'dashmi 'gyaras to poonam 'poonam	'Bari poojan 'Mata poojan 'Daserah 'Keli pooja* 'Garba*	'Malwi B 'All cas 'All cas 'Clean' 'All cas
Katik	1st	'atham 'teras 'chodas 'ammavas	'Karva atham* 'Dhan teras 'Narak chodas 'Dewali	'Brahmin 'Brahmin 'All cast 'All cast
	2nd	'ekam 'atham 'nomi 'gyaras 'poonam	'Annakot-Gobardhan 'Gopashthami 'Aonra nomi* 'Deva uthni 'Katik jatra	'Clean' 'Clean' 'Brahmin 'Clean' 'All Cast



Month.	Fort-night.	Date of the fortnight.	Festival.	
Aghan	1st			
	2nd			
Poos	1st			
	2nd			
Magh	1st			
	2nd	panchami	Basant	'Clean'
Phagun	1st	teras	Siva Ratri	Brahmin Gosain,
	2nd	poonam poonam	Holi Mahadev Baba ki jatra	All cas All cas

\*For women exclusively.

An Analysis of these 'fixed annual rituals' from the point of view of their religious import reveals that:

(i) three of them, viz., Rama nomi, Krishna aham and Ganeshha Choth, are celebrated to commemorate the birth of three of the principal gods of Hindu pantheon; two others, viz., Siva ratri and Anant Chodas, are also connected with two of the major Hindu gods;

(ii) three, viz., Mahadeo Baba Ki jatra, Ganga dashmi, and Katik jatra are pilgrimages to places considered to be sacred;

(iii) six of these are by way of rituals devised to protect crops and cattle; these are Akhati, Hariya goondiya, Hartalika, Keli pooja, Dewali, and Annakot - Gobardhan;

(iv) at six of the annual rituals (Rishi panchami, Pitar paksha, Nag panchami, Deva soni, Deva uthni, and Teja ji ki jatra), saints, ancestors and other local deities are honoured;

(v) the number of festivals observed by women alone is twelve; of these six are aimed at obtaining health and long life for husbands; the six are Gangor, Bar amnavas, Bar satam, Hariyali, Garba and Karua aham; on these occasions, they keep a day long fast, and offer pooja and prayers to the goddess Gouri, the peepal tree, the serpent god, or the Moon god for the perpetuation of

their suhag (married state);

(vi) three rituals (Bheru pooja, Mats poojan, and Narak chodas) are aimed at procuring the welfare of one of the kin units -- the family and the lineage;

(vii) the theme of at least four rituals is the dramatization of the brother-sister relationship, real or hypothetical; these are -- Dewasa, Rakhi, Bhai beej, and Ram nam;

(viii) twice a year, rituals are observed to honour the mother goddess; on these occasions, the priest of the goddess worshipped goes into a trance and makes predictions for the half year -- about crops, cattle, market conditions, disease, epidemics, and other topics of a general nature which are of interest to the village people;

(ix) lastly, there are the communal rituals, festivals in the real sense of the term, such as Holi, Dol gyaras, Dashera, and Basant panchami, when people observe a holiday from work and come out into the village lanes to sing songs and make merry.

Often the religious import of a ritual is differently understood by different castes. To the Falliwal Bania of Potlod and other Vaisya castes of neighbouring villages, Dewali is the day for the worship of the goddess of wealth; for the others, is a festival of lights, sweets and fireworks. Similarly, Dashera is a



THE IMAGE OF GANGOUR



BARI POOJAN AT  
THE BHAWANI MATA  
SHRINE IN THE  
DESHA CHAMAR WARD

primarily Rajput ritual when they worship their arms and weapons. In feudal times, this was called the day of seemolanshan ('violation of frontiers') when kings tried to extend the frontiers of their own domains by annexing land from neighbouring states. On the Rakhi day, adult Brahmin males keep a day long fast and change the sacred thread they wear on their shoulders.

Most of these rituals are purely domestic and private in character. The ceremonials are performed in the family house or in the village lane just outside the house, and they are presided over by the head of the household. In case of rituals observed by women exclusively, the pooja is supervised by the eldest female member of the household.

All these rituals are very similar in their formal features. The sequence of events are more or less the same. The participants observe a fast before the performance and undergo a ceremonial purification by bathing in the morning and donning washed garments. Sweets are cooked with care and special precautions. The girls and young women of the family paint traditional designs on the floor and walls of the scene of worship. Earthen lamps are lit, and the pooja is performed in the traditional way by pouring out libations of water, presenting flowers and sandal paste, and finally offering the sweets in the sacred fire in the name of the deity who is

worshipped on the ritual. This is followed by the recitation of sacred texts and singing of devotional hymns, and the distribution of the food offering (prasad).

Variations in the different rituals are mainly concerned with details. Thus different patterns are painted on different festival occasions, and different types of flowers, sandal paste and food offerings are made for different deities; similarly, different texts and songs are recited on different occasions. No secrecy is observed in the performance of these ceremonials, though they are usually attended by members of the household and kin relations only.

The component actions within this set framework of phases are again standardised. The participants must always appear barefooted but heads covered, with the tilak (sandal mark) on their foreheads, they always sit cross-legged and do not talk loudly during the ceremony, the officiant kneels when making the food offering and all the participants prostrate themselves on the ground (sashtang pranam) before the image or symbol of the deity. After the ceremony, youngsters and women greet the elders by touching their feet, and the prasad (food offering) is always passed round in accordance with age and rank in the kin group. The whole formalism is rigid and strict, and must be performed in the exact traditional pattern with prescribed formula, texts and hymns.

Not all the people of the village observe all the 'fixed rituals'. There is considerable variation on caste basis. A few festivals like Holi, Rakhi, Dashera and Dewali are celebrated by all castes. Some, like Annakot-Gobardhan, Keli Pooja, Hartalika and Ram nomi are observed by members of the 'clean' castes only, i.e., those only who lay claim to dwija varna status. There are other rituals which are observed only by a particular caste; for example, Dhan teras is a ritual observed by Bania castes only, Bari poojan in Kuar is a Balai ritual, while Bari poojan in Chet is performed by the Desha Chamar alone.

It will be found from the list of fixed rituals performed in Potlod, that only about thirteen out of a total of fortyfive are observed by members of all castes. Of these thirteen, three are pilgrimage and bathing rituals, three are rituals celebrated in honour of local godlings, four are important festivals of all-India importance -- Holi, Rakhi, Dashera and Dewali, and the rest three (Bhai beej, Bheru pooja and Mata poojan) are rituals devised for gaining divine protection for members of the family.

Twentythree of these rituals are performed by 'clean' castes only. In this category are included: rituals connected with one or the other of the principal



JATRA IN A NEIGHBOURING VILLAGE

Jatras are held all the year round at famous temples in villages, at which people from neighbouring village participate.





gods of classical Hinduism, rituals which are observed exclusively by women and which are aimed at obtaining a long life for the husband, crop and cattle rituals, and rituals celebrated in honour of saints and ancestors. Three other annual rituals are mostly performed by the 'clean' castes, but some members of the 'unclean' castes also perform them; these rituals are Dewasa, Pitar pooja and Garba.

Lastly, there are some rituals which are observed by single castes in Potlod village. Bar ammavas and Bar satam are rituals observed by the Purabi Thakur only. These rituals are not known to any other caste in Malwa, and it seems the immigrant Purabi Thakur have brought these from their original place, Uttar Pradesh where they are generally practised (cf. Majumdar, 1958, p. 253). The Samvatsar (New Year's Day) ritual is performed by Brahmin only. Similarly, Aonra nomi, Karua atham and Anant chodas are performed by Brahmin only. The Mata poojan and Bari ritual in Chet is observed by the Desha Chamar only, and similarly, the Bari ritual in Kuar is performed only by the Gujerati and Malwi Balai. Dhan teras at which the goddess of wealth is worshipped is a typical Bania ritual though it is also performed by the Brahmins.

Life Cycle Rituals.

We now refer to religious rituals of a different character which cluster around certain critical events in the individual's life, birth, marriage, and death. The Hindu know these as samskara or ritual purificatory ceremonies representing transitions in the physical, social, and spiritual form of the individual.

Dharma sastras have prescribed as many as forty to fortyeight samskara. These range from garbhadhana (foetus-laying ceremony performed at the time of the consummation of marriage) to pinda dan (offering of rice balls to the soul after death). The more important of these are (Vid., Prabhu, 1954, pp. 222 - 226):

- 1) garbhadhana (foetus-laying ceremony performed on the consummation of marriage);
- 2) pumsvana (ceremony performed in the third month of pregnancy for getting a male issue);
- 3) jata-karma (ceremony performed at birth for the acceptance of the child as a member of the family);
- 4) nama-dheya (name-giving ceremony performed two weeks after the birth);
- 5) nishkramana (performed in the fourth month after a child's birth when the mother and child are taken out of the confinement room);

- 6) anna-prasana (performed in the sixth month after birth at which cooked food is given to the child for the first time);
- 7) chuda-karma (first tonsure ceremony performed in the first or third year);
- 8) upanayana (sacred thread ceremony);
- 9) savitri (learning of the sacred mantra ceremony);
- 10) samavartana (ceremony performed at the return of the student from his guru's place after completion of education);
- 11) vivaha (marriage ceremony);
- 12) antyeshti (funeral ceremony).

The common village Hindu is not aware of the sastric theory of samskara, and he does not observe many of the samskara prescribed in the scriptures. He performs them because tradition prescribes that they should be, and he is largely a blind adherent to traditions. Moreover, there is always the fear that social recognition may be withheld if the required ceremony is not appropriately performed.

Here also, there is considerable caste variation in the performance of the rituals, and also in the number of rituals performed. The Brahmin perform the largest number of such rituals; other 'clean' castes perform a few less; the 'unclean' and 'untouchable' castes perform the least number of samskara. This is

shown in the following table.

Caste.	Life cycle rituals performed.
Brahmin	seemant (or khora bharana), jata-karma (or japa), nishkramana (or suraj pooja), nama-dheya, anna-prasana, chuda-karma (or maan utarna), upanayana (or janoi), vivaha (or byah), and antyeshti (or daag).
Other 'clean' castes	khora bharana, japa, suraj pooja, maan utarna, byah, and daag.
'unclean' and 'untouchable' castes	japa, byah, and daag.

These rituals surround four events, pregnancy and birth, initiation, marriage, and death, and are referred to by the people as birth rites (japa), initiation (janoi), marriage ceremony (byah), and death rites (daag). Janoi ceremonies are performed only by the Brahmin.

#### Pregnancy and Birth Rites

Japa observances begin with conception and culminate in the name-giving ceremonial. These are a mixture of religious rituals and magical devices whose aim is the welfare of the mother and her child.

The pregnant woman is hedged in <sup>by</sup> a number of taboos on her food and movements. She is not allowed to do heavy household work right from the beginning of her conception. It is customary to send a woman to her paternal house in the fifth or sixth month of her

pregnancy. This has two practical ends in view. Firstly, she escapes doing any household work in the advanced stage of her pregnancy. A rule which is much observed in everyday domestic life is that of the 'double standard of work'; it is imperative that women in their husband's houses should do all the household work, while girls at their parental houses are allowed to go free of any such responsibilities. Secondly, by going away to her paternal house, she escapes living with her husband and cohabiting. Ideally, a pregnant woman is expected to discontinue sex relations as soon as the pregnancy is known. Actually, she cannot help it so long as she lives with her husband. She has to avoid places believed to be inhabited by evil spirits as well as certain kinds of food which might harm the child in the womb.

#### The Khora bharana

Information is sent to the parents or brothers of the woman, and it is binding on them to come in a party to escort her. In her husband's village, ceremony is performed by her mother-in-law and sister-in-law. New clothes are prepared for her. On an auspicious day, she stands in those new clothes, and in her arms are given dry fruits, sweets, and a silver ornament or some money. This action is symbolic of her anticipated motherhood. On return, she is told, there should be a son in her arms. Songs specially suitable for the occasion are sung on this

ceremony, and she is given a warm send off.

If the parents or brothers of the woman are not so well off, they may confine such a ceremony to the first conception of the woman, and during subsequent conceptions, she may be allowed to live at her husband's house.

During birth, help of a village midwife is sought. The midwife is usually an elderly woman from an 'unclean' caste, but two or three Khati women are also known to be expert midwives in Potlod village. A dark ante-room in the house is arranged for the delivery; an old cot and some old mattress is given to the pregnant woman; dung fire is made and kept in a corner of the confinement room (sauri), and the midwife (dai) sits ready to help.

In case of difficult labour, help of a diviner is sought. He may prescribe a herb to be fetched from the bush and tied to the thigh of the woman, or some decoction poured down her throat. In serious cases, the Compounder from the Government Dispensary at Chandrawati-ganj is fetched to help in the delivery.

The child birth is announced by beating a metal vessel and burning of incense in the house. The dai cuts the umbilical cord of the child with a sickle, and later buries it at some secluded spot. The mother is given a



'PAGLIYA'

When a male child is born, information is formally sent to the affinal kin of the mother. A pagliya is written on red paper and sent through a Nai.

wash and change of clothes and a potion of ajmoo seeds, molasses and ghee to strengthen her. The child is washed and wrapped in warm clothes and given to the mother for putting to the breast.

In the evening, village women are invited to come and sing japa songs. They are given sweets.

An auspicious day (mahurath) is determined, seven, nine, or eleven days after the birth. On this day, the mother and child are given a purificatory bath by the navin (barber woman) and given new clothes to don. The drummer beats his drum outside the house, women sing japa and suraj pooja songs, and the woman with her child is brought out to 'have a glimpse of the sun god' for the first time after the child birth. Pooja is offered to the sun god, and after a further distribution of sweets, the ceremony is concluded.

If a male child is born, information is ceremonially sent to the affinal kin of the woman and to her husband's sisters. A pagliya (a conventional figure writing) is written on red paper, and sent through a Nai. In response to the invitation, the father's sisters of the newly born boy come with gifts of sweets, clothes and ornaments for the child and his mother, and have to be given gifts in exchange.

Forty days after the birth, the mother is taken out in a procession to the village well. She fills a





A PROUD YOUNG MOTHER

She is a Rajput woman dressed in her best who posed for this photograph on the occasion of her son's maan utarna ceremony.

pitcher of water from the well and it is offered to the household deities and the sun god. After this, she is allowed to resume household duties. The pollution caused by birth is removed.

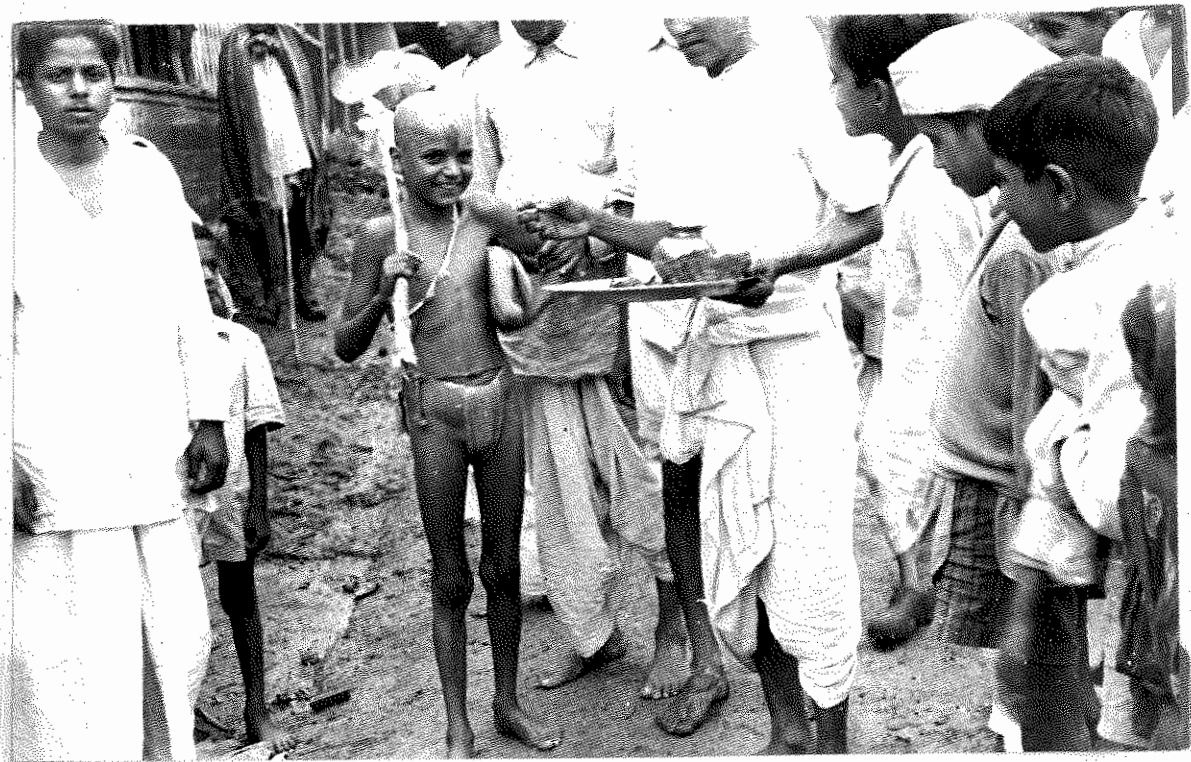
#### Maan utarna

Mann utarna is an optional ceremony, observed by those only who have any special reason to propitiate the deities. For example, if many children of a woman die in infancy, she may promise the boy's head hair to some deity, should he live to attain a particular age, usually three or five years. After the boy has attained the age, his hair are shaved at the shrine of the deity concerned. This is followed by a feast at which friends and relations of the household bring gifts of clothes, ornaments and cash for the boy. The mother's brother of the boy and his father's mother's brother are under special obligation to bring gifts of clothes. Sisters and father's sisters of the boy are given gifts in exchange.

#### Janoi

Only Brahmin boys are given the janoi or sacred thread. The usual age for this ceremony is twelve.

On the auspicious day selected for the ceremony, the boy's head is shaved and he is given a bath by the barber; he is given a saffron coloured silk loin cloth



JANCI OR UPANAYANA SAMSKARA OF A BRAHMIN BOY

to wear. With his parents on either side, he sits down to the pooja. The sacred fire is kindled, and offerings are made in it. The sacred thread is now given him, and its importance explained. He then begs for alms from his parents and other kinsmen. Gifts of clothes and money are given to him by his friends and relations. The ceremony concludes usually with a feast.

The janoi ceremony brings about a change in the status of a Brahmin male. No more is he treated as a mere boy. He has to observe taboos and live in the way considered suitable for Brahmin men.

#### Byah

The age at marriage differs, but seldom is it beyond twenty, the average being between thirteen and sixteen for boys, and between eight and thirteen for girls.

The marriage engagement is entered into at an early age, by parents of the couple. After the engagement, regular yearly gifts of clothes and food stuffs are exchanged between the two parties.

An auspicious date is agreed upon for the wedding (lagan), and this is formerly intimated by the bride's party to the groom's. Arrangements are made. Ganapati (Ganesha) is installed in both houses and worshipped with prayers for a safe ceremony. Several days

before the lagan date, the boy and the girl are annointed and ceremonially declared lada (groom) and ladi (bride).

The ceremonies are performed in the family house. Two days before the lagan date, a mandap (shed) is erected on two wooden ploughs stuck into the ground. Here the bride or groom is ritually annointed, bathed, and dressed into new wedding clothes. Next day, the ghar bhah ceremony takes place, at which presents of money or clothes or ornaments are made. In the afternoon the groom's party leaves for the bride's village, after duly propitiating all the village deities with prayers for a safe wedding.

At the bride's village, they are received, and stayed at the village temple or some other suitable place, and arrangements made for their board. In the evening, the groom is taken to the bride's house, and into the wedding chamber where an image of Mai mata (presiding deity at weddings) is installed. The couple are seated side by side, their clothes knotted together, their hands clasped; the priest recites the lagan mantras, and to the accompaniment of music, they are proclaimed man and wife.

The next evening, the newly wed couple are brought together; the sacred fire is kindled by the priest, and the couple walk seven times round the fire.

Friends and relations of the bride's party make gifts to the couple, the mother's brother of the bride figuring prominently by bringing gifts of clothes. Next morning, presents of clothes are made to men of the groom's party, and they are given a warm send off outside the village. The bride is sent with them.

Back at the groom's house, the party is formally received by the female members of the house, and taken to the Maimata chamber for pooja. That evening, the couple are seated on a plough and given a bath. If grown up, they may be allowed to sleep together. Usually this is postponed for a future occasion since at least the bride is immature, generally. A few days later, the bride is taken out by her affinal female relations to the village well to fill water; she may also be asked to help at the cooking. This symbolises her acceptance as a new member in her husband's household.

She is sent away to her people a few days later.

#### Daag

Most Hindus cremate their dead. A burial is given to a child, a person dying of snake bite or small pox and to a sanyasi. One of the sectarian castes, the Nath Jogi are known to bury their dead in the sitting posture. Children are usually buried without any

elaborate ceremonials.

A corpse is not allowed to remain uncremated for more than a few hours. Cremation is performed only during the day hours since the night is believed to be the haunting time of evil spirits, and deads cremated then it is believed may join them.

The family barber makes arrangements for the coffin cloth, bamboos for the bier, dung cakes and wood for the pyre, and other things needed for the cremation, like ghee, sandal wood, kanku (red lead), mooni grass, etc. The barber's services are available to the 'clean' castes only. In 'unclean' and 'untouchable' castes, this is done by one of the caste men. The chief mourners are: the widow or widower, the sons and daughters, daughter-in-law, and maternal kinsfolk of the deceased. The dead body is laid on the bamboo bier, covered with cloth, and tied to the bier with a thin rope. The colour of the cloth varies according to the sex and marital status of the dead person. Corpses of dead males are covered with white cloth; married women having husbands are wrapped in red cloth, while widows get white wrapping. Kanku dissolved in water is sprinkled on the bier. The bier is now borne out by four men, the nearest kin relations of the dead person. As the men move towards the cremation ground which is situated near the stream

outside the village habitation, women folk wail and mourn. A female member of the family (daughters of the family excluded) takes a mud pitcher and breaks it. The house is then cleaned and washed, and women folk, after a brief mourning, go out to the stream for bathing.

In the cremation ground, a pyre is erected of dung cakes and fuel wood. The bier is borne on the shoulders of men, followed by the mourners and participants in the ceremony. It is laid down at two places on the way where pinda (balls made of rice flour, sugar and ghee) are offered to crows and birds after being waved over the dead person. The dead body is laid on the pyre prepared in the cremation ground. The outer cloth wrapping is snatched away and thrown to a side and the corpse is covered with fuel wood; ghee is sprinkled on it and fire set. Fire is set by the nearest male sapinda of the dead person.

It is customary for participants in the ceremony to go shoeless and without a cap or turban. The person who sets fire thereafter wears on his head a turban of white unbleached cloth as a distinctive mark.

The people then sit around and watch the body being consumed by fire. After a couple of hours, the person who sets the fire goes down to the stream and fetches a vesselful of water. This he sprinkles on the



burning pyre, while other men stand around and throw pieces of dung cakes on it; after this, they immediately turn back and go to their homes. Before they enter their houses, however, they must bathe and change their garments thus removing the pollution caused by their accompanying the dead body.

Two days later, the teeja ceremony is performed. In this ceremony, only male members of the deceased's lineage (i.e., his 'shaving relations') participate. They offer their head hair and beard to the dead by shaving it off. Food is cooked outside the house near the stream, and all the participants sit down to a quiet meal.

Next day, the ashes and bones are collected from the cremation ground and kept in a mud pot which is hung on some tree in the neighbourhood. The pot is later picked up, carried to Ujjain, and thrown away in the holy waters of the River Sipra.

In the meanwhile, arrangements are being made for the final ceremony, known as nukta. It is in the form of a grand feast at which all caste members from the village, elders from other castes of the village, and friends and kin relations from other village are invited. The person directly responsible for this ceremony is the man who has set fire to the pyre, and who, by custom,

inherits the property of the dead person.

On the eighth day of the death, the pot containing the ashes and unburnt bones is taken to Ujjain for immersion in the sacred waters of the Sipra. It is believed that on this journey, the chief mourner who carries the pot must not turn back, since the spirit of the dead follows him closely. At Ujjain, pindadan ceremony is performed: rice balls are made with ghee and sugar and laid in heaps on leaf platters, on the stone-flagged stairs leading to the waters of the river at a place called Bherugarh. The rice balls are then thrown in the river, and the persons get down in the river themselves to offer libations of water (tarpana) in the name of the dead person. After this, they bathe and change and return to the village.

The nukta feast is performed in the second week after the death. Before the feast opens, the chief mourner takes off his mourning garments and puts on new clothes presented him by his mother's brother or wife's brother. Other friends and relations also present gifts. Then they all sit down to the feast after having washed away the ritual pollution caused by the death.

Ceremonial mourning is observed in a house where a death has taken place for a full year. The sense of grief is expressed by loud wailing on all occasions of rituals in the year and visits from kins folks

and friends who come to participate in the mourning. No marriage may be performed in a house in its year of mourning.

As I have pointed out above, not all the life cycle rituals are performed by all castes in Potlode. The Srivastava Brahmin perform a total of nine life cycle rituals for each individual male and eight for each individual female. Other 'clean' castes perform only six life cycle rituals. Members of the 'unclean' and 'untouchable' castes observe the least of them, i.e., only the three most important ones, viz, birth, marriage, and death.

There is also some variation in the details of their performance by the different castes. The variation is marked in three matters, viz., the officiating priest, the ritual incantations, and the paraphernalia of the ritual.

Only among the Brahmin, a Brahmin priest (called purohit) officiates at the solemnization of all the life cycle rituals. Other 'clean' castes invite the Brahmin purohit to officiate at rituals of marriage and death only. 'Unclean' and 'untouchable' castes are not considered to be eligible to have their rituals performed by a Brahmin priest (cf. Ghurye, 1950, p. 14), and they have to make their own arrangements. The 'unclean' castes have priests belonging to their own castes who officiate at their rituals. The 'untouchable' castes have the



BHAMBI WEDDING

The Bhambi are an 'unclean' caste. Marriage among them is a simple ceremony at which a priest of their own caste officiates. In the photograph, the Bhambi priest is sitting at the extreme right.



customs of performing their life cycle rituals with their panch (caste elder) or kuwasa ( a man to whom a daughter of the family has been given in marriage, such as sister's husband or father's sister's husband) officiating as priests.

According to Brahminic traditions, life cycle "ceremonies are to be performed with the help of a ritual, and two types of rituals have been evolved: the Vedic and the Puranic. The Vedic ritual is based on the Vedic mantras and is regarded as of great sanctity, while the Puranic is based on formulae of less sanctity, and not on revealed knowledge" (Ghurye, 1950, pp. 13 - 14). Both these may be performed by a Brahmin priest only. The Vedic ritual he reserves for sacraments in Brahmin houses, while the Puranic ritual is performed at life cycle ceremonies for members of non-Brahmin 'clean' castes. The main difference between the two types of ritual is in the mantras which are chanted on the occasion. In the Vedic ritual, sacred mantras prescribed for the specific occasion from the vedas are uttered. In the Puranic ritual, on the other hand, the mantras are from the post-vedic Dharmasastras. In practice, the hymns are selected by the priest himself, and thus they sometimes vary from priest to priest.

In folk traditions, there is a third type of ritual, which is performed at ceremonies in 'unclean' and

'untouchable' castes. The Brahmin priest does not minister at these ceremonies, and these ('unclean' and 'untouchable') castes have to content themselves with the services of their castemen-priests. No Sanskrit mantras invoking gods to come and witness the ceremony are chanted. The utterances of the priest are in the local dialect, calling upon the caste elders (panch) to beware and witness the ceremony. The ritual part of the ceremony is very brief. Three of the most sacred things commonly used in Brahminic pooja are not to be used at 'unclean' and 'untouchable' caste rituals; these are: sandal wood paste, ghee, and the sacred thread offered to the presiding deity.

Symbolism plays an important role in Hindu festivals and ceremonials, and the differences in details of ritual observances and actions are explained by their symbolic meaning. Thus colours represent the nature of things: white or yellow for sat (divine), red for raj (earthly and regal), and black or dark for tam (evil). This symbolism is again visible in the traditional patterns painted on the floor and walls, in the tilak or in the food-offering: fruit and milk for the divine, cooked food for the earthly, and meat and liquor for the evil. Again, when the prasad is partaken of by the participants, it symbolises physical consumption of token of spritual power. The actions of the officiant during the pooja

are invested with symbolic meanings, and the image or sign of the deity in itself is a symbol of an aspect of divinity and Creative force.

Reference has already been made to the all-pervasiveness of rituals in Hindu social life. Thus everything that is valid and desirable during a ritual is also valid and fair in everyday life. Rituals only help in bringing out these "ideal" characters and "social values" in bold relief, discouraging the undesirable by ritual exclusion or even ceremonial condemnation. This prescription or condemnation of behaviour in rituals is implicit, through component actions and choices in the ritual, and also explicit by open enunciation of the social values and dharmic codes. The status of women, for example, is determined by their ritual participation in religious ceremonies; during some of the festival-ceremonies, their position, concepts of loyalty to their husbands and the social uselessness of widows or childless women are explicitly explained through recitations of myths and texts (as models). Similarly, the status of particular castes is indicated by their participation in or exclusion from religious ceremonies. Rituals thus tend to perpetuate the system of religious ideas and beliefs and constitute the machinery which maintains the efficient working of a society in its traditional structure.



## CHAPTER X.

### CONCLUSIONS.

#### I

There are two views commonly held among scholars about caste. One is that it is a principle of social organization which was fairly common to ancient societies. The other view is that caste is limited to a single area, viz., India, and is an institution peculiar to and characteristic of society in India.

Much depends upon what we mean by caste. Do we understand by it the four varna system which divides society into four categories or classes, viz., Brahmin, Kshatriya, Vaisya, and Sudra? Such a division of society, we are told, was also found in ancient Persia, Greece and Rome. Or do we refer by it to the occupational groups common to the whole country, such as Priest, Cultivator, Barber, Smith, Washerman, Oil-presser, Tanner, Scavenger, and so on? Such occupational groups also existed in Europe in the medieval times and in China. Or do we mean by it the system of jati, small regionally-confined endogamous status groups which are the only real groups so far as the rural folk of India are concerned?



To me, the last seems to be the most appropriate for historical and sociological reasons.

Caste is from the Portugese word 'casta' which was first used in India by the Portugese. When the Portugese came to India in the 16th century they found the Hindu community in India divided into numerous separate groups, which they called 'castas', meaning tribes, clans or families. The name stuck and became the usual word for the Hindu social group. In attempting to account for the remarkable proliferation of castes in 18th- and 19th-century India, authorities credulously accepted the traditional view that by a process of intermarriage and subdivision, the several thousand castes of modern India had evolved from the four Aryan varna, and the term 'caste' was applied indiscriminately to both varna and 'jati'. "This", writes Basham, "is a false terminology; castes rise and fall in the social scale, and old castes die out and new ones are formed, but the four great classes are stable.... All ancient Indian sources make a sharp distinction between the two terms" (Basham, 1954, p. 148; see also Masson-Oursel, tr., 1934, p. 78; and Hutton, 1951, p. 47).

About the important sociological features of caste in contemporary Hindu Society, N.K. Dutt writes writes: "the members of the different castes cannot have

matrimonial connections with any but persons of their own caste; that there are restrictions, though not so rigid as in the matter of marriage, about a member of one caste eating and drinking with that of a different caste; that in many cases there are fixed occupations for different castes; that there is some hierarchical gradation among the castes, the most recognized position being that of the Brahmanas, at the top; that birth alone decides a man's connection with his caste for life, unless expelled for violation of his caste rules, and that transition from one caste to another, high or low, is not possible. The prestige of the Brahmana caste is the corner-stone of the whole organization" (1931, p. 3).

Empirical studies of caste in Indian villages demonstrate the truth of Dutt's statement (cf. Srinivas, 1952, pp. 24 - 25; also in Marriot, ed., 1955, p. 20; Gough in Marriot, ed., 1955, p. 37; Marriot, in Marriot, ed., 1955, p. 188; Dube, 1955, p. 36, Bailey, 1957, p. xv; Majumdar, 1958, p. 19; Mayer, 1956, pp. 136 - 138). My own data from Potlod substantiates this point. One is led to the conclusion that caste as we find it in Hindu India is an institution which is unique to India and which has grown and developed through many centuries and is firmly rooted in India.

In contemporary India, the system of the four

varna does not anywhere conform to social reality. Probably it never did even in ancient India. The historian Panikkar remarks that "this four-fold division is only ideological and not in any manner based on the facts of the social system.... only a schematic arrangement by theorists, who visualised society as organized on a horizontal basis" (1955, pp. 6 - 7).

"The varna of the present", writes Hutton "is not a caste, though it may be regarded as a group of castes" (1951, p. 66). It furnishes an All-India frame into which the myriad jatis in any single linguistic area can be fitted" (Srinivas, 1952, p. 25). All castes consider themselves as belonging to this varna or that, but to one of the varna each caste must belong. Varna is, therefore, to be understood as a type of reference group. The varna system introduces a strain of order and classification into an otherwise bewildering caste world.

## II

A diacritical feature of the Hindu social system is that the component units, that is jatis, are arranged in a hierarchical fashion. It is true that the hierarchy is not rigid and is rather nebulous in places. The top and bottom of the caste hierarchy in India are universally known and acknowledged. Almost all castes recognise the

Brahmin as occupying the top position, and the 'untouchable' castes are accorded the lowest position. For most of the other positions, there are conflicting claims by different castes.

The hierarchy that matters in everyday social life is the local hierarchy. There are a number of strata, and each stratum consists of one or more castes. The hierarchy is well-known in the village community, since the people have to act accordingly while dealing with persons who do not belong to their own castes. Each caste is an endogamous group, but in other aspects of their social life, there is considerable interdependence and interaction among castes in the same village. These activities dramatize the social hierarchy.

### III

The philosophy of the caste system is provided by the Hindu doctrines of avagamana (transmigration of souls), karma and dharma. Their aim is to explain the social inequalities inherent in the caste system; they provide the machinery through which individuals may improve their lot — in the future incarnations. Centuries of indoctrination by priests, wandering ascetics and saints have confirmed the belief of the people that everything in this universe is arranged mechanically,

that one must reap what one has sown, and that consequently one must sow good seeds to get a good harvest, next time. Such beliefs keep the people resigned to their present lot, struggling hard to improve their karma by the pursuit of dharma in their conduct.

Kroeber writes: "Religion has deeply influenced Hindu caste, especially the old and almost universal tenets of immortality of the individual soul, rebirth according to a scheme of moral causality (Karma), and earning of (ritual) merit by restraint and conquest of the passions.." (in the Encyclopedia of Social Sciences, Vol. 3, pp. 254 - 256).

The natal status of an individual is thus fixed by his Karma. He is born in a caste group, and his status is the same as that of his group. One of the basic requirements of his dharma is that he retains his group status throughout his life and dies an honourable member of his caste group. His behaviour and conduct, throughout his life, must benefit his caste group.

#### IV

Social status is of two kinds -- secular and ritual. Each is derived from different sources. The main sources of secular status are wealth, education, public office, and political power. It is largely on

the individual's plane that we refer to secular status, though in cases, the secular status of individuals also affects the status of their castes. For example, the Marwari Bania as a caste are known for their wealth, the Kayastha for the education, and the Rajput and Thakur for their land-ownership. Similarly, castes of political leaders in independent India have gained status, locally or even regionally.

Variations in ritual status, on the other hand, are based upon mystical beliefs, mainly upon what Stevenson calls "the corpus of beliefs concerning purity and pollution" (1954). These beliefs are of great antiquity and are possibly pre-Aryan in much of their content (Hutton, 1951, pp. 230 sqq.). They were incorporated into their religious beliefs by the Aryans; this is evidenced by the presence of the concepts in the post-Rig-Vedic Sanskrit liturgic literature.

Like secular status, ritual status is also of two types, viz., personal or individual ritual status, and group ritual status. The acquisition of ritual merit (punya) through deeds of piety and kindness is believed to improve a person's chances in the next incarnation. But group ritual status is a social affair and in his interaction with other status groups, it is his group

ritual status which is of the greatest importance.

We have thus two sets of status-conferring criteria - the secular and the ritual. Ideally, only the ritual criteria are important. We are told that wealth, or social, political or administrative power does not confer status in the traditional Hindu caste system. Towards this end, almost all the important activities and relations are guided by ritual rules, and the activities themselves are regarded as ritually invested rites and ceremonies.

In actual social life, however, considerations other than the strictly ritual ones, sometimes guide individual and group behaviour. The size of a caste in the village, and wealth and education of its members are important secular criteria in this respect.

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P R E C I S

(1)

(1) The aim of this study is to analyse and describe the function of Hindu religion in the integration of caste society in a predominantly Hindu village.

(2) The religion of the rural folk in India has been described as 'popular Hinduism'. Popular Hinduism lays greater emphasis on the rules of behaviour in everyday life, fasts, feasts and festivals and on the correct observance of local cult rituals, than on such formal aspects of Hinduism as temple worship, prayer, sacrifice, meditation, and study of scriptures.

(3) The village community studied is a relatively conservative one, less affected by the social and cultural change which is coming over rural India.

(4) In their life, village Hindus are involved in three structural systems, viz., kin, caste, and village community.

(5) Kutumb (household family) and kula (patrilineage) are kin groups; pinda and gotra are exogamous categories based on the principle of kinship, real or fictitious.

(6) Jati (Castes) are endogamous groups. Caste endogamy is prescribed by ritual, and enforced by threat of excommunication from the caste.

Castes are hierarchically arranged. The hierarchy has three broad divisions, viz., 'clean', 'unclean' and 'untouchable'. The

division is based on ritual considerations.

Each caste has a definite ritual status on the hierarchy, and its retention by caste members is largely dependent upon their observation of rules of ritual pollution. These cover commensal relations, dietary observances, restrictions on choice of occupation, deference and demeanour, and rules about visiting, touching and participation in village communal life.

(7) Castes in a gaon (village) are united in a 'vertical' organization. A single village community is constituted of a number of caste communities (called biradari, that is, the local resident section of a caste) occupying different positions on the hierarchy.

Castes in a village are interdependent, both in their everyday economic life and in the performance of rites and ceremonies.

(8) The traditional Hindu social system is a system with predominant ritual considerations lying at its base. It gives the most pre-eminent position to the Brahmin, to whom are assigned all priestly jobs, pursuit of spiritual knowledge, and the interpretation of the will of God. The Brahmin are the traditional custodians of Hindu scriptural lore.

(9) The non-Brahmin castes are required to emulate the ideal created by the Brahmin in their living in order to improve their lot in future incarnations.

(10) Each caste is prescribed a place at a specific level on the hierarchy, and a traditional calling, and is required to keep to its level.



(11) Theoretically, thus no mobility is possible for a caste since its level on the hierarchy is considered to be fixed. There is, however, a certain degree of movement possible for a caste, though within limits. The movement is generally upwards since a low caste always wants to raise its position on the hierarchy.

(12) To move up, a non-Brahmin caste has to give up certain of its un-Brahminic habits and customs and adopt such customs and rites of the Brahmin as are permitted for non-Brahmins to take to.

(13) The customs and habits of the Brahmin, thus, may be treated as ideals of the system. These are: vegetarianism and teetotalism, virgin marriage, prohibition on divorce and remarriage of women, and worship of the Brahminised gods in the Brahminic fashion. These constitute the values of 'Sanskritic' Hinduism.

(14) Within the Brahminic system, there is a sub-system which may be called the Rajput or Kshatriya system. Some of the leading practices of this sub-system are not in keeping with the Sanskritic principles. In general, the Brahminic system may be regarded as puritanical and orthodox, whereas the Rajput sub-system is rather liberal. The importance of this sub-system and its tolerance by the Brahmin is due to the secular power of the Kshatriya, and later, of the Rajputs. Their retinue and servants are gravitated towards the Rajput and become their allies.

(15) In their relations with castes, who are not their allies, castes of the Rajput block organize their behaviour in accordance with the Brahminic principle of exclusion.

(16) The position of a caste on the hierarchy is indicated in its dietary, social and economic relations with other locally resident castes.

(17) The indicator relations are guided principally by ritual considerations. The activities themselves are regarded as ritually invested rites and ceremonies.

(18) The system that emerges from an objective analysis of these indicator relations conforms in a great measure to the Varna system based on the theory of divine origin.

(ii)

(1) Dharma is understood by the Hindus as the basis of human relations. Its function is to hold together, maintain and perpetuate a given social order, and counteract disruptive tendencies both from within and without the system. Hindus believe that only 'righteous' action can perpetuate a social order. Dharma or 'righteousness' thus constitutes the Hindu values of life.

(2) Hindus regard life or worldly existence as a link in a chain of births and deaths. This worldly existence is one phase of a long sequence. Since birth or death do not mean much more than the beginning or end of only one phase of life, the soul in all animate beings is taken to be immortal. This transmigration of souls is governed by the law of Karma. The behaviour of an individual soul determines its state in future worldly existences or incarnations. The state of an individual is determined by his Karma, but he has the

freedom of action, and thereby the creation of a fresh stock of Karma.

(3) Attempt is made by the people to rationalise the marked inequality of castes in terms of Karma and reincarnation. Even though not all castes know the ramifications of the working of these doctrines, it is a generally observed tendency among all castes to ascribe the inequality to the mechanics of fate. In this way, it is functionally related to the social order, which is then taken to be divinely ordained. On the basis of their mythical origin, some castes are considered to be purer and higher on the scale than others.

(4) Every action in this world gives an individual an entry in his 'Karma register', in accordance with which his future existence is modelled. Good or righteous action gives a 'merit entry' (punya) whereas a bad or unrighteous action gives a 'demerit entry' (paap) in the Karma register. Dharma is righteousness, and therefore, action only in accordance with the principles of dharma give a 'merit entry' to a soul.

(5) The principles of Dharma may be classified in three categories: (1) 'Injunctions' which constitute the moral codes of conduct, such as the rules of piety, kindness, obedience and decent behaviour, helpfulness, obeisance to gods through worship and prayer and the prescribed fasts and feasts; conformity to these rules results in the acquisition of moral purity; the person is respected in this life, and gets a merit entry in his 'Karma register'; non-conformity results in moral degradation, disregard in the present life, and a demerit entry

in the person's Karma stock; (ii) Rules and rites for the acquisition of extra merit and moral upgrading; these are necessarily optional, such as special worship and sacrifices, pilgrimages, etc.; observance of such special rites and rules means a higher moral grade for the individual and extra merit entry in his Karma, but non-observance does not mean any degradation on the part of the person, in this or in any after lives; and (iii) rules that are absolutely essential for a person to follow; these are prohibitory by their nature and stress on what a person should not do; they are 'ritual' rules based on the principles of purity and pollution, such as rules of marriage, commensality and dietary observances, occupational restrictions, and the like; correct observance of these prohibitory ritual rules acquires a merit entry for the person in his 'karma register', but their most important role is in the retention of normal group status by the person concerned; non-observance of these rules of ritual avoidance is considered to be a serious affair. Not only does it give the person a demerit entry in his karma register, it makes him ritually impure and means for him the loss of group status and fall from normality.

(6) Such a person, (i.e., one who violates the ritual rules of purity and pollution) is deemed to have been polluted, and is avoided by his own kin and caste; in order to be reaccepted in his group, he has to perform the prescribed purificatory rites and atonement.

(7) The main sources for the derivation and statement of the principles of dharma known to Potlud Hindus are three: (a) myths and

## VII

legends borrowed from the Sanskrit scriptures commending righteous and condemning unrighteous behaviour; not many villagers can read these texts but the myths and legends and codes of conduct are widely known, spread by Brahmin priests and ascetics; (b) books which can be read by at least some villagers; Ramayana and Bhagvadgita are two such important source texts; and (c) tradition is the supreme and most accepted source of dharma; in popular concept, tradition is almost equivalent to dharma itself.

(8) Traditions vary from region to region, from caste to caste, and sometime from lineage to lineage. The tradition that a person mostly draws upon is the tradition of his caste, and in domestic matters the tradition of his lineage. To a lesser extent, he draws upon the general regional tradition, and still less upon the All-India Hindu tradition.

(9) From the view point of their following, principles of Dharma may be grouped in the following categories: (i) General Dharma followed by all Hindus in the community; (ii) Caste Dharma based on caste traditions; it varies from caste to caste and is the most important set of rules to be obeyed by a person; (iii) Kula Dharma — set of rules common to a lineage only; and (iv) Special rules to suit specific individuals and age-groups (for example a person who has performed his ancestors' Saradha at Gaya, need not repeat it year after year).

(10) All these rules are suspended when a person goes out of his 'cultural context', (e.g., when he goes to cities, or travels in

trains and buses) or becomes a Sanyasi.

(11) In his normal everyday behaviour, the Potlod Hindu is most conscious of the ritual rules of prohibition, since upon their correct observance depends his caste membership and status.

(12) Persons or groups, if they do not conform to the ritual rules of purity and pollution, are automatically expelled from their caste, and may be reaccepted only when they have gone through purificatory rites and atonement.

(13) Physical purity is a necessary step to the attainment of ritual purity; physical impurity causes ritual pollution, but physical purity need not always lead to ritual purity.

(14) Ritual impurity also taints a person's soul, and if he dies impure, his soul does not go to the other world, but remains in this world as ghost, till it is ritually purified.

(15) The entire physical world is either intrinsically pure, or neutral, or impure. Intrinsic purity and impurity are attributes of specific animals, plants, rivers, trees, and metals. All men belong to the 'neutral' category. The 'neutral' category is highly stratified.

(16) Pure things cannot be impurified, and conversely, impure things cannot be purified. All impure things impurify 'neutral' things or persons by contact; not all pure things are also purificatory. Fire, sun, Ganga water, and products of the sacred cow -- these are some patent purificatory objects. Some of the important intrinsic impurities which come in intimate contact with men are human

emissions, death and decay, destruction of life principle in seeds, and destruction of intrinsically pure objects such as cow, or deal- in its flesh, blood, or skin.

(17) Objects and persons belonging to the 'neutral' world are automatically polluted in general by contact of intrinsically impure things. Their purification, though possible, is not automatic but has to be intentional and ceremonial. This purity or impurity of the 'neutral' beings and things is different from the intrinsic impurity or purity of certain things and animals; this may be called acquired purity or acquired impurity. Things and persons with acquired im- purity transmit pollution, but acquired purity is not transmittable. Thus, in the 'neutral' world, acquired impurity overcomes acquired purity.

(iii)

(1) As a rule, all castes dine separately. At feasts, each caste sits in a separate row (pangat). Certain castes, however, re- gard their ritual status as nearly the same and observe free inter- caste commensality (such as castes of the Rajput block, the Balai block, and the Chamar block). 'Unclean' and 'untouchable' castes are altogether excepted from feasts, and may not dine with 'clean' castes even in separate rows. Among the 'unclean' and 'untouchable' castes there is no custom of multi-caste dinners.

(2) Food is eaten, i.e., it comes into contact with the internal organism of the person who eats it. Thus, it is believed to transmit



its impurity or purity to the eater in a very intense way. Dietary rules, thus have to be very stringent in their nature, and their correct observance is imperative for the maintenance of his 'neutral' state (ritual) by a person. These, however, are not quite so stringent and serious as rules regarding marital and sexual relations or rules in respect of occupational restrictions.

All foods are not equal from the ritual point of view. The general rule here is that uncooked food is considered to be intrinsically purer and less pollutable than cooked food, since the former can be washed and cleaned, whereas the latter cannot be purified by such measures. There are two types of cooked food, distinguished on the basis of their relative pollutability. Kachcha food is relatively more pollutable than Pakka food. The latter type of food is less pollutable because of its having been fried in the ghee — a product of the sacred cow. Drinking-water is also divided into the two categories of Kachcha and Pakka on the basis of the type of vessel it is carried and served in. All flowing water is believed to be pure at its source. If it is carried and served in earthen vessels, the water attains the highly pollutable character of Kachcha food. If, on the other hand, water is carried and served in metallic vessels, it is treated as Pakka food. Parched grain belongs to a category by itself. The purifying influence of fire on which the grain is parched reduces its pollutability to its minimum.

(3) All meats and alcoholic drinks, on the whole, are considered to be impure and polluting. Certain 'clean' castes, therefore, prohibit their consumption. Beef, even of dead cattle, is believed to



be highly impure and polluting, and is prohibited by all 'clean' and 'unclean' castes. All beef-eating castes are treated as 'untouchables'.

(4) Vegetarian and non-alcoholic food is regarded as Satvik or pure and is the usual food of Brahmin and Vaishya castes. Mutton, venison and alcoholic drinks are treated as rajas food. It is the common food of all 'unclean' castes and those 'clean' castes who lay claim to 'Kshatriya' or royal status.

(5) Almost all castes who are traditionally vegetarian and teetotalist are 'clean' castes; all castes who eat beef are 'untouchable' castes; but there are 'clean' as well as 'unclean' castes who eat meat and drink alcohols.

(6) On the basis of their dietary habits, castes may be grouped in three divisions — A, B and C. Each caste of A freely gives to and accepts Pakka food from other castes of the Group. With a few exceptions, castes of Group B and C neither give to nor accept food from any other caste of their respective groups. All castes of Group B and C accept all food from all castes of Group A (with exceptions — Bagri women). Castes of Group A, however, do not accept any food from any caste of Group B and C.

In Group A, there is a well defined and known stratification of castes in order of relative ritual purity of castes; castes of a lower strata accept all food (i.e., Kachcha and Pakka) from castes of the upper strata.

There is a sub-group within Group A consisting of meat-eating (but not beef) and liquor-drinking castes headed by the Rajput (called

Rajput cluster or Allies). All but two castes of this cluster or sub-group freely inter-dine, partaking of all foods (Kachcha and Pakka) and consider themselves as belonging to the same (or nearly the same) level of ritual purity. The two castes excluded from their cluster are treated as relatively less pure for extra-dietary reasons; these two accept Kachcha food from the Rajput cluster; no castes of the Rajput cluster, however, would accept 'Kachcha' food from these two.

All other castes of this Group A are strictly vegetarian and teetotalist. Each regards itself as ritually lower than the Brahmin only, and for this reason confines Kachcha food relations within the caste.

All castes of Group B freely eat meat and drink liquor. Castes of Group C also eat beef of dead cattle, and for this reason are treated as relatively impurer than the castes of Group B.

(7) Each caste of Group B (with one exception) and Group C (with one exception) confines commensal relations within itself, and neither gives nor accepts any food from other castes of their respective Groups. The exceptions are: Malwi Balai and Gujerati Balai (Group B) are fully inter-commensal; so are Malwi Chamar, Gujerati Chamar and Desha Chamar from Group C. A caste of Group B namely, Bagri, accepts food from three other castes of the same Group, namely, Nath Jogi, Dholi, and Teli.

(8) The restrictions in respect of entry into kitchen, and touching domestic cooking and dining pots are largely dependent upon

commensal relations. Thus, no person except those who belong to fully commensal caste groups may be permitted to enter one's kitchen and touch domestic earthen pots and utensils. This is true for all castes.

(9) The norms in respect of entry into dwelling house and touching pots and utensils are: all 'unclean' and 'untouchable' castes are prohibited from entering 'clean' caste dwelling houses or touching any domestic pots and utensils (earthen, metal or alloy) belonging to the latter; 'untouchable' castes are prohibited from entering any 'unclean' caste dwelling houses or touch any domestic pots and utensils belonging to the latter.

(10) The norms in respect of equal participation in festivals and ceremonies are: in clean caste festivals, all clean castes participate on an equal basis, 'unclean' castes may be allowed as servants, while 'untouchable' castes are excluded; in 'unclean' and 'untouchable' caste festivals, each caste usually confines participation to caste members, and 'clean' castes do not participate.

(11) Members of 'untouchable' castes are physically avoided by 'clean' and 'unclean' castes; 'untouchable' castes are also prohibited from entering temple buildings but may stand below in the open ground.

(12) Restrictions in respect of the use of external caste symbols are: (i) only the dwija may wear the sacred thread; (ii) only the dwija castes are served by the Barber and the Brahmin priest. Other castes are served for sacramental purposes by priests belonging to their own castes or by their caste elders (panch or kuwasa); and (iii) only the dwija may build two-storied houses. This rule is not

explicitly pronounced like the other two but taken to be such by the 'unclean' and 'untouchable' castes.

(iv)

(1) All occupations are either 'pure' or 'impure' intrinsically. This intrinsic purity or impurity is determined not in terms of the skill, economic gain or any other secular criteria. It is, on the other hand, determined essentially by ritual considerations of purity and impurity. Some of the intrinsically 'impure' occupations are 'very impure'. Those occupations that involve indirect handling of impure things are 'impure'; whereas the trades in which impure things have to be handled directly and physically are considered to be 'very impure'. Thus each occupation has a specific ritual position.

(2) Each occupation is linked up with one or more castes who pursue it as their traditional occupation. This means that the ritual status of the caste or castes approximates to the ritual position of the occupation.

(3) All castes which pursue intrinsically 'pure' occupations as their traditional callings are pure or 'clean' castes; on the other hand castes following 'impure' traditional callings are considered to be 'unclean' castes, and castes which are traditionally linked with intrinsically 'very impure' occupations are treated as 'untouchable'.

(4) 'Clean' castes are not permitted to take up 'impure' or 'very impure' callings; 'unclean' castes cannot and do not take to 'pure' or 'very impure', and 'untouchable' castes are prohibited from

pursuing intrinsically 'pure' or 'impure' occupations. Infringement of these rules results in loss of ritual status and expulsion from the caste.

(5) Certain occupations, however, are regarded as 'open'. For instance, agriculture and cattle rearing, though intrinsically 'pure' may be pursued by 'unclean' and 'untouchable' castes. Thus, all castes can own land and cattle, cultivate land as owner, tenant or labourer, and rear cattle.

(6) In addition to being intrinsically 'pure', 'impure', or 'very impure', all occupations are 'normal' for some castes, 'too pure' for others, or 'too impure' for still other castes.

If the ritual position of an occupation approximates to the ritual status of a caste or castes, it is considered to be 'normal' for the caste or castes. If, on the other hand, the ritual position of an occupation is higher than the ritual status of a caste or castes, it is regarded as 'too pure' for such a caste or castes. And if the ritual position of an occupation is lower than the ritual status of a caste or castes, it is treated as 'too impure' for the caste or castes concerned.

(7) Whether an occupation is 'too pure' or it is 'too impure' for a caste or castes, it is considered to be improper and irreligious for the caste or castes to pursue it.

(8) In the 'pure' occupation category, there are several well stratified sub-classes of occupations, based on ritual considerations. An exception is shop keeping, which is considered to be an 'open'



occupation for all 'clean' castes.

In the 'impure' and 'very impure' occupation categories, each occupation stands apart, and is regarded as purer by the caste that follows it, in comparison to other occupations of the same category.

(v)

- (1) In the performance of religious rituals, there is variation among castes of the village.
- (2) Morning worship is an imperative item of the daily routine of men belonging to the Brahmin and the mendicant castes; a few old men from other castes also perform morning pooja everyday.
- (3.) There are four temples and nearly ten shrines in the village. Distinction is made between religious structures dedicated to the gods of classical Hinduism (temples), and those to the local godlings and lesser deities (shrines); the former are well-kept and the deities regularly worshipped in a manner which is scripturally prescribed, the latter are not so well-kept since the people visit them only in times of necessity.
- (4.) Attendance at the daily worship in the temples is poor. Only a few men are regular visitors to the temples.
- (5) Both the types of religious ritual are confined to men from the 'clean' castes only. Women visit temples only on festival occasions, so do the sudra castes and the 'untouchables'.
- (6) Certain 'fixed rituals are observed by village Hindus. Only a few of these, however, are performed by all castes. The total number

of 'fixed rituals' performed by the 'unclean' and 'untouchable' castes is less than that performed by the 'clean' castes.

(7) In the life cycle rituals also, there is considerable caste variation. 'Unclean' and 'untouchable' castes observe only the principal rituals, viz., only those celebrated on occasions of birth, marriage and death.

(8) There are also caste variations in the details of the performance of rituals. These are in respect of the officiating priest, the mantras, and the paraphernalia of worship.

(vi)

(1.) In village communal life, a man's status is largely the same as that of his caste.

(2.) The status of a caste on the hierarchy is determined by a number of criteria. Ideally and traditionally, these criteria are those connected with mystical notions and religious concepts. Recent political and social changes have emphasized upon ~~such~~ secular criteria of status as wealth, education, numerical strength, and political power. In contemporary village, life, we find an intriguing social situation, complicated by the interplay of these factors.