

HINDUISM IN A KANGRA VILLAGE

by

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Thesis submitted for the
Degree of Ph.d. of the
University of London.

1969



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Abstract

In this thesis I set out to test the hypothesis that the separation of the pure from the impure is a theme which links all the various aspects of religious activity in village Hinduism, integrating them in spite of their apparent cultural diversity.

In the first Chapter I describe some of the recent theoretical approaches to the analysis of Hinduism in anthropological literature, for instance the contributions of Srinivas, Marriott and Mathur. Most of these emphasize the diversity of Hindu religious activities. But Dumont, and more recently Harper, have pointed to the unifying role of the purity=pollution principle which underlies all ritual activity.

In Chapter 2 I give a brief description of the village where I carried out field research, giving especial attention to the operation of rules concerning purity and pollution in social life.

In Chapter 3 I describe the private religious activities of the villagers. These consist of individual acts of worship addressed to members of a pantheon which includes deities of a local nature along with scriptural deities known all over India. I describe the villagers' conception of their relationships with these gods and the

techniques of the ritual they use in order to influence them. In many ways these relationships reflect the relationships between members of different castes in human society. The concern for the separation of the pure from the impure which governs contact between castes also governs contacts between men and deities. Also the relationship between a household or personal deity and his devotee is analogous to that between a powerful jajman and his low caste client.

Chapter 4 consists of a description of life cycle rites and other public rituals performed with the aid of a Brahman priest. Many of the public ritual acts conducted on such occasions are directed to the preservation of the pure deities from the threat of pollution arising from contact with their less pure devotees, or from other sources of pollution.

In Chapter 5 the festival cycle observed in the village is described. In calendrical rites the concern for purity is shown through activities such as purificatory fasting and bathing, which are recurrent elements in the round of festivals.

The last chapter consists of a general discussion of the purity-pollution principle. Not only does this principle give unity to the diverse aspects of religious

activity but it also provides continuity between Hindu religion and Hindu social life in general: the hierarchical relations between men and deities are only an extension of the hierarchical relationships between men themselves, and between men and the other things and creatures in the universe.

Acknowledgements

The fieldwork on which this thesis is based was made possible by a studentship awarded by the Department of Education and Science and a Horniman Scholarship provided by the Royal Anthropological Institute. I am most grateful for this assistance.

My thanks are also due to my supervisor, Professor A.C. Mayer of the School of Oriental and African Studies, who has given me much help and guidance throughout the period of this research. This fieldwork could not have been carried out without the help of my many friends and informants in Dohk, the village where I stayed, and in other nearby villages and I am grateful to them for their patient co-operation. Above all, I should like to acknowledge my debt to my father-in-law, Pandit Tulsi Ram. If I was kindly received by the villagers from the very beginning of my stay in Dohk, it must largely be on account of my connection with him, the respect and affection in which he is most rightly held acting as my passport to acceptance in the area. I should like to thank him for the lively interest he took in my project, and for acting as my guide and interpreter during the early months of my stay in Dohk. I am grateful to both him and my mother-in-law, Srimati Vidya Vati for assisting and advising me on the collection

of information. Finally I should like to thank Miss Kanch Bhalla and my husband, Mr. O. P. Sharma, for giving many helpful comments and suggestions.

Note on Transliteration

I have spelt Punjabi proper nouns as they appear in the anthropological and ethnographic literature on the area. Thus I have not transliterated such words as 'Shiva', 'Chamar', 'Pahari' according to any particular system: there are conventional ways of spelling such names which are familiar, and to depart from these would make for confusion rather than clarification. Vernacular terms used by the villagers have been transliterated according to the system suggested by Sir M. Monier Williams for the transliteration of the Devanagiri script in his Sanskrit-English Dictionary. (An exception is the word 'devata' which occurs so frequently that I have left it in its Anglicised form for the most part). The Pahari dialect spoken in Dohk is rarely seen in written form but when it is, Devanagiri is the script most commonly used (Gurmukhi is sometimes employed). Monier Williams's system can therefore suitably be applied.

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Chapter 1. Introduction

Hinduism presents special problems to the investigator on account of the multiplicity and diversity of its forms. Whoever sets out to describe Hindu religious practices in even a very limited area soon becomes aware that the observances vary from village to village; a god or feast honoured in one village may be given little consideration in the next. Within a single village the same bewildering variety is found. In the Himachal Pradesh village which I studied, for instance, this was particularly evident in the nature of the deities worshipped. The local pantheon included classical gods mentioned in the Hindu scriptures, such as Shiva and Durga, as well as local godlings such as Baba Sindhu, whose cults are unrecorded in Hindu literature; deities whose names occur in the Vedas and heroes of modern origin; personified natural forces, deified human beings, and even some saints of Muslim origin. Rites addressed to members of this complex pantheon were equally various; on some occasions they were performed privately in the home, and on others publicly under the direction of a Brahman priest; yet others were performed outside the village at temples or holy places.

It might be easier for the anthropologist to perceive some kind of pattern in these diverse activities

if they all took place within the fold of some organisational structure, some sect or church whose charter might reveal an underlying unity in belief or purpose. But Hinduism provides no such institutional framework. Sectarian commitment is the exception rather than the rule among Hindus and when villagers do join sects they still very frequently continue to take part in activities unsanctioned by the organisation to which they belong. For instance, in the locality I studied some Hindus were members of the Radhaswami sect. But this did not prevent them from taking part in religious rites which had nothing to do with Radhaswami tenets and which in some cases were even forbidden to strict Radhaswamis.

What, then, gives unity to the Hindu's religious experience and behaviour? Is there any factor which gives coherence to the apparent jumble of heterogeneous activities which makes up the religious life of a Hindu village, either at the level of belief system or at the institutional level? Indeed, is it meaningful to speak of a 'Hindu religion' at all, in the sense that there is a religion of Islam or a Christian religion? It would be reasonable to expect to find some kind of pattern underlying Hindu observance since for any individual Hindu to undertake such a variety of religious activities for totally unrelated purposes and

based on totally unrelated assumptions would surely be a psychological impossibility.

I feel that this problem is in special need of attention because most anthropologists who have studied Hinduism have adopted a classificatory approach which has tended to emphasize the fragmentation of the Hindu's religious experience rather than reveal anything which gives it unity. It is understandable that, faced with the profusion of cults and rites which constitute village Hinduism, the anthropologist should take refuge in 'pigeon-holing' what he sees. This kind of method has a long history and was common among nineteenth century ethnographers, who were mainly pre-occupied with the distinction between 'Aryan' and 'pre-Aryan' customs.¹ But this method tells us nothing about how the Hindu himself integrates his religious activities into a system of belief and behaviour. Classification should surely be the starting point rather than the end of analysis. I shall now discuss some of the major attempts at classification to show why I think this approach is inadequate.

The Srinivasian method; Sanskritic and non-Sanskritic.

The most typical (and probably also the most influential) example of the 'fragmentary' approach is

1. Ibbetson (1883), Vol.1.1.pp.115-6.

found in the work of M. N. Srinivas, who first developed the concept of 'Sanskritization', a term which has acquired a wide currency since. In 'Religion and Society among the Coorgs' (1952) he considers the question of the extent to which the people he describes are similar to other Hindus in respect of their ritual customs and the extent to which they differ. He attempts to answer this question with reference to the concept of 'spread'. Some elements of Hinduism are of 'all-India' spread, that is, they are found everywhere in Hindu India. The worship of Vedic deities such as the god Kshetrapala, known to the Coorgs as Ketrappa, is of all-India spread as is also the worship of rivers as representative of the holy Ganges. But the cult of the river Kaveri is confined to a certain area and has only 'regional' spread. The custom of pleating their saris at the back, which Coorg women attribute to a mythical flood of the Kaveri whose force pushed the pleats to the back of the women's dresses, is peculiar to the Coorgs alone and has only 'local' spread. There are thus different levels of Hindu practice, varying in the degree of their spread; 'all-India' Hinduism, 'regional' Hinduism, and 'local' Hinduism.

But in the same work Srinivas introduces also the term 'Sanskritic' Hinduism, a term which he has unfortunately

never explicitly defined. By implication the term comprehends the worship of scriptural deities such as Agni, Ganesh and Indra, the application of philosophical ideas expressed in the Upanishads, and conformity to what he calls 'puritanical' rules concerning the maintenance of ritual purity which are associated with the Brahman castes of India, especially adherence to a vegetarian diet. Local Hinduism is less 'Sanskritic' on the whole than regional or all-India Hinduism, but is constantly being exposed to the influence of Sanskritic Hinduism which tends to expand at the expense of those forms of Hinduism which are of less than all-India spread. One section of the Coorgs have Sanskritized their practices to the extent that they no longer offer meat and liquor to their ancestors but perform 'Shraddha' through a Brahman priest. They have also given up eating meat and drinking wine themselves and now wear the sacred thread as Brahmans do.¹

Sanskritic and all-India Hinduism turn out to be one and the same thing for Srinivas, since he states that Sanskritic Hinduism is "Hinduism which transcends provincial boundaries and is common to the whole of India".² But this identification of the two detracts from the usefulness of

1. Srinivas (1952), pp. 30-35.

2. Ibid, p. 75.

either term. Certainly such a thing as all-India Hinduism exists if a statement such as "most Indians are Hindus" is to make sense; indeed in my experience it is far harder to determine which elements in the religious life of a Hindu village are not shared with other Hindus somewhere or other in the sub-continent. But whether all-India Hinduism is predominantly Sanskritic in character or not is another matter. If Sanskritic Hinduism approves a vegetarian diet, then non-vegetarian gods and people are found in at least as many parts of India as are vegetarian gods and people; if Sanskritic Hinduism excludes the worship of village deities, as Srinivas implies,¹ then this is a non-Sanskritic cult which is certainly not confined to any one locality of India, since custodian godlings associated with the village unit are found all over the sub-continent, albeit differing in name and sex from province to province. Sanskritic Hinduism and all-India Hinduism can only be useful concepts if their separateness is maintained.

Generally, says Srinivas, Sanskritic forms of Hinduism are associated with the higher castes (and the Brahmans in particular) and these castes act, consciously or unconsciously, as the agents for their propagation. Because of their association with these castes, Sanskritic

1. Srinivas (1952), p. 180.

forms are regarded as more desirable and more prestigious, and hence are often deliberately adopted by castes aspiring to improve their position in the local hierarchy.¹ The single term Sanskritization therefore really comprehends two processes. Firstly, it is a cultural process by which certain ritual forms are disseminated and local forms undergo transformation. Secondly, it is a social process by which low castes attempt upward mobility through adopting ritual forms characteristic of the high castes. Unfortunately Srinivas tends to use the term rather indiscriminately without distinguishing the two separate ideas implied, so that when the Coorgs are said to have 'Sanskritized' their customs, one is uncertain whether the cultural or the social process is being referred to.

Srinivas later modified the position he took in 'Religion and Society among the Coorgs' in response to the criticism made by Pocock and others to the effect that when castes attempt this kind of deliberate change they are not always using Sanskritic Hinduism as their model, but that kind of Hinduism practised and approved by the local dominant caste. In 'Social Change in Modern India' (1966) he states that he himself "emphasized unduly the Brahminical model of Sanskritization and ignored the other models - Kshatriya,

1. Srinivas (1952), p.30.

Vaishya and Shudra. Even the Brahminical model was derived from the Kannada, Tamil and Telugu Brahmins, and not from Brahmin castes in other regions".¹ If this is so, then the idea that Hindus refer their behaviour to some supra-local type of Hinduism when they modify their ritual customs is much weakened, to say the least. Judgements about what sort of ritual or what type of cult is 'best' are evidently made very much with reference to what forms are locally available. We can say that they are made with reference to Sanskritic Hinduism only if we widen this category to such an extent as to make it meaningless. This problem has been well illustrated by several recent studies² in which anthropologists have turned their attention to the role of religious change as a means of attempting social mobility by low caste groups - and 'attempting' is the operative word since Sanskritization by no means always results in general recognition of the low caste's claims to a higher status.³ These studies have the advantage of showing that the Hinduism of a given group of Hindus is far from being static and conservative in all cases, and that in certain circumstances Hindus will exchange one set of ritual practices for another

1. Srinivas (1966), p. 7.

2. For instance, Cohn's study of Chamars (Cohn, 1955) and Mahar's study of Bhangis (Mahar, 1960).

3. The group of Pasis described by Majumdar succeeded only in exciting the anger of the dominant Thakur caste when they adopted the sacred thread. Majumdar (1958), pp. 76-8.

fairly readily; but they also illustrate the looseness of the term Sanskritic. If the many and heterogeneous forces which writers of the Srinivasian school mention as agents of Sanskritization are all to be described by the same term, it is doubtful whether that term has much value as a tool of analysis. And the problem still remains unsolved (either by Srinivas or by anyone else) of determining precisely which ritual practices or values are to be understood to be Sanskritic.

For instance, the Arya Samaj (a modern reformist movement) was a major influence on the sweepers described by Mahar and it directed many of the changes they made in their religious practices.¹ Yet if the Arya Samaj is to be described as 'Sanskritic' when on the one hand it advocates a return to the Vedas and on the other recommends radical changes in the ritual rules governing inter-caste relationships, what is the value of the term? If Sanskritic Hinduism is, as Srinivas suggests, largely the same as Brahmanical Hinduism it certainly ought not to be applied to a sect which aroused so much opposition from 'orthodox' Brahmans. It could perhaps be described as Sanskritic if the word is to be understood in the strict sense of 'connected with the Sanskrit language' in that it has done

1. Mahar (1960), pp. 282-5.

much to encourage a revival of Sanskrit learning. But it has also militated against the rigid application of rules concerning purity and pollution which enforce caste exclusiveness - the very opposite of what Srinivas's Amma Coorgs were doing when they Sanskritized their ways and broke off from the main body of their caste. Such diverse influences as modern reform movements, bhakti sects and local Brahman castes have too little in common to make any term which comprehends them all a particularly useful one.¹ A workable typology of modern Hinduism - if mere classification be admitted to be a desirable end - requires much narrower and more strictly defined categories than those which Srinivas and his followers have used. In particular, a typology which treats local (non-Sanskritic, non-Brahmanical) Hinduism as more than just a residual category would be desirable. Srinivas's approach leaves

1. A similar point is made by Staal in his critique of the use of the terms Sanskritic and Sanskritization by anthropologists. Sanskritization is "a complex concept or class of concepts" covering a wide variety of phenomena. Moreover it "covers cases where the influence of Sanskrit and the amount of Sanskrit material decrease". (Staal, 1963, p. 275). He gives the example of the Siv Narayan sect which Cohn mentions as an agent of Sanskritization, yet which rejects the use of Sanskrit for religious purposes in favour of the vernaculars.

unanswered such questions as why the local forms of Hinduism are carried largely⁹ by the low castes; wherein lies the appeal of such forms if more prestigious forms are available; why have low castes (or even high castes like the Coorgs) persisted in adhering to non-Sanskritic forms for as long as they have done?

But the most fundamental criticism which must be made is that Srinivas completely ignores the question of whether Sanskritic Hinduism really represents a qualitatively different type of Hinduism from more localised forms, or whether it may not simply stand for a different style of expressing of religious ideas and sentiments contained in both traditions. Does the worship of cobras in Coorg take on any different meaning for the Coorgs when they identify the snake god with the Sanskritic deity Subramanya?¹ When Amma Coorgs begin to observe "annual shraddhas after the manner of the Brahmins and completely eschew the other mode of propitiation"², does the offering of rice balls under the direction of a Brahman priest instead of meat and liquor through a low caste oracle indicate that the attitude of these Coorgs to their dead forbears has altered? Or have they only found new methods of expressing the same attitude?

1. Srinivas (1952), p. 214-

2. Ibid, p. 227.

In short, is the difference between Sanskritic (or all-India) Hinduism and other types of Hinduism a purely formal one, or do they represent qualitatively different modes of religiosity?¹ Do they demand basically different sentimental attitudes on the part of their adherents? And if they do, what is the psychological cost to members of low castes when they discard their non-Sanskritic customs for more prestigious Sanskritic ways?

Srinivas's failure to elucidate this problem probably stems from his over-riding pre-occupation with ritual at the expense of belief, which makes it difficult for him to present the different levels of Hinduism as elements in a more or less integrated system of thought and activity, which they surely must constitute in the mind of any particular Coorg. He gives very little idea of how the rites he describes fit into the Coorgs' world picture as a whole or how the Coorgs interpret their own ritual behaviour. He says little about what the Coorgs think they will obtain from the religious observances which they practice, or to what species of salvation these observances tend.

In a discussion of 'Religion and Society among the

1. Srinivas himself seems to imply that they do when he says that the all-India ritual idiom is 'Sanskritic in character' but he fails to define at greater length what sort of character this is. Srinivas (1952), p. 213.

Coorgs', Dumont and Pocock rightly criticize Srinivas for treating Coorg religion as though it consisted of no more than a body of ritual.¹ They attribute this confusion of ritual and religion to the influence of Radcliffe-Brown who, in his introduction to the book, asserts that "for the social anthropologist religion presents itself in the first instance not as a body of doctrine, but as what we may call 'religious behaviour as a part of social life. Social anthropology is behaviouristic in the sense that we seek to observe how people act as a necessary preliminary to how they think and feel."² As Dumont and Pocock rightly point out, to treat religious beliefs (and these include beliefs about ritual practices, not just metaphysical and eschatological ideas) as though they were merely "an ideological counterpart or support of ritual bearing no direct relation to society" is just as unfortunate as the opposite approach, "which attempts to find the consistency of religion only in the realm of beliefs, implying that rites are just the transcription on a secondary level of beliefs."³ Srinivas's close scrutiny of what the Coorgs do, at the expense of any investigation of what they think and feel, make it difficult to see how their religious activities

1. Dumont and Pocock (1959), p. 13

2. Radcliffe-Brown, Srinivas (1952) p. v.

3. Dumont and Pocock (1959), p. 13.

(both Sanskritic and non-Sanskritic) form part of a unified system. Unfortunately Srinivas is not the only student of Hinduism who is guilty of this error, and if I have discussed his work at length this is because it is typical of the way in which Hinduism has been studied by anthropologists. Altogether there has been a general failure to find any conceptual framework which admits a workable integration of Hindu ritual and Hindu belief such that "man is regarded, as he should be, as an acting-and-thinking or living-and-thinking being".¹ This is very often true even when the anthropologist has taken pains to collect detailed data about religious beliefs. A case in point is Mathur's description of religion in a Malwa village. In 'Caste and Ritual in a Malwa Village' (1964) he presents much interesting material on the 'Hindu ritual idiom', giving appropriate attention to concepts of purity and pollution and how they operate, especially how they are reflected in caste behaviour. Mathur does not, as Srinivas may be accused of doing, fail to record the beliefs of the people he studies. His book contains a whole chapter entitled 'The Hindu values of life' in which he presents concepts such as karma and dharma as they are understood by the villagers, supported by quotations from the statements

1. Dumont and Pocock (1959), p. 13.

of his informants. (Srinivas seldom refers to actual statements made by his Coorg informants when describing their religious beliefs). But Mathur does not succeed in presenting any conceptual link between the abstract beliefs of the villagers and their ritual activity, except perhaps in so far as adherence to ritual rules and prohibitions represents a special case of dharma. But if beliefs are to be described at all, why only describe such metaphysical ideas on the one hand and ideas about purity and pollution on the other? Why omit to describe what the villagers believe about the purpose of the life cycle rites they observe, or the many festivals which they celebrate? What, for instance, do they think would happen if they neglected these rites? Even if, as I sometimes found myself, villagers are not always able to give an articulate answer to such questions, their very lack of an answer would be an important datum in itself. People's beliefs about what they do should not be taken as simple explanations of their behaviour, of course, but they do provide essential information which the anthropologist cannot afford to ignore. They are a facet of social behaviour and to separate them from other activities as Mathur does is somewhat artificial.

McKim Marriott; the Great and the Little Traditions

An approach which is similar to that of Srinivas in

some respects is that of McKim Marriott who, like Srinivas, is concerned with the relationship of local to supralocal culture in India. If a village like Kishan Garhi, which he studied, cannot be treated as an isolated whole on account of the complex ties its members have with the outside world, how can its relationship to the wider society of which it is a part be conceptualized? Marriott finds a solution to this problem in Singer's concept of the 'great tradition', a form of civilization which "grows out of its own folk culture by an orthogenetic process - by a straight line of indigenous development, and is in constant contact with its folk culture."¹ The little (folk) tradition is carried by the little communities (such as Kishan Garhi) of the civilization in question, whilst the great tradition corresponds to the supra-local social community to which the little community belongs. Marriott singles out the case of village religious observances to illustrate the communication which takes place between the great and the little tradition, the religious great tradition consisting of "the literate tradition embodied in or derived from the Sanskritic works which have a universal spread in all parts of India."² But Marriott has more to say about

1. Marriott (1955), p. 181.

2. Ibid, p. 191.

the relationship and interaction of these two levels of Hinduism than Srinivas has to say of the relationship of Sanskrit to non-Sanskrit Hinduism. He describes the process of 'universalization' whereby any element of little traditional origin may become assimilated upwards into the great tradition by a reconstructed process of cultural absorption; a festival of local origin comes to be identified with a Sanskrit great traditional festival and takes on the characteristics of the latter. The reverse of this process is 'parochialization', by which elements which once presumably (and Marriott admits that such reconstructions are purely speculative) had a great traditional rationale lose this and acquire so many local elaborations that the original connection with the great tradition is no longer remembered.

Yet reading Marriott's article we are left asking the same questions that Srinivas's work provokes. Do these different levels of Hinduism really represent qualitatively different modes of religious behaviour? When a local festival like Saluno becomes transformed by the process of universalization into a great traditional festival such as Rakhi (as Marriott indicates could well have been the case) does this involve a real change in the kind of ritual, beliefs and values concerned? Or is it simply that

universalization and Sanskritization, to use Dumont and Pocock's words, consist merely of the "acceptance of more distinguished or prestigious ways of saying the same thing."¹ If the distinction between the two levels is only a formal cultural one and not a qualitative one it is of but slight interest to the social anthropologist, however important it may be to the cultural anthropologist.

Harper and Dumont; the pure and the impure.

A more promising method is that of Harper, who divides the 'supernaturals' worshipped in a South Indian village into three categories. These comprise the vegetarian, Sanskritic 'devaru', the meat eating secondary 'devate' or local gods, and the blood-demanding malevolent spirits or 'devva'. Harper recognizes that such schemes of classification are of little sociological import unless they either represent different types of religious behaviour or else correspond to distinct social groupings. He accepts the Srinivasian notion of Sanskritic Hinduism with some reservations, stating that "the difference between Sanskritic and non-Sanskritic deities should be viewed as representative of functional classes of supernaturals rather than historical in nature."² Thus the devaru, as well as being vegetarian

1. Dumont and Pocock (1959), p. 45.

2. Harper (1959), p. 228.

deities, are worshipped more by high caste persons than others, and mainly for the purpose of acquiring spiritual merit. They are primarily benevolent in disposition whilst the devate may cause either good or bad fortune. The malevolent devva are appeased only in order to avert the dire results of their displeasure and are worshipped more by members of low castes than by others. Yet one doubts whether the 'supernaturals' are really susceptible to classification as though they were detached elements in the religious tradition of the village. Though Harper, unlike Marriott, realizes that deities cannot be described without any reference to their cults and to the functions in the religious lives of those who worship them, he does not succeed in showing how the South Indian villager conceives the relationship of the deities to one another, how he builds a system of the elements which Harper describes. Like Srinivas and Marriott, Harper is still more interested in the Hinduism of a territorial unit rather than the Hinduism of particular Hindus.

He avoids the fragmentary approach more successfully in a later article¹ where he presents the various types of supernatural as elements in a hierarchy of beings which includes humans as well as deities and spirits. The various

1. Harper (1964).

members of this hierarchy are distinguished according to their degree of ritual purity relative to each other and the relationship of members of high castes to members of low castes is presented as analogous to the relationship between deities and members of high castes. There is continuity between the human and the divine levels of the cosmic hierarchy since "the relationships between castes requires (sic) that an occupational differentiation be maintained so that the other castes may be more pure, so that these in turn can help still another caste to attain sufficient purity to purify the gods."¹ Roughly the same sort of things endanger the purity of a supernatural as endanger that of a human, so that the purity-pollution principle provides a logic which integrates the Hindu's experiences of the world - both the natural and the supernatural.

A very similar approach is Louis Dumont's. Though he takes temple ritual as the starting point for his discussion of the religion of the Pramalai Kallar caste,² he makes it clear that basically he is less concerned with the details of the ritual enacted than with the nature of the deities to whom these rituals are directed, the nature

1. Harper (1964), p. 196.

2. Dumont (1957), pp. 313-419.

of the 'divine' itself. He notes that Kalliar temples house not one deity but an ensemble of deities - conventionally twenty-one, although sometimes not all the twenty-one gods of a particular temple can be identified by name. The most important feature of these temple pantheons is that they include two different types of deity, the vegetarian and the carnivorous, or the pure and the impure. These two categories of deity are seen as standing in a complementary but also hierarchical relationship to each other, the pure vegetarian deities being seen as superior to the impure carnivorous deities, who nevertheless have an important role as the 'guardians' of the former. This relationship is one of structural interdependence; the pantheon of a particular temple and the concept of the divine in general is "une totalité fondée sur une opposition irréductible."¹ Individual deities cannot be treated in isolation as they have no real existence - they exist only in relation to each other. Demons only become regarded as deities when they are able to gain access to such pantheons. The dichotomy between the pure and the impure deities - which may even be reflected in the existence of a dual priesthood, dual sets of cultic instruments and dual cooking arrangements - constitutes the 'essential principle' of the divine.

1. Dumont (1957), p. 416.

For Dumont, this distinction between the pure and the impure deities is not merely a reflection or an extension of the purity-pollution principle as it operates in Hindu society as a whole; it is the same principle. The hierarchical interdependence of the pure and the impure at the level of the divine is identical to the interdependence of the different castes in Hindu society, the caste system being founded, in Dumont's view, upon the purity-pollution concept. But Dumont does not see the pantheon (as Durkheim no doubt would have) as a 'representation' of the caste system, rather as a part of it. "La caste mêle les hommes et les dieux....le dieu véritable, c'est le Brahmane."¹ Caste however is the primary concept, and in another context Dumont says that the Hindu's belief in the gods is secondary to his belief in caste; it is derived from the 'religion of caste'. Just as Harper sees the idea of purity, conceived as a relative state of being which can always be threatened by the relatively impure, as the 'underlying principle' which gives caste and religion unity and consistency as a single system of action, so Dumont also related Hindu religious behaviour to other aspects of Hindu society by using the purity-pollution concept to interpret them both.

1. Dumont (1957), p. 419.

More important than this, in the present context, is the fact that both Dumont and Harper succeed by this means in relating the different kinds of Hindu religious behaviour to each other. Thus the worship of non-vegetarian gods or the relatively impure devvas are not lower and separate 'levels' of Hinduism which have yet to be absorbed into the all-India Sanskritic cultural stratum, but are part and parcel of a system which also includes the worship of vegetarian gods and relatively pure devarus, indeed are indispensable to it for the pure is only pure relative to the impure.

But it is conspicuous that both Dumont and Harper - like Srinivas - collected their material in South India where rules concerning purity and pollution are notoriously more stringent than in the North. Where rules of purity and pollution are so rigidly applied, and elaborated in such detail that it was possible for low castes to convey pollution to Brahmans simply by allowing themselves to be seen by the latter, it is surely only to be expected that they should colour the Hindu's religious experience also. Can this be expected to be the case also for a group of Hindus like the Saraswat Brahmans who were my chief informants and who (unlike South Indian Brahmans) are not debarred from eating meat and drinking liquor, who are

allowed to eat food cooked by a Jat, and who will cheerfully share a pipe with members of artisan castes who are looked upon as Shudras? It seems to be a general characteristic of both the Punjab and the Himalayan foothills that the ritual distance between the highest and the lowest castes is relatively narrow.¹ Therefore, if the purity-pollution principle is only weakly articulated in inter-personal relationships, must not the same be true of the relationships between men and gods? And hence must not Dumont's and Harper's interpretations of the structure of Hindu religion be inapplicable in these regions? In this thesis I shall try to discover whether this is true or whether the same principles may integrate Hindu religious behaviour even in regions of India where the purity-pollution polarity is not elaborately developed in social life.

Problems of method and definition

The anthropologist who takes Hinduism as the subject of his fieldwork is more acutely aware than usual of the problem of deciding what is and what is not to be included in the term 'religion'. The language of the Hindu peasants who were my informants does not contain any word which corresponds exactly to the English word 'religion'. The term dharm is perhaps the nearest equivalent, but it comprehends

1. Ibbetson(1883), pp.76-9.

much more than the kind of beliefs and behaviour which an English person refers to when he uses the word 'religion', since it includes all kinds of social and moral obligations which neither presuppose any belief in deities or the 'supernatural' nor depend on such beliefs for their sanctions. When the villager speaks of the 'Hindu dharm' he is not referring only to the worship of Hindu gods or Hindu beliefs about the nature of the soul or the after-life, but also to such things as the obligation of a Hindu son to honour his parents, the dietary restrictions he observes as a Hindu, the work he does as a member of a particular Hindu caste and the many other socio-religious rules which order his life. In English one might speak of such obligations being prescribed by a person's religion, but it would be unusual to include so much in the term religion itself.

The word 'mat' can also be used in some contexts as equivalent to the term 'religion' and it comprehends much less than the all-embracing term dharm. Mat really means 'belief', 'doctrine', 'creed' or 'principles'. Thus one might say that Hindus, Christians and Muslims adhere to different mat. But the word does not refer to specifically religious principles or doctrines; Hindus belonging to different sects differ according to their mat but so also do people adhering to different social or political

philosophies. Thus humanism, socialism or secularism can all be referred to by the term mat. A mat is not so much a religion as what in colloquial English is called an 'ism'. The only word which is really equivalent to the English term religion is the word mazab which is of extraneous origin itself.

The Hindu villagers with whom I worked came into contact with very few non-Hindus and therefore seldom have occasion to compare themselves with, say, Muslims or Christians. But when they do so it is seldom in terms of beliefs alone. A common answer to the question "how do Hindus differ from Muslims?" was "Hindus honour the cow as sacred whereas Muslims worship the pig". Another common response was "Muslims will eat from one common dish when they sit down to a meal but Hindus only like to eat separately", or "Hindus wash their hands before and after eating but Muslims do not." In other words, Hindus distinguish themselves from Muslims more on the basis of differences in social and ritual customs than in credal terms. When the villager says that he is a Hindu he is not making quite the same sort of statement about himself that a modern Englishman would be making if he said he was a Protestant or a member of the Church of England.

The statement of a young Brahman is perhaps

significant. Whilst telling me of his experiences of life in the Punjab plains, where he had worked for some years, he had occasion to speak of his contact with some Christian missionaries. He described the friendliness of the Christians he had met, how they had invited him to their church and how he had attended and much enjoyed a service there. But, he said, he had refused their warm invitation to dine with them afterwards because he was afraid that if he ate with them this would be taken to mean that he had become a Christian himself. Hinduism therefore means much more to the Hindu than the participation in Hindu religious practices - or perhaps one should say much less, for the worship of Hindu gods and goddesses can be dispensed with without a person's ceasing to be regarded as a Hindu. At all events he is not specifying his theological beliefs when he says that he is a Hindu and members of the Hindu village I studied worshipped Muslim saints without anyone suggesting that they had ceased to be Hindus.

All this raises a most important problem. If the Hindu does not isolate his religious experience from his secular experience, or at any rate does not draw the line between the two at the same point as the anthropologist would, is it legitimate for the latter to treat Hindu religion as a discrete system at all? Would this not represent an unjustifiable imposition of his own thought

categories upon the behaviour of the people he studies? And in the face of the practical difficulties arising from such an important difference in the terminology of the observer and the observed, would such a study even be possible?

The answer to the first question is, I think, that such an approach can be justified. The anthropologist must take into account the ways in which his informants classify their experiences, but he need not be limited by them. He aims, after all, to provide material which can be compared with data gathered in other societies and there can be no communication between anthropologists studying different societies if they are not sometimes prepared to classify the activities of their subjects according to categories which the latter might not understand or share. It is a major drawback of Dumont's work that his unwillingness to deal with Hinduism in terms other than those which Hinduism itself provides leads him to treat religion as a distinct category only for the purpose of description and not analysis.¹

1. "Des catégories comme "religion", "culte", "croyance", "dieu" ne peuvent être utilisées que sous bénéfice d'inventaire, et en prenant garde de ne rien fonder en réalité sur elles, comme une sorte d'échafaudage qu'il faudra, ou qu'il faudrait idéalement en tout cas, pouvoir retirer finalement, une fois atteintes des définitions plus spécifiques." Dumont(1957), pp.315-76

Consequently it is difficult to relate his findings about Hinduism to those of other anthropologists. He explicitly advocates a sociology of India¹ but effectively precludes a sociology of religion. Not every anthropologist is interested in making cross-cultural comparisons himself, but unless there are to be as many sociologies as there are societies he must surely present his material in such a form that comparisons could be made.

The answer to the second question depends on whether the anthropologist is successful in finding a good working definition of the term religion, so that he knows what phenomena he is supposed to be able to compare. This is a problem which has pre-occupied anthropologists more than sociologists recently, probably because sociologists have concerned themselves more with the internal workings of one particular religious system - and in particular with the problems of sectarianism and secularism in western society - than with making broad cross-cultural comparisons.

Definitions - as M. Spiro has pointed out in an article dealing with the problems of defining religion - can be of two kinds. The 'ostensive' definition merely indicates the sort of phenomena the term in question is intended to designate. The 'real' definition describes the 'essential

1. Dumont and Pocock (1957), pp. 9-10.

nature' of the phenomenon.¹ The 'real' definition can only legitimately be arrived at as the end-product of an enquiry, and can hardly form its starting point. It is probably because he has only the 'real' definition (and the problems it raises) in mind that a writer like Blackham feels that any attempt to define religion can be dispensed with. He opens his work on religion in western society by stating that "definitions of religion are many and misleading because religious behaviour is diverse."² But he admits that some kind of starting point is needed and does not seem to anticipate that anyone will disagree with his proposition that "religion is about the gods".³ As an ostensive working definition this has the advantage of being clear and simple and it fulfils Spiro's criteria of 'cross-cultural applicability' and 'intra-cultural intuitivity'. But Spiro's own definition is more satisfactory because more precise. Religion, he says, is "an institution consisting of culturally patterned interaction with culturally postulated superhuman beings".⁴ This is an improvement because it points to the fact which is of primary interest to the anthropologist,

1. Spiro (1966), pp. 87-9.

2. Blackham (1966), p. 1.

3. Ibid. p. 1.

4. Spiro (1966), p. 96.

namely that gods are not just believed in but also worshipped, that is, they enter into relationships with human beings. It is these relationships, their quality (whether they are 'communion oriented' or 'manipulative', to use Horton's terms),¹ the theories about the nature of the cosmos which they assume, the ways in which they are expressed through ritual and the benefits which men expect them to yield which the anthropologist must describe.

He should assume nothing about the relationship of religious institutions to other social institutions. For one thing these may vary from society to society; there is no reason to suppose that religion will always have the same function in all societies. Nor will any amount of juggling with definitions disguise or circumvent the awkward fact that in many societies it is very difficult to decide exactly where religion ends and where magic, philosophy, science, or any other culturally defined system of thought and action begins. In fact, as Spiro points out, we are not even entitled to assume that religion itself is necessarily universal. There may well be societies which have no religion according to his definition.

Above all, we must also be prepared to find that in some places and at some times the 'cultural postulation' of the

1. Horton (1960), p. 213.

deities may take precedence over the 'culturally patterned interaction' between them and the men who worship them (or vice versa). Sometimes religion is more conspicuously credal, sometimes more ritually oriented. Preacher and priest, pulpit and altar stand in varying relation to each other. In general anthropologists have concentrated more on religion as a ritual system than have sociologists, either because ritual was in fact more articulately developed in the simple societies they studied, or perhaps because, being visible, ritual was more accessible to the outsider with a less than perfect grasp of the vernacular. Indeed the very term ritual has been used rather carelessly as though ritual and religion were basically the same thing anyway. I have already mentioned the unfortunate influence which the Radcliffe-Brownian behaviouristic approach has had on Indian Studies.¹ It is only because of the persistence of this influence that I wish to restate the obvious here in order to make my own position clear. Religion and ritual are not the same. Ritual is formal, culturally standardized behaviour which involves the use of symbols, and it follows from this that whilst religion uses ritual, not all ritual is religious. I shall take ritual activity as my starting point in this description of religion in a Hindu village but I shall do my best to avoid the dissociation of ritual from beliefs (and

1. see pp. 20-21.

indeed the general neglect of the latter) of which Srinivas and his school are guilty by presenting at every stage not only the activities of the Hindus who were my informants but their ideas about what the rituals are designed to achieve and the theories on which practice logically rests.

Also I depart from Spiro's method at this point in that my purpose is to show how Hindu religious activities (both ritual and intellectual) are related to each other rather than to relate them to other social activities or to 'explain' them. This is not because I think that the latter type of problem is not worth investigating, but because I do not think that we can begin to discuss the relationship of the Hindu religious system to other social sub-systems until we have established that it is a system. It is only the prevalence of what I have called the 'fragmentary' approach in so much of the work conducted in this field hitherto that makes this necessary. Only if no principles can be found, no consistencies in the aims and techniques of Hindu religious activity, shall we be justified in concluding that only such methods can be used to analyze the Hindu's religious experience.

Chapter 2. The Village.

In this chapter I shall give a brief account of the North Indian village where I carried out field research between May 1966 and June 1967. An exhaustive description of village life would not be feasible here so I shall not give more information than is strictly necessary to serve as background for the account of religious activities which follows. This information falls into three main sections; (a) information about the area in which the village is situated, in terms of which the village can be placed in its cultural-geographical context; (b) information about the social life of the village relevant to an understanding of its religious life; (c) information about the villagers' general theories about purity and pollution and the way they are applied in daily life. These latter are essential preliminary data if we are to test the hypothesis that it is these ideas which integrate their religious activities also.

The village and its situation.

Dohk is a hill village in District Kangra, a part of the State of Himachal Pradesh. It is situated very near to the border of that province with Punjab. Dohk is not far from the Punjab plains in terms of physical distance, since



Figure 1. Map showing situation of Dohk.

only the Ramgarh range - the first fold of the Himalayan foothills - separates the valley where Dohk lies from the level fields of the Punjab. Its inhabitants resemble Punjabis in many respects. Their dress is essentially similar to that worn by Punjabi farmers and their language is really a dialect of Punjabi, even if some of its vocabulary is unfamiliar to the plainsman. But though they live only on the fringe of what Berreman calls the 'Bahari culture area',¹ the inhabitants of Dohk explicitly identify themselves as Paharis, i.e. hillmen, and not as Punjabis. They refer to their dialect as 'Pahārī bolī', seldom seek marriage partners from the plainsward side of the Ramgarh Dhar, and look upon Punjabis as alien outsiders.²

1. Berreman (1960) and Berreman (1963), pp. 136-7.

2. That I myself was able to establish a rapport with the villagers quickly was in a great measure due to the fact that I was affinally related to the Brahmans of Dohk. Continued acceptance as a 'Brahman' however was dependant on a degree of conformity to local caste custom. So far as relations with all castes but the Chamars and Julahas were concerned, the restrictions on inter-caste communication are not such as to preclude friendly and informal contacts, and so I have no reason to believe that my information regarding the religious behaviour and customs of the artisan castes, Rajputs and Jats is less reliable than that which concerns the Brahmans. Such informal communication with the Chamars was less easy to achieve. One or two articulate Chamars of Dohk proved to be very helpful to me, especially in the collection of stories and traditions concerning the devatas of the local pantheon. Also I was fortunate enough to find some excellent Chamar and Julaha informants in nearby villages who were less inhibited, perhaps because I did not stand in the relation of jajmān to them or their near kin. But the lesser detail in which I have recorded the religious activities of these castes is explained by the limited access I had to them on account of my own 'caste' status.

Compared with Punjab, Himachal Pradesh is an economically backward area and the villagers of Dohk know enough about the outside world to be aware of this and somewhat apologetic about it. As yet, Dohk has no tap water, no electricity and few shops. Some changes have taken place since the commencement of the Bhakra Dam project in 1948, which is now almost complete. The Bhakra Dam was constructed to hold back the flow of the River Sutlej at a point about eleven miles from Dohk so as to create a huge reservoir in which water can be stored for the irrigation of parts of the Punjab where the rainfall is very scanty, and also to create a supply of hydro-electric power. When the waters of this reservoir are at their highest level they cover some acres of land formerly owned by villagers of Dohk and the Government offered those thus deprived a choice of accepting a cash compensation or plots of land of equivalent value in the plains district of Hissar in Haryana State. Most people in Dohk accepted the latter although only one family actually migrated to Hissar. Most did not receive enough land to make it worth their while to move and they rent their plots to local tenants. The creation of the Dam and the subsequent development of Nangal (about seventeen miles from Dohk) as an industrial township has forced the pace of progress in transport and communications

and Dohk is now served by a new, though still unmetalled road from Nangal. But even at present this road is closed to traffic during much of the wet season since swollen rivers and rockfalls higher in the hills render it dangerous. Dohk still gives the impression of isolation even though it is less cut off from the outside world than it was twenty years ago.

Probably some of the attitudes which Paharis express towards the outside world, and especially their distrust and dislike of Punjabis, can be explained with reference to their political history. District Kangra is a predominantly Hindu area made up of a number of former small principalities. Dohk is situated in one of these, Kutlehr, whose raja still has his castle at a village about five miles away. This diminutive state was able to survive because its rulers were prepared to pay tribute to whatever imperial power dominated the neighbouring Punjab, first the Moguls and later the Sikhs. The Sikh emperor Ranjit Singh annexed Kutlehr in 1809 and when his empire was taken over from his grandson in 1849, Kutlehr became a British possession.¹ Culturally District Kangra was affected only marginally by events in the Punjab (only a tiny minority of its inhabitants became either Muslims or Sikhs) but it continued to be administered

1. Vogel (1933), pp. 489-90.

as part of the Punjab province by the British and was only united with Himachal Pradesh in 1966. The people of Dohk welcomed this measure with much enthusiasm as they felt that now they would be administered by fellow Paharis and not exploited by alien plainsmen.

The village itself.

Dohk is larger than the other villages in its immediate neighbourhood since its total population is 433, of which 56 - mainly young men employed in the army or the towns of the Punjab - are away for much of the time. Socially however, such people remain members of the village, for they retain their land rights there, return for long periods of leave whenever they can, and contribute to its economy substantially by sending regular remittances to their families. The majority leave their wives and children behind in the village and come back to rejoin them permanently in middle age. Married daughters of the village, on the other hand, are not regarded as members of the village and I have not included them here. Village exogamy is the general rule in this area and once a girl is married she is considered to belong to her husband's household and to have her property rights in his village.

Like other Pahari villages for which data are available,¹ Dohk does not contain a large number of caste

1. Berreman (1963), p. 216, Majumdar (1962), p. 67, Newell (1960), p. 59 and Rosser (1960), p. 79.

groups and it may be that this is a general characteristic of the settlement pattern in the Pahari area. The population and traditional occupation of Dohk's eight caste groups is shown in the table below.

Table 1. Population of Dohk according to caste.

Brahman (priestly caste)	211	48	% (approx.)
Chamar (scavenger and tanner)	83	20	%
Lohar (blacksmith)	65	16	%
Tarkhan (carpenter)	37	8	%
Nai (barber)	19	4.2	%
Chimba (washerman and tailor)	10	2.2	%
Suniara (goldsmith)	6	1.2	%
Teli (oil presser)	2	0.4	%
	433	100	%
Total			

There are 75 households in the village, a household being defined here as a group of people who eat from one common kitchen and who share a house or rooms in a house. Forty-one of these households are either nuclear families or sub-nuclear families (I employ Pauline Mahar's scheme of household classification¹) that is, nuclear families depleted by the death of one or more members. Twenty one are supplemented nuclear or supplemented sub-nuclear families, that is, they are 'supplemented by a widowed, unmarried or separated

1. Mahar (1968), pp. 346-347.

relative of one of the parents. In Dohk the most common form of supplemented nuclear household is the kind where a widowed or unmarried brother of the father is living together with the nuclear family. Households consisting of joint families, i.e. families of two or more married couples and their children, are in a minority. Only 13 of the households in Dohk are of this type. Five of these are linear families, a married couple and their son and his wife, and another 5 are linear-collateral, or supplemented collateral, a group of married brothers and one or both of their parents. Only two households are purely collateral, i.e. a group of married brothers who continue to live together after the death of both their parents. Usually a man sets up his own household soon after his marriage unless he is an only son, although if he is working outside the village his wife may continue to live with his parents until he returns to the village permanently. If he is not living separately from his brothers at the time of his father's death, this event will usually hasten the process. But even when a group of brothers live separately the land may remain undivided for some years after the father's death, and even when it is at last divided and the brothers both live and farm separately there is often much co-operation between the members of the households, both economic and ritual. For

instance, the men will help each other in the fields at the busiest times of the year, their wives will mind each other's children or cook for each other when one is debarred from the kitchen at the time of her monthly period or after childbirth. When there is a wedding or a funeral, the wives will co-operate to prepare the food for the feasts which must be given on such occasions. The process of fission is not an abrupt one and there are many degrees of kinship and co-operation which may link separate domestic units. The definition of the household as the commensal group is necessary here, since this is the group which villagers are referring to when they speak of 'household deities' or of there being a wedding or a funeral in someone's 'household'. The household is the hub of activity when any non-individual ritual action is to be taken, but it is not a distinct or corporate ritual unit in itself.

The economy of Dohk is overwhelmingly agricultural and villagers live mainly on the produce of 193 acres of cultivable land on which they grow maize in the wet season and wheat in winter. Several square miles of jungle, mostly common land, provide firewood, timber and grazing for sheep, goats and cattle. Ninety per cent of the cultivable land is owned by Brahmans, but most of those villagers who do

not own land rent fields from those who do; those who have neither their own land nor rented fields to cultivate work as labourers for daily wages. This applies mainly to the low caste Chamars, but almost all villagers do this kind of work occasionally since to give one's labour for a day or two when some major task is on hand is a common form of co-operation amongst relatives and neighbours. So although few derive their income from one source only, all do work connected with farming for at least some of the time.

It is relevant to a study of religious life to know something about differentials of wealth within the village. For example, we might reasonably expect to find a higher degree of ritual activity amongst the better-off to the extent that expense is a consideration which might deter the less wealthy. The Brahmans are the dominant caste in Dohk in both the demographic and the economic sense. Though there are poor Brahmans and prosperous low caste people, the Brahmans are as a caste the wealthiest group in the village. But the differentials of wealth are not as wide as the disproportionate distribution of land in their favour might suggest and there are families, Brahman and non-Brahman, who own little land but have a better income than families who own much land, because they have several sons in the army or in white collar employment. The general style of

living of the richest villager is not far removed from that of the poorest and the only really conspicuous gap is that between the clean castes and the Chamars, who own very little land and who rarely venture outside the village to work. There are no extremes of wealth such as might lead to basically different religious outlooks on the part of the rich and the poor.¹

Most members of all castes, save the Brahmans and the Chimba, follow the profession traditionally associated with their caste, though not necessarily as the main source of their livelihood. The relationships between artisans and their customers are of the jajmani type, each artisan receiving a minimum of four seers of grain from each of the families to which he is attached at each harvest. He may receive more, depending on the generosity of his patron, but in any case he usually has a right to certain perquisites of food, cash or clothing when there is any event such as a birth or wedding in his patron's household. He may also have special duties at such times (for instance Chamars bear the palanquins in which bride and groom are carried at weddings) so that household ritual occasions often involve the participation of members of various different castes.

1. Berreman notes the cultural homogeneity in general and religious homogeneity in particular amongst castes in the Pahari culture area. Berreman (1960), pp. 783-7.

Dohk is too isolated from urban markets for mass produced goods to provide serious competition for the rural artisan as yet and the jajmani system does not seem to be showing such obvious signs of decline as have been found in less inaccessible villages of the plains.¹ (In any case jajmani agreements are not the only kind of economic exchange found in the village since artisans often augment their incomes by providing goods or services over and above those which they traditionally stipulate, or by serving customers from other villages for cash). The association between caste and craft is still strong enough in Dohk to colour attitudes of villagers to members of different castes, and even when a man discontinues his jajmani ~~relations~~^{relations} and travels outside the village, he often takes up work related to his traditional calling (as in the case of a Tarkhan who now works as a carpenter in an urban flour mill).²

Another economic fact which it is relevant to mention here is the high incidence of outside employment. Thirty-one of the 128 men over the age of 15 are employed outside the village, i.e. about 25%. Twelve of these men

1. E. G. Lewis (1958), pp. 55-84.

2. Occupational concerns sometimes receive expression in the religious activities of the caste, as for instance in the case of the cult of the artisan deity Visvakarma among the Lohars and Tarkhans.

are in the Army. Army recruitment is not a modern development since the Dogras (as the Rajputs and Brahmans native to the north-western Himalayan foothills are known) have long been reputed for their prowess as soldiers. The British favoured District Kangra as a recruiting ground and there are few villages in the vicinity of Dohk who cannot claim at least two or three young men to the Indian Army. (How this is reflected in the religious life of the area can be seen from the enormous popularity of Jogipanga - a local centre of pilgrimage - where a saint is celebrated who is said to have special powers to protect soldiers at the front). The other nineteen men employed outside the village are engaged in various kinds of occupation, mainly minor clerical jobs or as assistants and accountants to shopkeepers in Punjabi towns.

Unlike Army recruitment, white collar employment outside the village is probably a recent development since such work demands educational qualifications which could only be acquired with difficulty before the establishment of a secondary school three miles from Dohk ten years ago and a primary school in the village itself at about the same time. The general level of adult literacy is not high - 50% of the men over fifteen and only 10% of the women over fifteen have had some kind of schooling, although a few of the

younger men have studied up to the eighth standard. However, it seems that a basic knowledge of reading and writing will soon be universal amongst the younger generation since now there are few children between the ages of seven and twelve who do not attend school, however sporadically. This may well broaden the scope of the religious life of the villagers since those who are literate exercise their literacy mainly through reading religious tracts and books available in local towns. Indeed, apart from the school books of the children, which themselves contain many stories of a moral or religious nature, such literature is more or less the only reading matter to be found in the village, or in which the villagers take much interest.

The spread of education may well accelerate the tendency to seek work outside even if the pressure on land due to the expansion of the village's population does not have the same effect, but it is hard to say how profoundly this will influence village life. Hitherto all those who have ventured to the towns in search of work have not only maintained close links with the village during their absence but have also eventually returned to the village to retire (as in Sirkanda, outside employment is only regarded as a temporary activity)¹. The return to village life after years

1. Berreman (1963), p. 73.

spent in a very different environment seems to take place quite smoothly. Many of the older men turned out to have spent various periods of their youth working as labourers in the towns without it having brought about any noticeable difference in their attitudes or behaviour compared with those who had spent all their lives in the village.

Whether the younger generation of white collar emigrants will return so readily or so easily remains to be seen.

The fact of outside employment has, I feel, more than economic significance. Through travelling beyond the village environment the peasant obtains the opportunity to compare himself with people living in other places of India, not least in respect of his religious and ritual customs. He brings much of the knowledge he has obtained into the village and thus counteracts to some extent its physical isolation, adding to a communal fund of information about (amongst other things) comparative religious practice which enables even those villagers who stay at home to develop their self consciousness vis-a-vis Hindus of other areas.

Purity and pollution.

There is not space here for an exhaustive enumeration of the social situations in which rules concerning purity and pollution operate. What it is necessary to establish

here is (a) that such rules do actually exist (if they did not, the hypothesis that they are also fundamental to the villagers' religious life would hardly be worth investigating), and (b) that they are of the same nature as purity-pollution rules observed elsewhere in India. There are certain features of social life in Dohk which might understandably lead to the conclusion that ritual purity is a concept of only minor importance to its inhabitants. For instance, whereas Brahmans observe a vegetarian diet in most parts of India, in Dohk they may eat meat. There is also a much narrower ritual gap between the highest and the lowest castes in Dohk than is usual even in Punjab. These features have been noted by Berreman in the hill village he studied and he lists them as general features of the Pahari culture area¹. But these local variations only mean that the rules are elaborated in less detail than in the plains, and not that they are not based on the same logic. One might say that the same species of thing are considered to be polluting in Dohk as in other Hindu villages, but the pollution they transmit is less powerful.

There are no generic terms in the dialect spoken in Dohk to express the polarization of the pure and the impure, such as the terms 'pole' and its opposite 'madi' used by the

1. Berreman (1960), pp. 776-7.

Kodagi speaking Coorgs¹. Different words may be used to refer to different classes of thing or person and to different types of purity and pollution. For instance, one could refer to a household vessel which is pure by virtue of having recently been scoured as sucā but a human being who is pure by virtue of having been born in a high caste would be described as śuddh. Purity and pollution represent to the villagers principles of action applied in specific situations rather than abstract theoretical notions, and hence they have developed a pragmatic vocabulary rather than one suited to general theorizing. But this does not mean that their behaviour does not show consistency, for a system of general principles may be deduced from their statements and action. My remarks here are based mainly on my observations of Brahman behaviour since my most frequent and intimate contacts were with Brahmans. But although Brahmans often asserted that members of low castes were less particular about ritual observances no marked caste variations in this respect were apparent to me (not always the case elsewhere)². There were however varying degrees of orthopraxy within castes and sometimes even within the

1. Srinivas (1952), p. 101.

2. For instance Dumont notes some differences in practice between Brahmans and Pramalai Kallar. Dumont (1957), p. 71.

same family¹.

Each villager can be regarded as having what has been termed a 'normal ritual status'², or 'natal' ritual status³, which he enjoys by virtue of having been born into a certain caste. This degree of purity can be threatened by certain types of contact and maximized by scrupulous avoidance of these contacts. It is useful here to refer to what Stevenson calls the 'Hindu pollution concept'.

Stevenson enumerates six main sources of pollution, subsumed by this term. These are;

- (i) the destruction of life and activities connected with it;
- (ii) death and decay;
- (iii) human bodily emissions;
- (iv) substances or activities which represent a violation of the sanctity of the cow, e.g. beef eating, contact with leather;
- (v) violation of the sanctity of other creatures which in certain areas are regarded as sacred in some degree;
- (vi) alcohol⁴.

The ritual prescriptions observed in Dohk are in accordance with these principles, although some affect the daily life

1. Harper (1964), pp. 175-6.

2. Srinivas (1952), pp. 106-7.

3. Stevenson (1954), pp. 46-9.

4. Ibid., p. 63.

of the villagers more closely than others. Principle (iii) is probably the most important. Thus as in other parts of India we find that saliva is regarded as polluting. This (together with the fact that food is a powerful transmitter of pollution) no doubt helps to explain the many restrictions which surround the activities of eating and cooking. Villagers in Dohk do not take this principle as far as Srinivas's Coorgs who must wash their hands even after touching the tongue or teeth with the fingers¹, but it explains why they regard someone who during a meal touches food or water vessels other than his own without washing his hands to have polluted those pots, so that whatever they contain cannot be consumed by others and they must be thoroughly scoured before being used again. Similarly, once a person has commenced a meal, any food he leaves is polluting to anyone else, for since food is always eaten with the hands he cannot help but have touched the plate with fingers that have also touched his mouth.

Another instance of the operation of this principle is the care taken to purify oneself after defecating. Faeces are impure and the process of defecating polluting, so that after going into the fields for this purpose a villager only

1. Srinivas (1952), p. 103.

regains his normal status of purity after he has cleaned himself with water and has then cleaned his hands with ashes or earth. By extension the pot in which he has carried the water is also impure. To wash his hands and then his pot the villager needs to use more water, yet whilst he is in his impure state he cannot touch the vessels in which the household's supply of water is kept. He therefore needs the assistance of some other member of the household who can pour water onto his hands while he rubs them and his pot with ashes. The great care which villagers exercise to maintain the maximum possible disjunction of the processes of eating and defecating is symbolized in the strict use of the right hand only in eating and the left hand only for cleaning oneself after defecating. A Brahman woman with whom I discussed this mentioned that she happened to be left handed but hastily added that of course she only used her right hand when it came to eating.

Women are specially liable to pollution of type (iii) since menstruation and childbirth are potent sources of pollution. In this part of India a woman is not required to maintain such strict seclusion as is often the case elsewhere¹ but she is expected to avoid entering the kitchen, or at least that part where food is cooked and served, and

1. E.g. Mandelbaum (1955), p. 230.

to bath when her period is finished. Birth also pollutes the mother of the child (and to a lesser degree the whole household) for a period which varies according to her caste but during which she is not allowed to cook or even enter the kitchen. Death initiates a similar period of pollution for the bereaved household, although we do not find here that there is any ban on its members merely touching outsiders.¹ Mourners do not observe any kind of seclusion, except a widow², nor does death pollution here demand the destruction of earthenware vessels used by the family and their replacement with new, pure vessels.³ But they are barred from cooking and the co-operation of neighbours is needed for the preparation of food.

Principle (i), respect for life, is a strong sentiment amongst the villagers but this does not prevent them from occasionally killing animals who prove themselves a nuisance - dogs who succumb to rabies or wild pigs who destroy the crops - without considering themselves polluted. In no caste is the consumption of meat altogether prohibited (except beef; Chamars are said by members of the higher castes to eat beef but I found no evidence to support this). Even Brahmans may eat meat, a feature which distinguishes Dohk from most other

1. Srinivas (1952), p. 106.

2. The chief mourner observes a certain degree of seclusion in Malwa. Mayer (1960), p. 235.

3. Dumont (1957), p. 249.

villages studied by anthropologists.¹ But in fact meat is not a very important article of diet here. There are only two animals whose flesh is used for food, the wild pig and the goat; the goats which the villagers keep in large numbers are mostly sold for slaughter in the towns, and wild pigs are difficult to kill unless one knows how to hunt them and can afford a gun. But if meat eating is not actually prohibited, vegetarianism is positively approved. It is hard to tell which villagers remain vegetarian by choice and which abstain from meat only because it is so seldom available, but the words of a Jat woman illustrate the sentiments of many of the womenfolk at least. When her husband brought home a portion of a goat as a neighbour had slaughtered she declared; "If I had my way, meat would not even be brought into the kitchen let alone eaten there". Other animal foods, fish and eggs, are regarded in much the same way: that is, they are permissible but inferior articles of diet for all castes.

Alcohol is also regarded as inferior, and to be a teetotaler praiseworthy, though only Brahmans are teetotal as a caste.

No doubt it is from principle (i) and (iv) that

1. E. G. in the village studied by Lewis, only the low caste Bhangis ate meat, and certainly not the Brahmans. Lewis (1958), pp. 40-1.

leather derives its polluting nature. A man is not polluted merely by the fact of wearing leather shoes, but he certainly may not wear them in the kitchen when food is being prepared or eaten. Some villagers take off their shoes and other articles, for example, purses or belts, when they eat for instance on a journey or at a restaurant in order to satisfy the feeling that the maximum dissociation between food and leather should be sought after.

The observance of these rules is of the greatest importance for the villagers' social life. For one thing, in order to maintain his normal state of purity each villager is closely dependent upon those around him. For example, the co-operation of another is needed even for the daily business of regaining normal purity after defecating. A woman needs the help of neighbours or relatives in the kitchen when she is debarred from the hearth during her periods or after childbirth. And since all forms of impurity are contagious in some degree it is not only in the Villagers' own interest to maximise his own purity but also a matter of consideration and courtesy for those around him to see that temporary and unavoidable forms of impurity are not passed on to others. Scraping one's vessels after eating, removing one's shoes before entering the kitchen - all these rules ensure that members of the same household can undergo

temporary forms of pollution with the minimum effect on each other.

The individual's relationships with others are governed by his current ritual state at all times, but the most conspicuous and permanent distinctions are those between members of different castes, who stand in positions of hierarchical superordination or subordination to each other according to their relative purity. As in other areas, restrictions on commensal, sexual and even (in the case of Chamars) physical contacts ensure that a certain distance is maintained between members of different castes. The following two tables summarize the main rules governing caste relations in Dohk. This information is useful as a general frame of reference which will make future references to particular castes meaningful. But also, if we are to consider Dumont's and Harper's contentions that the purity/pollution principle dominates the relationships between men and gods just as it dominates relationships between men of different castes, it is necessary to establish the nature of the latter type of relationship in the first place.

This is not the place for a detailed discussion of the relative merits of what Marriott has termed the 'attributional' and the 'interactional' theories of caste

Table 2. Commensal Exclusiveness

Caste	Castes from which specified items may or may not be accepted.					
	<u>Kacchā</u> food		<u>Pakkā</u> food		Water	
	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No
Brahman	Rajput Jat Tarkhan Lohar Suniara		Rajput Jat Tarkhan Lohar Suniara Nai		Rajput Jat Tarkhan Lohar Suniara	
		Nai Teli Chimba Julaha Dumna Chamar		Teli Chimba Julaha Dumna Chamar		Nai Teli Chimba Julaha Dumna Chamar
Tarkhan	Brahman Rajput Jat Lohar Suniara		Brahman Rajput Jat Lohar Suniara Nai Chimba		Brahman Rajput Jat Lohar Suniara Nai Chimba	
		Nai---Chimba Teli Julaha Dumna Chamar		Teli Julaha Dumna Chamar		Teli Julaha Dumna Chamar
Lohar	As for Tarkhans					
Suniara	No information due to absence of Suniara. Tarkhans and Lohars.			Probably as for		
Nai	Brahman Rajput Jat Tarkhan Lohar Suniara		Brahman Rajput Jat Lohar Suniara Chimba		Brahman Rajput Jat Lohar Suniara Chimba	
		Teli Chimba Julaha Dumna Chamar		Teli Julaha Dumna Chamar		Teli Julaha Dumna Chamar
Teli	Brahman Rajput Jat Tarkhan Lohar Nai Chimba		As for <u>kacchā</u> food		As for <u>kacchā</u> food	
		Dumna Chamar				
Chimba	Brahman Rajput Jat Tarkhan Lohar Suniara Nai Chimba		Brahman Rajput Jat Tarkhan Lohar Suniara Nai Chimba Julaha		As for <u>kacchā</u> food	
		Julaha Dumna Chamar		Dumna Chamar		
Chamar	Brahman Rajput Jat Tarkhan Lohar Suniara Nai Chimba Julaha		Brahman Rajput Jat Tarkhan Lohar Suniara Nai Chimba Julaha Dumna		As for <u>kacchā</u> food	
		Dumna (Daule) ¹ (Bat)		(Daule) (Bat)		

Table 3. Commensal Inclusiveness

Caste	Castes which will accept specified items			Notes.
	<u>Kacchā</u> food	<u>Pakkā</u> food	Water	
Brahman	All castes in Dohk	All castes in Dohk	All castes in Dohk	
Tarkhan				
Lohar				
Suniara				
Nai	All except Brahmans and some Tarkhans.	All castes in Dohk	All except Brahmans	
Teli	None in Dohk	None in Dohk	None in Dohk	No Hindus of any caste in the neighbourhood will eat with Teli but other Muslim e.g. Gujars, will do so. May use well only when no-one else is doing so.
Chimba	All except Brahmans some Tarkhans, Lohars and Nais.	All except Brahmans	All except Brahmans	May use the village well only when no-one else is doing so.
Chamar	None in Dohk	None in Dohk	None in Dohk	I could find no caste in the area which would take food from Chamars. Even Dumnas will not do so. Chamars may not use wells in Dohk but draw water from a stream in the fields.

ranking here.¹ Suffice it to say that I have used the latter method here since statements about rules of interaction can be checked objectively against actual behaviour. The attributional method would be difficult to apply in any case in an area where there are few differences between castes in matters of diet.

In Tables 2 and 3 I give information concerning commensal exclusiveness and inclusiveness amongst the castes found in Dohk. Applying the interactional method, the following hierarchy emerges.

Brahman
Tarkhan Lohar (Suniarara?)
Nai
Chimba
Teli
Chamar.

(The Teli's position is ambiguous and in a sense he is outside the Hindu ranking system, being a Muslim. For this reason not even the Chamars will accept food from him. On the other hand he does not pollute the village well by using it as a Chamar would, nor is physical contact with him avoided as it is with Chamars.)

1. See Marriott (1959), Also Gough (1959), Mahar (1959), and Mayer (1956).

This hierarchy resembles that which Berreman recorded in Sirkanda in that its main division is two-fold, rather than three-fold as in the plains of North India,¹ although artisans like smiths and carpenters fall into the upper division in Dohk whereas they fall into the lower division in Sirkanda. There is also a general agreement with Berreman's material in that we find that the distance between castes is narrower in Dohk than in comparable plains areas.² Berreman explains the latitude of practice in Pahari areas with reference to the fact that the hilly terrain precludes easy contact and communication between villages. Members of the particular caste in a particular village are cut off from their caste fellows in other villages and are forced into closer contact with members of other castes in their own village.³ This might explain the caste situation in Dohk, a village which has certainly been very isolated until recently, but it does not explain the weaker elaboration of rules concerning personal purity. Whether this laxity in Dohk is due to its proximity to the Punjab (an area much affected by contact with Muslim culture) or whether it is a general cultural feature of the Pahari region is hard to judge.

1. Berreman (1963), pp. 201-2.

2. Lewis (1958), p. 41.

3. Berreman (1960), pp. 780-7.

Laxity, however, is perhaps a misleading word for it suggests that the rules are there but are frequently broken. In Dohk the rules that exist are not, to be best of my knowledge, broken more often than those obtaining elsewhere (perhaps less frequently; being simpler they are easier to keep) and when they are broken the same kind of penalty is paid by the offender as elsewhere.¹

I hope I have established here that rules concerning purity and pollution do exist in Dohk and are of the same general nature and based on the same principles as those operating in other parts of India. This established, we can proceed to investigate whether they are as important in religion as in social life.

1. Serious ritual offences, e.g. cow-killing, sexual relations with members of low castes, are dealt with by a gathering of the local birāderī group who, in the last resort, can penalize the offender by ordering his ostracization. The only case of this kind which has arisen in Dohk in recent years is that of Sri Ram. He is a Brahman who, about fifteen years ago, formed a liaison with a Chimba widow. He set up house with her and her children by her dead husband and settled his land on their name. The Brahmans of Dohk offered him the alternatives of ending this association or facing a social boycott, but he refused to leave the Chimba woman. The other Brahmans still will not eat in his house, do not invite him to their weddings, funerals and other functions, and avoid social contact with him altogether as far as this is possible. Cf. Majumdar (1958), pp. 95-9 and Mayer (1960), pp. 260-268.

Chapter 3. Private Worship.

The Hindu villager expresses his religious ideas most fluently through the medium of ritual. Through symbolic action he demonstrates his beliefs about the nature of the universe and man's place within it, where his lack of verbal training might make it difficult for him to communicate these ideas directly. Through ritual he dramatizes his needs and aspirations and his relationships with the beings, both divine and human, that people his environment. It is central to his religious life and has an important role in his social life also, since he is frequently called upon to participate in ritual initiated by others. Wedding ceremonies, public scripture recitals, and the many festivals which punctuate the villager's calendar provide the occasions on which he can publicly affirm his participation in the Hindu religious tradition.

It is convenient to divide this description of Hindu religious activity into three parts corresponding to the three main categories of ritual occasion - private individual worship, public priestly worship and calendrical rites - although I should add as a precaution (lest it seem that I have succumbed to the classificatory habit which I deplored in Chapter 1) that these divisions are made purely as a

matter of convenience and are not intended to have any theoretical value.

The greater part of the religious activity which takes place in the village consists of private acts of worship on the part of individual villagers in response to personally felt needs. It is these rites, which I shall henceforth refer to as 'private rites', which form the subject of this chapter. I shall divide my description of these rituals into sections dealing with (a) the theological assumptions which underly them; (b) the sequence of symbolic acts which they comprise; (c) the circumstances and purposes for which they are carried out; (d) the relationships between men and the deities to which they are addressed; (e) the pantheon itself; (f) the extensions of private ritual outside the home, in shrines and at places of pilgrimage.

Concepts of the divine.

Fundamental to the villager's thinking is the distinction between God and the gods, between the Divine itself and the various divinities. The terms Bhagvān, Paramātmā, and occasionally Rab or Khudā,¹ are used to denote a somewhat abstract idea of God as the divine principle immanent in all creation and sustaining life. "God is like

1. Rab and Khudā are terms of Muslim origin but are used by Hindus also in this area.

the sap of a tree. The sap pervades it and if it dries the tree cannot live. So God is not in this place or that place, but in all things, and without him they cannot live," explained a young Brahman. It is not strictly true to suggest (as Berreman does)¹ that this concept of God is not personified, for the supreme deity is not regarded as being entirely unconcerned with human affairs or without responsibility or power to influence human welfare. In everyday conversation when villagers make statements like "God has been good to me", or "it is due to God's will", they use the terms Bhagvān or Paramātmā where I have used the English word 'God'. But God is only seen as influencing human fortunes in a rather general way. A man might attribute his general lot or his general state of health to the will of God or to the effects of the deeds (karma) which he has done in past lives. But specific misfortunes or specific happy events are more likely to be ascribed to the activities of the various devatās, or deities, which constitute the local pantheon. These are conceived in a more definite way than the vaguer concept of Bhagvān and have more distinctive attributes. The devatas are not merely personal, they are personalities.

1. Berreman (1963), p. 83.

The villager seldom juxtaposes the concepts devatā and Bhagvān, but if he ever does so they are not seen as being in any way contradictory; they do not represent two competing theories of the dāvine but are complementary ideas. The devatās occupy a rung in the cosmic hierarchy higher than that of mortal humans but lower than that of Bhagvān, although to the extent that the devatās themselves form a ranked hierarchy¹ the greater gods at the upper end of the scale tend to be merged with Bhagvān so that they appear as refractions of his power. Thus the name Bhagvān is even attached as a suffix to the names of the great deities Shiva, Krishna and Vishnu. The lower rung of the divine hierarchy is but a little removed from the human realm and many devatas of less extensive power have recognized human origins as deified ancestors, saints or heroes.

The relationship between Bhagvān and the devatas is explicitly described as hierarchical, as in one Brahman's depiction of the situation, "God is like the chief of police and the devatas are like his constables; they do his work but he is above them all."

God is higher than the devatas, yet it is to the latter that most religious rituals are addressed. Being immanent rather than manifest, Bhagvān cannot be depicted through images, neither is he pleased by outward gestures

1. See below, p. 163.

in any case. "Bhagvān is not some devata or ghost to be appeased by muttering his name in temples; he should be worshipped in the heart", said one informant. The devatas, on the other hand, are accessible mainly through ritual acts designed to please them. A further difference lies in the moral value placed on the worship of Bhagvān compared with that given to the cult of the devatas. It would be an exaggeration to suggest that the worship of the devatas is entirely devoid of a 'communicative' element, but it is motivated by predominantly practical considerations.

Briefly its rationale rests on the following premises; that the devatas have it in their power to influence human welfare both for the better and for the worse; they are gratified to receive offerings; by pleasing them in this way the individual can hope to persuade them to remove misfortune and to bestow good fortune. They worship of Bhagvān is primarily of moral value and is only of indirect practical use. If asked what actions constitute pun, or merit, the worship of God is usually the one which the villager will mention first of all. "To worship Bhagvān every morning before doing anything else", "to repeat the name of God every day", "to remember God all the time", were some typical replies to this question.

But the worship of the devatas is not indispensable

to the leading of a virtuous life. Numerous Hindu sects have from time to time urged that the ritualistic practices associated with the devatas are actually hindrances to salvation. Two such movements, Sikhism and the more modern Radhaswami sect, have made a few converts in the neighbourhood of Dohk, especially the Radhaswamis who have a major mission centre about thirty miles away, higher in the hills. But the cult of the devatas is not extinct amongst the members of these sects; I myself saw a Tarkhan woman, who went regularly to attend Radhaswami meetings, perform ritual worship of the devata Gugga on the festival of Gugga Naumi. Some villagers who are not members of these sects take a deprecatory attitude to the worship of devatas, especially those villagers who have had some education. A Brahman farmer who had spent some time outside the village and had studied as far as matriculation standard said, "The worship of the devatas is all superstition on the part of ignorant and simple minded people. What is really necessary is to revere Bhagvān in your heart." All the same, I noticed that at the commencement of the Ram Lila performance of which he was the main sponsor, he took a major part in the ritual worship of the devatas which inaugurated the festivities. Though it is not given so much moral value as the non-ritualistic worship of Bhagvān, the ritual cult of the devatas presumably corresponds to needs which are too

deep-rooted for it to be easily discarded.

Since the worship of God is not ritualistic, but inward, it is not accessible to observation by the anthropologist, and so it is impossible to ascertain how much time the villagers really devote to it. Everyone claimed to worship God but no-one claimed to set aside any set time for this kind of worship regularly (as several people did for the worship of chosen devatas).¹ It is paradoxical that it is the cult of the devatas which seems to absorb more of the villager's energy, even though in theory it is considered to have less spiritual importance than the worship of Bhagvān.

The worship of the devatas.

The complex of ritual activity through which the worship of the devatas is expressed is denoted by the term mathā tekṇā. This phrase is as frequently used in a secular context as in a religious context, and its literal meaning is 'to bow down'. In general it denotes respectful salutation of a superior on the part of an inferior in rank, or of a senior by a junior in years. It can refer to the act of touching the feet of an elder kinsman. Equally it can denote the greeting offered by a person of low caste or by a much

1. See below, p. 115.

younger caste fellow, whereby the lesser in rank raises his right hand and says, "mathā tekde" - we salute you". The act of supplication to a deity is also termed mathā tekṇā, the idea common to both the religious and the secular usage being the expression of respect and awareness of one's own subordination. When the villagers use this term in connection with a devata, they may mean quite literally the physical act of bowing or prostrating oneself before the image of the devata or at his shrine, but they also use it to denote a sequence of ritual acts performed in honour of the devata of which such an obeisance may be only part but whose climax is the presentation of an offering of food. When I refer to the villagers' 'worshipping' their devatas it is to be understood that this ritual sequence is intended.

The details of the worship depend somewhat on the taste and imagination of the person who performs it, but it always involves more than a mere inward prayer to the devata. Such a mental gesture may certainly be made but it is accompanied by certain conventional symbolic acts. I will describe a typical example of an act of worship addressed to a devata before attempting a general analysis of such ritual.

For the past ten years or more a Brahman housewife, Vidya Vati, had been in the habit of worshipping a family

sati¹ twice a year at harvest time, and would not start to use the new grain until this act of thanksgiving had been performed. After the completion of the maize harvest of 1966 I observed her carry out the rites which I describe here.

Vidya Vati rose early on the morning of the day she had decided upon for worship and before doing anything else took a bath and put on clean clothes. She then cleaned her kitchen and spread a fresh layer of cowdung over the hearth and the cooking area surrounding it. Having thus made her kitchen ready she prepared breakfast for her family but did not eat anything at all herself until later in the day when she had completed the rites. Next she began to prepare the food which was to be presented to the sati. This consisted of a kind of sweet pudding known as karah made from sugar, ghi and flour. Then she fetched the image of the sati (which consisted of a stone slab showing the sati and her child carved in relief) from the house of a kinsman where it was kept and set it up against the wall of the kitchen, which was where she intended to perform the worship. She then assembled the other items needed for the worship. Sitting

1. A sati is a woman who commits suicide by throwing herself onto her husband's funeral pyre. Such women are sometimes worshipped as devatas. See below, p.148.

before the image, she began to sprinkle water over it. Next she applied a little red powder to the forehead of the sati to make the decorative mark known as tika. Then she tied a length of the thick red thread used in many different kinds of religious ritual, known as mauli, around the middle of the slab. She lighted a stick of incense and waved it to and fro before the image before setting it down on the ground where it continued to burn until the ritual was completed. Joining her hands and bowing her head she muttered a prayer to the sati. "Oh Sati, it is all due to your goodness that our harvest has been good this year. Be kind to us and make it always so. Be merciful to our family. Protect the children, give them good health. Make the house happy and prosperous. It is all due to your power and grace and we thank you". Then she took a little of the pudding she had prepared and pressed it to the 'mouths' of the goddess and her child depicted on the slab. This completed the rites addressed to the image. Taking the dish of pudding she distributed portions to members of the household who were at home, and set aside portions for those who were not there at the time. Then she went to the house of her husband's brother and those of his two closest classificatory brothers and handed out portions to each member of all three households, again setting aside shares for those who were busy elsewhere at the time. She returned to her own home and put the remainder of the pudding away. Anyone who

called during the day was offered a little before they left.

The expressed purpose of making any offering is always to please the devata addressed and thus obtain some blessing, usually more or less specific. In the case described above the aim was to persuade the goddess to ensure good harvests in future years by making a pleasing offering in thanksgiving for the one which had just been gathered in. The contribution of the acts I have described can only be understood if we treat them as symbolic elements. Villagers themselves are usually able to give 'explanations' of the ritual symbols they use. Few would dispute that these interpretations are important data which must be taken into account in any anthropological analysis, though anthropologists disagree as to how far the pursuit of meaning is legitimate beyond this point. Nadel, for example, states that "uncomprehended 'symbols' have no part in social enquiry; their social effectiveness lies in their capacity to indicate, and if they indicate nothing to the actors, they are from our point of view, irrelevant and indeed no longer symbols (whatever their significance for the psycho-analyst)."¹ Turner, however, asserts that it is possible to go beyond what the informant says about a particular symbol in a particular ritual without relapsing into unverifiable guess-

1. Nadel (1954), p. 108.

work. By relating all the situations in which a certain symbol is used, its 'total meaning' emerges. Certain symbols emerge as 'dominant symbols' having a multiplicity of possible references, and tending to be 'ends in themselves'.¹ The ritual elements in mathā tekṇā can be analysed in this way; all of them occur in other religious and social contexts and by relating these contexts we can discover more about what they mean.²

Anyone who wishes to make an offering must, as Vidya Vati did, take a bath before commencing the procedure. This, the villagers say, is in order to make the worshipper pure. If for any reason this is not possible (for instance because of a shortage of water in the dry season) then he should at least wash his hands in clean water. A change of clothes is desirable, though some poorer villagers may not possess more than one suit of clothes, and this can be omitted. What appears to be indispensable as a preliminary is some contact with water through bathing or washing. Even if it were not the case that villagers openly state that "water is pure", the purifying properties of water could be deduced from a comparison with the other circumstances in which bathing or

1. Turner (1964), p. 49.

2. I am not sure that such total meanings are bound to be 'unavowed and submerged' as Turner suggests. It is not my experience that the participant is always so dominated by the activity context of the particular rite that he is incapable of seeing beyond it, although some villagers related the uses of a particular symbol more readily than others.

washing has symbolic (i.e. more than merely hygienic) value. For example, a member of a higher caste who for any reason is obliged to visit the Chamar quarters, to sit among Chamars, or to come into physical contact with them, will ask some member of his household to sprinkle a little water over him before he enters the house on his return home. But why should purification be necessary before worshipping, if the worshipper is enjoying his normal ritual state of purity at the time? The villagers' account of this act is that it is "to keep the devatas pure". Thus it becomes apparent that although the role of water is similar in both cases, the appropriate comparison here is not with an act of purification after contact with members of an impure caste; rather it is analogous to the care which a Chamar will exercise (unless he wishes to be deliberately insulting) not to pollute a Brahman - for instance by not entering his kitchen and by not touching his person except where circumstances make this unavoidable.¹

The relationship between man and devata seems comparable to the hierarchical relationship between high caste and low caste.

The same kind of interpretation can be given for the

1. When a Chamar receives money or food in payment for work done for a member of a higher caste, he stretches out his hands so that whatever is to be given may be dropped into his hands without any physical contact taking place. It is not possible to maintain this care when Chamars are engaged along with Brahmans in the construction of a house or similar work.

application of fresh cowdung to the hearth before cooking the prasād. The cow is regarded as being pure above all other animals, and although any violation of its sanctity gives rise to impurity, the normal products of the living beast are regarded as being especially pure, and sometimes purifying agents also. Cowdung is mixed with mud and applied to the floors of all rooms from time to time since it makes a good plaster, but applications to the kitchen floor are more frequent (another example of the ritual concern which surrounds all processes and places connected with food).

The food which is offered to a devata may be of various types - some devatas are thought to be especially fond of a particular kind of food. But it usually consists of a sweet dish of some description; the pudding offered by Vidya Vati is perhaps the most common offering, although roṭ, maize bread sweetened with crude sugar, and sweetmeats or fruit are also suitable. Villagers did not ascribe any particular meaning to this choice themselves. But sweet dishes are not part of the villagers' daily diet and are consumed only on holidays or at feasts, no doubt because they are expensive to prepare compared with the plain maize bread and lentils which are everyday fare. They are looked upon as suitable to set before respected guests, and the preference

for this kind of food when making offerings to the devatas may have no deeper significance than this. Offerings of meat are not made to devatas in Dohk, a point which I discuss at greater length below.

When offerings are made villagers will go to some pains to obtain an image of the devata they wish to worship. The term 'image' should not be taken to mean here only a sculpted figure of stone or metal, though some households do possess these. Most households possess coloured prints of the devatas which can serve the purpose of icons as well as decorating the walls. If there is no image and none can be borrowed from a neighbour or friend, the offering may be made without one and the ritual attentions which are directed to the image are omitted from the sequence. The worshipper will simply light incense and make his petition to the devata. Addressing him by name he asks him to partake of what is being offered, and then distributes it as prasād. Whether an image is being used or not, there are no special rules as to where the worship should take place, although the worshipper's own kitchen or courtyard are the most usual places. No purification of the site is needed beforehand such as is the case for certain other rites, but the worshipper will remove his shoes before coming before the image. This can be understood partly as a

gesture of respect to the devata, comparable to the rule which used to oblige Chamars to remove their shoes before coming through that part of the village inhabited by the other castes. This practice has been discontinued during the last ten or twenty years but Chamars still remove their shoes before coming into the courtyard of a high caste person and even a high caste person may remove his shoes before entering the house of a person he respects. But this is not the only meaning which this gesture yields. Villagers state explicitly that "leather is impure", and that this is why one should remove one's shoes in temples or when worshipping the devatas. So the exclusion of shod persons from the area where worship is to take place is therefore comparable also to the exclusion of shod persons from the cooking area. In the latter case it is the purity of the family's food supply which is at stake whilst in the former it is the purity of the devata's image which is at stake, but in both cases it is ritual purity which is threatened.

The next phase of the ritual consists of various acts directed to the image by the worshipper and it is whilst doing these that he makes his petition to the devata. Vidya Vati herself explained, "Pouring water, tying mauli, burning incense, all these things make the devatas pleased. If we do these things they know that we remember them and they give

us what we want. They smell the incense and the food and become happy." But it is not immediately clear why these particular acts should be considered gratifying to the devatas. The ritual significance which bathing has in other contexts and which I have already discussed suggests that it may be a purificatory rite here also, even if gratification is the conscious aim of the performer. Certainly some care is taken that images should not come into contact with polluting substances (they are not usually left lying about on the ground where they might come into contact with people's feet or shoes) and metal or carved figures of the devatas are generally kept in a cupboard or chest rather than displayed openly when they are not being used in ritual. So if we interpret the worshipper's bath as an attempt to maximize his purity before coming into the presence of a ritual superior (the devata), we might interpret the act of bathing the image as an attempt to minimize the effects of any pollution which the image may accidentally or unwittingly have been caused to suffer.

The application of the ṭikā and the maulī do not appear to have anything to do with purification. However these items are used on other occasions besides explicitly religious ones, and these other uses may indicate possible 'meanings'. The ṭikā for instance is applied in several different

circumstances, religious and secular. Firstly it is a form of personal adornment used by women. Formerly it was the prerogative of the married woman whose husband was alive as the symbol of her suhāg, her happily married state. Nowadays unmarried girls also sometimes wear it on festivals, weddings, and other such happy occasions. Widows still refrain from wearing it but nowadays it is only the sandhūr, the mark in the parting of the hair made with the same red powder, which is an accurate indication of a woman's marital status.

Secondly, parents sometimes apply a ṭikā mark to their children's foreheads on the sagrānd, the first day of the Hindu month, which is often kept as a minor holiday and celebrated by the preparation of sweet food. Thirdly it may be applied by the priest to the foreheads of those who come to worship at a temple when portions of sacralized food are distributed to them. These three distinct usages of the same ritual element may seem to have little to do with each other, but they do have one common denominator, namely that they are all associated with occasions or conditions of blessedness or happiness. The woman whose husband is still alive is said to be blessed and her presence is auspicious at any religious ceremony. The sagrānd is always an auspicious day and although villagers can seldom afford to set it aside as a rest day, it is the nearest equivalent to the Christian

sabbath. The visitor to a temple also partakes of happiness and blessedness for he has 'had the darśan' of the devata. (The term darśan denotes not merely the physical act of allowing oneself to be seen but suggests the gracious presentation of oneself on the part of a respected personage. It is used in polite conversation and in conversation with one's superiors in status). He has received the grace of that devata by consuming food offered before the image. Perhaps it is this association with happiness and auspiciousness which the worshipper hopes to convey to the devata when he makes an offering in his own home also.

The maulī seems to have similar associations. It is used in other religious ritual besides the private rites I describe here and in that context is said to afford protection to the wearer.¹ In the secular context it is used to tie the lengths of cloth which are given at weddings, and other family occasions, into bundles. Frequently it is included when ritual gifts are made to kin; for instance when a woman meets the bride of a kinsman for the first time after the wedding she should put a coconut and a rupee into her outspread veil or into her hands. These gifts are a way of congratulating her, and a length of maulī is often included with them. Here again the common association of these different ritual

1. See below p. 203.

uses seems to be the connection with gladness and auspiciousness, and again this may account for the idea that to offer this gift will cause the devata to be happy.

Both maulī and ṭikā are invariably red in colour, and red itself has recognized associations with happiness and good fortune. Villagers state, for instance, that it is for this reason that the bride is always dressed in red at a wedding, and expressed amazement at the idea that white should be a favoured colour for brides in England. "White is only for old women and widows; red is the colour for happiness".

The offering of the maulī and ṭikā can only be made if an image is being used, but incense is burned even when an image is not available. Here again, the expressed object of the act is to please the devata concerned. It is interesting to note that although devatas are supposed to be able to show themselves to men on earth in various guises, and even to be associated with particular geographical localities (i.e. Shiva is said to live in the Himalayas), they are often spoken of as though they lived above the sky. "The scent of the incense goes up to the devatas and they are made happy by it", said one informant. The same sort of imagery is used to account for the ringing of bells and gongs which may be included in this phase of the ritual. "The sound

goes up and reaches the ears of the devatas up there. Then they become pleased because they know that their devotees are remembering them."

Not all of these acts need be included every time worship takes place. But looking at the range of acts which are considered pleasing to the devatas, we see that it gives scope for the gratification of each of the senses. The scent of the incense appeals to the nose, the sound of bells or gongs to the ear, the offering of food to the palate, the bathing of the image to the sense of touch and the bright colours of the maulī and ṭikā to the sight. The sensual emphasis in the kind of worship directed to the devatas makes the contrast between it and the anti-ritual nature of the abstract worship considered fitting for Bhagvān all the more striking. Ritual is not just unnecessary in the worship of God, it is positively inappropriate; in the worship of the devatas not only is it essential but it involves acts which utilize the properties of the physical world in explicit and manifest ways.

The climax of the sequence of acts of gratification consists of the presentation of the offering of food. If an image is being used, a small portion of whatever has been prepared is pressed against the 'mouth'; if there is no image the worshipper simply tells the devata that the food is for

him and leaves the dish there for a few moments so that the devata may 'consume' his share. "The devata does not really eat the food", explained one informant, "for if you come back in the morning it will still be there. But the devata is pleased by it. Devatas do feel hungry but they satisfy their hunger when they receive food without actually consuming the food." What remains after the devata has received his share is distributed amongst the worshipper's relations and neighbours. This consecrated food is known as prasād, which literally means 'grace', and is considered to convey the favour of the devata to all who consume it. This appears at first to be a reversal of one of the most strictly observed pollution rules. Normally any food which a person leaves on his plate after taking a meal is polluting to anyone else. If he does not wish to finish it himself no-one else in the household can eat it; in accordance with the general principle that bodily emissions like saliva are polluting, it is jūthā and should be thrown away. Why then is the deliberate consumption of 'left-over' food here considered to be so highly desirable? Some clue as to why this may be so can be gathered if we look at the few exceptional situations where food left over by humans may be consumed. Firstly, certain low castes may receive the left over food of higher castes without their ritual status being further degraded; thus in Dohk, Chamars are occasionally

offered, and may accept, left over food from Brahman households. I even saw one very poor Chamar girl beg for scraps from the Brahman woman who employed her to bring firewood from the jungle. A wife may eat the remainder of a meal her husband has started without being polluted, and a child may eat food left over by his parents. In all these situations an inferior, either a ritual inferior or an inferior in terms of the structure of authority and seniority in the household, can eat the left over food of a superior without being polluted as he would be in other circumstances. The acceptability of the 'left over' portion of a divine meal may then be a confirmation rather than a reversal of the usual rule if it is understood that the devata is more pure than his worshipper. However, yet another meaning can be deduced from the act of consuming prasād. Member of the same household or very close friends of the same caste may occasionally share an eating dish as a sign of their affection for each other, although this is considered rather a disgusting and unclean habit in other circumstances.¹ A mother and child may eat from the same plate without either considering themselves polluted. So perhaps the sharing of left-over food may be taken to symbolize here not only the separation of the ritually superior devata and the ritually

1. Hindus in Dohk often claim that "Muslims are dirty because they will all eat from the same dish".

inferior worshipper but also the closeness of the devata (in terms of affection) which the worshipper hopes to achieve.

To partake of the prasād distributed by the sacrificer is an act of religious significance in itself, since the worshipper is, as it were, passing on the favour of the god to those to whom he gives it. A mere crumb suffices to convey the blessings and every effort is made to see that all members of the household receive some, however small the amount. There are no strict rules defining the circle of people to whom prasād should be offered after making an offering, but to deliberately omit to give prasād to a close relative or neighbour would be considered a deep insult, since it would imply that one did not wish that person to prosper. In fact even a casual passer-by who happens to be present when the prasād is being distributed ought to be given some. For example, I happened one day to pass by a small shrine dedicated to Shiva which stands near the roadside about three miles from Dohk. Two young girls from a nearby village were worshipping there, and although they were not personally known to me, they called out to me to come and receive the prasād they had just offered to Shiva. A forestry officer, a farmer, and several other people travelling along the road received portions also before the girls returned to their village to distribute the remainder.

To refuse to accept prasād from the worshipper would also be considered offensive, since it would imply either that the food had been unacceptable to the deity or that one did not concur with whatever desire the worshipper had expressed by making the offering.¹ In either case it would constitute a serious insult. One Brahman woman told me how once, during the civil strife of 1947 she had been frantic with anxiety about her husband who at that time held a job in Lahore. Weeks went by without any word from him and she began to fear that he had been killed. She then made a vow that she would worship Devi as soon as her husband returned or wrote to say that he was well. At last he arrived in the village, having escaped from many dangers, and the woman joyfully prepared the offering to the goddess. Her husband had previously quarrelled with his elder brother, and during his absence in the plains this brother had attempted to gain possession of his land by giving out that before his departure the younger had promised the land to him, and since he must now be presumed dead the land should be registered in his name. But in spite of strained relations between the two families the wife felt that at this happy moment all differences should be ignored.

1. If this is known, which is not always the case. I was the only passer-by who made any enquiry about the purpose of the worship of Shiva in the incident discussed above.

Accordingly she took prasād to her husband's brother's house and offered it to her sister-in-law. But she was told that she could keep her prasād since no-one but she was happy that her husband had returned. She recalled with bitterness that it was this incident which had persuaded her that it was useless to seek better relations with her brother-in-law's household and in fact there is still considerable tension between the two families even twenty years later. I did not hear of another incident of this kind.

The other major consideration which may make prasād unacceptable is the factor of caste. Many of the kinds of food used as offerings do not require the addition of water in the cooking process, or may even consist of uncooked food (e.g. fruit or soaked chick peas). Hence they count as pakkā food and their acceptance is subject to few restrictions. This means that except for the Chamars, members of all castes in Dohk can attend each other's religious ceremonies fairly freely with the question of food pollution only very occasionally arising. Invitations are seldom if ever extended across the division which separates the Chamars from the other castes. This may be due to the relative poverty of the Chamars which might make it difficult for them to provide large quantities of prasād,

also to the known unwillingness of members of higher castes to visit their quarters unless it is absolutely necessary. But I was told that if a high caste person were to find himself present when prasād was being distributed by a Chamar he would certainly not be able to eat the prasād (presumably the pollution of the distributor cancels out the purifying effect of the association with the devata in accordance with the principle that pollution overcomes purity).¹ The only occasion on which I was able to observe this was when I attended a Chamar wedding ceremony in the company of a Brahman and a Rajput who had guided me to the somewhat inaccessible village where the wedding was held. After the religious ceremonies were completed sweetmeats were offered as prasād to all present. My companions accepted a handful each but did not eat their shares. When I asked the Rajput what he would do with his portion he said, "I shall leave it where some animal such as a dog or crow can find it and eat it. Or I could give it to some Chamar in my own village. I could not eat it myself but it would have been insulting to the devatas not to take it as well as being rude to the Chamars. They are only low caste but they were our hosts and one should wish people joy at a marriage".

1. Stevenson (1954), p. 50.

If a person does not wish to eat his share for any other reason (either because he is not hungry or because he has no taste for sweet things), he will follow the same kind of procedure. He will keep back a token portion for himself, pass on the excess to someone else or leave it on some elevated place such as a window ledge or a wall where it may be consumed by sparrows or crows. Great care, however, is exercised not to let prasād fall to the ground "because it might get trodden by people's feet or other impure things". Any other items used in the preceding ritual are disposed of with the same care that they may not come into contact with any substance considered polluting. For instance, if flowers have been placed in front of the image as a gesture designed to gratify the devata, these will either be placed in a stream or hung on a tree so that they are clear of the ground "so that they cannot be touched by any impure thing".

The making of offerings after the fashion I have described here is essentially a private affair in that when a person performs such rites he does not invite other people, does not need the assistance of any religious specialist, and does not expect the benefits obtained to affect anyone other than himself or a person he himself has named in his prayer (in all cases that came to my notice a member of the worshipper's family). But if the worship itself is private,

the distribution of prasād gives it public consequences, for through this act the worshipper conveys the grace of the devata obtained by his devotions to a wider circle of people. The offering of food elicits the favour of the devata and in turn acts as the vehicle by which that favour can be transmitted to men. To a lesser extent the distribution of prasād can have secular consequences; there is a certain prestige to be gained from offering large quantities of prasād and in giving food which is made from the best ingredients, although private offerings of this kind do not provide such extensive opportunities for demonstrating one's wealth and generosity as wedding ceremonies and other life cycle rites.

This description of the ritual which attends private offerings to the devatas shows that the concept of purity and pollution is as crucial in this context as in secular contexts. When a villager makes an offering he communicates with a being who is his ritual superior; the ritual sequence used is comparable to an encounter between two human beings of disparate ritual status in the sense that certain rules must be observed in order to make communication possible without any threat to the superior's purity. We can summarise the ritual of making an offering as falling roughly into three phases: (1) preparatory, in which the

worshipper purifies himself and provides himself with a pure offering of food prepared under conditions of the maximum purity; (2) pleasing attentions to the devata (through the medium of an image if there is one), culminating in the presentation of the offering of food; (3) the disposal of the food, now made even more pure by the fact that the devata has partaken of it, and of other items used in the cult, also sacralized by their association with the devata's purity.

The context of private worship

In this section I deal with the events and circumstances which lead to the making of offerings to the devatas, i.e. what Turner calls the "action-field".¹

Though the worship of the devata is regarded as having value as a spiritual discipline² the most casual examination of the cults of the devatas as they are practised in Dohk reveals that they are seldom activated by other-worldly motives. The concept of spiritual salvation is hardly a dominant one in the religious life of the village, and moksha - release from rebirth - is seldom mentioned as a personal aim. As will be apparent from this material, religious activities are more often directed towards the more immediate concerns of bettering one's worldly fortunes

1. Turner (1964), p. 47

2. cf. Daniélou (1964), pp. 366-373.

in this life, or at most ensuring rebirth in favourable circumstances in the next. The devatas can help little in the achievement of the latter aim, which depends largely on the moral quality of a man's actions. But they have much power to bestow good or bad fortune in the present life, and it is the making of offerings rather than righteousness which persuades them to use this power in favour of a devotee. This is not because the gods are immoral; if they use their powers to cause misfortunes at times it is not because they are wicked by nature. Some deities, such as Siddh Channo or Durga, are intensely feared on account of the sufferings which they are thought capable of visiting upon those who displease them even unintentionally, yet they are not thought to be essentially demonic, for no-one would deny that they also bestow blessings upon those who please them. It is rather the case that whereas justice and goodness are the characteristics of the supreme Bhagvān, the distinctive characteristic of the devatas is their power, which they wield in a fashion that can best be described as 'amoral'.

Offerings may be made either to obtain blessings which it is felt the devata can bestow or to remove affliction on the whole for which a devata is suspected to be responsible. When a devata causes suffering, it is said

that this is due to the devata's khoṭā. This word is used of human beings as well as of devatas and has the basic meaning of 'malice', 'ill will', and occasionally 'deceit' or 'trickery'. When some crisis or misfortune occurs, the villager does not necessarily conclude immediately that a devata's khoṭā is the cause. If his buffalo has strayed it may be that the child who took it out to graze was careless. If his roof caught fire it may be that a spark jumped from an untended hearth. He will then take the appropriate measures - scold the child, see that his wife guards the fire more carefully in future. Usually an isolated occurrence of this type is not blamed upon the khoṭā of some devata if there is some obvious 'natural' cause. I enclose the word 'natural' between inverted commas because I do not wish to imply that the villager sees anything unnatural or even supernatural in the idea that devatas are capable of visiting human beings with disaster. The distinction between natural and supernatural occurrences is not relevant to the villager's mode of thinking in this context. Neither the blessings nor the trouble which a devata can bring violate the rules by which life in this universe is regulated. On the contrary, nothing is more 'natural' than that those who are angry should harrass those who cause their anger, using whatever powers they have at their disposal. Men and women themselves

(especially the latter) can harm their enemies by super-physical means, although this kind of harm is usually described as being due to ṭuṇā, i.e. sorcery, rather than khota. To the villager the distinction which is relevant here is that between trouble which is brought about through the ill will of another being (whether human or divine) and that which is not.

It is only trouble which is persistent or not easily accounted for which leads the afflicted person to look beyond immediate physical causes. Chronic ailments are typical of the kind of misfortune attributed to the khota of devatas, and instances recorded included causes of recurrent bouts of fever, sores and skin eruptions which failed to heal, persistent rheumatism or nausea. Other misfortunes which were thought to be caused by khota included the repeated occurrence of a particular kind of accident over a period of time, for instance when buffaloes had strayed or been lost on many occasions in spite of having been firmly tethered, or where a person had repeatedly cut or burnt himself and no obvious carelessness was apparent. In looking beyond the immediate 'natural' causes for suffering the villager does not deny their operation. But he seeks to read meaning into the persistence of trouble in the face of all his efforts to remove it. His task is then to discover

the identity of the agent responsible so that the right remedy may be applied.

There are professional specialists whose business it is to do this and who are known by the term celā.¹ Such diviners are thought to have a special knowledge of the ways of the devatas which enable them to discover which one is responsible for a client's misfortunes. A celā may be of any caste. The two celās most frequently consulted by residents of Dohk are a Jat and a Chamar both living in nearby villages (there is no celā in Dohk itself). The function is not hereditary; a celā may choose to pass on what he knows or what powers he is capable of transmitting to his son, or he may prefer to convey them to some other person whom he thinks suitable, or again, he may decide not to pass them on to anyone at all. A villager described the death of the well known celā who had lived in a village near Dohk. "He was in great agony, because the thing which was in him wanted to come out. It wanted to be passed on to someone else. But the celā refused to do this. He did not want to give it even to his own son because he did not find anyone he knew worthy of it. So he died like that, in great

1. The term celā means 'disciple', especially the disciple of a holy man, but in this part of India is used to refer to other kinds of religious functionary as well.

distress."¹

Anyone can become a celā provided that he can convince others that he can divine accurately and that his powers are therefore genuine. Villagers do not have a regular relationship with any one celā such as they have with their family priests or purohīts² but when in trouble will turn to that celā in their neighbourhood who has the best reputation or in whom they have the greatest faith. A successful celā will naturally tend to build up a regular clientele of 'customers' who resort to him rather than to anyone else but he is as likely to lose it if his powers flag. There is no limitation of clientele due to caste restrictions, since the celā-customer relationship does not involve the kind of contact which would be polluting to either. Thus there is no bar to a Brahman's consulting a Chamar celā if the latter's reputation is great enough to attract him.

It should be emphasised that the celā has no special ritual qualifications or religious authority such as the

1. This statement suggests belief in a familiar spirit or some such superhuman source of guidance, but this idea is not well-developed in this part of India. Questioning revealed that the 'thing' this informant referred to (I have translated literally here) represented the accumulated knowledge and skill of the celā, albeit represented as active and personified.

2. See below, p. 188.

Brahman priest has. He does not have any monopoly of communication with the devatas since the gods may reveal themselves to anyone in human guises or in dreams. He merely has certain skills of detection which can help his customer to save time and resources by revealing which devata would most profitably be approached in a particular case of misfortune. The prestige he derives from this is very much of the kind which any skilled worker - for instance a clever carpenter or a deft potter- might gain through success in plying their craft. Unlike those of the Brahman priest, the celā's services are in no way indispensable and more often than not the villager decides how to deal with his affliction without consulting a celā at all. Certainly he does not have the innovatory powers which Berreman attributes to shamans in another Pahari area.¹

The celā receives admiration rather than power and even the financial rewards are small since the client gives only what he wishes to give or what he can afford, either of which may not amount to more than one or two rupees. It is the office of celā rather than any particular celā which has importance for the religious life of the village.²

1. Berreman (1964) pp. 59 and 62.

2. It seems to be very common in India to find this kind of professional specialist complementing the Brahman's more formal functions. Whilst the latter is the indispensable ritual servant of the household in the performance of public ritual at life crises, villagers turn to various kinds of diviner to assist them in the solution of personal crises. There are considerable

Supposing, however, that a villager who is in trouble does decide that he needs the help of a cela to diagnose the source of his trouble, and that he decides which cela is most likely to do this accurately, he then seeks him out and explains what is wrong. On the basis of information given concerning the nature of the trouble, the time of its onset, etc., the cela sets to work. He will not necessarily name a deity as the cause: if he thinks his client's difficulties are due to sorcery he will say so and may suggest a remedy.¹

(Cont'd. from previous page)- variations in the methods of divining used, the social status of the diviner and the degree to which he can influence what his clients actually do, but the general pattern is widespread. Examples are shamans mentioned by Berreman(1964), Kotankis in South India (Diehl, 1956, pp.221-2), Bhopas in Rajasthan (Chauhan, 1967, p.203).

1. A common method of harming an enemy is to place some magical object such as a piece of paper on which a spell has been written, into the victim's food. When swallowed this is thought to cause him to fall ill. The antidotes suggested and often also provided by celas similarly often consist of slips of paper covered with magical symbols. No case came to my knowledge in which the cela actually named the culprit. The customer will normally be only too well aware himself of any enmity which others bear him and will be able to guess who has wronged him himself, only coming to the cela for confirmation that his trouble is in fact a case of tūna and not due to some other cause.

But if the celā is of the opinion that the khoṭā of some devata is at the root of the trouble, the next step is for him to divine which one is responsible. Celās are, naturally enough, secretive about the techniques of their trade, but the most common method of divining seems to be for the celā to recite the names of the devatas (or mantras containing their names), at the same time counting out grains of rice or lentils by throwing them to the ground one by one. When a grain falls in a certain position he knows that it is the devata whose name he has just uttered who has caused his client's misfortune. He will then advise his customer to worship that deity and may make suggestions as to what sort of offering would be most effective and any other action which might be advisable. For instance, a Brahman woman's year-old baby had suffered from bouts of fever for many months and the persistence of this illness led her to suspect that it was not a simple organic disorder. The celā she consulted discovered that the fever was due to the khoṭā of the goddess Durga and advised the mother to make an offering to her at once, which she did. But as the illness had been so severe the celā was of the impression that the goddess's displeasure was very strong and might not be so easily appeased. So as a further precaution he provided the mother with an amulet consisting of a small medallion on which the

goddess was portrayed in relief. He advised her never to remove it until the child was over the age of five, after which the time of danger would be past.

This, then, is the chain of procedure which often leads up to the making of an offering, and unless it fails to have the desired effect of removing the misfortune, the act of making an offering ends the matter. If things do not take a turn for the better, the sufferer will try other remedies, perhaps resorting to the celā a second time, or consulting another celā. Villagers quite frequently pursue this line of action simultaneously with others, hoping that one of these will turn out to be the right one. For instance, a Jat woman whose eight-year-old daughter had remained weakly since an attack of typhoid regularly consulted a hakīm (doctor) from a nearby village and dosed the child with various pills and powders bought from him. She was also following the advice of the district nurse at the local health centre as to the best diet and medicine for the girl. She also consulted the local celā and made offerings to the deity he named as the cause of the sickness and shortly after this made a pilgrimage to the shrine of a saint hoping that the child might be cured there. In actual fact none of these courses of action proved successful for the little girl eventually died, but her mother saw nothing inconsistent in following them all concurrently.

The celā is not the only means by which a villager can come to know which devata is troubling him. A devata may appear to him in a dream expressing anger or displeasure, this frequently being the case when a personal deity has been neglected by a regular devotee. Or the identity of the angry god may be deduced from the nature of the misfortune in question, since some devatas have typical ways of manifesting their wrath. Baba Sindhu has the troublesome tendency to set fire to people's houses and Durga's anger is characteristically manifested through fevers and smallpox. Or the afflicted person may be aware of some vow previously made to a devata which has not yet been fulfilled. These are all common sequences of reasoning and action which can lead up to the making of an offering in time of trouble.

But if devatas are commonly worshipped in order to avert their khota, this does not mean that village Hinduism is entirely a religion of fear. The villager does not forget his devatas when he enjoys good fortune. Offerings are frequently made to devatas in order to obtain some specific blessing. The most usual way to attempt to bring about some desired event is to make a vow to a devata to worship him as soon as the boon is granted. The devata then has an incentive to use his power to the advantage of his devotee.

A specific offering may be promised if the worshipper thinks this likely to be more effective. He may simply utter the promise in his heart or he may make a preliminary offering on the occasion of making his vow. He will make it to whichever devata he feels most likely to grant his request, probably a personal or household devata if he has one.

Vows may be made in all kinds of circumstances, both to avert undesirable events and to ensure desirable ones. Cases I recorded included vows made to worship a deity if a troublesome illness is cured, if a suitable spouse is found for a son or daughter, if a missing article is recovered or if an examination is passed. The villager may make the vow on his own behalf or on behalf of some member of his family. But the same principles underly all vows, i.e. that the promise will please the power to which it is made and impose it to fulfil the maker's request.

If the desired object is not obtained, the maker of the vow will assume that the deity was not sufficiently tempted to exercise his power on his devotee's behalf and he is under no obligation to perform the worship promised. No misfortune can be reasonably expected to result. But should a person fail to fulfil a vow when the desired good has been obtained, then he is assuredly inviting misfortune since the disappointed deity is bound to bring sickness or

disaster to the person who has failed him, or at least to one of his household. There was, for instance, an elderly woman living in Dohk who suffered from persistent digestive trouble and who had also become somewhat senile. This was explained by many as a punishment for her failure to fulfil a vow she had made about five years before. This vow had consisted of a promise to worship Gugga and to make an offering of Rs.10 if her daughter-in-law was delivered of a second son. When a boy was born to her daughter-in-law about a year later she continually put off fulfilling her promise to Gugga, who consequently victimised her in his anger. According to her neighbours, her sickness and mental degeneration were the consequences of her own neglect of this deity.

Indeed, one of the first questions which a villager will ask himself when faced with any inexplicable misfortune is whether he has not overlooked some unfulfilled vow he has made in the past. A vow is not, after all, always as easy to keep as it is to make since some expense is inevitably involved in the preparation of the prasād. If more has been promised (for instance to make a pilgrimage to one of the deity's major shrines) it is all the more tempting to postpone performance until the maker feels that his financial position is better, or until he has more time.

Probably some vows would continue to remain unfulfilled were not some illness or disaster to convince the maker of the vow that the deity is punishing him for this oversight. This is not punishment in the judicial sense. It is failure to maintain the proper relationships with the devata which is being penalized rather than offence against an impersonal moral order, and the offering represents amendment of the relationship rather than atonement for sin. All the same, failure to fulfil a vow is seen as morally reprehensible just as to break a promise to another human being is wicked and, "it is better not to make a vow than to make one which you cannot keep".

Devatas may also be worshipped in thanksgiving for some happy event even though no prior vow has been made to do so. Probably the majority of housewives make some kind of offering when a buffalo calf is born (an important event for any household since it means that the family can expect an abundant supply of milk for some months to come). In this case the offering is most frequently made to one of the Siddhs¹ since the Siddhs are regarded as having special powers to protect cattle. The worship is precautionary also, since it is seen as helping to make sure that the calf survives and that the supply of milk is regular. As one villager expressed it: "We say to the Siddh - this is your buffalo, not mine; make it always yield milk abundantly

1. A class of saints - See below, p. 137.

for our family." Similar rites are performed when a new buffalo is bought, and on both kinds of occasion some butter or ghi made from the animal's milk is presented along with the offering.

Another common occasion for thanksgiving worship is the completion of the harvest. Housewives seldom neglect to worship some personal or household devata twice a year after the maize and the wheat are gathered in. This too is a precautionary act, for the worshipper hopes it will ensure that he will be similarly blessed in future years also. Flour made from the newly harvested grain is used in preparing the offering and the family will not consume the new crop until this rite has been completed. As one village wife said, "People always worship some devata after the harvest. Who knows what might happen if we did not do this regularly?"

It should be clear from this account of the kind of circumstances in which the villager worships the devatas that in doing so he does not turn his back on wordly needs and ambitions. Religious and secular interests do not occupy two separate and water-tight compartments but are firmly integrated in private worship. The action field of private worship consists of the personal and domestic crises of day to day living and the villager calls upon the devatas to use their powers to help him resolve these crises. He does this in much the same fashion as he enlists the aid

of human specialists in such situations, namely by offering them something to make their trouble worth while. As I have shown, a villager who is in difficulties may very well enlist the aid of human agencies - the doctor, the nurse, well disposed friends or relatives - and divine agencies concurrently.

It is perhaps worth pursuing the analogy drawn in the previous section between man/devata and low caste/high caste relationships further. If purity is a characteristic of both devatas vis-à-vis men and of high caste persons vis-à-vis low caste persons, so usually is power. Purity and power are not invariably associated in the Indian caste system, but in that section of the local caste hierarchy which the villager's experience encompasses the correlation is usually fairly close. The caste which is politically and economically dominant is generally purer as well as more powerful than the castes it dominates. This is conspicuously true in Dohk where Brahmans are the dominant caste. And just as the high caste person is not automatically disposed to use his power to the advantage of the low caste person whom it might affect - his tenant, his kamin, his day labourer - so neither do devatas automatically manifest their powers in ways beneficial to humans. Persuasion is needed to encourage them to do this. Dumont's suggestion that the divine

hierarchy is an extension of the caste hierarchy may therefore be valid in more senses than one.

Relationships between men and devatas. Personal and household devatas.

When a person is in trouble and seeks the help of the gods, the choice of the devata whom he worships may be dictated by the advice of the celā. Or if the benefit he seeks is the speciality of one particular devata, then naturally he will turn to that devata first. But it need not be the purpose of the rite which determines to which devata it shall be directed, since it is common for an individual to have a regular relationship with a devata in which he or she has especial faith, and when any occasion for worship arises the villager turns to this 'personal' devata for help before any other. For any of various reasons the villager sees that devata as being specially interested in his welfare or specially disposed to assist him. Sometimes the devata makes this interest manifest by possessing the villager repeatedly. One Brahman claimed that he had become a regular devotee of the devata Baba Sindhu in this way. When he was a young man he had begun to suffer from frequent fits of possession and to see the devata in dreams. He made a private shrine for the devata in his house and burns incense there each day in his honour. Even now he is

occasionally possessed by Baba Sindhu, and the help which he claims that the devata has given him on account of this regular worship has convinced him that he is a most powerful god. Sometimes faith in the superior power of a devata is sufficient reason for a villager to choose that one as a personal deity. This was the case of an elderly Brahman who said that he revered Shiva above all other gods because Shiva, being the Destroyer, must exist eternally and outlive all lesser gods. Another Brahman claimed Thakur as his personal devata saying that "No devata can do what Thakur is capable of doing".

Villagers recognize the liberty of each individual to worship that devata which he or she thinks most likely to use its power to influence his or her welfare. But there is also a theory current in the village that not only individuals but also each social unit has its own devata. "Each house has its own devata" is a statement frequently heard, or "each caste worships its own devatas". People also speak of 'the devatas of this village', as though the village as a unit also had its own gods.¹ A close observation of the religious life of the village over a period of time reveals that this view of the situation is not altogether

1. "A man must have a chosen deity, but he must also honour the family deity, the village guardian angel, the village genie (naga), on the prescribed occasions." (Vijayananda Tripathi, Sanmarga 3, 1942, quoted by Daniélou, (1964), p. 370)

accurate. When the question is put to them explicitly many people admit that in their household no devata is in fact worshipped more than others and similarly they will claim that "people of our caste worship all the devatas. There is no distinction between us and other castes". It is particularly difficult to identify any devatas as connected with the village in the absence of any occasion on which the village acts as a corporate unit in religious affairs.

But the ideal picture of each social unit having its associated deity reflects reality just closely enough to explain its persistence as a theory. Not every household has its own deity but one does find that the tendency to worship a particular devata 'runs' in certain families. A man worships one devata rather than another because his father and grandfather did before him, rather than on account of any personal revelation of that devata's efficacy which he has received himself. A household devata in this sense does not mean a devata which is peculiar to that household and worshipped by no other but simply one of the local pantheon with whom a special tradition of worship has been established.¹

1. A similar phenomenon is reported by Berreman. The Paharis of Sirkanda explicitly referred to such family gods as 'ghar ke devate', i.e. household devatas. Berreman(1963), p.95.

The relationship which a villager has with his household devata differs little in quality from that which he has with a personal devata. Nor is there any difference in the ritual used. Although members of the household may co-operate in making the preparations when their household devata is to be worshipped by one of their number the actual ritual will be performed by one person only on any given occasion, not necessarily the head of the household. An individual may approach a household devata for help in personal schemes just as personal devatas might be, but there are certain occasions when the household devata (if there is one) is looked to for help sooner than any other devata. These, naturally enough, are occasions where it is primarily a matter of concern to the household as a whole in which the devata's help is to be enlisted. For example, when thanksgiving is made after the harvest it is usually the household devata to which it is addressed. And when a bride arrives at her husband's house for the first time after her wedding, the household devata will be included amongst the devatas which she worships jointly with her husband in the ceremony known as vadhāī.

Here again, further reference can be made to the analogy drawn earlier to human and divine relationships. If the relationships between men and devatas is comparable

in general respects to the relationships between members of castes of disparate status, comparison can be made here with a specific type of inter-caste relationship, namely the relationship between high caste jajman and low caste client. This relationship also is maintained between households rather than between individuals. That is, the obligations which it involves are enacted by individual members of the family, who provide the goods or services, or who make over the payments of grain or the gifts of cash or cloth. But they perform these obligations as representatives of a particular household. Similarly, it is an individual member of the household who performs the worship which represents the fulfilment of the whole household's commitment to that particular devata, but he or she worships the devata on behalf of the family and in order to attain some blessing or benefit for the whole family and not just one member of it. The human worshipper hopes for the same regular generosity as the artisan hopes for from his jajman and the same predisposition to use the powers at his disposal in that household's favour as a low caste family expects of a human patron.

The following table shows how many households in each caste have such household deities. Figures in brackets denote the total number of households in each category.

Table 4. Household deities

<u>Caste</u>	<u>No. of households</u>		<u>Deities</u>
Brahman	5		Durga
	1		Durga and Baba Balak Nath
	1		Thakur
	1		Rajak Bharatri
	1		Khwajah
	6		Baba Dera
	1		Lakhman Siddh
	<hr/>		
	16	(38)	
Tarkhan	5	(5)	Guru Gobind Singh
Lohar	10	(10)	Guru Nanak and Baba Balak Nath
Nai	4	(4)	Baba Balak Nath
Suniara	0	(1)	
Chimba	0	(1)	
Chamar	7		Siddh Channo
	3	(16)	Durga
	<hr/>	<hr/>	
Total	45	75	
	<hr/>	<hr/>	

These figures show that about two-thirds of all the households in the village associated themselves with a particular deity or deities, not sufficient to justify the villagers' view that 'each household has its own deity', but enough, perhaps, to explain how such a theory gained currency.

If the analogy I have drawn between jajmani

relationships and household/devata relationships is valid then the higher incidence of household devata amongst the service castes can be explained with reference to it, for it is these castes who have jajmani patrons and who hence might most understandably be expected to establish relationships of family clientage with divine patrons also.

A villager will worship one god by virtue of his membership of a particular household and another as a matter of personal choice, but in either case there is nothing exclusive about the relationship. The Hindu gods are not jealous gods and a person will worship different devatas on different types of occasion, as he thinks fit. After coming to live in her husband's house, a married woman may begin to worship his household devata if there is one, but she is at liberty to continue to worship the household devata of her parents' household, or indeed any devata she has been in the habit of worshipping prior to her marriage. But her children are unlikely to perpetuate the cult of their mother's deities; given the fact of village exogamy and the restricted spread of some cults, these may in any case be unfamiliar to them. As one villager put it, "A married woman may certainly worship her parents' gods but her children will worship the gods of this place". Even inheritance in the male line seems to be subject to some

irregularities; for instance, the family who have inherited the cult of Baba Dera as their household devata have a collateral branch who claim to have no household devata.

Historically speaking, it may well be that household devatas originate as the personal devatas of past generations whose cults have been perpetuated by descendants long enough for a family tradition to be established. Certainly it is felt to be rather unwise to neglect a devata once the habit of worship has become established. Devatas come to expect the attentions of their devotees and become especially irascible when neglected by a former worshipper. One Brahman woman, for instance, explained to me that she did not feel willing to undertake the worship of a devata which neighbours had suggested as the probable cause of her persistent illness, since this might initiate a relationship which she might not feel able to maintain later; she was already the habitual devotee of her husband's household devata and had a personal devata also, and she preferred to wait and see what help might be forthcoming from them first of all, rather than risk more trouble by arousing expectations which she might not be able to fulfil.

In some parts of India descent groups which are larger than the household may have special associated deities but I only recorded one instance of this in the district

where this research was carried out. Except for three families all the Brahmans of Dohk are of one gotra (Parashar) and are descended from a man named Nikka, the original founder of the village. It was through the ghostly vengeance of Baba Dera, the elder brother of this common ancestor, that the Raja of Kutlehr was persuaded to make over to Nikka the land on which Dohk was founded, and Baba Dera is now honoured by Nikka's descendants as a devata. I did not come across any other example of named ancestor deities associated with large agnatic descent groups, and the cult of Baba Dera seems to have sprung from the extraordinary circumstances of his life and death rather than from any general tendency for descent groups to have corporate cults. This tendency certainly exists elsewhere in India¹ but its absence in Dohk is not remarkable in view of the absence of any formal lineage organization. There is no descent group larger than the household which has any formal corporate existence which could provide the basis for a corporate cult.

1. For instance in the plains of the Punjab, many sections of the Jat caste have 'jathera' shrines dedicated to the common ancestor who founded the section. These are used by members of that section only and new ones are established when they settled at any distance from the original shrine. Rose(1911)Vol.1, p.193 and Vol.2,p.374. Also in Malwa both locally based lineage groups and maximal descent groups (clans) have their associated deities. Mayer(1960),pp.184-193.

It is also frequently said that castes also have their own gods, and there is certainly some substance in this, although what appears to be a caste deity may turn out to be a household deity when a particular caste is represented by only a small group of related households in the village.

For instance, I was for some time under the impression that Baba Balak Nath is worshipped by Lohars as a caste, since every Lohar family in Dohk claims to worship him especially. But one Lohar explained to me later that this was a matter of kinship rather than caste; the Lohars of Dohk trace their descent to a common and not very distant ancestor, and the cult of Balak Nath, initiated by him or some other recent ascendant, has persisted in all the Lohar households of Dohk to the present day. Other Lohars in other villages, my informant told me, might worship other deities, and Lohar girls from Dohk marrying them might or might not choose to continue to worship Baba Balak Nath when they left Dohk.

The following Table shows the castes in Dohk and adjacent villages who claim to have special caste deities.

Table 5. Caste deities.

<u>Caste</u>	<u>Deity</u>
Tarkhan) } } } } } } }
Lohar	
Nai	
Suniara (?) ¹	
Rajput	Gugga
Chamar	Siddh Channo
Julaha (weavers)	Kabir

The association between a devata and a caste need not be exclusive. For instance, Rajputs claim that they worship Gugga more than other castes do because Gugga himself was a Rajput, but he is worshipped by members of other castes as well. Usually the connection between a devata and a particular caste is explained by reference to the idea that the devata was in some way a member of that caste. Siddh Channo is regarded as having been a Chamar; stories about the life of Kabir make frequent reference to the fact that he was a Julaha and earned his living as a weaver. The caste devata may represent the ideal 'member' of the caste. Visvakarma is acknowledged as the divine architect who constructed the universe, the prototype of all

1. The Suniara family did not visit their house at Dohk during my stay but I was told by a Tarkhan that Visvakarma is their caste deity also.

artisans, and Gugga embodies the Rajput ideal of the chivalrous and heroic warrior. There are few special occasions set aside for the worship of caste devatas, although Tarkhans and Lohars always worship Visvakarma at Divali when they lay aside their tools and make offerings to him. Members of artisan castes may worship a caste devata in thanksgiving when they receive an order for a sizeable piece of work or on completion of such a contract. Referring back to the analogy between social and divine relationships, the caste devata offers the same sort of patronage to a devotee as a wealthy or influential member of a caste might offer to less powerful caste fellows, at the same time being treated as a ritual superior as though of higher caste status.

From this account it is obvious that in spite of the villager's insistence that each social group has its associated devata, the situation in reality is much less clear cut. There is no one-to-one relationship between devata and group, between cult and congregation. We cannot therefore argue that where groups do have their own devatas these associations arise from any functional requirements of the groups concerned. If the cult of a caste devata arises from the functional need to express the unity of the caste group, why do not all castes have one? If a household

devata represents the solidarity of the domestic group why do some households have no such devata, without appearing any less 'solidary' than those which do? The regular associations which are formed between men and devatas reflect social realities more in the quality of these relationships, which are analogous to relationships found within human society, than in their organizational aspects.

The pantheon.

Villagers often speak of the 'devatas of this village' or to the 'devatas of Dohk', but this does not mean that these devatas are worshipped in Dohk and nowhere else. Nor does it mean that they are associated with the village as a social unit as is the case in some parts of India where villagers come together to celebrate corporate rites in honour of a village god or goddess on certain occasions.¹ In any one village not all the devatas known to its inhabitants by name or through legend will be actively worshipped by them. The composition of the selection varies from one area to another, or even from one village to another and villagers are aware themselves that some of the devatas they worship are of restricted 'spread'. By the 'devatas of Dohk' villagers simply mean the members of the known pantheon.

1.E.g. Whitehead(1921), Chapters IV - VI.

who are traditionally worshipped in Dohk and with whom they build lasting relationships of the types already described, as opposed to those with whom they have only a nodding acquaintance. In this section I shall first give an account of this local pantheon. I shall then discuss the relationships which the villagers see as existing between the members of this pantheon and especially the possibility that these may also represent a further extension of the hierarchy of the pure and the impure.

Each devata is seen as having its characteristic attributes, just as men and women have their peculiar personalities. Some devatas have special functions which I shall also describe. In addition to this, devatas have typical physical guises which enable devotees to recognise them when they appear in dreams or even in human form. When devatas are portrayed in popular iconography it is in terms of these conventional characteristics, so that it is usually quite easy to identify the devata which an image or print is intended to represent.

Of the classical Hindu deities whose deeds and attributes are recorded in the scriptures only a few are actually worshipped in Dohk although many more are known by name. Of the classical triad (Brahman, Vishnu and Shiva) Brahman receives no direct worship unless one counts the

cult of the sacred pipal tree, commonly held to represent Brahman. Shiva and Vishnu, however, do have cults in Dohk and have a very important place in the religious life of the villagers. Vishnu has several common guises or epithets.¹ Firstly, he is important in his aspect of Sat Narain, the deity to whom the kathā, or sacred scripture recital, and certain fasts are dedicated. In the kathā stories, Sat Narain always features as the moral preceptor of mankind, expounding through his dialogues with the sage Narad the moral and ritual duties of men. But Vishnu is more commonly worshipped in Dohk as the god Thakur, the lord of the rains to whom the villagers turn for help in times of drought. Sometimes villagers speak of Thakur as if he were a separate being, but the majority agree in identifying him with Vishnu.²

Shrines dedicated to this aspect of Vishnu are known as 'Thakurdwaras' and are a common feature of hill villages. Vishnu is also known to the villagers in the form of his two

1. Most of the classical deities of Hinduism are encountered in more than one form, or have more than one name; often each is associated with a different aspect or attribute of the god.

2. According to Rose (1919, Vol. 1, p. 68) Thakur is also sometimes identified with Mahadeo, or Shiva. The term 'Thakur' simply means 'lord' - it is the polite term of address used when speaking to a Rajput - and it could be that the same epithet is applied to both of these mighty deities.

most important avatārs, or incarnations. They know the stories which relate the deeds of the playful and amorous Krishna and the righteous prince Rama and which form the subject of many a folk song. But these avatārs seem to have a cultural rather than a religious significance to the villagers since ritual is never directed to Rama and very seldom to Krishna.

But of the great deities of Hinduism, it is Shiva who plays the most prominent part in the imaginative and religious life of the peasants of this area. It is Shiva who figures in so many folk tales and local legends and it is he to whom the villagers turn more frequently in their personal devotions. His importance lies also in his connection with certain other widely worshipped deities - Devi, who is his consort, and the Siddhs, who are his disciples. His temples are known as Shivadwalas, and although there is no such shrine in Dohk these exist in many nearby villages. Shivadwalas do not usually contain any image but often house a collection of smooth pebbles (no specific number) which are treated as sacred. These may well represent the lingam, the phallic emblem of the god Shiva.

One of the most popular deities worshipped in Dohk is Devi. Devi seems to represent a principle rather than an individuality since she tends to assimilate all other

female aspects of the divine to her personality. All other goddesses tend to become identified with Devi whose very name means simply 'goddess'. Thus in Dohk she is worshipped as Durga, the fierce female power, and as Parvati the gentler consort of Shiva. She is 'Jvalamukhi', the flamy mouthed, who has given her name to the town of Jvalamukhi, a few hours' bus ride from Dohk, where her famous temple is situated. She is also the goddess who presides at the great temple of Kangra. The identification of one deity with another is a common feature of Hinduism but there are several ways in which the multiple identity of the Hindu goddess principle can be formulated. In some parts of India the villager represents the goddesses whose names he knows as a group of sisters,¹ often associated with various different pustular diseases (In Dohk we do not find any such division of labour amongst the various aspects of Devi, although she is seen as having general powers connected with smallpox. The popular term for smallpox is mātā, i.e. 'Mother' which is an epithet of Devi, and she is regarded as being especially liable to use this affliction to punish those with whom she is displeased. In Dohk, the multiplicity of Devi's forms is more often explained through the well-known story of Parvati's suicide. When she threw herself into the fire

1.E.g. Whitehead(1921),p.32,

which her father had prepared for ritual purposes, the various parts of Parvati's disintegrating body fell in the different places in India where her principle temples are now found. Her various local manifestations are explained by people in Dohk as representing the separated parts of her body.

On the whole Durga is the aspect of the goddess principle in which members of Dohk take the most interest. She is seen as a dangerous deity whose wrath is more terrible than that of other devatas. She is depicted in popular iconography as riding on a tiger and brandishing a trident. But she can also be protective and loving to those whom she favours and hence earns the epithet 'Mata'. Sometimes, it is believed, she takes the form of a small girl when she wishes to show herself in human guise, and one Brahman woman in Dohk claimed that Devi had appeared to her once in this way. She had been on her way to visit a famous shrine of the goddess but had lost her way and was wandering in the lonely jungle, exhausted and faint, when a small girl had appeared as if from nowhere and had led her to the shrine before vanishing mysteriously. There was no doubt in the woman's mind that this apparition had been Devi herself. Young unmarried girls are regarded as embodying the goddess, and

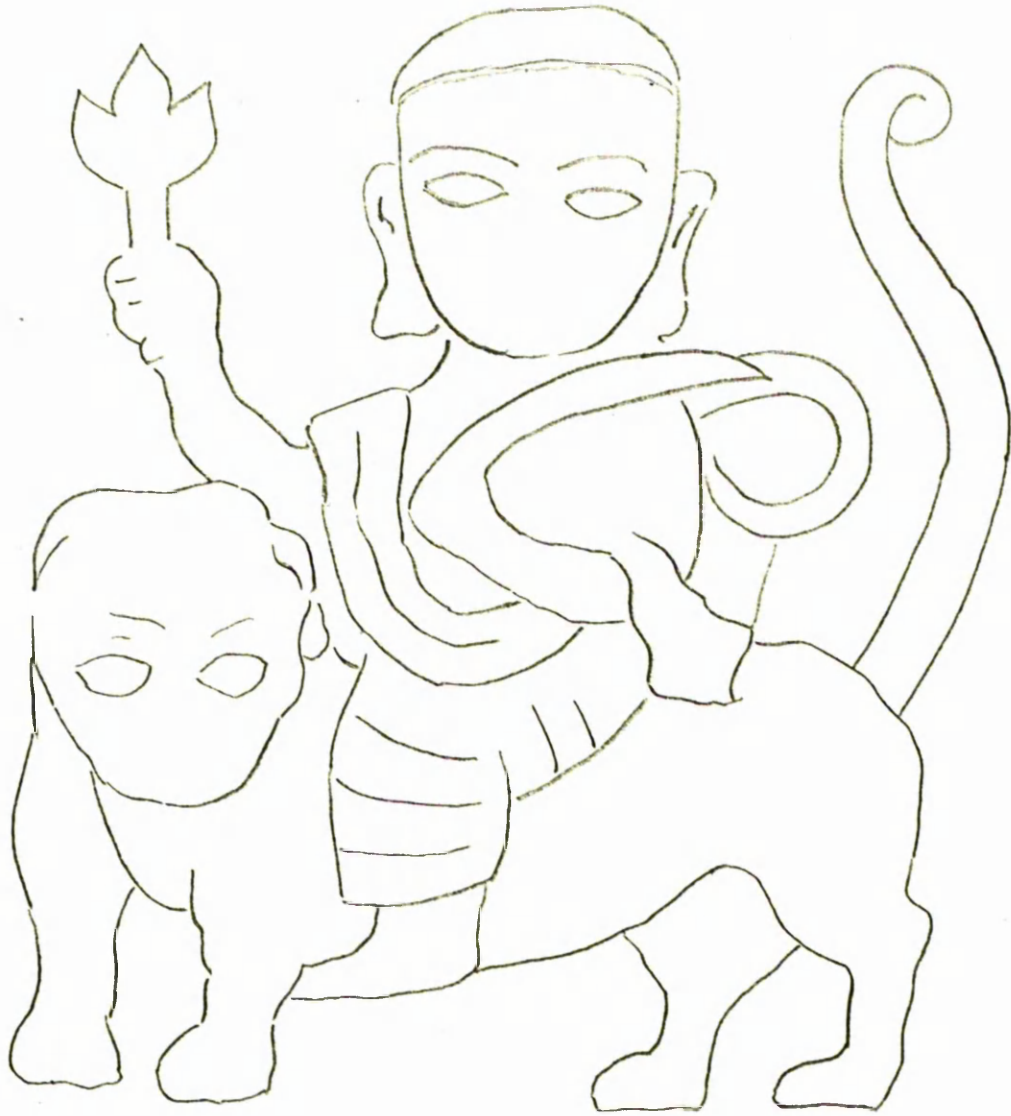


Figure 2. Relief of Durga on a shrine in Dohk.

to give charity to them is not only a meritorious act in itself but also a means of honouring Devi.

The only other classical deity which members of Dohk worship through private rites is Visvakarma, mentioned already as the caste devata of certain artisan castes. Members of other castes do not worship Visvakarma themselves but they acknowledge him as the heavenly architect who taught all earthly craftsmen their skills and who inspires all technical invention, and he appears in mythological tales current among members of all castes. For instance, a popular story tells how Shiva once placed a curse upon Visvakarma for taking an unnecessarily long time to complete an order for the construction of a new house for him and his wife Parvati. According to this curse, Visvakarma would always have too much work and too little money - a very accurate prophecy, said the Nai who related this story to me, for is not the carpenter always a poor man and over-worked?

A deity whose 'spread' is much more limited than these classical deities, but who nevertheless is very popular in Dohk, is Baba Sindhu. His cult appears to be confined to the hills bordering the Punjab plains and to Jammu where his principle shrine is found at Basoli.¹ When he appears to mortals it is in the guise of an old man dressed in long white robes. His most distinctive characteristic is the

1. Sirdaru Bhalyari (1896), p. 84. Rose (1919), Vol. 1, p. 316.

whistling sound which he is said to make as he wanders about at night and by which his approach is known.¹ There is a shrine in Kolka, a village adjacent to Dohk, which was tended by a Rajput woman until her death a few years ago. When worshippers came to the shrine she would become possessed by Baba Sindhu whose presence was known by the whistling sound which would issue from her lips at such times. Devotees would then put questions to Baba Sindhu and he would answer with unerring accuracy, it is said, through her mouth. Several villagers related how Baba Sindhu had given them help in this way, informing them of the welfare of an absent relative, revealing the identity of a thief or the whereabouts of a lost article, and answering other questions on such practical matters. But Baba Sindhu also has great potential power to harm, incendiarism being his speciality.² During my stay in Dohk, there were several outbreaks of fire in the Lohars' quarters. At about the same time, Haru, one of the Lohars, began to be possessed by Baba Sindhu regularly and said that he had had a vision of the devata who had told him that he had decided to transfer his residence from Kolka to Dohk. He would from now on haunt

1. This may account for his name, probably onomatopoeic. Certainly this devata has nothing to do with water or rivers in this district, as the name might otherwise suggest.

2. According to one writer, Baba Sindhu was said to have been responsible for burning down the police station at Bursar (about ten miles from Dohk) when it caught fire once in the last century. Sirdaru Bhalyari (1896), p. 84.

the place beneath a certain pipal tree near Haru's house, where he now required a shrine to be built for him. Haru began to take action, being convinced that more outbreaks of fire would be sent by the devata if his behests were not fulfilled. He began to build the shrine with the help of members of his family in their spare time, but when it was nearly complete, he went round to all the households in the village collecting Rs.2 from each family to recover the cost of the materials used. The construction of the shrine was greeted with some enthusiasm by the villagers, although no special ceremony was held to mark its consecration.

Incendiarism is not the only way in which this irascible devata is capable of annoying human beings. A Brahman of Dohk claimed that he had learnt to respect Baba Sindhu the hard way when one day as he was travelling along a lonely road, he began to feel stones being cast at him from all sides. No one was in sight except a bearded old man, whom he had taken to be Baba Sindhu himself, come to punish him for speaking slightly of his powers. However, Baba Sindhu seems to be capricious rather than consistently malignant in his intentions towards men, and when he expresses his wrath he does so by causing minor inconveniences rather than major catastrophes.

An important category of divine beings worshipped in Dohk and its environs is designated by the generic term

Siddh. The Siddhs are really deified saints, and they are usually described as having been born as human beings but as having attained superhuman stature through their moral qualities and ascetic practices. Siddhs can be persuaded to use these powers on behalf of human beings just as other devatas can be, and thus the villager can enjoy the wordly fruits of a life of renunciation which he is not able to practice himself.¹

A number of Siddhs are worshipped regularly in Dohk and its environs, and several of these have major cult centres nearby. The most popular Siddh in Dohk is probably Raja Bharatri. Bharatri was a king who left the luxury and power he had enjoyed when he discovered that his beloved queen had been conducting an affair with his chief minister. In sorrow he abandoned his kingdom and spent the rest of his life as a holy ascetic. He is said to have come to live at Makrer, a lonely village about three miles from Dohk on a high mountain ridge, where a simple shrine marks the spot where he is thought to have left his earthly body. (Hindu ascetics are never said to 'die'; they enter into samadhi, a state of

1. Quite possibly the human beings who were the prototypes of these saints, assuming that they ever existed, were members of the Kanphatta sect of Yogis or some related mendicant body, for the Siddhs are said by villagers to wander about the countryside in the company of Guru Gorakhnath, the founder of the Kanphatta sect. Secondly, the Siddhs are represented in popular iconography as having pierced ears like the Kanphatta Yogis (whose very name means 'having pierced ears') and as being equipped with other symbols used by members of this sect. Thirdly they are described as being the devotees of the god Shiva, as are the Kanphatta Yogis.

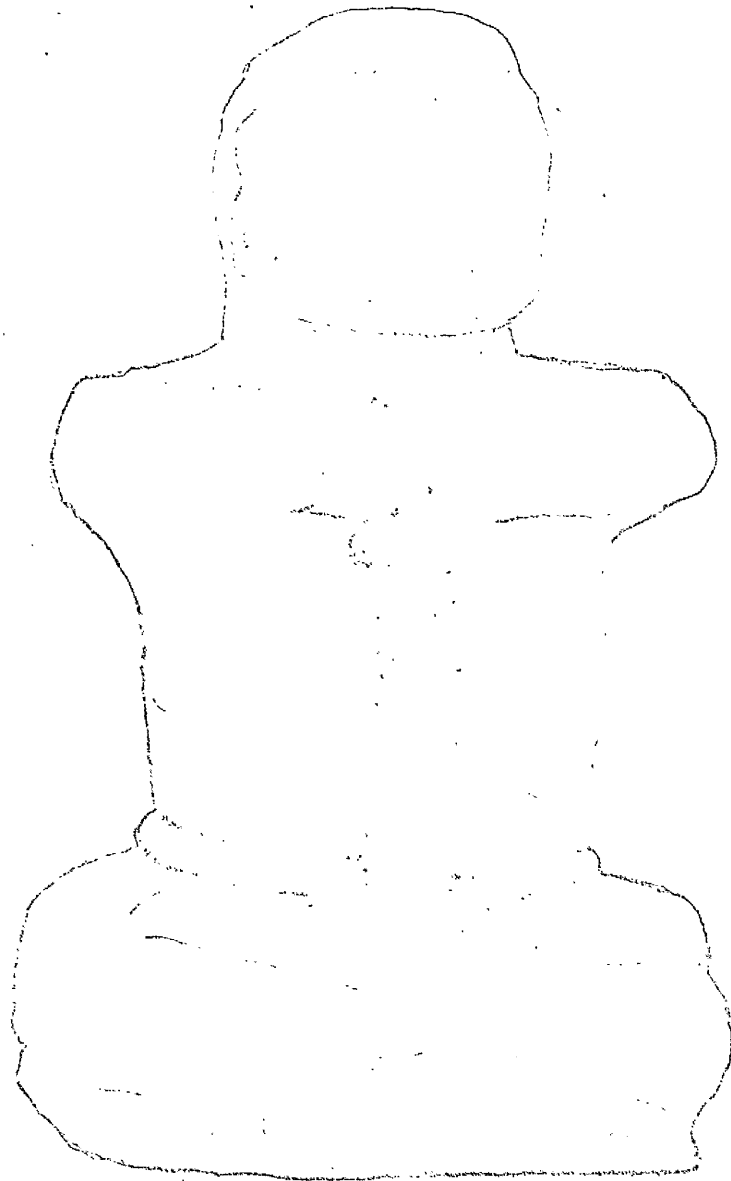


Figure 3. Image of Raja Bharatri

exalted contemplation in which they have no further need of a fleshly form).

Baba Balak Nath is another famous Siddh, whose cult is popular all over the Punjab. According to the priests who tend his chief shrine at Shah Talai, a village about fifteen miles from Dohk, even Muslims used to come in large numbers to worship there in the days before 1947. Baba Balak Nath was born in a Brahman family and devoted himself to an ascetic life when a mere boy. He performed many miracles as a result of the powers he gained in this way and eventually settled at Shah Talai where he attained samādhi.¹ The route to Shah Talai passes near to Dohk and is thronged with pilgrims during the hot season, taking goats to offer at the saint's shrine and singing songs in his praise as they go.

Even more famous than Baba Balak Nath is the saint Gugga who is the object of a very widespread cult. His chief shrine is at Bagar in Rajasthan and he is worshipped all over North West India. He is renowned less for his asceticism than for physical bravery. He was the son of a king, his story runs, who, with the aid of an assortment of devatas (whose precise composition varies in the different versions of the story related to me, but which usually includes

1. I describe the cult of Baba Balak Nath in more detail in the appendix.

Gorakhnath, Bhimsen, Durga and Guru Gobind Singh)¹ was able to defeat his cunning half-brothers who had plotted to rob him of his kingdom. The tale of Gugga is really a folk epic of which many local versions exist² and there is unfortunately no space here to record the many poetic details with which the villagers embroider the one which is current in Dohk, nor to enumerate the many pathetic and miraculous incidents which it includes.

But besides being a legendary hero here, Gugga is also known and worshipped for his reputed powers over snakes. His connection with snakes seems to be universal wherever his cult is found, but is not easily accounted for. Some minor incidents in his legend concern encounters with snakes, but these are not sufficient to explain very convincingly why a romantic warrior saint should also be referred to as the 'snake devata'. He is often worshipped in order to effect a cure for snake bite, as in the case of an old Brahman who explained how he had once been bitten by a snake when he had been cutting grass in the jungle. As a result he had been extremely ill for some days, during which time he made a vow to visit a nearby shrine of Gugga's. On recovery, he made the journey there and offered Rs.10 in thanksgiving,

1. i. e. personages renowned for special power and physical courage?

2. Rose (1919), pp. 171-192, and Temple (1884), Vol. I pp. 121-209, Vol. III, pp. 261-300.

but his death would have been certain, so he said, had Gugga not helped him.

Unlike other Siddhs, Siddh Channo is regarded as being primarily of a malevolent and destructive nature. He has the power to visit men with un-nameable disaster and diseases. "It is better not to utter his name", said a Jat woman, "because you would have to have a very good karma to escape from his khota." Siddh Channo is said to ride on an elephant and is represented by the image of an elephant at the shrine dedicated to him in a nearby village. Sometimes, villagers say, he visits his shrines and makes his encampment there. "When Channo stays at one of his shrines," said a Nai "he causes great destruction in the villages nearby. His elephants trample the crops and he causes outbreaks of disease. He is just like the police. When the police come to a village they always come in great numbers and cause the maximum inconvenience to the villagers. 'Bring chairs, bring tea, bring sweets,' they say. Likewise Channo never comes alone but with hosts of other devatas and wherever he goes he causes trouble. Once I saw him at a watering place in the jungle. I knew it was him because he was accompanied by a herd of elephants.¹ At about that very time, twenty or thirty people fell sick and died in the next village.

1. Elephants are not found wild in this part of India, to the best of my knowledge.

Channo does not look to see who is a good man and who is a rogue. He carries off the lot."

Siddh Channo differs from the other Siddhs in that he is worshipped only by Chamars and is referred to as a 'devata of the Chamars'. That is, he may cause khōṭā to a member of any caste, but only an offering made by a Chamar will be effective in calming his wrath. Non-Chamars who have reason to believe that they are the victims of his khōṭā provide a Chamar (usually, though not necessarily, either a member of that Chamar household with whom they have a hereditary jajmani relationship or else a Chamar tenant) with the necessary items for the offering. The Chamar is requested to worship Siddh Channo on behalf of the afflicted person and to distribute the remainder of the food amongst his own family as prasād. It should be emphasized that this devata is not described as being in any way 'impure'.¹ The fact that he is not worshipped directly by members of higher castes is not attributed to the idea that they might in any way defile themselves by doing so, nor are blood offerings made to this devata nowadays such as might offend the purity of a high caste person. It is simply that it would be of no avail for them to do so. Being a Chamar god, Siddh Channo

1. The practice of making offerings through the agency of a low caste person is, however, reminiscent of the way in which Brahmans occasionally depute members of low castes to sacrifice animals to 'impure' gods on their behalf in Coorg. Srinivas (1952), p. 226.

only listens to Chamars, and only an offering made by a Chamar is likely to have any effect upon him. It is interesting that Brahmans do not show any reluctance to enter into a transaction with a Chamar in which the normal pattern of high caste/low caste relationships is reversed. In any other context it is usually the Brahman who is in command of the scarce commodity (ritual purity, wealth, etc) and the Chamar whose mode of behaviour must show his sensibility of his own inferiority. But when a Brahman feels, or has been told by the celā, that he is being victimized by Siddh Channo, he is obliged to approach the Chamar in the role of petitioner and request him to use the scarce resource he has in his possession (access to an angry devata) on his behalf.¹ In spite of this potentially uncomfortable reversal of roles Brahmans do not seem to shrink from doing this. For instance one Brahman woman had suffered great anxiety when her daughter had been taken ill with a high fever. The sickness persisted and gradually grew worse. At the same time, she told me, her husband had been in financial trouble and also involved in a quarrel with his brother over the inheritance of their father's land. All these troubles

1. I have never heard of a Chamar refusing to comply, probably because a Chamar would have more to lose than to gain by rejecting an opportunity for his family to enjoy an unaccustomed delicacy.

convinced her that Siddh Channo must be to blame, since only he could be so cruel to inflict so much suffering at once.

Usually Channo is described as having been a Chamar himself, in the various tales which are recounted of his deeds and powers. One story, which is essentially similar to a story told by Chamars in Uttar Pradesh about the legendary founder of their caste,¹ describes him as the youngest of four brothers who was persuaded by the others to remove the carcass of a dead cow from their courtyard. When he returned they would not re-admit him to their house. He thus became the original scavenger and was told by his brothers that to make up for his misfortune he would be worshipped by members of the low castes. In the Kal Yug (the present degenerate era) he would be reunited with his brothers. Was this indeed not the case, commented the Nai who related this story to me, for nowadays Chamars do not suffer from as many ritual restrictions as they used to? Another story shows him as a giant who was defeated through an underhand trick in a wrestling match with a demon. The demon, however, prophesied that he would be a great devata in the Kal Yug, revered by low caste people in particular. Although he receives ritual worship only from Chamars, Siddh

1. Briggs (1920), pp. 15-17.

Channo may be invoked by members of any caste, for anyone may call on him to punish someone who has offended them. For instance, a Tarkhan related how a Brahman had owed him a large sum of money. He grew tired of asking for his loan back, and came to the conclusion that the Brahman had no intention of returning it. He invoked Siddh Channo against the offender, who soon after this began to suffer from pains in his back and remained bed-ridden for some years afterwards. This, the Tarkhan was convinced, was the punishment sent by Siddh Channo.

In contrast to Siddh Channo, the deified saint, Baba Ludru, is thought to be entirely benevolent. Unlike the other devatas, I never heard of any case in which Baba Ludru was thought to have caused khota to anyone. The cult of Baba Ludru seems to be a modern one, for villagers say that he lived in the nineteenth century.¹ He was a carrier by trade and made his living by transporting ghi in the foothills and Punjab plains. He used to stay the night at the hermitage of a holy man which was on his route. This holy man nominated Ludru as his successor in the following way. One day he felt that death was near to him and asked his servant to prepare creamed rice as a special delicacy. The servant did so and brought it to his master. As he ate,

1. I describe this cult more fully in the appendix.

he allowed some of the pudding to fall from his mouth onto the plate from which he was eating. However, he did not finish the whole amount, but gave what he had left to his servant and told him to eat it himself. The servant was loath to eat the leavings of someone else, especially food polluted by contact with another's mouth, and simply put the food away without consuming it. When Ludru arrived the same night, tired and hungry, the servant offered him the polluted food thinking that it was good enough for a simple villager. Later when the holy man was on the point of death, the servant asked him what he would leave to him, hoping that he would nominate him as his successor. But the mahant said, "What I had to give you, I have already given you. Whoever ate that rice is my successor." Little else is known about Ludru's life but he is worshipped nowadays especially for his powers to protect soldiers in battle and to ensure children for childless women. The story of Baba Ludru is related here because it is an apt illustration of the way in which food which would normally be considered polluting transmits virtue rather than pollution if the person who has left it is of higher ritual or spiritual standing than the eater. In this story left over food conveys spiritual powers to Ludru and makes him a famous mahant, in much the same way as prasād conveys blessings to those who eat it.

A devata, or rather a collectivity of devatas, worshipped locally is the group of spirits known as 'Agassia'. They are thought to have special powers to influence the welfare of women and children and are worshipped mainly by women who desire offspring or who wish to obtain protection for the children they already have, and in other matters of a more or less feminine nature. Some women suggested that the Agassia were the spirits of women who had lived exceptionally virtuous lives and as a result had become devatas after their death. There is a shrine dedicated to the Agassia in a nearby village and the customary offering made there is a live chicken. This is not actually slaughtered but is released at the shrine, much as the live goats offered to Baba Balak Nath at his shrine at Shah Talai are released in the courtyard of his temple.

The Siddhs and the Agassia are not the only instances of the translation of dead humans to the status of devatas. This is a fairly common process, although it is not always on account of virtue or fame as an ascetic that it takes place. Human ancestors have the power to cause khōṭā to living men and women, though they do not usually trouble any but their own descendants. When this happens they may come to be worshipped as devatas to avert further trouble. A

Jat woman, for instance, told me how a few years ago she had noticed that however carefully she lit the fire in her kitchen the flames always seemed to jump out from under the cooking pots and burn her hands. The trouble continued for a long time until she became convinced that some angry devata must be responsible. She consulted a cela who suggested that a particular recent ancestor was the cause of her difficulties. When she worshipped this ancestor her trouble ceased, though she continued to make offerings from time to time as a precaution against further molestation.

Ancestors can be elevated to the rank of devatas for other reasons than the trouble they cause to their descendants, especially if they die under unusual circumstances. Women who die as satis may come to be worshipped by their descendants. This was also the case of Baba Dera, a devata I have already mentioned as the forbear of the Brahmans of Dohk. Probably his story had its origin in some actual historical incident and there is no reason to suppose that he did not really exist, as his name is recorded in a genealogy in the possession of one Brahman family. He is said to have quarrelled with the Raja of Kutlehr and to spite his enemy committed suicide outside his palace, thereby laying the responsibility for the sin of causing the death of a Brahman (albeit indirectly) at the Raja's door. As a result of the wrath of the dead

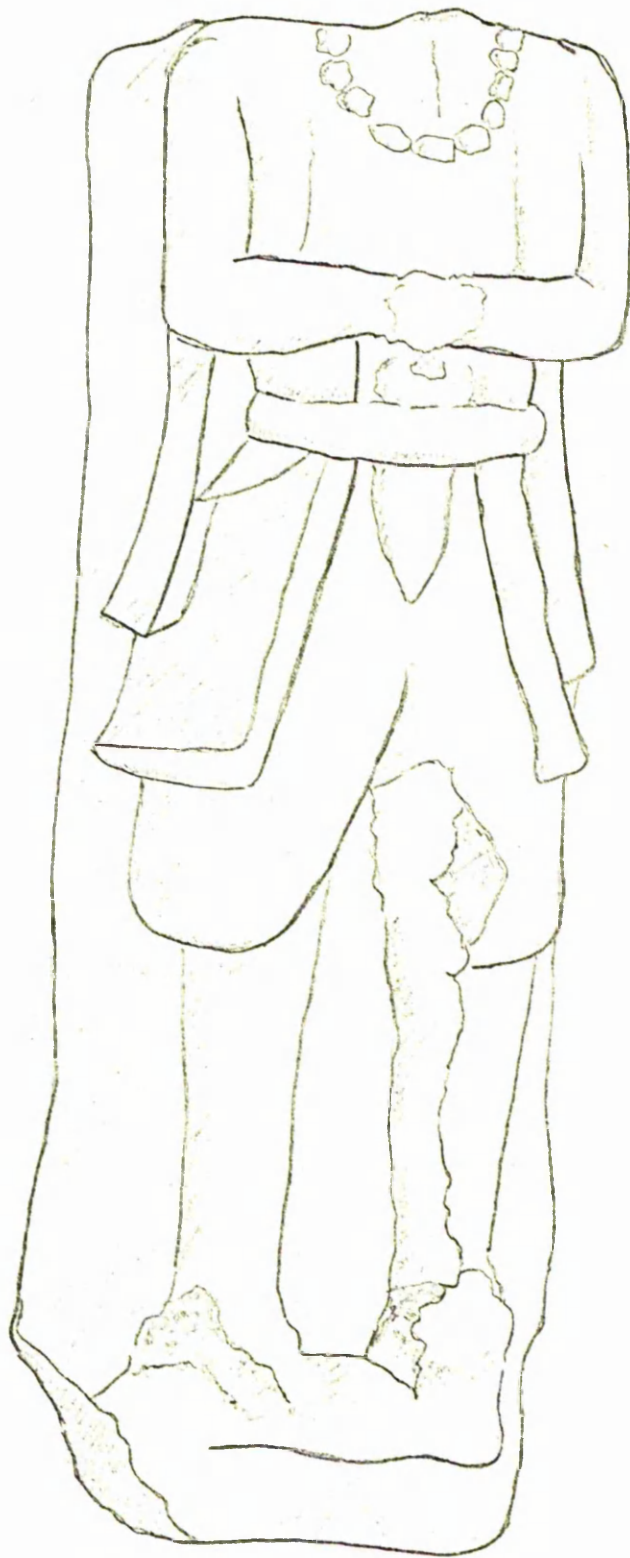


Figure 4. Image of Baba Dera

man the Raja began to suffer terribly from insomnia, and worms would appear in his food just when he was about to eat it. A wise pandit advised the Raja to make a gift of land to Baba Dera's youngest brother as a means of placating him and ending this torment. When Nikka accepted the gift the Raja's troubles ended.

Hinduism is essentially an eclectic religion and this fact is nowhere more obvious than in the Punjab. Prolonged contact with Islam led to the conversion of many Hindus there, but had consequences even for those who did not abandon their ancestral faith, since many Muslim saints or pirs came to be revered by Hindus as well. The influence of Islam in the Pahari area was rather weaker than in the plains but people in Dohk still worship one such pir, who is said to have lived at Pir Nagah, a village five miles from Dohk. His name seems to have been forgotten and he is known simply as 'Pir'. But he is remembered for the miracles which his ascetic powers enabled him to perform. So great was his enthusiasm for mortifying the flesh that he not only foreswore the comfort of a bed himself, but also decreed that no cot strung with rope or webbing was to be allowed in Pir Nagah, and to this day the few shopkeepers who live there sleep on cots fashioned from strips of iron. The Hindus of Dohk are well aware of this saint's Muslim

connections although they describe him as a 'devata'¹ like the other objects of their devotions. His appeal for Hindus is easily comprehensible for the values his cult exalts are only those which the Siddhs of Hindu origin stand for.

A devata who also seems to have Islamic affiliations is Khwajah,² the guardian of streams and waterways and patron of travellers, especially travellers by boat. His shrine in Dohk is situated near an important spring over which he is thought to have special powers of control. Villagers state that if he were not worshipped he might cause this spring (the only source of water available to villagers in times of drought like the summer of 1966) to dry up completely. He has other powers associated with water and is worshipped before setting out on a journey by boat, for he is said to be able to create huge waves to

1. In doing this they are only following the example of the local Muslims who also quite frequently use the term 'devata' when referring to their own saints. In fact they return the compliment paid them by their Hindu neighbours by openly worshipping certain Hindu devatas, notably Devi and the Siddhs, although this is more probably a case of incomplete conversion than eclecticism.

2. In Punjab Khwajah is worshipped as Khwajah Khizr and is variously identified by Muslims with Saint George, Elias, and other personages of Islamic tradition. Rose (1911), Vol.1, p.562. In the nineteenth century Khwajah Khizr used to be worshipped by Hindus in the West Punjab as an incarnation of the River Indus, also known as 'Udero Lal' or 'Darya Sahib! Ibbetson(1883), p.122.

engulf the vessels of those who fail to do this. The creation of the Bhakra reservoir and the consequent need to take a ferry to reach villages that could be visited on foot before has increased the importance of his cult recently. Several accidents in which boats have sunk in the lake and men or cattle drowned have been attributed to failure to give him due worship. I never came across any image of this devata (perhaps his Islamic origin would discourage his graphic portrayal?) but he is said to wear white or blue garments and to ride upon a blue horse.

In describing the attributes of the devatas worshipped in Dohk and their cults I have referred to some of the legends which are told about them, but in fact these stories are not indispensable adjuncts to their cults. That is, villagers may know little or much about the traditions connected with the devatas they worship; a devotee's fervour is influenced far more by a belief in the superior power of the devata he worships than by the contents of the stories told about that devata, although of course these tales often illustrate the devata's power. Some villagers are well acquainted with the legends I have recounted here and with many other anecdotes concerning the doings of the gods; others know relatively little, but it does not necessarily follow that these are lax in their devotions.

The stories of the devatas have, I think a function distinct from that of the cults of the beings they refer to. The cults themselves serve to interpret and modify the uncertainties of life; they help the villager to deal with illness, economic difficulties and other problems, and provide means by which he can feel that he is able to influence actively the powers and processes by which his fortune in life is determined. The stories relating to these objects contribute only indirectly to this function and to a certain extent can be considered independently. They form a body of traditional knowledge which can be regarded partly as the cultural expression of the imaginative genius and fantasy of a peasant people and partly as expressions of certain values which these people hold. The story of Gugga, for instance, does more than merely 'explain' the cult of the saint, It also serves to illustrate the type of human excellence associated with warriorhood. The tales of the Siddhs Bharatri and Balak Nath celebrate the type of the saintly ascetic and hint at the tension between this-worldly and ascetic values. The story of Ludru illustrates another theme found in many Indian legends (such as the legends of Ravi Das and Balmik) - the transmission of saintly powers to a person of humble birth. In all these stories themes and motifs of a moral nature appear which contribute to a value system which is not the property of

Hindus in this area alone, even if the local deities who are their principle characters are little known outside it.

The account I have given here includes all the devatas to which villagers devote private worship and which are known to the villagers as the 'gods of Dohk'. No villager worships all of these devatas, but those which he does worship will be selected from this pantheon. On the other hand, this list does not exhaust the full range of devatas known to the villagers by name. Those who have travelled outside the village are aware of the existence elsewhere of cults not found in Dohk. Besides this there are devatas who play a role in the cultural and religious traditions of the place without being the objects of actual cults. Many villagers are acquainted of the story of how the god Ganesh came to have an elephant's head, or how Rama defeated the king Ravana who abducted the virtuous Sita, even though they never worship Ganesh or Rama with the rites I have described in this chapter. Villagers do not regard such deities as less sacred or less powerful than those to whom they do address private rites of worship. Rather it is simply accepted that some devatas from the total collection worshipped by Hindus are liable to affect the destinies of the Hindus of Dohk more closely than

others.¹

These are the devatas of whom the villagers feel that they have had direct experience, through dreams, possession, encounters in fleshly guises, and through feeling the effects of their wrath or pleasure in their personal lives. Consequently it is these devatas who are the objects of their personal religious activities.

From this description it will be clear that the major pure/impure polarity relevant in the context of private worship in this village is that between more pure devata and less pure devotee. There is no explicit distinction between pure and impure devatas such as Dumont and Harper found and seems to be common in South India. Firstly there is no clear dichotomy between carnivorous and vegetarian devatas such as might form the basis of such a division of the pantheon, for there are no truly carnivorous devatas. Offerings of live animals are made at the shrines of certain

1. There is no reason to suppose that this pantheon is an unchanging one, though more than a mere year's observation would be needed to ascertain this. An indication of how a devata might come to be added to the pantheon of Dohk through an extension of its 'spread' can be found in the case of a Brahman family who came to live in Dohk recently after the lands of their own village had been covered by the waters of the Bhakra reservoir. Their household devata had been Lakhman Siddh, a saint known by reputation in Dohk but not previously worshipped there. The newcomers have revived the use of an ancient and decrepit shrine which they claim is the shrine of Lakhman Siddh, although the other villagers deny knowledge of the dedication of this long disused shrine. This could well mark the entry of a new member into the pantheon of the village.

devatas, although they are never made in private ritual held in the home. Goats are offered to Baba Balak Nath at Shah Talai and to Devi at Jvalamukhi, and chickens are offered to the Agassia. Of course it is quite possible that these practices represent later modifications of what were originally blood sacrifices. But in the absence of the necessary historical evidence this cannot be proved. The only case in which blood offerings have been made within living memory is in the case of the cult of Siddh Channo. An elderly Chamar told me how during his childhood the Chamars of a nearby village used to slaughter large numbers of goats at the shrine of Siddh Channo on certain festivals. He was uncertain as to exactly when or why the practice had been discontinued. Another indication that the offering of live animals may be a modification of the practice of making blood sacrifices lies in the fact that when live goats are offered at the shrine of Baba Balak Nath at Shah Talai, the saint is thought to indicate his approval of the gift by causing the animal to shiver violently. This so exactly corresponds to the sign of acceptance sought in other parts of India before an animal is slaughtered for sacrifice¹ that it is tempting to conclude that the goats offered to the Siddh used to be killed. But a local legend

1. E.g. Whitehead (1921), p. 99, Führer-Haimendorf (1948), p. 273.

suggests that the practice of offering live goats is, historically speaking, a modification of an originally strict vegetarianism rather than a concession to it. According to this story, Baba Balak Nath used not to accept goats at all. But one day the saint decided to move to a secluded spot half way up a mountain where he could meditate undisturbed by the thousands of devotees who came to obtain his darśan. But the place he chose was shared by a tiger who had made his den nearby. The poor tiger complained bitterly of the saint's presence. "How can I go on living here now?" he asked the Siddh. "You are a vegetarian, and since you don't allow goats to be brought here I shall soon starve to death, it seems". Out of compassion for the tiger, Balak Nath promised that he would henceforth allow worshippers to bring him goats which he would then pass on to the tiger for his consumption keeping only the vegetarian offering for himself. It is impossible to say whether this story refers to any actual historical change in the cult of Baba Balak Nath, but if it does, then the practice of offering live goats must represent a concession to meat eating rather than to vegetarianism. What I noticed in conversation with villagers was the spontaneous emphasis which they themselves gave to the fact that the animals offered to Balak Nath, Devi and

the Agassia are not slaughtered but released or resold by the guardians of the shrines. They themselves stressed the fact that the animals are not actually killed before I made any enquiry about their fate.

Further evidence that vegetarianism has normative value in the religious context is provided by the fact that in households where meat, eggs, or fish are eaten, these items are never brought near to a religious image. In one Brahman household where several members of the family were in the habit of eating eggs, I observed the wife remove the bag of eggs from the kitchen to another room before she started to prepare the prasād for an offering to Devi which she intended to make. "It would not be good to have eggs in the kitchen while we are worshipping Devi", she said, "because eggs and meat are not pure".

In the absence of any clear-cut distinction between meat eating and vegetarian castes among humans, it is perhaps understandable that the situation should be equally vague in the religious context. If we are to look upon the pantheon as an upward extension of the human caste hierarchy, then its division into strictly compartmented (but complementary) sectors according to the preferred diet of its members is natural where such a division occurs in human society. But in Dohk there is no such division at

the human level. Admittedly members of any caste may eat meat although they seldom actually do so, since they claim that they prefer the money they get from selling the goats they raise in the towns of the plains to the pleasure they would get from eating their flesh. But if meat eating is tolerated, vegetarianism receives the greater approval.

The tastes and behaviour attributed by the villagers to their devatas reflects this situation fairly exactly. The dominant norm amongst the gods, as among men, is vegetarianism, but the presentation of animals at certain shrines and the statement that blood offerings used to be made to Siddh Channo hint at the possibility of meat eating among the devatas as well as among men.

Nor can we find any clear division of the pantheon into pure and impure deities according to the ritual status of their devotees. There are, it is true, devatas associated with particular castes but only in two cases are such devatas worshipped by members of these castes alone. The exclusive worshipped of Visvakarma by the artisan castes does not appear to have anything to do with rules of purity and impurity, only to spring from the fact that the gifts which Visvakarma specializes in providing (manual strength and certain technical skills) are ones which are mainly of value to members of these castes. The case of Siddh Channo is more complex. He is the patron of the Chamars and is often

represented as having been a Chamar. Yet he is regarded as having the power to affect the lives of members of other castes, especially by causing them to suffer from diseases which can only be removed by propitiating him. Villagers themselves did not suggest that Siddh Channo was in any way 'impure' when they explained why his worship was always performed indirectly through the agency of a Chamar deputed to this possibility, an informant denied that it was so. "If a Brahman worshipped Siddh Channo he would not become impure. It would just be a waste of his time because Siddh Channo only listens to Chamars." All the same, historically speaking, the concept of impurity may have more to do with the matter than villagers themselves are prepared to admit, when other aspects of the cult are taken into account. For instance, where there are shrines to Siddh Channo these are usually, though not invariably, erected at the places used by Chamars for cleaning and tanning hides. In any village where Chamars are living such a spot will be found at a little distance from the Chamārarī (Chamars' quarters) and will be strictly avoided by members of higher castes. They do this even when there are no evil-smelling skins stretched to dry there, since the place is associated with the very process to which they ascribe the Chamars' extreme pollution. I was told that

there was once a shrine to Siddh Channo at the place where hides are cleaned in Dohk, although no trace of this shrine remains now. In other villages, even where no such shrine exists, Chamars often conduct the worship of Siddh Channo at such a place. So even if nowadays members of high castes do not explicitly describe Channo as an 'impure' devata, his circumstantial association with places and processes which are themselves potent sources of pollution may help to explain why they depute his worship to those who are already ritually degraded themselves.

If this represents a distinction between the pure and the impure it is clearly only a very rudimentary one. But this does not mean that there are no hierarchical distinctions among the gods of other kinds, for the villagers do 'grade' their devatas to a certain extent on other criteria. The precise manner in which these distinctions are made varies somewhat according to individuals, but they are made explicitly and spontaneously, and usually in terms of power. It is common to hear certain devatas referred to as 'great' devatas, and these are generally the scriptural deities like Shiva, Vishnu and Durga, who are known and worshipped in all parts of India. "Durga is the greatest of all devatas because it is in her power to do anything she wants to do", said a Brahman woman. Some devatas are

thought to be extremely powerful even though their cults do not have such extensive spread, such as Siddh Channo. On the other hand, those whose power is accounted less forceful are certainly those of decidedly local repute. For instance, I noticed that some villagers were rather sceptical about the powers of the Agassia who are generally regarded as 'women's devatas'. A Jat man said, "The Agassia do not have much power. They exist all right, but they cannot do very much. Only women have faith in them, otherwise they are not great devatas." He was not expressing doubts about the existence of these devatas or even about their divinity, only about their ability to influence their worshippers' lives in any useful way (and hence about the value of worshipping them). Another villager made the distinction between 'old' devatas and 'new' devatas. "Shiva, Vishnu, Durga, Ganesh and such devatas are really ancient. They were worshipped by our ancestors and their names are in the Vedas. But these Siddhs and saints are just modern devatas men have started worshipping in recent times and their powers are not very great". The same man, a Khatri from a nearby village, made a slightly different distinction on another occasion. "The Siddhs are only human beings who have come to be worshipped by men because they lived good lives or because of their asceticism." A Brahman who had

had a little education made the distinction which I have already referred to, between devatas who approach assimilation to the concept of Bhagvān and those which do not. "Rama and Krishna and great gods like that are Bhagvān. They are everywhere just as blood is everywhere in the body. Bhagvān is everywhere but he can appear in the form of Rama or Krishna if he pleases. Even a great saint like Kabir is really a form of Bhagvān, but little devatas like Baba Balak Nath are not Bhagvān. They are just men who have become devatas because they impressed others. They do not have great powers."¹ Not every villager would agree with these statements - if they did the cults of the lesser devatas would hardly have survived so long - but they illustrate the sort of criteria by which such grading takes place. To the extent that a hierarchical principle is detectable in the pantheon of Dohk it is based on power rather than purity (which is not surprising when we consider that it is the power of the devatas which the villager hopes to enlist to his aid when he worships and which largely accounts for his interest in them). And power is not distributed evenly among the devatas any more than it is among the castes that

1. Cf. Fuchs (1966), p. 229. "Sometimes, however, Bhagwan is identified with a god, with Rama. But when called to attention the Balahis merely admit that Rama is sometimes addressed as Bhagwan, since he is Bhagwan's incarnation."

make up village society.

There are other ways in which the pantheon reflects the structure of human society. The devatas have their specialties, just as there is a division of labour among men. Durga specializes in causing and curing pustular diseases. Agassia in feminine problems, Gugga in curing snake bite and the Siddhs in protecting cattle. In fact the realm of the human and the realm of the divine are not very clearly separated. Humans can become devatas, as in the case of the Siddhs, who are not supposed to have started life as other than ordinary mortals whatever powers they may have achieved later in their careers. Ancestors, too, readily acquire divine status. Certain great devatas can incarnate themselves in human form and even lesser devatas can adopt human guises in order to help or confound their devotees. The distinction between 'saint' and 'deity' which is of theological importance in Islam and Christianity is not critical in Hinduism, and the Muslim Pir is referred to as a saint or a devata quite indifferently by his Hindu worshippers. The cosmic hierarchy is extended upwards from the human level to the divine without any abrupt break, although above the human level its various grades are only distinguished roughly by human beings. This in itself recalls the vagueness which villagers often show about the

precise order of caste ranking in areas of the hierarchy remote from the status of their own caste. For example, in Dohk the Chamars drew fine distinctions between the ranks of various untouchable castes and their sub-divisions. They were aware of the existence of different sections of the untouchable Dumna caste and treated some of these as less pure than others. The Brahmans, however, were unaware that such sub-divisions existed and treated Chamars and Dumnas in exactly the same fashion in any case.

Shrines and Temples.

In this section I shall give an outline of the part which shrines and temples erected to members of the pantheon play in the religious life of the villagers. This is of relevance here for two reasons. Firstly, private rituals of worship such as I have described in this chapter may be performed at village shrines as well as in the home. Secondly, the erection of a shrine can be an expression of a phase in a personal relationship with the devata to whom it is dedicated.

Hinduism is essentially a domestic religion. That is, all the rites which a Hindu need perform can be carried out in his own home. It is possible for him to lead a life of piety and devotion without ever going near to a shrine

or temple. Shrines and temples do not have a role comparable to that of the church in Christian worship, the mosque in Islam or even of the Gurudwara in Sikh religious life.¹ The occasions on which a village shrine acts as the venue of any kind of religious concourse are few and far between. Village shrines are more commonly used for private acts of worship than for any other purpose. Most private worship takes place in the home, but if the devata which is to be worshipped has a shrine in the village, the devotee may perform the ritual or worship there instead. If the shrine contains an image, the worshipper addresses the same ritual attentions to it as would otherwise be addressed to a privately owned image in the home. But not every shrine does contain an image. Only three of the eight shrines in Dohk have one. The majority of village shrines are very simple structures, often consisting of no more than a rough stone platform beneath a tree or beside a footpath. If this is the case, the ritual is directed to whichever part of the shrine seems to form its focal point. Some shrines contain a stone which is regarded as representing the devata to which it is dedicated, as in the case of the

1. "People go to temples as they go to visit a saintly man or a sacred place or a renowned scholar. They pay homage to the image and offer flowers and incense. But if there were none of these sanctuaries Hindu life and its rituals would be in no way affected." Daniélou (1964), p. 376.

Thakur shrine in Dohk, and others may incorporate some symbol of the devata. A shrine dedicated to Shiva in the village next to Dohk contains a stone which is regarded as representing Shiva's lingam, or phallus, and a shrine dedicated to Siddh Channo contains a rough depiction of an elephant. Such symbols can serve the purpose of an image in worship and are treated in exactly the same way as representational images are, i.e. the worshipper will bathe them, apply ṭikā, burn incense before them. If the shrine contains no symbol or image which could form the focus for ritual of this kind, then the worshipper may simply omit that part of the ritual which requires some physical focus. Or he may perform it at home with some domestic image, coming to the shrine in order to make the offering of food before distributing the remainder as prasād.

The image or symbol housed in a shrine has the same kind of function in private worship as a domestic image, but in another sense the entire shrine is treated in a manner analogous to that of an image. Just as when a villager who worships in his own home removes his shoes before commencing as a sign of respect for the devata's superior purity, so he removes his shoes before approaching a shrine. When they pass by a shrine on their way to the fields villagers avoid stepping too near it if they are wearing shoes. If

the shrine is a roofed structure which can be actually entered (in Dohk only the shrine dedicated to Baba Dera is of this type) women will cover their heads before going in. This, admittedly is a matter of respect rather than of purity. A married woman keeps her head covered before any elder member of her husband's family and covers her face as well in the presence of male affines senior to her husband, even though there is no difference in their ritual status as members of the same caste. But a married woman in her husband's village will also veil her face if she meets a man whose caste is higher than her own if he is senior to her husband in years as well. So the gesture may have some reference to matters of purity and pollution.

Though villagers do not always assume any particular air of reverence when they approach a shrine in the ordinary course of daily routine, they demonstrate their respect for the devata housed there by doing their best to see that no impure article or substance is brought near such a holy place. Children are warned to avoid the environs of a shrine when they go into the fields to defecate and household rubbish is not tipped too near one. The majority of village shrines are also out of bounds to members of very impure castes. Chamars are not permitted to use any of the eight shrines in Dohk, with the possible exception of the shrine

to Raja Bharatri. A few people were of the opinion that Chamars might use this shrine if they wished but I never observed any Chamar attempt to worship at any of the shrines in the village. A Chamar who had been employed by a well-to-do Rajput in a nearby village to cut stones for a temple to Durga which he was having constructed grumbled about this. "They are very pleased to get Chamars to cut stones for their temples but you can be sure that they won't allow me to go in once it is built." It is argued by members of higher castes that the Chamars have their own shrines and their own devatas just as they have their own ritual customs in matters like weddings and funerals. "If Chamars want to worship Shiva or Durga or Balak Nath or any devata at a shrine they could always build one for themselves", said a Brahman informant. In reality there are very few local shrines available for the use of Chamars. There used, according to village tradition, to be a shrine dedicated to Siddh Channo in Dohk which was used by the Chamars and there are a few shrines dedicated to this 'Chamar' devata in the neighbourhood. These seem to be the only village shrines which Chamars can use freely and when these are built in the vicinity of the Chamar quarters they are not used by members of other castes. It is difficult to judge whether it is the purity of the high caste devotees or the purity of the devatas which is the prime consideration when Chamars

are barred from using shrines, but the restriction is congruent with the desire to effect the ritual separation of whatever is deemed impure from whatever is associated with the devatas.

Devatas are not limited to a physical body as a man is, though they may take on such a form when it pleases them. They are therefore not limited to inhabiting any one place at any one time. But they are thought of as tending to haunt particular places which please them and as being especially 'present' at certain spots, in particular the shrines dedicated to them. A shrine may be erected in the first place because there is evidence that it is a favoured abode of the devata concerned. Describing the woodland clearing near Dohk where there is a shrine dedicated to Khwajah, a Lohar woman said, "It is a very good place. The Khwajah lives in the spring and that is why his shrine is nearby". But it sometimes seems that the devatas lose interest in a place they have previously favoured. Some shrines which have long been out of use appear to lose their sanctity and the rules which would serve to maintain their purity are no longer observed. There are two such shrines in Dohk. One is situated on a rocky ridge outside the settlement area and is said to have been dedicated to Gugga. The other is in the jungle about a mile from the village

itself and it is no longer certain to which devata it was originally dedicated. No one uses these shrines for worship nowadays and rules like the prohibition of wearing shoes are no longer observed in their environs.¹ It is difficult to say why these shrines have shed their sanctity when another shrine in the village, a more modern construction consecrated to Krishna, has been disused for the last ten years or more without losing its holiness. It could have been their inaccessibility which originally led to their neglect and consequent loss of sanctity, since unlike the Krishna shrine neither of them are near to regularly used dwelling places or footpaths.

We can pursue the comparison between the ritual treatment of images and shrines a stage further here. For images can come to lose their sanctity in a similar fashion through long disuse. For example, before the present shrine of Baba Dera was built about ten years ago there was an ancient shrine of the same dedication on the same site. It contained some images of Baba Dera and his brother as well as of various other Hindu devatas, which were removed when it was dismantled. Members of the family who had sponsored the erection of the new shrine arranged them on a ledge outside their house where they are still displayed,

1. There is also a ruined shrine within the ramparts of an ancient fort four miles from Dohk which is treated with the same ritual indifference.

though no longer used in ritual. They are not now treated as though endowed with any special purity or with any ritual distinction. At most they are handled with the sort of respect which any other object of historical value might receive.

There are eight¹ shrines in Dohk, dedicated to the following devatas; Baba Dera, Raja Bharatri, Devi, Khwajah, Krishna, Pir, Baba Sindhu and Thakur. Each of these, except for the shrine dedicated to the Pir, is associated with a particular family or individual. The shrine to Baba Sindhu and the Krishna shrine were both erected in the first place by the men who act as their custodians at the present time, a Lohar and a Brahman respectively. In the other cases, the devata to whom the shrine is dedicated is the household devata of the family associated with it. The Brahman families who tend the shrines dedicated to Baba Dera and Devi are known to be the decendants of the founders of these shrines. But in what circumstances the three Brahman families who tend the shrines dedicated to Raja Bharatri, Khwajah and Thakur came to be associated with them in the first place is not known.

A shrine may be erected as a spontaneous and voluntary act of piety to a personal devata, as the shrine

¹Nine if we include the neglected shrine whose use has recently been revived for the worship of Lakhman Siddh. See above, p. 155.



Figure 5. Map showing shrines in Dohk.

of Devi is said to have been. But just as it is usually the constraint of some misfortune which impels private acts of worship, so (where anything at all is known about the circumstances of their erection) few shrines seem to have been built as altogether unsolicited marks of devotion.

A shrine may be built in order to satisfy a devata who is being troublesome, as in the case of the shrine to Baba Sindhu.¹ The Thakur shrine is said to have been built in similar circumstances. According to the local story, there was once a Lohar in Dohk who used to use a certain large stone to weight down his jute when he soaked it in a small stream which runs through the fields. But unknown to him, this stone was the dwelling place of Thakur, who began to trouble him by sending bad dreams and causing him to fall from his bed at nights. One night, Thakur appeared to him in a dream and explained that these troubles were a punishment for having removed the stone from its original position. In the morning the Lohar went straight to the stream and replaced the stone beside it, promising also to build a shrine there. He later fulfilled this vow and erected the shrine which still stands there today.

The history of the Baba Dera shrine is similar to this. This shrine was built to replace the older structure

¹. See above, p. 136.

on the same site. Agya Ram, the custodian of the shrine, had suffered from a reverse in his fortunes. He had been the richest man in the village until about fifteen years ago when he lost several large sums of money. He attributed this, I was told, to the wrath of Baba Dera, whose shrine had become rather decrepit through neglect and decay. By building the new shrine he averted the devata's anger, and indeed his affairs began to prosper again, for he was wealthy enough at his death four years ago.

I have referred to certain families being the 'custodians' of shrines but in fact they do not have any set duties. Villagers will say that "the shrine to Baba Dera is Agya Ram's", or "the shrine of Raja Bharatri is Ram Chand's shrine", but the guardianship does not involve more than a feeling of proprietary interest in the shrine occasionally expressed by carrying out a few repairs. Usually the devata to whom the shrine is dedicated is the household devata of the family, but they are as likely to perform rites of worship in their own home as at the shrines. They do not receive offerings made at the shrines or officiate at rites held by other villagers there, and the function brings neither material gain nor any special prestige.

In fact not a great deal of ritual activity takes place at shrines at all, and though the fact that they

continue to be built (three of the eight shrines in Dohk were constructed within living memory and I noticed three shrines in the process of construction in other villages nearby) suggests that they are important to the villagers, it is difficult to tell where their importance lies.

Perhaps they are best interpreted as spatial extensions of the villager's personal religious activities beyond the domestic context. The shrine, like the privately owned image, is an emblem of the devata, and like the image it is treated as having a special purity which must be respected and protected. But it is an emblem which exists outside the home and which is available for public use and therefore relates the private cult practiced by the individual to the religious life of the community as a whole. The erection of a shrine may be a phase in the development of a personal or family association with a particular devata, and the subsequent association of the shrine with the family may represent a stabilization of the relationship on a household basis. Where an individual builds a shrine as a result of some personal revelation from the devata, transactions between man and devata of an essentially private character are given public evidence. Shrines are important, therefore, less for what they are used for than for what they demonstrate.

The villager's experience of shrines and temples is

not limited to those found in his own village, as there are few adults in Dohk who have not at some time in their lives made a pilgrimage to one of the well-known shrines in Himachal Pradesh. Pilgrimages are most often made in fulfillment of some vow, and usually a promise is also made to present a specific offering. For example, a Brahman woman vowed to make an offering of ghi at the shrine of Baba Ludru at Jogipanga if her children passed their annual school examinations. This she duly performed when the results showed them all to have been successful. Another reason for making a pilgrimage is to deposit the hair shorn from a boy's head at the first hair-cutting ceremony. Or sometimes a pilgrimage is prompted by no such necessity but is undertaken simply for its own sake. Towards the end of the hot season when there is little agricultural work to be done, groups of women often arrange to visit some not too distant cult centre and such a pilgrimage constitutes both a holiday and an adventure for the villager, who has little opportunity to travel beyond the immediate neighbourhood of his village in the normal run of things.

The ritual acts performed at temples which are centres of pilgrimage follow the same pattern as those performed at local shrines and in private domestic worship. The same concern for purity is shown, though the physical

area which the devata's presence endows with ritual purity is greater. Many temples have a tap or water tank near to the entrance at which the pilgrim will rinse his hands by way of purification, just as he does before worshipping in his own home. Likewise he will remove his shoes before entering, and women will cover their heads. The attentions which the worshipper directs to the image when he worships at home are unnecessary in a large temple, such as the temple to Devi at Kangra, for there will be professional custodians whose duty it is to bathe and tend the image regularly. The pilgrim bows in front of the image and places whatever he has brought as an offering there. He then received prasād from the attendant priest. In some temples, such as the Durbar Sahib of the Sikhs at Amritsar (which a few members of Dohk had visited) a worshipper who offers a garland of flowers receives another in return from the officiant. But whatever the case, there is always both a giving to the devata and a receiving back from him, just as there is in domestic worship. Usually some of the prasād is taken home to be given to relatives or friends in the village, for the prasād from a famous temple is somehow regarded as conveying specially valued blessings compared with the prasād prepared in the village, and is prized greatly.

At some holy places special acts of reverence are performed which are thought to bring spiritual blessings to

the devotee, such as bathing in the Ganges at Haridwar or making offerings to the flames of natural gas which issue from the rocks at the famous temple of Devi at Jvalamukhi. All these acts of worship form the culmination of the pilgrim's journey, the fulfillment of the purpose with which he set out, and are eagerly looked forward to.

Most of the holy places which have been visited by pilgrims from Dohk are in the Punjab or the Himalayan foothills. The following temples and shrines had been visited by members of Dohk; the cult centre of Baba Ludru at Jogipanga, the temples dedicated to Devi at Chintapurni, Jvalamukhi, Kangra and Naina Devi; the shrine of Baba Balek Nath at Shah Talai; the shrine of the Pir at Pir Nagah; Haridwar;¹ the shrine of Raja Bharatri at Makrer. One might also include the headquarters of the Radhaswami sect at Beas which is frequently visited by members of this sect, including some Tarkhans and Chamars from Dohk. I have not taken into account here visits made to holy places in the course of journeys made primarily for other than religious reasons, in which case one would also have to include the temple to Krishna at Dvarka, visited by several boys from Dohk who had travelled widely in North India as members of the armed forces, and the Durbar Sahib at Amritsar, which most of the men who had ever been employed outside the

1. Haridwar is mainly visited by men for the purpose of depositing the ashes of a deceased relative in the Ganges there.

village had visited at some time or other.

Just as the concern for purity which surrounds the village shrines debars members of certain low castes from using them the same considerations restrict the use of the larger temples by untouchable castes. A Chamar, for instance, could not touch the feet of the Brahman mahant at Jogipanga, any more than he could deliberately touch a Brahman in any other context. Certainly he would not be allowed to enter the langar (the public refectory where the pilgrims are fed) and if he wished to make an offering of food it would only be acceptable if it consisted of uncooked provisions such as flour or sugar. "A Chamar might be able to do these things if he concealed his caste", explained one informant, "but he would be unlikely to do such a thing; he would be afraid that people might find out that he was of low caste and that they would be angry with him". (I rely on what I was told here rather than on what I was able to observe myself, for I never visited any place of pilgrimage in the company of Chamars).

None of the Chamars of Dohk had ever undertaken any journey for the sole purpose of visiting a particular temple or shrine, with the exception of one family who had become Radhaswamis and had visited the sect's headquarters at Beas. This could partly be due to the poverty of the Chamars which

places pilgrimages beyond their means. Economic factors would also account for the fact that trips to the more distant holy places, such as Kangra, were confined to the wealthier members of the village, mainly Brahmans. But, financial considerations apart, the very rules which safeguard the purity of a temple and which demonstrate its sanctity debar the Chamar from doing the very things which make a pilgrimage worth while for the average villager.

Just as the shrine symbolizes the relating of the villager's private devotions to the religious life of the village community, so the temple which is the centre of pilgrimage places his relationship with the devatas in a wider geographical context. By worshipping there he demonstrates his participation in a religious tradition common to an even wider community of people. But the rules which protect the purity of a great temple like that of Devi at Kangra or a smaller cult centre such as that of Baba Ludru at Jogipanga are no different from those which protect the sanctity of a village shrine or a domestic image. Whatever the spatial dimensions of the private cult, its idiom is the same, and the purity of the devata which is its object is a theme which integrates all its aspects.

Chapter 4. Priestly rites.

The religious activities which I have described in the preceding chapter may be carried out by the villager at any time without the aid of any ritual specialist. But there are some rituals, mainly life cycle rituals, which can only be conducted with the help of a Brahman priest. Unlike the private ritual of mathā tekṇā, these are of an essentially public nature. The attendance of others is always desirable and sometimes essential.

I shall divide my description of these rituals into sections dealing with (a) the role of the Brahman priest; (b) a description of one priestly ritual as an illustration of their general idiom; (c) the life cycle rites practiced by the clean castes; (d) priesthood and life cycle rites among the Chamars and Julahas. I shall maintain a comparison of these rites with the private rites I have already described in order to see whether they really represent two separate 'levels' or 'types' of Hinduism, or whether they are not based on the same principles.

The Brahman priesthood.

There is a mutual interdependence among the different castes in the village in religious matters, even though it is less obvious than their economic interdependence. In Chapter 3 I showed how members of the higher castes depend

on Chamars to make offerings on their behalf to Siddh Channo. Members of all castes in Dohk except the Chamars are even more heavily dependent on the help of a Brahman priest in their religious affairs.

The Hindu villager needs Brahmans for two purposes. He needs a Brahman priest to perform certain rituals for him (unless he belongs to one of those castes which are too low to be able to engage the services of a Brahman priest). He also needs Brahmans as recipients of charity. It would not be parodying the villagers' beliefs to say that they regard God as being in all creation but as being in the Brahman more than in other beings. "The Brahman is the svarūp (likeness) of Bhagvān. Those who abuse a Brahman abuse God himself".¹ These were the words of a Brahman, but members of other castes assented to this general sentiment in theory, even if they had little compunction in abusing individual Brahmans of their acquaintance in practice.

All dān (giving) brings merit, but on account of his extraordinary purity and holiness, it is especially meritorious to give to a Brahman. The presentation of charitable gifts to Brahmans form a part of many of the rites I shall describe in this chapter.

Technically a gift made to any Brahman is good, but a gift made to a particularly pious Brahman, one who is

1. Cf. Dumont (1957), p. 419. "Le dieu véritable, c'est le Brahmane".

devoted to God and does no evil, is the best of all. An elderly Brahman of Dohk was known for his piety and righteousness and generally admired for his pacific nature and refusal to become involved in quarrels and jealous gossip. He was much in demand as a recipient of charity at occasions like Shraddh.¹ Also a gift to a poor and needy Brahman is preferable to a gift made to a Brahman who is already well-endowed, all other things being equal.

If it is the duty of other castes to give to Brahmans, it is the duty of Brahmans themselves to facilitate spiritual progress by acceptance of their gifts. This may not sound a very difficult task to perform, but what it means in practice is that a Brahman who has been invited to receive charity from a villager in the form of a meal ought to leave whatever business he is engaged in at the time, however urgent it may be, to go forthwith to that person's house, whether or not it is convenient for him at the time. Likewise, since gifts to a pious Brahman are more meritorious than gifts to a Brahman who lives a godless and selfish life it behoves the Brahman to lead a more than usually upright life in order to be the more efficient instrument in the salvation of others. "The Brahmans in Dohk quarrel too much", said a Jat informant, "though they ought to be setting an example to other castes."

1. See below, p. 303.

Members of those castes from whom Brahmans cannot accept food without polluting themselves cannot, of course, feed Brahmans in the same way that higher castes can, but they can obtain exactly the same merit by either giving a Brahman the ingredients for the meal to take away and cook himself or by inviting the Brahman to a meal prepared and served by a Brahman or by a member of some other high caste, but provided at his own expense.

Since Brahmans are so important to the villager as recipients of his charity it is desirable that there should be at least one Brahman family living close to him. In villages where most of the land is owned by non-Brahmans it is very common to find a single Brahman family living, having been invited (according to the inhabitants) to reside there at some time in the past in order that they might have Brahmans at hand to receive their gifts. In Dohk the original settlers themselves were Brahmans. Brahmans can benefit spiritually by giving to other Brahmans, but the merit is greater if the recipient is a member of some other gotra. One of the four non-Parashar families in Dohk is said to be descended from a man invited by the original Parashar settlers so that they might have neighbours of a different gotra to whom they could give charity.

But villagers do not only need Brahmans as recipients

of their charity. Certain rituals, especially life cycle rituals, can only be performed with the help of a Brahman priest, since only the Brahman is qualified, by both his learning and his Brahmanhood, to recite the sacred verses and direct the offerings which they accompany. There is no way of preventing any literate person from reading these mantras since they are accessible to all in the bookshops in Nagal and other nearby towns. Members of the low Julaha caste in neighbouring villages, being debarred from employing a Brahman by their polluted state, are turning nowadays to an educated Khatri member of the reformist Arya Samaj, who uses the mantras which the Brahman priests employ when they perform worship for their patrons. But by members of the clean castes these mantras are regarded as only being effective if recited by a Brahman. They are so sacred that only a Brahman is pure enough to have the right to use them. Hence, besides receiving the gifts of other castes, the other duty of the Brahman is to be learned so that he can assist them in carrying out essential rituals which they are not qualified to perform alone. The Brahman should have a knowledge of the scriptures and should be able to instruct members of other castes in their meaning. This is the ideal expressed by Brahmans and non-Brahmans alike, although obviously most of the Brahmans in Dohk are unable to attain

it. "Brahmans ought to be learned", explained a Brahman farmer, rather apologetically, "But this is the Kal Yug and what time does a busy farmer get for educating himself?"

But since it is his very Brahmanhood which equips the Brahman to be the priest of the other castes, in theory any member of the priestly caste can fulfil the sacerdotal function, even if he is not very learned. This was demonstrated when the members of one Brahman family in Dohk decided to hold a kathā. They invited a Brahman priest of their acquaintance to come and perform it, but the latter agreed only rather unwillingly, since a serious quarrel had embittered relations between the two families recently. When all the guests invited had arrived but there was still no sign of the priest, it became evident that he had had no intention of coming in the first place, and the sponsor of the kathā became desperate. In the end the situation was saved when another Brahman, his neighbour, offered to read the text himself. He was not a highly educated man, but he knew the Devanagari script well enough to stumble through the Sanskrit text to the end. At any rate the sponsor of the kathā was considered to have obtained no less merit than he would have done if the priest had turned up, even if the audience did not get such good entertainment. This would not have been possible had the occasion been, for instance,

a wedding or a funeral, for though an untrained person might be able to carry off a kathā without too much difficulty, a detailed knowledge of the correct ritual procedure which must accompany the recitation is necessary for the more elaborate rites.

Any Brahman can be called paṇḍit (i.e. learned man) as a respectful form of address whether he be learned or not, just as a Rajput may be addressed as Thākur or a Tarkhan as Mistriji. Likewise any Brahman who carries out ritual functions is a padah (i.e. priest). But only the term purohit specifies the relationship between the priest and the person whom he serves. The relationship between the purohit and his patron is really an inherited connection between two households rather than a contractual one between individuals, in which respect it is exactly similar to the relationships which exist between the households of farmers and artisans who work for them. In fact the same term - jajmān - is used to refer to the patron in either case, and the jajmān does not choose his purohit any more than he selects his own Nai or Chamar.

A purohit visits his jajmāns twice yearly, that is, once after the maize harvest, and a second time when the wheat has just been gathered, to collect the payment of grain due to him. At each harvest he collects an amount of grain

(about eight pounds) which is fixed by custom, but the head of the household may give more if he is feeling generous or has had a good harvest. Only the minimum is determined by custom. In addition to these annual dues, which are payable whether or not the householder has had occasion to call upon his priest's services during the preceding year, separate payments are made whenever the priest performs some ritual for his patron. Joyous occasions, such as the birth of a son or the wedding of a son or daughter, also call for the making of gifts to the purohit, regardless of whether or not he has carried out any ritual duties on the occasion.¹

The minimum cash sum given for any ritual performed is Rs. $1\frac{1}{4}$. This is the usual sum donated for the performance of a kathā, but for more important rites like weddings, multiples of this amount may be given. The householder has an interest in giving as much as he can afford, for on all occasions the giving is done in public and honour accrues from giving much. On many occasions there is also a public collection for the priest from those who have attended the ceremony, so that the purohit may earn cash from those who are not his jajmāns in the course of performing rites for the latter.

1. Villagers who go to work in the towns sometimes have ceremonies performed there by local priests, but make the customary gifts to their purohīts when they next make the journey to the village.

The Brahman priest acquires his skills from his father, learning by accompanying him and watching him at work, in exactly the same way as the artisan receives his instruction from his father. The priest must also learn from his father certain non-ritual skills expected of a priest. For instance he must learn how the Hindu calendar works so that the villagers can consult him to find out in advance the dates of important festivals. Especially, he must learn how to make horoscopes for his jajmāns for the matching of horoscopes is an important consideration when two young people are to be married. Some priests also specialize in the making of protective amulets, charms to counteract the effects of ill-disposed configurations of the planets, mantras recited to ward off or cure common diseases, and other skills. These specialities, however, are not exclusive to Brahmans since members of other castes, especially chēlās, may gain a reputation for knowing such remedies.

As the purohit grows older and feels less and less inclined to tramp from village to village in the service of his patrons, his son gradually takes over the work himself. At the time of my arrival in the village, the somewhat elderly man who was the purohit of the Brahmans of Dohk would travel on foot from his home, which was about fifteen

miles away, to perform rituals for his jajmāns. He was usually accompanied by his eldest son, who would watch what was going on very attentively, and sometimes assist his father. By the time I was ready to depart, the father was very seldom seen in Dohk and almost all the rituals he had been used to perform were now carried out by his son.

When a purohit has more than one son, he will choose for his successor that son whom he considers most suitable for a priestly training and will instruct him accordingly. It is not the custom here to divide the jajmāns equally amongst all the sons, as is the case in Dohk amongst the artisans. Surprisingly, perhaps, I did not find any cases of disputes concerning the inheritance of office amongst the sons of priests; villagers stated that there could be no such quarrels, for the whole matter rested with the father. During his lifetime he alone had it in his hands to decide who should succeed him as purohit, and after his death it was too late to quarrel, since there was no way to obtain skills from a dead man. Another consideration may be that the rewards of office for a purohit are small relative to the time and effort which must be put into the job. All the purohits who have jajmāns in Dohk are land owners, and Rs.1 $\frac{1}{4}$ and the prospect of a free meal is not as great inducement as it sounds to persuade a busy farmer to

leave his fields and tramp for miles through the countryside at those seasons of the year when the time would be better invested in weeding or hoeing the crops. Many purohits live at some distance from their jajmāns and the son who inherits his fathers patrons may not refuse to come to their houses when called upon. Prestige is certainly derived from the office, but it seems that this is not sufficient compensation for the obligations involved to cause brothers to contest their fathers' decisions at present. Land is, at the moment, a more fertile source of disputes than priestcraft and at least one of the purohits who has jajmāns in Dohk has been involved in serious quarrels with real or classificatory brothers over the inheritance of land. Whether, when the competition for other sources of income (due to rising population and the expansion of education) becomes greater, the sons of priests will also begin to compete for the income derived from serving their fathers' jajmāns remains to be seen.

There is no way for a villager to change his purohit in theory, but in fact the purohit may be effectively replaced by another priest. When this happens, it is not because the villager is dissatisfied with his hereditary priest's performance; since he does not understand the Sanskrit in which the mantras are recited he really has no

way of assessing it. But what often happens is that the members of a particular family move some distance from their original home and then find it troublesome to make the long journey to summon their purohit every time his services are required. Therefore they begin to employ a priest who lives nearer to their new place of residence. In such cases the original purohit does not lose his right to receive annual payment and the usual occasional gifts. For example, the Lohars of Dohk came to the village some generations back from a place over twenty miles away, and still maintain their connection with the descendant of the purohit they had employed there. But for most ritual purposes they invite a priest who is not their purohit but who lives near Dohk, and their real purohit only visits them rather irregularly to collect his dues. Another example is provided by a young Brahman of Dohk who acquired a slight knowledge of sacred texts during a stay in the plains. His father had not been a priest, and so this young man is not anyone's purohit. But it is to this pādhā that the Brahmans of Dohk are increasingly turning for the performance of kathās and minor rituals, simply because he is on the spot.

In fact no villager is likely to have to search far for a Brahman priest to serve him when he needs one, since there is no shortage of such specialists. Apart from the

young priest I have just mentioned, five priests serve the villagers of Dohk as the purohits of the members of one or more caste group. Two of these live over ten miles away and are only invited for important rituals. But on the other hand, there are at least three other priests who live within a radius of five miles from Dohk and are called upon from time to time to perform rituals by its inhabitants even though they have no jajmāns in the village. Proximity is not the only factor which influences the villager's choice of priest, for he is unlikely to call a priest who has not also earned his esteem as an upright character, but it is a very important consideration in an area where the jajmān has to go on foot to a village perhaps many miles away every time he needs to call his purohit.

The only ritual which the purohit cannot perform for his jajmān is part of the funeral ceremony. Because death, and all that has to do with death, is a potent source of pollution, most of the ritual carried out at the funeral requires the services of a special funeral priest known as the Charaj. This specialist is a Brahman by caste, and the relationship he has with his patrons is an inherited one exactly like that of the purohit. But he is a very inferior kind of Brahman, too low to be allowed to marry with other Brahmans, so that the Charaj form a separate endogamous group.

This was the only instance I could find of differentiation of ritual status among Brahmans. Those who serve as purohīts or priests are regarded with extra respect, but are under no obligation to choose marriage partners from similar families (except that those whose jajmāns are Brahmans would avoid intermarriage with their own patrons). Nor is any distinction in ritual status or prestige made between those purohīts who serve high caste patrons and those whose jajmāns are of humbler rank. Such differentiation would hardly be practicable anyway, since many purohīts count members of a variety of castes among their clientele, some of whom may be of high caste and others of low caste. For example, one purohit who has patrons in Dohk serves Nais and Jats, but is not reckoned less worthy of honour than another who lives near to Dohk and whose jajmāns are all Rajputs.

There is, however, a consistent difference in dietary habits between priestly Brahmans and lay Brahmans. All those Brahmans who practice in any priestly capacity are strict vegetarians, even though in this area meat is not otherwise prohibited for Brahmans. When they marry into non-vegetarian families, their wives conform to the dietary rules of their husbands' households. Most priests will not even allow eggs to be brought into their kitchens.

This is another example of the application of the rules noted in the preceding chapter. The cult of the devatas is surrounded by rules whose effect is to maximise the disjunction of anything that is impure from the purity of the gods. It is logical therefore that the Brahman who regularly acts as an instrument in their cult should maximise his own purity by avoiding impure forms of diet in order to be a more worthy instrument.

The pattern of priestly ritual.

In the rites which the Brahman priest helps his patron to perform, the devatas are not addressed spontaneously as in the private rites already described, but are contacted through the use of formal verses in Sanskrit recorded in written texts, which are recited aloud by the priest.

It is at this point in the study of Hinduism that we encounter most directly the problem of the relationship between the literary and the folk traditions in a society where literacy is far from universal. Priestly rites are based on ancient texts which have for centuries been preserved and expounded by the Brahman priests. The Sanskrit in which they are written is no longer used as an everyday means of communication outside a few learned Brahman families and is incomprehensible to the villager for the most part. I suspect that even the village priests in the area I studied have at most only a very shallow understanding of

the language, and rely more on a Hindi 'crib' than on a real knowledge of the grammar and vocabulary of Sanskrit when they expound the scriptural verses to their jajmāns.

The sociologist is not equipped, nor is it his proper task, to explain how the complex poetic expression of Hindus living hundreds of years ago came to be compiled and written down, and to constitute the ritual formulae by which villagers in modern times consecrate their births, marriages and funerals. Whether by some process of acculturation 'non-Aryan' groups came to accept as more prestigious the ritual and scriptures of the 'Aryan' invaders, or whether the efforts of priestly classes to propagate the use of formulae to which they alone held the key accounts for the presence of a textual tradition in a largely illiterate community, is a matter for the cultural historian to decide. This being so, the sociologist has to accept as data facts which his science cannot explain. The question which it is relevant for him to ask is not, "How did the villagers come to possess such texts?" but "To what use do they put these texts?" Do villagers perform the rites in which they are used to produce different kinds of result from those which private non-textual rites are thought to achieve? If the principles and aims underlying the rituals are the same as those which underly the rites

described in the last chapter, then may not the employment of the priest and his texts be a merely superficial difference of technique?

The villagers do not have a generic term with which to distinguish priestly rites. Pūjā karnā simply means 'to worship', especially through ritual, and is often used to refer to rites conducted by a Brahman priest, but can also denote other kinds of formal worship besides the public priestly kind. But even if the language which the villagers use does not give recognition to them as a separate category, priestly rites share a common idiom clearly distinguishable from the ritual style of mathā ṭeknā. Particular priestly rites differ from each other in their component detail, just as no two examples of mathā ṭeknā involve precisely the same actions and precisely the same objects, but their general pattern is similar. It would be neither practical nor particularly illuminating to give a detailed description of every ritual in which a Brahman priest is employed. I shall therefore describe only one such rite in detail in order to demonstrate their general style.

The kathā, or scripture reading, combines an act of devotion with religious entertainment and is very popular in the village. The worship which precedes it is conducted

by the Brahman priest engaged to give the reading and is the example of priestly ritual which the villager most frequently has occasion to observe. During my stay in Dohk I must have witnessed this ritual more than twenty times and did not perceive any differences in the way in which it was performed on each occasion. As an example of priestly ritual I shall describe the worship which took place prior to a kathā sponsored by Badri, a Brahman of Dohk, to celebrate the return of his son from the army on leave.¹

The kathā was to take place in the evening and the priest arrived at about six o'clock. He was not Badri's

1. Kathās are most often held in fulfillment of a vow. At least thirteen of the twenty-three kathās which were held during my stay in the village were of this type. For example, one Brahman vowed that he would hold a kathā if he was acquitted of the crime of arson with which he was charged; another vowed to hold one if he managed to complete the re-thatching of his roof in time for the rains. Other kathās were held in thanksgiving for some piece of good fortune without any vow having been made previously, e.g. to celebrate the birth of a son, or arrival after a long journey. But holding a kathā brings merit to the sponsor whatever the circumstances in which it is held, and can be sponsored simply as an act of devotion. Such is the merit that a kathā brings that "in the Sat Yug, people who performed kathās were not reborn as humans but went straight to heaven when they died". The regular recital of kathās is looked upon as a way of cultivating a relationship with God which is easier for busy farmers than daily prayer or meditation, desirable as these are acknowledged to be. "You only like to go to those houses where people offer you a mat to sit on and make you feel welcome. So God likes to be in those houses where people say his name and hold his kathās all the time," said a Jat informant.

purohit but another young priest who lived in a nearby village, a man well known and liked by the villagers and related to one Brahman family there by marriage. Before setting out from his own home he had bathed and put on clean clothes, but before commencing his ritual tasks he gave his hands another quick rinse so that he might be as pure as possible before handling the sacred objects. Before his arrival Badri's wife had purified the place where the worship was to be conducted by smearing a mixture of fresh cowdung and mud over the floor in a corner of the verandah. The priest then set about preparing the mandala, or symbolic diagram, used in priestly worship, on this previously purified area. He did this by tracing the signs representing the deities to be worshipped in fine white flour.

The following deities were symbolized in the mandala used on this occasion (see Figure 6);

- 1) Suraj Bhagvan (the sun);
- 2) Onkar (the sacred syllable Om);
- 3) Shesh Nag, the snake who upholds the world;
- 4) Ganesh;
- 5) The sixty four Yoginis, Bhairon's wives;
- 6) Korsh Matrika;
- 7) Tridev (Brahma, Shiva and Vishnu).

When he had finished preparing the mandala, the priest asked Badri to check that he had provided the various

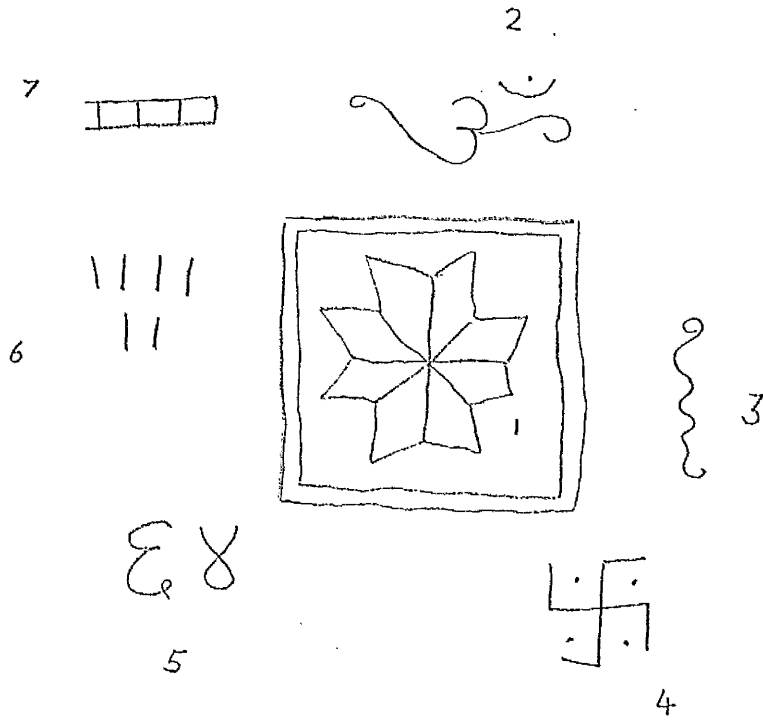


Figure 6. Maṇḍala used in worship preceding a kathā.

substances required for the offering to be made to the deities. These, set out on a tray ready for use, included rice, unrefined sugar, flour, incense, Ganges water and the red powder used for making the ṭikā. Badri's wife also brought a caukī, a low wooden stool or platform with various ritual uses, most often used for mounting images or pictures of the devatas when they are to be worshipped. Sometimes a favourite image or a religious picture is placed on the caukī during the worship which precedes a kathā, but this is not strictly necessary since the ritual which is essential on such occasions is directed to the symbols on the priest's maṇḍala and not to the image. At Badri's kathā no image was used but the priest used the caukī on which to rest the tray of offerings and his conch shell.

Meanwhile Badri had retired to bathe himself and change into clean clothes - a long cotton loincloth is considered appropriate attire for the performance of formal priestly rites rather than the loose pyjamas which are the usual everyday wear of men in Dohk.

The members of the household were now assembled and the ritual began. The priest sat down beside the maṇḍala and told Badri to sit on his right. He started binding a length of maulī round Badri's wrist and by tying blades of the sacred kusā grass to the third fingers of each hand.

The stated purpose of these actions was the preparation of the worshipper. The maulī tied to his wrist is thought to protect him from vaguely conceived evil influences at a time of critical ritual importance. The kuṣā grass, being regarded as pure and sacred, safeguards the purity of the worshipper which he has already taken care to maximize by bathing and donning clean clothes. The kuṣā grass is tied to the third finger of each hand because it is with these fingers that the symbols on the mandala will be touched; the third finger is considered more pure than the others, especially the third finger of the right hand and is always the finger used when applying ṭikā to someone's forehead on ritual occasions. For similar reasons it is always the right wrist to which the maulī is tied, although in a few rituals it is tied to both wrists.

Whilst performing each action, the priest recited the appropriate mantra in Sanskrit. Most priests know the mantras recited for this ritual by heart since they have used them so often, and the priest employed on this occasion had no need of a text, although I noted that he did use a text for parts of a wedding ceremony which I watched him perform for one of his Tarkhan jajmāns in Dohk.

Then followed mantras which announced, so the priest told me afterwards, the name of the village of the worshipper

and the purpose of his worship, namely, to obtain the blessings of the devatas for the kathā which he was sponsoring.

After this, the pūjā itself began. Each symbol on the maṇḍala was worshipped in turn, the priest chanting aloud mantras which invoked each deity or group of deities represented. After each mantra he would break off to give directions to Badri who could, of course, understand the mantras no more than any other villager. Under the direction of the priest he placed the items to be offered upon each symbol in turn, sprinkling water from a special spoon provided by the priest. (Sometimes water is shaken from a bunch of kuśā grass instead). The priest also broke off his chanting from time to time to give detailed instructions about other ritual gestures - touching various parts of the maṇḍala with the hands, saluting the devatas worshipped by bowing with folded hands - which Badri would then carry out.

When each symbol on the maṇḍala had received these ritual attentions the pūjā was completed and the priest gave a long broken blast on his conch shell to announce this to all and sundry. During this time, guests had been arriving one by one,¹ the men seating themselves on one side of the

1. It is usual to send an invitation for a kathā to all the houses in the village except the Chamars', whoever is sponsoring it, but the average attendance is about twenty-five people.

room and the women on the other. The priest then began to read from his texts. These were written in Sanskrit, but he would break off every few verses to explain their meaning in the vernacular. (A kathā usually relates a dialogue between Sat Narayan - a name of Vishnu - and the sage Narad. Sat Narayan explains to Narad the ways in which men can enjoy good fortune on earth and eventual salvation from rebirth. In particular, details are given of the various ritual duties which ought to be carried out, such as the observance of fasts, giving charity to Brahmans, daily worship of God). At the end all stood to sing a hymn and Badri's wife distributed the prasād which she had placed on the caukī prior to the start of the worship.

After all the guests had gone, she returned to attend to the maṇḍala, or what was left of it, since the symbols which the priest had prepared so carefully were now smudged beyond recognition. She scraped up what was left of the flour and the various offerings which had been made and set them aside on a tray. Badri later took these away and threw them into the nearest stream. I was told that the purpose of this was "that they should remain pure". Although they were no longer of any use, all these items had been consecrated by having been offered in the worship. It would therefore not have been fitting to leave them where they might come into contact with impure things - for instance

by being trampled by shod feet.

Priestly ritual and private ritual.

It is obvious that there are some important differences between the idiom of the rites I have just described and that of the private ritual described in Chapter 3. Both kinds of ritual bring about a confrontation between the divine and the human world, but in priestly rites the mediation of a third person is necessary between the worshipper and the objects of his worship. The role of the priest is not just that of an instructor or master of ceremonies who simply gives help to villagers who do not happen to have a knowledge of the correct ritual procedure. His recital of the mantras is an integral part of the ritual itself, and the villagers do not believe that the ritual would be effective without it. The utterance of certain word patterns can constitute a ritual gesture just as much as a movement of the hand or the head, in the sense that they are more than a mere accompaniment to the gestures of the latter type.¹ But in private ritual the words are more or less spontaneously composed and need not be declaimed

1. The utterance of set word patterns can be used to effect non-religious ends also. Some villagers know mantras which can be recited to ease minor ailments such as headaches, coughs and rheumatism. In Dohk the Brahman priest mentioned on p. has a reputation for knowing several useful mantras. A Lohar and a Chimba woman in the villager are also resorted to, and a Jat celā in the next village. Mantras of this kind are in Punjabi, not Sanskrit.

aloud. In priestly rites such as the one I have just described, only formal traditional sequences of words are used and these must be reproduced correctly. The villager is dependant on the priest to do this for him, whereas he can offer worship to any devata privately without the aid of anyone else.

On the other hand, essential though his services be in this kind of ritual, the priest does not act as more than the mouthpiece of the man whom he serves, and whatever benefit the ritual is aimed at securing accrues to the householder on whose behalf he performs it, and not to himself. Thus the ritual which precedes the performance of a kathā is aimed, in the view of the villagers, at drawing the attention of the devatas to the meritorious act which the householder is about to have performed and at obtaining their blessings for the performance. But in this case it was Badri who was the recipient of the blessings and recognition; the priest only acted as his spokesman and earned no more than the usual merit which accrues from doing one's own dharma efficiently. The worshipper may appear to act only as the passive executor of the priest's directions, but the worship is his and the blessings it brings are his.

Yet there are also similarities in the ritual procedures used in private worship and in priestly ritual.

In both kinds of rite, the preliminary purification of the performers is necessary. Neither Badri nor his priest approached the place where the ritual was to be performed without bathing and changing their clothes, i.e. without making sure that they had attained the highest degree of purity of which they were capable. Even Badri's wife had bathed before preparing the prasād which was to be distributed when the kathā was finished. Likewise, just as in private rites the image and other ritual equipment used (including the offering itself) must be kept pure, so in priestly rites exactly the same rules apply. In priestly rites an image is not usually the object of ritual attentions; in rites of this kind the maṇḍala acts as the focus of the ritual and symbolizes the devatas addressed, but it is treated in just the same way as an image is treated in private ritual, being kept pure at all times. Maṇḍalas are, for instance, only traced on a previously purified area, the cleansing process being carried out as it was for private worship, by spreading the ground with mud and cowdung. (Cowdung, like other products of the living cow, has exceptional purity). From the moment that this purification has taken place, the square yard or so of floor space affected is treated in such the same way as the area about an image, or the interior of a shrine or temple. That is,

no one will approach it who is for any reason in a temporary state of impurity, and all impure substances will be kept away from it. This means in particular that shoes will be removed before coming near to it, also other leather articles such as belts straps and purses. If by any chance the pure area should become polluted, even before the priest has begun to trace his mandala there, the whole process of purification must be repeated. This occurred once when I visited the house of a Tarkhan family whose daughter was to be married that evening. Part of the courtyard had been purified in preparation for the lagan ceremony to be conducted after the arrival of the groom. But whilst the rest of the family busied themselves in making the many preparations necessary, one of the children playing in the courtyard happened to stray across this area without removing his sandals. One of the women noticed this, and that part of the courtyard had to be smeared again with cowdung before it was fit to be used in the evening's ritual.

Just the same care is exercised after the ritual has ended to ensure the continuing purity of the items used in it; the remains of the mandala used by Badri's priest and the offerings made to it were not tossed away carelessly but submerged in a stream. In the villager's eyes this is also a measure taken to preserve sacred objects from possible pollution and he takes exactly the same precautions after

performing a private act of worship. In the case of two priestly rites - the welcoming of a new bride in her husband's home and the purification of a mother after childbirth - the submersion of the ritual paraphernalia constitutes a separate ceremony in itself. Certain priestly rites, like the kiriya karm on the eleventh day after death, even have the restoration of the purity of the worshipper as their chief aim, or as one of their main aims.

Villagers say that it is the need to retain the purity of the objects to which and through which the worship is to be directed which debar women from taking more than a minor part in priestly ritual. Women are, by their very nature, less pure than men. In particular their monthly periods render them liable to a very potent form of pollution, whilst men do not suffer from this recurring ritual disability. In theory, just as all people of a high caste are by their very nature more pure than people of low caste, so all the men of a particular caste are, by their very masculinity, purer than their womenfolk. Ritually a man is a higher form of being than his wife, and rebirth as a man is to be preferred to rebirth as a woman. As one priest said, "A woman, however much she bathes, can never be as pure as her husband." The near exclusion of women from priestly rites can be interpreted as further evidence

of the concern for purity which dominates both this and other types of religious ritual. The belief in the ritual inferiority of women does not receive much practical expression except in this context, for women certainly do not take a lesser part in private ritual than men. In fact, if worship has to be made to a household devata on any occasion of importance to the family as a whole, it is if anything more likely to be a senior woman of the household who performs it than anyone else. And even in priestly rites, women are not entirely debarred from worship. In the marriage rites the bride has a part to play, and when she gives birth to a child the mother takes part in the naming ceremony. But her role is a very limited one and it is her presence beside her husband which seems to count, as much as the few ritual gestures she is called upon to make. There is a general disapproval of women taking an overt part in public affairs when they have male kin to act on their behalf and the lesser role of women in public priestly ritual may be a reflection of this feeling as much as of feelings about ritual purity and pollution, since these do not effectively debar women from participating in other religious rituals.

But the fact that a woman lacks opportunity to participate in priestly ritual does not mean that she is

completely cut off from the spiritual blessings which flow from it, since villagers also believe that the merit or demerit of a man's actions affect his wife also. "If a woman is married to a man who does pun, her karma improves also. But if she is married to a sinful man, her karma becomes bad also", one informant stated. This means that whilst, for instance, it was considered right and proper that Badri (and not his wife) should perform the worship preceding their kathā, some of the credit for it, in terms of karma, accrued to her. Their ritual inferiority does not impose a complete ban on woman taking part in priestly rites, but it means that there is a very strong preference for it being performed by a man, and I was therefore interested to see what would happen when one Brahman woman who lived alone announced her intention of holding a kathā. She was the younger of a well-to-do Brahman's two wives, but because of their persistent quarelling, the husband had separated them and accommodated the younger in the smaller of the two houses he had inherited. Ill-treatment from both the elder wife and the husband had forced her to call a panchayat, which duly suggested that the husband should also make over to her certain of his fields on whose produce she might support herself during her lifetime. She thus had her own separate household, and relations with the other wife and the husband were strained, to say the least. The children of the

marriage remained with the father, and the elder wife discouraged them from having anything to do with their mother. It was a matter of some speculation on the part of her neighbours as to who would perform the preliminary worship for the kathā, since she had no male member of her household to do this for her. In the end, she asked her ten year old son to perform the necessary rites, even though she had to face the extremely difficult situation of approaching a house with whose members she was not on speaking terms in order to beg her estranged son to do this service for her. But the priest had advised this, since the ritual fitness of even a small boy exceeds that of his mother. If she had had no male kin in the village, said the priest, she might have officiated herself, but this had not been the case.

But in spite of these differences, the technique which is used to obtain the desired blessings in priestly ritual is basically similar to that employed in private rites. In both kinds of worship, the worshipper approaches a devata, or devatas, with an offering which he hopes will please them and persuade them to bestow upon him the benefits he desires. In private rites an image is used to act as a focus for the presentation of the offering (if one is available) and for other ritual attentions which are directed to the same end of giving pleasure to the deity. But in priestly rites, the

Brahman's maṇḍala has an equivalent function, the same respect for its extraordinary purity being shown, and the offerings being placed in contact with it, just as villagers touch the images used in private worship with the prasād they have prepared. The maṇḍala is a temporary construction used for one particular occasion only, but its role in the business of communication with the gods is identical to that performed by more durable symbols. Similarly, the rice, flowers and water offered at the maṇḍala do the same work as the offering of food made in private worship. "The devatas are hungry for worship, not food," said an informant, "but the things we offer satisfy them because they are a sign of our devotion. Thus gratified, the devatas are ready to do what we ask of them".

The items offered in priestly rites are not distributed afterwards as prasād; they usually consist of uncooked foodstuffs in any case. But the idea of spiritual blessings being conveyed through food is not entirely confined to the sphere of private worship, since on many occasions on which priestly rites are performed, especially joyous occasions like weddings and naming ceremonies, sweetmeats of various kinds traditionally appropriate to the occasion are distributed to all present afterwards. Though there is no special act of sacralization, for instance

through contact with an image, or by having been placed before it,¹ in other respects this food is treated as prasād. That is, to partake of the portion offered is to assent to and participate in the rejoicing of the worshipper on an auspicious occasion, and every effort is made to see that each member of the household, each kinsman and friend, receives a share, however small.

The less conspicuous place which the distribution of prasād has in most priestly ritual, and the fact that it is usually less closely linked with the religious ceremony which precedes it, may be due to the very fact that priestly rites are public. Private acts of worship are not congregational, but other people besides the worshipper benefit from the grace released by the worship through the distribution of the prasād. A priestly rite is conducted in the presence of others, so that there is less need for an act to symbolize the participation of others in the blessings which the devatas have been persuaded to bestow by the attentions of the worshipper.

Like private rituals, priestly rites consist of the presentation of a pleasing offering to the gods in order

1. The exception to this is the case of the kathā. Here a tray of sweets is kept near to the mandala or image and is shared out afterwards. No formal offering is made, but this food is termed prasād.

that they may become amenable to the worshipper's requirements. But how does the worshipper know the purpose of the ritual, if he cannot understand the Sanskrit in which the mantras are recited and the priest does not break off his incantations in order to explain them? A few of the women with whom I raised the matter could not even name the language used; a Jat woman rather cynically observed, "The priests mutter some priests' language of their own; after all, they have to earn a living somehow". But the majority know that Sanskrit is the sacred language of the devatas. According to this view Sanskrit is used because, although the devatas can understand a request phrased in the dialect of the village (or for that matter in any other human tongue) Sanskrit gives them most pleasure. They prefer it to any other language, and since the mantras are addressed to them and not to anyone else, it matters little whether men can understand them or not. It is their utterance which is important and not their comprehension by the utterer. Some villagers account for the use of Sanskrit by saying, quite accurately of course, that it was the language of the ancestors who wrote the scriptures and instituted the forms of worship used. As one Lohar observed, "Just as Urdu used to be the chief language in the days of the British, whereas Hindi is taught in schools nowadays, so Sanskrit must have

been in vogue at some other period. Perhaps at some future time we shall come round to using Sanskrit again." To those of the villagers who have had first hand experience of India's linguistic pluralism through travel or work outside District Kangra, the fact that their life-cycle rites are conducted in a tongue other than that used for everyday communication presents nothing anomalous. And since the distant ancestors who used it have in some way greater sanctity than the more recent products of the Kal Yug, it is quite logical for the villager to consider Sanskrit as also being more sacred than the languages of modern origin.¹

1. It is useful to refer here to Tambiah's discussion of the ritual value of sacred languages such as Sanskrit in Hinduism, Pali in Buddhism and Arabic in Islam. He argues that the distinction between the ritual use of verbal formulae in the vernacular, and in special sacred languages is "not absolute, but relative". Whatever the people themselves say, the use of a sacred tongue like Sanskrit is only a special case of the way in which the expressive and metaphorical properties of language in general are exploited in ritual. In practice, however, the sacred words have the same kind of relationship to the gestures they accompany whether they are intelligible or not. The fact that in Dohk villagers are quite content to formulate the prayers they offer in private rituals in the vernacular confirms Tambiah's suggestion that there is "no special need to embody sacred words in an exclusive language". What Tambiah has to say about the role of Pali in Buddhism is roughly true of the role of Sanskrit in village Hinduism. "For the Buddhist layman, the fact that he does not understand does not mean for him that the chants are mumbo-jumbo. He believes quite rightly that for those who know Pali the words contain great wisdom and sense; his ignorance is a reflection of his unworthiness and involvement in an inferior mode of life compared with that of the monk". Tambiah (1968), p.182.

But even if they cannot translate each mantra or give a detailed account of the meaning of each ritual gesture made, this does not mean that villagers lack ideas about what any particular priestly ritual is meant to achieve, or what blessings the offerings are expected to yield. I have, of course, no way of knowing whether the villagers' interpretations of the rites which their priests perform are correct, since I do not know Sanskrit myself and am therefore as unable as they are to translate the exact meaning of the mantras. In the description of priestly rites which follows, I can only report the meanings which the rites have for the villagers themselves, and not the 'correct' meanings - the internal significance of the rites which only someone with a knowledge of Sanskrit could provide. For reasons of the same kind, I am unable to assess the statements of the priests themselves about the significance of the verses recited. What I wish to emphasize here, however, is that the villagers do think that they know what is going on when the priest chants the mantras and are not without ideas as to the meaning of a particular ritual sequence. The benefits which priestly rites are thought to bring are usually less tangible and more diffuse than those which villagers hope to obtain through the performance of private acts of worship, as the description of life cycle rites given below will show, but the principles of the process by which these are

obtained are the same in the eyes of the worshipper in either case.

Priestly rites can also be compared with private acts of worship in respect of the deities to which they are addressed. Priestly rites are directed to deities whose names are known to Hindus all over India. The texts on which they are based and which are regarded as authoritative do not belong to any one region of India more than another. They and the gods whose cults they perpetuate are part of the body of cultural tradition common to Hindus everywhere - what Marriott calls the 'great tradition'. Consequently it is understandable that the familiar Siddhs and local devatas who play such an important part in the villagers' private ritual activities do not figure in priestly rites at all. The villager himself is aware that it is to those whom he calls the 'great gods' that the priests' mantras are addressed. A few of these 'great gods' are familiar parts of his personal religious experience; Shiva, Durga and Vishnu are known to the uneducated villager through legend and folk song, and he may sometimes worship them privately when he feels that they can aid him in some personal difficulty. The part which these deities play in the religious life of the village does not depend on the fact that they are mentioned in this or that sacred text,

for they have been incorporated into the imaginative life of the villagers and have no need of any textual prop for their popularity. Villagers may even state that they have actually seen Shiva in a dream, met Durga in human guise, and may relate folk tales in which these great deities figure alongside local deities unknown outside a very limited area.

But many of the devatas worshipped through priestly ritual are not part of the villager's personal religious experience. Varuna, Indra or the sixty four Yoginis do not form a part of his imaginative equipment and few save the priests were able to tell me anything about such deities. Perhaps the aid of such gods at some time in the past was (or for that matter in other parts of India still is) enlisted spontaneously by villagers through private ritual, but in present day Dohk the villagers' only knowledge of them is derived from having heard their names recited in mantras whose language he does not understand. In view of this, one might reasonably expect a lesser degree of sentimental involvement in priestly rites. Surely the villager will feel only a tepid interest in rites addressed to devatas of whom he knows little more than their names, however impressive these be, compared with the zest and pious attention with which he directs private worship to the devatas he has made

his own? Will not his commitment to ritual forms addressed to gods other than those with whom he feels he can establish personal relationships be somewhat half-hearted?

Such matters of sentiment are hard to assess, but I do not think that villagers take the rites which they perform under the direction of a priest any less seriously than those which they perform on their own, although their attitudes to them are rather different. They certainly see nothing problematic in the fact that one sort of ritual is directed to one sort of deity and another sort of ritual to another kind of deity. They speak as though there were a division of labour among the devatas, some (like Baba Balek Nath or Siddh Channo) being concerned primarily with helping their devotees in attaining personally desired goals, and others (like Varuna) being called upon to sanctify public ritual transactions - especially acts which define or change a person's status as a member of society. When asked why the Siddhs, for example, had no part in wedding rites villagers would often reply simply, "It is not their work". A Brahman priest interpreted the same fact by saying that, "The Siddhs and other small devatas are of recent origin and people like to follow them. But the gods worshipped at weddings and occasions like that are really important deities". In fact the attitude of reverence with which villagers approach

priestly rites may derive as much from the antiquity of the rites as from respect for the devatas addressed. Obedience and respect for elders is a general value applied in all areas of social life and the correct performance of textual rites is an instance of obedience to the ancestors who instituted them. As one Brahman said, "These mantras are from the scriptures which our ancestors wrote. The ancestors laid down the ritual as a part of the Hindu law we should follow". I do not think that this attitude of reverence is a feeling of lesser intensity than the enthusiasm with which the villager often approaches the ritual he conducts privately, in spite of other differences between the two kinds of rite.

From the foregoing discussion it should be clear that these differences are largely ones of style. There are differences in the language used and in the role of the specialists used and in the kinds of offering made. But they both consist of a similar central act of worship in which pleasing offerings are made to sacred beings through the media of symbols (images, pictures, maṇḍalas) which indicate their presence. What is significant for the theme of this thesis is that both kinds of worship, the act of communication between worshipper and devata is conceived in terms of a confrontation between the pure and the impure.

The maṇḍala representing the devata, and all the ritual equipment associated with it, must be kept pure, just as the image is protected from pollution in private worship. And as in private worship the devotee must purify himself by bathing beforehand. The two kinds of worship differ more fundamentally in respect of the religious and social contexts - the 'action fields' - in which they take place. In the following description of life cycle rites, it will be seen how it is the very publicity of priestly ritual which distinguishes it from individual worship rather than differences in ritual style.

Life cycle rites

Villagers of Dohk refer to their life cycle ceremonies by the term sanskāra, a word which, according to R.C.Pandey, implies the purification, sanctification and making perfect of the person who undergoes the rites, when it is used in Sanskrit literature.¹ Various scriptural works define the number and manner of the performance of the life cycle rites which Hindus of different statuses ought to perform. In the Grihyasutras (treatises which describe the ritual duties of householders) is compiled information about the correct ritual to be used on each occasion and the verses which ought to be recited. The Dharmasutras contain

1. Pandey (1949), p. 27.

instructions of a more general order about the duties of men and women in the different stages of their lives in society. The number of sanskāras prescribed in these treatises varies greatly, some sources mentioning as many as forty-eight rites, others listing as few as only seven. But even the briefest of these lists exceeds the number of life cycle rites carried out in most castes in Dohk, for in the village only three rites are obligatory for members of all castes (except for Chamars, whose case I shall deal with separately). These are the naming ceremony at birth, the marriage rites, and the funeral rites after death. The first hair cutting ceremony is quite frequently performed for small boys, but is not considered obligatory in any caste, and the sacred thread ceremony is only compulsory for Brahmans, Rajputs and Khattris. The villagers are not, of course, acquainted with these Sanskrit sources, but they are mostly aware that the scriptures authorize more sanskāras than they actually observe nowadays. One Brahman said apologetically, "In this Kal Yug, poor farmers do not have time to perform all the sanskāras they ought".

To undergo the full complement of sanskāras customary for a member of one's caste is a religious duty,¹ but it is also in the interests of one's birādarī that they should be

1. Classical sources mention rites of expiation for the non-performance of certain sanskāras. Chatterjee (1965), p. 18.

performed fully and correctly. (A person's birādari is the local group of caste fellows with whom there is social interaction either as kin or as neighbours). It is the members of the birādari whose prestige might be affected if, for instance, the funeral rites of a member were incorrectly performed, or if the marriage rituals were carried out incompletely. The performance of the sanskāras is not just a matter of personal taste or inclination or the outcome of personally perceived needs - like the private rites of worship described in Chapter 3 - but a matter of conformity to the demands of the social group to which one belongs.

Hindu rites of passage involve secular as well as religious activities (and of the religious activities, not all take place under the direction of a priest). Though I shall concentrate here mainly on the religious aspect of the ceremonial, some reference to these secular activities will be necessary. They are no less a part of the process which effects the transition of the individual from one phase of existence to the next, and they contribute both to the validity and to the drama of the rites in the eyes of the villagers themselves. I shall also describe the theories which villagers express about the religious meaning of these critical events.

Most of my information is derived from observation of life cycle rites carried out in Brahman households since it was with the Brahmans that I was most closely associated. But apart from the Chamars and Julahas, the different castes seem to celebrate their life cycle rites in basically the same fashion with only occasional variations in detail.

Birth ceremonies.

The birth of a child is an event of both religious and secular importance for the household. If the child is a boy, the rejoicing will be greater, mainly no doubt for practical reasons. Unlike a girl, a boy continues to contribute to the economy of the household after marriage and remains responsible for the welfare of his mother and father. But a son is also preferred for religious reasons. After a man dies the fate of his soul depends very much on the correct performance of certain rituals by the descendants he leaves behind, preferably by a son. A daughter cannot perform these rites, nor indeed can any woman, and so the birth of a girl does less to allay the parents' anxieties about the after-life. On the other hand, though a girl cannot perform these rites, she can in turn bear sons who are qualified to do this for their maternal grandparents. Also to give a daughter in marriage is regarded as a way of repaying the debt we owe to the ancestors for begetting us,

and so the birth of a girl promises this opportunity for winning merit later. A couple who have no daughters therefore suffer from religious disabilities almost as great as those who have no sons, even if their economic outlook is less assured. One Brahman man felt so strongly that a family without a daughter was inauspicious that he would not take food in such a house.

To bear daughters is better than to remain childless, and childless women often resort to religious activities which they hope will hasten conception, such as vowing to worship a certain devata after the safe delivery of a child. In view of the care which is taken to protect the woman and her unborn child once she has become pregnant it is perhaps surprising that this sentiment receives no ritual expression, for the sanskāras which the scriptures prescribe for the protection of the foetus are not performed in Dohk nowadays.¹ At most, a pregnant woman will place some religious image or the picture of some admired mythical hero in a place where she can look at it during the day, for it is thought that the child will then be born with the virtues of that

1. Nor do either of the parents observe any special ritual restrictions in order to protect the child, such as the prohibition on the wife's crossing a river in Gujerat (M. Stevenson, 1920, p. 115) and the ban on the husband's shaving found both there and in South India (Dumont, 1957, p. 235)

personage. The more time the mother spends in religious devotions the more the child will benefit in every way, so that pregnancy is liable to be a time of intensified religious activity for the mother.

The child is not thought to be invested with a soul until the quickening. As soon as the mother feels her child move, she knows that the spirit of some deceased person has entered its body. If the death of some relative or neighbour has taken place recently, it will often be suggested that the soul of this person has taken rebirth in the child, for it is thought that the spirits of dead people always prefer to return to the place where they last lived on earth. For instance a young Brahman woman bore a boy which she was convinced was a re-incarnation of her father-in-law who had died about a year before the baby's birth. The resemblance of the child to its grandfather confirmed her opinion.

Birth pollution.

At the onset of labour the woman goes indoors immediately, and the dāī, or midwife, is sent for.¹ Child-birth imparts a form of impurity to the mother which, if

1. Usually the barber's wife performs this function. But a woman of any caste can be a dāī if she has the skill and experience, even a Brahman. However, a Brahman woman of Dohk who occasionally did this work was criticized by some members of her caste who said that "there was no need for her to do such dirty work". Contact with the polluting process of birth should not be sought by a person of high caste.

not so strong as that conveyed by a death in the family, is sufficiently potent to oblige her to avoid contacts which could cause her to pollute others. Above all, she is debarred from cooking, since contact with food is one of the chief ways in which an impure person can spread pollution. By extension, her impurity affects all the members of the household, though it is not strong enough to warrant calling in a neighbour to do the cooking if the mother has a mother-in-law or sister-in-law who can prepare food for members of the household. Members of the other households, however, will avoid eating food cooked by members of the family affected or entering the room where the mother is secluded without asking someone to sprinkle them with a little water after leaving, in order to purify themselves. Birth impurity lasts for a period which varies with the caste of the mother, but is usually ten or eleven days, and the ritual activities which follow birth are largely directed towards controlling and finally removing this impurity. The restoration of the normal ritual status of the woman is not such a long drawn out process in Dohk as it is in many other parts of India. Amongst the Nagara Brahmans of Gujerat the birth defilement is not finally removed until the forty-fifth day, and the mother has to perform rites on the sixth, tenth, twelfth, twentieth, thirtieth, and thirty-seventh days in order to

achieve this.¹ The longest period of birth pollution observed in Dohk does not last for more than thirteen days, and even amongst the Brahmans the return to normal ritual status is accomplished in no more than two stages.²

But this should not be taken to mean that the idea of impurity has no conceptual importance in Dohk, for most of the birth rites have as their whole object the removal of impurity, and would be incomprehensible without reference to the concept. It should be noted that it is the mother rather than the child who is the active source of pollution and most of the purificatory rites are centred about her person. Until the naming ceremony finally removes her pollution she may not leave the room of her confinement except to relieve herself. Her breasts must be washed with cow's urine ("because it is pure") before her child can be suckled and the sacred syllable 'Om' should be traced on the infant's tongue with honey (another 'pure' substance which has various ritual uses). On the fifth day after the birth (for most castes) the mother takes a ritual bath and is given a little cow's urine to drink, a process which may be repeated on the ninth day.

1.M.Stevenson(1920),pp.9-17.

2.This simplification of the ritual usages observed elsewhere may again be a feature of the Pahari culture area, for Berreman reports that in Tehri Garhwal the usual period of seclusion is ten days, even though villagers know that strictly speaking it should be more. Berreman (1963),p.396.

As soon as possible after the moment of birth a lamp is lighted in the room where the confinement took place. This is kept burning until the period of pollution is over, on the eleventh day for Brahmans and on the thirteenth day for most other castes. On the morning of this day the mother is given a mixture of five substances to drink. These include Ganges water, cow's urine, milk, honey and tulsi leaves, i.e. all substances which are thought to be in some way purifying or holy. This "helps to purify the mother" and for the same purpose she takes another bath and puts on new clothes. Her new suit, provided by her parents, will be made of red cloth in accordance with the general association of this colour with happy and auspicious events.

Next come the rites in which the family priest's services are necessary. He will have been informed of the birth as soon as possible after it has taken place, and when he arrives on the morning of the eleventh day, he prepares a mandala in the verandah or courtyard and kindles a fire beside it. This fire is held to represent Agni, the Vedic fire deity, and is indispensable to many priestly rituals. In the context of the birth ceremonies Agni is said to be present as the 'witness' of the ceremony. The child's father sits beside the priest to offer worship to the devatas represented on the mandala under his direction.

First of all Ganesh is worshipped, as in all priestly ritual, but the main offerings are for the nine planets. The worship of the nine planets is a part of much priestly ritual also, but at this time it is particularly important as the influences of the planets will largely determine the future health, wealth and fortune of the new-born child. As a further protective measure the priest ties a length of mauli round the child's wrist just as he binds it round the worshipper's wrist when conducting a ritual for a jajman. In fact this act could be seen as marking the start of the relationship between the priest and the child, for the latter will in fact become one of the priest's jajmans if a boy. When the worship of the nine planets is over, the family Nai comes and places a tuft of dub grass in the baby's hand. The offering of a sprig of this grass is a common way in which low caste people or artisans wish long life and prosperity to their patrons or ritual superiors at life cycle rites, and must always be reciprocated with a gift of money, however small the amount.¹ Accordingly the Nai is then given a gift of one or two rupees. The child's paternal grandparents place a few small coins in a tumbler

1. Beggars of low caste can exploit this obligation to extract alms from persons of high caste by offering a handful of dub grass to anyone they think likely to have small coins in their pocket.

of water and the Nai sprinkles a little of this water on the baby's mouth. This is also interpreted as a means of ensuring the child's future welfare and comfort.

The next part of the ceremony involves the purohit again, who by this time has prepared a fresh maṇḍala in the verandah to be used in the next phase of the ritual. The mother of the child now comes out into the courtyard leaving the seclusion she has been observing since the birth for the first time. She seats herself beside her husband with the child on her lap. The pūjā which the priest then conducts is basically a repetition of the worship conducted earlier, but this time the mother and the baby are present, if non-participant.¹ During the course of the worship the priest announces the name which is to be given to the child. This will have been decided upon in consultation with him, since the auspiciousness or otherwise of a particular name for a particular infant depends upon the configuration of stars at the time of birth, a matter which only a Brahman priest with his knowledge of astrology is qualified to judge.

Next the purohit makes the mother touch the baby's mouth with a four anna piece and then applies the red ṭikā mark to her forehead, and also to that of the baby. These gestures are said to ensure the health and good fortune of

1. Among the Nagara Brahmans the mother is accounted as being still too impure to be present at the name-giving rite, and only watches it from an inner room. N. Stevenson (1920), p.15.

both mother and child. The final pūjā is thought to effect the release of both parents from the ritual impurity arising from the birth, but this release is only finalized when the priest has given them both a little water (preferably Ganges water) to sip. Both have now returned to their original state of ritual purity and the mother is now free to leave the house, to cook and serve food, and to engage on all her usual household duties without endangering anyone's purity. (The termination of the mother's impurity and the termination of that suffered by other members of the household is simultaneous, even though the mother's pollution is more severe).

The next stage of the ritual is the making of a series of gifts by the child's parents. The order of the procedure is very important here, for the villagers say that these gifts are only meritorious (pun) if they are made after the mother's final purification has taken place. If they are given before the naming ceremony they do not count as good karma but as bad karma (perhaps because if made before the household's release from pollution there is a danger of transmitting it to others through the gifts?). The first gift is made by the mother of the child to the Nai, in consideration of his services as messenger and master of ceremonies. The Nai will have done the work of inviting

the guests present at the rites and seeing that all the items needed for the ritual are at hand. For this he receives a rupee or more according to the family's circumstances. He should also be given a suit of clothing in celebration of the happy event. Next the brother of the child's mother receives a length of rough cloth known as tamol from her hands. The tamol, like the coconut given to a new bride, is a symbolic gift rather than a utilitarian one, for such cloth is never actually cut up or worn. All the life cycle rites involve gift making of this kind, in which relatives or servants are given presents which are often of very little economic value but of great ritual importance. They are important both as recognition of the relationship in which the giver and the recipient stand to each other, and in particular of services carried out during the life cycle rite in fulfillment of the obligations which the relationship entails. The tamol given to the baby's maternal uncle is said to be given in consideration of the gifts of clothing and money which he will have brought from the child's nānake, i.e. maternal kin. If the family can afford it they will also make gifts to Brahman girls at this time (usually Rs.1 or eight annas each are given, or lengths of cloth to be used as shawls) as an act of charity to celebrate their good fortune. All the members of the

child's birādarī who wish to do so may take this opportunity to hand presents of clothing for the child, and perhaps cash gifts of one or two rupees each to the mother. The purohit also receives his dues from the father - two rupees or more and a suit of new clothes.

During the pūjā which the priest has performed with the parents of the child, the women of the household will have been busy in the room where the mother was confined. After smearing a patch of the floor with cowdung to make it pure, they arrange five piles of maize upon it. Upon each heap are arranged several balls of dough, a length of maulī and a few small coins. Beside these piles, two balls of cowdung are kept. When the time for gift giving comes, these heaps are shared out between the purohit, the Nai and the dāī. Two heaps each are given to the priest and the barber, and one to the midwife. These, the villagers explained, are partly in recognition of the ritual services which these specialists have performed. But they are also given in recognition of their services as śahādat, or witnesses. Like the devata Agni, they have been present at the preceding ritual and have seen it through from beginning to end. The midwife of course has even been present at the birth itself. What they witness, and can certify to members of the child's birādarī should any query arise, is not just

the fact of the new baby's arrival, but the fact of the father's public acknowledgment of paternity as shown by his participation in the naming ceremony. No one could remember an instance where a man had denied paternity of his wife's child in public but should he wish to do so, they said, to refuse to fulfil his part in the naming rites would be one way of effecting this.¹

Vadhāī

The next part of the ceremony does not involve the priest but only the womenfolk, and is known as vadhāī denā, i.e. the giving of congratulations, or rejoicing. The women form a procession headed by the new mother who is supported by her husband's brothers' wives, and visit in turn the chief shrines of the village. Which shrines are visited will depend much on the household traditions of the family; if there is a household deity who has a shrine in the village this will certainly not be omitted. Otherwise it is generally the shrines which lie nearest the village site which are visited. The mother of the child carries a dish filled with whitewash, and as she proceeds she paints rings of whitewash with her finger on the walls and doorways

1. I witnessed the naming rites of a child who had been conceived while the mother's husband had been away serving in the army. In spite of the gossip which was current, the husband made no open reference to the fact that it could not have been his child and duly performed the naming rites. Having done this, I was told, it was too late to disclaim paternity.

which she passes. In the centre of each ring she traces, her husband's, brothers' wives (or other women of the household) apply a red tikā mark. No one seemed to be able to offer any precise explanation for this custom other than that it was a lucky or fortunate thing to do. Great care is taken that the mother does not leave out the doorway of any house that lies on the route the procession takes, so possibly the procedure represents in some way a sharing of the joy and good fortune which the child's birth had brought to the household.¹ At each shrine visited the mother makes an offering of śakar (unrefined sugar) later distributed as prasād, and the women circumambulate the shrine singing songs as they go. The mother then paints more white circles about the base of the shrine.

Next the procession makes its way to the village well. The mother climbs onto the parapet and traces on one of its flat stones a pair of figures said to represent the sun and moon in red paint. Beside them she paints signs representing the footprints and palm prints of her baby,²

1. If this interpretation is valid, the practice could be compared to the sharing out of the grace bestowed by a devata through the distribution of prasād.

2. In Rajasthan the arrival of a baby may be announced by sending the barber from house to house with a piece of paper on which the baby's footprint has been marked in red. Chauhan (1967), p. 211.

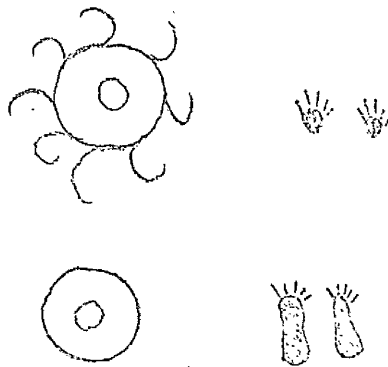


Figure 7. Symbols drawn on parapet of well
at vadhāi ceremony.

as shown in Figure 7. As in the case of the white circles, I was unable to elicit any explanation of this custom other than that it was a 'good' thing to do. Possibly the figures represent a kind of 'picture writing' prayer to the sun and moon that they should protect the child. Next the mother ties a length of mauli to the cross bars of the well and to two small pitchers which she then fills with water. Bearing these on her head she returns home with the procession of singing women and places them at the feet of her mother-in-law. She touches her mother-in-law's feet and then touches her new baby with one of the vessels of water. The meaning of this rite, according to the village women, is partly to honour the mother-in-law, who by giving birth in her youth has provided her with a husband, but also to show publicly that she is now entirely restored to her previous state of purity and can therefore touch the household water vessels.

without endangering the purity of anyone else.¹ (perhaps the touching of the baby with the water pot symbolizes the fact that by having undergone the naming ceremony he is now a member of the birādari and hence is ritually fit to share the household's eating and cooking arrangements).

If the child is a girl the vadhāi will be omitted and the mother simply carried out the rites at the village well without any preliminary visit to the shrines. In this case there will be no distribution of prasād, or at most a small quantity will be distributed among immediate kin and neighbours after being offered privately to some household devata. It is considered dangerous for a pregnant woman to partake of the prasād given on the occasion of the birth of a child, for if she does so she is liable to abort the baby she is carrying. This was the only case which came to my knowledge of prasād being anything other than beneficial to the person who eats it. A pregnant woman should accept her portion of prasād but should pass it on to someone else to eat.

The horoscope.

The birth rites are now complete and it remains only for the purohit to hand over to the father the horoscope which

1. This can be compared to the 'Ganga puja' performed by Coorg mothers. Betel leaves and coconut milk are dropped into the well before the newly delivered woman draws water from it, symbolizing the resumption of her normal relationship with the water source after her recent impurity. Srinivas (1952), p. 91.

he has prepared for the child. This document is of great importance in later life and for this reason the time of birth is noted as exactly as is feasible in a place where clocks and watches are rare possessions, so that the priest may draw up the horoscope as accurately as possible. The planets are believed to exert an influence on the lives and activities of men, and the nature of their influence on any particular individual is determined by the position in which they stand at the hour of his birth. "According to his stars he will live his life" explained a Brahman priest. "According to them he will be rich or poor, a great man or insignificant, honest or a thief".

If the horoscope indicates calamities, then there is nothing which can possibly be done to prevent them from taking place; if they do not come to pass this will be taken to reflect the ineptitude of the priest who prepared the horoscope rather than as a denial of the planet's influence on men's fortunes. But if the position of the planets at the time of birth only indicates the possibility of calamity, then the parents of the child can take steps to see that he is not exposed to the hazards foretold. If the configuration of the stars suggests that the child will be specially liable to danger from water then the parents will see that the child is not allowed near water or to travel by boat.

Sometimes the purohit himself can suggest suitable precautions. For instance a Jat woman in the village next to Dohk bore a son at whose birth the planet Saturn was said by the priest to be in a very unfavourable position. This planet would cause trouble for the baby during the first years of life unless the mother was careful to see that he always wore the protective thread which the priest provided. He told her to go to a local celā every month to renew the thread. She put it round her child's neck and he seemed to thrive. But one day, she told me, the baby started to cry loudly and all her attempts to pacify him failed. Fortunately no harm came since she noticed in time that she had forgotten to replace the protective thread which she had removed when bathing the child. As soon as she put it back he stopped crying, but the incident convinced her of the accuracy of the priest's predictions. Usually such dangers described in an unfavourable horoscope concern the early years of life and it is not referred to again until the time of marriage. The handing over of the horoscope is attended by no special ceremony, which is perhaps surprising for it is an event of importance and the parents will be anxious to hear what sort of fate is predicted for their child.

To summarize, the birth ceremonies establish the

new born infant's position in society by providing an occasion for the public announcement of his name and paternity. The pater acknowledges the child publicly before witnesses, who can testify to this, by consenting to carry out the naming rites. The content of the ritual is mainly directed towards obtaining blessings for the child from the devatas and assurances of its future welfare. But the ceremonies do not concern the baby and its parents alone, but the whole household, for they re-establish relationships which have temporarily been affected by the event of the birth. The various rituals of purification, priestly and otherwise, remove the impurity which affects all members of the household in varying degrees. The mother in particular resumes her normal state and relationships with others. Lastly, the giving of vadhāī and the distribution of prasād are acts of thanksgiving which involve the family's whole circle of friends and relatives in the rejoicing felt for the birth of the child.

First hair cutting rite.

Some castes perform this while the child is still an infant whilst others wait until he is a little older, but whatever the case, the timing of the ceremony is not a matter of indifference, and is only regarded as being beneficial to the boy if carried out at the correct time.

Among Lohars the ceremony is invariably performed in the third month after birth, whilst Rajputs perform it in the third or sixth month. Tarkhans have it carried out in the first, third, fifth or seventh year, and the same applies to Brahmans. If there is any general rule it seems to be that the rites should be carried out in an odd month or year of the child's age.

If the full ceremony is to be observed, the date for its performance is fixed by the purohit who decides upon the most auspicious day. On this day he comes and conducts a short ritual in which Ganesh and the nine planets are worshipped and asked to protect the boy at this ritually critical time of his life and to ensure his prosperity and happiness in future. The worshipper in this ritual is the father of the child; if the boy is old enough, he may be made to sit beside his father during the rites, but he does not have to perform any ritual gestures himself. The Nai then comes and crops the boy's head, leaving the tuft of hair at the crown which he will wear from now on as a sign that he is a Hindu.¹ He is then bathed, for the contact with the barber is thought polluting. To touch a Nai accidentally or in the course of other work does not give

1. A few men who leave the village to work elsewhere abandon this symbol of their religious identity when they submit to the attentions of city barbers, who are less conservative. But they grow it again when they return to the village.

rise to any impurity, only contact with him while he is carrying out his function of barber, and men always take a bath after he has given them a shave or a haircut. Gifts of cloth - there should be at least enough to provide a new shirt - and money - at least one rupee - are then presented to the Nai by the boy's mother. The mother calls together her female relatives and neighbours to sing songs of rejoicing, and distributes sweets she has made as prasād.

A boy who has not had the first hair of his head cut is thought to be especially vulnerable to vaguely conceived dangers, including the danger of sorcery. It is therefore most important that the first hair cutting rite should be carried out at the proper time (whenever this may be for the caste in question) without delay. As soon as it has been performed, the disposal of the hair is equally important. The clippings or combings from a person's head are useful aids to sorcery if some ill-disposed person comes by them. Normally villagers do not take any special precautions in the disposal of hair unless they have reason to suppose that someone is trying to harm them. But even if no specific enemy is feared, a small boy is always vulnerable to ṭūnā performed by childless women or women with no sons, on account of their jealousy. But it is not only important that the first hair should be disposed of

carefully; it should only be deposited at some especially sacred place. It is always good if it is thrown into the Ganges, but many castes have other customs. In this district it is traditional in many castes to leave the clippings at some temple dedicated to Devi, if possible at the temple of Jvalamukhi, where they are thrown into the sacred flames of the natural gas which issues from the rock there. This is the custom among the Brahmans of Dohk, and also among the Lohars, Tarkhans, Nais and Rajputs in the locality. The Tarkhans usually have the first hair cutting rites performed during Nauratra, the festival dedicated to Devi, if this is possible. But even among castes such as the Jats who have no such traditions, the hair is always kept until it can conveniently be deposited either in running water or at the shrine of some devata in which the parents have special faith. Even if it means keeping the hair for years until the necessary pilgrimage can be made, the hair is preserved most carefully, for to leave it in any place not endowed with more than ordinary purity, such as will provide protection from evil influences, would be to endanger the boy's welfare.

The sacred thread ceremony.

Originally the donning of the sacred thread, the upnanyana, marked the commencement of the boy's period of studentship, during which he devoted himself to learning from

a chosen guru and led an ascetic life, until his marriage. Nowadays, although the village priests describe sixteen as the ideal age for its performance, this rite is more usually postponed until the time of marriage itself and is carried out as a preliminary to the wedding rites.

It consists basically of a series of invocations to the devatas who are asked to protect the boy and endow him with wisdom. The boy and his father both take a bath and are shaved by the Nai before sitting together before the sacred fire, representing Agni, which the purohit has kindled. Most of the ritual gestures involved in the worship of the devatas are carried out by the father, but the boy's presence is necessary (unlike the worship before the first hair cutting ceremony at which the child on whose behalf the offerings are being made need not be present himself). The purohit presents the boy with a deerskin, a staff and a wallet, these being the symbols of the life of mendicancy which he is supposedly to lead from now on until the time of his marriage. Lastly, the purohit invests him with the janeū, the sacred thread itself, and teaches him the Gayatri mantra, the prayer for intellectual enlightenment. The priest then whispers in his ear another mantra which he must keep secret for the rest of his life. It is the latter act which, in theory, makes him the disciple of the priest who has performed the

rite and who is now his guru. In the village this does not have any great significance in practice; the officiant priest will be the boy's family purohit, to whom the villager is no more likely to turn for spiritual or ritual advice than he is to any other Brahman priest whom he knows. If the ceremony is conducted for several boys together and the boys are not already related, by the joint performance of the rite they become dharm bhāī - brothers by religion. They are bound to each other by a fictitious brotherhood and ought to behave towards each other as real brothers would.¹

After the mantra has been given, the boy should then go to each of his relatives who are present, beginning with the women, and beg from them as a sign that he has now entered upon the mendicant life of a student. As the rite is performed in Dohk nowadays this action is purely symbolic for normally whatever schooling the boy is to have will be completed before this time and marriage usually follows shortly afterwards.

But even if the ceremony does not have the meaning for the villagers which the scriptures explain it as having, this does not mean that it is without significance. Like the first hair cutting, it defines the boy's status. But whereas the hair cutting rite merely proclaims the boy a

1. This can be compared to the way in which young people in Maiwa contract ritual kinship ties by 'hearing Ram's name' together from a Vaishnava guru. Mayer (1960), p.139.

Hindu, as opposed to a non-Hindu, and as a worldly person, as opposed to one who has left the worldly life (sadhus and other ascetics who have left the worldly life of the householder grow their hair long) the donning of the sacred thread proclaims him a member of one of the three highest varnas of Hindu society. In theory, say the villagers, only Brahmans, Kshatriyas and Vaishyas should wear the sacred thread, and the threads should be of different lengths for each varna. But here again, practice does not accord with theory. For one thing the difficulty of establishing to which varna a certain caste belongs complicates the matter. No one doubts that the Brahmans are in fact Brahmans and that the Rajputs are Kshatriyas and are hence entitled to wear the sacred thread. The Khatriis are variously described as 'Rajputs who have taken up trade' and as true Vaishyas, but in either case their donning of the sacred thread would be legitimate. But there are also several artisan castes whose adult male members wear the janeū, even though they are generally considered, by other castes at least, to be Shudras. They may make more ambitious claims for themselves, as in the case of the Tarkhans of Dohk, who call themselves 'Dhiman Brahmans' on the grounds that they were created by Visvakarma who was himself a Brahman. But this claim is not made publicly. If it is true, as Tarkhans in a nearby

village claimed, that members of low castes sometimes even don the sacred thread to the accompaniment of the full priestly ceremonial, then this means that their purohits are acquiescing in the breach of the strict letter of the scriptures. Altogether, the wearing of the janeu by low castes does not seem to have aroused any opposition on the part of their ritual superiors¹, probably because there has been no attempt on their part to make a public issue of it, or to accompany the gesture with any overt or aggressive claims to higher status such as might threaten the prestige of the higher castes more seriously. In any case some members of the higher castes themselves are neglecting the practice nowadays. A Rajput informant stated that some members of his caste no longer bothered to wear the janeu and that it was only universal amongst old men.

However, the Brahmans of Dohk are very scrupulous still about wearing the sacred thread and it is regarded as an essential badge of status. "The janeu reminds a man that he is a Brahman. Wearing it prevents him from forgetting his own dharma", explained one Brahman. To members of any caste who usually wear the thread, putting it on means that the boy has attained a degree of adulthood which he did not have before. "Putting on the janeu means that the boy has

1. In some places it has provoked serious inter-caste conflict. Cf. Majumdar (1958), pp. 76-8.

become a pakkā Brahman or Rajput or Khatri", said a Brahman informant. The sacred thread ceremony therefore completes the process of defining the boy's status of which the naming rites and the first hair cutting were preliminary stages.

Villagers are always very careful to ask their purohit to provide them with a new thread as soon as the old one shows any sign of wearing out, so that they may not be obliged to go without one for even a minute if it breaks. I was told that in the event of his janeū breaking a man ought not to move from the spot where he is standing until someone can bring him a replacement. The need for continuous wear suggests that the janeū may be in some way a protection against harm as well as a status symbol. Perhaps in this respect it could be compared with the protective threads sometimes worn by children,¹ or with the maulī which the priest binds to his jajmān's wrist at the start of any ritual in order to protect him while the ritual is being performed. (The janeū itself however must be protected on occasion. When a man goes into the field to defecate he must loop the janeū over his ear or it is liable to be affected by his state of ritual pollution. He can only restore it to its normal position across his right shoulder when he has purified himself on returning).

1. See the case described above, p. 243.

Marriage

The immediate motives for marriage are not religious ones, but marriage still has religious significance for both the couple and their respective families.

Permanent celibacy is only approved if it is accompanied by the renunciation of social life altogether in order to lead the ascetic life of the sadhu. This is a spiritual state superior to that of the householder in the eyes of the villagers, but it is not one which anyone from Dohk has ever elected in recent times.

For the parents of the bride, the debt owed to the ancestors is discharged when they hand over their daughter as a free and unconditional gift to another family. And since the gift is dan̄, a charitable gift comparable to those made to Brahmans for spiritual rewards, anything received in return diminishes the merit accruing to the giver. This is the main reason for which the practice of giving a bride price, or anything which approaches it, is frowned upon. Though the theory of marriage which I have outlined is expressed by members of high and low castes alike, bride price marriage used to be practiced by Chamars until fairly recently, or so I was told by Brahman informants, although this cannot be proved for the Chamars deny it. But the form of marriage known as vatā, exchange, by which one man gives

his sister to another in marriage and receives that man's sister as his own wife, is occasionally practiced among Brahmans even now. However, even then each girl takes some kind of token dowry to her husband's house. All the marriages I witnessed during my stay in Dohk were dowry marriages, although the dowries given by Chamars were smaller, probably for purely economic reasons.

Marriage also has great significance for the bride herself, the change in her status being more drastic than that which the groom undergoes. At marriage she exchanges the role of kanyā, auspicious virgin and the embodiment of Devi herself, for the different, though equally auspicious, role of suhāgin - a married woman whose husband is still alive. As such, her presence will be welcomed at religious ceremonies of all kinds. She only loses her auspiciousness on widowhood. Widows of all castes except the Chamars¹ are prohibited from marrying again and even if young must dress soberly without the bangles and nose ornament which married women otherwise wear. Her participation in religious ceremonies outside the home will then tend to be limited, for the presence of a widow at a ceremony does not augur well. From the moment of her marriage, therefore, a woman has an interest in doing all she can to promote her husband's

1. Widows of certain artisan castes are sometimes permitted to live with a younger brother of the dead husband without being penalized, even though the existence of widow remarriage is generally denied by members of the caste. This is the case with Tarkhans, Lohars and Chimbās.

welfare for ritual as well as practical reasons since she does not wish to lose her suhāg. The wedding initiates a phase of her ritual existence in which much of her religious activity will be concerned with the welfare of her husband, for instance by keeping fasts on the full moon day and on the festival of Karva Chauth.¹ Marriage affects her religious destiny the more profoundly since, as I have noted already, it is commonly believed that a wife participates in her husband's karma.

The wife is not ritually indispensable to the husband as he is to her. He is permitted to marry again should she die. (In fact there is nothing to stop him from marrying again while she is still alive should he wish to, especially if she fails to provide him with a son). Hence it is natural that the concern for the husband's welfare which is a major theme in feminine ritual is not mirrored by a similar ritual concern for the wife on the part of the husband, or a similar ritual distinction between men whose wives are still living and widowers. The wife is not ritually indispensable to the husband because she is not irreplaceable.

In this part of India marriage usually takes place between the ages of twelve and eighteen for girls, and after the age of seventeen for boys. The arrangements are made

1. See below, p. 379.

by the parents of the couple and the pair are never allowed to meet until the day of the wedding itself. The bride and groom must be of different gotras and should also be of different villages, for boys and girls of the same village are said to be 'brothers and sisters'. That the horoscopes of the couple should agree is also a matter of importance and is taken seriously, as the following case shows. In 1967 a Brahman of Dohk had been looking for a wife for more than a year. He had a good name as a steady and hard-working boy and was a junior officer in the army. But according to his horoscope the stars were unfavourable and this was making it difficult for him to get a wife. More than once while I was staying in Dohk his engagement had been arranged only to be broken off once the girl's parents came to know of his inauspicious prospects. To the best of knowledge there was no other reason for breaking the engagement which these pretexts might have been used to disguise.

Once the engagement has been arranged (and this is marked by no special ceremony) the bride's father consults his purohit as to the most auspicious time to hold the wedding rites. It is the time of the ritual known as the lagan which must be specially carefully determined and the priest does this with reference to the horoscopes of bride and groom.

The rites which sanctify marriage usually span at least three days and can be divided into three phases; (a) the preparation of the bride and groom in their respective homes; (b) the performance of the rites which seal the marriage, the vedi and the lagan; (c) the rites which confirm the bride's acceptance into her husband's household after her arrival at his village.

The preparation of the bride.

This commences on the day before the wedding, a time of intense activity and preparation during which the actors in the rites which are to follow assemble. The high point in the day is the arrival of the bride's maternal kin, or nānake. The nānake are important for two reasons; firstly as gift bringers, for they bring a substantial contribution to the dowry and provide the girl's wedding outfit; secondly, the māmā, mother's brother, plays a crucial part in the ritual itself. It seems to be universally the case among Hindus that the wedding of a girl demands the participation of both paternal and maternal kin. In Dohk, I was told that "the mother's brother shows that he remembers his sister by bringing gifts for her daughter's wedding. The girl cannot get married without her mama's help and that is why he must be given honour".¹ When the girl's nānake are

1. Among the Kallar the maternal uncle received the honour usually given to devatas, known as ārati; ie, the waving of lamps arranged on a tray, often performed before religious images. This is an example of the giving of divine honours to a human being which is a recurrent element of the wedding rites in Dohk. Dumont (1957), p. 224.

seen approaching, the women of the household run out, singing songs of welcome and will not let them enter until they have each accepted a handful of sweetmeats and small coins (no specified amount).

During the day the women of the bride's household will have prepared what is called a dera,¹ that is a corner of one of the rooms in the house which will be set aside for certain priestly rituals. Here a gay design is painted on the wall which conventionally shows the bride and groom decked out in their wedding clothes. In some parts of India wall paintings are made representing female devatas which are worshipped later² but in Dohk no religious significance was ascribed to the painting and it is not used as an image. However, sacred images which the household possess will be placed before it, on a patch of the floor purified previously with cowdung. An oil lamp is placed here and is kept burning throughout the wedding rites until the bride has departed for her husband's house. When the family purohit arrives, he traces a mandala on this prepared spot, and on the afternoon of this first day conducts the worship of Ganesh and the nine planets with the bride's father. This

1. This word usually means an encampment or stopping place and is used in another religious context to describe a place where an itinerant holy man stays in the course of his wanderings.

2. For instance the depiction of 'Mai Mata' is worshipped by bride and groom in Malwa. Mayer (1960), pp. 228-9. In houses in Delhi I also saw wall paintings of Devi which I was told were prepared and worshipped at weddings.

This initial Ganesh pūjā seems to be a universal feature of Hindu weddings and in Dohk an informant told me that "Ganesh is always worshipped first of all in any undertaking, because Shiva promised this to Parvati.¹ If he were not worshipped first of all, there might be trouble later and the bride and groom might not be happy". In this ritual Ganesh is asked to bless the nuptials which are about to begin. The bride plays no active part in it, but sits beside her father while he carries it out on her behalf. When this has been done, the same ritual is repeated, but this time performed with the maternal uncle, again under the purohit's directions and with the bride looking on. This rite is known as the saind and was described by one villager as "the share(hakk) due to the maternal uncle. By performing it he shows that he cares for his niece".

The next part of the preparation does not involve the priest but is completed by the women of the household under the direction of the barber's wife. Accounts of Hindu weddings invariably refer to some kind of preliminary purification of the bride, sometimes in stages spread over a week or more before the wedding itself.² In Dohk the

1. The reference here is to the story of how Shiva beheaded Parvati's son Ganesh in a jealous rage. He replaced Ganesh's head with that of an elephant, consoling Parvati with the promise that her son would henceforth be the greatest of gods, worshipped of all in any ritual.

2. Mayer (1960), p. 228.

purification of the bride only involves one ritual performance and is begun only after the saind has been carried out on the afternoon of the day before the wedding itself. The purification is fairly elaborate for the girl does not just take a perfunctory bath in some secluded corner such as is considered sufficient before a private ritual to some devata, but in a specially prepared place in the middle of the courtyard. A patch of the ground is smeared with cowdung and a caukī is placed there. Ashes or cinders from the fire are placed beneath the caukī. Weeping loudly at the prospect of leaving her parents' house, the bride is led out and seated on the caukī. Bedsteads are placed round her to form a screen behind which she takes off her clothes. Then three or four married women of her household whose husbands are still alive help her to douse herself with water and to rub turmeric on her body. Her hair is unloosed so that oil and curds may be rubbed into it. They twine strands of kuṣā grass round her fingers. "The bathing and the rubbing with turmeric make the girl pure so that she is ready for the marriage", said an informant, and this interpretation certainly accounts for the items used. Water, fire and kuṣā grass are all substances which villagers regard as being pure or as having purifying effects in other ritual contexts and hence their association

with the bride in the ritual which is carried out to purify her. Turmeric does not have any other ritual use in Dohk and so it is not clear why it should be used here as a purifying agent, but curds, like other products of the cow are described as 'pure'. The kuṣā grass may have the additional significance here of providing protection, just as it does when a Brahman priest ties it to his client's hands before commencing any ritual.

Having purified the bride, the women bring out a tray of little cakes with which they then touch her head, hands and feet in turn. These are then distributed to all friends and neighbours present as prasād. The similarity of this procedure to the ritual process by which a plate of pudding is sanctified in private worship is striking, and in fact villagers sometimes describe the bride as having become a devī or goddess for the duration of her nuptials. Her ritual purification initiates the period during which she holds this exalted ritual status. May it not be, therefore, that the sanctification of food through contact with her body is not merely similar to the sanctification of food through contact with an image, but is the very same process. Having been invested with divine properties, albeit temporarily, the bride is qualified to perform the same function as the image of a divine being in private

worship. Perhaps the villagers' references to the bride as a goddess should be taken literally and not merely as a pleasing figure of speech.

The next stage in the preparation of the bride is of a secular nature. After the ritual bath she goes indoors to be adorned by the wife of her maternal uncle in the wedding finery provided by her nānake. The suit is always red in colour¹ and so are the bangles which her aunt helps her to put on. The women sing songs praising the generosity of the maternal uncle while the girl puts on the nath, the nose ornament which married women wear, for the first time in her life. In some villages it is the custom to take the bride out into the courtyard again after this and to seat her once more on the caukī.² All her kin take turns to bathe her feet with water poured from a pitcher held by her maternal uncle. This is referred to as 'worshipping the bride', which would appear to confirm what I have already suggested, i.e. that the bride's temporary ritual elevation to divine status should be understood literally. One could perhaps compare this act with the practice of bathing sacred images in private worship.

The bride's maternal kin do not only have an

1. See above, p. 89.

2. This custom is not found in Dohk itself, but in nearby villages where it does occur it seems to be practiced among all castes.

obligation to provide the girl with her wedding clothes, but must also bring new clothes for her parents, and the final stage of the preparations on the first day consists of the donning of the new shirt and turban presented by them to the bride's father. Having already bathed in preparation for the rites which he will later perform, he stands under the decorated arch which has been erected at the entrance to the courtyard and puts on his new clothes in public. This completes the ritual preparations which take place in the bride's house, and the assembled kinfolk can relax until they hear the sound of the band which will announce the arrival of the janet, the groom's wedding party.

The preparation of the groom.

The preparation at the groom's house closely parallel those which take place at the bride's house, except that the general mood is one of frivolity unmixed with the underlying distress which the bride's family feel at her imminent departure from their midst, and that they are spread over a slightly longer period of time. If the groom has not already been invested with the sacred thread this ceremony will be held sometime during the week preceding the date fixed for the wedding, since it cannot be postponed beyond the time of marriage. The main preparation of the groom consists of purificatory rituals very similar to those

undergone by the bride. The preliminary purification takes place within two or three days of the wedding, usually the day before the janet departs. Four women whose husbands are still alive are chosen from the groom's household to lead the rites and the purohit binds a length of maulī round the right wrist of each. The groom is then seated on a caukī in the courtyard over a spot previously purified with cowdung (just as the bride will be on the next day) and the chosen women apply turmeric to his body. This is an occasion for a good deal of light hearted horseplay amongst the women and they usually manage to smear as much of the yellow paste onto each other's faces and clothes as they rub onto the boy's arms and chest. After this they help him to bath and it is thought to bring good luck if a young unmarried girl, if possible a younger sister, is seated beside him while he takes this bath.

This completes the preliminary phase of the groom's purification and he then sits beside his father at the dera which has been prepared in one of the rooms of the house in exactly the same way as it has been made in the bride's house. The purohit then helps them to conduct the worship of Ganesh which sets the wedding solemnities in progress and which is performed in the same way as by the bride's father on the first day of the wedding itself.

Before departing for the bride's house on the first day the groom must go through the saind ritual with his maternal uncle just as his future spouse will be doing at about the same time. The only difference seems to be that the maternal uncle of the groom must also tie lengths of maulī to the wrists of seven women whose husbands are still alive and should present lengths of cloth to them. "The more generous he is, the better the prospects for the marriage about to take place", I was told.

A feast is given for the birādari before the final preparations for departure in the afternoon. Again the groom is seated in the courtyard and again he is annointed with turmeric by the women of the household. After he has taken another purificatory bath his purohit ties a protective maulī to his right wrist which he will not discard until the wedding rites are complete. Again Ganesh is worshipped, this time with the boy himself performing the ritual under the priest's directions. Only the groom's toilet remains now to be completed and he is assisted in this by his elder brothers' wives¹ who help him to apply nail

1. The relationship between a boy and his elder brother's wife is one of licensed familiarity and this is reflected in the kind of joking and horseplay which goes on at this time. It is interesting that rites which are basically similar in purpose and form can be attended by such different moods. The purification of the groom is carried out in a similar fashion to that of the bride but in an atmosphere of hilarity rather than grief.

varnish and other cosmetics under the surveillance of the barber's wife. The barber himself adds the finishing touch by tying the groom's new turban and the tinsel wedding crown. The wedding clothes are the gift of the maternal uncle, as in the case of the bride. The groom's relatives gather to make their contributions to the expenses of the wedding to the parents, and then when this is done the janet sets off. The marriage rites.

When the janet arrives at the bride's house, it does not actually enter the courtyard until the fathers of the couple to be married have greeted each other with a formal embrace, this being known as the milan, i.e. meeting. The janet is then welcomed and feasted after which all is ready for the rite which marks the start of the actual marriage and which is known as the lagan.

The rites which have been performed up to this point have been conducted separately at the homes of the respective spouses-to-be. They are indispensable for the proper performance of the wedding in that they prepare and purify the couple for this crucial ritual event, but they do not in themselves effect their union. They are joined as man and wife with the blessings of the devatas through two essential rites which form the ritual climax of the whole wedding. These are the lagan, performed on the night of

the janet's arrival, and the vedi, usually performed on the following morning. Both are conducted by the purohit of the bride's family, although the groom's purohit or any other priest who may have been invited may assist him in chanting some of the mantras.

The lagan.

Lagan means 'beginning' and although the villagers do not understand the Sanskrit in which it is conducted, this is the significance the rite has for them. "The lagan tells everyone that the wedding has now started", said one villager. It begins that part of the wedding in which the activities of the bride's and the groom's households converge and the joint ritual which forms the wedding itself commences. The marriage is not finalized until the performance of the lavā on the following day, but the lagan commits the boy and girl to each other and they cannot withdraw once it has commenced. The lagan is also a 'beginning' in another sense, for as one priest pointed out to me, it initiates the ritual co-operation which husband and wife should practice throughout their married life. Although there will be few other occasions on which they will sit side by side to make offerings together, the husband will henceforth be representing his wife's ritual interests as well as his own

when he participates in priestly rites in future. By entering the life of a householder he takes on ritual as well as economic responsibilities.

Before the lagan commences the groom bathes himself once more in order to remove any impurity acquired by chance during the journey, and through eating the meal provided on his arrival. He is then seated before the mandala which the purohit has prepared and the bride is carried out by her maternal uncle and seated on his right beneath the wedding canopy.¹ The bride's father also has a part to play in the lagan and he also sits by the mandala.

Villagers take account of three main events in the lengthy Sanskrit ritual which follows. First of all the purohit makes a public announcement of the names of the pair to be married and their respective gotras. This is considered important because the marriage of a boy and girl of the same gotra would be regarded as incestuous, even if they lived in different villages and were not known to be related in any way. Then, after the worship of Ganesh which opens most priestly ritual, the father of the bride must show reverence for the groom by bathing his feet with water.

1. This canopy is known as the vedi and gives its name to the vedi ceremony. In many places the erection of the wedding canopy is accomplished with some ritual but this is not the case in Dohk. C.f. Mayer (1960), p.229, M. Stevenson (1920), pp.61-2.

This act could be compared with the touching of the bride's body with the cakes which then become prasād; if the bride becomes a devī for the duration of the wedding, then the groom receives the honour due to a god. The climax of the lagan comes when the priest joins the hands of the couple at the moment which the previous consultation of their horoscopes has dictated as auspicious. To the onlookers this means that the couple are now committed to each other and are ready for the performance of the vedī ceremony.

The vedī.

This usually takes place the next morning depending on the configuration of the stars since, as for the lagan, the most auspicious time must be selected. Sometimes the vedī is performed straight after the lagan, but this imposes a great strain upon the pair who would otherwise have had the chance to snatch a little sleep after the exhausting activities of the day. The bride will be especially tired since ideally she, and if possible her maternal uncles' wives and her mother also, should fast from the commencement of the lagan right through until her arrival at her husband's house the next day. Eating inevitably affects the state of a person's purity, and much of the ritual during the day has been directed towards purifying the girl thoroughly.¹

1. This could be compared with the practice of keeping a fast on any day when the private worship of a particular devata is to be performed until the ritual has been completed.

Secondly her fast could be an indication of her critical ritual status: she is neither completely a wife yet, but neither is she any longer in the category of kanyā, unmarried virgin.

In the morning the groom and his party arrive from the resting place which has been arranged for them (they never stay in the actual house of the bride). The purohit will have prepared the sacred maṇḍala required for the performance of the vedī. This ritual, like the lagan, is carried out under the marriage canopy, but this time blankets are hung from the cross bars until the completion of the rite so that bride and groom are hidden from public view. (Could this be a protective measure comparable to the binding of the maulī?) The first part of the vedī consists of the worship of the devatas by the bride's father, which is then repeated by her maternal uncle. This worship, I was told, is to ask for the gods' blessings on the marriage and the assurance of its success. Then comes the part of the ceremony known as kanyā dān, the gift of a virgin (whose religious significance I have already discussed above).¹ The purohit makes the bride's father repeat mantras in which he declares that he now makes over his daughter to the husband he has chosen for her, and the groom similarly states

1. See p. 253.

his formal acceptance. This commitment is sealed on the part of the couple themselves by the performance of the saptapadī or lāvā. The bride and groom with their scarves tied together to symbolize their future inseparability, take seven steps round the sacred fire which represents Agni devata. The groom leads the bride, who is supported by her brother, and as she makes the seven paces¹ round the fire the priest directs her to repeat the mantras in which she promises to do everything for her husband's welfare and beseeches him to treat her well. As in the naming rites, the fire is regarded as being the śahādat, or witness, of the vows made before it.

When the vedī ceremony is completed, the groom marks his new wife's forehead (or rather that part of the voluminous blanket in which she is wrapped beneath which her forehead may be presumed to be) with the red powder known as sandhūr which only married women whose husbands are alive may wear as the symbol of their suhāg. The bride's mother transfers the sandhūr to her actual forehead under cover of the blanket.²

The purohit then reads the śārat to the assembled

1. In some parts of India seven full circumambulations of the sacred fire are made, (see Mayer, 1960, p. 229) but here only seven steps are considered necessary.

2. From now on the bride will have to veil her face from her husband's elder male kin as a sign of modesty.

company. This consists of a dissertation on the duties of husband and wife. It is recited in Sanskrit, but the priest gives a commentary in the vernacular so that all may understand.¹ This concludes the bride's purohit's part in the ceremony and the groom now makes a public gift to him, usually of cash although cloth may also be given. Then each person present, both from the bride's side and the groom's, makes a money contribution to the priest, dropping the coins into a pot which the priest holds out by reaching over the bars of the vedi.

Members of the bride's family then line up to make gifts of tamol to the groom and apply the ṭikā to his forehead in turn. Villagers describe the purpose of this rite as 'honouring the groom'. It is reminiscent of the way in which they honour their devatas by marking their images with ṭikā, and again suggests the temporary elevation of the groom to divine status.

After this, while the janet are feasting, the groom is made to sit with his bride indoors while the barber's wife performs the sirgundā, the dressing of the bride's hair. The women tease him, for instance by making him hold the

1. The śārat takes the form of a dialogue between a bride and a groom in which they explain what they expect of each other and promise to perform their respective duties. A priest who is articulate can make this entertaining for the audience and those who have found the lengthy Sanskrit ritual boring and have wandered away restlessly will gather round again to hear the purohit's lecture.

tray on which his wife's cosmetics are arrayed, or by hiding his shoes. At some point during the sirgundā the groom's father sends in a tray to his daughter-in-law on which various items of personal adornment such as jewellery, slippers, a suit of new clothes, sandhūr, are arranged.¹ These gifts are for her personally and not for her family since otherwise it might be said that they had accepted gifts 'in return' for the dowry.

The various items of the dowry are then assembled ready for the departure (there is no formal handing over of the dowry in public) and the bride is seated in the dolī (litter). She weeps loudly as her mother hands her in and departs amidst the tears of her relatives.

The bride's reception at the groom's house.

When the janet arrives, all the women of the household run out to greet the bride. Just as her mother helped her into the dolī, so her mother-in-law, who (ideally) takes her mother's place, now helps her to descend from it. A length of maulī is tied around the mother-in-law and the young couple so that they enter the doorway together. Villagers say that this shows that the bride is now tied to her new family by bonds which she cannot sever. In particular it shows the closeness of the relationship which

1. Cf. the 'chunri' gifts described by Lewis (1958), p.180.

it is hoped she will have with her mother-in-law.¹ Once inside the couple are seated on the dera and the groom's purohit performs a brief pūjā to the nine planets, this being interpreted as bringing blessings to the newly arrived bride and prosperity to the marriage.

Gūn khednā.

Next follows a rite known as gūn khednā. The bride is made to present handfuls of sweets to each member of her husband's household in turn. Each person hands them back to her and the exchange is repeated three times after which the sweets are retained by the kinsman. This rite is regarded as public proof of the bride's acceptance into the household. To take food from someone's hands is a sign of one's acceptance of them as ritual equals or near equals. Re-acceptance back into the birādarī after being expelled for some offence is usually effected by the offender offering food. Their eventual acceptance of the food (sometimes after an initial ritual refusal comparable to the handing back of the sweets to the bride before they are finally retained) denotes their willingness to receive him back.

1. In this respect it can be compared with the combing of the bride's hair by the mother-in-law among the Coorgs (Srinivas, 1952, p. 143) or the massaging of the mother-in-law's calves by the bride which I witnessed at a Brahman wedding at Amritsar. Both actions indicate intimacy and affection.

In the same way, gūn khednā is a way of establishing the bride's acceptance as a ritual equal (which is a matter of importance since before long she will be taking an important part in the preparation of food for the household).

Vadhāī

Early the next morning, both bride and groom take a ritual bath in the courtyard to purify themselves, so that they may be in a fit condition for the visit which they must next pay to the village shrines. The newly married couple, their scarves tied together as they were during the vedī ritual, head a procession consisting of all the members of the groom's household and birādarī. They proceed to each of the important of the village shrines and there perform a brief act of worship, each pouring water on the symbols or images of the devatas and offering some sweetmeats at every shrine.

Exactly which shrines are visited depends on the same considerations which direct the choice of shrines in the rite of vadhāī denā after the birth of a boy. In fact the visit of the bride and groom to the village shrines after their wedding is also termed vadhāī denā. If the groom's household has a household devata, the shrine of

that devata will be the first to be visited.¹ But in any case, a visit will be paid to one of the sacred pipal trees in the village, where the purohit (who has had no part to play in the worship at the other shrines) conducts a brief pūjā to the holy tree. In this worship both bride and groom take a part in making the offerings. Beneath the pipal tree one of the women of the bride's new family (usually the wife of the groom's brother) removes the heavy ornaments and coconut shells which the bride has been wearing since the first day of the wedding, to show that the critical part of the wedding rites is over. The bride will have a special status for some months after her marriage, but the removal of these decorations she has entered the phase where she will increasingly be regarded as a 'wife' rather than as a 'bride'. This act forges a special kind of relationship between the two women, and they become dharm bhain, or 'sisters by religion', and must behave to each other as sisters would. This gives the bride a start, as it were, in the work of forging relationships with the women of her husband's village, who will largely, if not all, be strangers to her at the time of her marriage, but amongst whom she must now lead her life.

1. In many parts of India where families have their own deities their worship is a prominent part of the post-nuptial rites (cf. Dube, 1955, p. 121) In Punjab there is no specification as to which shrine must be visited. (Lewis, 1958, p. 187). The usual practice in Dohk is a kind of compromise between the exclusive worship of domestic devatas and the general worship of the village gods.

The rite of vadhāī denā after marriage is interpreted by the villagers as a means of affirming in public the genuine union of the pair - for the wedding has after all taken place in the bride's house and will not have been witnessed by all of the groom's birādārī members, certainly not by the women, who never accompany the janet. "To give vadhāī is proof to all the birādārī members that the marriage has been properly performed. No one can deny that their marriage has been made in the right manner once this rite has been carried out", said a Brahman informant. Secondly, the bride is being (so to speak) formally 'introduced' to the devatas of her husband's village whom she must henceforth respect, even if she still continues to worship the devatas associated with her parents' household. It is evidence that she is accepted by those devatas and has been admitted to the religious life of the community which she has joined through her marriage. Some households have a tradition of offering vadhāī at shrines outside the village, or to devatas who have no shrines in the village. For example, a Tarkhan household had the tradition of sending the new bride and the groom to offer vadhāī at the famous Gurudwara at Anandpur Sahib (a major centre of pilgrimage for Sikhs, although this family did not describe themselves as Sikhs) where some offering would be made in the name of

Guru Gobind Singh. It is not unusual for vadhāī to be offered at some centre of pilgrimage in this way, although where this is the custom the rite may be deferred for a time until the family can afford the fares for the journey.

When the couple return from their tour of the shrines, a feast is given by the groom's father for the entire birādārī. The bride is seated in a prominent position, for the purpose of this feast (like that of gūn khednā) is to show that by participating in a communal meal the bride has been accepted fully by those among whom she will henceforth live.

After this meal, the women of the village come to 'see the bride's face', that is, they each lift the heavy veil the bride has been wearing during the entire wedding ceremonial and present her with the coconut and the rupee which everyone must give to a new bride on meeting her for the first time after her marriage.

The symbolic and ritual integration of the bride into her new household is now complete. The only rite which remains to be performed is the collection of the ritual items offered at the derā on the preceding day which are then taken to be sunk in the village well. The bride does this herself and then draws water there for the first time. The disposal of the offerings in this way is

reminiscent of the usual practice of throwing the remains of offerings made at other priestly rituals into running water, and its purpose is the same, namely, it ensures that the objects which have been sanctified by being presented as part of an offering should not be left about where they might accidentally become defiled. But this ritual can also be regarded as a sign of the new bride's ritual integration into the household, like the similar rite which takes place after the birth of a child. The fact that the bride is ritually fit to draw water for the family's use is further evidence of their acceptance of her as a ritual equal.¹

The rites which confirm her membership of her husband's household are now complete and she is now free to return to her parents' home for a period which will vary according to her age and the requirements of her husband's household. But whether her permanent removal to her husband's village and the consummation of the marriage takes place sooner or later, she now has the full ritual status of a married woman.

The general form of the marriage rites performed by

1. The ritual visit to the well seems to be a near universal feature of Hindu marriage ceremonial. See Berreman (1963), p.403, Dumont(1957),p.220, Mayer(1960,p.229, Srinivas(1952), p.143.

members of clean castes in Dohk is basically similar to those described by anthropologists in other parts of India. Where it differs chiefly is in the omission of certain rites widespread elsewhere (such as the worship of the potter's wheel, the ceremonial erection of the marriage booth) which make it appear as a rather simplified version. In their overall pattern, the marriage rites conform to Van Gennep's classical description of rites of passage.¹ The ritual separation of the bride from her natal kin and from the status of kanyā which she enjoyed among them is effected by the performance of the lagan. The vedī and the kanyādān rites join her to her husband and give her her new status of married woman, symbolized most obviously by the application of sandhūr to her forehead by the groom. The rites she must carry out when she arrives in her husband's village mark both the affirmation of her new status in the place where she will spend her married life, and her acceptance into the groom's birādari.

The most conspicuous feature of the marriage rites, and one which seems to be universal among Hindus, is the repeated purification of the bride and groom through rubbing their bodies with turmeric and through bathing. In part,

1. Van Gennep (1960), p. 128.

this can be seen as an application of the general principle that those who come before the devatas must first achieve the maximum ritual purity of which they are capable.

Altogether the bride and groom will spend many hours seated before the maṇḍalas prepared by the purohitas for worship during the marriage rites, so it is not surprising that this necessitates a more thorough and lengthy purification than the single bath or wash which precedes the pūjā which precedes a kathā, or an act of private worship. The physical transfer of the bride to her groom's village involves a journey and the possibility of contact with pollution (especially, perhaps, accidental contact with the Chamars who traditionally bear the palanquin in which she is carried?) and so it is understandable that she and her husband should bath again before they confront the devatas of the village when they give vadhāī. But purification may have an additional meaning here. The preliminary preparation of the bride elevates her, as we have seen, to the temporary status of devī, or goddess. There are other indications that her ritual condition is an unusual one, for she ought to keep a fast until after the completion of the vedī. She must not take off the coconuts which hang from her wrists, nor change her wedding garments until after the giving of vadhāī. In some parts of India the bride must observe additional ritual

restriction. For instance, at a Brahman wedding I attended in Amritsar the bride was forbidden to sleep anywhere but on the floor until she had been taken by her mother-in-law to worship at the temple of Devi a few days after the wedding (an urban equivalent of giving vadhāī?). We could interpret this elevation of the bride from her normal everyday ritual condition through purification and the observance of formal prohibitions as a sign of her temporary suspension from the normal everyday status system. Between her separation from her natal kin and her incorporation into her conjugal household she undergoes what Van Gennep calls a 'period of transition' and if this ritual hiatus is less marked in the case of the groom, it is probably because the passage from unmarried to married status for a man is not of such great ritual moment as it is for a girl.

Funeral Rites.

There is no obligatory ritual preparation for death, but there are certain acts which ease the transition of the dying man from this world to the next. If a man makes gifts on his death bed, above all the gift of an unblemished cow to a learned Brahman, this charitable act can make his journey to the court of Dharmraj, judge of the dead, an easy one; it may even ensure his release from the cycle of rebirth altogether. Also the dying man should be placed on the

ground since if he breathes his last while lying on a bed his passage to the next world will be troublesome. Immediately it is clear that he is dead an unbroken blast is blown in a conch shell to announce the fact to the village. (this is the only occasion on which a continuous blast is blown. On other ritual occasions a broken blast is sounded). The women begin to wail and beat their breasts and hearing these sounds the members of the birādārī will assemble to mourn with the family. If the dead person's eldest son is not at home he will be immediately notified of the death for he will have an important part to play in the funeral rites.

The dead are always cremated, except for small infants who are buried without any rites, and cremation is never delayed beyond the day of death itself. The birādārī members of the deceased form a funeral procession and make their way to the cremation ground, which is always situated near to running water where this is possible. Only the men accompany the bier to this place, the women proceeding only as far as the outskirts of the village where they remain weeping and beating their breasts until the procession is out of sight. It is interesting that at this time the mourning women often ignore the convention which forbids them to show their faces to their husband's elder male

relatives, and they appear without any head covering and with their hair unloosed and dishevelled. This behaviour would be considered most unseemly on any other occasion but it is considered a fitting sign of abandonment to grief at a funeral.

Any male members of the deceased's birādari may accompany the bier to the cremation ground, without any invitation being necessary. Indeed it is one's duty to go if one can as it shows respect for the dead man and consideration for his family. If the eldest son is present he lights the pyre; if he is not available the next eldest son, a brother, or any other agnate may do this. If there has been time to call the Charaj (funeral priest) the latter will now chant mantras which commend the dead person's soul to the devatas and ask them to ensure a happy fate for him in the life to come. Often no priest is present since the need to dispose of the corpse quickly in a hot climate (and perhaps also to limit the pollution which it conveys to all who touch it or come near it?) over-rides all other considerations. The Charaj employed by the villagers of Dohk lives at some distance and is not always able to arrive in time for the cremation itself. But this need not prejudice the dead man's chances of future happiness seriously, it seems. The men return home as quickly as

possible and on arrival take a bath to mitigate the polluting effects of contact with the corpse before resuming their normal activities.

Death Pollution and mourning.

The event of death, like that of birth, initiates a period of pollution for the members of the household concerned. This does not depend on contact with the corpse for from the moment of death all the dead man's immediate agnates, that is his father, father's brothers, his own brothers and his own sons, together with all their wives and children, are in a state of ritual impurity even if they happen to be outside the village at the time of death and during the ensuing funeral rites. If the dead person is a woman, it is her husband's agnates who are affected; members of her natal family will be unaffected however close the relationship, although if they visit the dead woman's house they will bath on returning home. Married daughters or sisters of the deceased are similarly unaffected, for marriage has transferred them to a different household and a different gotra. There is no formal division of the mourners into grades as there is in Coorg¹. But there is in practice a distinction between those relatives who are made impure by the death and those who are not for the former must observe certain ritual restrictions whereas the latter only observe

1. Srinivas (1952), p. 111.

those signs of mourning which have no reference to concepts of impurity such as the removal of jewellery on the part of women. Nor does the chief mourner observe any additional prohibitions or wear any emblem of his status as in Malwa where the man who lit the funeral pyre wears a white turban during the mourning period.¹

Death pollution is most severe on the actual day of death, when members of the dead person's household will not even enter the house of another family without having water sprinkled on them first. It is finally removed only after a period of mourning has elapsed which, like the period of birth pollution, varies for different castes. (The intervals mentioned in the following account are those observed by Brahmans but I give those which apply to other castes later).² During this time members of the household affected will avoid visiting other houses unless it is really necessary.³ They may not cook food for even themselves and a neighbour of the same caste is called upon to prepare their meals. They are however allowed to continue to draw water from the village well.

These precautions have to do with ritual pollution

1. Mathur (1964), p. 182.

2. See below, P. 344.

3. Even if it were not considered disrespectful to the dead this consideration alone would prevent mourners from joining in weddings and other celebrations at this time.

and are observed out of consideration for other living people rather than out of respect for the dead. But the household members must observe other prohibitions which are regarded as signs of grief and reverence for the departed person. Firstly all the close agnates of the dead man must have their heads shaved by the family barber as soon as they return from the cremation ground. On the same day the women of the household break all their bangles and remove any jewellery they are wearing. The widow, if the deceased is a married man, will never put on any jewellery again but the others may replace theirs when the mourning period expires.

Certain dietary prohibitions must also be observed. Foods which are regarded as auspicious and which are typically taken on festivals and happy occasions must be avoided. One such is milk and if it is essential to the health of any member of the household to take milk it is given with a dash of tea to disguise it. No fried foods may be eaten; the spluttering of hot fat as vegetables or cakes are added to it is thought of as a sound which denotes happiness and merry making, and for this sound to be heard in the house of mourning would be considered a grave mark of disrespect for the deceased. Throughout the mourning period the women will set aside each afternoon for the noisy

expression of grief and female kin and neighbours ought to make a point of visiting the bereaved household at least once before the mourning ends and weeping with them a while.

During the mourning certain rituals must be carried out by the chief mourner which ensure the welfare of the dead person's soul. Who performs them will depend much on who is present at the time, but the ideal person is the dead person's eldest son. Next in order of preference are other sons; brothers; brother's sons or father's brothers' sons. If no male agnate is available the rites can be performed by a sister's son or a daughter's son, but a distant agnate is always preferable to a person affinally related. No female can ever perform these rites, and in the absence of any male relative, I was told, an unrelated male would be asked to carry them out rather than omit them altogether. But a close agnate, it is said, will be bound to be more careful to see that the rites are performed correctly and hence that everything possible is done to safeguard the dead person's happiness. Someone less closely related might not be so scrupulous.

On the day of death a lamp is lighted which is kept burning until the end of the mourning period.¹ Ten balls

1. The burning of a lamp for the duration of a ceremony seems to be a feature of most life cycle rites. Villagers in Dohk do not ascribe any special significance to it. But it is perhaps worth noting that in Gujerat the lamp which is lit during the hair parting ceremony of a pregnant woman is explicitly described as the 'witness' of the rite. (Stevenson, 1920, p. 119) Perhaps the lamp fulfils a similar function to that of the sacred fire in this respect.

of dough are prepared and placed beside the lamp. These are called pind. On each of the ten days after death the Charaj comes to the house and helps the chief mourner to perform a brief pūjā to the deities in which these balls are consecrated and the gods are asked to ensure the welfare of the dead man's soul. The mourner then takes one of these balls and leaves it at the cremation ground near to the ashes of the dead man. The villagers regard this as a way of providing nourishment for the deceased, just as the food given to Brahmans at the Shraddh ceremony is thought to give sustenance to the ancestors. It is described as a sign of respect and love on the part of the living for the departed person. Each pind is thought to be associated with a different part of the body; the pind offered on the first day, is for the skull, the second for the mouth, the third for the neck, the fourth for the shoulders, the fifth for the chest, the sixth for the stomach, the seventh for the hips, the eighth for the thighs, the ninth for the calves and the tenth for the feet. The exact nature of the connection between each pind and the part of the anatomy it is held to represent is not clear. Most villagers seemed to think that the organ or limb in question was the part of the body nourished by the offering. (It should be noted that the word pinda in everyday speech actually means 'body').

When the chief mourner takes the piṇḍ to the cremation ground on the third day, he collects the bones which the fire has not consumed and puts them into a small cloth bag. They are not brought into the house - they are too impure - but are set aside in some hidden spot near the funeral pyre until they can be taken to be immersed in the Ganges at Haridwar. If possible, this should be done on the fourth day, usually either by the dead man's son or by the family purohit, but if this is not possible no harm is done by waiting until convenient, provided it is not put off for too long. Whoever takes the bones (or phūl, literally 'flowers', as they are euphemistically called) to Haridwar also notifies the genealogist who keeps records of the births, deaths and marriages of the family, of the death that has occurred before returning.

On the eighth day of mourning important rites take place which concern the women only. These are performed only if the deceased is a married man who has left a widow, for it is the widow who is mainly involved. On this day the widow's kin must assemble at the dead man's house, for they too have an important part to play. In these rites the barber's wife acts as mistress of ceremonies; the women of the dead man's household and the women of his wife's natal

village stand facing each other in the courtyard. They remove their shawls, unbraided their hair and begin to wail loudly, beating their breasts, heads and thighs. A woman who is content to make only a restrained show of grief and who does not slap her breast and head with real force will be upbraided by the barber's wife for not showing more respect to the dead man. When this is finished, the members of the widow's natal family present coins to the barber's wife, first passing them over the heads of the other party. The dead man's womenfolk do the same, passing their contributions over the head of the widow's relatives.

Until this time the widow has remained in a state of seclusion comparable to that of a woman who has just borne a child. This could be interpreted as a device for limiting the effects of the death pollution which affects her more strongly than anyone else. It could also be interpreted as a sign of her suspension from normal life during her transition from the status of wife to that of widow, publicly affirmed on the eighth day. She now crawls out onto the verandah, weeping and wailing loudly. Each of the women present, first those of her parents' village and then those of her husband's household, places lengths of cloth over her shoulders and hands her cash presents of at

least one rupee each. She then creeps back indoors and remains there until her term of seclusion finally ends on the completion of the kiriya karm ceremony.¹ These rites are said to demonstrate the continuing concern of her natal kin and their care for her welfare now that widowhood has taken away her chief provider and protector.

On the tenth day, when the last ping has been offered by the chief mourner, the lamp which has been kept burning is removed from its usual position and is placed near to the door. Flour is sprinkled on the ground near to it and is then covered with a blanket. After a few hours it is removed, and if the flour is disturbed any marks found are supposed to indicate the nature of the form in which the dead person has taken birth again. In the case of a rather unpopular Brahman who died in 1966, the traces in the flour suggested that he had been reborn as a snake, which was considered quite appropriate by those who had disliked him during his lifetime. His relatives, however, did not seem particularly disturbed by the news, so possibly the evidence of the flour is not taken too seriously.

During the tenth day, all the members of the deceased's

1. It is considered very improper for any person to replace a woman's shawl over her head if it slips off because it is reminiscent of the rites which take place at the time of her becoming a widow. To do this for a woman deliberately would be tantamount to wishing her a widow.

household go down to the nearest stream to bathe, the men accompanied by the Nai and the women by the Nai's wife. There they wash the clothes they have been wearing for the past ten days and put on clean ones. The barber then shaves the men, who have remained unshaven since the death of their kinsman, and the barber's wife dresses the women's hair, which has also been left unkempt during the days of mourning. These activities are considered to purify the members of the household of the ritual pollution they have undergone through their proximity to death, although they will not have returned fully to their previous ritual condition until the kiriya karm ceremony releases them finally from the death pollution.

For Brahmans, the kiriya karm is performed on the eleventh day by the chief mourner under the direction of the Charaj. It should be carried out in the courtyard of the dead person's house and should be attended by as many of the biradari members as can come. The Charaj prepares a spot in the centre of the courtyard by purifying it with cowdung, and places on it a cauki on which any religious image which the family possesses may be placed. He then prepares a mandala which mainly comprises symbols representing the nine planets and the four elements. In the centre of the cruciform diagram which represents the latter a leaf is placed which symbolizes the dead man's soul. The chief

mourner then worships the nine planets and the four elements under the direction of the Charaj. When this has been completed the Charaj kindles a fire on part of the previously purified area which has been left bare. With the aid of this fire he then conducts a havan. A havan is a kind of offering which has exactly the same purpose as other kinds of offering, namely to please the gods and hence make them disposed to grant what the worshipper requests; the difference lies in the fact that the offering is here a burnt offering. Ghee and an aromatic substance compounded of herbs, known as samagri, are thrown into the fire and the scent of these offerings is thought to give greater pleasure than anything else to the gods. The sacred fire represents the fire god, Agni, just as it does in other priestly rites where fire is used, and Agni is worshipped first of all with the appropriate mantras. The devata Agni, a priest explained, acts as mediator between men and the other deities. He is the channel through which the offerings made in the havan reach the gods for whom they are intended, and therefore Agni must be addressed first of all in recognition of his essential function. Thus the fire's consumption of the substances offered is not just a physical process by which they are made to give off their pleasant fragrance. They are, as it were, entrusted to Agni who then passes them on to the other gods.

For the havan offered as part of the kiriya karm, four officiants are needed beside the chief mourner. Any four men of the dead man's biradari may volunteer, since it makes no difference whether they are related to him or not. They purify themselves by washing their hands first, and the Charaj ties the protective mauli to their wrist as is usual before any priestly rite. With the chief mourner they seat themselves beside the fire. First the chief mourner must make the oblation of ghi which is an offering to Agni himself. Then the Charaj chants mantras in which most of the important Vedic gods are invoked. After each verse is recited, he directs the five men to throw a handful of samagri into the fire, uttering as they do so the word svaha.¹

The next part of the ritual is not directed to the devatas but concerns the funeral priest and his patrons, who make gifts to him. Traditionally, the bed on which the dead man lay when dying can be claimed by the Charaj, but in the funeral rites which I saw a new bed was given. Whatever the case, the bed to be given is now placed on the purified area of the courtyard and the Charaj sits on it. The dead man's relatives put their other gifts on the bed

1. Some villagers interpret this utterance as meaning that the offerings reach the devatas through being burnt to ashes. (Svaha means 'ashes').

beside him; these gifts usually consist of new clothes for the priest and his family and new bedding. Then the members of the dead person's household circumambulate the bed on which the priest is sitting twice and then take turns to touch his head and feet. Next, four male members of the household each take one of the legs of the bed and raise it three times. The villagers interpret these actions as 'honouring the priest like a devata'. Although he is impure because of his association with death and the death rites, he performs a function which no one else can fulfil and hence his patrons rely on him. These acts can perhaps be compared with the honouring of the bride and groom in the marriage rites. Like them, they serve to show how imprecisely the line between humanity and divinity is drawn. In Chapter 2 we saw how humans can become devatas after death and how devatas can manifest themselves in human form. So when villagers refer to humans being 'honoured like gods' in life cycle rites this need not be taken figuratively; it is further illustration of the continuity and intermingling of divine and human life.

The ritual of the kiriya karm is concluded when the Charaj sprinkles all the members of the dead man's household with water. This releases them finally from the pollution which they have undergone and can be compared with rites in which the Brahman priest gives water to the parents of a

new baby to end their impurity.

This concludes the kiriyā karm itself, but if the deceased was a married man, it must be repeated from beginning to end on the afternoon of the same day. Although the chief participant is the dead man's son or whoever has been acting as chief mourner in his stead, this time the rites are sponsored by the widow's family. The man's agnates have already shown their concern for his welfare and now his wife's relatives do the same. They present gifts of a similar nature and value to those given in the morning by the man's agnates and give the same honours to the priest as they make them.

This entire complex of rites known collectively as kiriyā karm is interpreted by the villagers as a means of ensuring happiness (sukh) for the dead person's soul. "By performing the pūjā", said the Charaj, "the living help to ensure that the dead man will be reborn in happy circumstances and to promote his salvation." The welfare of the departed soul is affected in two ways. Firstly, the sacrifices made to the nine planets and to the four elements and the other devatas are aimed at persuading these powers to do what they can to benefit the deceased's soul. The object of these rites is to please the devatas with offerings so that they will do all they can to see

that his next re-incarnation on earth is as some high form of life and that his next life is a happy and prosperous one. To omit these rites might cause the soul to become an unhappy and troublesome ghost. Secondly, not only the gifts made to the devatas, but the gifts made to the Charaj himself can help to benefit the dead person. For although it is the Charaj who will wear the new clothes and sleep on the bed which has been donated, the Charaj is seen really as a kind of mediator. The gifts, like the pinḍs, are really intended to contribute to the comfort of the dead man, and it is through the priest that they are made. This explains why the widow's family also make gifts to the Charaj, when the ritual is repeated on their behalf. They are not simply paying the Charaj for a ritual service - the payment would be out of proportion to the services rendered in any case, according to the kinds of rates which are customarily paid to Brahman priests, but are honouring the dead man through a living medium. The third reason for the performance of the kiriya karm was suggested by several villagers who described the rite as a way of making a public assertion of love and respect for the dead. The sons must do all that is in their power to benefit the dead man and the kiriya karm is a way of demonstrating this before witnesses, for usually as many male members of the birādari as are able will attend the ceremony. If the rites were

omitted people would say that they had not loved their father, I was told.

The twelfth day.

On the twelfth day, further rites are performed which are directed this time by the family purohit. The members of the household have now shed the deep pollution caused by the death through the performance of the kiriya karm and the ritual bathing, and the rites can now be conducted by the purohit without polluting himself. On the morning of the twelfth day, a havan is performed in the room in which the man died, by the chief mourner under the purohit's direction. This time the aim is not so much to benefit the soul of the departed as to benefit the living by purifying the house. A havan, in whatever context it occurs, always "purifies the air" according to my informants, but as a part of the funeral rites it has the additional effect of helping to remove the pollution attaching to the house as a result of the death that has occurred under its roof. The room in which the death took place has been more gravely polluted than other parts of the house and the smoke from the fire kindled for the havan renders it pure and fit for regular use once again.

Then the spot in the centre of the courtyard is once again purified with cowdung and another new bedstead placed on it. This bed is destined for the purohit and he sits

upon it in the same fashion as the Charaj did the previous day. Again the members of the dead man's household walk round him and honour him by touching his feet. Gifts of clothes and money are made to him. He draws a mandala on the purified area and with the chief mourner conducts offerings to the nine planets and Ganesh. As in the rites of the kiriya karm, these offerings are aimed at securing the favour of these devatas for the deceased person so that they will do all they can to ensure his soul's peace and happiness.

The remainder of the day's activities concern relationships amongst the living rather than the welfare of the dead. A feast is given for the biradari, which according to tradition should always consist of rice with vegetables. This feast is not, of course, in the nature of a celebration which in the circumstances would hardly be appropriate. It can best be compared with the feast which is given when a man who has been ostracized by his biradari for some ritual offence is received back again. By eating from the kitchen of the provider of the feast or by eating with him in the same line, the biradari members show that he no longer has any ritual disability in their eyes. The funeral feast is explicitly interpreted by the villagers in the same way.

"The feast given after the kiriya karm shows that the members

of the dead person's household are no longer impure", said a Brahman informant. "Now we can eat with them because they are pure again".

If the dead person was a married man, his affines who have been present since the performance of the kiriya karm, present the male members of the household with new headgear, either turbans or the small caps worn by Paharis, and give new bangles for the women. These gifts are said to show that they remember their obligations to the members of their daughter's conjugal household, even though her husband is dead.

With the putting on of these gifts, the period of mourning (as opposed to the period of ritual pollution which has already ended) officially terminates, and any mourning which the widow or others wish to observe after this is a purely voluntary affair. The rites are completed by the feeding of Brahmans two days after the kiriya karm takes place, although this may be omitted if the household cannot afford it. The aim of this is to benefit the dead man's soul, for the food is given in his name and the merit which the gift brings is his and therefore can help him to achieve a higher form of rebirth.

Giving in the name of the dead.

I have described the rituals which are compulsory

upon the death of any grown person, but there are further ways in which the dead person's family can help to ensure the welfare of his soul. Often further gifts are made to Brahmans, or offerings are made at shrines in the name of the departed shortly after the time of death. For example, a Jat couple whose eight-year-old daughter died of a fever gave three new cooking pots to the mahant at Jogipanga and a suit of new clothes to a Brahman girl. They vowed that on the sangrānd of every month they would feed the Brahman girl, who was about the same age as their daughter had been, in the name of their child. The death anniversary may also be marked by feeding Brahmans or making other charitable gifts. This is not compulsory, but usually the first anniversary is marked in this way even if the practice is not maintained later.

There are two possible ways of explaining how these gifts benefit the dead. Some villagers explain the practices of giving in the name of a dead person as a way of adding to that person's store of good karma. The merit which results belongs to the dead man as they are gifts made on his behalf; hence the gift represents one way in which the relatives he leaves behind can help to better his chances of being reborn in good circumstances. Another way of looking at the same practice is to see the gift making as a way of making gifts to the dead themselves either to placate them or to show love and concern for them. The Jat

woman who fed a Brahman girl in her dead daughter's name explained that though the food was actually consumed physically by the living Brahman girl, the satisfaction it gave was also felt by the dead girl. The Brahman girl thus acted as a kind of go-between in a transaction between living and dead. I have heard both these theories used to account for the custom of giving in the name of the dead.

In this context it would be useful to describe the rites performed in honour of the ancestors at Shraddh. This is really a calendrical rite recurring every year rather than a life cycle rite, but it can also be regarded as a continuation of the rites performed for the dead at the funeral itself.

Shraddh, the annual season for remembering the dead falls between the 3rd and the 19th of the month of Asu. On whichever day of the fortnight a parent (or any elder relative having no other living descendant) died, it is fitting to give food to Brahmans in the name of that man or woman. During these days the spirits of the dead visit the houses of their descendants and beg for food. If they receive nothing, they are liable to become angry and cause harm instead of giving protection. The food given to Brahmans indirectly accrues to the ancestor in whose name it was given and appeases his hunger. It is considered

the obligation of descendants to perform this rite annually for their dead elders, although to omit it would be perhaps less reprehensible than to omit the funeral rites, without which the dead person is almost sure to pester his living kin as a malevolent ghost.

Strictly speaking, daughters cannot perform Shraddh for their parents any more than they can carry out the funeral rites, the main reason here being that it would be sinful to take gifts from a daughter. A daughter's child, however, may perform Shraddh for a sonless couple and so may a sister's son, so that few people die without leaving some relative behind who is qualified to perform Shraddh for them.

During Shraddh certain prohibitions are observed which are reminiscent of the ritual restrictions observed during the mourning period after death. Clothes are not washed for the duration of the fortnight. "If you were to wash your clothes during Shraddh, all the dirt which came out would go to your ancestors." said a Brahman informant. For similar reasons any work which involves cutting, such as sewing and chopping vegetables is also avoided, since it is thought that by doing it the bodies of the ancestors would come to harm as though they also had been cut.

In theory all the ancestors should be honoured at Shraddh, but this is obviously impossible. Most people

confine themselves to honouring their parents and sometimes grandparents also, as well as any other person of the first two ascending generations who has died without leaving any direct descendant. The last day of the Shraddh fortnight is kept as a kind of precautionary measure for any other ancestors who have not been honoured individually. Many people again feed Brahmans on this day in the collective name of all the ancestors, so that no potentially angry ancestor may have been left out.

No special religious rituals are performed during Shraddh, although some people make a point of worshipping any personal or household devata they choose before serving food to their Brahman guests. Only those Brahmans who are pure in mind and command general respect ought to be invited, but in a predominantly Brahman village Shraddh is a rather cheerful affair, everyone inviting everyone else in the appropriate days. Any number of Brahmans may be called to participate in the Shraddh of a particular ancestor, three or four being the usual numbers. Generally men are invited for the Shraddh of a dead man and women to that of a dead woman, but there is no hard and fast rule in this matter.

Theories of the after-life.

I have left a discussion of the villagers' ideas regarding the religious significance of death, the life

after death and the factors which influence the soul's fate until the end because the description of the rituals which follow death clearly show that the ideas they express do not form an integrated and systematic body of theory. Rather they seem to hold several theories which at first sight would seem to contradict each other. Does the soul take rebirth immediately in another body, or does it lead a ghost-like existence? Is a man's destiny after death governed by the actions he has done during his lifetime or by the rituals which his surviving relatives carry out on his behalf? The interpretations of the different funeral rites which villagers give suggests a multiplicity of theories about life after death.

The soul (ru or ātma) is conceived as having an existence quite distinct and separate from that of the body it occupies, and it leaves the body at the moment when breathing ceases. When asked directly what they think happens to this soul after death, villagers invariably reply in terms of the theory of rebirth and karma. "According to one's actions (karma) in this life, so one will be reborn in the next incarnation". The rewards of present virtue are future riches, good health and social status. "You must have done good deeds in your past lives", a Jat woman told me, "because now you are wearing good clothes. You have fine food to eat and when you go to other people's

houses you are offered a charpoy to sit on. The Chamar woman who came here just now must have had a bad karma because she was wearing ragged clothes and we only let her sit on the floor".¹ "If we are only poor farmers", said a Tarkhan woman, "this must be due to bad actions performed in past lives". What constitutes a good or bad action varies in the case of each individual, for only that which is in accordance with one's own dharma - the social and ritual duties attached to one's position in society - can be good. "It is the dharma of a judge to dispense justice", said a Brahman priest. "A judge who does not do this will be the victim of injustice in his next life".

Punishment for one's sins in the next life is thus fairly literally conceived, but rebirth as any kind of human is preferable to rebirth as an animal. Someone who has performed the usual mixture of good and bad actions may be reborn as a man but an evil person will be reborn as some low form of life such as a snake or a dog. A Brahman priest

1. It is often suggested that it is the theory of karma which maintains the caste system. It is my experience that villagers do not invoke the idea of karma to explain the existence of the caste system as a whole, only why particular individuals are born in particular castes. The existence of different castes is usually attributed to the need for some sort of division of labour in society, and some castes are lower than others because the work which falls to their lot is considered dirty. But a particular person's birth in a particular caste would be accounted for by the accumulation of bad karma in past lives.

explained that as an animal he would have no dharma and hence could not do anything to further his salvation while living in this form. He must simply continue to be reborn in such forms until he has expiated the sins he committed as a man. Others claimed that animals can have their own dharma and that a human punished for example by being reborn as a dog could make a quick return to higher status by being a well-behaved and faithful dog. But the principle of reward and punishment is the same whichever theory is preferred.

But if this process of action and retribution is as automatic and immutable as the villagers' statements suggest, then why is the performance of the funeral rites seen as having a crucial influence on the dead man's fate? If his actions in life determine the state in which he will take his next birth, how can his surviving relatives hope to bend the inflexible law of karma?

Before we can answer this question we must understand the villagers' concept of the process by which the exact place of a soul's rebirth is decided. When the soul leaves the body, it does not, according to villagers, take rebirth immediately in another body but goes to the

court of Dharmraj, judge of the dead.¹ Dharmraj is identified with Yama, the lord of the underworld and is also regarded as a form of Vishnu. As one Brahman expressed it, "Vishnu and Dharmraj are not separate deities. Dharmraj is just a department of Vishnu's activities". When the soul arrives at the court of Dharmraj, he judges the actions it has committed in life. "Those who were generous in their lifetime are given good food by Dharmraj, whilst those who gave nothing get nothing", a Jat informant told me. Having weighed up the man's actions, Dharmraj allots to him the body in which he is next to take birth, according to his merit. He may, however decide that the soul should spend some time in one of the heavens (svarag) or hells (nārak) to which he has the power of assigning it. He may even prescribe rebirth as a devata if the man's actions have been exceptionally good, but until moksha is reached any form which Dharmraj gives will be a temporary one, occupied only until the effects of the good or bad karma accumulated in past lives have been exhausted. The

1. In Gujerat the temporal and spatial aspects of this journey are conceived in some detail. M. Stevenson reports that Hindus there believe that the court of Yama is in the south and that the soul takes a year to reach it, passing through numerous hazards on the way. In Dohk, villagers do not conceive the court of Dharmraj as being in any particular place, nor do they believe that any special length of time elapses between death and rebirth in a new body. In other respects the complexity of the beliefs of the Gujerat Brahmans about the after-life is reminiscent of the multiplicity of theories in Dohk. M. Stevenson (1920), pp. 156 and 191.

concept of Dharmraj personalizes what would otherwise seem to be an impersonal and inflexible process. The operation of karma seems less mechanical as soon as the idea of a mediating judge is introduced. When the villagers describe part of the kiriya karm ritual as an attempt to induce Dharmraj to deal mercifully with the departed¹, they are not in their own eyes denying the law of karma - for nothing can cause a truly wicked man to take rebirth as a rich, high caste, happy and healthy person unless he has an extraordinary fund of good karma pending from earlier lives; they are only seeking to mitigate its effects.

One Brahman had a more sophisticated way of accounting for the apparent contradiction between the theories which villagers express and the notions implied in the content of the funeral ritual. "No one can alter karma", he said. "If a man has behaved badly he will be reborn in some low form of life regardless of the ritual his sons carry out for him. The funeral ceremonies are just a way in which the sons can show devotion to their father and this is why it is important that they should be performed properly." In a truly sociological fashion, this

1. Vishnu receives repeated mention in the invocations made at the havan ritual, according to the Charaj.

man had perceived the rites not as a literal attempt to bend the immutable laws of the universe but as a symbolic expression of the feelings and desires which pious sons may be presumed to entertain.

Thus if the funeral rites imply any contradiction of the claim that the law of karma operates impartially (which villagers make in other contexts) then it is only an apparent one and can be resolved by the villagers to their own satisfaction.

But the rites which are carried out during the days after death seem to contain further contradictions. On the one hand the kiriya karm is designed to assure the rebirth in happy circumstances of the departed soul. On the other, gifts are made to the soul directly in the form of the pindas, and indirectly in the form of the donations made to the Charaj and the purohit. This would suggest that the soul continues to exist as some kind of ghost in need of attention from living kin rather than that it has gone to dwell in some other body. The same idea is suggested by the performance of Shraddh. This the villagers explain quite explicitly as a way of feeding the ancestors' spirits so that they will not trouble the living. How can the soul of a departed ancestor be in need of food and drink if it has taken rebirth in some other body? How can it at once

hover round its living descendants ready to trouble them if they do not feed it (or perform other ritual attentions, as when an ancestor demands worship as well) and at the same time continue its cycle of rebirth and death in some other mortal form?¹

So far as the offering of the pinda is concerned, strictly speaking this act implies nothing which need contradict the idea of karma to the villager. Those whom I asked explained that the dead man's soul does not take rebirth until after the mortuary rites are completed. Until the kiriya karm is performed the soul exists as a sort of ghost, hovering around the funeral pyre, or perhaps about the house where it had dwelt as a living being, until assigned a new form. But the custom of offering food to the ancestors at Shradh presents greater difficulties, for it can hardly be argued that all the ancestors in whose

1. This is not a new problem. In his Frazer lecture of 1953, Fürer-Haimendorf discusses the multiplicity of eschatological theories among Hindus and Indian tribes, and also as recorded in Hindu literature. But in most of the instances he gives, several theories of the afterlife can co-exist without logical contradiction because the soul is regarded as having several constituent elements. Thus among the Gonds, the 'jiv', or life force, undergoes reincarnation in another body, whilst the 'sanal', the personality of the dead man continues to exist as a kind of ghost whom his descendants may propitiate from time to time. (See Fürer-Haimendorf, 1953, pp. 38-42). But the Hindus of Dohk do not postulate any such division of the soul into various elements and do not use different terms for the soul when expounding the various theories recorded here.

names Brahmans are fed are still waiting to be reborn. One resolution of this problem was suggested by a Brahman man and is reminiscent of an explanation of the funeral rites which I have already quoted. "We know that the ancestors have by now been reborn," he said, "and that they have taken new forms according to their karma. The food we give them at Shraddh cannot really be consumed by them as by now they are reborn elsewhere. The custom of Shraddh is just a way by which we can show our respect and gratitude to them."

The funeral rites offer two ways of visualizing the life after death which the villager uses in different contexts; (a) the soul is re-incarnated at once or soon after death according to its past deeds; (b) the soul lingers as a kind of ghost, in need of care and attention from its living kin, and either hostile or protective towards them according to whether this attention is received or not. But certain beliefs which the villagers entertain suggest that there is a third way of visualizing the fate of the soul after death, though this is perhaps really only a variant of theory (b). Villagers often refer to a class of being known as bhūt, a kind of malevolent spirit. These beings can take on corporeal form, often huge and terrible in demeanour. They are said to live more or less like

humans - that is, they eat, sleep, marry, etc. though they tend to be most active at the times when most humans are indoors, i.e. at night and during the hot still hours of noon. Though they usually look human in appearance, they can assume the form of any animal they please in order to trick or torment people, for they are essentially malevolent in nature. "A bhūt cannot help troubling people," said a Jat woman, "It could not be benevolent if it wanted to, for it is not in its nature." Villagers are not usually very specific about the sort of torments which they think bhūts are liable to inflict upon their victims but most could recall occasions when they had encountered bhūts and narrowly escaped.¹ To the extent that bhūts are a separate and inferior class of being, the belief in their existence in no way denies the law of karma and rebirth. Rebirth as a bhūt is recognized as a form of punishment for humans who lead wicked lives. But certain categories of people are liable to become bhūts after their death without having committed any sin to deserve this fate, but rather on account

1. The complete absence of any sort of ritual aimed directly at the propitiation of malevolent wandering ghosts constitutes an important difference between the religions of Dohk and the material gathered in South India by anthropologists who have carried out field research there. Dube (1955), p.128. Harper (1959), p.232. Nor is there any practice comparable to the erection of 'paliyas' (memorials for people who meet with untimely ends) in Malwa where rites are held to appease ghosts. Mayer (1960), p.194.

of the circumstances of their death. Firstly, anyone who has died before their time, without having married or left descendants, is likely to become a bhūt after death.

Secondly, a woman who has died in childbirth or shortly after may become a bhūt, especially if her baby survives her. In that case she is liable to linger around the house where the child is kept and to attempt to bring about the death of the child so that she may be reunited with it.¹ Thirdly a person may become a bhūt because no proper funeral rites have been performed, or the mortuary ceremonies have been incompletely or incorrectly carried out. For this reason the chief mourner must be specially scrupulous in carrying out the details of the kiriya karm and other funeral rites exactly as the priest directs, for any omission may result in the dead person becoming a bhūt. Such an eventuality would not only be unfortunate for the deceased person but also for his kin who would be the first victims of his malevolence.

It does not seem easy to square these ideas with the moralistic eschatology of the karma doctrine since

1. A child whose mother has died must be guarded very carefully from this danger. A Brahman woman described to me how her daughter-in-law had died only a few days after giving birth to a son. The child was very healthy but was never left alone for a single moment for fear that the mother's bhūt, whom members of the family said could be heard crying and wailing about the house, should attempt to take the child to herself.

circumstances causing a person to become a bhūt in these ways are not in any respect the outcome of his evil actions. It could presumably be argued (although I did not hear any villager put this point of view explicitly) that though a woman who becomes a bhūt as a result of having died in childbirth may seem to have been served an unmerited fate, she must have done something evil in some other life to justify this form of death (and hence the evil form of rebirth which resulted from it). But we cannot escape from the fact that there is a certain inconsistency between the ideas that (a) a person's fate in the after-life is the result of his own moral actions before death and (b) it depends on the ritual actions of others, or other circumstances equally beyond his control at the time of death. As for the details of the process of reincarnation (whether the soul enters a new body immediately after death or on the tenth day or after the kiriya karm has been performed, and the nature of the role of Dharmraj) again the rites which the villagers perform and the statements they make in other circumstances suggest a multiplicity of theories. It is tempting to call these inconsistencies 'contradictions' and to wonder how the villager can apparently hold several quite distinct theories about the after-life simultaneously. But two theories can only

'contradict' each other if they are juxtaposed, or if one attempts to apply both in the same set of circumstances. In fact the villager does not do this. He employs one set of concepts in one situation and others in another. In the kiriya karm he behaves as though his father's soul was bound to take rebirth in some other body and at Shradh he behaves as though his father had become a hungry ghost. Though I found villagers quite articulate in their expression of both these views, and of the other possibilities suggested, they evidently do not feel the need to codify them into a tightly integrated system.¹

But ultimately there are few discontinuities which cannot be ironed out by an appeal to the doctrine of karmic retribution in its broadest interpretation, and when I tried to discover the logic behind beliefs which appeared at first sight to exclude each other, I often found that villagers would seek a resolution in such terms. For example it seemed to me that the idea that a child's fate is determined by the position of the planets at the time of his birth could not be easily reconciled with the idea that fate is

1. Dube describes a similar 'diffused belief pattern' concerning the fate of the soul after death amongst Hindu villagers in South India. The soul may (a) go straight to the Supreme Being if the time of death is an auspicious one; (b) hover around the house; (c) dwell near the cremation ground in ghostly form; (d) be sent to heaven or hell according to its deeds; (e) take rebirth within a few days. "Some of these explanations appear to be contradictory, but people believe in them all at once". Dube (1955), p. 125.

the result of good or bad actions in past lives. Will the merit I earn in this life win me a happy lot in the next, or is it liable to be cancelled by an unfortunate juxtaposition of stars at the time of my next appearance on earth? "The problem is non-existent" said one villager, "for the moment of a person's birth, and hence the fortune which the stars at that time augur, is in itself determined by his behaviour in previous lives". But in whatever way my fate is fixed, if it is quite immutable what is the use of worshipping the devatas in order to obtain benefits from them - whether the benefit desired is rebirth in good circumstances (as the chief mourner begs for his dead relative at the kiriyā karm) or merely relief from some troublesome ailment, the aim of many private acts of worship? The answer which I received was that the devatas might use their powers to help me but that this would in no way invalidate the merit or demerit previously earned which was now controlling my life, for the very question of whether my prayers would be successful or not was decided in advance by my past karma. The discontinuities in the beliefs implied in the Hindu mortuary rites are therefore only apparent at one level of analysis. At a higher level they can be eliminated by reference to the idea of karma which in its broadest interpretation provides an all-embracing

framework: within which a multiplicity of theories can be made to seem compatible.

Priesthood and life cycle rites among untouchable castes.

All that I have written concerning the Brahman priest and the rites which he performs applies only to the clean castes for only they can engage the services of Brahman priests. The very low castes cannot employ Brahman priests either on a regular basis as their purohits or occasionally for the performance of particular rituals. Brahmans avoid visiting the Chamars' quarters anyway, and no priest would consider a Chamar as a potential client, even though he can serve either low castes like the Nai and the Chimba with whom he also observes commensal restrictions. Since they are debarred from employing Brahmans as priest, the ritual based on Sanskrit texts of which the Brahman is both the custodian and the exponent, is inaccessible to the untouchables. Similarly they lack the opportunity for gaining merit and good karma in store for the next life through feeding Brahmans which is available to members of clean castes, since Brahmans would not stoop to accept charity from Chamars even if the food were cooked by a person of clean caste. (This at any rate, is what I was told by a Brahman priest himself). The untouchable castes

have therefore been obliged to make their own arrangements in order to remedy this deficiency. Of the castes represented in Dohk and adjacent villages, the Chamars and the Julahas are debarred from employing Brahman priests, and both employ priests of their own. In the case of the Julahas this is a recent development and members of this caste used not to engage any ritual specialist to conduct their life cycle rites. My Chamar informants claimed that members of their caste had always employed priests but the fact that even now not all the Chamars in the district do so, and that even those who do employ a priest do not engage him to perform all the life cycle rites which he is qualified to conduct, suggests that the Chamar priesthood may not always have existed.

Chamars.

The Chamars have within their caste a class of ritual specialist known as sādh¹. The sādhs do not seem to form a distinct sub-group - that is, they intermarry freely with other Chamars except for their own clients. The office is not necessarily hereditary since a sādh, like a celā, can pass on his knowledge to any one he deems fit to receive it, and any Chamar who acquires the necessary information and ritual skill by whatever means may become

1. In general usage this term denotes a holy man or ascetic.

a sādh. Nor is the relationship between the sādh and his client a hereditary one such as that between a Brahman purohit and his jajmān. The sādh does not receive an annual tithe but is paid separately for each particular service he performs. All the same, most of the sādhs serving Chamars in the neighbourhood of Dohk seem to be the sons of sādhs, and most of the Chamars seem to employ the sādh their fathers employed, so that there is usually considerable continuity in the relationship.

The sādh who is most frequently employed by the Chamars of Dohk is an interesting personality, articulate and self-taught. Unlike most of his caste fellows he is literate although he has had no formal schooling, having taught himself to read Punjabi in the Gurmukhi script. (Most of the Brahman priests only know the Devanagari script which is used for Sanskrit and Hindi). In spite of its association with Sikhism (having been popularized by the Sikh Gurus), Gurmukhi is the script in which a good deal of Hindu religious literature is published in the Punjab, and the sādh has a good collection of such works, including translations of the Puranas, the Ramayana and other classical works. Sometimes he holds kathās similar to those held by Brahman priests except that the initial rites are either omitted or conducted with Punjabi verses instead of

Sanskrit mantras, and that the texts themselves are also in Punjabi. Most of his knowledge has been picked up "here and there" (to use his own words), largely through his reading. He told me that he had very much wanted to learn how to cast horoscopes and had once worked as the servant of a Brahman priest in the hope that he might learn something of astrology from his employer. But he had been disappointed and hurt when the priest refused point blank to teach him anything at all, apparently only on the grounds that he was a Chamar. He himself declared that he was prepared to teach what information he had gleaned to anyone who desired to learn and is certainly liberal in lending books from his collection to anyone who wishes to read them.

This sādh seems to be inspired by a real missionary concern to uplift the religious life of his caste fellows. He does not express bitterness against the high castes, in spite of his failure to persuade any Brahman priest to instruct him and does not reject outright the caste system which denies Chamars the religious benefits available to the high castes. Rather he takes the attitude that Chamars must redeem themselves by their own efforts. "The Chamars came to be considered low", he said, "because they were engaged in work that was unpleasant and dirty. Only those who are filthy in their personal habits, whatever the caste

they belong to by birth, should really be regarded as impure." But the low castes, he said, had remained uninstructed and ignorant until saints such as Nanak, Ramanand and Ravidas had been born on earth in order to enlighten them. These saints, whose stories the sādh knows well and is fond of relating, showed that outward religious ritual and observances are useless unless the heart of the worshipper is pure. He quoted to me the tale of Ravidas, the Chamar saint, who opened his body to show the sacred thread he wore within his flesh, thus showing that true piety is a matter of inward devotion and not external ritual. He also related the teaching of Nanak, who said that flour was too valuable a commodity to be wasted by being sprinkled on the ground for vain ceremonial. All the same, Nanak (or so the sādh claims) translated the Sanskrit mantras used by the Brahman priests into Punjabi for low caste people to use. The sādhs in the area do possess texts written in Punjabi which contain mantras for use at weddings, funerals and most other rites which Brahman priests perform for their jajmāns, although I was not able to discover the real origin of these verses.

The sādh who serves the Chamars of Dohk knows a good deal about the lives and teachings of the bhakti saints who asserted the rights of the low castes in religious

matters and preaches their message of spiritual devotion to his clients. Like them he regards the worship of the devatas as a waste of time, devotion to Bhagvān being the real means to salvation.¹ Not all the sādhs whom I met were so articulate or so well-informed, and this man is very highly regarded by the local Chamars, who often point out with pride that he is really better than the Brahman priests, "for they just fill their pockets, whereas our sādh takes only the minimum for his labours and even then gives much of what he receives away." I do not know whether the latter claim is true, but he certainly appears to be a dedicated man.

It is interesting that in spite of his efforts to effect the moral and religious uplift of his caste fellows neither this sādh nor (to the best of my knowledge) any of the other sādhs who operate in the area seem to have emerged as political leaders of the Chamars. The movement afoot among them to give up tanning and removing dead animals and other practices regarded as unclean or degrading does not seem to owe its inspiration to him. Nor does he seem to have any connection with it, although he was apparently

1. His teaching aptly demonstrates the contradictions inherent in many of the movements generally referred to as 'Sanskritizing'. At once he encourages the emulation of the high castes in matters of life cycle ritual and the rejection of the external ritual which they set store by as symbolizing their status.

instrumental in gaining permission for the Chamars in his own village to draw water from a spring previously used only by members of the clean castes.

All the Chamars of Dohk, apart from five families who have joined the missionary Radhaswami sect, are clients of this sādh but even so, the occasions for which they require his services are not as frequent as those for which members of the clean castes call their purohīts. For instance, Chamars do not observe any religious ritual at birth, or at least none that needs priestly supervision. Relatives of the mother come and give presents of new clothes for her and the baby, as is the custom in other castes, and the parents may worship any devata in whom they have special faith privately as an act of thanksgiving, although this is not compulsory. After ten days she bathes and leaves her seclusion without any further ceremony. Likewise there is no ceremony at the first haircutting though, like members of other castes, Chamars keep the clippings after the child's first hair cut and later either place them in a stream or river, or leave them at some shrine as soon as the opportunity presents itself. Since the Chamars never wear the sacred thread there is no ritual for donning the janeū. Weddings, however, are celebrated in a manner very similar to that of clean castes. As amongst the Brahmans, the rites open with the purificatory bathing of the bride

and groom in their respective homes and the worship of Ganesh under the direction of the sādh. After the janet arrives at the bride's house, the lagan takes place at night, followed by the vedi the next day. The union of the couple is sealed by the circumambulation of the sacred fire kindled by the priest. The dowry is handed to the groom's father and the bride is given a new suit of clothes and other personal presents, just as is the custom with other castes. A noticeable difference is that since Nais will not take Chamars as their clients, the part played by the barber and the barber's wife in the weddings of members of clean castes has to be carried out by a fellow caste member among the Chamars. The sirgundā is performed by some elder woman of the bride's household instead of the Nai and some male member of the household has to be sent to invite the guests instead of the Nai. For the rites which require his direction, i.e. the Ganesh pūjā, the saind, the lagan and the vedi, the sādh prepares mandalas which seemed to me similar to those prepared by Brahman priests for the same rites, and the sādhs claim that the verses they use are exact translations of the Sanskrit mantras recited by the Brahman priests when the same rites are performed for members of the clean castes. I am unable to verify this since not knowing Sanskrit I have only the

Brahman priests' word for what their mantras mean. But the mantras I heard recited at the only Chamar wedding I was able to attend seemed to bear the same import as those recited by Brahman priests for the same rites in clean caste households if the accounts of the Brahmans themselves are correct. There was one exception, namely the lāvā rite. In the Sanskrit ritual conducted by Brahman priests the girl makes certain vows as she goes round the fire. But in the Chamar wedding rite this act is not accompanied by any vows but by a recitation on the part of the sādh of verses which describe the marriages of Shiva and Parvati, Sita and Rama, Krishna and Rukmini. These verses relate how the deities and heroes performed their weddings in the exact manner prescribed by the scriptures, what gifts were given to them by their relatives, and the splendour of the occasions.

A Chamar widow may go to live as the wife of another man without any disapproval on the part of her caste fellows. Similarly if she and her husband do not agree, either may take another spouse; in the case of a woman this automatically dissolves the first marriage provided the second husband comes to an agreement with the first (who is entitled to demand compensation even if a dowry was received at the first marriage). A second marriage is not celebrated with

any rites. The absence of the vows from the Chamar wedding ritual therefore may be an indication of the fact that it does not commit the bride so irrevocably to her husband's family as it would if she were of a higher caste in which widow-marriage and the remarriage of a woman separated from her husband would not be countenanced.

Chamars do not employ special funeral priests (perhaps because they are so impure that anyone who consents to be associated with them by performing any ritual at all could hardly be further polluted by carrying out the death rites?). The sādhs know how to perform a version of the kiriya karm which differs in no way, so they claim, from that performed by the Charaj for other castes, except that they are in Punjabi and not Sanskrit. On each of the ten days following a death the sādh performs the pind ceremony for his patron and the kiriya karm terminates the mourning on the tenth day itself. Gifts of new bedding, household vessels, clothes and cash are given to the sādh according to the means of the dead man's family. But these rituals are not universal among Chamars; the Chamars of Dohk simply cremate their dead without any special ritual being performed and the ashes are cast into any river or stream on the third day. The few who can afford the journey take them to Haridwar and deposit them in the Ganges as members

of other castes do. On the tenth day the members of the dead man's household take a bath and put on clean clothes to mark the end of mourning.¹

Chamars are not, of course, enabled to ensure the solace of the departed person's soul by feeding Brahmans in his name, for no Brahman would accept their food. But there are ways of marking death anniversaries and Shraddh which are thought to have the same beneficial effects. On these occasions Chamars prepare delicacies with which to feast unmarried girls, their own daughters, their sons-in-law, or "any person whom we respect" in the name of the deceased.

Julahas

The Julahas are slightly higher in the ritual hierarchy than the Chamars. They are allowed to use the wells from which members of the clean castes draw water provided that they do not dip their pitchers into the water until any clean caste person present has withdrawn theirs,

1. It is never easy to tell whether the absence of certain rites among the Chamars, or their existence in a simpler form, signifies a difference in religious outlook or is merely their inability to meet the expenses of elaborate ritual. I think the latter could be the case here. The expenses of a wedding can be saved for in advance, but since death may come at any time, the funeral rites require that the family should have a certain fund of ready money for the gift making which it entails. This is not the case with many poor Chamar households.

and they are not subjected to the residential segregation imposed upon the Chamars. But they too are barred by their ritual impurity from using the services of a Brahman priest and have been obliged to make their own arrangements. But whereas the history of the Chamar priesthood is obscure, the substitute for the Brahman's skills patronized by the Julahas is known to be of modern origin.

The Julahas employed no ritual specialist for the performance of their life cycle rites until the Arya Samaj turned its attention to them. The Arya Samaj is a Hindu sect which, though claiming to represent a return to Vedic Hinduism in its pristine form, has made great efforts to evangelize and uplift the castes formerly barred by their low status from using the mantras recited by the Brahman priests. The sect has conducted much missionary work in the Punjab, especially with a view to reclaiming the converts to Islam and Christianity for the Hindu fold and to preventing further conversion, particularly among the low castes. The Arya Samaj does not seem to have been as active in the hills as in the Punjab plains, but the plight of the Julahas seems to have attracted the sympathy of a few local members who then set out to evangelize them. One of these was a Khatri who lived in a village adjacent to Dohk. He devoted his life to helping the Julahas as a result of which

he was ostracized by the members of his birādārī who refused to eat with him so long as he maintained his connection with his low caste followers. He refused to give up the work he had started and eventually married the daughter of a Gurkha army officer in Dharamsala, being unable to find a bride from his own caste. He saw that his only son received a good education in an Arya Samaji school in the Punjab and after his death this man, now about thirty five years of age, took over the work his father had begun. The local Khatris remained adamant in their refusal to eat with him or give their daughters to him in marriage and he eventually took a Julaha woman as his wife. Although he is still referred to as a Khatri, his children are looked upon as Julahas and ritually he counts as a Julaha himself, for none who would not normally eat with Julahas will eat in his house. However, he has gained a grudging respect from members of clean castes as an educated person, for he has a knowledge of Sanskrit which enables him to perform for the Julahas all the ceremonies which the Brahman priests perform for their clean caste jajmāns.¹ This is resented by the local Brahmans

1. It is interesting that the changes brought about by the Arya Samaj in the neighbourhood of Dohk were in the direction of an extension of Brahmanic practice to castes previously excluded from it. In the area studied by Lewis it had the opposite effect of encouraging the dissociation of its Jat members from their Brahman purohīts through its insistence. Lewis (1958), p.72.

but there is nothing that they can do about it, for there is after all no way of preventing an educated person from gaining access to the texts which expound this ritual and record the mantras which accompany it. One exception is provided by a Brahman priest who lives in a village about three miles from Dohk and who has been affected by modern liberalizing influences to the extent that he is now willing to perform kathās in the houses of Julahas (though not to perform other rituals for them).

Before the Khatri priest's father began his missionary work the Julahas used to perform their marriages and funerals without the aid of any ritual specialist, using only very simple ceremonies which were conducted by an experienced member of the caste. According to the Khatri priest, this is still the case with a few Julahas who live in isolated villages as yet little exposed to the influence of the Arya Samaji missionaries in the area, but I was not able to witness such a ceremony.¹

Unlike the Chamar sadh who serves the Chamars of Dohk, the Khatri priest has also entered the political arena as champion of the low castes and stood successfully at the last elections to the local panchayat. He claims that

1. It may be the initial association of this sect with low caste Julahas which has inhibited any development of its influence among other castes.

politically he is a communist, yet his attitude towards his religious mission is very similar to that of the sādh. Originally, he told me, there were only the four varnas which were purely occupational divisions. The Chandals, or outcastes, were beyond the pale because of the unpleasant work they were obliged to do and were unjustly excluded from religious instruction from Brahmans. The latter failed in their responsibilities to teach the Shudras and Chandals who fell into bad ways, taking up evil practices such as meat eating and drinking wine, and turning to petty devatas instead of worshipping Bhagvān. He looks upon it as his duty, he says, to rescue the Julahas from these false ways and to point out to them that the propitiation of Siddhs and other non-Vedic godlings is a waste of time as they have no power. (He has even published a pamphlet in Urdu explaining these ideas.) When they change their habits they can regain their ritual status as ritual equals of the other castes.

To summarize this section, the ritual impurity of the Chamars and Julahas results in other religious disabilities besides their exclusion from village shrines, and more serious ones since the shrine is far from being indispensable for the villagers' private religious activities. The jajmān of a Brahman priest benefits indirectly from

the Brahmans' excessive purity which, as it were, he puts at his client's disposal by receiving his charity and performing his rites. As in the case of private rites, it may well be that it is the purity of high caste men rather than that of the devatas which would be at risk were such a ban not imposed. Members of clean castes do not seem to regard it as a serious infringement of their ritual privileges that untouchables should use ritual essentially similar to their own if they can find a specialist willing to perform it. Most seemed to know little and care even less about what arrangements they made. The Arya Samaji Khatri was ostracised for the fact that he ate with Julahas rather than because he recited the holy Vedic mantras on their behalf.

Yet the religious vacuum has not been completely filled for although the sādhs and the Arya Samajis perform rites similar to those performed by the Brahman priests they lack what is one of his essential qualifications in the eyes of his jajmāns, namely his very Brahmanhood. The qualities of the Brahman which help his client to improve his karma - especially his virtue as recipient of charity - are unavailable to the Chamar or the Julaha, which perhaps accounts for the fact that members of the high castes have not so far shown any signs of feeling that their ritual privileges have been usurped.

Conclusion

I shall now try to summarize some points about the place which priestly rites occupy in the religious life of the villagers.

Firstly, the rites which the villager carries out with the aid of a priest unlike private rituals, constitute public affirmations of his status in society. Life cycle rites mark the transition from one stage in the individual's social and ritual existence to the next. Even a kathā constitutes a public announcement of the sponsor's status if only to the extent that it publicizes the fact that he is ritually fit to engage the services of a Brahman priest; the kind of priest a villager is able to hire is in itself evidence of his status in the ritual hierarchy.

But more than this, the worshipper no longer acts in his capacity of private individual as he does in the rites described in Chapter 3. When he carries out private rites of worship the villager does so on his own behalf and on no-one else's. The blessing he hopes to obtain may benefit some other person - he might, for instance, desire the cure of a troublesome illness for a member of his family - but his act of worship is undertaken at his own will and not as a result of any formal obligations which his relationship with that person entails. Life cycle rites

provide occasions for kind to demonstrate in public their relationships to each other. They do this not only through the formal gift making which usually accompanies such ceremonies but through their very participation in the rites themselves. In the saind the maternal uncle demonstrates his avuncular relationship to the bride or groom; in the kiriya karm the son acts specifically in his filial capacity; in the naming rites the mother and father act in their parental capacity. These rites express both the ritual interdependence of different castes (through the needful services of specialists like the priest and the barber) and also the interdependence of kin; a girl cannot get married unless her father and her mother's brother (or other male relatives willing to represent her paternal and maternal kin respectively) are prepared to play their parts in the wedding ritual. Likewise, any person depends on a son or some other junior agnate to perform the kiriya karm and ensure his soul of peace. Indeed the living members of the bereaved household are equally dependent on the willingness of an eligible person to carry out this rite, since only by its correct performance can their impurity be removed in the proper way. Their disqualification from participation in most priestly ritual makes the women of any household dependent on the men since even a kathā

cannot be held unless some male member of the family consents to carry out the rites which will help to win blessings (spiritual and material) which will benefit them all.

Maybe it is just because the worshipper does not act only on his own behalf but in fulfillment of his social obligations to others that the factor of publicity is so important in priestly rites. (Indeed many priestly rites include a public announcement of the name and the address of the main participant.) If a villager decides to worship a particular devata for some personal end, it is of no concern to others and of no consequence whether he carries out the ritual in private or before others. But it is regarded proper that priestly rites, especially the life cycle rites, should be conducted in the presence of witnesses. Villagers often state the necessity of śahadat, or witnesses, for priestly rituals and even the sacred fire which represents the devata Agni is described as the 'witness' of the fact that the ritual has been conducted in the proper fashion. In the case of life cycle rites all members of the birādārī should be notified of the ceremony; in fact it should not be commenced until at least a few members have arrived to watch. It is their duty to come and see that all is performed as it should be. Indeed it is also in their interest to attend and observe the rites, for any incorrect

performance might affect their prestige. If they permitted a wedding to be conducted for two related persons or for a boy and girl of different caste, this might lower their standing in the eyes of the public. If they were not to satisfy themselves that the kiriyā karm has been performed after the death of one of their members they might run the risk of polluting themselves by eating food cooked by a person in a condition of ritual impurity.

Failure to invite a member of one's birādari to a rite of this kind is a very bitter insult as it is tantamount to saying that one does not regard that person as having value as a witness. For example, two related households among the Brahmans of Dohk had quarrelled over land rights some years ago and had been on bad terms ever since. When the son of one brought home a new wife the barber was deliberately instructed to omit the other house when he went round the village to invite people to attend the vadhāi ceremony. The groom's father declared that he no longer regarded members of the other household as his kin on account of their behaviour to him in the past, and hence he had no wish to see them present on this occasion. Relations between the two families could hardly become more strained than they already were, but the anger felt by members of the uninvited family served to perpetuate the enmity which had caused

their omission in the first place.

Through the performance of priestly rites enduring ties with kin and birādārī are expressed, and it is no doubt this fact which helps to explain their conservative nature. Villagers who have worked outside the village and attained a little urban sophistication may sometimes reject the worship of local devatas as a mark of ignorance, yet they still celebrate marriages and funerals in strict accordance with custom. But urban and secular influences are not the only agents of change to which the villagers are exposed, for another example can be drawn from the case of the Radhaswami sect. This sect has been sending missionaries to the district for about forty years and has found some adherents in Dohk. Radhaswamis are not supposed to worship the devatas, only the supreme deity Bhagvān, or 'Radhaswami' as they call him. Nor are they supposed to celebrate their births, deaths or marriages with the usual rites conducted by a Brahman priest but according to the sect's own ritual which is very simple. The sect does not recognize the Brahman's claim to superior ritual status, teaching that caste has nothing to do with the soul's progress towards salvation. Two Tarkhan families and five Chamar families in Dohk have joined the sect and attend its meeting fairly regularly, yet I know for certain that the Tarkhans at

least do not conform to the precept of the missionaries in this matter for I attended myself the wedding of a Tarkhan girl whose parents were otherwise very devout Radhaswamis, but who had the marriage rites conducted in the usual manner under the direction of the family purohit (whom they had never ceased to pay in spite of their sectarian affiliation). It may be that Brahmanic priestly rites carry a prestige which no family is willing to forego readily. This would certainly explain why low castes like the Julahas imitate them or adopt them rapidly once they have access to specialists willing to officiate for them, even though they made do with less elaborate ceremonies before. But it may also be that such rites, through the participants' expression of their relationships to each other and to their birādārī, demonstrate structural relationships in village society and are therefore unlikely to be abandoned or modified readily until that structure itself has undergone far-reaching change.

In addition to the public demonstration of social relationships (and more important than this in view of the theme of this thesis) priestly rites give expression to the positive value of ritual purity. I have already suggested that the sacred objects to which priestly rites are directed are regarded as being charged with a more than ordinary

purity, which the worshipper must take care not to diminish through disrespect or carelessness. In this respect therefore priestly rites do not differ from the private rituals described in Chapter 3. But as well as this, priestly rites are in several cases regarded as having the effect of actually removing certain kinds of ritual pollution; the kiriyā karm and the naming ceremony do away with pollution unavoidably incurred through the natural processes of birth and death. Perhaps it is paradoxical that in these rites the worshippers must take a purificatory bath beforehand in preparation for a confrontation with the deities which in itself will have a purifying effect. In the case of wedding rites the households concerned are in no way disabled by any form of pollution, but much of the ritual is concerned with the preservation of the purity of the couple to be united. Their ritual fitness to take part in the crucial rites which will join them as man and wife must be repeatedly and openly established by ceremonial baths taken in public. In all the main life cycle rites the people most closely concerned - the bride and groom in the case of weddings and the whole household in the case of birth or death - go through a period of ritual crisis during which their condition of purity or pollution is a matter of essential concern and during which they may have to observe

a degree of ritual separateness, even seclusion, from others.

If the precepts of the Hindu scriptures were followed by the villagers there would be a wide variation in the lengths of the periods of ritual pollution or separateness observed by different castes at birth and death. The Hindu ritual literature enjoins that the period of ritual disability suffered by the members of a Brahman household after the birth of a child should be eleven days, after which the naming ceremony and the purification of the mother should take place. For Kshatriyas a period of thirteen days is enjoined, for Vaishyas sixteen days and for Shudras thirty days. Similar periods of ritual pollution must elapse between death and the performance of the kiriya karm for each varna respectively. The Brahman priests with whom I discussed the matter admitted this to be the ideal which in theory ought to be followed exactly. But in Dohk there is not - perhaps cannot be - strict conformity to these rules in practice. In the first place the caste hierarchy there does not appear in action as a simple stratification of society into four orders but as a complex and probably flexible hierarchy of much smaller groups and there are some castes which cannot be unhesitatingly assigned to a particular varna. There may be differences

of opinion or even indecision, for as field anthropologists have found, it is jati which has greater reality as a functional unit in the Indian village rather than varna.¹ But leaving aside this difficulty, even the general principle underlying these injunctions, i.e. that the purer the persons concerned in the first place the quicker will be their return to a normal ritual status after the critical event, is not very closely adhered to in Dohk. The longest periods of pollution are observed not by the Chamars, but by the Lohars, who are far from being the lowest in the village hierarchy. Table 6 shows the periods of pollution which are observed after birth and death by members of the castes represented in Dohk and adjacent villages.

In practice even these rules are flexible. The period of birth pollution observed in a Brahman household during my stay in the village was only ten days. The eleventh day fell on a Saturday which is regarded as a very inauspicious day for bathing; if a woman bathes or washes her hair on this day it is thought that harm is likely to come to her husband. The priest therefore consented to carry out the naming rites and the purification of the mother a day early without any objections being raised by anyone. Occasionally local variations are found also, as

1. Srinivas (1955), p. 22.

Table 6.

Death pollution and birth pollution observed by members of different castes in Dohk.

	<u>Birth</u>		Ritual bathing of whole household (if separate from <u>kiriya karm</u>).	<u>Death</u>	Feasting of <u>biradari</u> (if separate from <u>kiriya karm</u>)
	Preliminary bathing of mother.	Naming rites and final purification of mother.			
Brahman	After 3 or 5 days	11	9	11	12
Rajput	3	13	10	13	15
Jat	5	11	11	13	16
Lohar	10	11 or 13	10	16	16
Tarkhan	5	10	-	13	-
Suniara	5	10	-	13	-
Chimba	5	10	-	13	-
Nai	5	7 (girl) 9 (boy)	10	13	16
Chamar	-	-	-	10	-
Julaha	-	11	-	11	-

in the case of the naming rites among the Lohars, which are performed on the eleventh day in Dohk but on the thirteenth day in villages only ten miles to the east.

The range of variation in the periods of pollution observed by different castes in Dohk is far narrower than that prescribed in the Dharmasutras and other classical works, and very short periods are observed by both very low and very high castes. Exact consistency with scriptural precepts is seen only in the case of those castes whose varna status is a matter of general agreement, namely the Brahmans whose claim to be Brahmans is disputed by no one, and the Rajputs, who are generally admitted to be Kshatriyas. The priests, and for that matter many of the lay villagers, are well aware that their practices do not accord with the injunctions of the scriptures (to which they otherwise claim they are perfectly obedient). They are apologetic about this, pointing out that the evils of the Kal Yug in which we are living cause expediency to prevail over fidelity to the laws laid down by the ancestors in the scriptures. As one Chamar informant stated, "There is so much work to be done if poor farmers are to make a living that a woman cannot afford to take thirty days' holiday just because she has had a baby." The upper castes are aware of the lack of conformity on the part of the low castes but seem

indifferent to it, and make no attempt to enforce distinctions which could serve to emphasize their ritual superiority. The Brahman priests themselves are acquiescent in the matter, just as they are in the matter of low caste patrons wearing the sacred thread, and they are the only ones who have it in their power to enforce the rules, for they could refuse to perform the rites if they wished. But their indifference probably arises from the fact that the approval of the conduct of the life cycle rites is the business of the birādārī members, who act as witnesses, rather than an inter-caste affair. It is, after all, their purity and prestige which are most closely threatened by non-observance of the periods of pollution which they have come to agree as proper for members of their caste, rather than that of other castes. The purity of a Brahman is endangered less flagrantly and less directly if he tolerates the emergence of a Chamar woman from the room where she was confined after only a few days than if he allows the same woman to come into his kitchen or touch his water vessels. It is the members of his own caste with which he has the closest domestic and commensal relations and who are hence more likely to pass on pollution to him if they do not observe the proper ritual restrictions at birth and death.

The rites performed with the aid of a Brahman priest, which Srinivas and others would term 'Sanskritic', represent a public dimension of the villager's religious life. But they are not based on principles which are basically different from those which underly the non-Sanskritic, little traditional, private rituals described in Chapter 3. Both these aspects of the villager's religious life are dominated and integrated by the concern for the purity of the devatas to whom the rites are addressed. In both kinds of ritual man/devata relations are expressed in terms of the opposition of the pure and the impure, in spite of differences in ritual idiom. In certain life cycle rites the concern for purity acquires a 'horizontal' dimension as well, in that the rites establish the purity of men vis-à-vis other men of similar status as well as vis-à-vis the devatas. But the techniques of purification are similar in both public and private contexts, and water, cowdung and other 'pure' substances play a similar purifying role in both kinds of ritual.

Chapter 5. Calendrical Rites.

In this chapter I shall describe the festivals observed in Dohk and comment on some of the themes they celebrate, especially the way in which these are related to themes expressed in the other kinds of ritual which I have already described. In particular, I shall try to demonstrate that the separation of the pure and the impure recurs as a major theme in the festival cycle just as it does in private rites and in priestly ritual. Some festivals are marked by the performance of a mathā tekṇā rite to the devata whose cult they celebrate, performed in the manner described in Chapter 3. Here, as in individual rites performed on other occasions, a major concern of the worshipper is to prevent the pollution of the pure devatas arising from contact with the impure. However, many calendrical rites are not directly connected with the cults of the devatas and centre more about the achievement of purity as an end in itself on the part of the individual who keeps them (or if not as an end in itself, as a means to the attainment of good karma which benefits the individual alone, and not any divine being).

It will be necessary to give a straight forward ethnographic account of the festival cycle first of all, reserving analysis until the end, since it is only by

considering the festival cycle as a whole that the place of these rites in the religious life of the village becomes clear. However, in each case I shall give the interpretation of the festival offered by the villagers themselves. In several cases there is more than one explanation available for the practices observed on a particular festival day, and where this is the case I shall give them all. On the whole, the villagers who could offer more than one interpretation of a festival were those who had had the most education and had travelled the most widely, although this was not invariably the case. Sometimes it proved difficult to obtain any explanation of a festival and this perhaps is evidence of the caution which is needed when dealing with the problem of what festivals 'mean'.

Anthropologists like Marriott¹ have explored in detail the various levels at which villagers 'explain' their festivals, but actual observation of the villagers' activities will often show that they mark a feast in the customary way without being able to give a neat account of what the festival 'means' at all. Thus more members of Dohk kept Panch Bhikhma by fasting and feeding Brahmans than could recount the story of Bhishma Pitama which rationalizes it; many who fasted on Sangar Chauth did not know the story of the Brahman widow's son which is said to account for its

1. Marriott(1955),p.194.

origin in any detail; and whilst most people celebrated Divali by lighting lamps in their houses, not all who did so knew more than the vaguest outline of the story of Ram Chand's return from Ceylon which Divali is held to commemorate. The rationale of a Hindu festival, it seems, may be of greater importance to the western observer than to the actual participants as a way of 'explaining' the rites which mark it. Just as the peasant's fervour in worshipping a particular devata depends less on his knowledge of the stories associated with that devata's cult than on his own personal experience of the devata's power, so his participation in a festival depends less on his knowledge of the traditional stories which are held to account for the customs which mark it than on his conviction that to carry out these customary activities is meritorious (and also, usually, enjoyable). The stories told in the village which describe the origins of the festivals re-inforce these customs, but are not essential to their survival. If as Marriott found, the anthropologist receives a variety of answers to the question "why do you keep this festival?" it may be that its rationalization is not as important to the peasant as its observance. The holiness of certain dates in the calendar does not depend on their rationale (rather the reverse) and the auspiciousness of these points

of time attracts a multiplicity of religious activities and interpretations, some of local and some of wider 'spread', as Marriott himself found. His cultural equipment provides the Hindu villager with a 'fund' of possible interpretations for the holiness or purity of a certain date, and he can select that theme from those which he knows which seems to him the most relevant or which has the greatest appeal. In the light of local traditions, the villager of Dohk can look upon Rakri as a time for sisters to show affection to their brothers or as a time for worshipping important village devatas. Nauratra can be regarded as a period dedicated to Devi or as a time for the remembrance of Ram Chand and his virtuous wife Sita. Sair can be a time for bestowing charity on one's barber or as the wedding day of Shiva and Parvati.

There is nothing whatever compulsory about the celebration of the calendrical rites. Failure to observe a festival brings no censure, neither does its observance bring any special prestige.¹ A few festivals such as Lohri and Divali are kept by nearly everyone, but otherwise there is considerable variation from household to household as to which festivals are selected from the total range of feasts and fasts known in Dohk, just as there is considerable personal variation in the devatas selected for worship from

1. Karva Chauth is a possible exception. See below, p.379.

the local pantheon. On the whole, more festivals are celebrated by high caste families and fewer among low castes, especially the Chamars. But as in other instances where members of low castes show a lower level of religious activity, this may be a matter of economics rather than of difference in religious outlook. Most festivals, like other religious occasions, are marked by the preparation of special delicacies which poor families can ill afford. Similar economic considerations may cause the same family to vary the number and selection of festivals which it observes from year to year. In the sense that less is gained by keeping them and less is lost by failing to observe them (either in practical or spiritual terms) the festivals of the Hindu year are less important to the villagers than the other rites I have described so far. But the festival cycle is of special interest because it illustrates the importance given by the villagers to the correct reckoning of time and season, in spite of the fact that for them clocks and watches are rare luxury goods. The timing of an action is seldom a matter of indifference. For almost any activity, some times are more auspicious than others, and these should be ascertained beforehand to ensure success. It may be a matter of astrology; for instance there are certain conjunctions of the planets which are

favourable or unfavourable to the performance of a wedding. Or it may be a matter of choosing the correct day of the week; a woman who washes her hair ~~or~~ or takes a bath on a Saturday may bring bad luck to her husband. She who washes her laundry on a Thursday is liable to cause ill luck to her parents, and no peasant will sell ghi on a Tuesday. Ritual activities should also be properly timed if the best effects are to be achieved; Tuesday is a specially suitable day for worshipping Durga, and Monday and Friday are good days for fasting. The very time of birth has a decisive influence on a child's future fortunes and development, as I have shown in Chapter 4, and must therefore be recorded as accurately as possible.

The precise measurement of time is therefore of both practical and ritual interest to the villager, and most can tell the day of the week and month without the aid of any calendar. Should anyone be in doubt or need to know the exact date of an approaching festival, the Brahman priest - acting as a kind of communal calendar - can consult his almanac and supply the necessary information at any time. Likewise, someone about to commence some important undertaking (a long journey, a business enterprise, a wedding) can ask the priest to tell him of the times when the stars augur best for the work in hand.

According to the calendrical system used in Dohk, the year is divided into twelve solar months. Certain months are regarded as having special qualities, not always obviously derived from the agricultural or other activities which characterize them. The month of Chettar, for instance, is an inauspicious time, whilst Vaisakh is an auspicious month, Sawan is also auspicious and plays a similar role in the folk song and legend of the area to that of the month of May in European tradition. The first day (sagrānd) of any month has special significance. Generally it is an auspicious time and may be celebrated by eating sweetmeats and other delicacies. It is also a good time for most ritual activities and is an especially fitting occasion for giving charity to Brahmans. Many sagrānds are minor festivals in their own right, although not necessarily of a religious nature. There are also inauspicious periods in each month such as the pañcak, the five days in each month which are so unlucky that no new work is undertaken while they last and any major work has already commenced is suspended for their duration.

Though the date (pervishta) is reckoned according to the solar calendar¹ the lunar cycle is still of great

1. Increasingly, the European calendar is coming to be used alongside the traditional system of time reckoning, especially by those who have lived outside the village or who have some education. But ritual events are always timed according to the Hindu calendar.

importance, especially in the regulation of ritual activity. Most festivals are reckoned to fall at a particular point in the waxing and waning of the moon, and since the lunar month does not coincide with the solar month, a particular festival may fall on different dates of the solar calendar from year to year. (The dates given in the list of festivals below are those on which they fell in 1966-7). As well as this, the full moon day (purāṇmāṣī) is always an auspicious time, and some women fast on every full moon day for their husbands' welfare. This fast, like certain others kept during the year, such as Karva Chauth and Chandan Chatti, is broken only when the moon is seen rising in the evening. The appearance of the new moon is also an auspicious event, and many villagers greet the new moon reverently with folded hands when they see it for the first time after the masiā, the night of no moon.

In accordance with the important part they play in the measurement of time, the sun and moon are regarded as devatas and at certain times receive ritual attentions from the villagers. Some men and women make offerings of water to the sun when they bathe, reciting the Gayatri mantra if they know it as they do so. Women offer water and sweetmeats to the moon when its appearance releases

them from the fast they keep on the full moon day. Here the moon is said to be the 'witness' of the fact that the fast has been completely and devoutly kept, in much the same way that the fire representing Agni and the assembled birādari members are said to be the witnesses to the correct performance of life cycle rites.¹

I shall now describe the activities which mark the various festivals kept in Dohk. Not every festival is accredited with a purely religious 'meaning' and even on those which are secular celebrations may take precedence over ritual activities. But most feasts are marked by both secular and religious activities and villagers use the same generic term tyohār to refer to both those feasts which have a primarily religious rationale and those which have not.

Vaisakh (April - May)

1st Vaisakh; Baisawa.

Baisawa, also known as Vaisakhi after the month in which it falls, is the Hindu New Year's day, and as such more auspicious than the sagrānd would ordinarily be. It is interpreted by villagers as a day of renewal - for example

1. It is interesting that most of those feasts that are controlled by the rising and setting of the moon are kept by women only. Could this refer to the similar duration of the female menstrual cycle and the moon's cycle of waxing and waning?

it is a particularly good day for putting on new clothes. Maybe this is why many villagers compare Baisawa in the hills to the celebration of Divali in the towns, for although Baisawa is not marked by such elaborate festivities as characterize Divali in either town or village, both these festivals express the theme of renewal, making clean and pure. On Baisawa the main ritual activity is the taking of a ceremonial bath in a local stream, "so as to begin the year in a state of purity". Early in the morning family groups make for the customary bathing places, if possible before engaging on any other activity that day, and certainly before taking any food. In the evening delicacies such as creamed rice are prepared.

Jeth (May - June)

1st Jeth; Nauli.

The sagrānd of Jeth is known as Nauli, or Nauli da vart, but seems to have no special 'meaning' except as a particularly suitable day for feeding Brahmans and giving charity. Many people keep a fast on this day, and as so many dates in the Hindu calendar are marked by fasting, it would be well to describe here what fasting entails for the villager. A fast is an act of abnegation, but not of penance or mourning. On the contrary it is an act of celebration to be performed on an auspicious day and the person who

keeps it should be congratulated and not commiserated. It benefits the person who keeps it by bringing them spiritual merit, but it may also be kept to obtain other blessings. For example, a villager may vow to keep a fast on a certain day if he is cured of an illness or relieved of some other trouble, just as he might vow to worship a favourite devata in similar circumstances. When any devata is to be worshipped, the worshipper will always keep a fast until the offering is completed, because by eating he would become impure, however slightly, and purity is very important when communicating with the devatas. It is equally important on a fast day, and a person who keeps a fast commences the day by taking a bath to purify himself, just as he would before worshipping a devata. A fast is a joyous occasion rather than otherwise, and its termination is generally marked by a meal consisting of finer food than is eaten every day, for instance, fruit or fried cakes. At all events, only those foods are eaten which are classified as 'pure' (.i.e. not meat, eggs or fish; certain vegetables such as garlic and carrots are also regarded as being less pure than others and are avoided on fast days as well as on other festivals). This is the general idiom of the fast as kept on such days as Nauli, although some calendrical fasts, such as Karva Chauth, have their own special customs.

Har (June - July)

4th Har; Nirjala Ekadashi

The 'ekadāśī' (i.e. eleventh)¹ of every lunar month is an auspicious day for fasting, but few villagers could give any reason for Nirjala Ekadashi's special sanctity. Some suggested that the fast kept on this day was kept in honour of some rishi (sage) whom they were unable to name. One Brahman suggested that 'Nirjala' was the name of this sage, but an etymologically more satisfactory explanation must be that of a Brahman priest who suggested that the word 'nirjala' meant 'without water' (jal) and referred to the fact that those who fast on this day should not even take a drop of water, a burdensome prohibition during the month of Har when the hot sun seems to scorch the earth at mid-day. In certain parts of India Nirjala Ekadashi is held to commemorate the day when the ancient hero Bhimsen determined to keep a fast, but by noon was fainting with hunger and thirst. His friends obligingly put his body in the Ganges in order to bring him round.²

1. As I have already pointed out, the solar calendar, used in Dohk for secular date reckoning, and the lunar calendar used for the reckoning of festivals do not coincide. Where the name of a festival is suffixed with an ordinal ('Chauth', 'Chatti', 'Ashtami', 'Naumi') this refers to the day in the lunar fortnight on which it falls, and not the date of the solar month.

2. Crooke (1926), p.176.

For most villagers, this day is eagerly looked forward to as the occasion for a fair which is held at a shrine dedicated to Thakur, situated in a village adjacent to Dohk. Inhabitants of this hamlet repaint the shrine and form a procession bearing new flags which they erect at the Thakurdwara with ceremony and accompanied by the beating of drums. (Fairs are almost invariably held at shrines and on festival days, although not necessarily on a feast dedicated to the devata of the shrine). At the Nirjala Ekadashi fair it is customary for those villagers who can afford to do so to provide śarbat (cold water sweetened with brown sugar) for the refreshment of those who attend the fair, as an act of charity. At this hot dry season of the year such refreshment is very welcome. Perhaps also it represents a further elaboration of the 'watery' theme this festival seems to celebrate.

Sawan (July - August)

1st Sawan; Chirna.

This is also a fast day and is particularly auspicious for the worship of the sacred pipal tree, to which offerings of water and incense are made. But by most villagers it is celebrated as a secular holiday on which married girls make a point of visiting their parents if at all possible. Until recently a swing used to be hung

from an ancient pipal on this day (swinging is an activity traditionally associated with the happy month of Sawan) but since this tree fell down in a storm a few years ago the custom has been discontinued. In nearby villages swings are still hung from trees and roof-beams on this day and the young women and girls amuse themselves by swinging on them.

Bhadron (August - September)

5th Bhadron; Rakri.

Rakri, or Rakhi as it is also known, marks the beginning of a period of festive activity which takes precedence over any other in this district. As in other parts of North India, Rakri is celebrated as the day on which sisters demonstrate their affection for their brothers by giving them gaily coloured charms (rakṛīs) and when possible tying these charms to their brothers' wrists themselves. A Brahman priest explained this custom as a survival of the ancient days "when Kshatriya girls tied threads to their brothers' wrists before they went into battle in order to protect them. Then they would say, 'Go and bring victory!'. Another interpretation of the custom offered was that the first rakṛī was tied by Subhadra to her brother Krishna's wrist, and that after this other women began to copy the custom. A brother must always give his

sister something (however small) in return for the rakrī, in accordance with the idea that to receive anything from the daughters of the house without offering anything in return would be sinful.

However, this aspect of the Rakri festival is not very strongly developed in this area and it is chiefly small children who give and receive charms. Those adult men who received them were mostly those whose married sisters were living with husbands who were working in the towns, where the celebration of the brother-sister bond is Rakri's main theme.

In Dohk, the chief activity on Rakri is nocturnal act of worship to the devata Khwajah at his shrine led by the hereditary guardian of his shrine who is known as the celā. The celā goes with the young men of the village to the shrine of Khwajah and offers sweets there and then leads them in circumambulating the shrine. They then return and distribute the sweets to all households except those of the Chamars as prasād.

This celā should not be confused with the other ritual specialist to whom the same name is given and whose functions I have already described.¹

As I have shown in Chapter 3, many shrines are considered in some way to 'belong' to a particular individual

1. See above, p. 103.

or family, but not every such guardian is a celā in the sense that I am discussing here. The celā is distinguished by the fact that he leads the festivities during the Rakri-Gugga Naumi period, during which he is particularly liable to possession by his tutelary devata. (Celās in the neighbourhood of Dohk are associated with various devatas, but most of the devatas who have celās seem to be local gods, especially Siddhs). The celā-ship is inherited, though not necessarily by the eldest son. In fact it need not be inherited by one son only; it is regarded as an inherited tendency to possession by the devata in question rather than a formal office, and in a Jat village near to Dohk all four sons of the recently deceased celā share in the functions of celā at Rakri. Celās are only found in those settlements where there is a Chamar population, for their possession largely depends on the stimulus of the music provided by the Chamar musicians. The celās themselves however can be of any caste, though most seem to be of the dominant caste of the villages in which they live, i.e. most often Rajputs, Brahmans or Jats. During the nine days between Rakri and Gugga Naumi the celā goes from house to house in his own and nearby villages accompanied by Chamar musicians and singers, who sing ballads celebrating the deeds of the warrior saint Gugga. They are rewarded by gifts of grain

by the householders and the celā is presented with money and lengths of maulī, which he attaches to the chattar, the umbrella which is the symbol of his tutelary devata and which he carries about with him as he goes from village to village. Usually, on returning to their own village the Chamar musicians delay outside the celā's house where they again begin to sing songs of Gugga. The celā then starts to 'play' i.e. become possessed, watched by the other villagers.

During this nine day period, the celā must observe special rules which are reminiscent of those kept in other contexts by persons undergoing some kind of ritual crises, e.g. the mourners after a death, the bride and groom at a marriage. For instance, he should only sleep on the floor with his chattar beside him. In fact he must spend the night wherever he happens to find himself at nightfall, for the chattar must not be moved after dark. Just as fasting marks so many other ritual occasions so the celā fasts from dawn to dusk on these nine days, taking only milk if extreme hunger or thirst make it imperative.¹ These prohibitions are only observed by the celā during this festive season; in fact it is only at this time of year that he has any specialized functions at all.

1. Milk is considered to be a 'pure' substance, a fitting food for a fast day or a festival.

14th Bhadron; Gugga Naumi

This festival marks the climax and conclusion of the period of ritual activity in which the cela takes a leading part. Gugga Naumi is the birthday of the saint Gugga whose exploits the Chamars have been rehearsing during the past eight days. The days between Rakri and Gugga Naumi are sometimes said to be the period of each year when the saint returns to earth to visit his beloved wife Suliar in secret. On Gugga Naumi people make offerings to any chosen devata in the manner described in Chapter 3. The devata worshipped, according to villagers' statements, ought to be Gugga himself, but according to my observation it was more often a personal or household devata, be it Gugga or some other devata.

Later in the day a fair is held at the shrine of the Khwajah, attended by the whole population of the village. This is the occasion for more singing and playing by the Chamars. Hearing this, many men become possessed by the devatas and begin to jump and dance in a frenzied fashion. In addition to the cela himself (who is a Brahman) I observed men of all castes and even small boys of eleven or twelve years old become possessed, although in a few cases possession was probably not genuine but affected for the sake of amusement. (Villagers state that genuine possession can

always be distinguished for the possessed person does not become tired as he would in his usual state of consciousness were he to indulge in the same frenetic activity). Men who become possessed are definitely regarded as being under the influence of the devata in question and any utterance they make is thought to be the speech of the devata. However possession is not used deliberately as a means of discovering the wishes of a devata or of questioning him in the person of the possessed man as it is in other parts of the Pahari area.¹ I was told that this could occasionally happen, and that a person who thought a particular devata could tell him something he needed to know, e.g. the cure for some illness or misfortune, would throw down a shirt or a scarf before the person possessed by the devata at the Gugga Naumi fair through whom the god would then reply. I never witnessed this myself and I had the impression that possession is enjoyed by the villagers for its entertainment value rather than as an opportunity for divination, for which they rely on the professional diviner also known as *cela* whose functions I described in Chapter 3. Indeed it can be very dramatic when first one man at the fair and then another rises and dances vigorously under the influence of the gods; the cela, himself also in a fit of possession, sits in the middle of the swaying crowd of leaping men and

1. Berreman (1963), pp. 89-93.

describes the devatas as he 'sees' them approaching and greets them as they arrive in the bodies of those whom they possess. As soon as a man becomes possessed by a devata those standing by run towards him to wave incense before him as an act of homage to the devata who is in his body. As many as twenty or thirty men at a time may become possessed at the Gugga Naumi fairs, which take place at all villages where there is a celā resident, at the shrine of the devata who is his tutelary.¹

The ability to become possessed is regarded as a kind of personality trait, a faculty which one is or is not

1. Possession by deities does sometimes occur outside the Rakri-Gugga Naumi period but seldom on such a scale as this. Probably one reason for this is that the devatas are said to be most readily attracted by music and this period is the time when songs are sung in their honour. I did observe a Brahman man become possessed on the occasion of a hymn singing session in honour of Devi held in the house of another Brahman the devata who possessed him being Devi herself. Another occasion was when I had invited a group of Chamar musicians to come and sing folk songs relating the stories of local devatas so that I could record these tales. Whilst a song in honour of Gugga was being sung one of the Chamars dropped his instrument and began to dance and jump, possessed by Gugga. Possession is not regarded as an affliction unless, as occasionally happens, a person is frequently possessed by a devata without any apparent stimulus such as music or incense. If this happens, it is regarded as a way in which the devata shows displeasure or demands worship from the person so affected. I have already recorded one case where such possession led to the building of the shrine in honour of Baba Sindhu (see p.135). It is interesting that possession almost never occurs in women. Presumably this is connected with the fact that the sort of behaviour which a possessed person manifests would not be in accordance with the modest and unobtrusive demeanour which a woman is expected to maintain in public. It is not regarded as in any way undignified in men, however, and occurs among men of all castes.

endowed with but which is especially persistent in a celā's family. "I have never been able to become possessed", one man stated, "I am just not made that way."¹ The Brahman who is the celā of Khwajah in Dohk explained that the gift of possession was more readily found in 'simple' people, that is, people who are not very educated or sophisticated. This hypothesis is certainly supported by the fact that of the half a dozen or so young men who had returned on holiday during the rainy season from employment outside the village, only one ever became possessed during the Rakri-Gugga Naumi festivities. But possession is quite involuntary, as the celā was able to prove from his own experience. "One year", he related, "I decided that I would not bother about going from village to village with the Chamars. It is too much of a bother in the rainy season, when the crops need so much attention, so I thought 'Let it go this year. I don't get so much money from it to make it really worthwhile'. Anyway, the Chamars made their rounds as usual and one day I was walking in the fields near to my house when I happened to hear their music. All at once it seemed that I was no longer in control of my own body. I seemed to float through the air back to my own courtyard where I began to dance in a state of possession. After that, I saw that it was useless

1. He evidently did not regard this as being particularly disadvantageous. The ability to become possessed does not bring any lasting prestige in itself.

to resist Khwajah when he wants to possess me, so I have carried out my usual activities at Rakri since then." The younger brother of this celā is also liable to possession by Khwajah and sometimes accompanies the Chamars instead of his brother. As in the case of the Brahman priesthood, quarrels appear never to arise over the division or inheritance of the functions among the sons of celās, presumably for similar reasons, i.e. the material rewards of the celā's activities are not great enough. Possession is a gift which is valued for the drama and entertainment which it provides but which does not bring any special prestige to those who have it.

However, possession is not merely a source of entertainment and spectacle. It has a very real religious value since it is a way in which the devatas actually make their presence felt among men. "It is good when people become possessed because then the devatas are here among us", said one Brahman. "We can see them with our own eyes when they visit us and play in the bodies of our neighbours". The identity of a devata who possesses a villager is usually either proclaimed by the celā himself, who if he is also possessed, can 'see' the gods as they approach. Or there may be characteristic ways in which particular devatas make their presence known. Baba Sindhu, for instance, causes

his medium to whistle. Possession, therefore, and especially the mass possession which occurs at the Gugga Naumi fair, adds another dimension to the villagers' relationships with the devatas. As well as the harm and the good which gods can do, their occasional appearance in the villagers' own bodies is further evidence of their interest and involvement in human affairs and further opportunity for gratifying them. Villagers explain the common occurrence of possession at this time of year by saying that between Rakri and Gugga Naumi the devatas are especially active. This would also explain the fact that so much of the ritual activity on and just before Gugga Naumi has little to do with Gugga but may involve other members of the local pantheon.

Between Rakri and Gugga Naumi fall two other festivals which have no obvious link with this festival complex.

11th Bhadron. Chandan Chatti.

This is a fast kept exclusively by married women (but not necessarily only those whose husbands are still alive, as in the case with Karva Chauth). On the Punjab plains this fast is only kept by unmarried girls and the local nurse, an unmarried girl from Hoshiarpur, caused considerable surprise among the women of the neighbourhood

when she too insisted on keeping Chandan Chatti. This fast, unlike other women's fasts, does not relate to the welfare of the husband, its stated purpose being simply to increase one's own merit or good karma. It is not immediately apparent therefore why it should be confined to women. But the story told to explain its origin may throw light on this problem. One day, the story runs, a Brahman told his wife to prepare food for some Brahman priests whom he had invited to his house. She obeyed, but whilst in the middle of her cooking discovered that her monthly period had begun. She was perplexed as to whether she ought to continue the work so as not to waste the food, or abandon it because of her now impure condition. In the end she decided that it would be simpler to conceal her impurity and she finished preparing the meal, which the Brahmans duly ate. But when she died, she was punished for this sin by being reborn as a bhūt. One night her son had a dream in which she appeared to him, beseeching him to give instructions to other women so that they might avoid her fate. He was to tell them to prepare food regularly for Brahmans, secondly never to cook when tainted by the impurity of their monthly periods, and lastly to keep the Chandan Chatti fast to remind them of these precepts. The feminine interest of the fast is clear from this story and

it emerges not merely as an occasion to win merit but as a day for reminding oneself of the rules of purity and pollution which ought to be observed. This fast is mainly kept by Brahman and Rajput women, and is unknown among the Chamars and Julahas, which may be related to the fact that it is women of the higher castes who show the greatest concern for the necessity of avoiding cooking or entering the cooking area whilst in their periods.

Women who keep this fast often give a modest feast in the evening for their friends and relatives and present gifts of domestic utensils, blankets and clothes to Brahmans and to their married daughters.

13th Bhadron. Janam Ashtami.

Janam Ashtami celebrates the birth of Krishna, but this aspect of the festival is not very important to the villagers of Dohk. A few people fast in honour of Krishna and sing hymns which recount his deeds in the evening, but the main activities of the day concern a purely local devata, for on this day the Parashar Brahmans of Dohk meet to worship their deified forebear, Baba Dera. The family who act as guardians of his shrine send the barber to fetch all the Parashar men. Together they circumambulate the shrine, ringing bells and blowing conches to please Baba Dera so that he will bring them prosperity

and good fortune. Sweets are offered at the shrine by the guardians and distributed to all who attend. Portions are sent to the homes of any Parashar Brahmans who were unable to attend. This was the only case which came to my notice of joint worship by the members of a descent group, as even the worship of deified ancestors of household devatas is otherwise undertaken by individuals only.

Asu (September - October)

1st Asu; Sair.

On the night of Sair, the barber visits the houses of his jajmāns carrying a basket which contains a galgal (a kind of citrus fruit), a lamp, and a dish holding the red powder used for making the tikā mark. Each householder should place a rupee in the basket and bow before the lamp. "We go to tell our jajmāns that they can begin to eat the galgal fruit after this day", was the barber's interpretation of this rite, which is consistent with the custom of not eating the new grain of a harvest or not drinking the milk of a buffalo newly calved until thanksgiving rites have been addressed to some deity. But there seems no obvious reason for having special first fruit rites for the galgal which is of very little dietary importance in Dohk and is seldom grown there. Many villagers in fact dismiss Sair as "a barber's festival, just a day when it is the barber's privilege to go begging".

Sair seems to be purely a Pahari festival for as far as I know it is not kept in the plains at all and is marked by more elaborate observances higher in the hills. For instance an informant who had visited Dharamsala told me that there it is celebrated as the wedding day of Shiva and Parvati, and images of these deities are placed in baskets with flowers and then floated on streams and ponds. Rose mentions that at Khad Ashri it was the custom for the barber to take an image of Ganesh to be worshipped by his jajmāns on this day.¹ Evidently there are several interpretations of Sair in the Pahari area and it may be that this festival is only weakly developed in Dohk because the village lies on its outer fringes.

3rd-19th Asu; Shraddh.

This is the yearly fortnight for remembering the ancestors, especially the more recently deceased, which I have already described in Chapter 4.

18th-27th Asu; Nauratra.

This is a period of ritual activity which, like the Rakri-Gugga Naumi complex concerns several distinct themes. On the one hand, Nauratra is dedicated to Druga. Villagers light lamps in her honour daily throughout the nine day period (Nauratra means 'nine nights') and pray to her for protection and prosperity. On Ashtami (26th Asu) some

1. Rose (1919), Vol. 1, p. 360.

villagers, especially those who look upon Durga as their personal or household devata, make offerings to her and distribute charity in the form of sweets, new shawls and small coins to unmarried girls in her name.

On the other hand, Nauratra is also connected with the story of Raja Ram Chand, the incarnation of Vishnu who is regarded as the prototype of kingly virtue and righteousness. For the last four or five years a Ram Lila, a dramatic enactment of Ram Chand's adventures, has been held in a nearby village during the Nauratra period. The Ram Lila is performed by local schoolboys under the direction of a Brahman priest who explains the story to the onlookers while the actors, attired in gay costumes, mime the action. Apart from the entertainment value of this performance it is also an opportunity for expressing devotion, for the young actors are said to be the mūrtiā (images) of the devatas they represent and as such receive much pious attention from members of the audience during the interval. Villagers come to touch their feet and to give them presents of sweets and coins and to bow down before them. Their elevation to divine status is only temporary of course, no-one having any illusions as to their real identity, and after the performance they become once again mere schoolboys - just as an image which is no longer in

ritual use becomes a mere statue. "It is our chance to see the devatas in living form", explained one elderly lady who had come to the Ram Lila. This is further illustration of the easy intermingling of the human and the divine world already seen in the context of life cycle rites and in the mass possession which takes place at Gugga Naumi, when the devatas enter human bodies in another fashion. The Ram Lila is performed in daily installments for five days and is followed by a fair on the last day, Dussehra. At night hired troupes of actors perform dramas based on scriptural themes but interspersed with much song and dance of a less devotional nature. Late at night on Dussehra the huge effigies of Ram Chand's enemy, the wicked king Ravan, and Ravan's wife and brother, are set alight and burnt much as the effigy of Guy Fawkes is burnt on November 5th in this country.

Both the Ram Lila and the dramatic performances have been arranged by the local sarpañc (chairman of the Panchayat which serves Dohk and about half a dozen other hamlets) and a committee selected by himself. However in 1966 the committee failed to agree as to the site which should be used and the sarpañc in disgust washed his hands of the whole affair. A young Brahman farmer who had been a political rival of the sarpañc for some time came forward

after various further disputes as to how the funds should be collected and allocated, and took the arrangements in hand himself. In the end the Ram Lila was held on an open space opposite his house and all the accompanying festivities went off very smoothly. His decision was welcomed by the majority of people since for some time the sarpañc had been holding the Ram Lila near to his own house which was in a rather isolated place off the road. The site chosen for the 1966 performance by the Brahman organizer was a more accessible site for most of the people attending the festivities. The Brahman priest who was to direct the Ram Lila performed a short pūjā in the Brahman organizer's house before the performance was to begin and then led the actors in procession from there to the place where they were to act.

Although the enthusiasm with which the Ram Lila has been received by the local people and the readiness with which they made contributions to the fund started for the purpose will, I think, ensure its continuance in future years, it is clear that this newly established custom has provided the opportunity for the expression of political rivalries. This is the more interesting because both the sarpañc (who claims to be a communist) and the Brahman farmer are very frank about their lack of interest in ritual

activities and the fact that they regard worshipping devatas as a waste of time. The latter rationalized his leading part in the organization of the Ram Lila by saying, "Simple people enjoy these things. The people round here are backward and uneducated and there is no harm in their amusing themselves".

Mala di Chandni.

Mala di Chandni falls after Dussehra and seems to be a purely local festival. For as many nights after Dussehra as the moon is bright, groups of Chamars go from house to house, usually in the early hours of the morning, singing traditional songs and begging for grain. In theory this festival is in honour of Sarban Nath, the first cousin of Ram Chand, and it is his legend which the Chamars rehearse in their songs. This tragic tale tells how Sarban Nath left his aged blind parents in the care of his wife while he went to practice austerities in the jungle. On his return he found that she had been ill-treating them and he turned her out of the house in anger. From then on, he wandered in the jungle, carrying his mother and father on his own back. But one day, he was accidentally killed by his uncle Dashrat, who mistook the sound which Sarban Nath made when filling his pitcher at a tank for that of some wild animal and shot him with a fatal arrow. His parents

died of grief when they heard of his death. In addition to this scriptural story the Chamars may also sing any other folksong, devotional or secular, which they think may please their patrons and sometimes perform dances to the music also. Like Gugga Naumi, Mala di Chandni provides an occasion for the recital of the religious folklore of the district.

Kartik (October - November)

6th Kartik; Karva Chauth.

This is a most important fast day for all married women whose husbands are still alive and is kept by nearly all of them except among the Chamars. In fact even some unmarried girls keep Karva Chauth, either for amusement or to test their stamina. But also, as their mothers assert, their future husbands exist somewhere unknown to them, whose welfare should be safeguarded just as carefully as though they were already married. For the aim of this fast is to secure the long life and well-being of the husband and it is considered incumbent on every woman to keep it as long as her husband is alive, unless she is sick or suckling a young baby.¹ A total fast is kept from dawn until moonrise, though before day-break those who can afford it eat some

1. The non-participation of the Chamar women may be related to the fact that they are not debarred from marrying if the first husband dies. His survival is not therefore of such vital ritual concern for the woman since her ritual status does not undergo such a drastic change if he dies.

fruit or sweets. When the moon appears, the woman offers some water and sweets to it and is then free to break her fast. Just as during Shraddh no woman does any washing in case the dirt she removes from the clothes should affect the ancestors she is honouring, so no-one does their laundry on Karva Chauth lest the dirt should affect their husband. And just as during Shraddh people avoid using sharp instruments lest they should 'cut' their ancestors, women keeping Karva Chauth do not sew or prepare vegetables which have to be cut with a knife, in case their husbands should suffer from cuts or wounds. It is because of this last prohibition that the traditional fare on the night of Karva Chauth is black lentils and rice which require no chopping or cutting in their preparation.

A good many women know the story of Karva Chauth and relate it to each other on this day. The version of the Karva Chauth legend which is current in Dohk is not very different from that recorded by Marriott in a U.P. village several hundred miles from Dohk.¹ A daughter and a daughter-in-law were keeping the fast in the same house, the story runs, By evening the daughter, who though married was still only a small girl, became very hungry. In pity for her, her brothers climbed a nearby hill and there displayed a golden tray. They told her that the moon

1. Marriott (1955), p. 204.

had risen, and thinking the flashing of the tray to be the rays of the moon, she broke her fast. But as soon as she had eaten, the news came to her that her husband had died. But the daughter-in-law did not break her fast until the moon had really risen and her husband remained alive to survive until a ripe old age.

The welfare of the husband is not the only object of the wife's concern on this day, for on Karva Chauth a woman who is keeping the fast should make a present to her mother-in-law. If her mother-in-law is dead, she should give a present to any older woman of her husband's family, and failing this, a gift to any older Brahman woman is equally meritorious. The gift should consist of a tray laden with sweets, trinkets, rice, fruit, coins, or any other small presents the woman can find, and before she hands it over, she should light a lamp in front of it. She should hold a little water in her cupped hands and wave them over the gifts she is about to make. The women I questioned could offer no explanation of this custom except to say that the gift would be less effective in its aim of ensuring the woman's happiness in her husband's household were it omitted. Possibly it has some connection with the role which water plays in purification. It is also reminiscent of the custom of waving coins over the recipient's head when money is

given to priests, barbers and other family servants at life cycle rites, a gesture known as vārnā. Although it is not mentioned in Marriott's account of Karva Chauth, this aspect of the fast is just as important as that which concerns the husband's welfare in Dohk. This is really quite logical, since the success of a woman's married life depends quite as much on her relationship with her husband's mother and other female relatives as it does upon that with her spouse himself.

16th Kartik; Divali.

This is the culmination of the group of festivals connected with Ram Chand, and commemorates the day on which he returned in triumph from Ceylon after recovering his wife Sita from the clutches of Ravan. But although they are aware of this 'meaning' the villagers who choose to mark Divali with any religious activity perform acts of private worship to personal devatas rather than to Ram Chand, just as on Gugga Naumi they worship any devata in whom they have faith, not necessarily Gugga. And whilst it is true that in the evening lamps are lit and placed about the house, this is done less in remembrance of Ram Chand's joyous return to Ayodhya than as part of the general secular festivities, which include decorating the house with fresh whitewash and mural paintings, and preparing

sweet cakes and pudding for the evening meal. "I don't know what the meaning of Divali is. All I know is that it is an opportunity for eating good food", one Jat woman frankly confessed.

Magar (November - December)

2nd Magar; Panch Bhikhma.

This is a fast day kept in memory of Bhishma Pitama (Bhikhma would appear to be a local corruption of that name) the grandfather of the Pandavs who, according to the Mahabharata, kept a fast for five days preceding this date. When afflicted with an arrow wound which was later to prove fatal, Bhishma refused to lie on an ordinary charpoy but accepted only the bed of arrows prepared for him by Arjuna, since only this bed was fit for a warrior, he said. He remained on this couch for about five months for he knew that he would not die 'until the chariot of the sun started to rise towards the north' (i.e. after December 21st?). During the five days preceding his death he kept a complete fast and villagers still abstain from eating sāg (spinach) which is the vegetable in season at that time, or any sweet food during the days before Panch Bhikhma in memory of the austerities practiced by that hero. On Panch Bhikhma itself those who have fasted all day prepare khicrī (rice mixed with lentils) at night and even those who do not fast prepare

khicrī or some other tasty dish to distribute to Brahmans as charity on this day.

Poh (December - January)

30th Poh; Lohri.

This festival does not seem to have any religious significance and is marked by no ritual activity. Lohri is regarded as a very 'Punjabi' festival, and in the plains is kept by lighting bonfires in public places, just as Holi is in other parts of India. In the hills fires are not lit, but villagers look forward to Lohri as an occasion for khicrī and other delicacies. After Lohri, it is said, the days begin to become warmer and the mornings cease to be frosty.

Magh (January - February)

6th Magh; Sangar Chauth.

This is a fast kept by women of the Brahman and Rajput castes only, and the following tale is told to explain the observance of this day. In the Tret Yug, there was a Brahman widow who lived with her small son. She was much given to worshipping the god Ganesh and had made an image of Ganesh from cowdung which she would worship each day in her house. One day her son took the image to play with, unknown to the Brahman woman at the time. It so happened that at that time the Raja needed some pottery.

vessels as part of the dowry to be given with his daughter at her forthcoming wedding. Yet owing to the bad spell some enemy of his had worked, none of the kilns in the town would function properly and the clay would not bake thoroughly. The king asked a learned priest what he should do, as he needed the pots very urgently. The priest advised that he should make a human sacrifice by putting a small child into the furnace along with the pots. The king's servants were sent to find a suitable child and they seized the Brahman widow's son, the first little boy they came across when they set out to search for a victim, and put him into the kiln. Yet when they opened the oven door to take out the pots, not only were the pots thoroughly baked, but the child had miraculously survived and was found playing unconcernedly with the image of Ganesh. It was, of course, the power of this god which had saved him, and the Raja ordered that henceforth all women should worship Ganesh and keep a fast in his honour on that day. The real name of the fast, explained a Brahman priest, is 'Sankat Chauth' because Ganesh rescued the child from sañkaṭ, i.e. suffering. Another (perhaps related) interpretation of this festival was provided by the same priest who said that it was also the birthday of Ganesh. But although most of the women who kept the fast were aware

of the fact that Sangar Chauth is connected with Ganesh, I never observed any special act of worship directed to Ganesh on that day. The fast is kept in the same way as those observed on Karva Chauth and Chandan Chatti. That is, the women who keep it abstain from eating and drinking totally until the moon is sighted when it rises in the evening. The purpose however, is said to be to contribute to one's own store of merit.

Phagun (February - March).

1st Phagun; Gaurati da Vart.

This is also a fast day for women and like Karva Chauth it is thought to ensure the long life of one's husband. It is kept by married women whose husbands are alive for their own suhāg. They fast all day until the moon rises. But the gift giving which takes place on this festival is not, like that which takes place on Karva Chauth directed to the women of the family but to the husband himself. The wife should give him sweets to eat in the evening to show her concern for him. Any sweet dish will suffice, and a woman who is too poor to be able to buy sweets from a shop safeguards her suhāg just as effectively as the better off if she gives her husband unrefined sugar melted in warm ghi. Those women whose husbands are away working in the towns or in the army try to send something if they

keep the fast, even if it is only a token pinch of sugar sent in an envelope. The husband should give some money to his wife in return for her consideration, just as the brother who receives a rakṛī should give something to his sister, a few rupees being the usual amount. Women who wish to add to their merit may take the opportunity provided by this fast to give charity to Brahman women, the traditional gift being new sets of bangles.

15th Phagun; Shivratri.

This festival receives only slight recognition in Dohk. A few Brahmans (men and women) keep a fast in honour of Shiva by abstaining from food altogether until they have worshipped Shiva at his temple, if there is one nearby, or at home. After this they take only one meal in the whole day, at which only certain 'pure' foods should be taken. No bread of any kind is taken, only certain vegetables, such as artichokes, pumpkin or potatoes. Milk and fruit may be eaten. After Shivratri, according to popular belief, Shiva lets loose all the snakes which he has been guarding during the winter, to run free until he gathers them together again the next autumn. The weather is growing warmer at this time and snakes do in fact begin to re-appear at about the time of this festival.

Chettar (March - April)

If some points in the calendar are considered auspicious, there are others which are inauspicious and even dangerous. Eclipses of the sun and moon fall into the latter category and when an eclipse is due each purohit goes to the houses of his jajmāns to distribute supplies of the sacred kuśa grass which, when placed in the household food and water vessels, protect their contents from 'impure' influences. A solar eclipse is especially likely to make people impure in some way and after the sun has re-emerged (which villagers ascertain by reference to the priest's predictions rather than by watching the eclipse, for it would be dangerous to venture out of doors until the critical event is over) everyone goes to the nearest stream to bathe. The whole month of Chettar is regarded as inauspicious in the hills and no major work is begun during this month. It is especially dangerous to utter the name of any month which is about to begin or has just begun until one has heard it from the mouth of some respected person, such as a Brahman priest or the head of one's household. It is usual for the head of a family to recite the name of the new month on the morning of the sagrānd to the assembled member of the household, so that they may not run the risk of hearing it from someone else, after which he gives them

each a handful of sugar or any other sweet food to eat. To deliberately mention the name of the new month in the presence of someone senior to oneself or of higher caste before they have heard it already is a way of insulting that person or expressing hostility. But the name of Chettar, in complete contrast to the usual practice, should only be heard from the lips of a member of the low Dumna caste. Dumnas are not in the least auspicious in the usual way of things, but during Chettar they go from house to house singing songs and begging for grain. These songs often narrate tales about the devatas, but are not necessarily of a religious nature and can deal with almost any subject,¹ so long as they somehow include in their verses the name of the month Chettar. Having heard the name of Chettar the villagers are free to make mention of this month without fear of ill consequences.

On the whole, what Lewis has to say of the festival cycle of Rampur is also true of the festival cycle of Dohk, namely that the themes which are celebrated in the festivals observed are diverse but that certain recurrent ritual elements appear in many of them.² For instance, the

1. For instance, a song which I heard in 1967 described the building of the Bhakra Dam and the tragic death of some local men who were killed in an accident on the site.

2. Lewis (1958), p. 237.

majority of festivals are marked by either fasting, gift making, or the preparation of special foods, although the details may vary.

Of the themes which are expressed through the festival cycle, three are most prominent; man's relationship with the devatas, his relationship with his kinsmen, and the acquisition of merit for the spiritual advancement of the soul. Most festivals are concerned with one or more of these themes.¹

The devatas are commemorated in village festivals in several different ways. Some festivals simply underpin the cults of the gods worshipped in the village by setting aside special days in their honour. Gugga may be worshipped at any time, but Gugga Naumi is a specially suitable time. Similarly, Janam Ashtami is dedicated to Krishna, Nauratra to Devi and Shivratri to Shiva. Usually the worship directed to devatas on such days is essentially the same as that offered in private ritual at other times, although it may be accompanied by other activities such as fasting ,

1. The absence of seasonal or agricultural themes is remarkable in a community where every member relies on their crops for their living. This is not the case in all parts of India, for Mathur notes that in Malwa festivals are "bound up with important seasonal events, farming activities and the like". (Mathur, 1964, p.169). The most that can be said of the festival cycle of Dohk in this respect is that the season of most intense festive activity (Bhadron-Asu) is also the period of most intense agricultural activity, falling in the midst of the rainy season, though the festivals at this time of year bear little relation to agricultural themes.

making charitable gifts, etc. Other festivals, like Divali and Sair, commemorate mythical events in which divine personages took part. Worship of Ram Chand on Divali or of Parvati on Sair is not obligatory or even usual, but these dates in the Hindu calendar provide appropriate occasions for recounting their legends and thereby perpetuating traditional stories which have moral and religious significance for the villagers. Such feast days may even serve to remind villagers of the cults of devatas which do not usually receive a great deal of ritual attention in private worship by providing a seasonal opportunity for their remembrance. For instance, more people in Dohk would turn to a local saint such as Baba Balak Nath in an emergency or personal distress sooner than to an 'all-India' deity like Shiva. Yet men and women who never worshipped Shiva as their personal devata made a point of fasting in his honour on Shivratri. Similarly the cult of Ganesh is commemorated on Sangar Chauth even though Ganesh is never the object of villagers' personal devotions. The festival cycle therefore adds a temporal extension to the villagers' personal religious experience and activities, just as the visiting of shrines and temples outside the village adds a spatial extension.

The re-affirmation of kin ties is a subsidiary theme

of many Hindu festivals, such as Chandan Chatti, but in some it constitutes the main subject of the day's activities, as in the case of Karva Chauth or Rakri. Gift giving is an important way of perpetuating and re-emphasizing kinship relationships, just as it is in life cycle rites, and several festivals celebrate particular ties in this way. On Chandan Chatti the woman who keeps the fast asserts her ties with her married daughters by giving them presents, and at Karva Chauth she shows her respect for her mother-in-law or for other older women in her husband's household in the same way, hoping thereby to ensure a smooth and happy relationship with them. Where the husband is the object of concern fasting is the chief means of its expression. Thus at Karva Chauth and Gaurati da Vart the wife hopes that her meritorious abstention from food will help to prosper her husband and bring him long life. Some festivals, such as Mala di Chandni and Sair, also serve to remind villagers of their links with the artisans who work for them by providing opportunities for giving them presents of cash and grain. Even where no particular tie is being celebrated gift giving is a recurrent festive idiom; the giving of charity to Brahmans and unmarried girls is a feature of many feasts, such as Durga Ashtami or Panch Bhikma thereby affirming both the social value of giving (as bringing

prestige) and its religious value (as bringing merit).

The third theme which is repeatedly celebrated in the festivals kept in Dohk is the acquisition of merit or good karma for one's own spiritual benefit. Festivals like Chandan Chatti and Sangar Chauth provide the individual with opportunities for performing actions which confer merit on the performer, the two most important being fasting and gift making. In theory, there is no season which is better than any other for the performance of these activities. Many undertakings, such as holding a wedding, setting out on a long journey, commencing the building of a house, are likely to bring good results only if carried out on days when the stars are in positions which augur well for such purposes. But "bathing (snān), gift-making (dān), remembrance of God (jap karnā) and fasting (varat rakhnā) can be performed at any time. All times are good for these things." These were the words of a Brahman priest but the idea is a common one amongst the villagers. There is no moment which is not auspicious for such meritorious actions. But in practice it is evident that some times are regarded as more appropriate than others and certain dates in the calendar are marked as specially suitable for their performance, contrary to the villagers' statements. Thus it is only rarely that bathing does not benefit the bather, but to bath on Baisawa is

especially advantageous; gift making, especially to Brahmans and to one's daughters or unmarried girls, is always a meritorious action and adds to one's good karma but Panch Bhikma is an exceptionally good time for feeding Brahmans and Nauratra for feeding young girls; fasting can never be other than spiritually beneficial, but to fast on Nirjala Ekadashi or Chirna is more than usually meritorious. Festivals, therefore, remind the villager of the ways in which merit can be won by providing special occasions for these activities. In this respect the religious activities of the festival cycle complement the private religious activities described in Chapter 3, being directed to 'transcendental' other-worldly ends instead of the 'pragmatic', this worldly concerns which dominate the villagers' private worship.

In view of the importance of fasting as a way of marking high points in the Hindu calendar (ten of the twenty calendrical feasts kept in Dohk are celebrated in this way) more perhaps should be said on this subject. A fast can be kept to ensure the welfare of someone else (as in the case of the many fasts which married women keep for their husbands) or as a means of honouring some devata (as in the case of Shivratri or Janam Ashtami). But even if the prime purpose is not to obtain merit for oneself,

fasting invariably has this effect, I was told. There is nothing immoral in the villagers' eyes in enjoying one's food and drink; usually special delicacies are prepared to be eaten when the fast is broken and the religious value of food has already been illustrated amply in the preceding two chapters. But abstinence has the effect of helping to cultivate the detachment from the world of the flesh which is necessary for spiritual salvation. Yet this is not the only or even the greatest virtue in fasting. As one woman rather sceptically remarked, "There is no merit in an empty stomach if one continues to lie or to steal. It would be better to give up these things than just to give up food, which one must go on taking for the rest of the time anyway in order to survive." The supreme value of fasting is that it constitutes a form of purification. Fasting makes one pure in the sense that it is thought to help to purge the mind of impure or evil thoughts, but it also purifies in the ritual sense. A person who is maintaining a fast is considered to be in a somewhat higher state of ritual purity than his normal everyday degree of purity, and for this reason a person who desires to worship a particular devata (whether as a way of marking a festival or whether in response to some personal need) will often not only bath beforehand but will also

maintain a fast until he has completed the offering. The act of eating invariably conveys a mild form of pollution to the eater, regardless of what he has eaten, and the longer one abstains from eating the more one's state of purity exceeds its usual level.

From this, it will be seen that the concern for the maintenance of ritual purity is just as apparent in Hindu calendrical rites as in private worship and in priestly ritual.¹ More than half of the festivals kept in Dohk are marked by purificatory fasting. Most of the rest are celebrated by preparing special delicacies appropriate to the season (khicri on Panch Bhikma, rice cakes on Divali) but this has the same, and not the opposite, purpose to the fasting for the foods consumed on festival days must be those which are regarded as 'pure'. Meat and eggs are

1. When we remember the concern for purity which surrounds life cycle rites, the comparison which Leach draws between life cycle rites and festivals seems particularly apt, even though he is not dealing specifically with the Indian case. He argues that festivals serve to mark off periods of time which would have no objective existence of their own but are made real by being ordered by recurrent festive activities. These festivals are like life cycle rites in that the "moral person is suspended from his normal profane status for a while". Rites of passage mark intervals in the individual's life and festivals mark intervals in the life of the community, but the process is the same in either case. Both serve to 'create' time. In India the parallel is especially conspicuous because in both cases the 'suspension of the moral person from his normal profane status' is symbolized by purificatory, mainly in the form of bathing, consuming only 'pure' substances, etc. Leach(1961), pp.134-5.

never eaten on any festival and even certain vegetables are looked upon as less pure than the others and are avoided on feast days. Also, a ritual bath is often taken on a feast day with the same aim of purification. Often this is as a preliminary to keeping a fast or conducting an act of worship to some devata, but on Baisawa purification through bathing is the first and chief activity of the day. In fact, it is as though certain days in the calendar were regarded as being charged with a higher degree of purity than the others, if purity is an attribute which can logically be ascribed to so abstract a concept as a date in the calendar. And since Hindus are prepared to rank the members of virtually any class of being in order of ritual purity - Brahmans being pure among men, cows among animals, the pipal among trees - there is, perhaps, nothing absurd in the idea. For the days which are marked in the calendar as being festivals or otherwise worthy of special observance (such as the full moon day or the eleventh of the lunar month) are commonly described as pavitra, which has the meaning of 'pure' as well as 'holy'. The emphasis on ritual purity is therefore a theme which recurs in the cycle of calendrical rites observed in Dohk just as it does in the other departments of religious activity found there, even if the villagers themselves justify their festivals more

in terms of the devatas they are supposed to honour or the good food by which they hope to celebrate them.

The festival cycle perhaps lends itself to comparison with material from other parts of India more readily than any other element in the religious life of the village. In Table 6 I have shown the list of festivals celebrated in Dohk alongside the festival cycles of four other villages in North and Central India. I have presented this table with a view to demonstrating (a) that some of the festivals kept in Dohk can be said to be great traditional whilst others are purely local, or little traditional, but that (b) the great and little traditional festivals do not celebrate values or themes of a different nature.

The following festivals are celebrated in all five areas mentioned in this table; the brother-sister festival known variously as Rakhi, Saluno, Rakri, etc; Janam Ashtami; the ancestor festival known as Kanagat, Shraddh, or Pita Paksha; Nauratra, or festivals bearing other names but celebrated at the same time of year in honour of the goddess Durga; Dussehra; Diwali; Shivratri.

Five other festivals are kept in three or more of the villages; Karva Chauth; a festival honouring Lord Krishna and his cattle, known as Gobardhan, Gaojiman, etc; Basant; Holi; Devuthani.

Table 7. Festival Cycles

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	Kishan Garhi ¹	Sirkanda ²	Rampur ³	Potlod ⁴	Dogra area ⁵	Dohk
Baisakh	Devi-devata ki puja Basor puja	Popria Sankrant	Ghantal Deo	Akhati		Baisawa
Jeth		Ghorlia Sankrant	Jaith ka Dussehra	Ganga Dashmi Bheru puja Ram Nam		Nauli
Har				Dev Soni		Nirjala Ekadashi
Sawan	Tij Saluno and Rakhi	Rakri	Tij Silono	Nag puja Rakhi	Rakhi Nag Panchmi	Chirna
Bhadron	Janam Ashtami	Janam Ashtami	Janam Ashtami Gugga Naumi	Krishna Janam Ganesh puja Anant Chodas	Janam Ashtami Ganesh Chatturthi Anant Chaudas	Rakri Chandan Chatti Janam Ashtami Gugga Naumi
Asu	Kanagat Naurtha Dussehra	Kanagat Nauratra	Kanagat Niortha Dussehra	Pitar Paksha Mata puja Dussehra	Pita Paksha Naoratri Dussehra	Sair Shradh Nauratra Dussehra Mala di Chandni
Kartik	Karva Chauth Divali Gobardhan puja Devuthan	Gaojiman	Karva Chauth Hoi Gobardhan Divali Devuthan	Karva Atham Diyali Gopashtami Devuthani	Divali Devuthan	Karva Chauth Divali
Magar		Pahari Divali				Panch Bikhma
Poh	Burho Baba ki puja		Makar Sankrant			Lohri
Mag	Sakat	Kichari Sankrant	Basant Panchmi	Basant	Basant Panchmi	Sangar Chauth
Phagun	Siv Ratri Holi	Siv Ratri	Siv Ratri Holi	Siv Ratri Holi Mahadev Baba ki jatra	Siv Ratri Holi	Sivratri
Chettar	Ekadashi Patthwari puja Durga Naumi	Phul Dalna	Basora Devi ki Karahi	Mata puja Ram Nomi	Devi ki puja Ram Naumi	

1. Marriott (1955), p. 192
2. Berreman (1963), pp. 387-94.

3. Lewis (1958), p. 199
4. Mathur (1964), pp. 170-2.

5. Bingley (1899), pp. 56-62.

Nine festivals celebrated in Dohk are not mentioned in the other lists; Nauli; Nirjala Ekadashi; Chirna; Chandan Chatti; Sair; Mala di Chandni; Panch Bhikhma; Lohri; Sangar Chauth.

Most of the festivals which receive the most widespread recognition are scriptural in the sense that they are prescribed in the Hindu scriptures, they commemorate events recorded in the scriptures, or that they honour deities whose cults are sanctioned by the scriptures. Whether it is the fact that they receive mention in the scriptures (which are peculiar to no particular locality in India) which accounts for their widespread popularity, or whether it was the fact that they were universal which led to their being incorporated in the manuals of Hindu practice one can only speculate until more is known about the religious and cultural history of India. But if the festivals which have the widest spread celebrate themes which are of all-India validity, the reverse is not true, for it cannot be said that those feasts which have only local spread stress local concerns only. There is a fairly large category of festivals in Dohk which do not appear on the lists of Hindu holidays compiled by other anthropologists, yet which express themes which are of all-India significance. Panch Bhikhma, for instance, celebrates an incident which occurs in the epic

Mahabharata (which is certainly part of the great tradition of Hinduism however we define that concept) even though it is only a local little traditional festival. Sangar Chauth celebrates the power of a deity invoked by virtually every Hindu in the sub-continent at some time or other, even though it is only the Hindus of this particular locality who honour him with this festival. Looking at the problem from this point of view, it appears that there are almost no purely 'local' festivals, for even those which have the most limited 'spread', like Mala di Chandni or Sair, express themes and values shared by Hindus everywhere, and commemorate events which are part of the common fund of legend and tradition. Above all, the theme of purification is no less prominent in the little traditional festivals than it is in the all-India holidays, whether it occurs as the main theme or as a subsidiary one. Six of the nine festivals which are only reported in Dohk (i.e. all except Lohri, Sair and Mala di Chandni) are 'purity oriented' to a greater or lesser degree, most of them being fasts when purification through bathing and abstention from food is an important part of the procedure. Three of the seven festivals found in Dohk which are also found in all the other areas listed in Table 7 are also fasts aimed at purifying body and soul. The concern for purity therefore not only links the different

departments of the religious life of the village, but is also a theme which links the different 'levels' of cultural tradition within a particular department. As is the case with individual rites and priestly ritual, we find that the cultural 'stratum' to which a particular calendrical rite belongs has little to do with the kind of theme or values it will celebrate. The maintenance of important relationships within human society and the correct ordering of relationships between the pure and the impure in the wider community of all created beings are concerns which recur in calendrical rites of all 'levels'.

Chapter 6. Conclusion

Let me now restate the problem which I outlined in the first chapter of this thesis and summarize some of the answers which have emerged. I suggested that most anthropologists who have described village Hinduism have laid much emphasis on differentiating its elements according to the various levels of cultural experience and tradition from which they spring. They have described how the different categories of religious custom so distinguished are related as parts of a cultural system but have not shown how (if at all) they hang together as a working system for the people who practice them. Are the Hindu villager's religious activities really just a hotch-potch of various rites and cults in which only our ethnocentric bias as western observers (seeking perhaps in other religions the organizational and doctrinal consistency which Christianity has always valued if never attained) causes us to look for system and coherency? Or are there any general principles manifested in all departments of Hindu religious endeavour - in the Sanskritic and the non-Sanskritic, the great and the little traditional, in the cults of all-India spread and those which are purely local - which integrate the villager's religious experience and activities?

From the material I have presented it is apparent

that the religious life of the villager is regulated by three cycles of religious activity, whose rhythms fulfil religious needs of three different orders. The domestic and personal crises which punctuate the villager's day-to-day life - troubles connected with his family, his crops, his health, and occasions for thanksgiving connected with these same personal concerns - give rise to the need for individual assurance and contact with the gods which is fulfilled by the private religious activity described in Chapter 3. The villager enlists the aid of the devatas privately for help with his individual problems. But his life also has a rhythm which takes its course independently of these peculiar joys or misfortunes, for certain points in his social and physical development must be marked by rites which are ordered not by his personally felt needs, but by requirement of the section of society to which he belongs. For the performance of the life cycle rites described in Chapter 4 the villager is responsible to society as represented by his birādari group, and he is not free to exercise the choice as regards the time and manner of observance as he is in his private devotions. A third rhythm of religious activity takes place in response to the seasonal cycle of time which is at once independent of human life, either individual or collective, and yet in

another sense is ordered by the artificial divisions which men make through their reckoning of time and through the seasonal observances and festivals which they keep. The villager's observance of the festival cycle therefore relates his own life rhythm to an impersonal time cycle independent of the individual joys and tribulations of his personal life.

We can, if we so wish, distinguish the elements in each cycle of religious activity according to the cultural 'level' of Hinduism to which it belongs, but these distinctions are of little functional importance. Whether the villager seeks help from Shiva or the little traditional devata Baba Sindhu for help with some personal difficulty, the method of propitiation he uses and the kind of result he expects will be the same. When he takes a wife, the Sanskrit worship of great traditional deities conducted by the priest in the lagan and vedī ceremonies are performed for the same kind of reason and with the same kind of expectation as the worship of local devatas which is held without the aid of a priest at the vadhāī ritual. When the villager celebrates an all-India festival such as Nauratra or Janam Ashtami, his fasting or feasting are in keeping with the same idiom according to which he fasts or feasts at local festivals such as Panch Bhikhma or Gugga Naumi.

The material in this thesis shows that these three cycles of religious activity can also be related to each other with reference to certain common principles of action. Dumont's contention that Hindu religious behaviour expresses the principle of the hierarchical relationship of the pure and the impure is confirmed by the evidence of Dohk, even if in secular life the rules about ritual purity and pollution appear less stringent and less elaborate than those found in some other parts of India, notably South India.

Implicit in the rules which govern all kinds of religious activity (private, priestly or festive) is the principle that the gods are more pure than the men who worship them. Hence care must be taken during worship that contact with less pure beings does not expose them to sources of pollution. There are three main categories of rules which protect the purity of the divine; (a) those which ensure the maximum purity of the worshipper himself (bathing, fasting, etc.); (b) those which safeguard the image or whatever symbol represents the devata; (c) those which ensure the purity of whatever is presented as the offering (by using only pure substances in its preparation, placing the offerings in a stream after they have been used, protecting prasād from falling to the ground, etc.).

I have said that the superior purity of the devatas

is only 'implicit' because when they describe their pantheon, villagers do so in terms of the super-human power of its members rather than of their super-human purity. They say, "Durga (or Shiva, or Balak Nath, or Channo) is powerful", rather than, "Durga is pure". But when they account for the details of worship they do so explicitly in terms of purity and pollution. They say, for instance, "We bathe to make ourselves pure", or "We put garlands offered to the gods on trees afterwards to keep them pure". Actual observance of the rites reveals that it is in fact the devata's purity which these measures are designed to protect. The devotee's own purity is important to himself, as at all times, but at the time of worship he purifies himself out of consideration for his relationship with the god whose favour he wishes to earn rather than out of consideration for his relationship with other men. It might be more accurate to say that it is the image of the devata whose purity is the object of concern, since it is to the image that the precautionary measures are directed. It is the image which is bathed, and it is the image in whose presence the worshipper tries to achieve his maximum purity potential. Strictly speaking, it is admitted, there are non-ritual ways of communicating with the devatas which do not involve preliminary purification,

for according to the villagers the gods can hear silent prayers made in the heart of a sincere devotee. For such mental communication the worshipper need not be in an extraordinary state of purity. But as soon as the devata is represented in a tangible way by any concrete sign or symbol of his presence, that symbol is regarded as being charged with a degree of purity superior to that of the devotee which must be protected if the worshipper is to expect good results from his devotions. And it is the presentation of tangible offerings through the mediation of tangible symbols which is regarded as being the most fitting way of approaching the gods and of getting their favour; mere inward devotion will bear little fruit here, although it is the ideal way of approaching the supreme Godhead Bhagvān. When the tangible symbol is no longer used, as with discarded images, derelict shrines, and the site of the maṇḍala when the debris has been removed, it no longer acts as the conjunction of the material world and the divine world and effectively ceases to be charged with extraordinary purity.

As I have emphasized throughout this thesis, these rules apply whatever the cultural origin of the rite which is being performed. It makes no difference whether the villager worships a little traditional non-Sanskritic devata

such as Raja Bharatri through private ritual or some great traditional god such as Shiva through priestly ritual, or whether the rite takes place as part of some festive celebration. In every situation where the human approaches the divine, the pure and the impure must maintain their distance.

The material I have gathered in Dohk thus suggests similar conclusions to those drawn by Dumont and Harper on the basis of their South Indian material. Although in Dohk the devatas themselves are not ranked by the villagers according to their purity, the relationships between devatas and men in both areas appear as one segment of a more extensive system of relationships, in which contact between any two beings is ordered according to how much more pure the one is than the other. At the human level these differences in ritual purity are institutionalized in the caste system, although even within the caste there may be temporary differences in ritual state between certain members at a given time. To compare the relationship between men and devatas with those between men of different castes (as does Harper) or even to regard the divine world as an upward extension of the caste system (as does Dumont) are helpful ways of interpreting Hindu religious behaviour in Dohk also. As Brahman is to Shudra, so devata is to

Brahman. Just as contact between Brahman and Shudra is ordered so that the Brahman's purity need not be diminished, so contact between man and devata can be arranged without the devata's purity being violated provided that certain rules are observed by the worshipper. But these very words imply that there is also a difference between the two kinds of contact. Inter-caste relationships are characterized by active attempts on the part of the superior party to preserve his own ritual purity intact, whereas in man-devata contacts it is the inferior party who makes the arrangements to safeguard the purity of the other. If a Brahman has to do business with a Chamar, to a considerable extent it is he who takes the initiative in enforcing the distance between them; after all it is he who has most to lose if such distance is not maintained. He can seat himself out of reach of the touch of his ritual inferior, can indicate to the latter where he should sit, and can see that any food or drink offered to the Chamar is eaten either from leaves or from the Chamar's own vessels. Similarly, he can refuse to eat food or to take drink offered by a ritual inferior in the unlikely event of such an offer being made. It would be difficult for a Brahman to protect himself from a Chamar who was determined to violate his ritual purity, but such a contingency is not likely to arise in the ordinary day-to-day

contacts between castes in the village. A villager can usually fend off polluting contacts if he is sufficiently alert and diligent. But when contact between a man and a devata takes place, it is not only the man who initiates it but the efforts to maintain the necessary ritual distance between the two parties must also come from his side. Unlike the Brahman, the devata is helpless in this matter, and should his worshipper fail to respect his superior ritual status, he can only react with anger after the offence has been committed. In fact I never heard of any specific case in which a devata punished a devotee for failing to bath before worship or for wearing shoes in a temple or any like sacrilege, but villagers asserted that if the correct measures were omitted the worshipper would certainly not be granted his request and would surely feel the effects of the devata's anger before long.

The differences in ritual status between men are also recognized in the context of religious ritual as well as those between man and devata. There are shrines in Dohk at which Chamars may not worship; there are centres of pilgrimage which they may not use; along with Julahas and Dumnas they are prohibited altogether from participating in or sponsoring rites in which Sanskrit texts are recited by a Brahman priest since they are thought by other castes

to be too impure to be allowed to hear these sacred verses (in any case their ritual impurity is an insuperable obstacle to their engaging a Brahman priest in any ritual capacity in the first place).

But, as I have already mentioned in Chapter 3, it is debatable whether these rules are enforced out of consideration for the purity of the devatas or for that of the members of the clean castes. For instance, Chamars are not allowed to worship at the shrine of Durga which was erected by a Brahman family in Dohk, yet there is nothing to prevent them from worshipping Durga in their own homes, as indeed they do, using exactly the same procedure as do members of higher castes. And though they cannot employ Brahman priests, they have their own priests who perform rituals which differ little from those conducted by Brahmans in respect of their general form and content apart from the matter of language. Where members of different castes come together, the greater the ritual distance between them, the more elaborate are the arrangements necessary to prevent one from polluting the other. But no extra precautions seem to be demanded from a low caste worshipper commensurate with his lowly ritual status than would ordinarily be observed by a high caste worshipper. Probably the clean castes are interested in the maintenance of religious

apartheid more for the sake of their own ritual purity than for the sake of that of the devatas.

The need to distinguish between the pure and the impure does not only pervade the villager's religious and social life but also colours his attitudes to many of the things in his environment. It is true that, as Mathur states, "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, rivers and water, even time and place are pure or impure".¹ Within almost every category which the villager distinguishes, he will rank some items as more or less pure than others. Thus among animals the cow is most pure, the buffalo rather less pure than the cow, whilst domestic pigs, donkeys and other foul-feeding animals are ranked very low. Among the trees the pipal and the bor are pure and the lasura is impure, a 'Musulman' tree too polluted to be used as timber.² Amongst vegetables, carrots and turnips and onions are less pure than pumpkins, cucumbers and potatoes, which is why

1. Mathur (1964), p. 99

2. Rose refers to the Punjabi belief that even fevers could be classified according to their 'caste'. Rose (1919), Vol. 1., p. 256.

the former group of vegetables is avoided on festival days. Amongst beverages clean water and milk are pure, though the water of the Ganges is purer than other kinds of water, and alcoholic drinks are impure. These distinctions do not have equal practical importance. Some, such as the distinctions between different kinds of wood or between different kinds of wild animal affect daily life only marginally, whilst others, to which I have made more extensive reference in Chapter 2, affect it intimately. This is the case for instance with the classification of foodstuffs which is associated with important dietary rules. Most of these distinctions are of potential importance for religious ritual to the extent that in ritual the worshipper seeks to exclude what is not pure and to include what is pure.

Indeed one might be forgiven for concluding that in Hinduism purity and sanctity are the same, especially since one of the words which can denote 'pure' (pavitr) can also be rendered as 'sacred'. But this term has only limited use compared with others which do not have any specifically religious connotations. The pure and the divine are not to be neatly equated. There are things which are pure but which have little religious significance, whilst others have religious significance without being

accredited with any special purity. Thus the cow is regarded as being extremely pure, but her religious role in Dohk is not commensurate with her purity (although the products of her living body are often employed in religious ritual) for no rituals are addressed to cattle in this part of India. Crows are looked on as rather inferior and impure - mainly, I think, because they are so often seen feeding on dung - yet they do have a religious significance; to feed them during Shraddh is a pious act since they are fancied to embody the souls of the ancestors returned to earth to receive food from their descendants. Similarly, snakes are looked on as somewhat impure to the extent that villagers will wash their hands afterwards if they are obliged to handle one. Yet they have religious significance as the creatures of Shiva (who is often represented as an ascetic around whose body snakes entwine themselves) and also as the prototypes of the vaguely conceived snake deities known as Nāgs sometimes represented by coiled figures on the shrines of the ascetic Siddhs. In some parts of India snakes are actually worshipped on the festival of Nag Panchami.¹

So even though in operation the distinction between them often appears blurred, ritual value and religious value are not quite identical. The principle of the hierarchical

1. Rose (1919), Vol. 1., p. 915.

separation of the pure and the impure pervades the villager's relationships with the devatas but I would hesitate to call it a 'religious' principle in itself. If men's relationships with devatas are controlled by the need to separate the (superordinate) pure from the (subordinate) impure, exactly the same can be said of his relationships with other beings in the universe, notably with each other. Historically it is quite possible that the cosmic hierarchy of the pure and the impure in which the Hindu places himself developed as a downwards extension of the hierarchical relationship of men and gods, but it could just as easily have developed as an outwards extension of the hierarchical relationships between different castes. But the question here is one of logical, not historical, priority. Logically, the opposition of the pure and the impure operates as an a priori assumption regulating all kinds of relationship. We can choose to describe it as a 'religious' notion if we wish, but if we do so the secular shrinks to vanishing point immediately, for in what field of activity does the villager not apply these values at times?

But the attempts of the villager to eliminate the impure, made in all departments of his religious life, do not always have reference to some divine being. In some

rites, the participant seems to maximize his own purity for its own sake rather than merely as a means of showing respect for the devatas. For example, in the case of the kiriya karm the chief mourner baths before worship in the usual way, since through this worship he will commune with the devatas; but the performance of the whole ceremony itself is held to have a purifying effect on him and (through him) on the members of his household also, freeing them from the death pollution they have recently undergone. Purification is a necessary preliminary to the rites but it also derives from them. Again, after a woman has been delivered of a baby, the completion of the naming ceremony releases her from the polluted state she has been in for the last eleven days or more, even though she has to bath beforehand in order to be sufficiently pure to participate in the ceremony in the first place. Havans conducted in the house of a dead man also have the end result of producing purity for its own sake and not as the preliminary for entering the presence of some devata. Many calendrical rites centre about the achievement of a state of personal purity, independently of whether any ritual addressed to the devatas is to take place on the same day. On full moon days, women who fast for their husbands' welfare should purify themselves by bathing first thing in the morning regardless of whether

they have any intention of communicating with the devatas that day. Those who keep Sangar Chauth or Chandan Chatti, or who fast on Shivratri or Panch Bhikhma ought to bath before commencing work for the day and ought to avoid all but pure forms of food when they break their fast in the evening, whether or not they undertake any act of worship as a part of the day's activities.

These observances illustrate the moral value which is placed upon the achievement of ritual purity over and above its practical value. In most circumstances the villager is motivated in his efforts to maintain or maximize his purity by a clear realization of the inconveniences which he will suffer should he fail to do so. If he does not maintain a certain 'normal' ritual state vis-à-vis other members of society, it is difficult to live in society at all. Everyone suffers at some time from forms of pollution which have the result of inhibiting relations with others; a menstruating woman cannot cook for her family, a person who has not cleaned his hands after eating cannot serve food to other members of the household, and members of a household where there has recently been a birth or a death cannot offer food cooked in their own house to visitors. Purificatory measures taken at the right time generally restore the relationships thus interrupted and only in

serious cases of contact with polluting castes or cow killing is the polluted person likely to be cut off completely from his peers. Similarly, purificatory measures are necessary before worshipping a devata, not just out of pious respect but also because unless they are approached in the correct way the devatas are liable to withhold the practical help which the devotee hopes to enlist by worshipping them. But the purificatory religious practices which I have just mentioned demonstrate the moral value which is placed on purity as an end in itself. Purity is not only practically desirable, it is also morally commendable, and these practices provide opportunities for the villager to earn merit by purging himself of impurity. Ritual purification through bathing is one of the meritorious acts which can be undertaken at any time and which always contributes to a person's good karma. The statement of a Rajput farmer's wife aptly illustrates the moral value placed on ritual purity. During a discussion of the kinds of action which are most meritorious she said, "To give food to cattle, birds and dogs is very meritorious. Those who give food to animals are doing good deeds and will be happy themselves. But there is not much merit in the action if the food is not pure, but is just the left-over remains of someone's meal. To get good karma you should give

animals untouched food, just as you would to the members of your family".

Those who pay due attention to their state of purity increase their chances of being reborn in a favourable form in the next life, whilst those who are careless about purifying themselves are running the risk of rebirth in some undesirable form, as the cautionary tale accounting for the origin of Chandan Chatti shows. Villagers are not so naive as to identify purity itself with ethical worth. It is only one moral value among many. No-one thought the better of a Brahman woman who was reputed to be sexually promiscuous, because she was diligent in keeping fasts and in performing purificatory rites; rather her boasts about her pure habits excited ridicule and contempt. But equally, another Brahman woman whose habits were otherwise blameless earned stern censure for her notorious carelessness in observing the proper rules with regard to the cleaning of cooking utensils and other purificatory activities. A few Brahmans even claimed that they would not eat in her house for this reason, in case they should be polluted themselves. Failure to maintain a high standard of personal purity certainly invites criticism of a moralizing tone. So even if the interest in ritual purity which links the villagers' religious activities like a common theme is not specifically

'religious' (in the sense that it does not depend logically upon beliefs of a religious nature) it is certainly 'moral' and of more than merely pragmatic significance.

I hope that in this thesis I have shown that the approaches to the study of Hinduism pioneered by Harper and Dumont can be fruitful. The religious practices of Hindu peasants can be represented as a system of action without recourse to schemes of classification which are not of a sociological nature and which call for substantiation which only the cultural historian can provide if they are to be really convincing. I hope that I have also shown that the purity-pollution principle does not only give the villager's religion consistency at the level of ritual but also at the level of belief, for it has as much conceptual importance in framing the ways in which he envisages the relationships between the different inhabitants of the universe as it has ritual importance in determining the way in which these relationships are actually conducted. Though I have taken external practices as my starting point for description of village Hinduism rather than abstract religious belief I hope I have avoided the pitfall of isolating ritual from the beliefs which support and legitimate it, which I deplored in the first chapter. I do not exclude the possibility that other ways of relating the Hindu villager's religious

activities to each other might be revealed with further research. The purity-pollution principle is the lowest common denominator of village religion rather than its highest common factor and the emphasis I have placed upon it comes as a necessary reaction to the tendency of so many Indianists to 'fragment' the Hindu's religious experience, rather than from a conviction that this is the only (or even necessarily the most interesting) thing that can be said about Hinduism. But I hope that I have succeeded in showing that there is a workable alternative to the 'fragmentary' approach, and one which has the advantage of being applicable to material gathered in places as far apart and as culturally diverse as Tamilnad and the Himalayan foothills.

Appendix.

Baba Ludru and Baba Balak Nath;
a comparison of cults.

I have already related the traditional story of how Ludru, the simple carrier, obtained spiritual powers and became a famous mahant. The term mahant is usually translated into English by the word 'abbott' but in fact a mahant need not be the head of a formal monastic institution. The gaddī (throne) which the mahant inherits from his predecessor does not always represent any administrative office but rather his succession to the spiritual lineage of the saint who founded the gaddī, whether or not this involves the headship of some sect or body of ascetics. There is no such group associated with the throne of Baba Ludru, only an informal and fluctuating band of disciples. The present mahant is the fourth to succeed to the gaddī of Baba Ludru. He is a young man of about twenty-five and became mahant only a few years ago.

To a certain extent the mahant who occupies the gaddī of Baba Ludru is identified with Ludru himself and may be referred to by the name of the saint. In paying one's respects to the mahant one is paying one's respects to Ludru himself and pilgrims to Jogipanga are disappointed if they do not get the chance to touch his feet or at

least to catch a glimpse of him as he sits in the shrine at prayer.

According to local belief, when the mahant is about to die he knows the time of his death and names the person whom he wishes to succeed him. The successor thus appointed may be only a small boy when the mahant names him, but the mahant's spiritual powers enable him to know which of his disciples will develop the qualities necessary to a mahant. The present mahant had been nominated as successor to the gaddī when only a young child. He was the only son of a poor Brahman couple who, giving up hope of any offspring, had come to worship Baba Ludru and had promised him that if he granted their plea for a son they would dedicate the boy to him to be brought up as his disciple. When a son was at last born to them they brought the baby to the shrine of Ludru to be brought up by the mahant. As he grew the boy showed such exceptional seriousness and devotion that the mahant decided to name him as his successor. So far, all the mahants have been Brahmans but I was told that in theory at least a member of any clean caste could become a disciple of Baba Ludru.

The cult of Ludru centres to a great degree about the mahants who have succeeded to his spiritual heritage, and many legends have grown up in the comparatively short

time the gaddi has been in existence relating to their miraculous powers. For instance, it is said that during the Second World War a soldier serving at the front vowed to donate a whole month's pay to Baba Ludru if he returned safely from battle. He escaped unharmed and set out to Baba Ludru's shrine to fulfil his vow. But on the way he deliberated as to whether he could really afford such a large sum. What would his children eat if he were to give away so much money at once? So he decided to give only half his month's pay. But whilst walking along the road he again had second thoughts and made up his mind to give only five rupees. When he presented this sum to the mahant the latter asked him why he did not give more. The soldier was confused and said nothing, whereupon the mahant showed him a large shawl riddled with holes. "Whilst you were at the front" he said, "I held this shawl before you to protect you from the enemy's fire. These holes were made by the bullets which would otherwise have killed you." This made the soldier so ashamed that he immediately handed over the full amount which he had promised to give. A similar tale relates how a peasant was once taking a gift of sugar to Baba Ludru's shrine. On the way he became so hungry that he could not resist tasting the sugar. By the time he arrived there was only a little left but when he took this

to the shrine and offered it the mahant met him and offered him sugar to eat, saying in a kindly tone of voice, "Do not remain hungry; if you still need food, eat this sugar." Such was the perception and charity of the mahant.

Certain mahants have attained special fame for their piety and spiritual powers. Such was the case with the present mahant's predecessor, about whom many stories are told. The present mahant is as yet only a young man and has not had time to show miraculous powers, although it is confidently expected that he will do so sooner or later. His spiritual prowess has already given rise to this tale. One day a woman came to Jogipanga wearing a sari. (The sari is not usually worn by village women in this part of India, the salwar being their everyday dress; this woman must have come from the plains or from a town). When all the pilgrims sat down in the langar to eat the meal which had been prepared she joined them, but omitted to remove her shoes. When the cooks went to get the mahant's permission to serve the food, he knew without coming to look that all was not well and said, "Wait until the person who is still wearing his shoes has removed them." The cooks then went back into the langar and told them that the meal could only be started when all had taken off

their shoes. Now the woman had tucked her sari over her feet when she had sat down, so no-one could see that it was she who was holding up the meal and she was too ashamed to stand up and own her mistake. When no-one got up to take off their shoes, the mahant came into the laṅgar in person and immediately approached the woman who was responsible for the delay. Gently he said to her, "Sister, do not be ashamed to admit your carelessness. We all make mistakes sometimes. But our Hindu law says that we should not bring our shoes into a dining room, so please take them off so that we can begin our meal." Ashamed at being found out, but amazed at the mahant's intuitive perception of her guilt, the woman obeyed him and the pilgrims started their meal. This story must have arisen in the last few years, since the present mahant has only occupied the gaddī for a short time; this illustrates how a cult which is popular and very much alive will continually throw up new legends which are assimilated to the existing body of tradition which attends the cult.

The centre of Baba Ludru's cult is at his shrine at Jogipanga, but the original Baba Ludru had his hermitage at a lonely spot near Una, about ten miles from Jogipanga. This place, however, did not remain lonely for long, for the rapidly growing fame of Baba Ludru brought many pilgrims.

These pilgrims in turn attracted shopkeepers, pedlars, and others determined to profit by the cult of Baba Ludru. The predecessor of the present mahant apparently became tired of the noise and the bustle which surrounded him, for it left him no peace for meditation and worship. He decided to move to Jogipanga, at that time a deserted tract of scrub and jungle. When he arrived at Jogipanga, he struck his cimṭā (tongs) into the earth and, so it is said, fire sprang from the very spot. However, the ascetic and his little band of disciples also needed water in such a barren and desert place, so the mahant struck the ground with his tongs again and water flowed from it. Beside the pool so formed, the mahant and his disciples established their residence. Until this time the spot he chose had been an inauspicious place, unfrequented and the haunt of dangerous bhūts. The presence of the holy mahant, however, caused these ghosts to depart so that now there is no danger for human beings.

To some extent the mahant achieved his purpose of finding peace and quiet by moving to Jogipanga, for even now there are few dwellings there apart from the shrine which he established and a few farmers' cottages. It is situated in the midst of an inhospitable tract of jungle. Jogipanga, with its deep cool lake and its mango groves, seems like an oasis in this desert. There are two main

places of worship in the complex of buildings beside the lake. One is the small shrine containing the images of various deities where the mahant habitually goes to meditate. This is the older of the two shrines and the one which pilgrims visit in order to make their offerings and to greet the mahant. The second shrine was built by the present mahant to honour his late master and contains an image of the previous mahant. A mahant, or indeed any ascetic, is not cremated after death but is buried, and this shrine marks the burial place of the mahant¹. Besides these shrines there is a spacious dharamsālā, or guest house, for the use of pilgrims, a langar, and a small school-house for the accommodation of the few Brahman boys who receive instruction in Sanskrit and the Hindu scriptures from the mahant. The latter has his residence at about half a mile's distance from the shrine itself, at the top of a very steep hill. It is said that the mahant is sometimes seen moving about on this hill after dark, clearly visible in his white garments, conversing with a similarly robed figure who is none other than the original Baba Ludru.

The mahant spends much of his time in meditation and worship, but also passes much time in receiving pilgrims, welcoming with what is evidently very real pleasure both those who are obviously habitual visitors and those who have

1. The place where an ascetic is buried is known as his samādhi.

come to Jogipanga for the first time. He struck me as a person of such sincerity and kindness as to provide a sufficient and genuine basis for his reputation for holiness, independently of the sanctity of his office. He seldom leaves Jogipanga except for occasional trips to nearby villages, mainly in connection with the administration of the lands which are attached to the gaddī. (One acre of the land in Dohk belongs to the gaddī of Baba Ludru though it is actually cultivated by villagers). The remainder of his time is spent in teaching the boys in the little school attached to the shrine and, in the evenings, giving sermons and conducting prayers for the assembled pilgrims.

Although the cult of Baba Ludru is very popular in the area in which it is found, I do not think that it has a very extensive 'spread'. Few of the pilgrims who were at Jogipanga on the day I visited it came from more than twenty miles away and most had not come so far. I received the impression that the cult of Baba Ludru has a very strong following within this restricted area, from which pilgrims tend to make frequent and regular visits, but is not much known outside this region. This may be partly due to the fact that as yet there has grown up no popular literature to publicize the cult outside the circle of villages which can be reached by hearsay of Baba Ludru's wonderful

powers. Given the policy of the present mahant and his predecessor of discouraging publicity and commercialization, it is unlikely that the cult will spread much in the near future, although it is equally improbable that its great popularity will decline in the area where it is already established.

Although the mahant owns land in some nearby villages, the running of the centre at Jogipanga is largely financed by the cash offerings made by pilgrims. Other gifts besides money are made, ghi, sugar and milk being traditionally regarded as especially acceptable to Baba Ludru. These foodstuffs are used to stock the laṅgar, which provides meals twice a day to the pilgrims. Villagers say that the food served in this laṅgar cannot fail to taste delicious to the pilgrims whatever it consists of, even if the cooks have thrown the skins of the pumpkins into the curry, on account of the miraculous powers of the mahant who presides there.

The powers of Baba Ludru attract people from all walks of life, but like many other deities Baba Ludru specializes in granting certain types of blessing. He is considered to be especially careful of the welfare of military men. Kangra has been the traditional recruiting

ground for the Dogra regiments and many of the boys who join the army from this region entrust their safety to Baba Ludru before leaving their villages for active service. Secondly, Baba Ludru is thought to be specially powerful to help women who have difficulty in conceiving children. Vows are frequently made by couples who have any anxiety on this account to make an offering to Ludru as soon as a child is born to them. In fact it is said that such is the benevolence and holiness of Baba Ludru that he never fails to grant what is asked of him. It will be seen that Baba Ludru is conceived as essentially a kindly deity. All the stories told of the miraculous powers of Baba Ludru and the mahants who have succeeded him reflect beneficent wisdom and charity. He is perhaps unique amongst the deities of Dohk in being entirely benevolent, and is never responsible for causing sickness or misfortune.

The second deity whose cult I shall examine in detail is Baba Balak Nath, the most popular of all the Siddhs known in the foothills. I have already related that part of his legend which is universally known, but fervent devotees can elaborate upon this mere outline of the story for the interested listener. The guardian of the Baba Balak Nath's shrine gave the following details. Baba Balak Nath,

when only a small child, spent many years at Benaras studying the Hindu scriptures. He amazed his teachers by his aptitude for learning and his ascetic inclinations. But this was to be a source of trouble with his family, for when he returned home he found that his parents had arranged his marriage. The ascetic life held more attractions for him than that of a householder, but he could not convince his father of this and was obliged to run away to escape matrimony.¹ Balak Nath became a famous ascetic and his renown reached the ears of the celebrated Guru Gorakh Nath, founder and leader of a sect of Yogis, who resolved to make him his disciple. Arriving at Baba Balak Nath's hermitage with a train of three hundred and sixty disciples, he asked Balak Nath to provide milk for the yogis. Balak Nath was miraculously able to summon the fabulous cow Kamadhenu, who can grant any wish, and placed his bowl under her udders. The milk flowed automatically, sufficient for all the ascetic band. Gorakh Nath was much impressed by this proof of Balak Nath's miraculous powers and urged him to join his band of disciples. Balak Nath preferred a solitary life and told the famous Guru this.

1. This kind of incident seems to complicate the efforts of many Hindu saints when they first set out on the ascetic path; a modern example is that of Swami Dayanand Saraswati, founder of the Arya Samaj, who relates a similar incident of himself.

But Gorakh Nath would not take no for an answer and continued to press him. Finally, Balak Nath became so tired of his pestering that in despair he used his powers to enable him to escape by flying through the air. He alighted at Shah Talai, which seemed to him to be a quiet enough spot. It was there that he became the servant of Rattno, the Lohar woman. In the centre of Shah Talai itself can be seen an ancient hollow bor tree, said to be the very tree in which the saint concealed the food and drink supplied by Rattno. He performed many other miracles. For instance, when the cows he was grazing wandered into the cornfields while he was rapt in meditation, he saved himself from the wrath of the farmers whose crops had been damaged by restoring the spoiled corn so that it was even taller and more lush than before the cows had devastated it. Such were his powers that he could cause barren cows to give milk and he nourished himself with this milk whilst meditating in the jungle. His dwelling place was a cave in which he kept a lamp burning at all times and the name by which he is widely known - 'Deut' Siddh - is said to be derived from the term dīvā which means lamp, although this etymology seems rather obscure to me. These are only a few of the tales related about Baba Balak Nath and I have

recorded them as told to me by the mahant at Shah Talai. Many other versions exist, however, and there is not space here to tell of the numerous miracles which Baba Balak Nath is said to have performed, and which are related by his devotees and in the popular booklets on sale in the bazaars of Shah Talai and many other local towns.

There are many shrines dedicated to Baba Balak Nath in the Punjab and the foothills, but the most famous is the temple at Shah Talai, about twenty miles from Dohk, which is the true centre of the cult. The shrine is situated near the summit of a pine-clad hill, about three miles from the town of Shah Talai itself. Save for a little bazaar consisting of some ten to fifteen shops, mainly selling souvenirs, religious prints and booklets, and other items connected with the cult of the saint, there are no other buildings nearby and the approach to the shrine is a steep and rocky path through lonely, though beautiful, scenery. The shrine marks the spot to which Balak Nath fled when importuned by the attentions of Guru Gorakh Nath. The cave in which he spent his days, practising austerities and meditating, can still be seen and is one of the main attractions at Shah Talai. It is situated on the face of a rocky cliff and is reached by a

short flight of stairs leading from the courtyard of the main shrine. Women are not allowed to approach this cave but must confine their devotions to worshipping the images in the shrine below, but I was told that it contains an image of the saint. This cave is sometimes referred to as the samādhī of Baba Balak Nath, but strictly speaking this is inconsistent with his legend, according to which Baba Balak Nath did not die for Shiva had conferred immortality upon him. According to the priests who guard his shrine, he still lives at Shah Talai, hidden in the core of the mountain. The temple itself like so many Hindu holy places, really consists of a complex of shrines surrounding the central shrine to Balak Nath. These subsidiary shrines are dedicated to various deities, mainly other Siddhs, and including two brothers of Baba Balak Nath who were also Siddhs, although much less famous than he.

The cult of Baba Balak Nath is disseminated over a wide area and pilgrims come to Shah Talai from all over the northern parts of the Punjab and Haryana, in spite of the fact that the shrine is not particularly easy to get to. Only rather irregular bus services connect the town of Shah Talai with the main route from the plains to Hamirpur, and the track leading from the town to the shrine is rough and

steep. Nonetheless, one sees whole families, including elderly people and tiny children, negotiating the climb, sometimes picnicking halfway up. Altogether a holiday atmosphere seems to prevail on such expeditions and the pilgrims shout cheerfully to each other and sing songs in praise of Baba Balak Nath with what breath they can spare as they toil up the slope. No doubt for people from the hot and dusty plains the trip to the pleasantly situated shrine, even in the hot season (which is the traditionally approved time for making pilgrimages to Shah Talai), makes a pleasant excursion in spite of the inconvenience of the journey. Unlike Baba Ludru, Baba Balak Nath is not primarily the deity of rural folk but is popular amongst town people as well, and on the day when I visited Shah Talai three hired coaches had arrived from Jalandhar crowded with prosperous looking city folk.

But the majority of Balak Nath's pilgrims are peasants from the plains¹ who make the journey on foot, thus taking several days to reach the shrine. The route which they take passes through a village lying about half a mile from Dohk and during the month of Asu they form a virtually

1. According to H.A. Rose (1919) Vol. 1, p. 279, these used to include Muslims as well as Hindus. Muslims living in villages near Dohk certainly worship Baba Balak Nath occasionally but since Partition it is improbable that many Muslims still come to Shah Talai from the plains.

non-stop procession, carrying flags and portraits of Balak Nath and singing hymns in his praise as they go. They often camp for the night by the roadside near Dohk, and several farmers of the village have made good profits from selling milk and other provisions to them. These bands of peasants include both Hindus and Sikhs, and may come from as far afield as Amritsar.

The pilgrims bring all kinds of offerings to present at the shrine, but there is one kind of gift which is traditionally made to Balak Nath which is never taken to Jogipanga, namely, live goats. Peasants usually bring their own goats but goats are also available in the bazaar near the shrine, where they are sold quite cheaply. These are brought to the shrine and presented before the image of the saint, but, interestingly, are never actually slaughtered. I was told that they are resold by the guardians of the shrine and their price contributes to the funds needed for its maintenance.

Unlike Jogipanga, the shrine at Shah Talai has a regular staff of pūjārīs who look after it and perform rituals before the images twice a day. These rituals are not elaborate ceremonies using Sanskrit mantras (such as can be seen at some important Hindu temples, like the temple to Durga at Kangra). The rites at Shah Talai consist of

the simple act of ārati performed before the images, accompanied by extempore prayers in the vernacular made by the pūjārī. The pūjārīs are Brahmans by caste, although the mahant himself is a Gosain. The office of pūjārī is hereditary and that of mahant, if not actually passed from father to son, appears to run in a particular family. Altogether the mahant has a far less important role in the cult of Baba Balak Nath than in the cult of Baba Ludru. The mahant at Shah Talai lived within the precincts of the shrine itself and spends much of his time greeting the pilgrims and distributing prasād and vibhūti,¹ yet it is the darsan of Balak Nath which the pilgrims have come for, not that of his living representative. The deity and his spiritual successor are not merged as they are in the cult of Baba Ludru. As far as I know there are no legends relating the spiritual powers of the mahants who succeeded Balak Nath such as cling to the name of Baba Ludru.

The relatively unimportant role of the mahant at Shah Talai may be due to the greater diffusion of the cult. The pilgrims to Jogipanga are mostly regular visitors from a rather restricted area, whilst those which visit Shah Talai come from a much wider area, but make less frequent visits. The mahant at Jogipanga, because of his opportunities for
 1. i. e. sacred ashes.

intensive interaction with the local devotees has been able to build up a personal following from amongst them. The villagers do feel that they have a personal relationship with him, and Jogipanga itself obviously has a most important place in their sentiments, much local pride being expressed in connection with it.

The cult of Baba Balak Nath is more widespread and most of the pilgrims come from areas which are far beyond the immediate locality in which the mahant's personality could be expected to exert a real pull. And in proportion as the role of the mahant and his personal influence in maintaining and disseminating the cult is relatively weak in the case of Baba Balak Nath, so the role of the commercialized aspects of the cult is well developed. As well as the small bazaar adjacent to the shrine, there are also many shops in the town of Shah Talai itself which profit from the cult in one way or another but especially from the sale of literature relating the stories and hymns of the saint. Many of the booklets and prints sold there bear the names of printers from places as far away as Ludhiana and Amritsar, and are available not only at Shah Talai but at bookstalls and markets in towns all over the North Punjab and the Punjab foothills. In addition to the medium of literature, the cult also receives publicity

from the itinerant celās who wander from village to village relating tales of Baba Balak Nath, or at least used to in the early years of this century.¹

It seems, therefore, that cults differing in 'spread' differ also in the kind of media they utilize to attract devotees. In the case of the very local cult of Baba Ludru the centre of pilgrimage itself plays a far greater role, especially the personal efforts of the mahant who lives there. The popularity of Baba Balak Nath's cult depends far less on the mahant, or indeed on anyone at Shah Talai, and far more on the work of commercial agencies, operating largely at some distance from the cult centre itself.

But these differences must not be allowed to obscure the essentially similar functions of these cults in the religious life of the villager. The relative spread and age of their respective cults is less important to him than the powers which both deities have to help him attain the aims which dominate his everyday life.

1.H.A.Rose (1911)Vol.1.p.279 Many centres of pilgrimage have such travelling publicists attached to them, who advertise the merit to be gained from visiting them. During my stay in Dohk I did not come across any such celās from Shah Talai, but two celās from the temple of Durga at Jwalamukhi toured the area during the 'Nauratra' period.

Finally, I record a tale current in Dohk which illustrates the way in which deities of the village pantheon tend to be associated with each other in local legend regardless of their respective importance outside the locality. According to this story, Baba Balak Nath and Raja Bharatri once paid a visit to Kashmir and on their way back called on Baba Ludru. He divined their intention before they arrived and instructed his cook to keep some food aside and see that the lamp was kept burning in readiness for their arrival. One day two sadhus came by, crying, "Aulakh, Aulakh" - the traditional call of ascetics in search of alms. Baba Ludru told the cook to give the sadhus the food he had prepared for Baba Balak Nath and Raja Bharatri. The cook was puzzled, thinking that there would be none left for the Siddhs when they arrived but obeyed nonetheless. When the sadhus had eaten their fill and had spent a convivial evening with Baba Ludru, smoking bhāng, Baba Ludru suggested that they should all go to Haridwar to bathe in the Ganges. Accordingly they set off, and after accompanying Baba Ludru as far as Haridwar, the two sadhus disappeared. On the return of his master the bewildered cook asked who the mysterious visitors had been, and was told that they were none other than Baba Balak Nath and Raja Bharatri themselves.

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