

**The London School of Economics and Political
Science**

*Status, Security and Change: An Ethnographic Study of Caste, Class and
Religion in Rural Rajasthan.*

Jordan C.R. Mullard

A thesis submitted to the Department of Anthropology of the
London School of Economics for the degree of Doctor of
Philosophy, London, July 2010.

UMI Number: U613434

All rights reserved

INFORMATION TO ALL USERS

The quality of this reproduction is dependent upon the quality of the copy submitted.

In the unlikely event that the author did not send a complete manuscript and there are missing pages, these will be noted. Also, if material had to be removed, a note will indicate the deletion.



UMI U613434

Published by ProQuest LLC 2014. Copyright in the Dissertation held by the Author.
Microform Edition © ProQuest LLC.

All rights reserved. This work is protected against
unauthorized copying under Title 17, United States Code.



ProQuest LLC
789 East Eisenhower Parkway
P.O. Box 1346
Ann Arbor, MI 48106-1346

Declaration

I certify that the thesis I have presented for examination for the MPhil/PhD degree of the London School of Economics and Political Science is solely my own work other than where I have clearly indicated that it is the work of others (in which case the extent of any work carried out jointly by me and any other person is clearly identified in it).

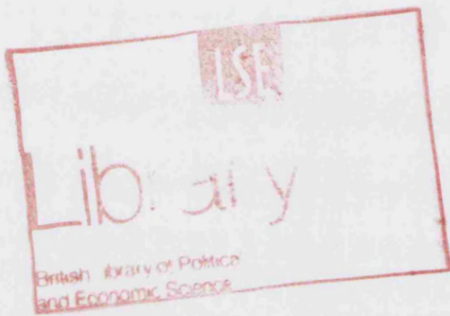
The copyright of this thesis rests with the author. Quotation from it is permitted, provided that full acknowledgement is made. This thesis may not be reproduced without the prior written consent of the author.

I warrant that this authorization does not, to the best of my belief, infringe the rights of any third party.

Ms. Jordan C. R. Mullard

THESES

F
9377



1264005

Abstract

Based on 17 months ethnographic research carried out in a medium sized village in North West Rajasthan, this thesis explores the relationship between status, security and social change in a context of extreme economic uncertainty. Through changes in tenancy laws, the redistribution of land after the abolition of Zamindars in the 1950s, the withdrawal of high castes from the village, success through affirmative action policies, and caste mobilisation via Sanskritisation an extended family of the untouchable leatherworking caste Meghval in the village of Mudharamsar have risen to be the new village elites. Their unusual position as wealthy landowners and political agents has caused conflicts, alternative commensalities, and 're-traditionalised' practices amongst other villagers. This was further exacerbated by the temporary closure of mines in the area that provided the bulk of employment for other villagers causing many of the lower castes to search for alternative means of income and status-making. Some returned to their traditional caste occupations, others organised as a 'labour class' and Meghvals drew on kinship obligations in search of solidarity and security.

I argue that social mobility and change amongst the rural poor involves both confluence and variance of what Bétielle (1974) termed the 'ideas of caste' and the 'interests of class' underpinning agrarian relations. In doing so, I extend Bétielle's analysis to situate my informants' ideas of caste, class and religion within their broader interests in constructing, claiming and using identity and status as mechanisms for coping with economic uncertainty, social change and inequality. I highlight the contradictions between normative ideals concerning caste, kinship and religion on the one hand, and changing class and power relations on the other. I am concerned to look at the spaces between these oppositions wherein alternative discourses and identities are generated, which at times bring unlikely actors together and at others reaffirm pre-existing relations.

Acknowledgements

I went to India in 2005 planning to live in a small village near the Indira Gandhi Canal in the Bikaner district of Rajasthan to study health rights, development and concepts of illness. After spending several months visiting villages in the canal command area and building strong relationships with the local NGO, I was informed that I could no longer stay in that region. I had unbeknown to me contravened my research visa by travelling within 50 kilometres of the International border with Pakistan and therefore, was forced to move locations and discontinue work in that area. The local police had threatened to remove me from the village and take away my research visa, the acquisition of which was a lengthy process. It is in acquiring this elusive visa that my acknowledgements must begin.

The seventeen months I spent in India were made possible by a number of people and institutions, however, my first thanks must go to Mr. & Mrs. Khanna of Greater Kailash, New Delhi. This couple and their family made my transition to India seamless; they welcomed me with open arms, and pulled countless strings to make sure I received my research visa in a timely manner. I would therefore also like to thank their employees, particularly Colonel Dutt, who painstakingly accompanied me from one Ministry to another to insist I receive the documentation I needed. This family and their employees were a constant source of support to me during the length of my fieldwork, offering an opulent respite, on the few occasions I came to Delhi, from the heat and dust of Rajasthan.

There are many people I met in Rajasthan that I would like to thank here and I fear I cannot do justice to them all. Their hospitality, trust and warmth were what sustained me during the harder months. I begin by thanking Harshwardhan Singh of Bhairon Vilas whose tremendous support and kindness provided me with a city bolt hole and whose family gave me an insight into the Rajasthani elites of Bikaner. In Bikaner city I would like to thank 'Andy'/ Anand Singh, *Mera chota bhai* (my younger brother) Anand Swami, Anil and Kalpana Mathur of Rani Bazar, and Paan uncle next door. To Dr. Mathur who alleviated my various ailments whilst in the field and provided an alternative cure to treating the 'evil eye', and to Bhumika Satia a woman after my own heart and a true friend. I would like to extend my last thanks to the city of Bikaner to a most generous and loving friend Shiv Swami, whose selfless kindness meant I was never in doubt for long. I must also thank Saddam Hussein, my research assistant, who made the 4 hour bus journey from Bikaner everyday to come to the village. Without Saddam, I would never have been able to collect the data presented here. He revealed to me the nuances of the Rajasthani language as well as being an objective companion in the field.

My last 'Indian thanks' must go to the people of Mudharamsar (pseudonym) whose willingness to not only welcome me into their lives but share with me their thoughts, opinions and feelings, I cannot thank enough. There are, however, a few individuals that I must mention by name. These are the Panwar Meghvals particularly, Kamraj and Rampyari, Ramdial ji, Ramchandhan ji, Umesh, Prinka, and Raju (Hare Krishna). My hosts made me so welcome in their home and refused to accept any payment, even when I pushed. I asked them every month and every month I received the response: "You chose out of the whole world our village and our house; you are like family from a previous life". I would also like to thank the other family members, and especially Rukmani Devi, or "ma ji" who saw me as her 'adopted' daughter. I would also like to thank Chaghan Lal, Karna Ram, Tripala Ram ji, Susil Kumar Singh, and Mohan Das.

There are various institutions without whose financial support this thesis would not have existed. Namely, the Wenner-Gren Foundation for Anthropological Research, the Royal Anthropological Institute, and the University of London Central Research fund. I would like to make a special thanks to the London School of Economics for awarding me the Rosemary and Raymond Firth Award as well as countless other grants during my time at the school. The lecturers of the LSE Anthropology Department have been a constant source of encouragement and I thank them all, but I particularly owe a great deal to my initial supervisor Dr. Mathew Engelke who first inspired me to do it. I wish to pay a very special thanks to my main supervisor Professor Chris Fuller for his unwavering commitment and support. I would also like to thank Professor Jonathan Parry who became my supervisor once I returned from the field, and who, like Chris, supported me, even when I moved to "*Cold Comfort Farm*". Together, my supervisors were a fantastic source of knowledge and direction and I am grateful for their critical eye, which never failed to make me want to do my best.

I also owe a great deal to my family whose love, encouragement, not to mention patience, has been a solid feature. I particularly want to thank my mother who, among many other things during my studies, put up with sugar in her tea when she came to visit me in the field, and to my father who made me realise what was important. However, my final thanks must go to my partner Tom, for his sense of humour, intelligence and love.

Contents

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS: FIGURES, TABLES AND PLATES	8
FIGURES	8
TABLES.....	8
PLATES.....	8
A NOTE ON LANGUAGE	10
INTRODUCTION	13
CASTE, CLASS AND RELIGION: THE ‘IDEAS & INTERESTS’ OF STATUS	15
SANSKRITISATION AND SUBSTANTIALISATION: CASTE AND RELIGION	24
CONTEXTUALISED BOUNDARIES: A PLAN FOR THE THESIS	28
THE MEGHVALS	30
METHODOLOGY	33
CHAPTER I. CASTE AND KINSHIP: THE PHYSICAL AND SOCIAL STRUCTURE OF THE VILLAGE	37
PART 1: OUTLINE OF THE VILLAGE	38
<i>EVERYDAY INTERACTIONS: THE PHYSICAL STRUCTURE AND SOCIAL CONTOURS</i>	44
<i>HOUSEHOLD STRUCTURES, DWELLING PLACES AND ROADS</i>	46
COMMENSALITY AND SOCIAL INTERACTION	54
SOCIAL INTERACTIONS: STRUCTURAL DISTANCE AND THE DIVISION OF LABOUR	61
<i>NEIGHBOURHOOD IDENTITY, CASTE, AND PATHWAYS IN THE VILLAGE</i>	61
PART 2: BUILDING SOCIAL CAPITAL	63
<i>RE-INVENTING CLIENT/PATRON RELATIONSHIPS</i>	63
<i>THE ‘CONTROVERSIAL’ MEGHVALS: THEIR RELATIONSHIPS WITH HIGHER CASTES</i>	67
<i>SANSKRITISATION AMONG THE MEGHVALS</i>	70
<i>DIFFERENCES IN CASTE AND STATUS: MEGHVAL AND KUMBHAR</i>	73
<i>ALTERNATIVE INTERACTIONS: INTERNAL SEGMENTATIONS & TRADITIONAL INTERPRETATIONS</i>	76
PART 3. KINSHIP AMONG THE MEGHVAL AND KUMBHAR	78
<i>RELATEDNESS AND SIMILARITY: FICTIVE KINSHIP AND THE RE-CLASSIFICATION OF STRUCTURAL DIFFERENCE</i>	90
SUMMARY	95
CHAPTER II. ECONOMIC ORGANISATION AND CLASS: MINING AND AGRICULTURE	100
GENERAL EMPLOYMENT PATTERNS	108
PART 1. MINING	114
<i>THE FOUR MINES: LABOUR, PRODUCTION AND ORGANISATION</i>	118
<i>RECRUITMENT, INCOME AND SOCIAL RELATIONS</i>	128
PART 2. AGRICULTURE	141
<i>HISTORICAL BACKGROUND: LAND OWNERSHIP AND REFORM</i>	142
<i>AGRICULTURE: PRODUCTION AND OWNERSHIP</i>	145
SUMMARY	162
CHAPTER III. POLITICS AND GOVERNMENT JOBS	169
PART 1. THE RESERVATION SYSTEM: THE POLITICS OF GOVERNMENT JOBS	171
<i>THE BADA KASTKAR AND POLITICAL ELITE IN MUDHARAMSAR</i>	178
PART 2. VILLAGE POLITICS AND THE PANCHAYAT	182
AN ILLUSTRATIVE VIGNETTE	189
PART 3. GOVERNMENT JOBS: STATUS AND SECURITY	193
SUMMARY	198
CHAPTER IV. RELIGION: SANSKRITISATION, PROTECTION AND SOCIAL DIFFERENTIATION	203

PART 1. DEITY PLACES IN MUDHARAMSAR	209
PART 2. THE KEY FESTIVALS IN THE VILLAGE.....	218
PART 3. THE RELIGIOUS TRADITIONS.....	236
THE FIRST TRADITION: RAMDEV	236
THE SECOND TRADITION: THE KUNDA <i>PANTH</i>.....	254
<i>RAMDEV AND THE KUNDA PANTH: SANSKRITISATION AND RAJPUTISATION</i>.....	263
THE THIRD TRADITION: BHOMIYA.....	266
SUMMARY	271
CONCLUSION: CLASS, CASTE AND RELIGION: A QUESTION OF POWER, STATUS AND ECONOMIC SECURITY	275
POWER, HISTORY AND SOCIAL CHANGE.....	276
CLASS, CASTE, STATUS AND POWER	283
SHIFTING CONTEXTS: CASTE, CLASS AND RELIGION.....	288
<i>GLOSSARY OF HINDI AND MARWARI TERMS</i>	293
<i>BIBLIOGRAPHY</i>.....	298

List of Illustrations: Figures, Tables and Plates

Figures

Figure 1. District Map of Rajasthan	11
Figure 2. Map of Bikaner District.	12
Figure 3. Approximate distribution of wards in the village and subdivisions based on caste, class and history..	42
Figure 4. Chart showing the general pattern of food exchange between castes in the village.....	59
Figure 5. Chart showing the patterns of access to the Hinglaj Mata temple	60

Tables

Table 1. Table showing the population of castes in the village.....	39
Table 2a. Table showing the OBC castes in Mudharamsar Village	40
Table 2b. Table showing the SC in Mudharamsar village.....	40
Table 2c. Table showing the FC castes in Mudharamsar village.	40
Table 3. A table defining the types of households	50
Table 4a. Occupational patterns for males in Mudharamsar.	111
Table 4b. Occupational patterns for females in Mudharamsar.....	112
Table 5. Table showing distribution of labour in the four mines.	120
Table 6. Table showing population of Mudharamsar in 1961.....	145
Table 7. Land ownership patterns for the village according to caste and household.	151
Table 8. Ownership and average revenue patterns for the largest landowning castes and families in the village.....	151

Plates

Plate 1. A woman and children at a feeder well in Mudharamsar.	41
Plate 2. A rectangle vernacular style of house in Mudharamsar.	49
Plate 3. The descendents of Mungla Ram's main house and compound gateway.	49
Plate 4. Photo of the digging phase of production.....	122
Plate 5. Photo of digging and loading in the Indo-Ka-Bala Mine.	124
Plate 6. The mine manager, Sobash Paliwal, outside his office.	124

Plate 7. Unloading the camel carts.	124
Plate 8. The Rama Devi Sharma mine office.	126
Plate 9. Manual extraction at the Rama Devi Sharma mine.	126
Plate 10. Photo of the ACIPA mine.	127
Plate 11. Women sorting, sizing and dressing at the ACIPA mine.	127
Plate 12. Sieving at the ACIPA mine.	128
Plate 13. The children of the ACIPA mine.....	128
Plate 14. Bhumiya/ Bhairon shrine near to Mudharamsar.....	217
Plate 15. Bhomiya/ Yogi burial shrine in the village.	217
Plate 16. Jain Burial monument in Mudharamsar.	218
Plate 17. Rampyari leading the Navratri puja at the back room shrine.	230
Plate 18. Divali puja at the household shrine of Ramchandhan & Jyoti Devi.....	232
Plate 19. Ramdev temple in Ramdeora.	239
Plate 20. Main Samadhi/ Durgah to Ramdev at Ramdeora/ Runicha.....	240
Plate 21. Dali Bai's Bangle.	240
Plate 22. Samadhi's/ Durgahs at the Ramdev temple in Ramdeora.	241
Plate 23. Dali Bai's 'real' Samadhi.....	241
Plate 24. Footprints at the Ramdev temple in Kolayat.	242
Plate 25. Inner chamber of the Ramdev temple in Mudharamsar..	243
Plate 26. Popular image of Ramdev.	243
Plate 27. Sandals/ Chapals outside Ramdeora/ Runicha town limits.	250
Plate 28. Kamad performers at Ramdeora.....	255
Plate 29. The Kunda <i>Panth</i> Altar.	259

All photos were taken by the author except for Plate 20, which was courtesy of the Runichadham Blogspot (<http://runichadham.blogspot.com/2007/08/blog-post.html>).

A Note on Language

In 2004 Rajasthani was recognised by the State Assembly as an official Indian language rather than simply a dialect of Hindi. However, national recognition by the Government of India is still pending. Rajasthani is a mixed language with several regional dialects present throughout the state. Informants would comment that if you travel only 50 kilometres north, east or south from Bikaner a different language would be spoken. The village of Mudharamsar is in the north-western district of Bikaner and consequently Marwari, popular across western Rajasthan, was the local dialect. Due to the popularity of Hindi films, television shows, and newspapers, most informants were also able to speak Hindi, the exception being those with very limited access to Indian media. All Indian words will be italicised and translated into their Hindi equivalents rather than into Rajasthani and a full glossary is provided. Proper names of people, places, and castes appear in their usual English forms. Whilst it is conventional practice among anthropologists of South Asia and particularly India, for names and terms to be transliterated from Sanskrit forms, because informants invariably used vernacular Marwari terms all Indian terms will appear without diacritics in text. Instead, all italicised Indian terms will be transliterated in the glossary provided at the end of this thesis.



Figure 1. District Map of Rajasthan.

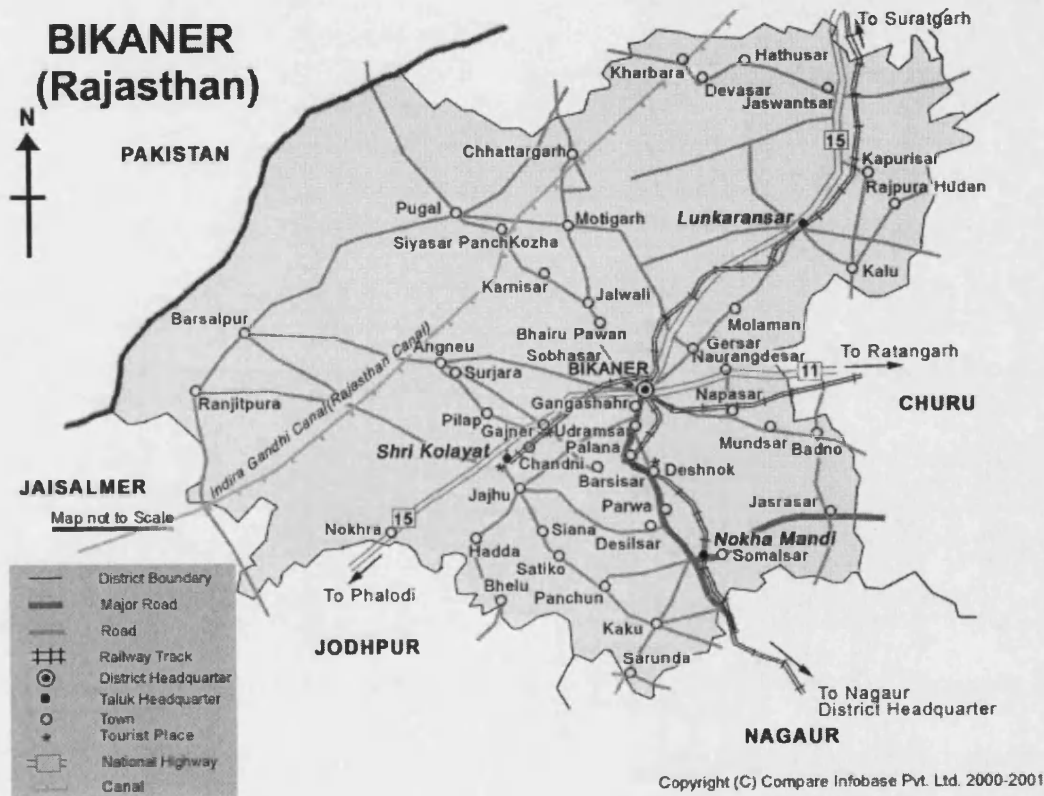


Figure 2. Map of Bikaner District.

Introduction

“There is only one caste, Human Beings, it was Man that created caste not god”.

The quote above was a common statement amongst the caste of Meghvals I lived with in the village of Mudharamsar, in the Thar Desert of Rajasthan, India. Their words captured a particular type of sentiment commonly expressed by the older generation of low castes alive during the post independence liberalism of the 1950s. However, it became clear that these sentiments were also indicative of a much wider social attitude stretching across the generations, a discourse for which extended back in time. Upon first hearing it, such utterances appeared to suggest that caste, for some, was a matter of human dictate, and not one ordained by god as is commonly understood. Whilst caste still had an ideological force and historical associations for my informants, you could it seemed begin to choose what value it had. Moreover, it was not just caste that had a temporary value, the relationship between caste and other forms of social differentiation were equally undergoing considerable redefinition and analysis in the village.

Re-positioning the status of a caste is not a particularly new theme and enough has been written on caste and status in India to suggest that this process has been around for some time (for instance, Ghurye 1961, Srinivas 1971 [1966], Mandelbaum 1972, Miller 1975). Explanations for this process have come in many guises. For example, some scholars have suggested that it is the modernisation process and the breakdown of what Gupta (2000: 27) terms the “natural economy” that has allowed castes to move out of their earlier categories of stratification. Other writers have suggested that the positive discrimination policies of the state have helped particular segments of the lower castes to re-define their status (Beteille 1996 [1965]), whilst some have suggested such castes also modified their religious discourse and practice in order alter their status (Srinivas 1971). Others have suggested that such processes as

those above can be characterised by either caste fission or fusion as logical models for social mobility (Mandelbaum 1972: 487-499). What is clear, however, is that whilst trends can be recorded, the contexts in which such processes occur are context specific. Such processes in Muharamsar were not only particular, but when examined in relation to the wider social relations and enormous economic upheavals within the village, turned out to be quite unique.

During my fieldwork the main source of employment for many of the villagers had been suspended. From the 16th May 2004 to 15th February 2007 the Rajasthani Government had shut down many of the mines in the state to encourage mine owners to adopt anti-pollution measures. A total of 24,000 mines were temporarily closed causing enormous unemployment in the mining regions of the state. Bikaner District, famous for its mineral wealth, in the North West of Rajasthan and where I was conducting my fieldwork was particularly hit. 18,000 people in the *tehsil* (sub-district) where I was located, Kolayat, were made redundant causing considerable economic uncertainty for the families whose main or only source of income was mining. This closure period coincided with my time in the field, and although I made a point of returning to the field in March and April 2007 after the mines had reopened, their closure characterised a large part of the public discourse during my stay and in fact continued to shape much of the subsequent discourse upon my return.

The mine closures sent shockwaves through the village. The resulting economic insecurity caused many villagers to desperately seek employment elsewhere; others fell prey to drinking, violence, and crime, whilst others sought compensation and retribution. There was a flurry of Trade Union activism; discussions concerning the differences between salaried and non-salaried, skilled and manual workers fuelled many of my informants' conversations. People who previously had anonymous daily wage labour in the mines were cashing in kinship ties and obligations as a way to secure work in alternative industries such as agriculture; others without these kin networks sought work in the city or private sector jobs. Other villagers sought refuge in their traditional caste occupations hailing them as the most secure and "proper" form of employment. Wives, who up to that point had never done paid work, took informal sector jobs as a way to contribute to the household income. As one can imagine, all of this activity was

underpinned by a strong sense of insecurity and urgency. This insecurity permeated many aspects of social life in the village which affected social relationships and solidarity between neighbours, kin and wider village relations more generally. Therefore, the everyday concerns over status, economic security and village relations that one would expect to find in any village in India were further complicated by the mine closures. These complications shaped social discourses on caste, occupation and class, and religion and consequently it is these areas of social life that make up the central themes running through this thesis.

Caste, Class and Religion: The 'Ideas & Interests' of Status

Caste means different things to different people in a range of different situations. While little will be gained by attempting to apply a monolithic meaning to the term caste at this point, some definition will provide a foundation from which we can explore the variety of meanings and manifestations given to caste by the inhabitants of Mudharamsar village. Following (Mayer 1962 [1957]), there are two aspects to caste: firstly, that which refers to the four main castes or *varnas*, and secondly, that which refers to the internal subdivisions of those *varnas* into innumerable *jatis*. It is the term *jati* that my informants most often used.

Briefly, the Hindu caste system divides the whole of society into four *varnas* (category or estate: Brahmins, Kshatriyas, Vaishyas and Shudras) and subsequently into innumerable *jatis* (castes). *Jati* comes from the root *jan* meaning "to beget" or "to produce" and is used to denote origin and the group or class to which something belongs. In terms of caste, *jati* is the social stratum in which one is born. The 'orthodox' position states that one is fixed in a *jati* by birth and there exist sets of rules governing acceptable occupations, foods, marriages, and forms of association with other *jatis*. A feature of *jati* both in the village of Mudharamsar and elsewhere in Rajasthan is that they are internally organised into sub-castes or clans along patrilineal, virilocal lines, where village exogamy, in Rajasthan at least, is most favoured.

A further element of the caste/ *jati* system is that it is characterised by a strict order of ranking, the organisation for which was and is believed by most high caste Hindus, in particular, to correspond to the natural order of things. Beteille (1983) reveals how *varnas* were given their

rationale by the Hindu theory of *gunas*¹ or 'qualities', according to which each individual was endowed with one of three basic traits (purity, passion and ignorance) or some combination of them (Beteille 1983:10). Furthermore, each characteristic was deemed to relate, although not exclusively, to caste, so that Brahmins are associated mainly with purity, Kshatriyas with passion, and so on. These qualities are then also linked to the particular *jati* one belongs to, although the exact relationship between *varna* and *jati* is highly complex. Some scholars go far as to suggest that *varnas* evolved into *jatis*.

However, there is controversy over the *varnas* themselves: for example, whether they were marriage-restrictive and whether a considerable proportion of the population actually lived completely outside the *varna* structure. Either way, many orthodox Hindus believe the original *varnas* are still in place and serve to express divine justice through the transmigration of souls. The *varna-jati* one is born into reflects the reward or punishment of each soul for its previous life and this is expressed through a ranked occupational structure. Beteille suggests that there are two arguments put forward to explain or justify such differentiation: firstly, that it represents the division of labour and not inequality per se: and secondly, that the division of labour corresponds to the natural and innate scheme of things (Beteille 1983:16-17).

Whilst my informants more often than not use the term *jati*, throughout the thesis I will use caste to denote the particular *jati* of those I am discussing. I will qualify the term caste in each instance by referring to the particular caste in question by its name and whether they were regarded as a clean, high, or untouchable, low, caste. Moreover, where applicable I will also use the contemporary language to denote caste ranking through the classifications of Scheduled Caste (SC), Scheduled Tribe (ST), and Other Backward Classes (OBC).

Like Caste, class has also come under intense scrutiny in the ethnography of India (Ossowski 1963, Beteille 1965, Lynch 1969, Gould 1963, Breman 1974, 1993, Miller 1975, Molund 1988, Chandavarkar 1999, Osella and Osella 2000 to name a few). In this thesis I shall

¹ It is difficult to establish the exact definition of the three Gunas or guns, Sattva, Rajas and Tamas. Definitions vary ranging from purity, goodness and virtue for sattva and passion and indifference for rajas, and ignorance or darkness for tamas. Harlan (1992) offers the following: "This generic use of the term sat, however, exists alongside the more specific meaning of sat as goodness, truth and purity. This same definition of sat is articulated in the Indian notion of the three guns or qualities. According to popular wisdom, sat is the virtue associated with Brahmins whereas rajas (passion, activity) belongs to Rajputs, and tamas (darkness, topor) to baniyas" (Harlan 1992: 126).

use a Marxian definition of 'class' similar to that used by Beteille (1974, 1983, 1991, 1996), and Weberian definitions (1947, 1948) of 'status'. They are both 'ideal types' against which to measure the social world. The different meanings that Marx gave to the concept of class varied enormously, but it is in his most restricted use of class that it is possible to derive an effective ideal type. Moreover, it is this specialised usage which makes Marx's concept, in this thesis, more useful as an ideal type than Weber's, even though Weber's is observably closer, in certain contexts.

Both Marx and Weber defined class in terms of economic situation; Marx stressing relationship to the means of production and resultant common economic interests and Weber in stressing common 'life chances'. For Marx an aggregate of people can only be termed a class in so far as they are linked by the tie of class consciousness, by the consciousness of common interests and the bonds arising out of common class antagonisms (c.f. Ossowski 1963). What Weber terms as classes are more like Marx's strata, in which the identity of interests (belonging to the members of a stratum) does not lead to unity, nationalism, or political organisation (Ibid.: 74). It is Marx's emphasis on property relations and class antagonisms which makes his conception of class more useful for an understanding of class in Mudharamsar village during my fieldwork. The Marxian concept of class used in the thesis is defined by the sharing of common economic interests resulting from a common relationship to the means of production and class consciousness resulting from an awareness of the antagonistic relationship between classes. It is however, important to note that whilst it is Marx's definition of class that will be used, it is nonetheless an ideal type. What will be explored, particularly in Chapter Two, is how it is this understanding of class that is used, by informants, to demarcate different workers who have lost their jobs in the mines, landowners and those who can get jobs in the fields.

Status in the thesis is defined in terms of different styles of life and Weber's definition is the most useful:

“In contrast to the purely economically determined ‘class situation’, we wish to designate as ‘status situation’ every typical component of the life fate of men [and women] that is determined by a specific, positive or negative, social estimation of honour”

(Weber in Gerth & Wright Mills
1948: 186-7).

...[S]tatus honour is normally expressed by the fact that above all else a specific *style of life* can be expected by all those who wish to belong to the circle...The decisive role of style of life in status honour means that status groups are the specific bearers of all conventions” (Ibid.: 191).

Status honour in Mudharamsar is partly dependent on evaluations of relative purity and pollution and on whether or not a group provided services for others. Both these evaluations are linked to caste rank. However, if a caste did not perform its traditional occupation or role or had taken on the role of another, its members’ status honour varied considerably (c.f. Miller 1975). This is because on the one hand, such groups could not easily be ranked in the ‘traditional’ caste hierarchy, but also due to their relative levels of security in their alternative forms of occupation.

Villagers also measured status in terms of religious beliefs and practices, and by choosing to adopt certain forms of worship over others. Caste and religion, then, are systems of ideas and values and the choices within them relate to specific understandings of status. For example, many informants had made the choice to adopt the practices of high castes as a way to better their position or shed doubt on the ‘polluted’ origins of their caste. The direction and historical associations of such choices lead one to question whether the security of that status is a factor in the decision making process and, in turn, whether the security derived is of an economic or social kind. Whilst such choices are not particular to the time of my fieldwork, the variation of explanations offered by some informants were deeply rooted in concerns over their economic security. For others religion was a vehicle for social mobility and enabled them to express their ‘true’ identities.

Factors pertaining to security and identity were of utmost importance to my lower caste informants and revealed most strongly how social relations concerning caste, class and religion

were reflective not only of the economic context of the village during fieldwork, but also of wider concerns of how status and social mobility is being understood in contemporary South Asia. The multifarious valuations given to differences in caste, class and occupation, and religious practices are, in part, contrasted with 'traditional' evaluations based on purity and pollution. Whilst it remains questionable whether such 'traditional' evaluations ever existed, and indeed many of my informants were active in constructing such evaluations, certain of the social institutions were connected. Once upon a time, in village India, for instance, caste and class were, more often than not, synonymous.

For example, agricultural labourers were historically of low or untouchable caste whilst the landowners were usually of high ranking caste, whereas household labour-using proprietors generally came from the middle agricultural castes, although not exclusively. Historically the distribution of other resources and access to political power generally followed a similar pattern. H. A. Gould (1963) in analysing the class system in India depicted three levels: the Forward Classes (high castes), the Backward Classes (middle and lower castes) and low classes (*Harijans* or very low castes). According to Gould, these three groups shared common interests because they stood in approximately the same relationship to land and production. In other words, they were respectively, large scale farmers, small scale farmers and landless labourers. With the advent of industrialisation in India, many of these relations were likewise mapped onto the organisation of labour in factories and mines.

However, in the anthropological, sociological and historical study of India there has been an underlying assumption that modernisation, or the increase in technology, industrialisation and the free market economy would lead to the dissolution of the caste system. And what is more, this dissolution would produce the circumstances through which a class consciousness, in a Marxian sense, could occur. Given this, much of the data on industrialisation and labour, for example, is in fact preoccupied with trying to locate the above teleology (see Breman 1993, Chandavarkar 1994). Other scholars have noted that this fascination has often blocked accounts of caste, kinship and other social relations that can provide the motivation or de-motivations behind work and labour (Parry 1999). In this thesis I

explore the relationship between work, status and identity and how informants utilise notions of both class solidarity and kinship obligations when struggling to find secure incomes.

This ethnographic study looks at caste, class and religious identity and status from the viewpoint of those living in Mudharamsar village, a medium sized settlement containing 16 different castes. For the residents of Mudharamsar, the various manifestations of caste in everyday life pointed to its unremittingly pervasive role in structuring social relations. For example, caste provided a methodology for claiming rights and affirmative action, helped groups ensure economic security, yet also signalled a symbolic antithesis to social change (Jacobson & Bruun 2000). As such, residents of Mudharamsar view caste as a spectrum of motifs that can be used first as a yardstick to measure social mobility, change and status, and second as a collective representation of solidarity and shared experience. This was particularly so among and within the upwardly mobile lower-caste groups. Moreover, caste, along with other social institutions such as, class and occupation, politics, and religion, were woven together in different contexts to create very particular status evaluations. It is in examining these contexts that status, and social change for the inhabitants of Mudharamsar can be explored. This is because caste along with class and religion not only contains properties that maintain the status quo, but can also serve, often through normative discourses, as a measure of how much things can and do change.

The variations and contradictions in how status is understood in Mudharamsar do not come without their fair share of conflict and there is considerable competition between the low caste groups in the village. What is more, this conflict was accentuated by the economic upheavals witnessed during my fieldwork and subsequently framed much of the discourse around caste, class and religion. It is because it was primarily the low castes that were affected by the mine closures, coupled with an unusually active and socially mobile set of low caste families, that this ethnographic study is focussed on the low caste groups in Mudharamsar village. This thesis does not ignore the high castes, but rather places them in the context of a village with an upwardly mobile low caste Meghval family and dwindling high caste

occupation. This Meghval family was not only one of the wealthiest in the village; it was also one of the largest families with political ties stretching to the State legislature.

The choice to focus on what revealed itself to be a wealthy and powerful Meghval lineage was somewhat forced upon me by virtue of living with the Meghvals: however, this was only part of my motivation. As fieldwork in the village progressed, it became increasingly evident that this family was unusual. My conversations and relationships with other villagers revealed that the Meghval family was, indeed, the most significant anchor from which to explore the unusual social organisation in Mudharamsar. This was because many non-Meghvals in the village appeared to compare themselves with them and to judge their position in relation to the Meghval family. Moreover, the economic environment meant that many low castes in particular were searching for work and members of the wealthy Meghval lineage became one of the main sources of employment in the region's second largest rural industry of agriculture. Whilst the Meghvals' position had more than likely been a great source of gossip and conjecture over questions of status, class and caste prior to the mine closures, just as much as it was during, it was evident that their status had in fact been further elevated by becoming the principle recruiters of the poorer villagers. Consequently, the activities of this Meghval family came to characterise much of the conversation on caste, class, religion and social organisation amongst other castes in the village.

This Meghval lineage had for some time been active in altering their status through religion, employment and politics. Having made the choice to give up their traditional occupations of leather working many years before, the Meghval family had for some time been active in village politics. They entered temples used by high castes, walked around the village freely, built the main well in the village, and openly spoke out against casteism. All these activities gave them higher status in the eyes of some villagers; whilst others saw them as 'trouble makers'. From whomever I spoke to, it was clear that their position set a precedent for others in the village to compare their own caste, class and religious identity and social status against. Moreover, these comparisons were further heightened by the period of economic instability occurring during my fieldwork where a majority of Mudharamsar's lower castes were

splintering in several directions in pursuit of employment and status security. This made the Meghvals and particularly the three generations of Meghvals descended from the most recent patriarch, Rupa Ram, in conjunction with the poorer Meghvals, even more compelling to the eager ethnographer.

It would be wrong however, to suggest that this thesis is 'just another' monograph about caste in South Asia; it is not. It may also be criticised as adopting a view that places caste at the centre of social organisation when, rather, it aims to highlight the nuanced way it is invoked in different contexts (c.f. Dirks 2001). It is my hope that this thesis be viewed as a study of two interrelated systems that structure social organisation; one that is concerned with a systematisation of ideas and values and the other a systematisation of material resources or interests (cf. Beteille 1974: 35-55). It is a study that looks at all forms of social status in the village of which caste is an enduring, but no longer, if it ever was, exclusive indicator.

The caste system's exclusivity as a method of social organisation has not only been challenged by the anti-caste movements of India's past and present, by authors such as Gail Omvedt (1994 & 1995), but it is also challenged by peaks and troughs in economic security or insecurity. Such movements in the economic fortunes of entire communities cannot help but force people to reappraise their position and status. In so doing, caste is often considered the most logical place from which to start re-positioning status and identity in line with other systems of stratification. This is particularly important when caste, as Dirks (2001:5) describes is "not in fact some unchanged survival of ancient India, not some single system that reflects a core civilisational value, not a basic expression of Indian tradition. Rather, I will argue caste (again, as we know it today) is [also] a modern phenomenon..." Whilst Dirks believes the modernity of caste to have resulted from the colonial encounter, my argument is less historic and more situational. It is interested in exploring the use of caste as a contemporary identity and what it can tell us about social change.

This thematic focus comes with its fair share of historical theory and several conceptual concerns inform the ethnographic analysis offered in this thesis. The analysis of status and identity in this thesis is primarily as a methodology for exploring social change. As a result, I

begin by taking social relations as the starting point for understanding stratification and status. In the words of Max Weber, a “social relationship thus consists entirely and exclusively in the existence of a probability that there will be, in some meaningfully understandable sense, a course of social action” (in Marshall 2000: 306).

Therefore, this thesis is not one of status per se, although status does play a key role, it has a rather more humble approach. I approach status, like many anthropologists, by taking the contexts in which social relations occur as pivotal in defining how social life is understood. It is the ethnography that leads to analyses that re-position social status in terms of social boundaries, social relationships, identity, and contextualised practice. The voices and actions of my informants situate their status-making in relation to concerns over security, competition over the access of resources, and the linked roles of economic and social capital.

In the thesis I follow Bourdieu’s (1977, 1983, 1984) understanding of capital, which argues that all humans exist in a multidimensional social space containing various different forms of capital that can be articulated through social relations. Like for Bourdieu, capital involves the value to be had from social networks, which can both produce and reproduce inequality. This thesis deals specifically with social and economic capital, although Bourdieu had named many more types. I define social and economic capital by those social networks that are based on caste, politics, and religion and those related to material resources or class on the other. Whilst these forms of capital are largely mutually constitutive, separating them helps to interpret the words and actions of my informants and the perceived trajectory of social change. In understanding this, the thesis explores the South Asian anthropology of caste substantialisation and Sanskritisation as conceptual and processual tools for examining, firstly, the role of essentialising practice for those I lived with in the village, and secondly as a method for locating the orientation of ideas for the statuses claimed.

Sanskritisation and Substantialisation: Caste and Religion

Briefly, M. N. Srinivas first used the term Sanskritisation in his book “Religion and Society among the Coorgs of South India” (1952) and is quoted here:

“The caste system is far from a rigid system in which the position of each component caste is fixed for all time. Movement has always been possible, and especially so in the middle regions of the hierarchy. A low caste was able, in a generation or two, to rise to a higher position in the hierarchy by adopting vegetarianism and teetolism, and by Sanskritising its ritual and Pantheon. In short, it took over, as far as possible the customs, rites, and beliefs of the Brahmins, and the adoption of the Brahminic way of life by a low caste seems to have been frequent, though theoretically forbidden. This process has been called Sanskritisation in this book, in preference to Brahminisation as certain Vedic rites are confined to the Brahmins and the two other twice-born castes” (Ibid.:32).

Later in “Social Change in Modern India” (1966) he elaborated the process thus:

“Sanskritisation is the process by which a low Hindu caste, or tribal or other group changes its customs, ritual, ideology, and way of life in the direction of a high, and frequently, twice-born caste. Generally such changes are followed by a claim to a higher position in the caste hierarchy than that traditionally conceded to the claimant caste by the local community...Sanskritisation is generally accompanied by, and often results in, upward mobility for the caste in question; but mobility may also occur without Sanskritisation and vice versa.” (Ibid: 6-7).

Sanskritisation, therefore, is largely a choice in how to move from one status to another. This process has several key implications for the actors involved. Not least that they must actively orientate their practices and beliefs in the direction of higher castes, but they must also essentialise those practices to firmly establish them as such in time. There has been much discussion of how Sanskritised practices are awarded historical meaning, particularly in the context of caste origin stories. Robert Deliege (1993, 1999) for example wrote extensively on

caste origin myths and how these are used as evidence of past glory and high status. His thoughtful analysis highlights how the myths of low castes often cite some grave wrong doing that had the effect of weakening the central character's status. The underlying message in such stories, then, is that not only have they been wrongly accused of being low status, through recognising this wrongdoing they can, in fact, achieve that original high status again. After all, it was not their fault, or so the story goes, that they were reduced to the lowly status they may now currently hold. Consequently, these origin stories invert and challenge, as Mahalingham (2003), Vincentnathan (1993) suggest, the dominant accounts of caste origin by providing an alternative social essentialist account of their particular caste. However, this is a temporary inversion as Moffatt (1979) conversely shows the power of origin stories is to ultimately enable confirmation of a high status and thus it reproduces the basis of the caste hierarchy.

The Meghvals in Mudharamsar, as well as some other low castes, have been active in Sanskritising their beliefs and practices. This process has caused ruptures not only within the caste but also between castes of similar 'traditional' status. To achieve a Sanskritised status, as an ideal type, a caste must, at least conceptually, consider themselves part of a caste with clear boundaries that mark them as distinct from other castes. It is this necessary idealisation of an individual caste that is partly characterised by the term substantialisation. The significant difference is that substantialisation need not depend on the traditional indicators of status defined by caste hierarchy. However, it does similarly depend on a unified internally coherent concept of a caste.

Dumont (1970) influenced by both Ghurye and Srinivas suggested that substantialisation involved "the transition from a fluid, permanent universe in which the emphasis is on interdependence and in which there is no privileged level, no firm units, to a universe of impenetrable blocks, self-sufficient, essentially identical and in competition with one another, a universe in which the caste appears as a collective individual, as a substance" (Dumont 1970:269). Writing about Dumont, Fuller summarised that the caste, for Dumont, seems to accept an internal equality, which means that from an ideological point of view structure seems to yield to substance, each caste becoming an individual confronting other

individuals (Fuller 1996:11). This implies that castes are, or at least are becoming, internally unified and coherent units. Fuller, suggested that these trends were however accompanied

“...by the increasing differentiation of status, power and wealth developing within each caste – a development which is itself contributing to the decline of clear-cut caste ranking and hence, paradoxically, to an increasing normative emphasis on difference between castes. Substantialisation is, in effect, a self-contradictory process, because as it develops castes actually become more heterogeneous” (1996:12-3).

In Mudharamsar structure only in part yields to substance, as it is the structure itself that continues to define how that substance is cogitated and articulated. However, and as Fuller suggests there is considerable interest in constructing idealised normative discourses to highlight the differences between castes. Such normative discourses can be used to compare the material reality of social relations in the village against the idealised normative/ traditional caste concepts. As Srinivas (1962) stated caste was not about to disappear but was just adapting itself in response to prevailing social changes. As a result, we are able to chart social changes through analysing the disparity between normative discourses on the one hand and changing material realities on the other.

Consequently, I share Fuller’s assessment that substantialisation is perhaps better conceived of as an ideological shift sharpening the divide between public and private behaviours, and it does not necessarily follow that these shifts are conceived of uniformly (Fuller 1996:15). Other scholars of South Asia have also questioned the claims of authors who state that intra-caste cohesion is increasing (such as Parry’s discussion of Hiroshi Ishii 2007). Therefore it is just as likely that intra-caste differentiation is increasing just as inter-caste differentiation is increasing. It is this process of intra caste differentiation that is increasingly important to villagers in Mudharamsar and particularly so among those competing for economic and social capital.

Taken together Sanskritisation and substantialisation appear compatible, and in certain contexts they do operate as such. For example, in the arena of village politics castes will generally favour candidates who share their caste background (discussed in Chapter Three).

However, in other contexts these ideal formations become highly incompatible to the point where one can see a continual movement from substantialisation to de-substantialisation and back again in the ethnographic data. Moreover, this movement is in constant flux, far from consistent, and is wholly dependent on context. The de-substantialisation of caste can tell us just as much about the internal divisions of a caste as Sanskritisation, which similarly is not adopted uniformly, nor is it steadfast in time or space. However what Sanskritisation, unlike substantialisation, offers in a clear way is an explanation of the direction toward which a caste looks when considering its status.

Locating the direction of different identities and status making practices are important for two interconnected reasons: firstly, for understanding the link between status/ life style, and social capital (see Bourdieu 1986, [1979]), and secondly, for examining their relationship to economic stability. For example, on the one hand, the Sanskritisation of the Meghvals' practices orientates them towards the high castes, making a value judgement that dismisses previous practices in favour of practices that are given high status according to the 'traditional' hierarchical system. However, these identity markers are strongly contrasted, in terms of status, to other identity markers among the Meghval that associate them with, for example, a labour class. This has the effect of pulling the caste in two opposing directions: one toward caste or the realm of ideas and the other toward class or the arena of interests. Locating the orientation of these identity markers then, helps to indicate the type of social change they are seeking, which in turn links to the type of capital they are wishing to accumulate, be it social or economic. Therefore it is through examining what practices are adopted, who is adopting them, and in what contexts they are chosen that we are able to explore status and social change. However, this can only be done by making certain assumptions about how certain social relations work. That is in order to answer the above questions these markers need to be fairly measurable and therefore require a certain degree of rigidity in space and time, and these will be referred to here as 'contextualised boundaries'.

Contextualised Boundaries: A Plan for the Thesis

The analysis offered in this thesis begins in the first chapter with one of the most prevalent boundaries discussed in South Asian anthropology; that of caste. The concept of boundaries is useful here for demonstrating how status works. In the same way as Barth, in his approach to ethnicity, advocated the critical focus for investigation as being “the ethnic boundary that defines the group rather than the cultural stuff that it encloses” (1969:15), this thesis begins with caste and kinship as a structural starting point. What will be explored is how that “cultural stuff”, in the context of caste, interacting with the boundary, at times appears to dissolve its rigidity and fragment its members, yet nevertheless still retaining the signifier of caste, and to a certain extent kinship, as a set of bounded practices. The way in which it does remain however, is based on evaluations of caste, kinship and status that are actively constructed for certain aims: for example, the case of the Sanskritised practices of vegetarianism and teetotalism among the wealthier Meghval (discussed in Chapter One and Four) and fictive kinship and relatedness described in Chapter One. What is significant is that the boundary itself does not disappear even though the ‘cultural stuff’ it encompasses can be highly variable. As such, these benchmarks or structural boundaries are ideas that form part of an ‘identity toolkit’. This toolkit can then be drawn upon to meet specific interests such as for securing jobs in the fields as outlined in Chapter Two, for political affiliation explored in Chapter Three or for Sanskritised and Rajputised status in Chapter Four. Even though what it means to be Meghval for the more wealthy family, and vice versa for the less wealthy, alters according to context, none would deny they are still Meghval. It is only very occasionally that the gap between the richer and poorer Meghvals becomes so vast that they are considered a different sort of Meghval in the eyes of their caste mates. It is, therefore, only in highly specific contexts that we see a partial collapsing of the boundary.

Using boundaries as a starting point helps not only to locate where one status identity begins and another ends (a necessary tool for the empirical study of status) but also indicates the structural component of identity making. In other words, in order for it to inform the action or

practice of those adopting it, it must also have a recognisable boundary that demarcates it in opposition to another identity or status boundary. This structural component is defined by the evaluation given by or to the members of that status group.

So far in this discussion we have assumed that status is something actively chosen by the strategising participants of social life. However, status is not just constructed from within the group, it is also constructed by those outside. Thus status does not exist outside history; rather status identities can be projected onto a group and constructed as such over time through such mechanisms as labelling. Howard Becker (1963) in *"Outsiders"* explored how self-identity and group identity may be determined or constructed by the terms used to classify them. This is particularly evident in 'traditional' notions of caste that draw on the Brahminical dictates found in the "Laws of Manu", which in part continue to inform the contemporary South Asian practice of caste. Thus Chapter One in describing the village more generally also shows how restrictions are still placed on the social interactions between castes in the village. However, it also shows what has happened to the social structure of the village as a consequence of the upward mobility of a particular lineage of Meghvals. Whilst conversely Chapter Two highlights that the same actors revert to caste and kinship norms to determine who can get a job in agriculture during the mine closures.

Thus what is also striking about Mudharamsar village is that the most economically affluent and politically active families in the village are from low castes. This virtual, although not exclusive, reversal of dominant social relations in rural India will be explored in conjunction with the economic turmoil. It is both these factors that provide the backdrop to the various metamorphoses of caste, class, and religion in Mudharamsar. In fact, the voice of my informants, expressed in the following pages, suggests that caste, in certain cases, is still very much a measure of status and security but by no means does it have the final word on it. Thus the central themes of caste, class and religion to be explored can be characterised as containing a plethora of status identity configurations that lead back to underlying concerns over security, access to resources and the development of either social or economic capital. However, before

going on to explore the themes above in detail, it is necessary to establish who the central actors in this thesis are.

The Meghvals

The Meghval community was formed by members of the low caste groups, whose collaboration began in Bombay, present day Mumbai. Historically, the caste members worked as agricultural labourers, tanners, cleaners, weavers, scavengers, messengers and guides throughout British India. The Meghvals are distributed over Rajasthan, Gujarat, Maharashtra and Madhya Pradesh. In Rajasthan, they are also known as 'Megh', 'Meghval', or 'Meghbangi'. Other communities also refer to them as 'Meghwal', 'Chamar' or '*Harijan*' and are considered as synonymous with the 'Bhambi'. The Meghvals were regarded as among the lowest of all Hindu castes and consequently outside normal social relations.

Snodgrass (2006) in his study of the Bhat community suggests that the Meghvals, under the name Bhambhi, were leather workers and occasionally ate the flesh of the carcasses they removed and that this contributed to their collective impurity. Among his Bhat informants, Bhambhis were also considered to be guardians or caretakers of the village and thus were also synonymous with Balais (Ibid: 82). Some using the derogatory terms 'dhedh' or 'dhedha', which means literally to drag, thus relating them back to their previous occupation of removing dead animals, also call them. According to the Census of India 1901 the Meghval (under the general names of Chamar and Bhambhis) were classified as untouchables.

Repeated famines and search for work led many of the untouchable castes (henceforth ex-untouchable or Scheduled Castes) to Mumbai where they were hired by the colonial state as janitors and scavengers in the Bombay Municipal Corporation (henceforth BMC). They formed a caste council in 1937 and named themselves the Meghvals and created myths and stories of a shared past. The caste members began to be active in nationalist politics and anti-caste discrimination movements beginning in the 1930s. Since then, their increased presence in the public sector, exposure to trade unions, the spread of education and awareness amongst the

youth as a result of accessing the positive discrimination measures of the state, and interaction with political parties, have led to the advancement of some sections of the caste. Today they are listed in the official Schedule of Castes in Rajasthan and are notified as Megh, Meghval, Menghvar. According to the 1981 Rajasthan Census, their population was 889,300. In the same census, the Meghvals were listed as an occupational group engaged in the tanning of hides, farming and agricultural labourers.

Their constitution, the "*Meghval Gnati Bandharan*" or "The Meghval Caste-Constitution", was first written in 1953, and subsequently updated in 1977, 1986, and 1993. The Constitution outlined the justifications for adopting their new name and set out parameters for social relations, practices, and customary laws. The most significant article of the caste Constitution is one that decrees that no Meghval shall drag or skin dead animals and if caught so doing would be fined a sum of money. Thus the caste, through their Constitution, sought to reinvent themselves via a process of Sanskritisation so as to remove the basis for their previous subjugation. This was further reinforced by the adoption of the typically twice-born practice of wearing the *janeu* (a sacred thread adorned after the second sacred birth ritual observed in the presence of a Brahmin priest).

In addition, the advancement of a politically savvy elite in the caste shaped much of the ideology around how 'Meghval' social advancement should be achieved. For example, the several reviews of the caste Constitution since its conception in 1953 have made the marital family and conjugal life more compatible with high caste Hindu customary laws. Patriliney, for example, has come to replace matriliney, while, bride price has been replaced by the dowry system (see Chapter One).

Religion is another key area in which Meghval status-making is enshrined within the caste constitution. The caste-collective had brought together Ramdeo Pir, also known as Ramdev, a Hindu/Muslim miracle saint, as their chief deity, with the varied religions, sectarian traditions, Gods, and Goddesses of other sections of the caste. Dhali (2007), for example, suggests that historically religious identities among Meghvals were not perceived to be exclusive identities. She suggests that in the past there was little internal agreement amongst Meghvals about their membership of a religious community. The data presented in Chapter

Four of this thesis further shows that the religious affiliations of caste members are a matter of ongoing debate, dissent and controversy within the caste. This area of controversy continues to shape their contemporary status-making. For example, the various divergent religious traditions have come to be stratified according to a spectrum of Sanskritised practices, where essentialised notions of Meghval identity, history and gender are used as a justification for adopting one practice over another. This status orientated stratification of religious practices further differentiates the caste. However, there are also key moments where they unite and this is seen quite clearly in the caste's relationship to Ramdev. What will be discussed in Chapter Four then, is how the various religious beliefs of the Meghvals have become indicators of social capital and change. Attention will be paid to how religious motifs may be assembled and dismantled to support Meghval status and identity making, along with a detailed look at the more general festivals of the village and how these have changed over time.

Moreover, because historically the Meghvals were drawn from a large and varied group of low castes, some had converted to different religions. Thus, being a Meghval, historically at least, did not exclude the possibility of being a Christian or a Muslim. However, by the nineteenth century the upper castes had already accepted the Meghvals (then the Chamar and Bhambhi) as Hindus and included their deities and belief system as a part of Hinduism. This appropriation was bitterly contested and still rages today in the form of a dispute over the ownership of the most important pilgrimage site for Ramdev worshippers. What will also be examined in the thesis is that this conflict has also come to characterise aspects of the religious affiliation within the Meghval community itself. The varying religious practices of the Meghval in Mudharamsar will be explored in relation to the Sanskritisation, Hinduisation, and Rajputisation of specific elements of the Ramdev tradition in contrast to other religious traditions practiced among the Meghval and other castes.

Ramdev has undergone what I term a process of Rajputisation. This is where the image and motifs of Ramdev have changed over time from those with strong Islamic elements to those where he is depicted as a Rajput hero. The corollary to Rajputisation is that of Hinduisation where the Islamic motifs in the story of Ramdev have been altered to fit Hindu doctrine. What will be explored in this thesis is how these traditions have come to represent particular notions

of status and Meghval identity that on the one hand highlight the heterogeneity of the Meghval caste, but on the other unite the caste as the original followers of Ramdev.

Internal differentiation in religious belief is also closely related to the economic differentiation detailed in Chapter Two and the socio-political differentiation explored in Chapter Three. What will be discussed is that this differentiation is intimately tied up with concerns over the social advancement of the Meghval caste and how best to achieve it. In addition, it will explore for whom these methods work, particularly in a time of economic uncertainty. For example, certain actors place more emphasis on Sanskritisation and substantialisation as a methodology whilst others suggest the problems are economic. Thus, the diversity within the Meghval caste will be explored in relation to problems surrounding the underlying concerns of security, status, and the unequal distribution of social and economic capital.

A concurrent theme that will also be explored is that whilst internal differentiation marks the experience of everyday life among the Meghvals of Mudharamsar, the importance of caste substantialisation enshrined in the caste constitution is not lost. What will hopefully become apparent through the chapters that follow is that the Meghvals do unite in a number of key contexts. These contexts bring together elements of each identity (caste, class and employment, politics, and religion) under broad Substantialised themes. The most notable contexts are ones where the caste is placed in direct competition with another caste, in this case the slightly higher caste of Kumbhars. This somewhat antagonistic relationship between the Meghvals and Kumbhars will be discussed as an underlying theme throughout the thesis. However, what will also be explored are the various contexts in which this antagonism arises and for whom it is most prominent.

Methodology

I first visited India in 1999 where I conducted undergraduate research into identity and social change. It was during this trip that I first went to Rajasthan and saw the Indira Gandhi Canal. I

began my fieldwork in 2005, the first few months of which were in fact spent in a small village near this canal. This is because I had initially planned to study the controversy surrounding the canal, health rights claims, malaria and illness. However, it was not to be, as the police had informed the NGO I was working alongside that I could no longer stay in that area. Unbeknown to me, I had breached the conditions of my research visa by going within 50 km of the international border with Pakistan.

This was a blow, especially since I had, upon first arriving, made sure to ask my informants the proximity of the border. Through a friend in Bikaner I was introduced to Kolayat town and from there I found Mudharamsar. Believing I could follow through with my original research proposal, I set forth to do the household survey and initial introductions. However, it became very clear from these early conversations that the interests of people in the village had nothing to do with the canal. In fact, many had never even been near it and the village was too far away to receive any of its precious water. Rather, my new informants were all, unsurprisingly, pre-occupied with the mine closures in their area and the loss of their jobs. Seeing how significant the mines were to them, I felt uncomfortable pursuing a topic that clearly had little relevance to their lives. Instead, I chose to be led by my informants' concerns as Bernard (1994) notes rather than impose my previous research agenda, which was clearly inapplicable. As such, I followed Briggs (1986) understanding of the interview as a socio-linguistic event and was careful to listen to the direction my informants wanted to take the discussion we had.

By taking such a position, I began to feel that my research was being driven by the unusual context of an upwardly mobile low caste Meghval family, a family I felt to be instantly compelling. Conscious that I was living with this family and the bias that may arise from this fact, I actively sought out the company of other villagers. I carried out a series of door-to-door surveys as a vehicle not only to collect household data, but also as a way to spend time with every caste and household in the village. I did much of the 'hanging out' anthropologists are renowned for, but I structured it by location in the village and time of day. This was partly to

avoid being out in the blistering heat of the desert sun, but also because there were definite daily rhythms and routines in the village that I wanted to capture.

I divided my time in the field between activities in the village as well as exploring extended networks outside of the village in the nearby town of Kolayat and the district's capital city, Bikaner. I carried out some archival research during the first phase of my research. However, because the economic context during my fieldwork gave rise to such a flurry of activity, the contemporary lived experience and perceptions of socio-economic change were more pressing. It was only upon my return, when the mines had re-opened, that I was able to collect the recorded historical data. I tried to spend an equal amount of time with men and women, as well as children and the elderly. Initially I was very much adopted by the men of the village, but as time progressed and as many female anthropologists in South Asia and beyond come to experience, I was slowly co-opted by the women until I was firmly identified as 'one of them' (Bell, Caplan and Karim, 1993).

For a majority of the research period I was living with the Meghval family. As a result I had limited access to their Kumbhar rivals. This access was limited on two fronts: firstly, because I did not experience their everyday living arrangements, and secondly, because the tensions between the two families meant that I was torn between paying respect and duty towards my hosts and the desire to collect balanced data. My Meghval hosts expected me to be supportive of their existing social relations and to assimilate into family life as an "adopted daughter". As such, the social mores expected of those living under the same roof, including how they manifest in physical access to others in the village, became even more apparent through my own experiences of living with a family. As a result, this understanding further revealed the rivalry between the two families that characterises much of the key debates and tension in the village.

Structured and Unstructured Methods

As a way to try to understand the tensions in the village I constructed a series of structured methods. These involved map making, a household survey and a festival survey. I constructed

three principle maps. First, I drew a general map of the village, the second differentiated location by ward, caste and type of house, whilst the third map highlighted the location of religious sites. This enabled me to make a range of comparisons between the areas of the village, caste, religiosity, occupation, avoidance, friendship, affluence, and kinship.

These physically observable comparisons could then be traced onto the more qualitative responses and dialogues I encountered, encouraged and stumbled into. These detailed exegeses involved the perceptions informants had concerning everyday life and their's or others' lived experience. This covered a range of opinions and attitudes, such as what they thought, felt, understood about how people conducted their affairs in the village, and what they thought were the correct, altered, or aberrant activities and lifestyles of others in the village. As part of my qualitative toolkit, I also collected life histories, origin stories, and family genealogies.

Chapter I. Caste and Kinship: The Physical and Social Structure of the Village

Caste and kinship are two central aspects of social organisation in Mudharamsar village. This is highlighted by the unusual circumstances of one large and powerful family. What is more, and against normative village structures wherein high castes typically dominate, this powerful family belongs to the low-caste Meghval (leather-working) community. As one might expect, the relationship between this family and other castes in the village is fraught with conflict, confrontation, and contradictions. Such relationships are common; however, the most notable are between their largest rival, and also low caste, a wealthy family from the Kumbhar (potter) community. The anomalous position of the landowning Meghval lineage vis-à-vis the normative caste hierarchy provides the backdrop to competing interests, commensal relations, and discourses concerning caste, inter and intra-caste, and kin-based relations in the village. In addition, these tensions were complicated during my time in the field by the economic insecurity arising from the mine closures. This is because the mine closures and increased concern over income and status had, in fact, further elevated the socio-economic position of the Meghvals as the primary source of agricultural employment for people in the village. How people in the village interpreted these changes not only shaped the perceptions of existing relations, but also appeared in how people structured and negotiated the physical space of the village.

This chapter has three parts with three distinct but interlocking aims. Part one will offer an overview of the village both physically and demographically, the second part of the chapter will discuss caste and inter and intra-caste relations in the village; and part three will examine relatedness and kinship among the Meghvals and others in the village.

This latter point is reinforced throughout the thesis by highlighting the relationships between members of the two lineages. As such, I refer to the central Meghval and, to a lesser

extent, Kumbhar families in several different ways. The first category of description is the most general using terms such as powerful or wealthy to denote these individuals as different from the less wealthy villagers. The second categories of description are more specific and relate to specific branches of the lineage, for example, those descended from the original patriarch. The third category is even more specific and relates to differences in the following generation and finally, the present generation of sons, their wives and children. In each of the three categories I refer to the names of the specific ancestor and, where appropriate the name of the individual being discussed.

Part 1: Outline of The Village

The following sections describe the patterns of social interaction in the village as they are manifest through everyday activities. This will involve an overview of the caste and settlement patterns, pathways taken through the village, household arrangements, temple-going, eating food, and collecting water.

Mudharamsar village is said by informants to have been founded by a group of wealthy Paliwal merchants in the 16th Century. An inscription in the interior chamber of the Hinglaj Mata temple dating to the same period supports the origin story. Moreover, there is an old cenotaph in the village and many informants have said that it was built to commemorate the Paliwal founders. However, a few informants also suggested that Maharaja Ganga Singh of Bikaner commissioned it some time in the early 1900s. The main part of the village is located on the right-hand side of a small metalled interior road heading in a south-westerly direction. There is a regular bus service to Bikaner that stops every two hours at the small bus stop situated near to one of the main entrance roads into the village. This service connects the surrounding villages in the irrigated region close to Bhajju, near to the Pakistan border, and to Kolayat and Bikaner city. The bus is often overcrowded and laden with fruits and vegetables to be sold at the market towns. The left side of the road closest to the village is principally made up of uncultivated grazing land owned by members of the Meghval family in the village. There are two Meghval houses situated at the eastern end of the village on the left-hand side of the

road and the houses of the semi-nomadic Kalbelia are situated some distance from the Meghvals' on the same side of the road.

Mudharamsar is a mixed caste village comprising predominantly of Scheduled Castes (SCs) and Other Backward Classes (OBCs). There are 236 households in the village and the largest caste groups are the Meghval and the Kumbhar. Based on my household survey data there are 502 Meghval inhabitants and 266 Kumbhars. Other well-represented castes in the village are: Nayak (207), Sadh (164), Darzi (139) and Nai (136) (see Table 1 for a breakdown of castes in the village and Table 2a, b, and c for their traditional occupations).

Meghvals have been the largest caste in the village for some time. The 1961 census, which used Mudharamsar as one of its 36 village case studies, reported that Meghvals made up 31% of the population. In 1961 there were a total of 71 houses with Meghvals making up the majority (21 houses), followed by Darzi (15), and Kumbhar (11) (Bhargava & Gupta 1965a:22). The population of Mudharamsar has almost quadrupled since the 1961 census was carried out from 419 to 1669 inhabitants in 2006.

No.	Caste	No. Of Houses	No. Of Males	No. Of Females	Total Population
1	Meghval	70	271	231	502
2	Kumbhar	44	143	123	266
3	Nayak/ Bhil	30	116	91	207
4	Sadh	22	81	83	164
5	Nai	19	64	72	136
6	Darzi	18	75	64	139
7	Kalbelia	8	52	34	86
8	Dholi	4	14	18	32
9	Sansi	4	11	9	20
10	Paliwal	4	8	10	18
11	Lohar	3	14	12	26
12	Rajput	3	8	7	15
13	Bhat	3	13	9	22
14	Muslim	2	14	11	25
15	Chuhan	1	4	2	6
16	Brahmin	1	2	3	5
	Total	236	890	779	1669

Table 1. Table showing the population of castes in the village.

The following three tables show the different castes in the village, their traditional occupations and their current classification under the Rajasthan government list of recognised caste groups. The OBC and SC classifications pertain to those castes that are deemed to have certain disadvantages and are accorded reservations in government institutions and more recently educational institutions. The other category listed here is commonly referred to as FC (Forward Caste or general caste). These groups are traditionally seen as either intermediate or high caste.

Caste	Traditional Occupation	Current Classification	Total Population
Kumbhar	Potters	OBC	266
Nayak/ Bhil	Tribal group	OBC	207
Sadh	Sectarian Caste	OBC	164
Darzi	Tailor	OBC	139
Nai	Barber	OBC	136
Lohar	Blacksmith	OBC	26
Muslim	N/A	OBC	25
Bhat	Tribal group	OBC (DNT)	22
		TOTAL	985

Table 2a. Table showing the OBC castes in Mudharamsar Village. OBC= Other Backward Classes, DNT= Denotified Tribe.

Caste	Traditional Occupation	Current Classification	Total Population
Meghval	Leather Workers	SC	502
Kalbelia/ Nath	Snake Catchers	SC	86
Dholi	Musicians	SC	32
Sansi	Distillers	SC (DNT)	20
		TOTAL	640

Table 2b. Table showing the SC in Mudharamsar village. SC= Scheduled Castes, DNT= Denotified Tribe.

Caste	Traditional Occupation	Current Classification	Total Population
Paliwal	Pastoralist	FC	18
Rajput	Royal or Military	FC	15
Chuhan	Religious Guards/ landowners	FC	6
Pushkarna Brahmin	Priestly/ Ritual	FC	5
		TOTAL	44

Table 2c. Table showing the FC castes in Mudharamsar village. FC = Forward Castes.

There are six official wards in the village. In the past the ward structure primarily corresponded to the distribution of castes in the village. Today, however, whilst certain wards are still physically dominated by particular castes, others are more mixed. In addition, there are specific areas in the village given alternative titles that correspond partly to caste, but also to other forms of status differentiation. Consequently, subdivisions can be drawn within the existing ward structures that tell of the social unities and divisions between different status groups within the same ward.



Plate 1. A woman and children at a feeder well in Mudharamsar.

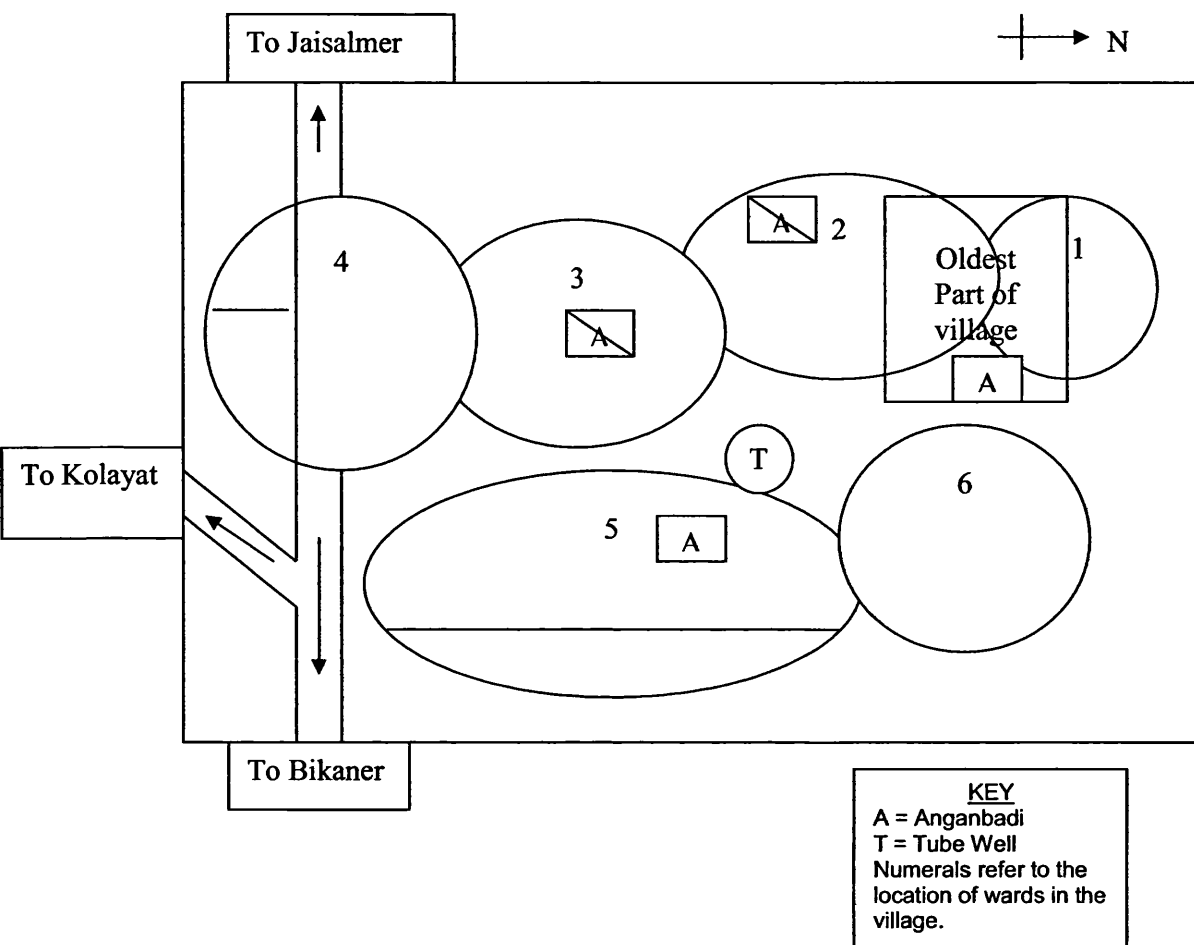


Figure 3. Approximate distribution of wards in the village and subdivisions based on caste, class and history. The wards shown in figure three correspond to the following caste groups: (1.) Sadh, Darzi, Nayak, Paliwal, Rajput, Brahmin, (2.) Kumbhar, Nai, Nayak, Muslim, (3.) Kumbhar, Nai, Darzi, Nayak, Meghval, (4.) Bhat, Kalbelia (Jogi), Nayak, Meghval, (5.) Meghval, Kumbhar, (6.) Meghval, Nayak, Dholi, Kumbhar.

The Three Main Temples

Although chapter four will deal with religion in more detail, a brief outline of the main temples will be given here. Whilst there are numerous small shrines and a number of minor temples located in and around the village, there are three principal temples: one dedicated to Hinglaj Mata, one dedicated to Thakurji (also called the Shiv or Krishna temple), and one dedicated to Ramdev. Both Ramdev and Hinglaj have strong regional significance and hold great importance for the people of Mudharamsar.

Hinglaj and Ramdev are central to the sectarian traditions that make up an important feature of religiosity in Mudharamsar village. The Hinglaj temple is the oldest in Mudharamsar and an inscription in the interior chamber states that it was built in 1540. Hinglaj is considered a manifestation of Sati and her life story is the same as the classic Daksha story of Shiva's wife.

This story is as follows: the goddess Sati who was married to Shiva immolated herself in her father's (Daksha's) house to avenge an insult to her husband by her father. Shiva, after punishing his father-in-law, who is considered responsible for his wife's death, wandered about with Sati's body, dancing like a demented creature. The wild rhythm of the leaping god shook the universe and the celestials, fearing the worlds would come to a premature end, asked for help from Vishnu the Preserver. This god took his flaming discus and cut the body of Sati into fifty pieces, all of which fell to the earth and each of which is celebrated as a holy place of Hinduism. Hinglaj is believed to be the place where the dismembered goddess Sati's head with its *hingul* (*sindhoor*, vermillion) fell. The place known as Hinglaj is located approximately 120 Kilometres North East of Karachi, on the Hingol River in Makran, Pakistan. Hinglaj Mata as she has now come to be known is associated with the *Kanphata* yogis, the *Kunda Panth* and the Sindhi traditions (cf. Briggs 1998 [1938]).

The wealthy Meghval family in the village built the Ramdev temple in 1993. Dominique-Sila Khan (2003) has shown that Ramdev was an Ismaili missionary born in Rajasthan in the 15th Century; his main shrine (Samadhi) is a four hour drive from Mudharamsar. Whilst the literature on Ramdev suggests he was Muslim, he has been fully incorporated into the Hindu tradition and is currently worshipped by both Hindus and Muslims. Celebrated for his healing powers and his pre-disposition toward caste equality, the worship of Ramdev is now perceived by Hindu informants in Mudharamsar as a bhakti cult and is popular among ex-untouchable communities and the Meghval in particular. Ramdev, similar to Hinglaj, is also associated with the Kunda Panth secret sects of which there are several members within the village and one of the three main traditions of the village to be discussed in Chapter Four.

The Sadh, a sectarian caste of Shivite tradition, were in the process of renovating the Shiva/ Krishna temple whilst I was in the field (2005-2007). The interior chamber dates back to

the 1960s. The temples in the village are said to be used by most of the villagers; however, conflicts over who should have access are rife.

Everyday Interactions: The Physical Structure and Social Contours

When discussing the structure of the village, informants often used the concept of 'outside' or 'inside' the village. When I asked people to elaborate on this they drew on caste and class distinctions implying values to each of the divisions. Following these discussions it is possible to say that the village can be divided into ten key areas. Referring back to the map in Figure 3, the area classed as ward 5 can be sub-divided into two sections. The largest and densely clustered section closest to the centre of the village is entirely inhabited by Meghvals that share the same clan or *Gotr*, Panwar, most of whom are part of the Meghval lineage descended from the original patriarch, Mungla Ram Panwar. This family owns more land than other Meghvals in the area and are more spread out, with the densely clustered houses of other Meghval, Nayak and Sansi families to one side of them.

Nayak were formally notified as part of the Bhil tribal group, but in Rajasthan is now considered SC. They generally keep to themselves in the village and stay within their mohollah; the exception is one Nayak family that lives on the outskirts of the oldest part of the village. This family has been in the village for many years and is fairly well respected by the people in that section of the village. The female head of this household works with women in the *Anganbadi* (village centre for women and children).

The Sansi similarly keep to themselves. Originally a caste of distillers, today they are regarded as having very low status in the village and are generally kept out of village affairs. They have taken on the traditional occupation of removing dead cattle that was once the purview of the Meghval. Their numbers are very low in the village and many have left for the city. The Darzi are fairly large in number and whilst many are engaged in their traditional occupations of tailoring, there are some that own land. This community is fairly dispersed

throughout the western and northern parts of the village. Many live near the Bhat community on the south western side of the village.

As will be shown below, many of the Meghvals not of the wealthy lineage live in the densely clustered part of the village. These poorer Meghvals claim, with varying degrees of genealogical accuracy, to be relatives of the Panwar lineage. When informants from other areas of the village describe the village they refer to this section in various different ways: “the Meghval part”, “centre part” and the “wealthy part”. The choice of language used to describe this part of the village indicates the range of values attached to this section by different informants. Moreover, there are some key subdivisions within this central section of the village. To the east of the densely clustered part are the homes of the wealthy Panwar Meghvals. In total this area is fairly spacious with two well kept tracks running parallel to each other, with smaller evenly spaced tracks joining them up in a grid like format. Many Meghvals refer to this area as the centre of the village, whereas higher caste groups tend to call it the “Meghval area” with derogatory connotations. The wealthier Meghvals generally refer to it as their *Mohollah* (neighbourhood).

Ward 4 can be divided into three: first, by the road, second, by the Kalbelia settlement, and third by a Meghval settlement. Whilst the Meghval family in the eastern part of the subdivision is visited by Panwar Meghvals from the other side of the road on occasions of births, deaths and marriages, they are often said to live “outside” the village and to be a different Meghval *Gotr*. This *Gotr* is supposed to have moved to the village much later than the Panwar Meghvals. All Panwar Meghvals on the other hand, are said to have originated from the village of Bap located in Jodhpur district.

The Kalbelia who live in the western-most part of this division are considered by many of the people living ‘inside’ the village as illegal inhabitants. They are not seen as being part of village life at all, even though they have been there for fifteen years and do participate in some of the village’s religious activities. The Kalbelia migrate to Haryana in the summer months in search of fresh pastures for their camels and goats. They are essentially semi-sedentary pastoralists but many of them also participate in their traditional occupation of snake catching and charming, and often perform traditional dances and ceremonies for wealthy Rajput families

in Bikaner city and beyond. Their status in the village is very low and they have been linked with prostitution. No informants in the village referred to them in this way; however such accusations were made frequently by some Rajput informants in the city. Villagers do, nevertheless, regard them as being “dirty, ill-mannered, and a foul-smelling annoyance that should be removed from the area”. For example, when I went to visit the Kalbelia, I asked an informant what he thought I should take as a gift; he replied: “a bar of antiseptic soap!”

The final subdivision is the old part of the village. This area is comprised primarily of Sadh, Brahmin, Paliwal and Rajput families. The *haveli* houses that make up this area are some of the oldest in the village and are claimed to be the original houses of the Paliwal founders. The distribution of castes within the old part of the village is not unusual for the Bikaner district; in fact, it is the norm to find Brahmins and closely associated castes in the old part of most towns and cities. However, the fact that Mudharamsar village has an old part is very unusual and signifies the historical and regional importance of the village.

Informants state that historically only Brahmins were allowed to live in the holy town of Kolayat and those wishing to be close to the holy site lived in Mudharamsar. Paliwal informants wax lyrical that, once upon a time the village was inhabited by a group of wealthy merchants. These former rulers of the village are said to have built coins and gold into the very walls of the old *havelis* to preserve their wealth and to have it displayed for visitors to see. Consequently, there are many myths of buried treasure and lost fortunes among the remaining Paliwals. The villagers living outside the old part refer to this part as the “Sadh part”, the “old part”, and a few older informants have called it the “Paliwal part”.

Household Structures, Dwelling Places and Roads

Types of Houses

There are three different types of house in Mudharamsar. Within each of these, however, there are considerable variations in style and size. The first type of house is the vernacular style typical of the Thar Desert and common among the tribal communities and low caste pastoralists.

In Mudharamsar, these houses are used by Meghval, Sansi, Kalbelia and Bhat castes. The houses are made from a mixture of sand and dung, light brown in colour, with either a thatched roof or tree branch beams covered in the same plaster used for the walls. They are commonly round structures but can also be square. The branches are collected from the surrounding area, and whilst in theory are free to be gathered, they are in short supply. Enterprising children can often be seen gathering and selling bundles of the wood for a nominal sum. These branches and twigs are also used for firewood by most of the households in the village and there is a general concern that soon the natural supply will run out. Bricks and concrete, on the other hand, are fairly cheap building materials in this region and most villagers will buy or scavenge materials from the several large brickworks near to the village.

Thus the second and most popular form of house is the brick or concrete built house. These are square structures that are often rendered and painted white, blue, light yellow, terracotta, green, or a dusky pink; some are also left unpainted with the brick or concrete exposed. Whilst all castes in the village would be happy to live in a concrete or brick house, this category contains the most variation in quality, size, style, and cost. Therefore, deducing the economic position of the inhabitants of such houses is fairly straightforward. These houses can range from being three storied; multiple roomed, pristinely painted with ornately elaborated façades on the one hand, to single storied, one room houses with bare walls and scavenged corrugated iron or thatched roofs on the other.

The third types of house are small versions of the common *haveli* style found in most of Rajasthan's towns and cities. A majority of these houses are located in the old part of Mudharamsar. Today, they are occupied by Rajput, Sadh, and Paliwal castes along with one Nayak family. There is only one other *haveli* style house and that is located toward the south of the village and is occupied by the matriarch, Rupa Ram's widow, and two of her sons, and their families. This style of house is fashioned from sandstone blocks with ornately carved wooden beams in the interior, and wooden frescoed ceilings. These houses are quite elaborate and like their city equivalents signify status. However, those found in Mudharamsar today are quite dilapidated and often in a state of disrepair, speaking volumes of a previously affluent era that has long since departed.

The Arrangement of Houses and Household Structures

Most of the families in the village live in compounds often containing between two and six separate houses. Compounds can be made up of any arrangement of the house types listed above, with two exceptions: the old *havelis* and the rows of 'terraced' concrete houses. A household in this context is defined by the use of a common hearth and the houses or buildings within a compound need not have a kitchen but serve more as bedrooms and living areas. The compounds are demarcated spaces, encircled by a boundary marked either by a concrete wall, fence made from twigs, rope, or lines of small stones. Informants state that the choice of material for fencing the compound depends on the wealth of the family.

There are also more obvious physical boundaries between clusters of same caste compounds and compound clusters made up of a different caste. The divisions between such compounds are primarily marked by a small track, which indicates spatially the social distance between the castes. These tracks tend also to be used as effluence drains and are referred to as *kacca* roads. For some, these roads run at the side or back of the compounds. Those that run to the side of the compounds are usually between compounds of the same caste, whereas those that run at the back are usually of different caste. This latter arrangement entails that the compounds be built facing in the opposite direction with a fairly large track in between. Both parties will rarely use the back track preferring the front track for all forms of access. A further building style is to have one cluster closely backing onto another cluster containing a different caste, with just a small gap in between. In this context, members of both clusters access the *kacca* track in between. However, on a day-to-day basis most choose to use the track to the front of their property. These front access tracks are considered *pakka* roads and can, in theory, be used by all castes.

This type of private compound demarcation is more-or-less present in most wards in the village. The exceptions are in wards two and three, where the highest concentration of terraced houses can be found. These houses are single storied, one or two roomed, concrete and brick structures. The terrace houses are caste specific and it is only the poorer Nayak, Meghval and Sansi who reside in these houses. Most of these terraces contain a small yard of compacted sand

and dung where animals such as chickens or goats have shelter. These houses are closely packed to form rows of individual households often with very small gaps of no more than a foot or two between. In some cases the walls of one house will provide the walls to another, particularly those without yards. However, it is generally the yard walls that are shared.

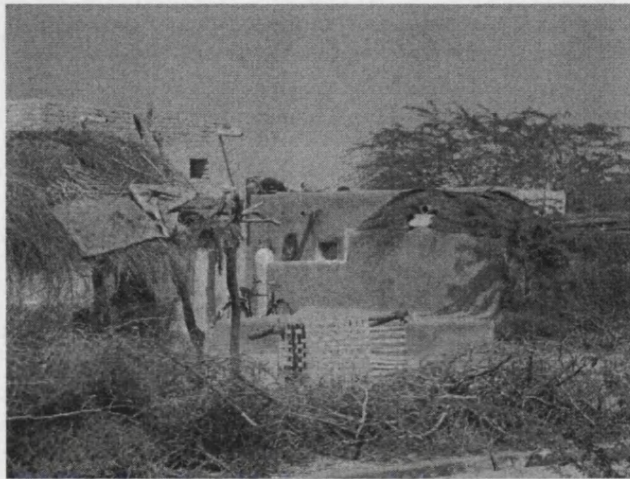


Plate 2. A rectangle vernacular style of house in Mudharamsar. The twig fence in the foreground demarcates the compound boundary.



Plate 3. The descendants of Mungla Ram's main house and compound gateway. The main house is the older building, obscured slightly by the gate, in the left of the picture facing east. The cows in the picture belong to the powerful family. This compound contains four separate but related households.

Household	Definition
<i>Original Patrilineal Compound- shared hearth (khas Ghar or main house)</i>	Two or more houses including the original patrilineal house. All members will eat from the original house's hearth.
<i>Original Patrilineal Compound- separate hearths</i>	Two or more separate houses, but of the same lineage eating from separate hearths.
<i>New (break-away) Compound</i>	As above but can also include agnatic kin.
<i>Single household Nuclear</i>	A household with no extended kin.
<i>Extended household</i>	A household with extended kin.

Table 3. A table defining the types of households and their living arrangements in Mudharamsar.

Household Structures

The larger compounds comprise of extended or joint family groups². The most common residential arrangement is that if a couple has two or more married sons they will share a hearth with the youngest son, his wife, and their children. The other married sons will live in separate buildings either within the original patrilineal compound and without a private hearth, or will have built a second break-away compound or house with their own hearth near to what my informants often refer to as the "main house" (Khas Ghar or original patrilineal compound). Sons who have built second compounds generally tend to be older with their own children approaching marriageable age, although not exclusively so. Neighbours in this context will often be families of the same caste with traceable cognatic ties, usually along the male line of descent.

A second popular household structure is that of parents of married sons living alone in a separate house. This household will often not be located within a main compound or within the compound of close agnatic kin. Informants have said that this kind arises usually when parents are young and active, or if the sons have moved to a different village. A third household

² For a detailed analysis of the prevalence of the joint family residential arrangement in rural Rajasthan see Pauline Kolenda 2001 "The Joint-Family household in Rural Rajasthan: Ecological, Cultural and Demographic Conditions for its Occurrence". She also draws on data from the 1961 Census of India field reports and compares Mudharamsar village during that time to other villages in Rajasthan.

arrangement is a nuclear family living in one house that is not part of a compound but demarcated by a boundary. Whilst the nuclear family arrangement can in some cases be related to the fitness of the son's parents and their ability to live alone, it is also linked to wealth, employment opportunities, and desires to establish their own extended family compound, or if rifts between family members have occurred. Meghval informants have explained that once a son is married, and depending on their financial circumstances, the parents will build a separate house for the married couple. Often the parents will part finance this couple until the son is earning enough to be independent.

A final household arrangement is when the husband has settled uxori locally and is living with the wife and her parents in a single house. This form is primarily adopted when there are no sons in the wife's family, if the husband has come to Mudharamsar for employment in one of the mines, or if the husband has come from a less reputable family, thus giving the wife's family more bargaining power over where the couple will live. This latter form is unusual and the wife's family are normally compensated by not needing to provide a dowry or by offering a smaller dowry. Although the wife's family may have chosen a lower class family the match will nevertheless conform to caste and *Gotr* rules. Thus hypogamy is reported to be rare in the village and indeed, only three cases were returned from my household survey. However, it is important to note that the reportedly low figure could also partly be explained by the taboo surrounding hypogamy. Whilst marrying a woman from a higher status family is not without benefits, a 'good' Hindu wife, in popular discourse, should always be regarded as subservient to her husband. One way families suggested they can ensure this subservience is through having a higher economic standing than that of the new bride. Moreover, those males that did report hypogamy in the village often bemoaned the jests, jibes, and lack of respect they received as a result.

Like elsewhere in Rajasthan³, the joint family structure prevails in Mudharamsar and many families live in the bounded compounds outlined above. Whilst informants are often inconsistent in their use of the term joint-family or *pura parivar* (complete family), they are

³ See Pauline Kolenda (2001) "The joint-family household in rural Rajasthan". In *The Idea of Rajasthan*, pp 56-131.

usually referring to a household consisting of two or more related couples. Typically, a joint-family is composed of parents and one married son, his wife and their children (the patrilineal joint-family), but there can also be more than one married son (the patrilineal-collateral family). It is this latter type that prevails in Mudharamsar.

Houses, Compounds and the Meghvals

The relationship between house type and caste is largely in accord with what can be expected. Lower castes are predominantly found in the smaller vernacular or concrete and brick houses. Whilst the higher castes are located in either the old houses of Mudharamsar's past rulers or in new concrete or brick structures. However, looking at the different house types also tells us about the increasing intra-caste divisions in the village. For example, many of the poorer Meghvals live in the smaller concrete or brick houses or in the vernacular style houses. Conversely, the wealthy Meghvals own five large compounds each containing at least three houses. What is more, three of the five Meghval compounds actually house up to four different households. Their houses are generally one to three storeys with ornately carved and painted façades. Moreover, the main house of the Meghval family is an old *haveli* house and whilst it has the typical wooden beams, they are however not as ornate as those *havelis* found in the north/ Sadh area of the village. When asked, the family state that the house was the original house of their ancestors who first came to the village (Mungla Ram and Kharna Ram Panwar see kinship charts below). Later Karna Ram, the elder brother, built a second house with his wife next door to Mungla Ram. The fact that the original Meghval house is of the *haveli* style and that it is still occupied by the direct descendants of Mungla Ram's youngest son marks it as different: firstly, to the other Meghval houses in the village, and secondly, to the other houses of the wealthy family. In so doing, it signifies quite clearly the lineage of the family and secondly, the status of the family in relation to other Meghvals in the village.

Lineage is particularly significant as Mungla Ram's youngest son (Rupa Ram), in keeping with patterns of inheritance, stayed in the main house. Likewise, today it is his wife (Rukmani Devi) and her youngest son, Brijesh Panwar, who reside in the main house. The slight

deviation to this historical residence pattern is that Ramdial ji, the fourth eldest son (see the Meghval genealogies below) also resides in the main house. The reason for this is because his wife left him and so he moved back to the natal house and the fifth son, after his own marriage, took his house. The youngest son, Brijesh, will however inherit the property once his mother passes away. The Meghval's main house is not only a material representation of their historical presence in the village, but is also a statement about the position they currently occupy vis-à-vis other Meghvals.

This family's history in the village is widely known among the other Meghvals as well as other castes. The main house of the Rupa Ram's widows and indeed the entire compound, in which it sits, is a physical reminder of their status as the first Meghval family brought to Mudharamsar by the past rulers of the village. This historical background adds to their current social capital, as although they were brought in as lowly leather workers and agricultural labourers, they can claim direct descent from those Meghvals who held important client/patron relationships with the past rulers of the village. Pierre Bourdieu defined social capital as:

“the aggregate of the actual or potential resources which are linked to possession of a durable network of more or less institutionalised relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition” (1983:249).

As such, the relationship and network established through the past rulers of the village has over time increased the status of the Meghvals. What is more, this past social relationship is literally 'cast in stone' for all to see. Given the emphasis on descent among many in the village, other castes are interested in establishing similar types of lineages and client/patron relations amongst each other and this most often occurs among low and intermediate caste groups (most notably the Dholi, Kumbhar and Sadh).

Commensality and Social Interaction

When describing inter-caste relations in the village, I take my lead, with some additions, from Adrian C. Mayer (1966). As although in everyday life there are great discrepancies, the clearest expression of ritual or caste status, according to Mayer, was through the criterion of commensality. His view on the commensal hierarchy largely corresponds to the theory of ritual purity. Additional to this, however, my informants used commensal indicators to specify both positions of ritual purity but also inter-caste relations based on alternative measures to the purity-derived commensality.

Briefly, commensal contact refers to what Stevenson (1954) termed the “Hindu Pollution Concept” cited by Mayer (1966:33). These include the cooking of food and its consumption, smoking, and drinking water. For example, a superior caste will not accept food nor eat from the cooking pots or the hands of a caste that it regards as inferior. Nor when eating will any of its members sit next to people of an inferior caste in the same unbroken line (*pangat*); drinking and smoking follow similar rules of exclusion. However, these are the very general categories as within each there are graduations of exclusion according to the type of food consumed as well as the container from which it is served.

Foods are classified in two kinds: *kacca* and *pakka*. *Kacca* (lit. unripe) food is that which has been cooked in water and includes the staple food of cakes of unleavened breads (*roti*)⁴, and the daily range of curries and chutneys. It also includes certain food served at feasts: a curry made from curds, for example, or rice. Thus most every day foods are *kacca*. *Pakka* (lit. ripe), foods, by contrast, are those made with clarified butter (*ghi*), flour, sugar, and parched grains. Such foods are usually sweet to the taste and are most often eaten at feasts such as weddings (Ibid: 33).

Kacca foods can only be eaten from a far more restricted number of castes than *pakka* dishes. Thus the average daily diets make for exclusive eating. Being *pakka* food, parched grain

⁴ *Roti* can be a *pakka* food if cooked in *ghi*, however, when served plain it is regarded as *kacca*.

can be accepted by people from a larger number of castes and this is quite important, for these grains (wheat, sorghum, peanuts, pulses) can be served as snacks when visitors drop by. In Bikaner, rice, defined as *kacca* food by Mayer, is in fact considered a highly regarded festive and thus *pakka* food. Rice is not grown locally, is costly at the market, and thus is reserved for special occasions or if visitors come to the house. On these occasions, the rice is offered as a sweet and is cooked in milk, sugar, clarified butter, with cashew nuts and spices usually added. Likewise, Parry (1979: 95) reports that in contrast to rice as a purely *kacca* food, in Kangra boiled rice is offered as a festive food. In Mudharamsar, festive *pakka* food is very rich. The most common dishes during village festivities include a fried *bhujia* and *subje* curry (a regional speciality made from ground pulses which are deep fried and fashioned into namkeen, then mixed with vegetables) and *puri* (deep-fried bread common in North East India). The position of a caste on the commensal hierarchy, then, can be assessed on the principle that eating food cooked or served by another caste denotes equality with it or inferiority; and that not to eat denotes inequality or superiority (Ibid.:34). These types of commensal relations will be explored in detail below and will also provide the bench mark for denoting new forms of commensality and exclusivity here and in the chapters that follow.

Commensality: Water and Food

Restrictions over accessing water and taboos surrounding which communities can accept which type of food (*kacca* or *pakka*) from other communities are two factors that further reveal the social structure and the pattern of alliances within the village. The patterns described below are the 'ideal' patterns of commensality. However, these 'ideal' relations are often contradicted by certain contextually specific forms of commensality.

Kumbhars are able to share the same water sources with several of the other castes in the village (Nayak/ Bhil, Nai, and Dholi), whereas the Meghvals only use the wells located within their designated areas of the village. There is only one tube well in the village, which was built by the late Rupa Ram ji, the patriarch of the powerful Panwar Meghval family, over twenty-five years ago. However, this well feeds all the smaller wells from which the other

castes draw their water, except for the step well in the village. Meghval informants revelled in this paradox, and one informant summed up the sentiment quite concisely by saying that:

“Even though the other castes will never take water from our drinking pots they all take the water from our well”.

The Kalbelia and Bhat are the only castes in the village that will openly accept *kacca* food from the Meghvals, and this is usually obtained through begging. However, the Kalbelia must collect their water from the step well, which ironically is the only well not fed by the Meghval’s well, and are not permitted to take water from any of the feeder wells in the village.

The Kumbhars will accept *pakka* food from the Paliwal, Meghval, and Lohar. However, they will not accept food from the Sadh or Nai. This is because they give *dan* or a donation to certain castes for ritual functions performed for them. As D. B. Miller (1975: 70) points out, it is regarded as an ill-omen to accept food from those to whom one may give a donation for ritual services. Consequently, no return whatsoever should be accepted. This is because *dan* has a distinct morality different from the morality of other forms of payment. It has the character of a charitable donation humbly offered to someone of higher status, whose acceptance of the gift allows the donor to gain merit (c.f. Parry 1979). As temple keepers of the village, the Sadh receive such payments from the Kumbhar and higher castes and thus many castes will not accept food from them. The Sadh do, however, accept *kacca* food from Brahmins and some villagers have reported that this is due to their sectarian heritage where in the past they would have begged for food at temples and holy places.

A similar situation can be recorded for the Nai, although they will only accept *pakka* food from most of the high and intermediate castes in the village. The Meghvals claim they will accept *pakka* food from most of the high castes in the village. However, there were no occasions in the village when I witnessed this and it is likely that high castes would not have occasion to offer such food to them in the village itself.

Meghvals do, however, exchange *pakka* food with Kumbhars. Moreover, between specific actors, *kacca* food will also be exchanged. These forms of exchange usually take place between the less wealthy members of both castes and particularly among those who share

similar employment conditions in the mines. This example of commensality is highly significant for expressing the shared identity of a “labour class” among the daily-wage manual workers and extends to include Nayak and Nai castes. This alternative identity centred on work conditions and labour will be explained in more detail in the following two chapters.

Very few castes will accept food from the Dholi, the exception being the Sansi and Kalbelia. Although food will be accepted from the Nayak, (formally Bhil tribal community) by the Meghval, Sansi, and Kalbelia, they are not permitted to take water from the well close to the old part of the village, where some Nayak families live. Instead they must either get water from the step well or from the well in the main Nayak cluster situated closer to the centre of the village. Whilst generally the Sadh share a well with the Rajput, Pushkarna Brahmin, and Paliwal families who live in the old part of the village, they will also go to the step well and collect water. When asked about the step well water they say it is sweeter and purer than the main well water, even though the chance for contamination by animals is greater. In terms of taste, the underground water in the village and elsewhere in Bikaner is very saline and the step well water, being surface water, is indeed much sweeter.

Whilst for the older Sadh and Brahmin villagers it is unthinkable to accept food from lower caste groups, there are contradictions to this. These contradictions often occur in the younger generation. Amongst the younger informants (15 to 20 years) the exchange of food takes place regularly between people of different caste, albeit away from the watchful eyes of parents and older relatives. One clear example will illustrate this generational shift.

At the time of fieldwork a close Meghval informant of mine, Umesh, and her Pushkarna Brahmin friend Meenakshi were both in Class 10 of the government secondary school in Kolayat. They were firm friends and could often be seen in the market place of Kolayat pouring over brightly coloured bangles, giggling over Bollywood heartthrobs and discussing Umesh’s impending wedding. On the evening of Umesh’s *mendhi* or henna party, the event held the night before the wedding where henna is applied to the hands and feet of the bride, Meenakshi came to wish Umesh luck, and also to bring a gift. Knowing that she would be unable to attend the actual wedding as her father would not allow it, Meenaksi had to settle for a brief visit before the *mendhi* party was due to begin. Although Umesh’s mother offered her tea and a plate of

pakka food, Meenakshi did not accept it and gave Umesh her gift and quickly departed. When I asked Umesh about this, she replied:

“When we are at school or on our way to school we will share food but we cannot do this when we are in the house. It is very hard for Meenakshi she is Brahmin and her father is very strict. My mother will offer food because that is our custom when someone comes to the house, but we all knew she would not take it”.

It is in the space of the everyday activities of talking about the village, moving around the village, collecting water, eating food, and attending temple, that clear caste divisions are articulated. As we have seen, the physical structure of the village goes some way to illustrate certain caste divisions as well as internal divisions within particular castes. These divisions are further given credence, in village caste discourse, through rituals surrounding food, attending the houses of others, and in the ways in which inhabitants move around the village. The rationale given by informants as to why inter-caste interactions take the form they do are more often than not explained by the extent to which a particular caste observes the orthodox restrictions and allowances particularly with reference to the use of places of worship and the division of labour. Much of the animosity shown toward the Meghval in the village tends to highlight incidences when these restrictions are questioned or threatened. Conversely, good relations for such informants are expressed by a caste’s adherence to the restrictions. However, as is the case among the younger generations and the labour class, there are also other forms of commensality that centre on alternative appraisals of status and identity.

		Givers														
Receivers		Rajput	Brahmin	Chuhan	Paliwal	Sadh	Kumbhar	Nai	Darzi	Lohar	Nayak	Bhat	Dholi	Meghval	Sansi	Kalbelia
Rajput																
Brahmin																
Chuhan																
Paliwal																
Sadh																
Kumbhar																
Nai																
Darzi																
Lohar																
Nayak																
Bhat																
Dholi																
Meghval																
Sansi																
Kalbelia																

Key
 ||| Perfect, ripe or Pakkā food
 ||| Not perfect, unripe or Kaccā food
 No food is exchanged

Figure 4. Chart showing the general pattern of food exchange between castes in the village. The chart is to be read from the receivers' point of view: what type of food the receiver will accept.

Caste	Open Access	No Access	Disputed Access
Rajput	Open Access	No Access	No Access
Brahmin	Open Access	No Access	No Access
Chuhan	Open Access	No Access	No Access
Paliwal	Open Access	No Access	No Access
Sadh	Open Access	No Access	No Access
Kumbhar	Open Access	No Access	No Access
Nai	Open Access	No Access	No Access
Darzi	Open Access	No Access	No Access
Lohar	Open Access	No Access	No Access
Nayak	Open Access	No Access	No Access
Bhat	No Access	No Access	No Access
Dholi	Open Access	No Access	No Access
Meghval	No Access	No Access	Disputed Access
Sansi	No Access	No Access	No Access
Kalbelia	No Access	No Access	No Access

Key
Open Access: any member of the caste can enter the temple unchallenged.
No Access: no member of the caste can enter the temple.
Disputed Access: caste members do enter but are challenged or criticised for doing so.

Figure 5. Chart showing the patterns of access to the Hinglaj Mata temple according to informants and general observations.

Social Interactions: Structural Distance and the Division of Labour

Traditionally, certain castes could not live alongside other castes. Bound within the conventional scale of purity and pollution, the structure of many mixed caste villages in Rajasthan were, and indeed still are segregated on these terms. On the surface, Mudharamsar is no exception and as mentioned, castes have designated spaces in the village. Moreover, certain castes will even take alternative pathways through the village that they believe are reserved for their caste and for those with whom they are able to mix. Whilst some of these restrictions relate to what are referred to as either *kacca* or *pakka* roads, there are other restrictions that apply only to the *pakka* roads. Having said this however, there are clearly defined caste neutral spaces such as the Government School and the bus stop. The bus stop is situated outside the village parameters, which is a definite caste neutral zone.

Before explaining the roads and pathways in more detail, it is important to note that there are no surfaced roads in Mudharamsar. All the roads are sand tracks. A main road means it is wider than the others and the sand has been compacted through usage.

Neighbourhood Identity, Caste, and Pathways in the Village

There is for some a strong feeling of identity within certain caste-based segments of the village. This communal identity is partly a legacy from past caste commensality, yet it is confounded and reified by the contradictions encountered through the shift in power and upward mobility of the Meghval family. What is more, their position during the mine closures had in fact strengthened this feeling of identity. It is important to recognise that this identity is not a direct import from the past. Rather it has gone through several modifications that also find representation in the physical structure of the village. In the eyes of many high and some low castes, the centre of the village has moved from the old part, made up of predominantly Sadh, Paliwal, Rajput, and Brahmin families and situated in the north east, to the hub of the Meghval area toward the south east. In an attempt to deal with this altered layout, alternative and relatively modern restrictions have also been put in place. These modifications try to re-

reinforce as it were, the past physical structure of the village, even though many of the low castes refuse to abide by them.

Avoiding the Meghval Area and Restricting the Movements of Low Castes

Certain castes in the village go out of their way to avoid crossing the Meghval area, whilst others attempt to restrict the Meghvals from using certain roads. The *pakka* pathways that criss-cross the village have been designated by some as routes for certain castes. While many do ignore these restrictions, others do adhere to them and privately chastise those who flout them. Those groups living in the old part of the village will take an external road that leads around the eastern edge of the village. Sadh and Brahmin informants have said that they rarely walk through the centre of the village; as if they were to they would have to cross the Meghval area. Furthermore, there is a large pathway that leads more-or-less directly from the Meghval area to the Hinglaj Mata temple (see diagram in Chapter Four), and is considered the main access road by many. However, members of the Sadh community do not like the Meghvals using the section of the pathway that is closest to the temple. When at their most civil they suggest the Meghvals should take a smaller road round the side. However, most Sadh informants emphatically state that the Meghvals should not be allowed anywhere near the temple and certainly not to enter its inner chamber.

The sentiments expressed by the Sadh informants are not unique to the Mudharamsar context. It is an established, although changing rule that untouchable caste groups should be denied access to temples used by higher caste groups. Many of the lower caste groups in Mudharamsar also adhere to this idea. For example, neither the Sansi nor Kalbelia will ever walk through the centre of the village to the Hinglaj temple. Both communities have preferred to build their own shrines in their respective areas. The Kalbelia only ever enter the village during festivals to beg for food or to catch snakes if they have been invited to do so. The Sansi houses are inside the village; however, individuals rarely cross through the centre of the village and tend to walk round the western edge. Out of the Scheduled Caste communities in Mudharamsar, it is only members of the Meghval, Dholi, and Nayak castes that go to the

Hinglaj temple. Other low caste groups will not even attempt to go near the temple revealing that for some the traditional restrictions which direct inter-caste interaction are still very pervasive.

There are however some discrepancies in how these boundaries are observed. For example, among the low castes it is only the Meghval family, Dholi and Nayak that use the Hinglaj temple. However, it is only toward the Dholi and Nayak that no opposition is expressed. It is hard to establish why the Nayak are permitted, other than the relationship one family has with the old part of the village; however, it is less difficult to do so for the Dholi, who have tried to establish a kind of client/ patron relationship with the Sadh community and other higher caste groups. Whereas previously the Dholi played their instruments for all castes, today they are making exclusive choices over who to play for. As mentioned previously, lineage and the strong link between the wealthy Meghval family of today and the rulers of the village in the past, as well as the subsequent elevation of the Meghvals during the mine closures, has all impacted on the decisions of the Dholi. As such, it is the Dholi themselves that phrase their decision making in relation to the actions of the Meghval. It is unclear whether the Dholi's mobility choices are directly related to the position of the Meghvals. However, it is clear that a discourse exists that compares the actions of the Meghval family with those of other social climbers.

Part 2: Building Social Capital

Re-inventing Client/ Patron Relationships

The sections presented here offer a more detailed analysis of the key alliances and divisions within the village. These centre on specific social relationships between a restricted number of castes, namely the Dholi, Sadh, Nai and Kumbhar. How these restricted relationships relate to the upward mobility of the wealthy Meghval, the economic insecurity of the time, and changes to the social structure of the village, will also be described.

The Dholi are also an ex-untouchable caste similar to Meghvals. However, they are traditionally a caste of musicians (drummers). Often Dholi individuals that practice their traditional occupation are asked to perform during religious and ritual occasions for their Kumbhar, Nai and Sadh patrons. It is this relationship with other castes that they believe gives them an advantageous position. The Dholi play for their patrons during festivals and life-cycle celebrations and derive both fiscal and symbolic remuneration. These relationships, however, are recent as many informants have stated that in the past the Dholi would have played for all castes in the village not just Kumbhar, Nai and Sadh.

In general, very few of Mudhamsar's villagers depend on the internal village economy, as the majority work either in the mines that surround the village or in the town of Kolayat. Those that do depend on the village economy are either engaged in their castes' traditional occupations, have adopted the traditional occupations of castes that have stopped doing them (for example the Sansi) or are employed in agriculture. My data on this, however, was complicated. Because my fieldwork took place when one of the main sources of employment had shut down, it was difficult to ascertain exactly how long informants had worked in these jobs. However, what informants said about them was very clear and certain among them had adopted them in response to the mine closures.

Among those with whom I had more contact, it was clear that those engaged in their traditional occupations had not been doing them for long. Prior to the mine closures such services were performed by individuals living in the nearby town of Kolayat or by roaming peddlers from other villages. In fact, it was only when the mines closed that the Dholi had consciously chosen to return to their traditional occupation. This is partly because they were unable to get work in agriculture as the large Meghval landlords favoured kin workers; but also because, for my informants, re-establishing these 'traditional' relations gave them security and status. For example, the Nai as Barbers perform rituals for the Sadh, wealthier Kumbhar, and Dholi. The Sadh perform rituals during *Shivaratri*⁵ for the wealthier Kumbhar, Rajput, Nai, and Dholi. These interactions can be considered client/patron and consequently are a useful

⁵ *Shivaratri* or the night of Shiva is a Hindu festival celebrated in November – December by devotees of Shiva.

backdrop for understanding why the Dholi specifically mark themselves as distinct from the Meghvals of today. However, the relationship the Dholi has with other castes in this system of exchange rely on binding obligations that carry with them a moral discourse of duty and responsibility not unlike kin based relations. However, because the Dholi have constructed a powerful discourse concerning their practices that invoke caste-based evaluations they thus consider themselves more ritually pure than the Meghval.

Most of the Meghvals, for example, are not engaged in their traditional occupation of leather working. Those Meghvals who claim to be engaged in their traditional occupation of leather work (2.3%: see Table in Chapter Two) only in fact make shoes. They sell them not within the village but in Kolayat town. Moreover, while their traditional association with the removal of dead cattle firmly placed them outside the ritual hierarchy, today no Meghvals in the village engage in such activities. Rather, those that work with leather collect already prepared hides from tanneries in the region. In the past, however, the picture was quite different.

Briefly, as this lineage's history will be presented elsewhere, the Panwar Meghvals were brought to the village by the wealthy rulers and were expected to do their traditional work as well as agricultural labour. They were given a house which would have contained Mungla Ram and Kharna Ram, their wives and children. Today with the extensions made, yet housing only a few family members, the house is comparable in size to the high caste houses in the north of the village. Although considered lowly one of the brothers, Mungla Ram, was able to develop a close relationship with the village rulers. Since then this Meghval family, through various methods, have increased their status significantly distancing themselves from their more 'polluted' origins.

Conversely, the Dholi are attempting to reinvent similar relationships with other castes in the present to the ones that helped the social mobility of Mungla Ram in the past. The Dholi take great pride in their relations with higher castes and look to them for status. The maintenance of this relationship is immediately one that sets them apart from other low caste groups, most of whom do not perform their traditional occupations nor rely on the village economy for their primary source of income. No doubt whilst performing for their high caste

patrons the Dholi overhear complaints and gossip concerning the currently 'unnatural' position of the Meghval: a critique that 'cannot be true of the Dholi'.

One male Dholi informant stated quite clearly that they do not play for Meghvals because they consider them to be of a lower status, even though they occupy a similar position within the orthodox hierarchy. Chauhan (1999: 86) notes that in the Rajasthani village of Ranawaton-Ki-Sadri, none of the castes, even the lowest in the village, would accept food from the Dholi. Adrian Mayer (1966) in Ramkheri village had similar evidence of the Dholi's exclusion from high and even low castes. For example, he found that no *harijans* (ex-untouchables) would eat from the Dholi, none would smoke with them, nor craftsmen serve them. However, the Dholi were expected to serve all untouchables without distinction, yet could draw water from the common village well. When pressed, Mayer's informants likened them to *adivasis* rather than a caste (tribal group, low in status but outside the hierarchy) (1966:38-59).

As such, the Dholi's current ambiguous status in Mudharamsar may not be that unique as their condition of "being like" *adivasis* means they are able to occupy an anomalous position. However, the fact that they now perform for high castes and refuse to serve low castes suggests an alteration to their status where they are more firmly orientating themselves towards the cleaner castes. This explains why perhaps, they liken their services to the *adhikar* (privilege) of performing ritual functions for a patron. This discourse allows them not only to justify their position but also for it to be accepted as binding by the other castes involved in the exchange.

What is important to note however, is that the power dynamics involved in the client/patron relations of the past are not as vivid in the relationships of today. For example, many of these individuals had previously worked alongside each other in the mines as equals. Perhaps more likely, is that the explanations given for this shift to traditional caste occupations highlight a response to the unusual economic hierarchy of the village: a hierarchy wherein the offspring of Rupa Ram (contemporary generation of Panwar Meghval household heads) have suddenly become a leading source of employment in the village.

Therefore, by establishing these client/patron relationships informants are, at least ideologically, expressing an attachment to the "natural and ritual" division of labour, even if it bears very little resemblance to it in practice. The way informants appear to justify such an

approach is through essentialising the client/ patron relationship. As such, informants considered their traditional occupations as the most 'proper' form of employment for them.

Furthermore, having a position in a client/ patron relationship with higher castes gives informants such as the Dholi, for example, a discourse with which to compare themselves to the wealthy Meghvals. They do this by reconstructing for themselves the social relations that the Meghvals once had with the rulers of the village, albeit in a greatly altered form. In other words, the Dholi are able to embed their decision-making in a set of social relations of a sort the Meghval were once engaged in. However, the Meghval disowned those relations in the 1950s by refusing to perform their traditional occupations, even though the wealthy family had in fact gained some status because of them. Consequently, the social capital levied by the Dholi from such relations is of a similar kind to that accrued by the former patriarchs of the Meghval family.

The Dholi on some level, view the adoption of their traditional occupations as an historical imperative for their advancement. Conversely, the Meghvals of thirty or forty years ago saw the refusal to practice their traditional occupations as necessary for their social mobility, even though those in Mudharamsar had already achieved some advancement. In this respect there is a conscious effort on behalf of the Dholi to 're-traditionalise' their practices as a way to gain social status. What is more, it is a choice that draws on quite different criteria for mobility than those eventually adopted by the Meghval, but is similar enough to the relations the earlier Meghvals had with the village rulers for a comparison to be drawn.

The 'Controversial' Meghvals: Their Relationships with Higher Castes

All my informants in the village knew that I was living with one of Rupa Ram and Rukmani Devi's sons and whilst their negative sentiments concerning the Meghval were often generalised to the entire caste, it was clear through the way they behaved with other Meghvals that their animosity was directed mainly toward the wealthy family. This suggests that the upward mobility of the Mungla Ram and more specifically Rupa Ram lineage was deeply controversial

and to a certain extent 'offended' the other castes. The high castes took offence partly because they felt threatened, as their traditional power had been removed. However the basis of the offence was more complicated for the lower castes. As will be shown in the chapters that follow, rivalry between the castes is most vigorous between those close in 'traditional' status. However there are still some very specific tensions between the wealthy Meghval and the higher castes.

Some of the wealthier Meghvals descended from Rupa Ram have adopted a Sanskritised *bhakti* identity as a way to claim a long heritage for their upward mobility. In doing so they are able to reconcile their upward mobility with their traditional caste heritage. This does however suggest they are still uncomfortable with their new status. That being said, the Meghval family are also politicised and do not accept the traditional ranking of their caste. They often claimed that everyone should be able to enter the temple irrespective of caste and took little notice of the objections presented to them. Reflecting this, they used the temple, much to the irritation of the higher Sadh and Brahmin castes. This belief in caste equality also has roots in the history of their religious ideology. However the Hero they worship has himself undergone a form of Sanskritic-Rajputisation that makes it more palatable for popularist consumption. This means that what once contributed to their low status now in fact contributes to their upward mobility. Stressing their devotion to the now widely accepted divinised Hero, Ramdev, does little harm to their current position.

The fact that the Meghvals continue to use the main temple despite the opposition from higher castes also shows that they do not fear reprisals. Although the Brahmin and Sadh are higher in ritual status as per the traditional ranking of castes, the Meghval lineage descending from Mungla Ram are confident enough in their own contemporary status to ignore the higher castes' opposition. Their ability to do this highlights how they are no longer dependent on the higher castes for employment, social status, or political representation as in the past they would have been. Unlike their Dholi counterparts who have opted to gain leverage from the traditional division of labour, the Meghval lineages in part, represent a contradiction to the traditional order and thus embody a real threat to the stability of the higher castes' ritual authority and ascribed status. However their religious identity coupled with their political strength dampens the flames

of contempt enough to prevent any major assault on them. In fact, certain sons of the Meghval family are actually called upon to settle village disputes (see Chapter Three)

Even so, the Meghvals, in the eyes of the higher castes, occupy a position outside of the natural order and on an everyday level actually challenge that order. This refusal to conform further renders them susceptible to criticism on the basis of the ‘unnatural’ position they currently hold. One Brahmin informant and the father of Meenakshi, discussed above, began to criticise the Rupa Ram’s sons to this very effect:

“The father of Kamraj (Rupa Ram) was a good man but his sons are not. They don’t even wash their own cups! They have forgotten the god – they have grown wealthy and strong whilst Brahmins have become poor and low. They do not adhere to the culture (dharma). Brahmins should be the strongest [caste] that was the will of god”.

This Brahmin informant thought that the Meghvals, and the powerful family in particular, have forgotten their ‘roots’ and the history of their position within the ‘divinely’ sanctioned caste hierarchy. His critique draws specifically on their contemporary position and invokes a sense of loss of his own or his community’s status. The reference to the washing of cups is a direct insult that draws on the traditional caste hierarchy. Traditionally untouchables were offered separate cups to drink from that they were expected to wash up themselves separately from the drinking vessels of other castes. Thus a key signifier of status was the extent to which one had to touch the used and so polluted plates and cups of others (Dumont 1970). He is also implying that Kamraj’s father was more conforming to the traditional practices than the current generation.

The Brahmin informant quoted above is a part-time family priest for the Sadh, Rajput, Nayak, Nai and Kumbhar families in the village, and for Paliwal families in the nearby village of Sankla Vanta. The concept of caste that the Brahmin used to criticise the Meghval brothers also drew significantly on the concept of *varna* and the natural division of labour. In this way, the priest does not concede to the new status claimed by some of the Meghvals. This type of disagreement between claimed and conceded status does not just exist in the realm of opinion, but can also become an institutionalised practice. For example, the Dholi, previously non-

discriminatory in whom their clients were to be, now refuse to play for the Meghval, claiming them to be more unclean than themselves. Whilst the Dholi have chosen different methods for social mobility that rely on the village economy and a Sanskritisation of their practices, the Meghvals have also adopted Sanskritised practices as a way to advance.

Sanskritisation among the Meghvals

The Meghval lineage descending from Mungla Ram in the village has to a large extent gone through a process of Sanskritisation. Whilst the caste as a collective agreed to reject their traditional caste pursuits, not all gave up eating meat and drinking alcohol. Amongst the Meghvals in the village there are those that have followed the collective decision and those that have not. Whilst it is generally the middle class Meghvals that have adopted the Sanskritised practices there are also differences in behaviour within kin groups.

Such informants regard eating meat as part of their caste heritage and identity. Conversely, those that do not eat meat regard it a 'backward' practice in which Meghvals no longer engage. Moreover some members of the powerful family have opted to wear the *janeu*, or sacred threads, associated with the twice-born. These practices are all interpreted as part of the endeavour to Sanskritise the caste, outlined in the Caste Constitution. Jeffrey Snodgrass found that the *janeu* worn by the Meghvals he encountered was different from that worn by twice-born castes. Among the Meghvals of Udaipur and Jaipur city, he shows that, whilst the high castes wear *janeus* made from finely woven cotton, a pure substance, the Meghvals in his fieldsite wear one made from buffalo intestine (2007:82). However, the Meghvals who wear the thread in Mudharamsar claim they are made from cotton similar to twice-born castes.

Moreover those wearing the sacred thread also wear the *rudraksha mala* or string of prayer beads associated with the god Shiva. Shiva is a central figure of the *Panth* which some of the Meghval lineage follow. However by the same token they speak passionately about the abolition of caste and are fully aware and vocal about their previous position and consequently detest being called Chamars. Most of the other Meghval families in the village, however,

continue to consume alcohol and occasionally partake of meat. These ordinary Meghvals do not have the same access to resources as their upwardly mobile caste mates and therefore lack the opportunities for advancement that more affluent families enjoy. Thus, the process of Sanskritisation among the Meghval in Mudharamsar has only been a partial one.

Generally, attempts to upgrade caste attributes are regularly, although not always, enforced by caste councils, implying that Sanskritisation could never succeed unless the “advanced” segments of the caste dragged others up with them, or managed to dissociate themselves from their backward brethren. Nowhere in the literature, however, does it suggest that Sanskritisation is a singular phenomena that must encompass the entire caste, indeed it is its complexity that is often accentuated (Srinivas 2002). What is important is that while such advancements are meant to be regularly enforced, in practice, it is only ever those with a certain degree of social capital that can, in fact, enforce them. There will always be some that are left behind, whether through choice or circumstance; a certain degree of investment in the social hierarchy up which people are meant to climb, is also essential. Consequently we can view the highly particular adoption or decline in adoption of certain Sanskritised traits amongst sections of the Meghval caste, including their motivations for this, as evidence of the fragmentation of that caste. Depending on the reasons for or against Sanskritisation, this fragmentation can indicate along what lines cracks are appearing, such as those of wealth, power, and status, and how these are conceived. Srinivas states, for example, that:

“Occasionally we find castes which enjoyed political and economic power but were not rated high in ritual ranking. That is, there was a hiatus between their ritual and politico-economic positions. In such cases Sanskritisation occurred sooner or later, because without it the claim to a higher position was not fully effective. The three main axes of power in the caste system are the ritual, the economic, and the political ones, and the possession of power in any one sphere usually leads to the acquisition of power in the other two. This does not mean, however, that inconsistencies do not occur—occasionally, a wealthy caste has a low ritual position, and contrariwise, a caste having a high ritual position is poor” (Ibid: 203).

Although Srinivas still implicitly refers to Sanskritisation as something occurring uniformly within a caste, he does highlight that ritual and economic status need not, in every context, go hand in hand. Moreover, these inconsistencies can occur within the caste rather than

just between castes. Consequently, it is equally likely that Sanskritisation can be inconsistently adopted by members of a caste. As Mandelbaum (1972: 486) suggests ritual homogeneity within a caste does not need to be complete, but there does need to be enough unity to provide a rationale for their claims. The visibility of this differentiation will, then, depend on the scope of the caste council's enforcement strategy and the degree to which ritual purity is the desired marker of social status.

This partial adoption of Sanskritisation leads one to question the reasons for its acceptance by some and not others. What appears to be the primary cause of this differentiation is a corresponding discrepancy in the levels of social and economic capital found among those choosing to adopt the Sanskritised practices and those who do not adopt such practices. This is further accentuated by the economic uncertainty during the time of fieldwork. What was clear was that those who had lost their jobs were, although not exclusively, less interested in social capital and, as one might expect, more interested in economic capital. What will be elaborated in the subsequent chapters is the relationship between social and economic capital and how the two are closely linked to different claims of power, economic security and social mobility in Mudharamsar village.

This power, however, works in two ways. Most obvious of these is the power to be gained from having access to methods of advancement, such as Sanskritisation for the Mungla Ram lineage. The less obvious, but equally well documented, is the power to be gained from non action⁶. For example, failure or refusal to act may be taken as evidence of this power and this is highlighted again and again by the poorer, yet economically motivated, Meghvals. Some of the poorer Meghvals are very conscious that they cannot access the Sanskritised practices and have strong objections to those who wish to. For them, adopting such practices does nothing for the abolition of caste. In fact, it reconfirms the importance of caste as a measure of status and mobility. Before going on to describe how the powerful family is viewed by other Meghvals and castes in the village, it is important to recognise that Sanskritisation as a form of social mobility is primarily based on acquiring symbolic and cultural capital. This kind of capital is

⁶ Much has been written on resistance through everyday practices such as those discussed by Scott (1985) in "Weapons of the Weak" or in Parry (1999) "Lords of Labour: Working and Shirking in Bhilai"

contrasted with economic capital that forms the primary drive of the poorer Meghval. This is not to say, of course, that the symbolic status inherent in Sanskritisation does not also have an economic manifestation, but rather that these different forms of capital help to highlight the very different motivations between different actors in the caste.

Differences in Caste and Status: Meghval and Kumbhar

The Meghvals and the powerful family in particular, not only get ridiculed by the Dholi, Sadh and Brahmins, but unsurprisingly, they are also subjected to derision from their largest rivals, the Kumbhar caste. Yet although the Kumbhar community also represents an anomaly to the ritual order, their contradictory position goes unchallenged by the higher castes, and indeed it was rarely, if ever, mentioned. Whilst we have seen that generally most families in the village live in close proximity to other families of the same caste, there is one exception. The Kumbhars have quite a scattered distribution within the village. The Kumbhars can be found in the eastern part, northern part and western part, and appear to be freer to move around the village. They do not associate themselves strongly enough with the Sadh and Brahmin community in following their routes through the village, but rather appear to walk wherever they please, and with very little opposition from other castes.

Similar to the Meghvals, very few Kumbhars are engaged in their traditional occupations, (in fact only one person in the entire village was so employed). The children of the powerful family in particular, are wealthy and well-educated. Given this, why are they not treated in the same negative way as the Meghvals? Whilst the Kumbhars are currently categorised as OBC they were previously notified as a Scheduled Caste. This re-notification has in part contributed to their general acceptance by higher caste groups in the village and has also increased the level of both economic and political competition between themselves and the Meghvals. There is considerable competition between the Scheduled Castes and OBCs

throughout India and the tensions between the two wealthy families can be seen as part of this wider trend.

The Kumbhars occupy a rank marginally higher in the traditional order of castes to that of the Meghvals, and as such have been considered a clean caste in other areas of Rajasthan⁷. Yet they are certainly below the Sadh and Brahmin castes in the traditional ranking. Whilst being of a different occupational origin then, they now occupy a position recognised as being similar to that of the Sadh caste, which is also classified as OBC. The traditional occupation of the Kumbhars, which was pottery, when coupled with donkeys and their excrement, was previously considered polluting in some parts of India. However, pottery has now been elevated, through government policy in Rajasthan, to a recognised handicraft, and the Kumbhars in Mudharamsar are far from ignorant of this.

The Kumbhars hold a unique position within the village. Previously they were regarded as low status, yet today they make act as patrons to those castes engaged in their traditional occupations. This is in marked contrast to the Meghvals who, despite having a similarly low historical position to the Kumbhars, do not. As mentioned, the Brahmin priest, Dholi musicians, Nai barbers, and Sadh all perform rituals for the Kumbhar community. On the one hand, the wealthier Kumbhars act as patrons to the communities they receive services from and as such are part of the altered client/patron system outlined above. In this respect they govern much of the village's service economy, whereas the Meghvals own the village's agricultural production. Unlike the other castes, though, the Kumbhars observe very few of the traditional restrictions.

Interactions between the two lineages, Kumbhar and Meghval, are at times difficult. In their lightest form they maintain a civil distance, yet at their strongest can result in violence. That being said, under certain conditions and for certain Meghvals and Kumbhars commensality and friendship do occur. One such context is among the Meghval and Kumbhar members of the labour class. However, such occasions of commensality are also exhibited in a more private domain. A Kumbhar man was invited to the wedding of one of the daughters of the Meghval *Patwari* (village land accountant) whilst I was there. I later found out that the man who attended the wedding was also a member of the secret sect/tradition known as the *Kunda Panth* (or as

⁷ See Chauhan 1999 "A Rajasthan Village".

some informants say the Shiv *Panth*⁸). Thus religious practice also increases the inter-caste contact and commensality.

By contrast, historically the Meghval would scavenge animal carcasses for their hides. Their traditional occupation involved styling the scavenged leather into shoes, satchels, and other everyday products. Such work required, and still requires for many leather-workers, handling decomposing animal flesh, which also involves close contact with the polluting processes of death and bodily decay. It is this aspect of their traditional occupation that has made leatherworking a polluting activity in the eyes of most high-caste Hindus. Meghvals are, therefore, generally considered to be impure and untouchable by virtue of their hereditary association with this unclean occupation. What is more, it has been suggested by some that Meghvals ate the meat from these carcasses, making their work even more repulsive⁹. Eating meat is controversial and is considered defiling by some, but not all, high-ranking Hindus. However, eating the meat of a cow, a highly sacred animal, is considered barbaric and lowly by all high castes.

Many Meghvals also worked as agricultural labourers. While some owned their own plots, most worked as tenant farmers for Rajput/ Paliwal *Zamindars*, or *Jagidars* (landlords). Jeffrey Snodgrass claims that traditionally, Meghvals were also required to volunteer as village guards and were responsible for the protection of others. In this capacity they also served as village or town criers. Snodgrass notes that in many cases Meghval families were collectively expected to provide one family member to serve the village's *Jagidar* in these capacities, while all the others were left free for different pursuits (2007: 81).

In Mudharamsar no such relationship has been recorded and the Panwar Meghvals were principally brought from Jodhpur district to perform their traditional occupation for the Paliwal rulers. Over the last 100 years, however, there has been a gradual relinquishment of this profession. As mentioned, in the 1950s the caste council ordained that no Meghval will drag or skin dead animals. The last case against this was in 1959 when a Meghval man, Udaram, living

⁸ The Shiv *Panth* is the sanitised term used to refer to the Kunda *Panth*. The Kunda *Panth* is associated with left-handed tantric practices and has often been referred to as the Mailā *Panth* or dirty sect.

⁹ See Jeffrey Snodgrass (2006) "Casting Kings: Bards and Indian Modernity" Oxford: Oxford Uni Press., for an account of Bhambhis and their relation to the Bhat community in Southern Rajasthan.

in Mudhamsar was fined Rs. 11 for disregarding the aforesaid decision. Today some 50 years later, no Meghvals in the village, regardless of class, remove dead animals. In fact, this service has been taken over by the Sansi, who were traditionally a caste of distillers. The Sansi adopted the service because the production of liquor in the village has been publicly banned due to its proximity to the holy pilgrimage site of Kolayat town. It is important to note, however, that the practice of distilling has not been totally eradicated; informants did suggest that you can still get *arrack* (home brewed liquor) in the village.

Alternative Interactions: Internal Segmentations & Traditional Interpretations

As we have seen in the sections above, caste is segmentary. Whilst historically high castes make little distinction between the lower varnas, castes, and the different grades within a caste, this is changing significantly. For example, in the past the same word would even be used to describe groups at all these levels of segmentation, and those practising the system saw no major difference in kind between them (Parry 1979). In Mudhamsar today, it is clear that those differentiations between and within *varnas* and *jatis* are made by both high and low castes, albeit based on different criteria. Such distinctions are made in very specific ways in specific contexts and among specific actors, revealing a highly nuanced and interpretive approach to status ranking and social mobility.

For example, differences between castes are most notably, though not exclusively, expressed in a comparative discourse that uses the wealthy Sanskritised Meghvals as a measure. However, this discussion is predictably apparent among castes that have an interest in social mobility and is most prevalent among those interested in either acquiring or maintaining their social and symbolic capital. Whilst this capital is defined by status in the caste system, its main advocates are individual families. What is more, the key protagonists are families that buy and sell their services in the village.

This discourse of comparison involves both high and low castes in the village. It is based on both making a distinction between castes and making a differentiation within the caste from one generation and family to the next. This type of differentiation is, in practice, no longer based on the traditional *varna/Gotr* identity distinctions or one that draws on the substantialised caste identity. Instead, it is a set of evaluations that draw on economic, social, and to be shown, political and religious disparities. As such, these evaluations not only cross caste boundaries, but also fragment the internal coherence of a caste, leading to a variety of different social relationships occurring between quite unlikely actors. These alternative interactions are then established in opposition to evaluations that contradict them. They are made oppositional through discourses that essentialise them as different. In the case of my informants, the Dholi, Kumbhar and Sadh have essentialised the Meghval as different. This is qualified, for them, by the wealthy Meghvals' refusal to engage in their re-traditionalised economy, their vision for social organisation, and their mobility. The irony is that the Panwar Meghvals' choice to Sanskritise and therefore raise their status, is not dissimilar to the re-traditionalised socio-economic choices of the Dholi.

Thus the 'traditional' and historical segmentations of *varna, jati* and *Gotr*, conceived of as inalienable, do still inform actors' understanding of the distinctions of class, politics, religion, and in its modern Sanskritised or 're-traditionalised' form, caste. As Parry notes of the 'traditional' segmentations: "Just as each caste is conceptualised as a different genus, so the constituent units within a single caste are in certain contexts seen as being of qualitatively different kinds" (Ibid.: 131-132). As such, the Dholi and other castes mentioned previously are conceiving the Meghval lineage, their class, status and politics as somehow being "qualitatively different" to their forefathers and to other non-Panwar Meghvals, who still adhere to some of the 'traditional' caste restrictions or practices.

Part 3. Kinship among the Meghval and Kumbhar

This section has three aims: first to describe the general kinship patterns of the Meghval and Kumbhar, and second, to introduce the two wealthy families of each caste. A third more specific aim is to highlight the internal divisions of *Gotr* among the Meghval, as well as the different economic and political fortunes within the Mungla Ram Panwar lineage.

Meghvals fall into two endogamous sub-castes: the Vasira and the Jata. According to informants, the Vasira are said to be of higher status than the Jata. The Vasira will only accept food from the Jata if it is delivered in a *pital* (brass) dish. The Meghvals of Mudharamsar primarily fall into the Vasira category, apart from an unmarried man who lives alone and was brought to Mudharamsar by the powerful family to teach at the Meghval private primary school.

The Vasira sub-caste is then sub-divided into numerous exogamous *Gotrs* (or *Gotra*), which are patrilineal lineages/ clans (Pradhan 1966:ix; Tiemann 1970). Importantly, however, elsewhere *Gotr* is understood to be a collection of clans (Sharma 1973, Parry 1979). The rule of *Gotr* marriage among Meghvals is that one cannot marry into the *Gotr* of any kin within two generations. In practice this is worked out by mapping the *Gotr* of the mother and father, and the natal *Gotr* of the maternal grandmother and paternal grandmother. During fieldwork, I collected the details of 33 different *Gotrs* for the Vasira Meghvals. This turned out to be far from exhaustive as informants indicated that there were over one hundred to be found in Rajasthan.

The selection of a spouse is through negotiation. Traditionally a payment of *dapa* or bride price was offered. However, the Meghval caste constitution, agreed in 1953, replaced it with the practice of dowry. Divorce is permitted for both men and women and is orchestrated through the caste council. In these instances, children are chiefly the responsibility of the father unless they are young, in which case they will stay with the mother. Remarriage is permitted for divorcees, widows, and widowers.

Within the family, avoidance relations exist between a woman and her husband's father and her husband's older brother. Joking relations exist between a woman and her husband's younger brother, between a man and a younger sister-in-law and between grandparents and grandchildren. In month seven of pregnancy a woman will go to her father's house where an important pre-natal ritual takes place. This involves the brother placing a coconut and sweets onto the lap of the expectant mother. Pre-delivery restrictions apply. After giving birth, the *suraj puja* (ceremony) is carried out on the 7th or 9th day, where the mother and baby first step outside the house. The mother observes pollution for one and a quarter months after the birth, where she then takes her final ritual bath and is free to move around the house and externally as usual.

There are many tensions within the Meghval family depicted in the kinship charts below. These antagonisms generally correspond to disparities in wealth, status and power between the households. These disparities also affect marriage patterns and wealthier parents with children of marriageable age are choosing potential spouses from families outside of Mudharamsar, and preferably from Bikaner city. Whereas poorer families are restricted to the surrounding villages. This desire to marry into families based in the city is a common theme among all villagers in Mudharamsar, although it is very rare that families can afford such alliances, and consequently they only exist among the wealthy. Amongst females the desire to marry out of the village highlights the belief that there may be more freedom in the city, and among mothers that their children will have better opportunities in the city. Amongst males, it stems from the kudos of having a city-born wife, although some men were anxious that the city women would not take to village life. Underpinning both these sentiments is an expectation of status. This is still the case, even if the families are actually living in very poor conditions in low class parts of Bikaner.

Each *Gotr* of the Meghval caste is technically of equal status, although, in practice there are certain *Gotrs* that are accorded more. In Mudharamsar the Panwar *Gotr* is given considerable status by the Meghvals, partly due to the relative wealth and prosperity of the powerful Panwar lineage, but also because some Panwars' in the village claim to descend from the Panwar Rajputs. Some informants suggest Panwar is another name for Parmar, an ancient clan of Rajputs, now fallen from grace, whose name means "one that strikes the enemy" (from

the Sanskrit *Par* or alien/ enemy and *mara* or to strike, kill). Members of a *Gotr* are said to belong to a single *kul*, or line of patrilineal descent. Even though the vast majority of people interviewed were unable to offer both precise genealogical links and any evidence of their Rajput lineage, this perceived heritage is used to claim a higher status identity among the Panwar. They considered themselves to be of the “same kind” and descended from a shared Rajput ancestor.

There are 141 Panwar Meghvals in the village, representing 28% of the entire Meghval population. Of the 141, 95 individuals have traceable descent from the last known patriarchs Mungla Ram Panwar and Kharna Ram Panwar. Both of these men were born in the mid 19th century and their descendents make up two of the original Meghval families in Mudharamsar. This group can then be sub-divided between those who descended from Mungla Ram and those who descended from Kharna Ram. Those that descended from Kharna Ram are less well-off than those that descended from Mungla Ram (see genealogies below). Moreover, in terms of wealth, there is a further division between those descended from Mungla Ram’s first less successful son Moti Ram and his second, highly successful son, Rupa Ram. Below are the kinship diagrams of these lineages including both Moti Ram and Rupa Ram’s children. Unfortunately, however, I was unable to collect detailed kinship data for two of Rupa Ram’s sons, Chakan Lal and Raivet Ram. Chakan Lal was very ill whilst I was in the village, and although I visited him on numerous occasions, he was ultimately hospitalised and I never felt comfortable interviewing him under such conditions. I was, however, able to gather some rough details of the number of family members, but this was collected from other informants. Raivet Ram was, until recently, the MLA (Member of the Legislative Assembly of Rajasthan) of Nokha *tehsil* and no longer lives in the village, but in Bikaner city. I met his family only twice whilst I was living with the Panwar as he only came to the village during special occasions such as marriages and funerals.

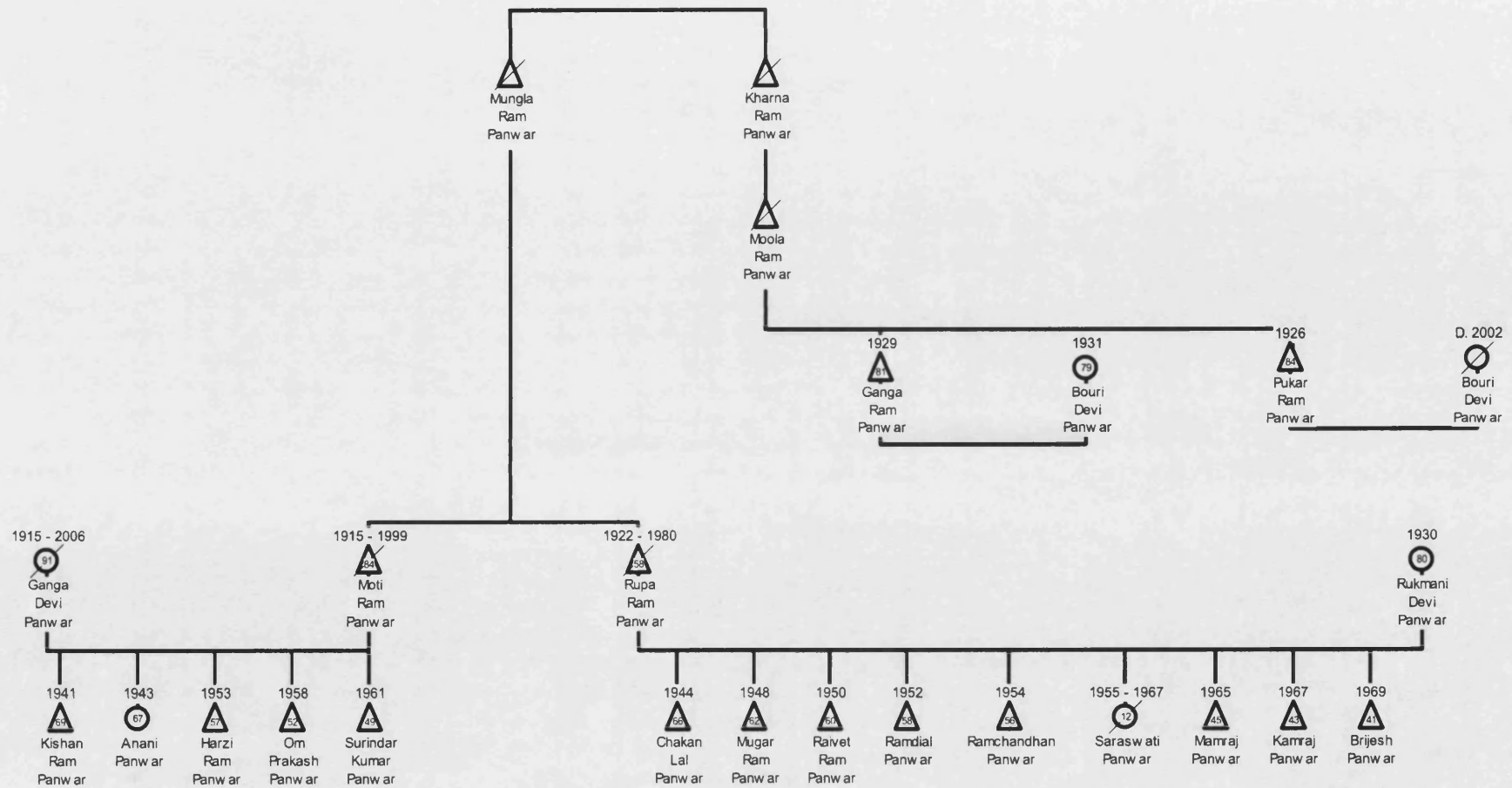


Figure. 6. Kinship diagram showing three patrilineal generations of the powerful Panwar Meghval family.

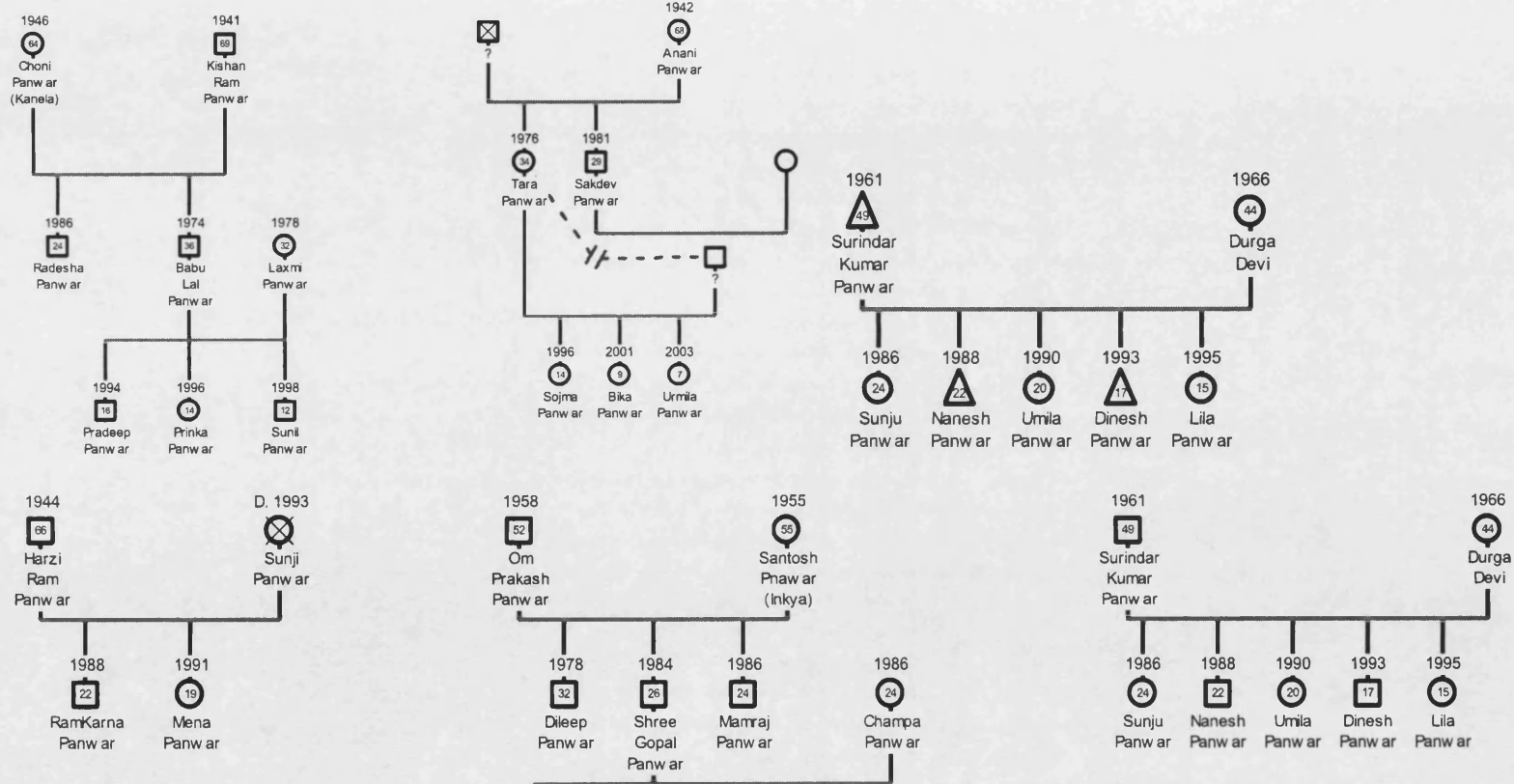


Figure. 7. The children of Moti Ram Panwar.

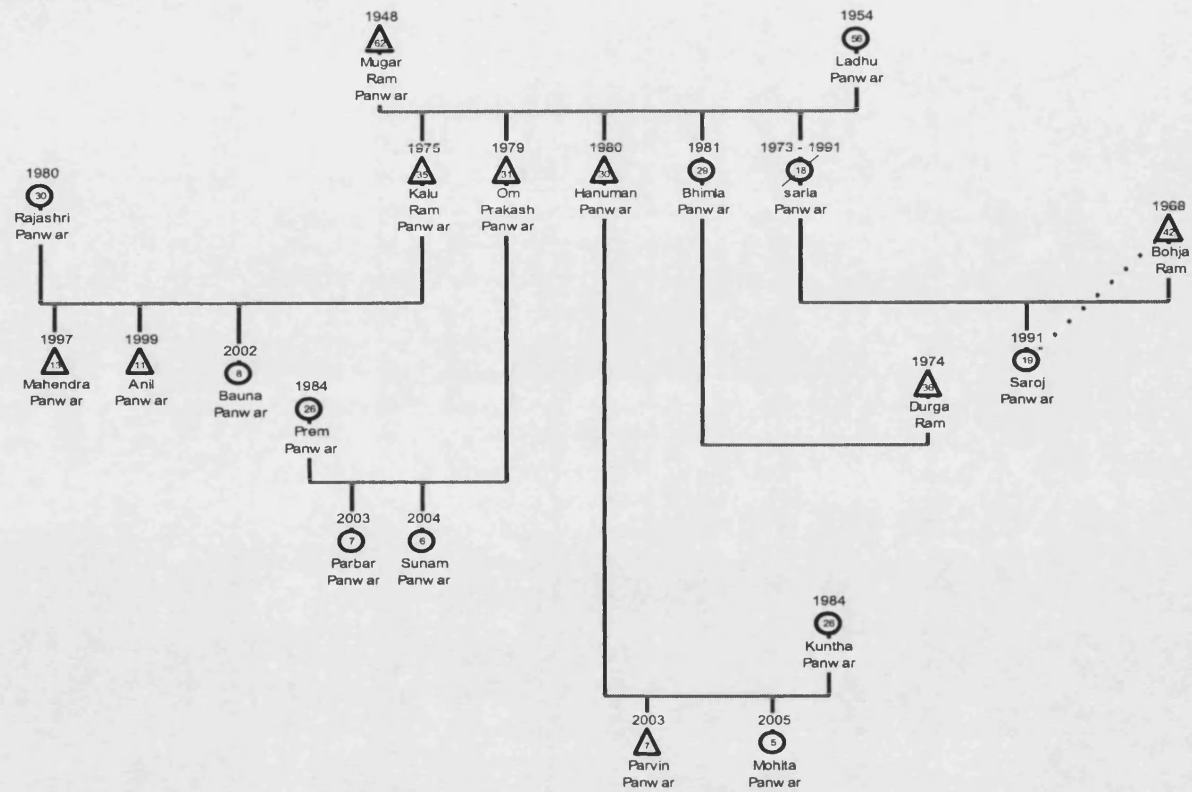


Figure. 8. Kinship diagram of Rupa Ram's second son's family.

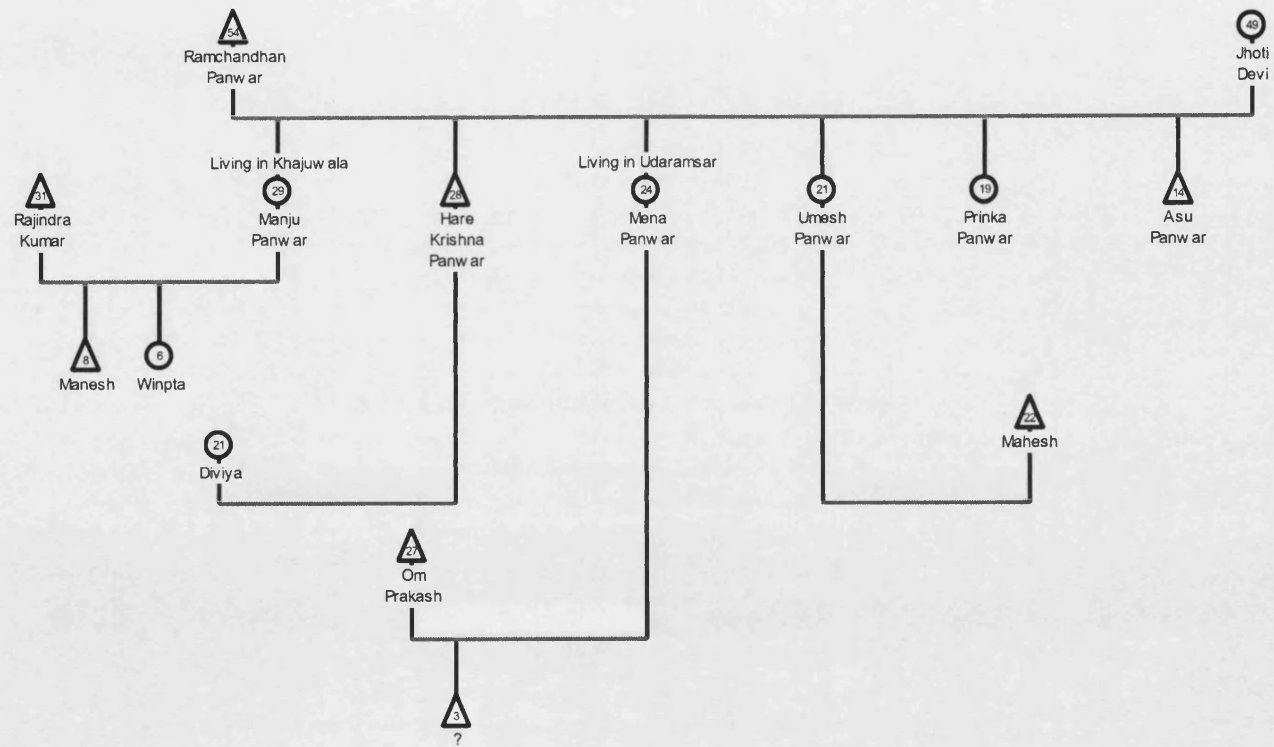


Figure. 9. Kinship diagram of Rupa Ram's fifth son's family.

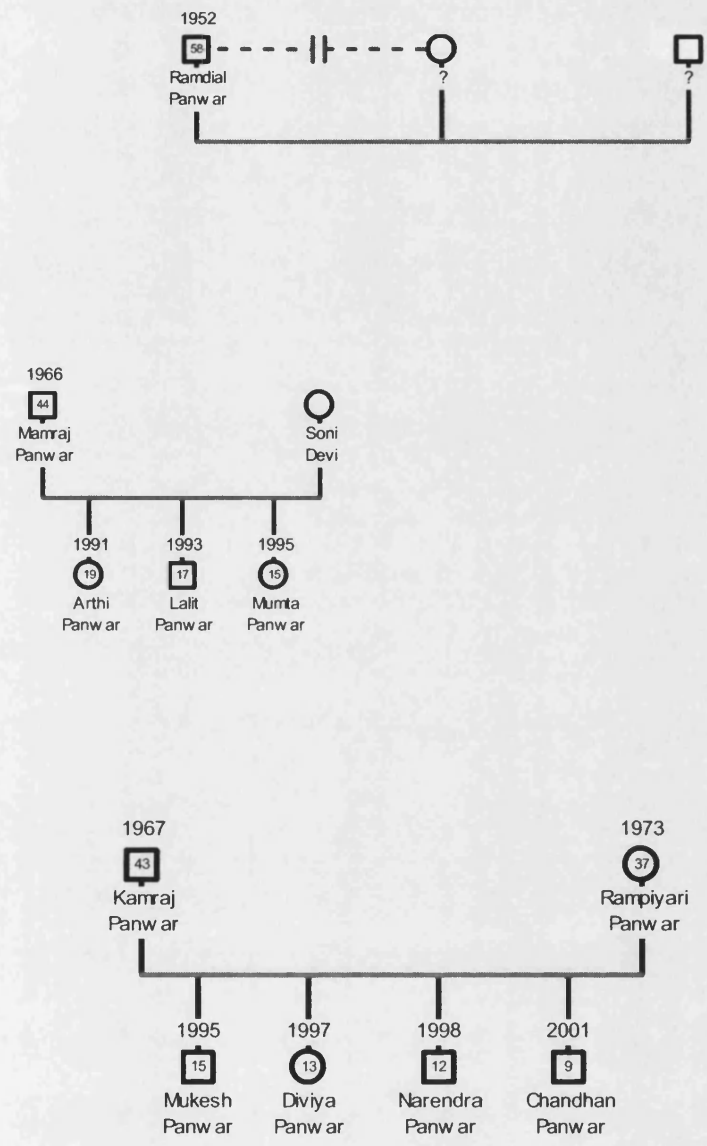


Figure. 10. Kinship diagram of Rupa Ram's forth, sixth, seventh and eighth sons' families.

The importance of *Gotr* marriage and sub-caste among the Kumbhars is comparable in many ways to that of the Meghvals. They are similarly divided into numerous exogamous *Gotrs* through which marriage alliances are regulated. There are only three different *Gotrs* in Mudharamsar: Prajapat, Verma, and Kapupara. Prajapats make up the largest group with a total of 247 members. There are only two Verma families with a combined total of 13 people and the Kapupara are also very small in number with only one family of six individuals.

Prajapats make up the largest group of Kumbhars in the village. Moreover, the majority are related to the lineages of Birba, Delad and Suka Ram who were young contemporaries of Moti and Rupa Ram Panwar (see kinship diagrams). My data on the kinship patterns of the Kumbhar is far from complete, yet the reasons for this further highlight the tensions that exist between the two main families of the village. Living with the Meghval family hampered my access to the Kumbhars in quite significant ways and as a guest/ adopted daughter was under some duress to spend little time with them. The Meghvals generally regarded the family as “money minded” and often cautioned me against trusting them.

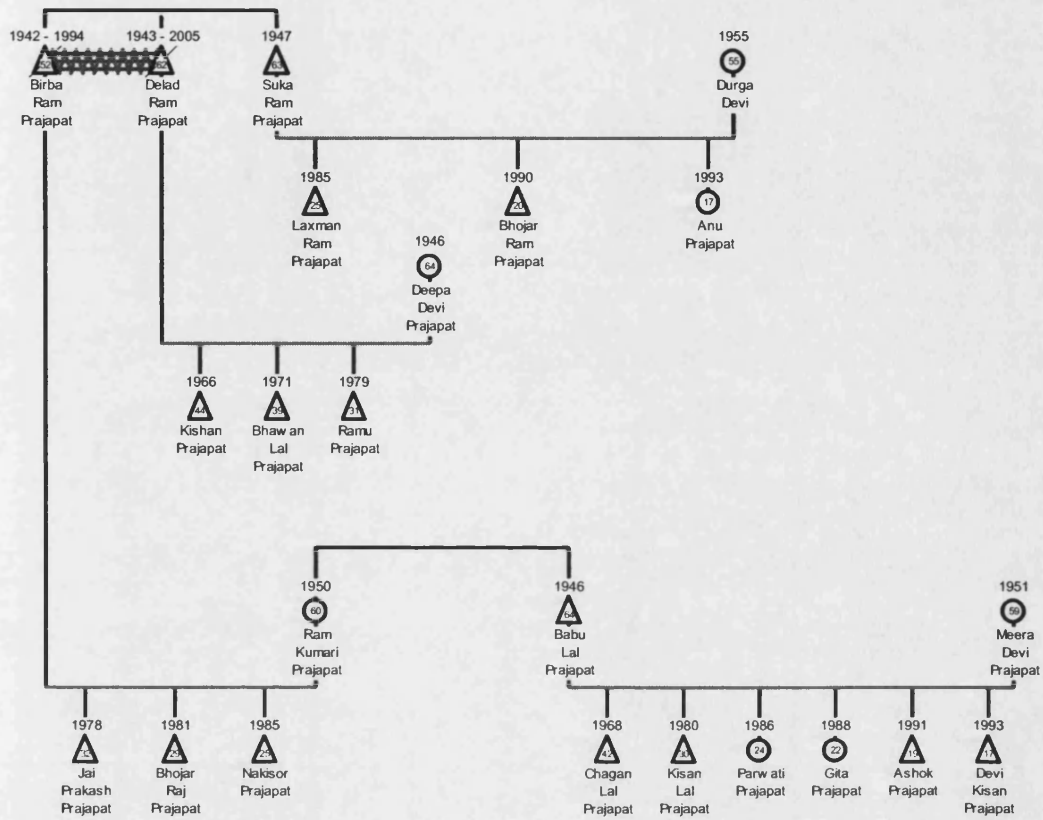


Figure. 11. The wealthy Kumbhar family.
 Delad Ram is said to have caused the death of Birba Ram.

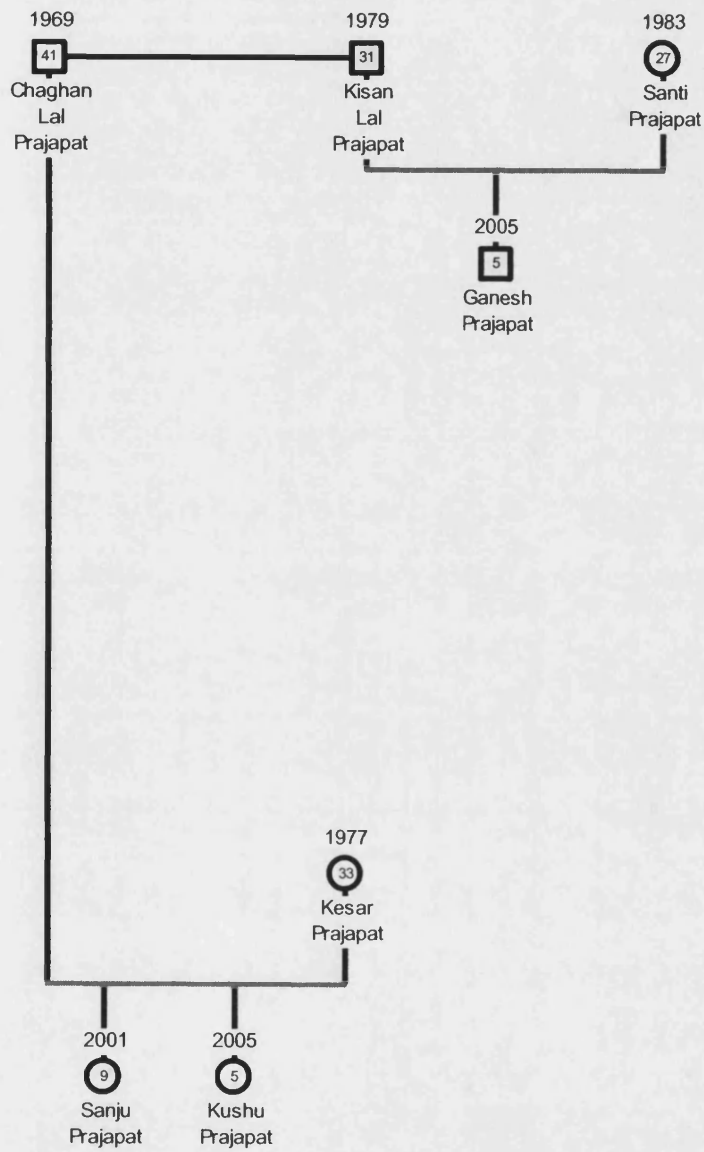


Figure. 12. Kumbhar family continued to include the full family of Delad Ram and Deepa Devi Prajapat.

The real tensions between the Meghval and Kumbhar castes are between the two powerful families depicted above; relations between the less well-off are, as the following chapter shows, quite different. The economic standing of the landed Kumbhars and the landed Meghvals, on the other hand, are quite similar. Their houses are the biggest in the village and both have a range of material goods associated with prosperity such as fridges, television sets, and motorbikes. Although the Kumbhars are more conspicuous about their consumption patterns and display their items freely, the Meghval are more secretive about displaying their wealth and often actively negate the consumption of material goods. For example, several of the Panwar brothers explained that spending money on material things was not good. For example, during my household survey I noted how many families owned animals, type and quantity as well as how many households owned vehicles, type, and quantity. When I came to ask the elders among my host family they stated that such things as vehicles were unnecessary when they lived so close to Kolayat where you could get a bus to any destination. They commented that such things were for showing off when what really counted was how you treated people and engaged with the world. What I later realised was that whilst some of these sentiments rang true for the Meghval family, because so many had government jobs they actually rarely paid bus fare on the government buses.

Both the Meghval and Kumbhar families own land. However, they do not rely on agriculture as their main source of income, but rather their government jobs provide the bulk of their salaries. Whilst public sector jobs will be discussed in Chapter Three, the main points of contention between the two families are over who has political power in the village. The relations between the two families on an everyday basis are characterised by rupture and unity. They are invited to the life-cycle celebrations of each others families and share a sectarian affiliation and piety-based identity, but at the same time compete for status in the political domain. Whilst this will be expanded upon in the following chapters, the Meghval family, in the final analysis, occupy a higher economic position to that of the Kumbhars.

These powerful families (Meghval and Kumbhar) are highly regarded by other members of their caste in the village and, whilst petty jealousy and minor conflicts do occur within the castes, most when asked are proud that a low caste Meghval or Kumbhar family has

reached the position they have. Given this, there is a desire among many to be close to these families. Whether it is for economic advantage through employment opportunities, for political representation, or for status, most other Panwar and non-Panwar Meghvals, for example, want to have some association with the family. These associations often come in the form of fictive kinship. However, when looking at fictive kinship among the Meghvals, it is important to draw a distinction between those relations which are agnatic or affinal and those which are not.

Like other castes, marriages are not possible among Meghvals of the same *Gotr* as they are considered to be kin, sharing the same lineage, and thus patrilineal ancestor. Many cannot, however, trace their connection with this family, other than by their shared and greatly substantialised *Gotr*. Nevertheless, those Meghvals considered kin, albeit distant, do use kinship terms to define their relatedness to the wealthy family. This use of kinship terms is contrasted to occasions where kinship phrases are used among individuals or groups that are considered, with regard to caste and marriage, unrelated. These two variations are connected to notions of similarity and difference that are used to define wider social relations between individuals.

Relatedness and Similarity: Fictive Kinship and the Re-classification of Structural Difference

In Mudharamsar, common affinal and agnatic kinship practices are defined by segmentation and 'traditional' notions of endogamy and *Gotr*. Fictive kinship on the other hand, refers to social connections that can go beyond individual personal relationships, can be enduring, and can carry rights, responsibilities, and even rituals associated with being related (c.f. Jamous, 2003). Fictive kinship is therefore broader in scope as it is both locally and analytically understood (Lambert 2000: 75).

Amongst the Meghvals in Mudharamsar, closeness or relatedness is highly important, particularly in terms of proximity to the wealthy Meghval family. Moreover, when discussing both their social and biological relations, they do so by using the phrase *ke pas* (to be near). Thus commensality among different groups of Meghvals is actively sought. However, what will

be shown is that this, similar to the relations between castes, is highly specific and refers to particular types of dependency-based relations. It is through this understanding that fictive kinship works to make physically close, in certain contexts, that which is socially or ritually distant in others.

The language of fictive kinship or relatedness in the context of the village is defined in terms of parental and sibling roles, maternal and paternal connections, and even marital bonds. For example, often un-related Meghval women of a similar age whose husbands' work for the Panwar brothers family will refer to each other as *chachi* (father's younger brother's wife), *didi* (elder sister) or *bai* (Rajasthani for sister). Younger men will refer to older Panwar Meghval men as *Chacha ji* (respected uncle) and the wife of Rupa Ram, Pukmani Devi, is referred to by all as *Ma* or *Ma ji* (respected mother). Kumbhar women will often refer to Sadh women using these kinship terminologies, the Sansi with Nayak and the Kalbelia with the Bhat. In this way, such relatedness mimics the *mohollah* or neighbourhood divisions outlined at the beginning of the chapter. As mentioned, the village is a nucleated locale with clear divisions of space and place, which are also reflected in relations of commensality. Each area of the village can be seen as a micro-environment, given a name that positions it within the larger physical structure of the village and juxtaposes it with other village locales. Furthermore, each micro-environment is sub-divided by the compounds that form it and, depending on which way they face, can further express relatedness. Those occupying compounds that share *kacca* roads, for example, often also share food and refer to each other as kin. Thus for many, fictive kinship also expresses a notion of space, place and commensality.

Spatial and locality-based relations are also found among the Meghval, and women of other caste in Mudharamsar. Many rural Rajasthani women rarely travel alone and when they do are often sat, by their husbands, next to other women on public transport. These women quickly strike up conversations. Common introductory questions I found to be asked by rural Rajasthani women in Bikaner district of each other was "*kisi goan ja've*", or "from which village have you originated?" The answer to this question immediately tells the enquirer the natal, rather than husband's village. If it is followed by "*the jati kya hai*", or "what is your caste?", the enquirer, if of the same caste, should also be able to work out what *Gotr* the other woman is, thus,

deciphering fairly quickly if there is any direct relationship between them. Whilst this example is primarily based on caste and village, when two women of different caste realise they are from the same village, they will often continue a conversation and may share what food or water they have with them.

Helen Lambert (2000) working in Rajasthan, similarly describes how fictive kinship is used to continue relations between women who originated in the same village, but after marriage move to their *sasural*, or husband's natal village, but are still in the same locality as each other. Moreover, she found that ties between women based on the mother's natal village were maintained regardless of caste. She further suggests that like elsewhere in North India, Rajasthanis consider themselves to be part of wider village relations and often use kin terms of reference to address unrelated individuals living in their village (Lambert 2000: 76-85).

Such exchanges, however, signal relatedness based on a shared reference point. In the instance above, the reference point is spatial; however, the women's closeness can only exist in certain contexts as if they met each other in the village they would have to conform to caste rules. This example is similar to the relationship between Umesh and Meenakshi we saw previously. In that instance, the context of a marriage ritual in the house prohibited them from sharing food, even though only a few days before they had enjoyed such activities together outside the village and referred to each other as sister. Both Meenakshi (Brahmin) and Umesh (Meghval) were aware that marriage would change their relationship forever. For example, both noted that although they would always remain friends, this relationship would be different from the one they currently hold as neither could come to the other's *sasural*. Instead, they said they would have to meet either in their natal village or in a place that was neutral. This shows how the breakdown of caste rules exists in very particular contexts that often takes place outside the village. In this respect, relatedness through fictive kinship also indicates the contradictions between behaviours and localities considered public and those viewed as private. As such, fictive kinship expresses commensality and similarity. What is more, sometimes it is beneficial for these qualities to be made public, but for others to remain clandestine. In this respect, the expression of fictive kinship can be greatly dependent on context.

Like the Meghvals, the Kumbhars also frequently use fictive kinship to denote relations with members of the same caste. However, they also have special connections with other castes that perform certain ritual functions for them and these relations are often described using terms of endearment. For example, *Baba* (father like) is commonly used to describe an elderly Nai barber who performs ritual haircuts for the Kumbhar family, while uncle or sister is used for friends and close neighbours, particularly the Sadh. The relation between the Kumbhar family and the Nai barber is duty or honour bound where monetary or other material gifts are exchanged for services rendered (c.f. Balzani 2003). However, other uses of fictive kinship among the Kumbhar denote camaraderie among the poorer members of the caste. Many of the poorer Kumbhars work in the mines and amongst this class fictive kinship is used to express a shared identity, which often extends to include the less wealthy Meghvals.

In the case of Mudharamsar, fictive kinship among the Meghval and Kumbhar is principally used to create alliances, even if not reciprocated, that indicate the similarity of status between the individuals in question. On occasion, fictive kinship makes use of a genealogical charter and notion of descent¹⁰. For example, informants wishing to express connections to the Meghval family will explain that their distant male ancestors were the best of friends, uncles or brothers. Some even suggest that their father's father was the *dhatak putra* or adopted son of the other's male ancestor, either in a general way or by referring to a shared Panwar *Gotr*. In some cases, informants will cite a recent event such as organising a lift into town for one of the family as proof of their relatedness. These formulations are sometimes supported by the Panwar family, but the suggestions of others are met with quizzical looks and dismissive gestures. For some, then, fictive kinship is a fairly sycophantic method of suggesting relatedness in order to benefit from the status or economic resources of another, whilst for others it expresses a social or emotional bond shared by both parties.

Some people, therefore, use fictive kinship to secure relations that are materially or symbolically beneficial. For example, whether it is to maintain ritual relationships, to gain favour with wealthy caste mates, or neighbours, all share the same result: the production of social capital. What is more, this social capital has the capacity to produce either the actual or

¹⁰ See Tambiah 1965:132.

potential basis for securing economic resources and increasing the material security of those involved. Claiming closeness, particularly with powerful members of the caste, then, can have material benefits. This closeness signals what is often considered a time-honoured relationship enabling lower status groups to build their social capital by expressing shared experiences or encounters with higher status groups. The claim of a long history of association automatically ties the fortunes of one family to those of another. Consequently, for some, an association with wealthy families enables access to prestige and social capital that could otherwise not be accumulated.

In Mudharamsar, the substantialised identity surrounding the Panwar *Gotr* serves to link otherwise unrelated actors. In this way, it operates like the use of fictive kinship. Importantly, these networks of relatedness are not always amicable among the Meghvals. In fact, similar to the networks among those who exchange services in the village, relationships among the Meghval are also between individual families, and this can cause specific tensions. For example, poorer families, who predominantly work in the mines and fields, are exceptionally vocal about the different life chances and experiences they have compared to those of the wealthy Panwar family. These lower class Panwar Meghvals are, however, the favoured choice of agricultural employee among the landowning Meghvals (to be discussed in Chapter 2). Moreover, in politics, as will be explained in more detail in Chapter Three, Meghvals of all classes will join together to vote for Meghval candidates, essentialising their shared heritage of untouchability.

The interpretation and practice of fictive kinship then, highlights contextually specific understandings of similarity and difference. These understandings are used to classify different social relations. For example, in certain contexts the wealthy Meghval are labelled as inherently different to the poorer Meghvals even though they may share the same caste and even *Gotr*. At other times these differences are put aside under the banner of a shared heritage that unites them as ‘brothers’ and ‘sisters’. In other words, in certain contexts it is the distinctions of class, status, and the behaviours and practices adopted by the wealthy Meghval family that mark them as different to poorer Meghvals; yet in other contexts these differences are not significant. This contradiction is also true between different castes of similar class.

For example, the Kumbhars descended from Birba Ram, who shares many characteristics of class with the Meghvals descended from Rupa Ram; do not regard themselves as similar to them. Instead, the wealthier Kumbhars regard themselves as more similar to the Sadh whom they relate with quite regularly, even though many of them are poorer in class. Similarities among the Kumbhar and Sadh, like difference between the Meghval and Kumbhar, are also related to beliefs and practices. However, just as difference is socially, ideologically, and historically constructed, closeness or similarity in kind is also thus constructed. As we have seen, similarity in certain contexts can be constructed in such a way that crosscuts the boundaries of caste and kinship with one of locality (c.f. Östör, Fruzzetti, and Barnett 1992 [1982], Lambert 2000) conversely, in other contexts they are defined by proximity to a certain family, caste or locality.

The use of fictive kinship in Mudharamsar is always between those for whom marriage alliances are out of the question¹¹. In this way, fictive kinship is creating a bond that will never be expressed through the physical side of kinship. Instead, this relation uses the duties and expectations associated with consanguinity and affinity to structure otherwise unconnected parties. Supporting Lambert's (2000) findings, informants in Mudharamsar likewise suggested that this form of relatedness is, in some cases, superior to reproductive kinship, because it does not contain the pollution of sexual intercourse. As the following chapter will explain in more detail, fictive kinship is also used among male and female manual labourers where the threat of sexual violence is ever present. Such terms, coupled with exchanging food, are all part and parcel of their shared identity as manual daily-wage labourers.

Summary

This chapter was divided into three parts. The first part primarily dealt with the physical structure of the village, the second with the social structure and the third with kinship. Taken together they highlight how elements of the physical and social structure of the village are

¹¹ Conversely, see Leach (2001) [1954].

important for understanding how individuals relate to one another and how they see themselves within the wider context of village life. Questions concerning where and how people decide to build a house, what kinds of access to places of worship people enjoy, and who can drink water from which well, are all laden with social values and mores that reveal tensions, conflicts and unions between individuals and communities. As André Bétielle (1996) has pointed out, the physical structure of the village can be seen as mutually constitutive of its social structure. Whilst it is important to recognise how the structure of the South Indian villages he studied are far more rigid than they are in the north, as we have seen in this chapter the distribution and location of houses in Mudharamsar are far from random. An analysis of their spatial organisation reveals basic unities and divisions within the wider social structure of the village. Thus, community or familial alliances are given physical form through the location and proximity of habitation. As (Beteille 1996: 19) puts it:

“People who are close to each other in the social system tend to live side-by-side; people whose social positions are widely different live apart...physical distance can be seen as a function of structural distance”.

One of the most pressing dimensions of the social structure that villagers in Mudharamsar invoke is caste, even though they do so in different ways. These invocations include discussions of both inter-caste and intra-caste relations. Whilst economic and political factors are just as likely to be raised, and in certain contexts express specific commensal relations, caste is often whispered among some as the proverbial skeleton in the cupboard for private grudges against the low castes, and as justification for certain alliances with other castes. The importance of caste, however, differs in various contexts. What is more, antagonisms of this sort are in fact usually between certain families rather than certain castes.

Like most studies of India from the time of McKim Marriott's (1955) influential study *“Village India”*, this chapter began with the assumption that caste can not be described in terms of a ‘traditional’ hierarchy that relies on economic inter-dependence, the respective roles of various castes in rituals, and the positioning of castes on a pollution/ purity scale (Chauhan 1967). Ritual dominance alone in no way determines the nature of caste interactions in

contemporary India (Gupta 2000, 2004), nor can castes be considered as locked purely in local confines (Marriott 1955). Instead, most scholars of India agree that we are increasingly seeing more of M. N. Srinivas's (1972) observation that many castes are moving away from their traditional occupations to enter the competitive arena of democratic politics. In Mudharamsar, the hierarchy of purity (as defined by the normative ideal) is publically undermined in everyday village life by the presence of a dominant Dalit caste. On the surface then, the wealthier Meghval and Kumbhar families in Mudharamsar contradict the 'ideal' workings of the caste hierarchy. However, as part 2 of the chapter highlighted, the Meghval have adopted Sanskritised practices, which conversely reveal how these traditional evaluations of purity still play a key role in defining their status. As such, the complexities of caste do not diminish its significance as a system of social organisation. In fact, actors such as the Dholi and Sadh use 'idealised' discourses of caste to construct their complaints against the wealthy Meghval. Often such discourses are reminiscent of the equally constructed Brahminical perspective, enshrined in texts like the "Laws of Manu". In village social relations, arrangements, politics, and economics, caste, enshrined in its present avatar of competition, is still very much alive.

Moreover, it is in invoking the 'ideal' system that we, as social scientists, are able to chart the deviations from it. The caste system and all it invokes is a key component of Indian society and the complexity with which it is marked is part of its signature. Likewise, the 'ideal' structure of normative caste practices and beliefs used in contemporary discourse in Mudharamsar are likely to have never existed in the past. However, as scholars of caste we are forced to refer, in one way or another, to the 'ideal' hierarchy that Dumont so eloquently defined. This is because it offers a yardstick with which to compare changing practices.

Therefore, everyday caste interaction in Mudharamsar elucidates how caste represents for some an 'ideal' system of normative practices that can be drawn upon in different situations and for different ends. This chapter has, therefore, examined everyday practice and some of the motivations behind the public rhetoric and caste discourses. In so doing, it has attempted to highlight the contradictions to the 'ideal' view of caste, as well as show how actors re-evaluate and re-define what they consider 'traditional' forms of social interaction and status ranking to be.

These contradictions are most clearly visible in the way that different castes in the village relate to the Meghvals descended from Rupa Ram that I focussed my research on in the village. Critics of this family, such as the Sadh and Dholi, cite their own adherence to the 'traditional' or 'ideal' order as a way to claim a superior ritual status. However, the observed practices of the Dholi have, in fact, undergone considerable modification, as indeed have the Meghvals. The Sanskritised practices of the Meghval lineages, however, have not been adopted in the same way by the poorer Meghvals. Many have been less quick to discard certain of their own practices and these are most notable in the realms of religion (to be discussed in Chapter Four).

The third part of the chapter was concerned with kinship. What has been shown in this chapter and will again be shown in the chapters that follow is that both real and fictive kinship configurations also provide sets of experiences and discourses that structure relations in the village. Kinship coupled with different ideas about status and social mobility form the basis of allegiances, grudges, and claims of power and prestige in the village. As such, those engaging in the re-traditionalised service economy rely on kinship, real and fictional, just as much as the Meghval who belong to the Panwar Gotr.

According to Henry Maine (1961, [1880]), social relations and associated modes of exchange come in two primary or ideal forms: those that are based on contract and those based on status. These two configurations are characterised as individual, impersonal, and temporary at one end of the spectrum, and supportive, group-orientated, and based on long-term bonds at the other¹². In a society as rapidly changing as India the former set are becoming increasingly more common, but in no way are they pervasive. As is shown here and in the chapters that follow, relations that are easily assumed to be contract-based are still, nonetheless, proven over and over again in the ethnographic record, to be subject to definition by the latter type. The discussion in this chapter reveals kin-based decisions in the village to be both highly contractual, particularly where 'traditional' status and forms of employment are concerned, and also contain a supportive undertone relating to relative status and economic uncertainty, identity, locality and kinship. Moreover, other actors use fictive or metaphorical kinship to unite

¹² See also Mandelbaum (1970) chapter 9 for a detailed explanation of such a spectrum.

individuals often of different caste under other identity markers even though marriages or even public friendships between them would be forbidden. Thus fictive kinship, like other social relations, is used to express status through the taxonomy of difference and similarity. In the context of Mudharamsar this taxonomy is one used to highlight the varying unities, cleavages, and contradictions that have arisen from the unusual dominance of one Meghval family. In the following chapter I explore two industries, mining and agriculture, which have often been associated with contractual employment relations.

Chapter II. Economic Organisation and Class: Mining and Agriculture

This chapter is concerned with the main economic and occupational patterns of the inhabitants of Mudharamsar village and the social relations that comprise them. Whilst some villagers are engaged in the re-traditionalised service economy of the village, most villagers are also engaged in mining and agriculture. To explore how these industries affect social relations in the village, first a consideration of the historical, geographical, climatological, and geological context of the Thar Desert, and in particular Kolayat sub-district, will be given. Over the years the environment of this district has given rise to an intensive mining industry providing a major source of employment for villagers in the area. The economic significance of mining in Mudharamsar has eclipsed that of agriculture.

This industry, coupled with the particular historical developments leading to the rise in power of Mungla Ram's family, has created a shift in the social and economic relations between castes within the village. Labour is required for the mining of minerals and clay, as well as prospering brickworks, and other related industries. However, this is beset with problems. Mine closures, coupled with the migration of cheap labour from outside the state, has meant that competition for such jobs is intense, and secure employment opportunities within this sector are scarce, creating alternative alliances and divisions between actors in the village.

Secondly, this chapter will discuss the second largest employment sector, agriculture. The climatological and environmental context of this region inhibits intensive arable farming and villagers are forced to diversify with regards not only to types of crops produced, but also in terms of employment and sources of income generation, where agriculture is becoming a less favourable and reliable source of rural employment. Many villagers are landless and seek employment in other forms of occupational activity, in this case mining. However, agricultural employment is still important, particularly when there is no work in the mines.

The first theme of this chapter is concerned with production, in the physical sense, for the two main industries, mining and agriculture. For example, what is being produced, how it is

produced, and the ways in which production is organised. Chiefly, however, this thesis is about changing social relationships. To this end, the substance of these relationships must be examined. Although this will also be expanded upon in subsequent chapters, the production and labour relationships outlined here highlight the contexts in which caste cross-cuts with class and kinship relations creating alternative social networks and identities that conflict with normative ideals. What is more, these changing relations are partly triggered by the changing patterns of economic activity in the village.

Several factors affect the decline in reliance on agriculture as a primary source of income. Firstly, the harsh environment of the Bikaner district to a large extent necessitates engagement in a variety of occupations. There are very few individuals whose only income is derived from agriculture. However, this is only half the story as the wealthy, albeit relatively small, landlords are also the Meghvals descended from Mungla Rams. This alteration to the traditional ownership and organisation patterns of agriculture, predominantly high caste landlord and lower caste labourer, has had significant impact, not only on the upward mobility of the Meghvals, but also in how other low castes relate to this family. Secondly, a large percentage of Mudharamsar's population is landless and is forced to choose alternative forms of employment, namely mining. In this respect the figures in the tables below speak for themselves. In 2005-2006 only 14.7% of males were engaged in agriculture, compared to 46.3% in mining. Conversely, in the 1961 census almost 95% of Mudharamsar's population were engaged in agriculture, whilst 2.6% were dependent on mining and 62.3% had it as a subsidiary occupation (Bhargava & Gupta 1965: 27).

This decline in agriculture can be seen as part of a wider trend highlighted by Dipanka Gupta in his 2005 article "Whither the Indian Village" which highlights an almost national trend of the decline in agriculture as a viable employment option for India's village dwellers. The agriculturalists in Mudharamsar appear to follow the patterns described by Gupta. For example, even the larger Meghval landlords in Mudharamsar have salaried jobs outside of farming and daily-wage employees sporadically rotate from field to mine in order to secure regular incomes. The profits that landlords receive from agriculture, although dependent on market conditions, do however, significantly improve their overall income. Importantly, their position is not just one

of wealthy landowner, as mentioned; it is also based on a variety of other employment and social activities, all of which constitute their relatively high class status in the village context. The other factors that contribute to the wealthy Meghvals' current standing in the village will be discussed in the following chapters. They relate to public sector employment, political involvement, and religious belief.

A further distinction that will be discussed in this chapter is gender. Women's labour power is also drawn on and, whilst many women work in the mines, many are also engaged in agriculture and household industries. Poor as well as lower middle class women diversify just as much as men and, whilst still expected to keep house, often either work full-time in the mines or do ad hoc informal sector work to supplement male incomes. Whilst frowned upon by many, women working in the mines have their own network cross-cutting caste that centre on childcare and the inter-generational divisions of labour. These networks in the mines provide an environment where women of different caste background can meet, support and share experiences with one another. Women who stay in the home do not have the same degree of access to such opportunities. However, some women from wealthier Meghval households, who are required to stay within the confines of the family's compounds, engage in informal sector work such as spinning wool and this exposes them to alternative networks.

During the time of fieldwork the amount of women engaged in informal sector work was said to have increased by informants. Some households, where previously women had remained in the home, were either seeking or had acquired informal sector jobs to contribute to the household income in cases where the men could not find work. This was largely deplored by those that were better off in the village, who considered such women to be morally loose (c.f. Das 1976). However, many of the women engaged in such work spoke highly of it even though they knew their reputations were being questioned. This informal sector work was divided among a group of women who liaised with women of different castes from Bikaner city, enabling them to extend their social networks. What is more, many women also oversee and on occasion engage in agricultural production. In these contexts, kinship alliances are utilised by the wives of the Meghval landlords in order to maintain order in the fields and dictate recruitment opportunities.

In a mixed economy, with agrarian, industrial and informal sectors, labour relations are highly complex leading to questions concerning the nature of class relations. This chapter then also seeks to explore the class-based identities that exist in the village and how these are articulated. There is a wealth of literature on class in India. However, much has been focussed on how to identify classes and whether Marxian or Weberian definitions of class are appropriate. According to some, this focus has had the negative effect of narrowing the definition of class and class consciousness. André Bétielle, for example, suggests we should focus attention on the native concepts of social inequality and class (1974:35-55). In doing so, we must however recognise that although caste and class share similar characteristics, there are also key distinctions between the two. As Bétielle points out, caste is concerned with ideas, whereas class is concerned with interests. Social inequality in India (as elsewhere), Bétielle reasons, is not just a matter of differences in wealth, power and privilege but also a question of values. Therefore, inequality has both a material and an ideological aspect, which often reinforce each other (Ibid: 38).

The most historically significant material basis of inequality in South Asia is the distribution of land. Whilst it is difficult to get conclusive figures for this in Mudharamsar, there are certain facts beyond question. There is a small class of people who own or control much of the land in and around the village and a very large class of landless agricultural labourers. However, agriculture is only part of the material base in Mudharamsar. Mudharamsar is surrounded by highly profitable mines and is therefore also made up of a class of industrial workers. Within this class of industrial workers are numerous sub-divisions and categories. Moreover, some of these workers are both landless labourers and miners. Due to the extreme economic pressures during the time of fieldwork such workers also occupied a range of ranks in both settings. For example, some held a higher rank in the industrial setting than their agricultural working mates, and visa versa. This fragmentation of the working class raises several issues concerning how to locate class and whether the interests that characterise them hold true in a variety of contexts.

The social historian Rajnarayan Chandavarkar (1999:208) summarises that many scholars of labour in India have been hesitant and uncertain about how to locate classes when

the fragmentation of the working class was brought on by the very processes which constituted them. He suggests, that rather than perpetuate what he sees as the teleological arguments concerning the conditions for class awareness, we should take into account the diversity of sources of identity in India and the particular political and economic context in which a class awareness may occur (Ibid.: 209).

This chapter will discuss the composition of different gangs of industrial and agricultural workers. What will be shown is that caste alone is not the only form of social differentiation or identity being used among them. By comparison however, in agriculture, caste and kinship are more important in defining the organisation of labour. It is important to add, however, that although caste or class identity may be elevated as the primary identity indicator in some contexts, the distinctions of caste, kinship and class do overlap in others. As such, neither identity marker can be seen in isolation but rather as sets of social attributes that become reified depending on the context. They are all categories of social differentiation and whilst each elaborates different properties of status, inequality and position their role for defining social relations more broadly is shared. What becomes important here is in what specific contexts do we find class, for example, as the chief identity marker and, firstly, how this compares to contexts where kinship is more significant for organising social interaction, and secondly, how the different markers fit with normative ideals concerning status in different contexts?

In Mudhamsar the different articulations of caste, class and kinship are clearly shown in the social relations between workers in the two main employment arenas of mining and agriculture. However, these two employment arenas are not neatly bounded with different groups of workers in each setting. It is common for the same group of workers to move from mining to agriculture and back again, which for some is a straightforward transition, whilst for others it is more complicated. What results is a highly contextualised social differentiation and identity-making that is based on specific criteria relating to the conditions of labour, caste, and kinship. These identities, however, share one important characteristic that they each represent a response to economic and social insecurity.

For some villagers small scale agricultural labour supplements incomes derived from equally irregular sources of employment, such as industrial jobs in the mines. The circular

migration from field to industrial sites and back again has often been described in terms of market conditions. For example, Morris (1960) saw such migration as reflecting market demands for a cheap, flexible labour force that can be hired and fired when necessary. Whilst the recruitment and stability of work in the mines near Mudharamsar can in part be explained in this way, reducing labour relations and identity to the whim of the market does little to explore the ways in which workers view their position. As Parry (2005) discussing Chandavarkar's work suggests, industrialisation in India has not necessarily created the united working class that Marxists supposed, but rather industrialisation in some contexts has reinforced the characteristics of a pre-industrial economy that is dependent on kin, caste and co-villager networks (2005: 143). It is hard to imagine the development of a Marxist class consciousness in this context. Nevertheless, for daily-wage manual workers in Mudharamsar the term class is an essential part of their identity as industrial workers. Moreover, this identity appears to transcend caste and kinship in the context of industrial labour. However, for some workers this identity fragments along caste and kinship lines in an agricultural setting.

This alternating and reconstituting of identity highlights how malleable, indeed fragile, these identities are. This fragility is also mimicked by the insecurity of resources in the material world. The ability to construct these identities is then, a resource in itself. The identities given respond to particular contexts and generate meaning for the actors within them. In this respect, such identities are part of our habitus. As Bourdieu suggests, habitus generates meaningful practices and meaning-giving perceptions. These practices and perceptions represent how we classify the world and our capacity to differentiate and attach value to those practices and products, and in doing so, the social world is constituted. For Bourdieu, social identity is defined and asserted through these different evaluations (1986: 170-172). Such evaluations in Mudharamsar highlight the tension changing material contexts and normative ideals.

For villagers social relations centred on labour are made explicit by the degree to which one has a regular source of income. In the mines this distinction is made in terms of permanent staff and daily-wage labourers. The daily-wage labourers refer to themselves as a labour class and speak of their united position against those who are salaried employees. The degree to which this unification remains consistent is, however, questionable, and internal disputes arise

when this class is fragmented by its own labour conditions and employment strategies. What holds true in the context of the mine changes when in the field. Some individuals who share the same labour conditions in the mines have very different social networks they can draw upon when in pursuit of agricultural labour. These social networks are centred on a kin-based patronage system similar to that seen among families who exchange 'traditional' services in the village, as described in the previous chapter.

Srinivas and Bailey (1955 and 1957 respectively) argued that the elements of patronage ceased to exist when, in the villages of India, traditional servitude fell into disfavour with the rise of the market economy. Breman (1993) likewise notes that the vertical pattern of relationships that was characteristic of the traditional agrarian system was replaced by mutually antagonistic attitudes. Landowners on the one hand, and agricultural labourers and the landless on the other, are parties with conflicting interests. For Breman (1993: 79), this process of change was closely related to the disruption of what he sees as the 'stationary' village economy and a break-through to an expanding economy on capitalist principles. He suggests that improved communications with the outside world, coupled with increasing production for the market, resulted in an enlargement of scale that put an end to the closed order of the traditional rural community. The idea of the "autonomy of the village" has been heavily criticised (such as by Dumont and Pocock) as it was highly unlikely that any village was entirely devoid of external influences. Moreover, in a context where agriculture is on the decline and very few rely on it as their main source of income, the relations between agricultural workers have changed quite significantly.

In Mudharamsar getting work in the fields is largely dependent on kinship, and individuals who shared the labour class identity in the mines, find themselves in competition with each other for agricultural work. The question then arises as to what this competition does for the labour class identity? The disparity between workers' solidarity in the mines, and their reliance on traditional networks of kin and caste when in the fields, in part does not appear to be contradictory to the working class in Mudharamsar. Indeed, some informants state that though the work is different they are still a labour class. However, for those unable to get regular work in the fields there is a glaring difference.

It is important to make clear that all the figures presented in this thesis were gathered directly from sources in the village and around, and were accurate during the time of the research (2005-2007). It is important to bear in mind that a majority of the figures relating to the mines specifically were collected once the mines had reopened in 2007.

Geomorphology: Climate and Topography

Bikaner is in the arid zone of Rajasthan with an average annual rainfall of between 250 to 350 mm. There are no permanent rivers in western Rajasthan. The topography of the state has played a large part in its social and economic development. The Aravalli range that runs through Rajasthan divides the state into two distinct geo-climatic parts. The area lying to the East of the range is a vast plain covered by a thick alluvian mantle, and the south eastern part has thin soil and is very rocky. The area to the west of the Aravallis, and the region where Bikaner is situated, is known as the Thar Desert and is characterised by extreme temperatures and long spells of severe drought, accompanied by high winds and low to semi-arid conditions of humidity. The Thar Desert consists mainly of plains with some areas of sand dunes and low hills. Singh and Ghose (1980) identify two zones of sand dunes in western Rajasthan, covering 58% of the area.

Droughts occur in two out of five years (Henderson 1994). Even in years where precipitation is at or near to normal levels, the timing of rainfall will impair agricultural production if it does not correspond with crop requirements. The soils are classified as light-textured, grey-brown desert soils, which are alkaline and saline. None of these soils are very fertile; they are high in mineral and low in organic content. All these soil types are susceptible to erosion; many are deposited through wind action. During the dry months, March to July, sandstorms accompanied by hot violent winds, may deposit an inch or more of soil. Sandstorms can also destroy newly-germinated crops. Each year re-sowing is often necessary because of heavy dust and sand deposits that cover the plants.

General Employment Patterns

The main forms of economic and occupational activity in Mudharamsar village are mining and agriculture. However, when taken all together very few villagers rely on agriculture as their only source of income. Both arable and pastoral agriculture is carried out, although arable is more common. Villagers engaged in pastoral agriculture and/or animal husbandry keep cows, chickens, sheep and goats. Whilst some castes are employed in their traditional occupations, most villagers are engaged in other forms of non-farming employment. For example, some are hired as private teachers, clerical workers, shop keepers/assistants; an important but small arena for employment is the exchange of 'traditional' services in the village, as we saw in chapter one. Another significant employment sector that will be discussed in the following chapter is the government/public sector. These jobs are highly sought after and those who have them hold high status in the village.

The tables below outline the employment patterns of the people in Mudharamsar and the figures point to several significant issues. The first issue is that during the time the survey was carried out the mines had been officially closed and demonstrations involving local miners were being held both in Kolayat and Bikaner city. The mine closures had a significant impact on the workers in Mudharamsar. Whilst I was conducting the survey, I came across several cases where families were on the verge of starvation, suffered alcoholism, and one or two cases of domestic violence. Alternative employment was desperately needed and consequently many miners reluctantly turned to agriculture. This leads onto the second issue, that even though the mines were closed and many of the workers were frustrated at being unemployed, informants identified their occupation as mining. Whilst in part this means that the tables below can only be seen as a guide, what this clearly reveals is that for certain castes their identity as miners, and later I found a 'labour class', outweighed their employment status at the time. Moreover, this identity was further cemented by the industrial action in which many were involved in. There is one other aspect of the data reported in the tables below that needs some explanation and that is the employment patterns of the Dholi. In the household survey Dholi respondents identified either mining or their traditional occupation as their primary sources of employment. However,

on further exploration Dholi informants told me they were also recruited by Kumbhars as agricultural labourers even though only one woman claimed this occupation. This is partly because they saw their traditional occupations and offering them a better more secure chance of economic security as well as adding status to their position in the village.

The tables below also indicate further caste-based disparities regarding both mining and agriculture for the two largest castes in the village. Kumbhars are less likely to be engaged in agriculture than their Meghval counterparts, yet both communities own land, and this highlights one of the key tensions between the two families in the village. As chapter one showed the wealthy Meghvals and Kumbhars are ambivalent towards each other and whilst some individuals are quite outspoken with regard to their dislike of the Meghvals in general, most of their dislike is directed toward the wealthy Meghval lineage. The Kumbhar lineage makes many allusions to their respectability compared to the Meghvals and their dislike of agricultural pursuits is often couched in a status-based discourse. This status discourse also explains why the Dholi did not identify agriculture as a main occupation, even though they received more money for this work.

In other contexts, to be discussed in future chapters, the wealthy Kumbhar landowners also form close alliances with the members of the Meghval lineages. For the poorer Kumbhars the picture is different and many attempt to find work in the fields. These Kumbhars do not see big differences between themselves and poorer Meghvals and many claim caste is not what makes them different but rather it is the Meghvals' ability to get better jobs in the fields during the hard times that makes them different.

As will be shown below, the relationships between workers, whether in agriculture or mining, are sub-divided on several levels, and whether one has access to a regular income in either sector is the principal distinction. Whilst Kumbhars do own land, it provides a subsidiary income only as most of the plots are relatively small; whereas Meghvals own quite large plots of land and generally recruit kin workers from within the caste. The elite aside, it is the employment patterns of the casual daily-wage labourers, during a time of increased unemployment that starkly reveal the class-based allegiances. While cleavages exist between those that can get regular work in the fields through kin connections and those that cannot, there

is a group of daily-wage workers of both Meghval and Kumbhar background, as well as other castes, that are not able to get regularly paid work in either sector, and it is among this group that commensality, when at work, is expressed.

Caste	Agri	%	Mines	%	Manual	%	Semi-skilled	%	Government	%	Shop Owner	%	Trad. Occup.	%	Other	%	Unemployed	%	TOTAL
Meghvals	41	23.3	86	48.9	4	2.3	5	2.8	13	7	5	2.8	4	2.3	1	0.6	17	9.7	176
Kumbhars	7	7.6	44	47.8	5	5.4	11	11.9	4	4.3	7	7.6	1	1	5	5.4	8	8.7	92
Sadh	9	18.4	20	40.8	1	2	5	10.2	0	0	9	18.4	0	0	5	10.2	0	0	49
Nayak	5	5.4	57	61.3	7	7.5	7	7.5	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	17	18.3	93
Nai	7	20	16	45.7	3	8.6	0	0	2	5.7	1	2.9	3	8.6	0	0	3	8.6	35
Darzi	7	18.9	5	13.5	1	2.7	2	5.4	1	2.7	0	0	17	45.9	0	0	4	10.8	37
Kalbelia																			
Dholi	1	12.5	3	37.5	1	12.5	1	12.5	0	0	0	0	2	25	0	0	0	0	8
Sansi	0	0	0	0	0	0	0		4*	100	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	4
Paliwal	0	0	1	25	0	0	1	25	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	50	0	0	4
Lohar	0	0	8	72.7	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	9	0	0	2	18.2	11
Rajput	0	0	0	0	0	0	3	75	1	25	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	4
Bhat	1	11.1	4	44.4	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	4	44.4	9
Muslim	0	0	0	0	1	16.7	3	50	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	33.3	6
Charun	0	0	1	100	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
TOTAL	78	14.7	245	46.3	23	4.3	42	7.9	25	4.7	22	4.2	28	5.3	13	2.5	57	10.8	529

Table 4a. Occupational patterns for males in Mudharamsar. The table includes marginal and main workers. It is important to note that the table above classifies people according to the occupation they declared as their primary during my census, consequently, it can only be seen as a guide. For example, many miners are also engaged in agriculture.

Caste	Agri	%	Mines	%	Manual	%	Semi-skilled	Other	%	Government	%	Shop Work	%	Weaving	%	Trad. Occup.	%	Housework	%	TOTAL
Meghvals	11	8.7	21	16.5	1	0.8	0	0		1	0.8	2	1.6	6	4.7	0		85	66.9	127
Kumbhars	5	7	10	14	0		0	1	1.4	0		1	1.4	0		0		54	76	71
Sadh	0		2	5.7	1	2.9	0	0		1	2.9	0		0		0		31	88.6	35
Nayak	12	18.5	17	26.1	2	3.1	0	0		1	1.5					0		33	50.8	65
Nai	5	16	3	9.7	1	3.2	0	0		0		0		0		0		22	70.9	31
Darzi	2	6.5	2	6.5	0		0	0		0		0		0		0		27	87	31
Kalbelia																				
Dholi	0		2	33.3	0		0	0		0		0		0		0		4	66.7	6
Sansi	0		0		0		0	0		0		0		0		0		4	100	4
Paliwal	0		0		0		0	1	20	0		0		0		0		4	80	5
Lohar	0		1	16.7	0		0	0		0		0				1	16.7	4	66.7	6
Rajput	0		0		0		0	0		1	25	0		0		0		3	75	4
Bhat	0		2	33.3	1	16.7	0	0		0		0		0		0		3	50	6
Muslim	0		0		0		0	0		0		0		0		0		6	100	6
Charun	0		0		0		0	0		0		0		0		0		1	100	1
TOTAL	35	8.8	60		6	1.5	0	2	0.5	4	1	3	0.8	6	1.5	1	0.3	281	70.6	398

Table 4b. Occupational patterns for females in Mudharamsar. Figures include main and marginal workers.

Note

Manual: jobs excluding mines and agriculture

Semi-Skilled: includes truck drivers, taxi drivers and street vendors.

*100% of working Sansi men are cobblers/ leather workers and look after sick and elderly cows at the Kolayat *Gaushala* or Cow Sanctuary.

This community took over the leatherwork duties of the Meghvals in the 1950s.

Other: includes professional/ skilled

Women often recorded having more than one job e.g. farming and housework.

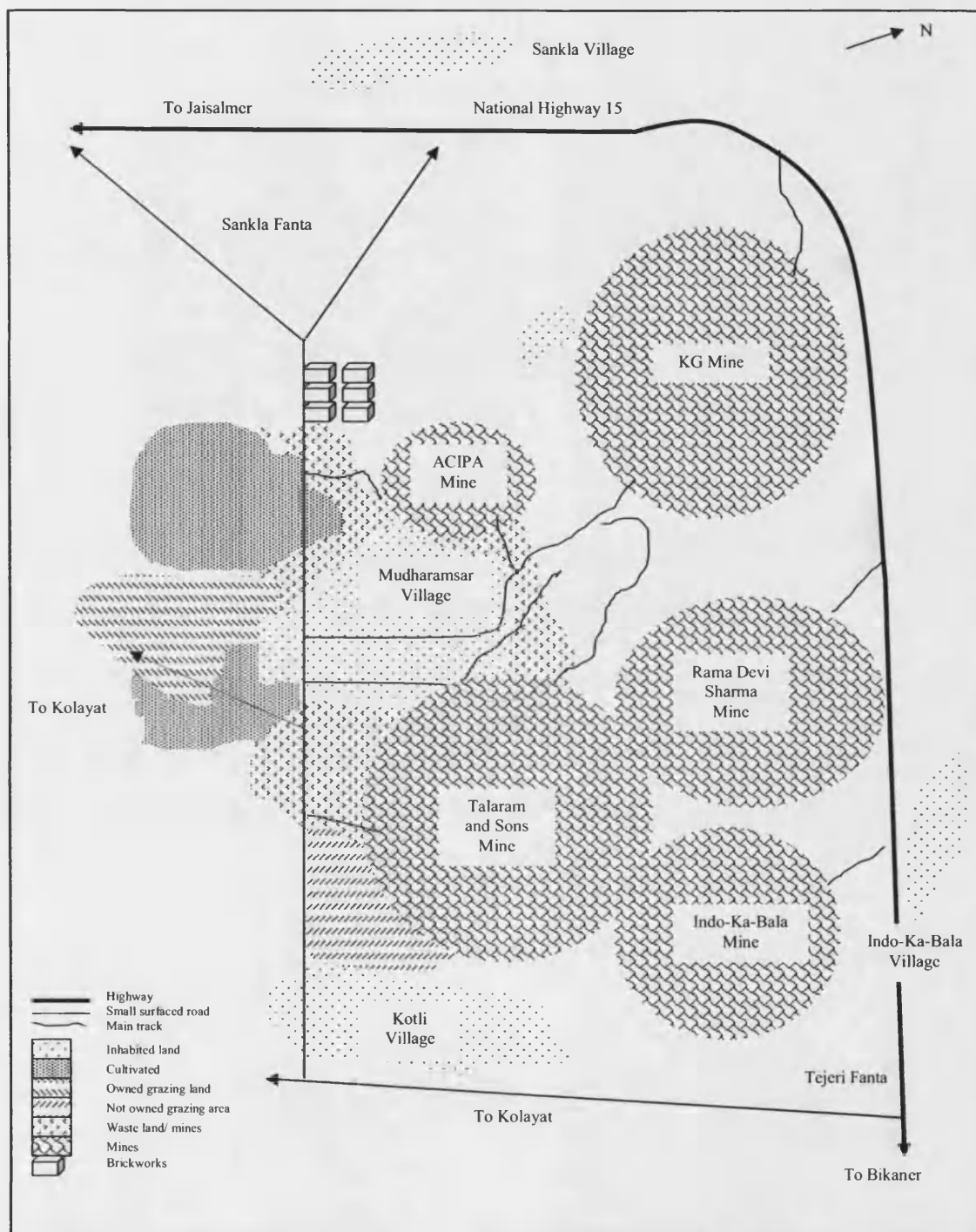


Figure .13. Sketch Map showing Mudhamsar and surrounding villages, Mines and Land Use (not to scale).

Part 1. Mining

By way of an introduction into mining in and around Mudharamsar, it is necessary to say that the bulk of my fieldwork took place during a period when the mines had been officially closed. This set up a very particular problem that became especially acute when informants were detailing their primary occupations. This was further complicated by the fact that many of the villagers were involved in industrial action and their participation in this action appeared to heighten their sense of loyalty to that profession. Moreover, the loss of their jobs put immense strain on the individuals and their families, and many were engaging in a variety of alternative occupations as a way to make ends meet. As a result, the tables above very much represent my informants' main occupations prior to the mining suspension.

A total of 24,000 mines in Rajasthan were closed from the period of 16th May 2004 to the 15th February 2007. During this suspension period 18,000 people in Kolayat *tehsil* lost their jobs. The main reason for the closures as expressed in local papers at the time, by mine managers and the Union representatives was a response to growing concerns over pollution. The Rajasthan Supreme Court found the mining companies culpable of excessively polluting the environment and ordered that all mines be closed until anti-pollution measures were put in place. These measures were to include the planting of trees and plants, and dampening the main walk ways around the mines. The mine administrators, in response to this, proceeded to make large redundancies. Whilst the permanent staff were awarded some compensation for loss of pay, most of the daily-wage staff were excluded from this. In response, the local AIUTUC or All India Trade Union Congress called a large demonstration in Kolayat to call for the immediate re-opening of the mines or compensation to be offered to those without formal contracts. Many of the miners from Mudharamsar attended the demonstrations. A total of 1500 people from the surrounding villages attended the demonstration in Kolayat.

Mining is crucial in Rajasthan, where rainfall is minimal and regular incomes from agriculture difficult to find. Local Kolayat miners, organised by the Union Rep, Supesh Chauhan, who was also the local secretary for the Communist Party of India, wrote a letter to the *Tehsildar* (officer) on 29th August 2004, explaining the local consequences of the, then,

potential suspension. This was followed by a public meeting in February at the Kolayat *tehsil* office to discuss what the effects of the closures would be. It was decided at this meeting to organise a public hearing, which lasted three days (14-17th February 2005), and official union figures showed that over 40,000 people attended the public hearing. Just over a year after the first demonstration, a second demonstration in September 2005, was held in Bikaner city. This attracted a huge crowd and over three thousand people were reported to have marched through the city. The demonstration was attended by several dignitaries such as the national level Trade Union Secretary and Leader of the Communist Party of India, an MP from West Bengal. The Union representative, Supesh, explained to me how he had been offered 2 Lakh to disband the Kolayat Union in the late 1980s, and an offer of 35 Lakh in 2005. He also told of the threatening behaviour of some of the mine owners during the strike, and how he was worried for his family. Three weeks after our meeting and whilst I was back in England, I received a call to say he had committed suicide in his home.

Supesh left his home in Uttar Pradesh in 1975 to come to Rajasthan to work as the Superintendent for Talar Ram and Sons mine. It was during this job that he became interested in the Trade Union and in 1988 he resigned from his job to set up the local Kolayat division of the AITUC. He recounted that the first official mine in Kolayat began in 1940, under the auspices of Maharaja Sadul Singh, and the first private lease issued in 1956. He was a great source of information and extremely dedicated to improving the working conditions in the mines. His presence among the miners will be sorely missed.

The organisation of mining in Mudhamsar is such that most of the less wealthy villagers, are in one way or another, dependent on it for their livelihood (46.3% of men and 15% of women in the village). During the period of intensive fieldwork from 2005 to 2006 all the mines in Rajasthan had been officially closed by the Central Government; however, some were operating illegally. Upon a subsequent research trip in 2007 the mines had been re-opened, and much of the data presented here comes from comparing life once the mines had reopened, with the time when they were closed. Whilst there are five mines in close proximity to Mudhamsar village, I was only able to get access to four. The four mines studied here are open cast mines extracting a mixture of ball clay, china clay and gypsum.

The production techniques and internal organisation of the mines is fairly standardised and similarities between working styles and labour relations can be found in three of the large mines. The smallest mine and the one which is closest to the village is quite different and will be examined in more detail. It is in this mine that the largest concentration of labour from the village is utilised, and comprises exclusively of daily wage manual labourers.

The land where the mines are located is leased from the government for a maximum of twenty years, with an additional three years for prospecting,, increasing to five if necessary. Mining leases are then regularly renewed every twenty years. The central government has certain powers over the mining industry such as granting licences for prospecting, reconnaissance and excavation. The government is also responsible for health and safety monitoring, pollution limitation, and can withdraw licences if contractors do not fulfil their obligations. Moreover, the government has an extensive concessions package for investors in so called 'backward' districts such as Bikaner. Complete tax holidays for a period of five years from the commencement of production and a thirty percent tax holiday for five years thereafter are granted along with overhead expenditure deducted from gross income to reduce annual income tax payments, after the tax holiday has ended. Operational mines are therefore, a lucrative industry and Rajasthan is the fifth largest mineral-producing state housing 70% of the total non-ferrous (non-iron) metal reserves of the country and 5.74% of the total value (Sengupta 2005:2, Government of Rajasthan-www.rajasthan.gov.in/rajgovresources/actnpolicies/MINERAL.html & www.gits4u.com/raj/raj11.htm). Before going on to discuss the organisation and labour relations in each of the four mines in the area, a brief description of the minerals produced by the mines near Mudharamsar and their general usage will be given.

The Clays and Minerals

Both China and Ball clay are vital minerals used in ceramics. Ball clay is very rare and can only be found in a few places around the world. Its name dates back to the early mining methods when specialised hand tools were used to extract the clay in rough cube shapes of about 30 cm. These methods are still used in many of the mines surrounding the village. The corners of the clay cubes become eroded through storage and transportation, fashioning the clay into ball shapes. Ball clays are sedimentary in origin and are formed by ancient rivers carrying a variety of mineral and plant sediments, such as kaolinite, formed from decomposed granite, which settle in low-lying basins to form overlaying seams of ball clay. Ball clays contain three main minerals: 20-80% kaolinite, 10-25% mica, and 6-65% quartz. Ball clays are used in many different industries, but in particular form an important component in ceramic manufacturing. Kaolin or 'china clay' produces a very white colour when it is fired, but used alone it is brittle and weak and must be mixed with ball clay to produce a workable, malleable raw material. Together these clays are used for sanitary wear, table wear, and wall and floor tiles. Principally ball clays are utilised for their plasticity, bonding properties and their ability to withstand extremely high temperatures.

The third mineral mined in the region is gypsum. Gypsum is a very common sedimentary mineral predominantly found deposited in lakes and sea water. It occurs as a flattened crystal often containing twinned crystal formations. A very fine-grained variety of gypsum is also named Alabaster which is used for ornaments. In arid regions such as the Thar Desert, Gypsum occurs in an opaque flower-like form mixed with sand particles and is often referred to colloquially as the "desert rose". It is mainly used in plasterboard lining for houses, soil fertilisers and conditioners, and for Plaster of Paris.

The Four Mines: Labour, Production and Organisation

The mines dominate the landscape of this region. Unlike in the village where the ground is predominantly soft and sandy, the earth in the mines is hard and rocky. Towering spoil heaps rise like newly-formed mountains from the otherwise flat terrain. More akin to a moonscape, the surrounding area is eerily devoid of the usual desert vegetation. You would be forgiven for thinking the open cast mines are natural fissures or gorges: as one assistant commented they would make a good picnic spot. Pools of cloudy green-blue rain water sit at the base of the mine like a shot of hopeful colour in an otherwise bland and water-short landscape. The surface of the striped layers or benches of rock are made jagged and uneven by manual extraction with pick axes. Small tracks the width of a truck wind down to the most recent digging area and the repetitive sounds of iron hitting rock are a stark reminder that this is a working environment, and not a pleasant one to be sure. Inside the China and Ball clay mines the whiteness of the rock glares in the desert sun making it hard to see clearly and dust finds its way into every crease of clothing. Work in the mines is tough and little shade is offered from the searing desert heat. Manual workers wear scarves over their heads and faces to protect them from the sun. The swirling clouds of dust cover their clothes, shoes, and exposed skin in a fine patina of grey-white powder. Whilst the wearing of hard hats is a legal regulation, only one of the four mines made hard hats available to their workers.

Two of the largest mines near Mudhamsar are owned by the same company Bikaner Clay and Chemicals. Upon the death of the father, in whose name the mines were registered, the mines were divided amongst the three sons. The father originally came from Pakistan and during the partition of India and Pakistan came to Bikaner on the advice of a friend who knew of prospecting opportunities. Today, the three sons live in Bikaner. The Talaram and Sons and Indo-Ka-Bala mines are the two largest mines near to the village; 245.86 and 162 hectares respectively. Together they constitute the Bikaner Clay and Chemicals group. Talaram and Sons mine for China clay, Ball clay and Gypsum whilst the Indo-Ka-Bala mine specialises in Ball clay only. Both of these mines use a combination of mechanised and manual labour. Rama Devi Sharma mine is 157 hectares in size and is a Ball and China clay mine. Similar to the Talaram

and Indo-Ka-Bala mines, work in the Rama Devi Sharma mine is both manual and mechanised. The final mine that will be described is ACIPA or Anirudh Ceramics Private Limited. This is the smallest of the mines and the supervisor stated it only began production one and a half years ago, which coincides with the time of the mine closures. Unlike the other three mines where excavation and mine expansion is taking place, this mine is only carrying out the dressing and dispatch phase of production. Dressing is a manual stage where the clay is cut down to size and obvious impurities removed, and remnants sieved for use in cement. This mine employs workers from Mudharamsar village only and will be discussed in some detail throughout the chapter.

	Talaram and Sons		Indo-Ka-Bala		Rama Devi Sharma		ACIPA	
Size (hectares)	245.86		162		157		60	
Clay types	Ball, China & Gypsum		Ball & China		Ball & China		China	
Staff	No. & Wages Rs.		No. & Wages Rs.		No. & Wages Rs.		No. & Wages Rs.	
Structural- Monthly Wage								
Managerial, clerical	4	6500	4	6000	4	7000	1	?
Mechanised (male)	2	?	4	4000	5	5000	0	
Mechanised (female)	0		0		0		0	
Manual (male)	7	x	2	x	10	3500	0	
Manual (female)	0		5	?	0		0	
Daily-wage								
Mechanised (male)	0		0	110***	0	110***	2	?
Mechanised (female)	0		0		0		0	
Manual (male)	30	118	12	96	13	150**	14	70
Manual (female)	8	118	10	68	7	100	25	70
Total	51		37		39		42*	

Table 5. Table showing distribution of labour in the four mines. These figures are approximates based on the calculation of informants and rough head counts and were accurate at the time of the research (2007). * This total does not include children below 14 years of which there were many. The wage data presented was given by the Supervisors for each of the mines. ** Daily wage manual labourers are paid Rs. 25 per metric tonne. The figures shown represent the Mine Supervisor's calculations. X Contract manual staff are paid Rs. 20 per metric tonne according to the Supervisors of these mines. ***These figures represent the amount such workers would earn if employed; currently none are employed in these categories.

Talaram and Sons

The Talaram mine is the largest of the four mines and was founded in 1952 and currently employs 13 Permanent Staff. The organisational structure of this mine is as follows: firstly, the Mine Supervisor in charge of overseeing the mine and liaising with the company's directors. Second to the Supervisor is the Mining Mate, who is in charge of labour and production. Informants explained that if there are over 50 workers in the mine a Foreman has to be employed whose job is to monitor the workers more closely. Following the Mining Mate are two clerks who are employed to keep records of production, expenditure, wages and dispatch loads. Non-administrative labour in the mines is divided into four key areas: firstly, the excavators who are employed on a contract basis to remove the top soil and begin the process of

excavation. This is the initial phase and unless extensions to the existing mine are taking place this task is usually completed in a couple of months. Large mechanical diggers are used for this and are hired along with the operator. This is fairly dangerous as tracks have to be made in order to take the weight of the diggers. As the diggers go deeper rocky earth has to be built up and packed tightly to make a ledge for the machine. A small group of men with shovels pack the earth and rocks to create a sturdy track for the digger. Some of the top soil or spoil is used to make the tracks and the remainder is loaded by the digger into a truck and dumped in a designated spot.

On one occasion I was told to drive up to the area where the mine was being extended to take a look and I offered to give a lift to one of the manual workers who were making his way to the site. Navigating the tracks in the mines is no easy task especially if you meet a truck on the way. The worker beside me, Sonaram, informed me how to reverse back onto a resting ledge to let the truck pass. Inspiring little confidence, he explained how he had seen a truck almost fall off the resting ledge requiring the workers to haul it back on with ropes.

The second process of production is possibly the most gruelling task and involves manual mining with pick axes and shovels. Approximately 25 people are employed in this mine to cut the clay from the exposed rock. All “cutting workers”, as they are known in the mines, are men. Out in the glaring sun, workers are divided into gangs of five. Each worker has one pick axe and one shovel. Workers perch on a ledge no more than a meter or so wide and at varying levels of height from 17 ft from the surface to 100 ft below, depending on which bench they are digging. This stage is perhaps the most dangerous as the extraction of the clay along its seam leads to overhanging ledges of unused rock. As the workers dig deeper into the seam the overhanging rock from the bench above becomes increasingly unstable. Cracks in the benches above can appear and informants explained how if they are not filed down they can collapse and cause fatal injuries. The men in these gangs must also load the rough cut clay into trucks which are then taken to the “dressing” area situated close to the site office.

At the dressing area the process of sorting and sizing takes place. This is done manually using small axes and is regarded by the men as the easiest job on site. The sorting and sizing workers are all women and their job is to cut the rough clay down to a size no larger than 4 to 6

inches. This involves sorting the best looking pieces and removing the impure rock from them. A highly repetitive task, the women squat over a pile of rocks and chip away at the clay. A second task carried out in this area is to sift the dust that comes from the dressing procedure for use in cement. Large sieves are rested at an angle and the dust is scooped up and passed through the sieve. This work carries respiratory health implications as the dust produced from both sorting, sizing and sieving is very fine and many workers complained of reoccurring chest and breathing problems. The men in the dressing area are “loaders” and they have to load the dressed clay onto the trucks. The truck drivers in the mines are responsible for removing spoil, transporting the rough cut clay to the dressing area and taking the final product to the weigh station in Tejeri Fanta for final dispatch (see map). Once at the weigh station the royalty documents are stamped and a truck driver sent by the buyer takes the load to its final destination. Weight is determined by the number of wheels on a truck, for example a six-wheel truck takes 9 tonnes, a ten-wheel truck carries 16 tonnes, 14-wheel truck carries 22 tonnes and an 18 wheel truck can hold 28 tonnes. Overall production for this mine is between 50 to 60 cubic tonnes per day; however, the actual amount depends on demand.



Plate 4. Photo of the digging phase of production.

Indo-Ka-Bala Mine

This mine was founded in 1969 and is also part of the Bikaner Clays and Chemicals Company. Similar to the Talaram and Sons mine, the organisational structure is divided into four key grades. Firstly, the Mine Manager, Shobash Paliwal, a jovial middle-aged man who lives in Mudharamsar village, and secondly the Mining Mate, thirdly, there are clerical and administrative staff, and finally the labourers. Similarly to the Talaram mine, work is both mechanised and manual and is divided more-or-less in the same way except the extraction process, which is mechanised. Between 40-45 feet of surface soil and rock is removed by large digging machines operated by one worker. Once the spoil is removed the clay is exposed and two operators use machines known as dumpers (JCB diggers) to load the clay into trucks. The third phase of production is carried out manually by six men who sort the clay from the trucks and load the sorted clay onto camel carts. The penultimate phase of production is dressing and, similarly to the Talaram mine, is carried out entirely by women and children (15 people). The final stage of production is carried out by men, using a combination of mechanised lifters and by hand using shovels. The finished clay is loaded on to trucks, which are sent off to be weighed. A total of 20 metric tonnes is produced on average per day in this mine.



Plate 5. Photo of digging and loading in the Indo-Ka-Bala Mine.



Plate 6. The mine manager, Sobash Paliwal, outside his office.



Plate 7. Unloading the camel carts.

Rama Devi Sharma Mine

The last lease for Rama Devi Sharma Mine started in 1993, although the supervisor speculated it had been running for more than 30 years before. The head office for this company is based in Bihar. The Supervisor in this mine is a highly enthusiastic young man, and whilst the managers in the other two mines were quite jaded by the governmental anti-pollution policies, he actively embraced the new measures. He was exceptionally proud of the advances he had made to the mine and stated he had planted over 5000 trees around the mine. This mine is possibly the least bleak of them all. A freshly white-washed office stands at the entrance to the mine with a grassed lawn and a fence covered in shocking pink Bougainvillea bushes and, unlike the other mines, a well is provided where workers can take refreshments. There has been considerable investment in this mine since the closures and due to the out of state investment, was the only mine that remained inactive for the entire closure period.

There is, similar to the two mines above, a combination of mechanised and manual labour is used. The first activity is excavation down to 55-60 feet using mechanical diggers. Similarly to the other two mines, informants explained that they use a benching technique making steps of 12 feet. After every bench is a seam of clay approximately 5 feet deep; this is extracted using a combination of manual and mechanised techniques. The structure of work is similar to the other two mines; however, this mine predominantly employs staff from Bihar. The Supervisor stated that all permanent workers are Biharis and only a few of the daily-wage manual and mechanised workers are local. He added that workers from Bihar are more experienced because they are trained to a higher standard in the mines in Bihar. There are considerable tensions between local workers and Bihari workers, which will be explained in following sections. However, suffice to say here, this mine is considered by village informants to be the best mine and the Supervisor is considered to be fair and kind to his workers.



Plate 8. The Rama Devi Sharma mine office.



Plate 9. Manual extraction at the Rama Devi Sharma mine.

Anirudh Ceramics and Plastics Limited (ACIPA)

The ACIPA Mine, according to the supervisor, is a new mine established in 2005, although the original site was an active mine some time previously. This is the smallest of the four and work is concentrated on the dressing and dispatch phase of production for larger mines in the region. The mine has two access points: one from the road and a small dirt track from Mudharamsar village. A small rundown office sits at the mine entrance and one tree is located near to the dressing area. All labourers are from Mudharamsar village, all are paid daily-wages, and production is carried out manually.

This mine had continued production during the closure period. In 2005 research was carried out in this mine and at that time there were only five workers, three of which were women. All were Meghval and came from the village. More recently however, production has increased and the mine currently employs 42 staff, which for the specific work carried out, is considerably more than the other three mines.

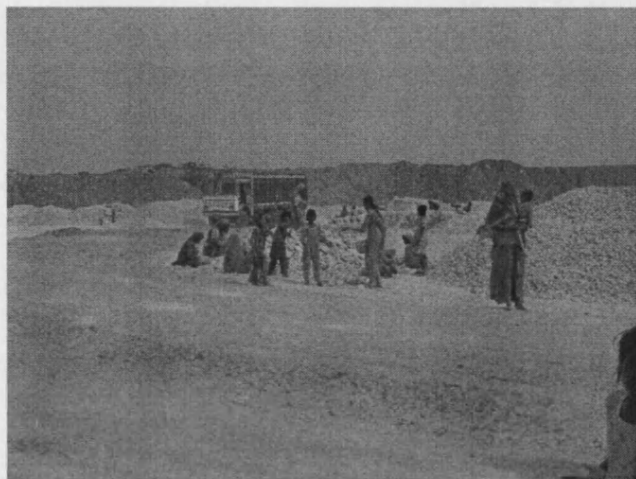


Plate 10. Photo of the ACIPA mine.

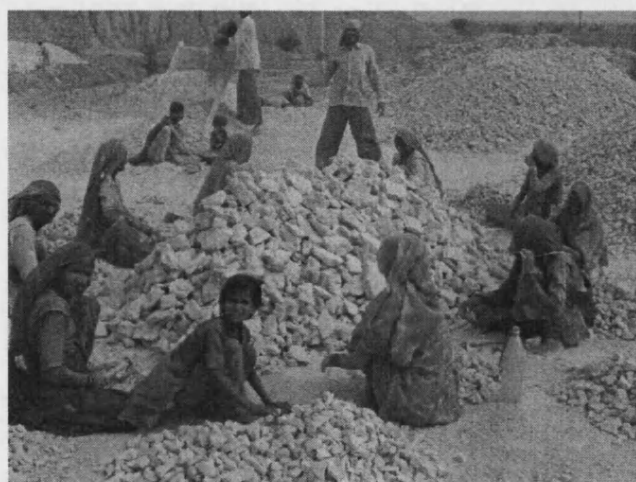


Plate 11. Women sorting, sizing and dressing at the ACIPA mine.



Plate 12. Sieving at the ACIPA mine.



Plate 13. The children of the ACIPA mine.

Recruitment, Income and Social Relations

As the previous section showed, jobs in the mines are hierarchically organised; however, these ranked labour divisions are further divided into sub-status sets that draw on a range of economic and social indicators, which provide the basis for particular social relations that develop. Recruitment patterns in the mines are primarily dictated by demand. However, the inter-play between different job positions, whether employed from a local pool or from Bihar, and issues concerning gender and age, are causes for rupture and discontent. As a result, recruitment styles,

income patterns, access to benefits and differential treatment, provide the material basis to the social relationships that exist between workers and work gangs within the mines.

There is a clear distinction in the mines between mechanised and manual labour. Social relations are primarily articulated through the disparity of income and material benefits that exist between permanent and daily-wage staff. Within these two categories further social distinctions are made based on gender and age. Caste, according to informants, does not appear to be particularly significant amongst manual workers. The general breakdown of castes in the mines is quite predictable. All managerial and administrative staff are high caste, whereas all manual workers are Scheduled Caste and OBCs (or low/ intermediate castes).

The recruitment methods for workers in the mines differ according to which type of job is being recruited. Senior level managerial staff are recruited directly by a company representative. On-site managerial staff from the region are in charge of recruiting all necessary staff and usually recruit locally. However, in two of the four mines (Talaram and Sons and Rama Devi Sharma) senior administrators have been recruited from Bihar, and not Rajasthan. In the Rama Devi Sharma mine, whose headquarters are based in Bihar, most permanent employees have also been recruited from Bihar, except the mine supervisor who is from Deshnoke, a village 30 km from Bikaner city. Permanent mechanised labourers are generally hired in conjunction with their machines from private local plant contractors, except in the case of the Rama Devi Sharma mine, where most of the machines and their operatives have come from Bihar. Plant contractors may also suggest known manual labourers to the site managers. However, permanent manual employees are usually hired through a process of enlistment or are brought in from contacts based in Bihar. Advertisements are posted and candidates gather at the site, and their names are recorded by the administrative staff. Those fortunate to have their names on the list are recruited as semi-permanent staff.

Similarly with Gerard Heuze's (1996a) study of miners in Bihar, now Jharkhand, and casual daily-wage manual labourers are primarily employed through the use of middlemen who specialise in recruiting casual manual staff. Known as *munim* by my informants, these recruitment assistants go directly into villages in the surrounding area and inform possible workers of the work-gangs required, where and when the work is and salary information. The

recruitment assistants generally favour reliable workers that are known to them (cf. Heuzé 1996a:100-102 for the preferential treatment of recruitment agents in the mines in Bihar). However unlike in Bihar, in Mudharamsar the middlemen are contracted by mine managers, which mean they are subject to the pressures of production, and consequently these relationships are weak and are broken with little remorse.

Whilst the ever-pressing need for work on behalf of labourers cannot be underestimated, many labourers complain bitterly about the recruitment and maintenance tactics of the *munim*. The recruitment assistants operating in Mudharamsar are quite unlike the Bihari agents Heuzé describes. The Bihari recruitment agents appear to be quite sympathetic toward casual workers, as they have built their recruitment network around the territory in which they live, thus potential workers are also likely to be neighbours and possibly even kin. The casual workers, according to Heuzé, are well aware of how these networks work and strategically draw upon them by expressing deference and submissiveness, making it hard for recruitment agents to refuse including them in the work gang (Ibid.). Heuzé consequently suggests that these ties of kinship and caste dictate access to jobs resulting in the fragmentation of the workers' solidarity. The recruitment agents working in Mudharamsar, however, are hired contractors who, on the one hand, can provide work for labourers, but on the other can just as easily take it away. Informants state that they do not live in the village and instead are recruited from Bikaner city. This distance means the middlemen and workers do not share the same familial ties or neighbourly restrictions making more visible their class differences¹³.

Accused of stooping to such levels as bribery, blackmail and coercion, the *munim* operating in Mudharamsar are also used by mine supervisors as the muscle to quieten dissatisfaction among existing manual employees. Informants have explained how recruitment assistants regularly threaten casual employees with the loss of their job and have occasionally made threats of violence toward casual workers who have sought support from union officials. The news of possible work, however, does travel fast in the village and many more workers

¹³ Gerard Heuze (1982) argues against the existence of an industrial working class in India. He claims that Indian workers fall short of the concept of class for several reasons. They do not have a common culture setting them apart from other classes. They do not have separate political organisations and their trade unions are dominated by professional politicians and other outsiders. Internally they are fragmented along the primordial lines of religion and caste. Moreover, for Heuzé, they are further divided in terms of income, security of employment, and occupational status.

than those selected by the *munim* find out through word-of-mouth. Both the labourers that have been selected by the recruitment assistants and those that have heard of the possibility of work from neighbours and friends will then gather at the site at the time indicated. The administrative staff along with the *munim* will pick the workers they wish to employ and send the others home.

The disparity between the treatment of permanent and casual staff is further highlighted through income patterns. All figures presented here were gathered between 2005 and 2007. Permanent Staff that are paid regularly are divided into two groups, those paid monthly and those paid fortnightly. For the three mines where mechanised work is carried out, managerial and administrative staff are paid monthly and all other permanent employees including salaried manual workers, are paid twice in one month. Referring to Table 5, the income data displayed in the table are based on statistics gathered from mine supervisors. Whilst the accuracy of this data is highly questionable, it, along with the income data received from workers, indicates the nature of the relationships staff have with their employers and the ideal representation of wage payment that employers wish to portray. As such, this data provides an insight into the gap between the appropriate amount as perceived by the supervisors and the actual or exaggerated under-payment on behalf of employees. Acquiring reliable income data in the field is difficult and many supervisors were reluctant to divulge full amounts for all their staff. Moreover, mine workers may have a vested interest in understating their actual pay. However, the disparity between the two reveals the tensions between workers and supervisors. The Government-set minimum daily-wage is divided into three categories: unskilled, semi-skilled and skilled. The wage amounts are Rs. 89, 105 and 145 respectively. As such, the government-set wage increases by 18 percent from unskilled to semi-skilled and 38 percent from semi-skilled to skilled. Using this as a benchmark it is possible to measure the discrepancy between the amounts given by supervisors and workers.

What can be seen from the income data presented is that managerial staff are paid approximately forty percent more than the permanent mechanised workers (between Rs. 5000-7000 and Rs. 4000- 5000 respectively or approximately £60- 80 and £47- 60), which loosely corresponds to the government standard. However, the key tensions between workers in the mines are between those that are paid daily-wages and those paid monthly or fortnightly, and

this is where the biggest discrepancies in wages can be seen. There are no daily wage mechanised workers in any of the mines at present. However, some supervisors did give wage information for this group. According to their figures, daily-wage mechanised workers would earn approximately Rs. 2860 (£34) per month for a six-day working week excluding days off, which is about 43 percent less than the highest salary earned by permanent mechanised workers. This level of wage disparity between workers doing similar jobs cannot be seen in any other work bracket except for that between male and female daily wage employees in the Indo-Ka-Bala and ACIPA mines. Male manual labourers in the Indo-Ka-Bala mine earn Rs. 96 (£1.14) per day whereas female labourers earn Rs. 68 (£0.81), which is approximately 40 percent less. Moreover, the government minimum wage is meant to apply to both male and female workers; however, the gender pay gap implies that women are considered to be in a category below unskilled workers. The work of women in the mines is generally considered by supervisors and male employees to be of an easier kind even though accident reports for this work are higher in number and long term respiratory problems common.

Upon talking to daily wage manual staff in Indo-Ka-Bala and the ACIPA mine to cross-check the figures given to me by supervisors; it seemed the amounts workers received were considerably less than the figures quoted by mine supervisors. Daily wage male workers in the ACIPA mine, for example, stated they earn Rs. 70 per day or Rs. 19 below the minimum wage and women stated they got Rs. 50 per day for similar work or 78 percent less than the minimum wage. As in the Indo-Ka-Bala mine, this is a gender gap of 40 percent. Wages in the ACIPA mines are worked out on the basis of average daily production. Workers, both male and female, in the dressing area explained that the salary figures are based on the ability to fill 43 *Kunda*, or round bowls approximately 50 cm in diameter, with dressed clay per day. They stated that if they do not fill the recommended 43 bowls they will get less. Thus the wage gap between male and female workers is not based on their ability to fill the required quota as both shares the same production quota¹⁴.

¹⁴ See Marx (1955) and Cooper (1984) arguing that there are similar rates of labour exploitation for piecework and time work.

These disparities are further made explicit by the presence of children in the mines and the amounts they receive. There are many children working in the ACIPA mine: approximately 10 aged between 7 and 14 years old. Women workers explained that they could not leave their children at home, and although the children do not get paid, it was clear they were helping their parents to meet the production quota. The supervisor explained that workers had to be over the age of 18 to get paid; however, some informants stated that most workers over the age of 14 were being paid the same as female workers. The adolescent children of adult workers who are paid the same rate as their mothers can increase the total wage of the family by quite a significant amount. One informant explained that he had his wife and three of his older children working in this mine, with a joint take home of Rs. 270 per day. The fact that adult women are paid the same as children suggests that their labour value is regarded as equivalent to that of children.

Similar to Heuzé's findings, women labourers make up a large contingent of the casual daily wage workers. A majority of the women are young, although there are some older women, unmarried or newly married and illiterate, and their customary obedience makes them the ideal choice of worker for the mine managers. Whilst also expected to keep house, thus reproduce the labour force on a daily basis, the status position of women in the mines with mixed gender work gangs is low. The married women are often employed alongside husbands, brothers and children, often carrying young babies with them to work. Older women who work in the mines have more status over the younger women and regularly boss them around, bringing with them the age status customs of the house. Women eat their lunch separately from the men and those who are the wives, sisters or daughters of male workers will serve their male kin first, as is also customary in the home. There are however some important deviations to this. Food is often shared amongst the daily-wage manual labourers regardless of caste. As at home, it is the women who will distribute the food to both their male relatives and the other men who are sharing it before dividing what is left among the women and children. Similarly to the rules of the home, the unrelated men, whilst receiving the food from the woman, will refer to them as sister or daughter whilst thanking them or in some cases make a jocular comment as a

husbands' brother might. These relations not only help to cement the labour class identity but also extinguish, in public at least, any threat of sexual interest.

Importantly, kinship is often subordinated analytically to caste as a marker of social identity, and not being able to share substances such as food and water with certain people should, as Lambert suggests, be examined in terms of relatedness rather than just caste (2000: 83). For Lambert's informants relatedness or non-relatedness stemmed from an "ecological conception" with a specific emphasis on the flow of substances between persons and places. This is similar to the female informants on the bus in Chapter One. However, in the mines women did not use substance or locality as a way to define how they perceive themselves, but rather the conditions of their labour. Rather than the collapsing of one identity based on a specific locality, what is evident among my informants is a continuation of the labour class identity for those who share the same conditions of labour in the fields as they do in the mines. The labour class identity then, is based on the workers' relatedness through their status as anonymous, daily-wage and manual workers regardless of caste. However, this is not the only identity to be found. Women have specific social relations that relate to gender norms and support systems. However, what marks these out as different is that they can be between women of different caste.

Whilst customary gender relations exist for most women who work alongside male kin, there are two other sets of relations and social networks among women of different caste that appear to be present: firstly, women who share childcare responsibilities, and secondly, an inter-generational division of labour. As the photos above highlight, there are a considerable amount of children present in the mines and whilst many of the older ones work just as hard as the adults, and are paid the same as their mothers, there are also many below school age, including babies and toddlers, that require constant monitoring. Women in the mines, regardless of caste, take care of each other's children and this provides a social network of childcare that includes both those with and those without children. Young or elderly women, for example, with no children present will also help to look after the infants, informally scolding them if they get in the way or comforting them when they cry. This type of informal childcare is not an uncommon practice in spaces deemed to be public but potentially dangerous or not subject to the usual

social mores of interaction. For example, I was often being thrust a baby to hold by a rather harassed looking mother on particularly busy bus journeys. It is, however, unusual that it is occurring in a work context.

The exchange in childcare among women in the mines of different castes does, however, suggest that the space of the mine is considered different to that of other work spaces and the village, but similar, in part, to that of the home. Whilst this sort of relationship would exist in the fields, it would rarely include actors from outside the village. As such, the mines offer more opportunity for women to establish relations with other women whom they would ordinarily have little to do with. This solidarity among women in the mines is also expressed through singing and an inter-generational division of labour that has been created by the women. This inter-generational organisation is similar to what one might expect to find in a joint-family household; the older women are treated with respect, water is offered to them first and the younger married women will take on the heavier jobs. The young unmarried women, without children, are bossed about by the older women, are given moral advice and lessons on good conduct, but are also given leeway to be more playful. Moreover, whilst each individual is required to meet a production quota, it is not uncommon for women to support other women in doing this. This is done by either lending them a child or helping the woman themselves once their own quota is adequately met. Whilst these types of relations appear common, particularly in the ACIPA mine, it would be wrong to romanticise this apparent harmony. Arguments are very common and some women refuse to engage with the other women altogether.

One thing the women in the mines share consistently is the general loathing felt toward them by other village women. Women who work in the mines are considered to be of poor moral standing by village women who do not need to work, and rumours of sexual promiscuity are the topic of lively debate at the wells in the village. Some young female miners have suggested that they fear sexual advances at work and whilst none were explicitly reported to me, it was made clear that the threat is very much present. Alpa Shah (2006) has noted that the industrial setting can allow for alternative expressions of sexuality where women can engage in prohibited romantic relations. In her study of economic migrants from Jharkhand to Brick Kilns in other states in India, she found that migration to industrial sites was not simply the result of

exploitative forces of capitalist production as is often said to be the primary driver (see Breman 1974, 1993) but rather, for her informants, was a way to escape the confines of the home, an opportunity to see more of the country and provided the chance for more freedom in romantic affairs (Shah 2006).

Whilst such work marks a positive trend in migration studies in exploring the agency of workers, economic push factors must not be ignored or relegated to a secondary factor as is frequently the case in such studies. Migration involves a particular set of relations that in part create disjuncture, not only in terms of physical space and place, but also temporal space where everyday customary values and duties are not as immediate. This does not mean, however, that the original economic motivations are not present. As Shah suggests “[I]t is not contradictory to view brick kiln labour migration as exploitative, while also understanding that most migrants not only view their movement as a choice but also see the brick kilns as an important, if temporary, space away from the social constraints back home” (2006: 93).

Whilst the industrial setting may be considered as more free, it is the act of long distance migration that compounds this sentiment in the case above. For my informants the industrial setting is on their doorstep, most of the mines are only a short distance walk away from the village, forty five minutes at most, and a majority of their work mates are also neighbours and kin. For this reason, the behaviours of women in most of the mines are still subjected to the close scrutiny of male or older female relatives that also characterise their lives in the village, even if there are several important modifications to these relations. It is possible that the accusations of promiscuity may be based in some real practice; however, it is more common for female workers and older men to talk of the threat of sexual violence rather than a will to explore alternative romantic liaisons. This discourse partly explains the use of fictive kinship among men and women in the mines. The nature of the accusations of sexual violence warrants further analysis as they point toward particular cleavages between the compositions of work gangs across the mines.

Both men and women tend to suggest that it is the Bihari manual labourers in the Rama Devi Sharma mine who are the biggest threat. This points not only to a regional bias, which in part is grounded in a general distrust of Biharis that many informants both in the village and

outside share, but it is also rooted in economic relations. All manual permanent workers in the Rama Devi Sharma mine are said to be Biharis and many villagers complain that they take the jobs of local people. This will be discussed in more detail below but suffice to say that the threat to local women at the hands of the “uncouth philandering Biharis” is unlikely to be based in actual practice and is more likely to be symptomatic of the competition to secure regular incomes and a general prejudice against East Indians (considered by many in the west of India to be thieves and bandits).

There may well be, of course, something particularly aggressive about Bihari gender relations that have also lead to such generalisations by Rajasthanis. For example, Argwal (1994: 275-276) has highlighted how over the years in Bihar there has been an erosion of women’s customary rights and an increase in land related ‘witch’ killings among tribal communities. Such murders have been noticeably perpetrated by the close male kin of women who stood to inherit familial lands as per their customary right. It could well be that stories of such atrocities have reached Rajasthan and therefore contributed to the anxiety many feel about the Biharis in the area.

Tensions are also strongly felt between those who have permanent positions and those workers who are paid daily-wages. Casual labourers consider themselves to be a “labour class” distinct and separate from permanent employees. When in the mines, these two categories of workers tend not to mix. Permanent employees form work gangs with other permanent workers and although the two are forced to interact on some occasions, it is clear there is a status differentiation between them, even if carrying out the same roles. Permanent workers believe they have more claims on the organisation of work and life in the mines. When mixing, they tend to be the more vocal, displaying authority over the daily-wage labourers. This may come through citing anecdotal experiences of occasions when daily-wage labourers were not present, or suggesting they have a closer relationship with management than the daily-wage workers. Both groups of workers are, however, well aware of where the profits of their labour go and draw no distinctions between class members on the basis of caste. As one daily-wage Kumbhar informant put it:

“We are all of different castes but this is not important. We are all labour class, the *thekedar* (mine or property owners who lease the sites from the government) take the money and we get nothing. It doesn't matter which caste you are from. There is competition but this is because some are regular workers. They get bonuses, pensions and they know how much they will earn every month. We do not have this thing. If we say anything they try to stop us, the *munim* say they will give our jobs to people from outside Rajasthan. Nobody cares about the labour class this is the truth”.

The class division is based on whether one has regular employment and all the perks that go with it. This informant was quite clear about the nature of their position, and during this conversation 10 to 15 other villagers gathered to listen and soon enough everyone had some supporting comment to make. It became increasingly hard to carry on with the conversation as several people were talking at the same time and my assistant was struggling to translate accurately and my hand was aching from trying to write everything down. One of the key points made by one informant and agreed upon by the others, however, was that they had no time to think of caste, they were all in this situation, and they had to support each other. This incident was the first time that I had heard so many people talk in such a passionate way to present such a unified position. What the incident above showed was how strongly informants saw their position in terms of economic differentiation and the instability of their work. Caste was overtly important in terms of who the managers were but for the daily-wage workers, caste as a social category was regarded as not as important.

Caste here has two important dimensions: firstly as a social category, where one's caste name, *jati*, indicates the position and commensal nature of that individual and secondly, an analytical dimension, as a system of social stratification based on a hierarchical ranking of social types. Informants mute *jati* when explaining the labour class but do draw on some of the analytical components of caste. The muted nature of caste was particularly clear when informants discussed their involvement in the demonstrations that took place during the mine closure period (2004/2007). Informants explained how during this period many of the workers in the village participated in the demonstrations. The miners explained how they would travel together to the site of the demonstration, sit together and share any food they had.

It could of course be that my informants were down playing the significance of caste to me as most Indians are reluctant to appear caste prejudiced and it is more likely that caste is used even if in a contradictory or covert manner. One important aspect, however, that suggests a conceptual overlap between caste and class is linked to ideas of commensality. For example, when asked whether food would be shared between daily-wage workers, the answer was a resounding yes. However, when asked if food would be shared with permanent workers and vice versa, the answer was a resounding no. However, because the recruitment process in the mines is fairly ad hoc it is possible that a once daily-wage worker could become a permanent worker on any given recruitment occasion and in so doing informants stated food would no longer be shared with them. It is important, however, to recognise that commensality of this kind is also a feature of class (cf. Bourdieu 1986). What is most significant in this particular context is that a worker's upward mobility to a permanent position automatically necessitates a change in commensal relations with that person. This is because the conditions of their labour have changed and consequently so to has their relatedness. They no longer share the defining characteristics of being manual daily wage labourers and are instead separated both physically in terms of the work gang they belong to but also structurally in terms of the conditions of their labour.

Parry (1999) has noted that in publicly owned factories the organisation and recruitment of labour de-legitimise caste and provide a barrier against ethnic regionalism (Ibid:3, Parry & Struempell 2008). In part this is also true for miners in Mudharamsar. As shown, caste as a category of status and differentiation in the mines is positively denied by manual workers. However, there are tensions surrounding the regional origin of work gangs. The threat that local jobs will be filled by Biharis is ever present and in several of the mines Biharis make up a majority of the permanent workforce. Whilst many of those classified as Biharis are actually from Uttar Pradesh, the term Bihari is used as an insult and informants often make references to how they do not wash, are sexual predators that not only threaten their women, but also take the best jobs. It is no coincidence that the Biharis who receive the most insults are those working in the Rama Devi Sharma mine: as mentioned previously, this mine is considered to be the best mine by informants. When asked if they had a choice which mine they would prefer to work in,

most informants responded by saying the Rama Devi Sharma mine. One Meghval informant said:

“This mine [Rama Devi Sharma] is best, the supervisor wants to make it a good place to work and he looks after his staff. He is very careful and follows all the rules. I have heard that he pays good wages and most staff are treated well”.

When I asked this informant about the Biharis he got quite agitated and added:

“These bloody people come and take our jobs. We all want to work in this mine but we can’t because the rats take the jobs and we are left with the scraps. They all live together, eat together, wash together, they all are drinking [alcohol] and sleep together- please don’t mind this thing but this is their character. They are a real problem for us, but we can’t do anything about it. They do not have family so behave badly. In before time my father could let my sisters walk freely around the place but now I will not let my daughters out –these bloody boys will try their luck with them. You [me] should also be careful for this thing”.

Therefore the labour class in this context is unified in so far as the workers are local and paid daily wages. Daily wage labourers are quite clear about the basis of their position, access to employment opportunities, and the inequalities present in the mines. However, their strategies for gaining work in an agricultural setting and the social categories used for differentiating between types of workers are premised on quite different criteria.

The following section will discuss agricultural labour and land ownership and how the orientation of labour relations for those who are daily wage labourers in the mines but more permanent workers in the fields, shift to include more traditional modes of social organisation. These shifts both divide and strengthen the labour class: there are some who employ kinship and caste networks and there are others who do not and much of this depends on production and the types of historical relationships they have within the village.

Moreover, the distinction between those who own their own land, who do not, those helping out kin and those who sell their labour to strangers, have further social implications for the solidarity of the labour class. Some daily wage labourers in the mines are kin and caste labourers in the fields, whilst others remain ‘anonymous’ daily wage labourers in both settings. Some informants strongly believe they are a labour class and landlords are just the same as mine

managers, whilst kin agricultural labourers see their work as fulfilling familial obligations. Those who own their own land, however small a plot, are part of a different class altogether and it is those that are landless daily-wage labourers that unite under the labour class.

Part 2. Agriculture

The labour class is not a watertight compartment to use Bédetille's analogy. Rather the focus of its position and the identity it is given shifts, in part, towards a set of relationships that draw more on caste and kinship. Whilst historically agriculture in India has been discussed in terms of its reliance on labour derived through client/ patron bonds, often predicated on traditional structures of caste and kinship, there has been a massive decline in agriculture throughout India (Gupta 2005). Even though the figures suggest an increase in other forms of rural employment, the Indian village still conjures images of a pristine agrarian life governed by the agricultural seasons and customary duties pertaining to caste and kinship. We know the picture on the ground is not as simple (see Parry 1979, Breman 1993, Bédetille 1996, and Gupta 2005, to name a few who highlight the complexities in agrarian relations). Mudharamsar is no exception; the wealthy in the village are low caste, and other sources of employment such as mining are more lucrative for poorer village dwellers. Gupta (2005: 756) suggests that what is common in all instances is a general disenchantment with village life. As such, the ambition to leave the village for a better life outside of it, or to stay in the village but not to work the land, is too pronounced to be overlooked. Changing social relations within rural settings, brought about by progressive government policy, migration to urban areas and a shift away from agriculture, has meant that more land has been available to low castes. In Mudharamsar it is the Meghval and Kumbhar who occupy the position of wealthy landlords often employing workers of the same or similarly low caste. And many of the high castes have given up agriculture for more lucrative management jobs in the mines, government or retail industries. A common ditty among low castes sums the situation thus:

“Caste is like this. We live in Mudharamsar village, the high castes move to Kolayat town, when they move to Bikaner city; we will move to Kolayat town, we will always be behind them”.

Historical Background: Land Ownership and Reform

Historically Bikaner's kings held little land in the province of Kolayat. Early Gazetteers indicate that *Khalsa* or “crown lands” were located in the east of the district where the land was slightly more fertile and Kolayat was never included under the royal titles (Erskine 1910). During the time of the formation of a unified Rajasthan in 1949, there were numerous demonstrations in Bikaner led by low caste tenants under the auspices of the regionally famous freedom fighter Chaudhari Kumbharam Arya. These demonstrations led to extensive land reforms; namely the Rajasthan Protection of Tenants Ordinance (1949) and the Rajasthan Tenancy Act (1955), which became applicable to the whole of Rajasthan. The land reforms provided for the transfer of titles to peasant cultivators who had traditional rights of usufruct, the removal of intermediaries, compensation of landlords by the province for lands resumed, ceilings on the size of holdings, and retention of title by landlords to land that they personally cultivated (Rosin 1981:75). As a result of the political struggles in Bikaner, the emphasis on tenants' rights, and capping holding size that underpinned land reform policies, meant that land shifted from the hands of high caste *Zamindars* or landlords, to the hands of those who had worked the land for them. These cultivators and tenants were low caste and Mudharamsar village is an example of where such a shift took place.

Briefly, Mudharamsar village was founded by a group of wealthy high caste Paliwal agriculturalists. According to informants, in the early 1940s a majority of land was held by a high caste Paliwal landlord in the village, Ramchandhan Paliwal. He owned 500 acres or 2000 *bighas* of land, 16 acres of which were cultivated by the father of Rupa Ram Panwar, Mungra Ram Panwar, and the ancestor of the current Meghval lineage.

The greatest victory of the tenant movement in Bikaner, according to one of Rupa Ram's sons, was the establishment of the Rajasthan Tenancy Act (1955) aimed at securing the

rights of tenant farmers. Under this act Rupa Ram's father was issued with his first official tenancy agreement, which stated he only had to give thirty three percent of the total crops harvested from this land as *banto* or rent and was entitled to keep the remaining sixty-seven percent for himself. This agreement, coupled with the passing of the *Zamindari* and *Biswadari* Abolition Act four years later, led to the transfer of ownership of the 16 *bighas* (4 hectares) from Ramchandhan Paliwal to Rupa Ram's father. Moreover, a further 16 *bighas* of Ramchandhan Paliwal's land were given to a Kumbhar family and 48 more were passed on to four Pushkarna Brahmin brothers to be divided equally amongst them. Pushkarna Brahmins in the village lost a majority of their land in subsequent years even though they were the first to receive titles under the land reform legislation. In fact, today, only the son of one of the original Brahmin brothers and his children remain in the village.

The village Patwari explained that the remaining 420 *bighas* were claimed by the government and were later, as part of larger contracts, leased out to the mining companies. According to the 1965 village survey carried out by the Census of India 1961 the Meghvals had considerable lands, suggesting that they either already owned more land than was stated by the Patwari or acquired more land shortly after the land reforms.

The census report wrongly suggests that the village was a *khalsa* village based on the *ryotwari* system where the responsibility of paying land revenue fell to the cultivator himself with no intermediary. The *ryot* had full rights in terms of sale, transfer and leasing the land and could not be evicted if the revenue payments were kept up-to-date. This system could explain the large plots owned by lower castes in the village. However, my informants along with the Gazetteer of Bikaner for 1910 state that the western part of Kolayat district was never a *khalsa* area. If both are correct and I think it likely they are, it means the patterns of large low caste landownership must have occurred during the time of the land reforms, as previously the land would have been owned by Rajput, or as informants have stated, Paliwal *Jagidars*.

Land in Rajasthan prior to the abolition of *Zamindars* and *Jagidars* was divided into two types: *khalsa* or non-*khalsa*. The *Khalsa* lands were under control of the state/ king and the non-*khalsa* lands were given to intermediaries known as *Zamindars*, where the grantees of the land were the *Jagidars*. What is more likely is that during the late 1950s a period where Rupa

Ram was a prominent politician, the family were able to take advantage of the land reform policies and buy considerably more land. Today the powerful Panwar family divided over 6 households own 97.5 hectares of the 150.62 owned by the entire Meghval landowner households (of which there are 15). The table below reveals the distribution of land ownership according to the census of 1961.

Community	No. Households	Acreage (original figures)	In Hectares	Households without land
Sunar	1			1
Pushkarna Brahmin	1			1
Dholi	1	10.0	4.05	
Paliwal	1	16.0	6.5	
Rajput	1	22.0	8.9	
Muslim	1	16.0	6.5	
Khati	2	16.0	6.5	1
Nayak	10	179.0	72.4	
Meghval	21	441.5	178.7	2
Nai	2	46.0	18.6	
Sadh	6	164.5	66.6	1
Lohar	4	26.5	10.7	1
Khumbar	11	212.0	85.8	2
Darzi	15	189.5	76.7	
Total		1339.0	541.95	9

Table 6. Table showing population of Mudharamsar in 1961. The data is taken from Bhargava & Gupta (1965: 28).

Today the pattern of land ownership in the village, with the exception of the Brahmin family and Nayak households, mirrors the figures recorded in 1961. As such, the contemporary landlords are no longer the high caste Paliwal founders of the village but rather a majority of the agricultural land is now owned by the Meghval and Kumbhar.

Agriculture: Production and Ownership

Nationally agricultural labour in India is in decline. The percentage of those engaged in Rural Non-Farm Employment (RNFE) over twenty years went from less than 20% in 1993 up to 35.2% in 2002 (Gupta 2005: 756). Whilst this does not suggest that agriculture itself is in decline, it does highlight that fewer people are engaged in agriculture in rural settings, which could be due to mechanisation, better fertilizers and irrigation systems rather than a decline in production. Similarly, the organisation of agriculture in Mudharamsar is such that most villagers

are not dependent on it as their main source of income, instead they are likely to cite mining as their primary occupation. Only 14.7% of men (78 men) and 8.8% or 35 women in the village recorded their primary occupation as farming/ agricultural. Moreover, a staggering 197 or 80% of households returned from the survey claim to have no agricultural land of their own compared to only 10% of households in 1961. The exact reason for this has been difficult to establish. Informants stated that they did not have time to work their own land and that because of the mining land was too expensive now.

The population density of Bikaner district is one of the lowest in the state at 61 per square mile (Census of India 2001). However, poor soil quality, the lack of irrigated land in this region, and irregular and minimal rainfall has meant that many farmers are only engaged in semi-commercial or subsistence agriculture that does not require big plots of land or a large labour force. Moreover, the government owns a considerable amount of land in and around the village locale. A total of 1334.38 hectares of land is owned by the government most of which is now leased to private companies for mining purposes.

A further reason for the lack of regular participation in agriculture close to the village is due to the large irrigation project, the Indira Gandhi Canal, which stretches through the northern most part of Kolayat *tehsil*. Heralded as the most ambitious of irrigation projects, the Indira Gandhi Nahar Project, upon which work began in 1957, was designed to bring water to the Thar Desert, yet villagers regularly comment on how hard it is to buy land in the region. The estimated completion date of the canal was set at 1999 at which point it was believed to have increased the agricultural production for all those living in Bikaner. However, it is only about 65% complete today and the land in the region is owned by a select few. When/ if completed, the Indira Gandhi Canal will be the world's longest irrigation canal: 9709 km. Beginning at the Hairke Barrage, a few kilometres below the confluence of the Sutlej and Beas rivers in western Punjab, it runs south-southwest for 650 kilometres, and will eventually terminate in the north western most district in Rajasthan, Jaisalmer. In Rajasthan the Indira Gandhi canal feeds approximately 15 watercourses running both south and north from the canal. Each watercourse is expected to irrigate an area of 200-300 hectares with a multitude of smaller tributaries running from them (Hooja, 2001). However, none of the tributaries stretch to Mudharamsar

village¹⁵. Over the years there have been several large disputes raised about the canal project. The transfer of water from the canal basin in the Punjab to Rajasthan, for example, contributed to the civil unrest in the Punjab state during the 1980s and early 1990s (GIS development 2004). Throughout its history, charges of corruption and mismanagement have been levied against the Indira Gandhi Canal Board and cases of bribery, mal-distribution of water, and carelessness are frequently raised in the Indian media.

Whilst agricultural production is minimal compared to other districts in Rajasthan through which the canal passes, the land close to the canal has become the centre of agricultural production in Bikaner. However, the controversy surrounding the canal combined with its proximity to the international border with Pakistan, and better soil quality and crop yield has made the land surrounding it expensive and difficult to access. Informants have commented that only those with political connections and the money to do so are able to buy land in the command region. The principle commercial arable crops produced in the canal region are wheat, cotton, sugar cane and peanuts. Some villagers travel the 30 km to cultivate and work as agricultural labourers on land close to the canal region. Many make the daily commute by bus, private truck or Ox cart and during the harvest season many more stay in the fields for weeks at a time.

Very few of the villagers, however, own land in this region, the exception being the wealthy Meghval family, which is a point of great contention between other families that own land around the village. The price of land close to the canal is expensive and much has been brought by wealthy Rajputs from the city for the purpose of cash-crop production. What is more, commercial arable agriculture has never been big business in Bikaner, where historically pastoral agriculture was more predominant. For example, Bikaner has invariably been ranked as one of the lowest districts for agricultural output; however, land in the canal command area is highly prized and provides yields far exceeding that of non-irrigated land. As such, crops from the irrigated region flood the local markets, often driving down the price of crops at the corn exchange, which makes it hard for farmers with non-irrigated land to compete. One of the greatest tensions in the village is between families without irrigated land and those with it.

¹⁵ In the literature these areas are called outlet commands and in Hindi *chak*.

The agricultural production carried out by villagers involves both arable and pastoral forms. Predominantly arable agriculture is monsoonal and irrigation is rare in the area directly surrounding the village. This is because the tube wells needed for irrigation are expensive to dig due to the depth of the water table. Most villagers own land some distance away from the village, mainly because the land directly surrounding the village on the northern and western side is either owned by the mining contractors from Bikaner and Bihar or is common grazing land. A majority of the land owned by villagers is near to the village of Sankla, whilst still classed as Mudharamsar, the land is a two rupee bus ride away (approximately 10 minutes). Land on the far side of this village is irrigated, although no villagers own land in that vicinity.

The common seed and pulse crops produced by villagers are as follows: *Bajra*, which is the major food crop of Rajasthan and is a dry-farmed subsistence grain ground to make bread most common in winter months. *Jowar*, popular for its drought tolerance, is used as both human food and fodder for animals. *Moth* (pronounced mot) is a popular desert pulse used in cooking and for animal fodder. *Til* or sesame, and crops such as wheat, gram, barley, chickpeas and lentils are also grown. Vegetable crops include: *Ketchri*, *Kukū* (cucurbitaceous or cucumber family), *Sangri* and watermelons. Seeds, berries and green beans that grow in the wild are also seasonally harvested; these include: *Buro* and *Sewun*, which are often mixed with *bajra*, wild *Ber* and *Kharil* berries are also collected and eaten as fruits. A further popular wild vegetable are *Kajiri* pods which are used either fresh in vegetable dishes or are dried, ground into flour, and formed into a *bhujiya* (namkeen) that can either be eaten dry or cooked in ghee and served with *roti* (unleavened flat bread slightly thicker than chapatti).

There are certain phases in the agricultural cycle at which there is a heavier demand for labour. This is so during ploughing, planting, weeding and harvest. Each of these operations takes approximately a month to complete, with a peak period for each. Ploughing usually takes place between the months of November to December, a month after the last *Bajra* and water melon harvest. This is largely carried out by men either manually with hand ploughs or with an ox plough as none of the farmers in Mudharamsar have mechanised ploughs or harvesters. Natural manure or occasionally chemical manures, for more prosperous farmers, are dug into the earth and the planting begins in late December to early January. However, if there have been

unusually heavy rainfalls or hailstorms in late January early February as there were in 2006, these crops will need to be re-planted. By April/ May the crops are almost matured and the task of thinning and weeding is carried out. This phase is primarily carried out manually by women and children. The harvest season is the longest phase and demands the most labour. Harvest begins in June and depending on the crop, strength of the monsoon and the weather conditions experienced during the growing period, can end as late as October. Agricultural production is thus characterised by peaks and troughs in the demand for labour, the most time pressured peak taking place during the harvest season. Informants state that pulse crops, for example, have to be harvested quite quickly as they are prone to bolting and this is intensified by irregular rainfalls. Whilst agricultural work is an on-going process requiring a constant supply of labour, most informants who work for daily wages state that in one year, if the rains have been good, they will only get four months of intensive work.

The crucial social relations as far as agriculture is concerned are generally seen as those between owners and non-owners of land. However these two categories are not homogenous nor are they as dichotomous. Many of the farmers in the village, like elsewhere in India, who own their own land, are small scale cultivators engaged in petty/ non-commercial agriculture. For example, 23 of the 39 landowning households have plots less than 10 hectares in size. Moreover, the largest group are the non-owners of land making up 80% of households. Those that are involved as agricultural labourers are so for either large absentee landlords who own land near the canal, or for family members, the head of which has a primary income not related to agriculture, such as the Meghvals. Moreover, there are differences between those that are tenants on rented land and agricultural labourers who work for daily wages in cash. Tensions over agricultural work are similar to the disputes found amongst miners. This is particularly the case for those who sell their labour for daily wages. However, unlike in the mines where tensions arise between daily wage labourers and permanent employees, in the fields these tensions are related to kinship and these will be discussed below.

The Main Landlords and Land Revenue

The landowners are not a homogenous group and one of the key distinctions is between those who own irrigated land and those who do not. Moreover, further fissures occur according to how many kin members have entitlement to the product of the land and the extent to which they depend upon it as their main source of income. The official records of land ownership or *Jamabandi* for the village are quite misleading with respect to working out the income generation patterns of land owners. This is because the land owned only refers to land in the immediate vicinity of the village and does not include land owned in other areas of the same *tehsil*. Moreover, legal caps placed on the size of land holdings has meant that often the name of the owner on the record is not actually the person who receives the income from the land. It is common for villagers to use family ties to buy extra land and an increasingly popular option is to put the land in the names of female relatives or using the name of friends. However, this means that the *Jamabandi* is not particularly useful as a measure of land ownership on its own. The data I present here is from a combination of official land records, early census data, the oral histories of informants, and the contemporary narratives of landownership in the village. What becomes clear is that the historical relationships between the original village founders, the castes that served them, and the continuity of kinship links have, for the most part, produced the unusual, although not unique, landownership patterns in the village.

Size of Holding (Hectares)	Kumbhar	Meghval	Paliwal	Brahmin	Darzi	Sadh	Rajput	Muslim	Total
0-1			1			1			2
1-2	1	1		1	1			1	5
2-3	1	1	1						3
3-4	1		1						2
4-5	1	1							2
5-6		2				1			3
6-7	2							1	3
7-8									0
8-9	1	1							2
9-10		2							2
10-15	1	1	1		1				4
15-20	2	4			1				6
20-30	2	2					1		5
Total	12	15	4	1	3	2	1	2	39
Total Land Owned	131.27	150.62	19.51	1.27	27.52	5.3	27.50	7.5	370.49

Table 7. Land ownership patterns for the village according to caste and household.

Largest landowners in the Village (caste)	No. of large Landowner Households	Total Land (Hectares)	Average Annual Revenue Per Hectare irrigated (Rs.)	Average Annual Revenue Per Hectare non-irrigated (Rs.)	Total Annual Income (Rs.)
Meghval-Panwar	6	97.5	271,687.50	347,760	619,447.50
Kumbhar-Prajapat	3	27.61		121,925.76	121,925.76
Darzi	2	27.52		121,528.32	121,528.32
Rajput	1	27.50		121,440	121,440
Paliwal	4	19.51		86,156.16	86,156.16
Total	16	172.14	271,687.50	798,810.24	10,704,97.74

Table 8. Ownership and average revenue patterns for the largest landowning castes and families in the village

The largest landowners (or *bada kastkar* as informants call them) in the village are Meghval, Kumbhar, Darzi and Paliwal and the land is sub-divided between kin. The wealthiest landowners are members of the Meghvals descended from Mungla Ram and the ownership of irrigated land in the Indira Gandhi canal command area marks them out as quite distinct from the other landowners.

As mentioned previously, the Meghvals were brought to Mudharamsar in the late 19th century by the Paliwals to render them professional service as Charmars or Chamars (the removers and skinners of dead animals and leather working), and as cultivators. Fifty or so years later great political upheavals and low caste tenant demonstrations, such as those led by Chaudhari Kumbharam Arya in Bikaner, sought to put an end to the exploitative *Zamindari* tenant relationship. At the same time the Meghval caste *samaj* or council during the mid 1950s ordained that no Meghval shall in future drag or skin dead animals. This decision coincided with the *Zamindari* and *Biswadari* Abolition Act (1959), which led to the redistribution of land and as a result a majority of the Meghvals were able to leave their traditional caste occupations to take up full-time agriculture. As agricultural labourers and cultivators for the Paliwal landlords the Meghval family acquired land. Consequently, the newfound status of the dominant Panwar Meghval family as landowners in the 1950s meant they were able to send their children to school and ultimately raise their economic status. As one of the lucky families who received land, these Meghvals were able to acquire more lands and are now the dominant landowners in the village.

The Landowners

Chakan Lal Panwar, the elder son of Rupa Ram (see the genealogies in chapter one) owns 85 *bigha* or 21.25 hectares near the village. A further two brothers, Ramchandhan and Ramdial Panwar, own 21 hectares. Kamraj Panwar, a younger brother, owns 12.5 near the village and 6.25 hectares in the Indira Gandhi Canal command area. Gangaram Panwar, a cousin of the Meghval family, also owns 75 *bigha* or 18.75 hectares, and another cousin owns 71 *bigha* or 17.75 hectares of land. The total land owned by this family is 97.5 hectares, 18.75 hectares of which are irrigated. One Rajput (see figure 5.) owns 27.5 hectares of land in the village.

However, they are not from the village but from Bikaner city and whilst they employ local workers they will be treated separately in the following section. Whilst Kumbhars, when compared to their population and that of the Meghvals in the village, appear to own considerable lands, many of the owners reside outside of the village, and the largest plot owned by villagers is 27.61 hectares and is sub-divided amongst three brothers.

Further divisions can be seen within the landowner class between those who have irrigated land and those that do not. The cultivated land on the left side of the road on the western side of the village (see map) is divided into four plots, all of which are owned by the sons of Rupa Ram. Two of the largest plots are owned by individuals whose main income is derived from this land. Work on the land is primarily carried out by themselves, their wives, children and kin, except during harvest time when daily-wage agricultural labour is recruited. The other two plots, which are smaller in size (approximately 2 hectares each), are rented out to two other Panwar Meghval families in the village. The cultivated land on the right hand side of the road is divided into three plots and is owned by one Sadh, Darzi and one Kumbhar family in the village. This land is not irrigated. The plot of grazing land to the south eastern edge of the village on the left hand side of the road is jointly owned by the Meghval brothers and is primarily used as grazing land for cattle, although this land also contains wild growing *ber* bushes and *kaijri* trees.

Rupa Ram's sons also own land in the canal irrigated region near the Pakistan border and, as one might expect, the crop yields from this land are considerably higher than for non-irrigated land. The average revenue from crops grown is based on the total average annual yield of 1.92 quintal or 192 kgs per hectare on non-irrigated land and 6.3 quintal per hectare on irrigated land, as per my informants' calculations. Irrigated land thus produces approximately 6 times the yield of non-irrigated land. The general cost of crops vary each year depending on the type of crop, levels of seasonal rainfall, demand, and the best price that can be arranged at one of the three *mandī* or corn exchanges in the region. Type of crop and corresponding price do vary slightly, but all hover approximately between 1800 to 2700 rupees per quintal. The figures in table 7 are based on an average of Rs. 2300 per quintal, irrespective of the type of crop grown. The overall net income of the Meghvals then is substantially higher than the income of

other landowning families, and whilst their income is split between 6 households, it is still over double the amount which each Kumbhar household, for example, is likely to receive.

The position of the two large Meghval and Kumbhar land owning families in the village, however, are not just determined by how they relate to each other, but rather are shaped by how they relate to other villagers with whom they have contact. The choice of worker to work the land varies amongst the landlords and this is where the key ruptures between workers and owners exist. The Meghvals tend to employ kin members to cultivate the land and only during the peak harvest time employ daily-wage workers from other castes. The landowning Kumbhars in the village, on the other hand, tend to employ kin labourers and individuals who have a close relationship with the Kumbhars, although not necessarily from the same caste. For example, the Dholi are employed as agricultural labourers by Kumbhar landowners, and although the Dholi do not see this work as their primary occupation, (see employment tables above) most of their regular income, since the mine closures, is actually derived from work in Kumbhar fields. Rarely do the Kumbhar landowners work in the fields themselves. Moreover, some Kumbhar workers prefer not to work on farms owned by the Meghval, preferring to work on Kumbhar or Darzi plots, citing concerns over respectability as their motivation. The Darzi landowners employ a combination of daily-wage workers and longstanding cultivators that have worked the land for several generations. The relationship between those that are employed as daily-wage casual workers and those that have kinship links mark relations that divide the labour class.

Labour Relations in the Fields: Tenants and Kin Labourers

Tenants and kin workers can be divided into three groups. Firstly, those who are tenants on land owned by large absentee landowners, secondly, those who are tenants on small plots of land owned by kin landowners and thirdly, workers employed to work as labourers by kin during peak times. Whilst the second and third class of workers also engage in daily-wage work in the mines, when in the fields their position marks a departure from the unstructured position they held in the mines, to one structurally defined by kinship. The Dholi are likewise recruited on a similar basis and whilst they are not related, their relationship with the Kumbhars in the

traditional exchange of village services utilises discourses of honour, duty, and obligation not dissimilar to kinship ties. Moreover, the relations between workers and landlords with kinship ties share certain characteristics comparable to a system of patronage that guarantees them regular employment. The Meghval kin labourers claim to be the children of the Panwar brothers' parallel cousins. In other words, the Panwar brothers' paternal grandfather was the brother of the labourers' great grandfather. The labourers descend four generations from Karna Ram, the uncle of Rupa Ram (see genealogies in Chapter 1). They refer to the landlords as respected uncle or *chachaji*. They are considered family of the same Panwar Gotr and no marriage alliances are possible between them. The kin tenants working on land away from the village, however, are generally related by marriage to the landlords and therefore are of different Gotr. For example, Kamraj's wife's younger brother was a tenant on the land of one of his farms. Whilst the tenant called Kamraj *chachaji*, Kamraj referred to him as *sala* (wife's brother). This particular tenant was treated fairly well as he had only just started working for Kamraj when I was there. Many other tenants do not fair as well, and although maintaining a level of civility is necessary among marriageable groups, on farms near the village kin are generally related by consanguinity, albeit distant, in some cases through affinity.

Whilst the kin tenants on small plots are more-or-less guaranteed a regular income from the land, the kin labourers are paid either daily wages or in kind (share of the crops). Both classes of kin labourers, however, are bound by a moral discourse, which in some cases means they are unable to exercise their rights in the same way that tenants for absentee landowners can. They are, in some cases, financially indebted to their kin landowners who have supported them during hard times. One informant, for example, wished he did not work for his family at all. He stated it had caused him more trouble over the years or it "eats his head" to use his words.

The tenants' of absentee landowners, on the other hand, lease the land from the landowner and pay a percentage of the harvest to the landlord. The amount they pay varies according to the harvest but roughly corresponds to the tenancy regulations guide of 33% of the total harvest, and the remaining 67% they keep. Relations between tenants and landowners are strained and the final sum paid usually relates to how successfully the tenant is able to bargain

with the landowner. However, such bargaining is often complicated by family ties and often arguments between absentee landlords and tenants are tempered by their relationship. Conversely, the relationship between tenants and landlords living in the same village can be particularly fraught, whilst unrelated tenants working for absentee landlords enjoy a more formal relationship; this is particularly the case with land owned in the irrigated region. For example, one of Kamraj's tenants, who lives near to Modayat village on an irrigated plot a few kilometres from the canal, leases the land on contract from Kamraj. The title deeds of the land are, however, in his wife's name, Rampiyari, but Kamraj has the official rights of attorney. Kamraj is liable for all expenses, such as accommodation and equipment, and must make sure that the tenant, a Bishnoi farmer, receives these along with equipment maintenance costs, although this is heavily negotiated and usually results in the tenant spending more than he is obliged to. According to Kamraj, the tenant keeps between 65 to 67 per cent of the crops and the rest he keeps. The exact amount is determined by the total yield and the tenant is responsible for the entire process of production. Only once the harvest has been collected does Kamraj take his percentage. Both parties sell their crops independently at the corn exchange.

Relations between landlords and tenants that reside in the same village are quite different. Unlike the more formal, and to a large extent permanent, tenancy agreements that operate on land owned by absentee landlords, on land close to the village where the landlord also resides, the landlord and immediate kin are active in overseeing production. This is particularly the case for the Meghval landowning families. For example, amongst the Meghval the elder wives are very active in overseeing the harvest and they can be seen giving orders to younger kin members concerning production methods. On one occasion I witnessed a wife severely scolding a tenant for not cutting the bajra at the base of the stem. Not cutting the plant at its base reduces the amount of the by-product, animal fodder, which can be used for the cattle. These small tenants, similar to those described by Bétielle in Tamil Nadu (1996) and some contemporary tenants in Gold and Gujar (2002) in Ajmer district, Rajasthan, do not have the means or power to claim their rights of security, thus are largely dependent upon the goodwill of the landowners. Their tenancy agreements are informal contracts not recorded in the *tehsil* land records, and as such the landowner can choose to claim back the land at any time.

The third class of workers are distant kin of the landlords and although they are in a different economic position, are employed on the basis of their kinship links. Whilst they do receive remuneration in the form of cash in hand, and a small amount of the crops for the labour they provide, it is their relationship to the landlords that guarantees them regular employment. This class of worker is highly susceptible to the whim of the landlord and is often overseen either by the women or are monitored by relatives closer to the landlords. However, kin are seen as more trustworthy. This is also the case for quite distant kin of a different *Gotr* or clan. For example, one worker I got to know very well was the son of one of the Meghval brother's wife's cousins. Trust is very important because if the work is not carried out properly it has potential repercussions that stretch beyond the landowner/ cultivator relationship. In this respect familial duty and obligation have considerable weight, and being tarnished as unreliable can impact on the future marriage arrangements of those families. In the example mentioned above, repercussions were felt in the conjugal relation between the Meghval brother, his wife and her mother-in-law. On several occasions when I asked whether it was good to have kin working in the fields, the wife would often respond by saying that in "some ways it is good because many other workers are lazy and untrustworthy and that you have to watch them very closely as they may steal from you". Although, she often remarked that kin workers were generally more reliable, in her case, if they did not fulfil their work obligations, she would feel a sense of shame because it was a mark on her character.

There are moral implications then to employing kin workers in ways that there are not with daily wage workers. Moreover, as the closest relative my informant felt obliged to keep watch over the workers. This partly explains why the Meghval wife plays an active role in overseeing the key peaks in the agricultural calendar because she feels a duty to watch over the workers. What is more, this sentiment must have been somewhat heightened by the economic climate. For although the wealthy Meghvals were aware of the internal differentiations within their caste, they were nonetheless interested in benefiting their caste as a whole. Thus employing kin and fictional kin during the mine closures not only reassured her of her good character, on the one hand, but also that long term reciprocity with the employee could be assured (cf. Bloch 1973).

Kin labourers, working for landlords with familial ties in Mudhamsar, are largely well looked after and, even though they complain loudly they know that in times of need they can ask the landlord for help and support. During peaks in the agricultural cycle close kin labourers are also brought in from neighbouring villages. In these cases, the workers will stay in the house of the landlord, eat meals with them and share leisure time with them. Kin workers who live in separate houses in the village will be visited by the landlord's family and both will attend and contribute financially to the life-cycle celebrations and religious festivals held in each others houses. It is therefore, the kinship link that not only guarantees them regular employment in the fields if they need it, but also provides a support network that strengthens the original familial bond.

That being said, however, it is wrong to conclude that production for profit is not part of the reason behind the employment of kin workers. As mentioned above, kin workers are seen to be more trustworthy and whilst part of this can be explained by the customary duties underpinning kinship ties, it is not the only explanation. It is surely also linked to survival and the continuation of the family in the future. As Bloch points out, the use of daily wage anonymous workers may be more efficient in the short term but is more costly in the middle and long term. It is because kinship is moral and long term that it produces a greater chance of adaptability to long term social and environmental changes (1973: 86-87). What is more, the shared caste background of kin workers also means that the ritual distance and associated exploitation is somewhat mitigated. That being said, there are clear differences amongst the Meghvals who are employed as kin workers.

Many of the poorer non kin Meghvals have not undergone the same degree of social mobility and Sanskritisation as their wealthy caste mates. Many still eat meat and drink alcohol and, whilst ritual distance is denied by informants, there is a substantive distance both economically and ritually between the two classes. Consequently, although they are of the same caste the substantialised identity that enabled them to leave their traditional occupations behind has begun to breakdown in the context of private practices. In this way, the incorporation of Sanskritisation into the private domain has only been partial indicating a clear distinction for some between what is said in public and that which is practiced in private. Whilst the more

Sanskritised Meghvals would never suggest the less well-to-do are of a qualitatively different kind to themselves, they do see them as less educated and of a lower social class. As a result, the social tastes or life styles, to eat meat etc., of the poorer Meghvals are equivalent to their social standing and economic class, the teetotalism and vegetarianism of the wealthy family are seen as pretentious activities reserved for those who can afford such airs. As such, they fully recognise that their own life chances are considerably less than those of the powerful family. In the final analysis, however, most of the poorer individuals are pleased it is a family of Meghvals who are the wealthy and powerful in the village and not a high caste one.

Daily Wage Agricultural Labourers

Workers who sell their labour for daily wages earn between Rs. 50 to 60 per day, which is the same for kin workers, although kin workers, in addition to daily wages, will also receive some payment in the form of crops. The position of daily wage farmers is considered more insecure by informants and workers are generally employed during the peak seasons of the agricultural cycle only. Kin workers, on the other hand, are required periodically throughout the year and many more are trusted to work all year round. The demand for additional labour in the fields is dependent on the quality of the monsoon and in particularly dry years daily wage farmers struggle to find work in the fields. If a good harvest is expected, however, these workers will abandon their jobs in the mine to work in the fields. This is a common and more-or-less expected pattern of which the mine supervisors and landlords are well aware. Moreover, when it does rain work in the mines is even more dangerous and the mine supervisors will send the daily-wage workers home regardless of the time of year. If the rains correspond with the demand for labour in the fields the workers are able to maintain their income by switching professions. However, informants state that if the rains come at the wrong time, such as during the planting season, they have no source of income, as the more regularly employed kin workers are more likely to be recruited to replant the seeds that have been washed away.

Daily wage farmers have little or no direct contact with the landlords outside of agricultural employment; the exceptions being during *Panchayat* meetings, the casual exchange

of greetings at the bus stop or whilst walking around the village. Informants say that whilst they know the individual landlords in the village well they are not bound to any one of them and can work for any landlord. In some ways this gives them an advantageous position over kin workers. Kin workers are bound to work the land of their relatives and as such are subjected to the associated morality of obligation and duty, whereas daily-wage farmers have, in principle, more freedom to choose whom they work for. However, this formulation is perhaps too simplistic and informants offered highly contradictory statements regarding their position in comparison to kin workers.

While some informants made the point that they had more freedom, they often qualified it by adding that kin workers were overall, in a much better position, as they are guaranteed work in the fields whenever they wanted it. As mentioned previously, there are many kin workers who also work for daily wages in the mines and it is these workers that informants consider to be more fortunate. Kin workers on the other hand often expressed a desire not to work for family as they felt the burden of responsibility was too great. Daily wage agricultural workers often commented, however, that kin workers were treated more fairly and were given a percentage of the crops, whereas the daily-wage workers were just given money. This in part corresponds to the attitudes of the landlords, who see daily wage labourers as a pool of labour that can be drawn upon and discarded when necessary.

Landlords often commented that daily wage workers were not as trustworthy as their kin worker counterparts but were a useful and cheap source of labour when kin, for one reason or another, were not available. In part, the landlords are expressing their desire for a flexible reserve army of labour as Marx conceived. This reserve labour force can not only be used to fill in the gaps during peaks in the agricultural cycle but also serves to maintain the commitment of kin workers. The threat that jobs will be taken by daily wage workers is a common complaint among kin workers and, whilst they would not say as much to the landlords, they often noted the differences between themselves and the landlords.

One Meghval informant stated that he could never raise his immediate family to the same position as his cousins – Rupa Ram's sons. He cited his lack of education and land as

principle factors that were preventing his social mobility. On one occasion when we were talking he threw his hands in the air exclaiming:

“What can I do for my family? All I can do is work but even then it is difficult to send my children to school. They (the Meghval landowners) are lucky, history was good to them. It was not good to me. Maybe one day I will loose my job and then I will be in trouble”.

When I asked if he could not just work in the mines and leave his agricultural work he said that the mine is even harder. What is interesting is that daily wage workers express similar sentiments concerning the landlords. Whilst never as laden with a sense of regret for not being dealt the same cards as their relatives, they consider the landlords to be just the same as the mine owners. They represent a class that they cannot access; one where their shared life chances and ability to pass them on to their children is what marks them as separate.

Before concluding this chapter, there is a further area in agriculture that provides the basis for fissures and alliances within the social organisation of the village. Pastoral agriculture provides a production arena in which most castes have some form of contact, although heavy restrictions do apply. Moreover, it is important to note that agricultural production tends to be valued over pastoralism and there is a general bias towards overemphasising cultivation and agricultural labour as primary sources of income. For this reason, many informants were reluctant at times to express their dependency on pastoralism.

Moreover, there is a general bias toward the occupations of men in census recording, and whilst men are more likely to be engaged in regular agricultural production than their female counterparts, many of these families also own animals, and, a significant amount of the work involved in pastoralism is carried out by women and children. Most families in the village, for example, own animals of one sort or another, from one cow for milk to herds of sheep, goats or camels.

Arable and pastoral productions co-exist uneasily as forms of agriculture for villagers. The type of agriculture carried out has largely been dependent on caste and in Bikaner where grazing resources are few, pastoralists are often at loggerheads with their arable neighbours.

The key pastoralists in the village are poorer Meghval (sheep and goats), Bhat (goats) and Kalbelia (goats and camels). The Meghvals descended from Rupa Ram own the most number of cows in the village with 8 in total. Many Paliwal and Sadh households also own cattle and water buffalo, but not nearly as many.

Approximately 80% households in the village have animals of one kind or another. However, the pattern of animal ownership is quite clearly caste specific. It is not surprising, for example, that between them the Meghval, Bhat and Kalbelia are the chief owners of goats and sheep. For all three communities eating meat is not 'traditionally' forbidden. The Meghvals in the village who own sheep and goats are considerably poorer, and of course less Sanskritised, than their vegetarian counterparts of the same caste. What will be shown is how the relationship between meat-eating and sect affiliation among the Meghvals and other low caste communities in the village, highlight patterns of social relations that at times contradict the normative ideals. At other times, however, these practices also contradict the Sanskritised ideals, and instead highlight relations between parties that ordinarily would have little contact.

Summary

Forms of employment activity in the village highlight sets of social relations that throw into the foreground issues concerning economic inequality, status, caste and class. Labour and production in the mines, for example, necessitates the interaction of different categories of workers. As André Bétielle (1996: 110) points out, the relations of production tend to create both cleavages and bonds between classes of workers. These cleavages at times coincide with normative distinctions in the social structure. For example, the differential treatment between groups of workers and within groups, such as the wage disparity between permanent and daily-wage workers and internal distinctions based on age and gender, highlight how production is organised in line with customary relations that exist in other spheres of daily life. However, at other times alternative social networks are established that do in fact contradict the normative ideals. For example, casual labourers regardless of caste consider themselves to be a "labour

class” distinct and separate from permanent employees doing the same jobs. The discourse surrounding this class is intimately connected to the conditions of their labour, which were made more explicit when they lost their jobs in the mines.

Security aside, the status differentiation between these two categories of workers (daily wage and permanent) also comes in the form of ownership or a sense thereof. Even though both groups are property-less, in a technical Marxian sense, the security of a permanent job and the perception that their labour has a higher value has created among them a stakeholder status where none on the larger stage of production actually exists. On the smaller stage of everyday interactions, however, one could say they do have a stake in the immediate means of production and therefore exist as a class. For example, their status as permanent workers affords perks inaccessible to daily-wage staff, such as control over who gets access to the better quality tools or who can get favours granted by management. The labour class, conversely have, through the presence of permanent workers doing the same job, the mine closures, and political action, been exposed to the contradictions of the productive system. This and the value of their labour causes them to form an identity separate to those with whom technically they share the same class. This suggests that class identity as it is conceived of by my informants is dependant on job security, access to resources, and profitable relations or lack thereof. All of which carry with them the perception of a stake or sense of ownership and belonging to and in the productive process. The lack of these controls leads to the sense of alienation experienced by the labour class. As a result, daily-wage employees, irrespective of caste and kinship, have formed a new low status identity expressing a commensality based on the conditions of their employment.

Let us return to the questions which opened this chapter concerning the transference of the labour class identity in the mines to the fields. As suggested, this identity is contextually bound; when Meghval daily-wage miners seek work in the fields they are more likely, due to their caste and kinship connections, be employed in agriculture. However, there are daily-wage labourers of both castes who continue to consider themselves a labour class, even though they may employ different social networks to gain employment. Moreover, daily-wage miners could easily become permanent workers through the recruitment process. Informants stressed that they would stop sharing food with such an individual as he or she would then eat with the permanent

workers. In this way, Lambert's observation that "restrictions on food exchange not only express but create degrees of social difference...non-relatedness" (Ibid: 83-84) that need not purely relate to caste, is quite accurate in this context.

Even though intra-caste differentiation is becoming increasingly important, caste can still be seen as the traditional starting point for the division of labour. Whilst many villagers are not involved in their traditional occupations, the exception being those who have re-traditionalised their activities, one's access to resources is still partly dependent upon the traditional position held within the caste hierarchy and this is particularly true in times of economic insecurity. It is, of course, a non sequitur that low caste position always equals low class position. Nonetheless, it is impossible to ignore that most of the poor families in the village are also low caste, and this is highlighted by their position as daily-wage workers, both in the fields and mines. What is more, the Meghval landlords, whilst representing a contradiction to the 'traditional' or normative structure of agrarian caste relations (with Rajputs as the common landlords of Rajasthan), give preferential treatment to kin workers forming kin-based relations of obligation, duty and long term reciprocity that can be abused by landlords in a time of economic scarcity. Whatever the kin relationship may be, and this includes the kin-like duty obligations found amongst the Dholi agricultural workers, the landlord still has power over the labourer. That being said, the Meghval women do invoke a discourse of morality when explaining their relationship to kin workers.

The morality of kinship, expressed by Meghval landlord informants, is similar to that described by Bloch. Bloch shows how the crucial effect of morality is long term reciprocity and that this long term effect is achieved because it is morality, as opposed to reciprocity, that forms the ultimate aim. Moreover, this morality is defined by the delay in reciprocity as it highlights how kin relations can withstand a longer tolerance of imbalance or inequality. Therefore, and following Malinowski and Mauss, Bloch highlights the point that "immediate reciprocity is tantamount to the denial of any moral relationship between the parties, while delay between gift and counter-gift is an indication of the moral character of the relationship" (1973: 76-77). Thus, in his example of agricultural relations among the Merina of Madagascar, he similarly shows how some kin were always expected to help in the fields and could be relied on to come.

However, they needed many more people they could draw upon. Consequently, in order to have a sufficient number of workers they used what he calls “artificial” kin to make up the numbers. Moreover, it was only because these workers were treated like kin (repeatedly asked for help) that they obliged (Ibid.: 79).

In Mudharamsar, the situation is similar; however, the women who express a moral obligation are also bound by a set of power relations. The reciprocity they ultimately receive is in the form of good conjugal relations as well as what they understand to be a more invested workforce. The relations between Dholi agricultural workers and Kumbhar landlords are closer to those described by Bloch. Rather than reciprocal relations being based on real kinship or conjugal life, the reciprocity the Kumbhar receive is through political support and a guaranteed flexible army of labour. Reciprocity for the Dholi, however, is based on their inclusion in the re-traditionalised exchange of village services. This is because their relationship in the exchange is a source of social mobility and pride, even though they get very little remuneration for it. As such, the Kumbhar grant the Dholi a position in the re-traditionalised exchange in order to guarantee their labour in the fields. Both these types of relations are, however, very different from the anonymous relations the landlords have with non-kin daily-wage labourers or distant tenants. Taken together the relationship between Meghval kin workers and their landlords, and the Dholi and the Kumbhar landlords binds all four classes together within a distinct mode of production based on long term reciprocity and agricultural labour.

That being said, what is interesting here is the context in which these classes and identities are formed. It is the social world after all that not only defines the identities, but is given shape and meaning by those identities. The social identities and evaluations discussed in this chapter not only organise the practices, and the perceptions of those practices, in the social world, they also structure them by their relational properties into distinct modes of production. These identities, where recognised or not, are labels (Becker 1963) defined by their caste and class position. Caste and class are themselves systems of differences and differential positions generated by particular social relations. The locus of these differential positions or classes, however, varies according to context.

The village economy is, on the whole, not autonomous nor self sufficient and does not represent a single unified context. At the very least, workers travel the short distance to the mines, where they meet with workers from neighbouring villages and those from further a field. The mine owners are similar to absentee landlords in the eyes of the workers and the latter classify themselves as quite distinct from those who have regular or permanent work in the mines. All of which broadens the context and scope of different positions and groups of employees. However, on a more specific level what I term the village economy, is actually subdivided into different modes of production, which are defined by the different classes of worker described above. These subdivisions to the village economy are characterised by industrial, agricultural and lineage modes of production that define social relations in the village.

What is also clear is that the relations between same caste workers in the fields, and the tensions that exist within the Meghval caste, indicate that a form of caste de-substantialisation is taking place. Rather than the caste uniting under a notion of sharing an inalienable substance, the caste is fracturing along class lines, often interpreted through an equally essentialising discourse. In the case of the Meghval landlords their position is both ideologically and materially grounded highlighting the disparity between themselves and their kin workers. On the level of discourse they have, on the one hand, adopted high caste practices associated with purity and piety, which constitute an ideology expressing a departure from their previously perceived and exploitative state of pollution; a state by which their kin workers, in private, still adhere. However, some Meghval landlords still do manual work in the fields. On the other hand, it is the material context of the Meghval landlords that has enabled this transition in status to take place and be, in part, socially approved of in the public domain. This approval, however, is most notable among poorer wage labouring Meghvals as well as other low caste employees. There is of course a backlash to this acceptance among the low castes that chose to adopt their traditional occupations during the mine closures, such as the Dholi and Kumbhar.

Not unlike the Meghval employees, these 'traditional' workers have structured their services around kinship (see Chapter 1), similarly ensuring long term reciprocity with those families for which they work. They justify their choice of work by drawing on traditionalist

discourses of duty and caste origin. Likewise, the Meghval landlords have adopted Sanskritised discourses, which help to reconcile their upward mobility. If the wealthy Meghvals were to publicly eat meat, for example, the contradiction between their caste background and economic position would be exposed to comparison and competition with other Hindu castes –it is still only Rajputs in Rajasthan, after all, who can without question be both wealthy landowners and public carnivores. Therefore, adopting an ideology of piety is a socially sanctioned method of expressing their difference from other Meghvals without laying claim to a position that would fundamentally question the customary order of things.

What this reveals is a highly nuanced understanding of the nature of power, status and social hierarchy by the wealthy Meghvals. This understanding of how power works and how to access it without fundamentally disturbing its underlying premises, is a consequence of both their social and economic capital. As Pierre Bourdieu (2002 [1977]) suggests, there is a homogeneity to the mode of production of habitus (i.e. the material conditions of life, and of pedagogic actions/ or socialisation), which, in turn, produces a homogenisation of dispositions and interests. Far from excluding competition, these interests may in some cases engender it by inclining those who are the product of the same conditions of production to recognise and pursue the same goods (2002:63-64). This is why the Dholi, Kumbhar and Meghval have sought similar justifications for their occupational choices, as a way to advance.

Similarly to Bourdieu's observation of the products of habitus, the practices of the Panwar Meghvals likewise correspond to Weber's understanding of the domestic unit. The domestic unit, a monopolistic grouping defined, as Weber said, by the exclusive appropriation of a determinate type of goods (land, names etc.) is the locus of a competition for this capital, or rather, for control of this capital. He suggests that this competition continuously threatens to destroy the capital by destroying the fundamental condition of its perpetuation. In other words, the Gotr of a caste, like a family, is monopolistic. However this produces internal conflicts and competition over the resources held by or available to that Gotr – be it land, name, Sanskritised knowledge, even reservations. In this instance, competition over resources held are a result of one Gotr's historical position (lands granted, reservations won, and education attained by virtue of being the first Panwar Meghvals in Mudharamsar). What is more, the continuation and

maintenance of this inequality may well lead to the internal collapse of the caste itself as the basis upon which Meghval caste identity rests becomes less meaningful. This is because the internal divisions resulting from one's ability or inability to access the resources available become increasingly acute, in this case reduced to Gotr and family, and the methods employed to access the resources pull the caste as a whole ever more apart. This process was thrown into the foreground by the fact that even poorer Panwar Meghvals are dependent on the wealthy for jobs during the mine closures. This suggests that even Gotr is fragmenting along class lines.

This point is made clearer in the following chapter where poorer members of the Meghval caste are vocal about their inability to access the special provisions granted to them by virtue of their low caste status. In this respect, it takes a certain level of social and economic capital to claim and get access to the resources granted, and many poorer Panwar Meghvals, in this context, consider themselves as different to their wealthy counterparts. However, in the context of electoral politics a 'normative' discourse concerning a substantialised Meghval caste identity is reinstated.

Chapter III. Politics and Government Jobs

In the last chapter we saw how status identities connected to employment opportunity and labour conditions formed the basis of cleavages and unities in the social dynamics of the village. Whilst miners felt unified as a labour class because of their employment conditions, in the fields that unity for some was fragmented. Moreover, the wealthy Panwar Meghval landlords provided a contradiction to the normative structure of agrarian relations, thrown ever more into the foreground by them becoming the main source of employment during the mine closures. The Meghval landlords exploited kinship relations to create a closed employment network based on familial patronage, duty, and obligation. Following on from the last chapter, then, there is a third social arena wherein networks involving inter and intra-caste unities are highly visible. This chapter is concerned with the public sector, politics and government jobs. In particular, the chapter shows how politically driven social networks and identities highlight an expansion of social relations involving class identities on the one hand, but also the contraction to the more normative caste-based status identities on the other. Some of these networks are built around the reservation or affirmative action policies of the state, forcing actors to align themselves with particular identity markers.

Reservations have extended political participation and equality of participation quite significantly. However, the trajectory of individual caste struggles often forms the backdrop to success in the reservation system, political affiliation and candidate partisanship. Often discourses of a shared caste heritage and solidarity are invoked to encourage support, solidarity and, in theory at least, representation for low caste groups and individuals that perhaps otherwise would not have a voice. However, this reliance on caste identity in the politics and practice of reservations also has a contradictory effect: whether applying for a job or running for office, a candidate's success remains dependent upon the persistence of the caste conditions to be overcome. In this respect, the reservation system pulls its actors in two opposing directions. First, it encourages the idea of creating a level playing field among different castes through

political representation, decision-making and involvement in governmental duties. Secondly, however, the basis upon which a reservation is granted very much depends on the existence of the inequality. Consequently, actors have to prove their disadvantaged status and this relies on a particular understanding of caste as a substantialised unit. Accompanied by a set of hegemonic discourses, this substantialised caste identity is in direct contradiction to the everyday reality of intra-caste differentiation.

The first aim of this chapter, then, is to examine the role of reservations and public sector employment in structuring social relations in the village. Secondly: it will explore the tensions between the contradictory discourses of caste substantialisation on the one hand and changing social and economic relations on the other. In addition to the caste-based discourses there are also contradictory discourses concerning duty and security surrounding the public sector and these shape not just how government employees are seen but also how they see themselves.

A number of ethnographies have detailed the socio-economic relations of village communities. However, few have examined how this arena corresponds to the public sector at the level of a single village. This raises several key methodological issues. Firstly, how, in a village, does one locate the public sector, and is it even useful to see it as an institution? Generally, the public sector includes all instruments of governmental activity. For example, they include administration, departmental undertakings such as railways, policing, and non-departmental enterprises, which are run as autonomous bodies wholly or largely owned by the government, for example, state banks. In the context of a single village, however, the phrase public sector and all it encompasses is quite meaningless, even though the local governmental body or *Panchayat* plays a big part in village life.

In Mudhamsar, for example, people use either the English words ‘government jobs’ or the Hindi phrase *sarkari naukri* or “government service” to refer to those connected with the public sector. This phrase encompasses a wide range of jobs from bank clerks, police officers, teachers, petrol pump stewards, civil servants, and local politicians, who are regarded as doing “social work”. The great diversity of occupations that fall under the banner of ‘government jobs’, although divergent, is set up in opposition to what informants call ‘private’ jobs or

'work'. How the terms are used and how those with government jobs are understood by non-government workers further highlights *sarkari naukri* as a separate category and identity, wherein all share certain conditions.

A large component of the public sector at the village level is of course politics, and villagers will use the English word 'politics' to describe factions and disagreements among political agents. The word politics largely has a derogatory meaning for most people¹⁶, such as ruthless and suspicious behaviour. Most government positions held by villagers are linked to education, banking, insurance, civil service, and/ or as local leaders/ political representatives in the *Panchayat*, either at a village or *tehsil* level. Whilst local politicians are not generally regarded as having *sarkari naukri* those that are deemed to carry out social work as part of their job are also regarded in this vein. Although few in number are actually employed in government jobs, a majority of villagers who hold such positions are from low caste communities; the Meghval and Kumbhar in particular. The main reason for their representation in government sector employment is a combination of two interrelated phenomenon. Firstly, the specific reservation or affirmative action system in the Tehsil has enabled many low castes to gain government jobs. However, this is often dependent on the second factor, an existing economic and social capital enabling individuals to access the information, knowledge and networks necessary to gain government jobs.

Part 1. The Reservation System: The Politics of Government Jobs

The policy of reservations in its most general form is concerned with achieving equality in a world permeated by inequality (Beteille 2003). This was thought to be achieved through locating those who required positive discrimination. Those who were deemed to be in need were labelled "depressed" or "backward". They are made up of three main divisions, the Scheduled Tribes, the Scheduled Castes and the Other Backward Classes. Together, they comprise

¹⁶ Similarly, Beteille found 'politics' to have derogatory connotations in South India (See Beteille, A. 1996:141).

approximately 30% of the total population of the country. The Scheduled Tribes and Scheduled Castes are relatively well-defined categories, whereas the Other Backward Classes are highly amorphous.

According to the 2001 Census of India there are 340,187 SC and STs in Bikaner district out of a total population of 1,674,271, making SC and STs just over 20 percent of the population. Unfortunately, Census population figures are not readily available for the OBC notification in Bikaner. For Rajasthan as a whole, however, the OBC population is 46.8 percent.

The policy of reservations in India involves a quota system through which a percentage of employment posts are reserved for the three groups above. Reservations also extend to include women, and other groups deemed economically or socially disadvantaged in Government, public sector, and although heavily contested in the new wave of upper caste demonstrations, some private educational institutions. Reservation policy also involves the representation of Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes in the Parliament of India, and consequently is a political tool for increasing the representation of low castes in governmental decision-making, from the village Panchayat to the Lok and Rajya Sabha. Consequently, reserved quotas are available at every level of public administration and decision-making. Reservations are not however, meant to exceed 50% in any given institution. Yet, Rajasthan, currently has a 68 % reservation, which includes a 14% reservation for Economically Backward forward castes and a special 5% for the Gujjars, Banjara, Gadia Lohar and Raika communities, making it one of the highest in the country. Such an anomaly in reservation politics is particular to the history and politics of reservations, and in particular the scope of the OBC category in Rajasthan.

The Politics of Reservations in Rajasthan

Rajasthan's situation with regard to OBCs is linked to the political power that the OBC category has had on state level politics in Rajasthan, and elsewhere in India. For example, back in the 1950s the OBC classification dominated the press at both a national and state level, and support

for the category came from an understanding that there were many more deprived groups than those simply classified under SC and ST. However, in Rajasthan support for the OBC category was largely championed by intermediate castes rather than from low castes as seen elsewhere in India. This higher caste assertion that surrounded the formation of the OBC category set an agenda in Rajasthan that backgrounded the SC category as one of elevation, in favour of the OBC category.

For example, Rob Jenkins (1998, 2004) makes explicit the particular form of Mandalisation that took place in Rajasthan. He argues that unlike neighbouring Uttar Pradesh for example, Rajasthan's electoral politics did not involve an accelerated political organisation among lower and more economically disadvantaged castes. Instead a backlash ensued from the powerful intermediate caste of Jats, who having gained political sway through the *Kisan Sabha*¹⁷ movement wanted to be included in the OBC category (2004: 10). Whilst the Jats were ultimately included in the OBC category, the representation of OBCs in State level politics was still minimal. For example, even though there was immense campaigning on behalf of powerful OBCs, the mainstream parties, Congress and BJP, did little to accommodate leaders from the lower castes.

For example, Christophe Jaffrelot's 2003 data indicates this caste bias quite clearly. During the period 1980 to 1998, the percentage of OBCs among members of the Rajasthan State assembly was usually around six to eight percent. The proportion of OBCs in Rajasthan's parliamentary delegation during the same period tended to hover around the eight percent mark, sometimes rising to twelve percent. Moreover, the representation of OBCs in ministerial posts was only nine percent. For most of the period since then it has remained at the lower level of

¹⁷ The *Kisan* or peasant movement begun between the 1920s and 1940s was intent on dislodging the upper-caste, urban establishment from its positions of power. This movement was first initiated by members of the cultivating castes (for example, the Jats and Bhumihars) and was interested in rallying all those engaged in cultivating work, on the basis of socioeconomic demands. The proponents of *kisan politics* came primarily from the rank of peasant-proprietors who tried to mobilise "the peasants" to promote their own interest, and maintain lower castes under their influence (Jaffrelot 2000: 87).

The Jats have for some time, held considerable power in Rajasthan. They are the states largest caste, 9% of the population. After the 1962 general election, Jats held 13% of the seats in the Rajasthan Legislative Assembly. Rudolph and Rudolph tell of how the politically influential Speaker of the Assembly was a Jat, and two of the cabinet's most powerful members were Jats (Ibid.:86). Jats are not just numerically strong but are highly politicised too. They were the first caste in the state to organise caste associations for purposes of self-help, mobility, and interest representation and they remain powerful to this day.

around six percent and in 1998, under an OBC chief minister, the Rajasthan council of ministers, was just three percent OBC (2003: 353 -365).

Whilst OBCs were not reaching high political office, the involvement of the Jats in reservation politics, some of whom were either influential or courted members of the BJP, raised the prestige of the OBC category endowing it with a political gravitas or social capital that the SC category did not have. However, the number of communities classified as OBC increased exponentially with the increase in status and coverage of this classification. In Rajasthan there are, for example, 82 communities classed as OBC, compared to 59 for SC and 12 for ST. This has however, also increased the competition within this quota leading to an increase in interest in other classifications.

Splits within the OBC group began to develop as early as the late 1990s with the middle-caste peasants attempting to distance themselves from the lower caste OBCs. The lower castes, in response, supported further segmentations of the category proposed by the SJF or Social Justice Front (or Samajik Nyaya Manch a local party with BJP links), which would entitle them to specific reservations. However, the BJP attempting to woo the Gujjar community promised them a reservation as OBC in 2003. However, realising that the OBC category was dominated by Jats, the Gujjars called for a new reservation quota. The BJP in response suggested the establishment of a special quota for the Gujjars. Around the same time the Congress promised a new category for Economically Backward Classes and in December 2008, Rajasthan's Congress Chief Minister, Ashok Gehlot, on taking office enacted the reservation for the Economically Backward Classes.

Today this classification includes a fourteen percent reservation in government posts for the economically backward that were not covered by other quotas. This quota for the forward castes found considerable support among the poorer of its ranks. On the 19th June 2008, the then Chief Minister of Rajasthan, Vasundhara Raje, announced job and education quota benefits for the economically backward category. This was crystallised in a statement by the Law Minister Ghanshyam Tiwari that "Rajasthan has become the first state in the country to announce reservation to EBC" (Thaindian News 2008). On 30th July 2009 "The Rajasthan Scheduled Caste, Scheduled Tribe, Backward Classes, Special Backward Classes, and Economically

Backward Classes (Reservation of Seats in Educational Institutions of the State and Posts in Service Under the State) Act, 2008” (Act No. 12 of 2009) was put forward for ratification. The Banjaras, Gaia Lohars, Gujars and Raikas are provided reservation as a separate Special Backward Class, and for the hitherto unreserved economically deprived sections of Rajasthan’s society be reserved under the Economically Backward Classes category.

This change to the reservation system of Rajasthan can be traced back to the demands of the Jat community. This community campaigned for their inclusion and re-notification in the OBC category in October 1999. Gujjars struggling to compete against the Jats in the OBC category wished to be re-notified as a Scheduled Tribe.

The particular trajectory of the OBC category in Rajasthan was one championed by intermediate castes at the expense of the poorer OBCs. This higher caste support has had two important consequences. First, poorer lower caste individuals have been less likely to gain reserved positions as they have been up against considerably more wealthy and better educated individuals. Yet, secondly, the category has been accorded considerable social and political capital that has had a positive effect for lower status communities.

Low caste groups throughout India have over the years become increasingly political and electoral affiliation is often determined by the particular struggle certain castes have undergone to acquire reservations or upward social mobility. In rural areas this has created new forms of competition where low castes are pitted against each other for reserved positions, either in political institutions or as public servants, and the situation in Mudharamsar is no exception. The success of this competition, for some in Mudharamsar, relies on the historical trajectory of their particular caste and the caste’s ability as a collective to seek a change. In doing so, political actors draw on caste identity to gain support from other caste members of different economic background. Whereas for others that intra-caste differentiation is what makes the political/ public sector or arena, regardless of shared caste heritage, constitute a separate class of actors removed from their own experience. However, their choice over whom to support come Election Day is often still determined by caste background even if they know, as a class, the politician has different interests to theirs.

Reservations and Government Jobs

Indian positive discrimination policies have been widely researched and discussed by a large number of authors. However, what is important in the context of Mudharamsar is the role these policies play in structuring social relations. In Mudharamsar relations between castes are characterised increasingly by one's access to government jobs and positions, particularly in a time of economic uncertainty. This can lead to the unification of a caste in opposition to another, on the one hand, but can also highlight the internal differentiations of status and class of a caste on the other. Consequently, the ability to access reserved government jobs has become yet another symbol of status, class and social capital. As one might expect then, reservations have had a significant impact on social relations in the village.

A total of 29 people (25 males and 4 females) living in the village have government jobs; of these 14 are Meghval and 4 Kumbhar (See tables 4a and 4b). A majority of these workers are employed by the local government as teachers, *patwaris* (land accountants/ revenue collectors), nurses, police constables, *Panchayat* members and so forth.

The reservation system and associated politics has stark consequences for the dynamics between high and low castes in the village. Where once the ruling elites in Mudharamsar were high caste today the decision makers in the village are predominantly from low castes. Whilst part of this shift in power is a result of the withdrawal of high caste investment both physically and politically from the village, it has left a vacuum for the lower castes to gain political power. This kind of social change has led many to form alternative inter-caste and intra-caste identities that at times conflict with normative ideals, yet in other contexts conform to them on some level. On the one hand, some of these identities are based on factional competition over status, power and wealth, wherein arguments for each notably draw on caste and kinship. However, this factional competition also creates a space for employment based identities that present themselves in opposition to those above and relate more strongly to class. These are particularly strong amongst those who do not have government jobs and/ or who lost their manual jobs during the mine closures. Such identities are drawn through a complex set of discourses in the

village over the value and characteristics of government jobs. These discourses were further complicated during the time of fieldwork by an above average disdain toward the Rajasthani state for closing the mines.

The discourses concerning the value of government jobs can be divided into two interrelated parts. Firstly, the perceived status of government jobs and how that status is itself contradictory. Secondly, the value placed upon public sector occupations as a secure form of income. What will be examined in this chapter is the perception of government jobs and how this relates to the social structure of the village. Linked to this, the chapter will also explore the relationship between government jobs, power, status and class. It will also examine how the security of such jobs, both financially and socially, underwrites how this group of workers is understood by those outside the sector. It is important to add that whilst people with important private sector jobs are also given high status this is often because they have the power to influence government decision making. That being said, the real interest in government jobs by the people of Mudhamsar lies in the way they are fairly secure and a potentially accessible means of bettering your position.

The issue of job security, as we saw in the previous chapter is central to the discussion of work-related identities and forms a crucial indicator of both class and class consciousness. For example, the financial securities of regular income and benefits, which government employees receive, mark them as distinct from other workers. Consequently, informants regard public sector workers as being of a similar, if not better, class to skilled permanent workers in the mines. They are extremely unlikely to become unemployed and their take-home pay is protected against inflation via Dearness Allowance payments¹⁸. In this way, job security forms part of a clear continuum which shapes how class is understood. What becomes significant here is how this continuum exists, regardless of pay and the specific job being carried out. For example, it is of little consequence whether you are a low paid government worker or a well paid mine manager, both positions have job security. Therefore, both these groups of workers, who share job security, are placed in opposition to the labour class, even if some will be

¹⁸ Dearness Allowance is a cash payment made to employees by the employer to offset the effect of inflation.

receiving similar sized pay cheques to the latter (cf. Lockwood 1958). What is more, like a secure job in the mines, reserved government jobs are a primary vehicle for advancement amongst the rural poor of Kolayat.

The bada kastkar and Political Elite in Mudharamsar

Six of the individuals with government jobs in the village belong to the descendents of Rupa Ram and one, the wife (Laxmi Panwar) of Moti Ram's grandson, Babu Lal. They occupy a range of positions. For example, one is a *Panchayat Samiti* member (Block Council based in Kolayat), one a government bank clerk, two are teachers, one is a headmaster, one is a *Patwari*, and one an *Anganbaii* officer. They are considered to be politically well connected by other villagers, and in some cases this is true. The third eldest son of Rupa Ram and Rukmani Devi, no longer living in the village was, for example, a Member of the Legislative Assembly (MLA) and his father before him was also a prominent politician. Another brother, Ramdial, was the *Sarpanch* of the *Gram* and *Goan Panchayat* and is currently a *Panchayat Samiti* member for Kolayat *tehsil* or Block. Moreover, their powerful position is further enhanced by the fact that their families own considerable lands in and around the village. Their position as wealthy landlords, coupled with their prestigious government jobs, clearly places them among the ruling elite of the village.

As members of an ex-untouchable caste, the Meghvals partly gained their positions through reservation policies. However, as the last chapter showed, they also owe much of their advance to the early political transformations that granted their forefathers titles to land in the late 1940s and 50s, and their father's role in local politics. Thus the Meghval landlords have considerable political and economic power in the village, even though many of the government jobs they hold are not political positions.

Those with political jobs, such as those in the *Panchayat*, are technically elected positions. However, it is the same families, the Meghval and Kumbhar landlords that put

candidates forward. This regular electioneering on behalf of the two families increases their presence, political influence, and image in the village. It is partly because of this that villagers often regard each of the families as having *sarkari naukari* even though in reality it is only one, two or even none in any one family household that will have such a job. Moreover, those political positions are not meant to be permanent. Being the elites of the village, the two families are in constant competition, and politically they occupy two different ends of the spectrum. Part of this competition can be explained by looking at their notification as OBC and SC and how these classifications have shaped the social relations between them.

The Politics of Caste Notification among the Kumbhar and Meghval

The Kumbhars or Kumhars are, in fact, classed on the central list as Scheduled Caste in most States and Union Territories of India. In Rajasthan, however, the community *Samiti* or council petitioned for the caste to be re-notified as an Other Backward Class in the 1990s as they made a case showing that in the past, they were not deemed untouchable, but did suffer social deprivation. This petition coincided with the SJF campaign for the segmentation of the OBC quota into subcategories, such as backward, most backward, and/ or extremely backward. In fact, some villagers have suggested that it was due to the wealthy Kumbhar family's connection with the BJP that this re-notification was able to happen.

When asked today about caste and how they view themselves, Kumbhar informants consistently refer to the OBC category. One Kumbhar informant during a conversation about reservation politics stated:

“We are OBC, before we were SC but now we are OBC. It is much better for us now. We can get better jobs, business and government jobs, and look after our families. Before we were all classed as SC but that was wrong, we are not the same. We are different and now everyone can see this thing [the difference].”

Chaghan Lal clearly implies that the OBC classification is more desirable and indeed superior to him than the SC category, and that Kumbhars were incorrectly notified under SC. It highlights how even though the practice of untouchability is technically illegal, the category SC is still burdened with those connotations.

As we saw in the previous chapter, the Kumbhars were traditionally seen, in some states, as just above the pollution line and historically did not accept food from Meghvals. The Meghvals, on the other hand, were considered to be well below the line. They were originally excluded from the inner chambers of the temples and their houses were to be separate from the Kumbhars. Indeed, this segregation was present in Mudharamsar during the early 1960s. The census survey of the time shows that the Meghval houses were positioned in one corner of the village some distance from the Kumbhars and other non-polluting castes. However, as Chapter I showed, today the Kumbhar houses are spread throughout the village and the Meghval area has become the centre of the village.

Although Kumbhars were not traditionally subject to the rules of pollution in the same way as Meghvals, their socio-economic position has largely been lower. In 1965, for example, the Kumbhars shared a section of the main well in the village with Darzis, Rajputs, Nais and Lohars, whilst Meghvals were expected to drink at a separate section with the Nayaks, formally the Bhil Tribal community. However, 19 of the 21 Meghval houses owned on average 23.24 acres of land each, and only 9 of the 11 Kumbhar households owned on average 23.55 acres each (Bhargava & Gupta 1965:28). Thus, whilst the Meghvals were subjected to exclusion and ritual segregation, combined they owned more than double the amount of land of their Kumbhar counterparts (441.56 and 211.95 respectively).

Thus whilst they may have been rather better off ritually, they were economically less well off as a whole. What is significant about Chaghan Lal's statement is how it reflects the wider perception that the OBC category has greater status than the SC notifications. In this respect the views raised by Chaghan Lal are concerned with increasing both his family's status but also the status of his caste through the re-notification. Part of the justification for switching to OBC was also found through the state-wide recognition that the earthen pots, for which the Kumbhars are traditionally known, were classed as a Rajasthani handicraft. This opened up new

avenues of employment, economic benefits through government loans and subsidies, as well as a growing market through leisure and tourism.

These strategies for using the system to institutionalise or formalise a higher caste status can be seen all over India. However, the particular Mandalisation that occurred in Rajasthan provided the perfect context in which the Kumbhar could legitimately make their claims. This is because their new economic mobility would not necessarily count against them. Moreover, the fact that their occupation was traditionally deemed polluting meant that higher castes or dominant low or intermediate castes could not get into the pottery trade, and thus the Kumbhars could have more-or-less absolute control over this employment sector, whilst also benefiting from a higher status classification. For example, by aligning themselves with the Jats and the OBC category more broadly, the Kumbhars were able to make a claim of disadvantage, even though they were at the time economically fairly well off, or at least had a secure occupational avenue, should they choose it. What is more, this is highly visible at the village level.

Similarly, Srinivas shows, for example, how low castes utilised the new economic forces presented by the British. A low caste that made money as a result of new opportunities also made attempts to raise its status vis-à-vis the other castes ([1957] 2002:253). Moreover, he reminds us that these newly rich castes only pressed for higher status for themselves, not for the abolition of the entire caste system. Drawing on Bailey's (1957) study of Bisipara village in Orissa, he makes the latter point.

For example, two low caste distiller communities, the Boad, regarded as outcastes, and Ganjam distillers of Bisipara, suddenly became rich as a result of changes to the state liquor policy. The prosperity of these two groups resulted in disquiet, as they both wanted to lay claim to having a higher status than before. By 1910 the Boad distillers owned more land than anyone else. The acquisition of land by the two castes was followed by the Sanskritisation of their custom, ritual, and way of life and all this was part of a process of staking their claim to being a higher caste. Traces of this tactic to Sanskritise can also be seen among the well-to-do Meghval. However, the Boad found that Sanskritisation did not help them. As a result, their claims for a higher position in the hierarchy had to come from elsewhere. Consequently, they sought support

from officials and the law courts to secure the rights, which the constitution of India guaranteed them (Srinivas 1957 cit. do. Bailey 1957: chap. 2.).

Part 2. Village Politics and the Panchayat

Panchayati Raj is a system of three distinct tiers (Bjorkman & Chaturvedi 2001). The first tier is at the district level, *Zilla Parishad*, this is followed by *Panchayat Samitis* at Block level, of which there are four in Bikaner, and this is followed by the third tier the *Gram Panchayats* (of which there are 218) which are based on a collection of villages. Mudharamsar falls under the *Gram Panchayat* of Mudharamsar-Kotdi. Self government at the village level in India is generally the remit of the *Gram Sabha*. However, this third tier is also broken down into the individual *Goan Sabhas* which form the *Gram Panchayat*. At the grassroots level there is then the *Gaon Sabha* or individual village meetings accounting for anything upward of 250 individuals in a village, and the *Gram Panchayat* or village councils encompassing around 10,000 people from a number of villages (usually 5 to 15). Generally the *Sarpanch* is nominated by the elected *Panchayat* members. However, in Mudharamsar this is done by the villagers in the *Gram Panchayat*. It is important to note that often people in Mudharamsar use the term *Gaon Sabha* interchangeably with *Gaon Panchayat* and *Gaon Panchayat or Sabha* interchangeably with *Gram Panchayat*.

Moreover, unlike elsewhere in North India, the term *Sarpanch* is used by the villagers to refer to both the head of the *Goan Sabha* and the head of the *Gram Panchayat*. This might be because villagers elect leaders to both the *Goan* and *Gram Sabhas* and therefore the two are regarded as synonymous. Moreover, in the past it has often been the same person doing each job. This is further complicated by the close proximity of Kotdi to Mudharamsar and should either population grow by only a little it is likely the two will merge. This caused considerable confusion, however, when collecting the data, so where appropriate, I will use village *Sarpanch*

for the chairperson of the *Goan Sabha/ Panchayat* and just *Sarpanch* for the chairperson of the *Gram Panchayat*. In cases where they overlap I will state this clearly.

Tension between the Goan Sabha and Gram Sabha are further articulated by the dominance of both the Meghval and Kumbhar. However, much of the context for the political discussions focussed on the *Gram Panchayat* elections in 2003 and its effect on the current workings of the *Panchayat*. In 2003 a young Kumbhar woman was elected *Sarpanch* of the four villages under the *Gram Panchayat* of Mudharamsar-Kotdi. Prior to her election victory the *Sarpanch* was Ramdial ji, one of the Meghval brothers who lost his seat but kept his position in the *Kolayat Panchayat Samiti*, and is regarded by many as the *Sarpanch*. His true position in Mudharamsar today, however, is more akin to a *Gram Sevak* (village servant or social worker) and some do refer to him as that. However, it has been reported as early as Tinker (1959) that the power of the *Gram Sevak* is waning and it is Ramdial's role as an honorary *Sarpanch* and *Panchayat Samiti* member that grants him his power. This is clearly revealed by the fact that under the *Panchayati Raj* system he should have lost his seat in the *Samiti* to his Kumbhar successor. However, he was granted the right to keep his seat and therefore straddles the unusual role of being both the head of the *Goan Sabha*, a pseudo *Sarpanch* at the *Gram* level, and a *Panchayat Samiti* member at the Block level. How this highly unusual arrangement was able to occur was never made explicit to me. However, some of the Meghval kin workers which were employed in the family's fields stated it was because he was considered an experienced, trustworthy and devoted candidate.

Consequently, although the Kumbhar incumbent was entitled to hold the office, Ramdial remains active in all aspects of village and Block level politics. The events surrounding this election were recounted to me by a number of both Meghval and Kumbhar informants. However, before going on to discuss this it would not be out of place to have a brief outline of the legislative actions leading up to this election. These reforms provide the backdrop to the unusual events that took place and contributed to the current political discord in the village.

In Rajasthan the 73rd amendment (1993) to the *Panchayati Raj* system, to provide reservations for women, was implemented and then stretched to cover both council members and *Pradhans*. Out of the 37 *Sarpanch* seats in *Kolayat tehsil*, 14 were reserved for women.

Which *Gram Panchayats* in Bikaner district would fall under the reservation was to be based on a random rotation system, implemented in 1995. All *Gram Panchayats* (GPs) in a district are ranked in consecutive order according to their serial legislative number (an administrative number pre-dating the reform). A table of random numbers is then used to determine the seats that are to be reserved for SCs and STs, according to the numbers that need to be reserved in these particular districts. They are then ranked in three separate lists, according to whether or not the seats had been reserved for a SC, ST, or are unreserved. Using these lists, every third GP starting with the first on the list is reserved for a woman in the first election. For the next election, every third GP starting with the second on the list was reserved for a woman and so on.

GPs that have less than 5% SCs or STs are excluded from the list of possible SC or ST reservation and are therefore unreserved seats. In administrative terms, the entire village of Mudharamsar is divided into six wards, and elections to the *Goan Sabha* are on a ward basis. This means that technically the different areas which make up the village find more or less fair representation. However, because the ward structure in Mudharamsar no longer corresponds to the distribution of castes in the village, certain castes are over-represented, such as the Meghval and Kumbhar.

Voters from the four villages included in the GP elect a GP council, which then elects from among its members a *Sarpanch* (chief/ chairperson) and an *Upa-Sarpanch* (vice-chairperson). However, in 2003 it was the entire village that elected the Sarpanch not just the elected council members. This had a significant impact on who was elected, because the Meghvals (predominantly Congress supporters) dominate in Mudharamsar and the Kumbhar (BJP supporters) do so more generally in Kotli. The *Sarpanch*, however, is the only member of the council with a full-time appointment and currently it is Vidiya Devi Kumbhar (Prajapat) who holds this full-time post.

Informants stated that there was considerable unease surrounding the reforms and knowing that the Mudharamsar-Kotli seat was that year to be reserved for a woman, coupled with a severe drought the summer before, led to a general feeling of discontent. Leading up to the election villagers recounted how clear it was that the BJP had won considerable favour in

Rajasthan as a whole and, whilst both parties were active in the district, it was clear that the BJP were winning ground. One informant recounting the events stated:

“Ramdial was Sarpanch but we all knew he could not get re-elected as it had to be a woman. Most of the people in the village had supported Ramdial in the past but things changed and the BJP were making sense. They promised better electricity in the village, educational programmes and people liked them. We had many problems that year it was a bad drought. The government did supply some food to the shop (the main shop is owned by descendents of Moti Ram Panwar) to distribute but many people did not receive this food. There were many problems and people felt the Prajapati family (the Kumbhar family proposing the successful candidate Vidīya Devi) in Kotli were good and would do something to help”.

Another informant working in the *Anganbadi* at the time supported this by saying:

“We are meant to provide one meal every day except Sundays to the children who come to the Anganbadi. We get Rs. 2 per child per month paid every six months from the trust (an NGO part-funded by the State Government) but this always comes late. That year we had very little money to buy wheat. Some women donated food but nobody had food to spare. The shop was meant to give us food that the government had given them but instead we had to pay some money from our funds and we got into great debt with the shop. We are still in debt to the shop now and we cannot pay them back”.

When asked about the candidate for the election she said:

“We thought it was very odd to have a woman Sarpanch but some thought it was good for us. Some people say it was not a real election and she is not a real Sarpanch because she has no strength. People think that it is the family that wants this thing. Her *sāsūra* (father-in-law) is a wealthy man and he is already on the Panchayat council for his village. People think he wants his son to have the job but because that time we had to have a woman he could help his son in the future by making her Sarpanch. Most people think like this.”

Vidiya Devi is a young Kumbhar woman and I attempted to meet her on several occasions, but every time I tried was shown into a room and only allowed to meet with her husband and her father-in-law. The first occasion I realised something was amiss was during the opening of a stitching project at Chaghan Lal's house. The crowd consisted predominantly of Kumbhar and Sadh women sat on the floor and a handful of their men sat upon chairs. People had explained how the *Sarpanch* was going to open the project, but rather than a young woman, it was a nervous young man who said a few muffled words at an older man's provoking. At the end of the ceremony I began talking to a reporter from the Rajasthan Patrika, a well-loved Rajasthani newspaper, who was sent to cover the opening. He explained that apparently the wife of the young man had just had a baby and so was not able to attend herself.

Having been confused by the presence of the young man, who had no official title, at the opening of the stitching project, I later asked some of the individuals who had attended why Ramdial had not also been invited. The Kumbhar, Sadh and Dholi informants present stated that it was because Vidiya Devi's family supported them. Upon further enquiry one informant stated it was because they were OBC and during the elections it was the Kumbhars and their duty-bound Dholi employees that helped to get Vidiya Devi elected. When I asked the rather taboo question of whether it was because Ramdial was Meghval one Dholi informant quietly responded in the affirmative. Realising the admission, others commented that they knew the Kumbhar *Sarpanch's* family well and they had supported them because they thought an OBC candidate would represent their needs more fully than a SC candidate.

Some time after this event I went to the house of the *Sarpanch* and was again presented with the furtive husband and a very boisterous father-in-law. During the entire conversation they made no reference to Vidiya Devi or any work she had done, and when I asked if I could meet her, replied I could not because she was inside the house with the baby (I was sitting in a guest room situated close to the compound's perimeter fence). As I was leaving a young woman poked her head out from behind the curtain of a door to the *angan* (central part of the house) and shyly smiled at me. Returning the smile, I asked the father-in-law who it was and he responded: "That is Vidiya". Following this, he abruptly changed the subject to when I could

come and collect the *Panchayat* documents we had discussed and he briskly walked me to the gate, while I continued to stare over my shoulder in the direction of the curtain.

Over time, it became increasingly clear that informants' speculations concerning Vidīya and her family were accurate. She was never present at any of the official or religious gatherings in the village: rather it was always her husband and father-in-law.

Members of the Meghval lineage also believed that it was the husband and father-in-law who wield the power, although they were often reluctant to talk directly of village politics. The fact that Ramdial had not lost his seat on the *Panchayat Samiti*, for example, was hardly discussed by the family; in fact it was just assumed to be perfectly normal for him to maintain his position. However, many other Meghval informants did say it was unusual for this to happen but because Ramdial was so well known, it was obvious that he would remain active.

On one occasion a Meghval informant indicated that the *Gram Panchayat* office was originally located in Mudharamsar but that in 2003 a decision was made to move it to Kotli. This informant believed that this was why the Kumbhars did better. When I asked why this would affect the position of Ramdial, the informant said that a deal was made – Ramdial could keep his position on the condition that the *Panchayat* office was moved and a Kumbhar take the official title. When I asked how such a deal was possible, the informant said it was because the Kumbhars in Kotli are very strong and they are connected to an old Rajput family who no longer lives in the area, but is still quite powerful. I could not, however, find any other evidence to support this explanation. Even so, what it shows is the strong sentiment amongst most informants that the Kumbhars won the election through less than honourable means, but on the other hand that Ramdial is not considered entirely admirable either.

Whilst many Kumbhars, Sadh, and poorer Meghvals were fairly open with me about their attitudes toward Ramdial and the family, the Meghval landlords almost never expressed criticisms of any kind about the Prajarpat Kumbhar family or of Vidīya's family. For example, it was only on one occasion that Kamraj expressed a criticism of the Prajarpat Kumbhar family with an enigmatic reference to the political situation between his family and theirs.

I had been spending a lot of time at Chaghan Lal's house over a period of a month or so and had built up a good relationship with his family. When his father passed away I was invited

to the wake. I stayed for dinner and Chaghan Lal drove me on his motorbike the short distance to Kamraj's house. Kamraj came out to meet us and invited Chaghan Lal in for tea. Chaghan Lal refused but Kamraj persisted until Chaghan Lal finally relented and entered the house. Whilst both of a similar age it was clear who was in charge and Kamraj, while polite, was very confidently expressing his condolences and asking questions. Chaghan Lal on the other hand gave one-word answers and barely raised his eyes from the floor. When Chaghan Lal left, Kamraj said I had been spending a lot of time with his family recently and I should be careful because they were, in his words, "money minded".

When I asked Kamraj to expand on this he stated that the family have connections with the *Sarpanch's* family and that family had caused problems for his family in the past. I asked him if the problems were related to the election of Vidīya Devi and he agreed, saying:

"For some people power is more important than family and respect. People do not respect them because they know they are money-minded. You can have a high title but it means nothing without respect".

Kamraj was always rather mysterious when it came to discussing village politics, yet he was always opinionated when discussing regional or national politics. As such, it was never very difficult to unpack his meaning. This quote clearly shows that both Kumbhar families, Chaghan Lal's and Vidīya Devi's, are not respected, politically at least, in the same way as Ramdial and his own family. This shows that although Ramdial's position is not officially valid, the people, and particularly the numerically dominant Meghval, either respect him enough not to care, or are fearful if they disrespect him.

When asked about politics more generally, Kamraj tended to draw a direct link between his religious beliefs and his political opinion. For example:

"Reservations are one method for making society more equal. Before it was very unequal low castes had nothing, no education, food or jobs. All the good jobs were taken by high caste people. With the reservations come opportunity and a chance to better your position. However,

today it is still unequal many people are poor and without jobs. God says there is only one caste, we, humans have made caste not God”.

Here Kamraj draws attention to how caste is unfounded in religion. Moreover, by implication he suggests that those who practice caste discrimination are not true to god. This is a powerful rhetoric and one that is used among other low caste political actors. For example, Michelutti (2008) shows how metaphors of Krishna as the perfect politician who represents the needs of low castes is actively employed by the Yadav political classes of Uttar Pradesh.

The tensions between the Meghval and Kumbhar are primarily played out between their creamy layers, the two powerful lineages in particular. However, this competition is also visible among the poorer sections of the caste and one of my early village experiences reveals this quite well. The following vignette also illustrates the power Ramdial has to settle village disputes.

An Illustrative Vignette

One night I was lying on my charpoy bed reading by torchlight when I heard shouting. The nights in the village were usually eerily devoid of human sounds and the ferocious barking and growling of the feral village dogs fighting for their territory only ever punctuated the silence. I leapt from my bed when hearing the human voices and drawing back the heavy lock of my iron door I ran to the edge of the rooftop to see what all the commotion was about. I was just beginning to make out the individual shapes of a large group of people when Kamraj called to me through the grated courtyard roof. I was terribly excited as usually nothing happened in the evenings and I asked if I could go and see what was happening. By this time the whole family was awake and both Rampiyari and Kamraj were at first adamant that I should not leave the house and that it would be unsafe for me to do so. Rampiyari, however, was also a little excited by all the commotion, and whilst she hurried to gather all the children, four in total, around her she was also suggesting that Kamraj should go and see if the members of the “main house” were alright.

The main house is situated within a small compound about 250 yards from Kamraj's house. Rather than take the usual route to the main house, however, Kamraj said that we should first see why people were gathering along the small track behind his house. As we approached the group of about 15 men it was clear that a ferocious argument was taking place. Many of the younger men were brandishing *lathis* (long bamboo poles) and sticks and were waving them threateningly at the two men in the centre of the group. The men involved were talking in a rapid and informal Marwari, a local Rajasthani dialect, which at the time I had only just begun to learn.

Tensions were mounting and quite suddenly a man raised his *lathi* and struck the more vocal of the two men in the centre. At this point Kamraj pulled me further away from the ring and said it was time to go to the main house. Just as we rounded the corner of the narrow lane, Ramdial, Kamraj's elder brother, was walking towards us. They passed a few rapid words and we turned to head back towards the group of men. On approaching the ring I heard several of the onlookers shout "*Ramdial ji āi'nge!*" or "Ramdial ji is coming!" and on hearing this many of the men ceased fighting and looked in our direction. As we approached the ring, Ramdial ji demanded to know what had happened and for everyone to drop their weapons. The language of the men changed to a formal Marwari with which I was more familiar. Both the Hindi¹⁹ and Marwari languages contain informal, familiar and formal/ honorific directive levels and the formal in Marwari is closest to Hindi. Ramdial ji said that the Police should deal with the matter and sent someone off to call them.

Some time after the event I found out that the two men at the centre of the ring had been accused of attempting to steal a goat from a Meghval family in the village. Moreover, the two goat rustlers were of Kumbhar caste; one lived in the village and the other was an Auto Rickshaw driver in Bikaner city. Many villagers speculated that the men had tried to steal the goat because they thought the Meghvals were becoming too strong. It did not seem to matter, however, that the man whose goat was stolen was actually quite poor.

¹⁹ Hindi actually contains three divisions: Formal, Informal, and intimate, these are generally categorised in the second person pronoun – you or *Āp*, *Tum*, and *Tū* respectively. Similar to French, these commands also change the verb endings.

* * * *

What this case shows most visibly is the relationship Ramdial has with other people in the village. He is viewed as a man of authority with the power to intervene in village disputes. Moreover, this power is recognised by both poorer Meghvals and Kumbhars, suggesting that his authority over village matters stretches beyond just status as part of a political lineage. His power is felt by the people of Mudhamsar and, what is more, it is listened to. Thus, it is not surprising he has a vested interest in remaining active on the *Panchayat Samiti*.

The importance of Reservations at the state level is clearly revealed to be just as important politically at the *Gram Panchayat* and village level. Both Chaghan Lal's and Vidiya Devi's family are BJP supporters whereas Ramdial and Kamraj's are committed members of the Congress party. Vidiya Devi's victory was, however, clearly one for her husband and father-in-law rather than for herself. Villagers' support for her family was intimately connected to her status as OBC rather than as a woman. Although some women thought it was good to have a female *Sarpanch*, this was secondary to her OBC status.

The use of the SC and OBC classifications to convey political affiliation and divergence is quite common. This is particularly so for the Kumbhar who have fairly recently acquired the OBC classification. Moreover, using these identity markers is seen as an acceptable political strategy to express factional dissonance within the local *Panchayat* system. However, this language is in part, euphemistic, as it conceals deeper caste-based prejudices and allegiances that exist in the village.

Whilst the Kumbhars have traditionally occupied a position only marginally higher than the Meghvals, this difference is highly significant to them, and like the Meghvals they have greatly benefited from reservation politics. However, this shared access to social mobility, and the similarities in their lifestyles, largely go unrecognised in their explanations. This is partly because the perceived basis upon which they achieved their position, Scheduled Caste and OBC, is seen as divergent.

The understanding of the two classifications, OBC and SC, is then strongly linked to community and the traditional or normative ranking of castes. In this way, the horizontal, and to

degree, vertical boundaries of the individual castes are seen as relatively permeable, whereas the boundary between Scheduled Caste and Other Backward Classes is less so. This is because each category implies specific material entitlements on the one hand, and traditional caste ranking on the other. Inadvertently, the claiming of them requires a conflation of caste ranking with, in effect, a fiscal value of what that ranking is worth. Thus it is with little surprise that these categories have reinvigorated hostility between castes of different traditional ranking.

Consequently, for the castes involved, the political power contained in the two categories (OBC and SC) rests in how they signal the boundary where 'backwardness' ends and untouchability begins a greatly politicised pollution-based distinction that in reality is quite blurred, but, nevertheless, endures as an acceptable form of discrimination for those on the right side of the line.

The Meghvals do however; appear to have quite a different approach to politics, at least publicly, to that of the Kumbhars. Their perspective on reservations draws on morality and religious motifs, to be discussed further in the following chapter, and encompasses the benefits to be gained for all low castes not just their own. Therefore, Kamraj's critique of the Kumbhars' political motives appears to be morally based. This is however; a useful political tactic and one that is used throughout India (cf. Michelutti 2008).

Discourses surrounding respectability and status are common concepts employed in popular representations of those with government jobs, in contrast to political actors. However, these sentiments are not just press induced messages; they are also used by people in their everyday discussions of power, status and the legitimacy of a person's social standing. In a village where it is predominantly low castes that have government jobs, the villagers in Mudhamsar make a clear link between reservations, politics, employment and status. What will be seen below is how those who cannot gain access to the opportunities presented through reservations, even though they may share the same caste as those who do; see those with 'government jobs' as forming a separate class.

Part 3. Government Jobs: Status and Security

Government jobs are highly sought after and although they are quite obviously hierarchically ranked, competition for any of the numerous positions is fierce. For example, Kamraj held the position of clerk and computer operative at the time of fieldwork for the State Bank of Bikaner and Jaipur (SBBJ) in Kolayat. He explained how he had to sit 6 separate exams and write an essay as part of the application procedure for the reserved position. Moreover, he added that there were over 1000 applicants for the single post he currently holds. This level of competition is common for reserved seats and Kamraj is convinced it was his Masters degree in Commerce that swung the job in his favour. A similar situation can be seen in the next generation.

The son of Ramchandhan Panwar (see genealogy in Chapter 1), one of Kamraj's elder brothers, whilst coming to the end of his Bachelor degree had attempted to get a government job with Hindustan Petroleum, a state nationalised petrol company, and later as a police constable. Raju claimed that there were over 1500 applicants for the latter job, confirmed by a newspaper article at the time, and even though he was invited to sit the exam, was not short listed for the second round. On both occasions he was unsuccessful, but he was determined to keep applying for government jobs. When I asked him why he did not try his hand at something else he stated:

“My father has a government job, and his father before him, and many of my uncles have government jobs. Government jobs are the best jobs. You get good pensions and good money and if I want to raise a family or go into politics I can. They are greatly respected and many people want them. This is why I want one too”.

Whether a bank clerk in the state bank, policeman or petty government official one only has to say “I have a government job” and the rest speaks for itself. Those with government jobs command both respect and suspicion, partly because the holders of such jobs are seen as having connections that could be called upon to achieve their wishes, but also because they are secure. “A government job is a job for life” as many informants like to put it. The significance of the

statement above, concerning the security of government jobs is an important factor for villagers who see government jobs as a way to better their position.

Ramchandhan's son's statement indicates several issues pertaining to the power, prestige and sense of continuity and permanence that can be acquired through government jobs. However, whilst it would be wrong to suggest that Ramchandhan's son is only interested in the power he can get as a government employee, his sentiments do express a widely held belief in the status of such jobs, particularly in rural areas where economic opportunities are in short supply. Moreover, there is a certain degree of social capital to be gained from having a reserved position. Not only because competition is so severe for such jobs, but also because it has great social meaning for those involved.

What is most interesting about Raju's understanding of government jobs is that having one would give him more choices and freedom in life. He often explained it would give him the opportunity to move away from the area and adopt the lifestyle he would like. Unlike his father, Raju was largely uninterested in the Sanskritised beliefs of his parents. Although he respected them and would participate fully during religious ceremonies, he privately desired an alternative life for himself.

Raju and I had a joking relationship and we often talked openly about caste, class and politics. On one occasion, Raju told me that he ate meat and drank alcohol. When I asked him if his parents knew, he replied that they most likely did but chose to ignore it. He was also one of the groups of young Meghvals who attended the last caste council and was often open about how he hated casteism. Whilst he had immense respect for his parents, he did not like the fact that they chose to adopt practices that reaffirmed caste. For example, some years before he had refused to wear the *janeu*, even though his mother had begged him to continue to do so. During this conversation, Raju also explained how he was not alone in this belief and that many of his friends also ate meat, drank alcohol, and wanted government jobs as a way to leave caste behind. For Raju and his friends, having a government job meant more freedom.

What is more, this freedom was orientated in two opposing directions: firstly, away from the Sanskritised caste identity, and secondly toward an identity based on the material benefits of a government job. For Raju, the benefits of a government job would afford him the

economic security to enable him to live the life he wanted, on the one hand, but on the other he was well aware that his status as SC and being a Panwar Meghval was what would enable him to get a government job. Among the wealthy SCs in Mudharamsar, it is their status as SC and in this case Panwar Meghval, that gives them the greatest head start in getting such a job in the region.

Among poorer Meghvals the situation is quite different. When asked about government jobs, they stated that they were only available to the educated. As one informant put it:

“You can only get a government job here through reservations but they only work if you have access to education. We have to work for money and for food. These things (government jobs) are far away from us. I try to send my children to school but it has no meaning when we need food. To get a government job you already need some one in the family who has an education and a good job”.

This sentiment highlights the sense that it is only the creamy layer that can get access to reserved seats. And that a basic level of affluence has to be present for a person to get a job. The reservation system is highly competitive and covers a wide range of government agencies and institutions. For some jobs, such as police constable, the candidate must have at least 12th class pass²⁰. As mentioned in the last chapter, most villagers are engaged in agriculture and mining, are poorly paid and they see themselves as a labour class. When I asked whether they thought people who did manual work, but for the government, were also part of the labour class they felt that any person with a government job was more fortunate.

“It does not matter if you are a policeman or a government sweeper. They get benefits that we do not get. They are a separate class. We do not get pensions and we are not paid regularly- they are. Even if the work they do is not good they still get many good things... This is what makes it different. Also, they can move up in their jobs and their families can benefit. We cannot move up in our jobs”.

²⁰ 12th class or ten plus two is equivalent to our A'Level standard.

This quote highlights the crucial fact that having a government job, regardless of how polluting the work is, such as sweepers who were traditionally untouchable, have security in their jobs. Similar to the distinctions drawn between permanent and daily-wage workers, the above shows that the status of the job, and subsequent class to which you belong through doing it, rests in the job's security and permanence. Although I suspect, of course, most people do recognise that a job in waste disposal would be less appealing than a job in a clean office.

The use of class however, in the quote above, is very much related to the security and advancement that comes from having government jobs. Job and economic security, then, is elevated above the traditional ranking of those tasks. This is perhaps also why Raju felt he no longer needed the Sanskritised identity of his parents, as the discourse amongst the younger generations was that once you had a government job it did not really matter which caste you belong to. Having a government job, for this generation of workers, gave one a social and economic capital that would enable them to live more securely, and therefore less at the whim of caste prejudices. There is of course this major contradiction that keeps coming up. On the one hand they seek lives independent of caste practices and are highly pragmatic about the values attached to economic security, but on the other hand those who have achieved such security in Mudhamsar have done so by virtue of their caste background.

Consequently, the status accorded to government jobs feeds further into the role of reservation policies in shaping how advancement is understood. As claiming jobs in this sector is for the low caste, dependent on identifying yourself as belonging to a disadvantaged caste. This need to claim a disadvantaged caste position in order to receive a government job marks this great contradiction in the discourse and practice of reservations. Perhaps what Raju was commenting on is that the state requires the idea of caste identity in order to grant a job, but that the grantee need not, in practice, conform to that evaluation once he or she holds it. In fact, the hope of the original policy drafters was likely to be closer to this latter point than the highly cynical reservation politics of today.

Either way, for the poorer low caste villagers having a government job has clear benefits that are not available to them. Moreover, many still recognise that most Meghvals are

poor and consequently, the wealthier of the caste are very different to themselves. For example, one informant stated:

“We are all Meghvals this is true, but this does not mean the same thing for them as it does for us. They are rich so they can do more things. They are very different from us. They can send their children to school. They do not worry about food and debts. How can we be the same our lives are very different now”.

The implication in these informant’s comments is that the wealthy are a different kind of Meghval and ‘being’ Meghval has different meanings for them, suggesting that the substantialisation of caste is breaking down. Whilst both the poor and wealthy Meghvals still talk of a Meghval caste, particularly when politics is involved, it is clear that this is beginning to mean different things to different groups within the caste. Consequently, ordinary Meghvals, who are unable to use their ‘Meghvalness’ in the same way to advance their lot are challenging the premise of their caste unity. Moreover, wealthy Meghvals of a younger generation likewise want to move away from using caste as the evaluation of their status. Consequently, both the poorer and wealthier Meghvals of the younger generation see government jobs as containing an economic capital that of itself is not dependent on caste ranking, even though getting the job necessary to acquire the capital is.

The combination of affluence, status, security, and power to be had from government positions, then, dictates the parameters of the public sector classes. The wealthier political classes are, however, internally divided along caste lines and utilise those divisions for political gain. Conversely, to the everyday non-politician they represent a bounded class with a shared identity, whose glass walls and ceilings they will never pierce. What is more, the power to be had from this class is desirable to the younger generation who see it as a way to gain more freedom from the constraints of caste.

Summary

The Meghvals are the dominant caste in the village. What is more, the Meghval landlords are also fully-fledged members of the local dominant class. Their position as inside the system is in material terms, immutable. This current position however, contradicts their traditional caste status as outside the dominant society. Through reservations though, their very 'Meghvalness' has been the vehicle for achieving their current position.

Conversely, the Kumbhars' traditional status and position in the caste hierarchy was greatly ambiguous. On the one hand, they were inside and able to drink water from the same well as a Rajput, but also they were partly outside the system due to the substances used in their traditional occupation of pottery. Through political mobilisation during a time when powerful intermediate castes were also applying pressure to state politicians, they were able to get local reservations via their re-notification as OBC. Moreover, this re-classification helped to confirm their higher ritual status over the Meghvals whose position as deprived and polluted held no historical ambiguity. However, the OBC category meant that the Kumbhar did not need to compete in the same regional quota as the numerically strong Meghvals, but would enable them to increase their competition at the village level by uniting with other powerful OBCs in the region. What is more, by involving other castes, such as the Dholi, both as employees in their fields, and as exchangers in the re-traditionalised trade in village services, they were able to galvanise greater political support in the village.

We have seen that today both the Meghval and Kumbhar families more or less share the same class position, even though there is little class consciousness amongst them, and compete for status in the village. A large part of the animosity between them is, however, linked to reservation politics and the control of the *Panchayat*, accompanied by discourses surrounding the labels of Scheduled Caste (SC) and Other Backward Class (OBC).

Their respective membership in either the Scheduled Caste or Other Backward Classes category is bound up in discourses concerning political persuasion and beliefs concerning social change and the abolition of caste. In addition, the use of these terms for political purposes

immediately identifies, on a superficial level at least, the position of the actors involved within the 'traditional' caste hierarchy. Scheduled Caste, after all, still carries the connotations of untouchability in Rajasthan, unlike the OBC notification.

However, these identity markers are not rigidly applied. Instead their association with particular communities is deeply blurred by a caste's ability to be re-notified under a new category. This blurring means that not only can a caste change its status but also its entitlements and opportunities for secure government jobs under the reservation system. This change typically takes the form of upward mobility from SC to OBC, as is so among the Kumbhar. However, it also depends on the political climate, which category is popular at the time, and which receives the highest quota of reservations, but has the smallest population, and thus greater potential for secure government jobs. Thus the notification as SC, OBC, or ST is highly political. Today more and more communities are switching between different notifications depending on the economic and political advantages to be gained.

An example that received considerable press coverage in Rajasthan was a dispute between the Gujjars and Minas. In October 2007 half a million Gujjars, after being accorded OBC status, took to the streets of Rajasthan in a violent protest wishing that their notification as OBC be changed to Scheduled Tribe. Moreover, this claim was strongly rejected by the Mina (or Meena) community who are the largest and most influential of the 8 Scheduled Tribes in Rajasthan, and consequently stood to lose their monopoly over the reservation quota.

Figures collected by the Ministry of Personnel, Public Grievances and Pensions (2005) showed that ST filled 4.3% out of a maximum of 7.5% quota for jobs classed as category A. These are occupations such as the civil service and Superintendents of the police force. However, the OBC category only filled 4.7% out of a maximum 27% quota for the same jobs. Moreover, a similar pattern is reported for the category B, C and D positions. The Gujjars by all accounts should be better off under the OBC category and many felt they were once their previous demand for re-notification under ST was rejected in 1970s. However, when in 1999 the Jats being courted for their votes by the BJP, won their demand to be notified as OBC, the Gujjars felt they were losing their share to their numerically and politically more dominant Jat

counter-parts. The Gujjar leaders felt that one way to escape the stronghold of the Jats was to be re-notified under ST (World Sikh News, June 2008).

Consequently, for some the choice or preservation of a notification partly depends upon the material gains to be had from that label. However, as we saw among the Kumbhar in Mudharamsar, the discourse of a classification can be just as powerful an incentive for notification, even when the material reality suggests otherwise. In a context where economic opportunities and political representation are scarce, rural communities such as the Meghval and Kumbhar in Mudharamsar, are somewhat forced to construct essentialised identities on whatever grounds, as vehicles to claim entitlements or just to have their voices heard.

The power-based tension between the Meghvals and Kumbhars arising from their similar economic position has created considerable rifts, both socially and ideologically, between the two. However, both prefer to use SC and OBC to define themselves rather than *Dalit*, meaning depressed and downtrodden.

Dalit is often associated with urban, politically active ex-untouchables and the subaltern movement more generally (cf. Gorringer 2005). However, it is gaining in common parlance among rural communities. Having said that however, Karen Kapadia (forthcoming) has also noted that among her low caste politicians, using *Dalit* is admonished. Likewise, my Meghval informants never used this term and when I mentioned it most looked uncomfortable, saying they preferred Scheduled Caste or *Harijan*. *Harijan* (or people of god) is a term adopted by Mahatma Gandhi in 1933 as the winning entry in a competition to find a suitable name to replace 'untouchable'. Mendelsohn and Vicziany (1998) show how this term was widely adopted by the general public and among the ex-untouchables themselves. However, in recent years the term has lost support and as early as the late 1930s it was being used negatively by some militant activists to denote a person who had internalised attitudes of inferiority and accepted their traditional ranking in the caste hierarchy.

Although no decent scholar of South Asia would dispute that these communities have historically, and many still today, experience severe oppression and subjugation, it is no longer universally agreed that there is a body of people so distinct from other Indians that they should be separated out and labelled untouchable or some other synonymous term (cf. Mendelsohn and

Vicziany 1998: 8-9). However, even though it is regarded as difficult to locate a distinct body of 'oppressed' people, caste prejudice is still rampant. What is more, this prejudice finds its way into the very terms OBC and SC themselves. As a result, there is a fine but politically and socially cavernous line that is drawn between the identity of SC and OBC. Whilst this line hides the wide variety of statuses present among those to be accorded protective discrimination, where the line is drawn is still of great significance.

For many, however, this line is subjectively drawn and is more often than not used to highlight differences between two creamy layers. For example, the demographic data from census records, educational admission files and employment data all suggest that it is the minimally disadvantaged and numerically strong that have benefited more than others. Subsequently, competition is fiercest among the groups' creamy layers, whose participation in politics has increased significantly over the years, whilst others of their caste play little or no role in politics.

What is more, such competition is no longer confined to the cities but is equally as visible at the village level. This process is clearly taking place across Northern India and cannot be explained by India's protective discrimination policies alone. Whilst reservations have certainly helped to define the motive for intense competition between the creamy layers of the Scheduled Castes, OBCs and now STs, the discourse that surrounds the competition is locked in a wider discourse of disadvantage and methods for advancement. Over time, reservations have, like many social movements, created a discourse of social justice wherein individual advancement is linked to group mobility, and groups are to move forward by claiming they have been left behind.

Although riddled with internal disputes over class and status, this group of low caste government workers and politicians share little but name with the caste background that entitled them to this mobility. Most of them have, for example, Sanskritised themselves to align with high caste evaluations of status. They are part of the village 'establishment' and poorer villagers of the same and different caste fear negative reprisals should they confront them. However, this understanding of the elite as a separate group is not clear cut. The intra-caste differentiation may be better understood by the analogy of the glass ceiling or smoke screen, as power for the more

wealthy, and indeed representation for the less wealthy, is still very much located in the ideas of essentialised caste identity.

The poorer Meghvals will, for example, vote for the Panwar family during elections and continue to support Ramdial even though he should, *de jure*, have left office. Moreover, Meghvals of all economic backgrounds, particularly during the effervescence of Election Day, do feel a strong sense of pride that it is a Meghval family that have done so well. And although the existence of a common caste identity is muted in everyday life, there are key themes around which it rallies. One of these themes is religion, and although in many cases it does feed into wider social differentiation, religion among Meghvals is a great source of caste pride.

Chapter IV. Religion: Sanskritisation, Protection and Social Differentiation

The decline in status of the high castes and the earlier village oligarchs has allowed lower castes to express their political views and claim a stake in the agrarian economy. Whilst on a political stage caste identity is still significant and informants choose to support the candidates of their own caste, at the level of everyday life this identity is greatly fragmented. The political and economic gains made have been for a few and this revealed itself starkly in Mudharamsar during the time of fieldwork. Many poor low castes in the village, as the previous chapters highlight, are still subject to exclusion and marginalisation. What is more, this exclusion draws on both caste, and class based prejudices. These identity based evaluations are, however, context specific. The effervescence of election day, for example, and the political rhetoric of caste reservations creates the illusion that castes are bounded and internally unified, when in fact they are, in routine life, the very opposite. The social differentiation within individual castes does mean, however, that some are forming bonds of identity and status that stretch beyond caste, but these are also fragile and context specific.

The competition for status and power in this hierarchical social world creates alliances and divisions amongst the people of Mudharamsar. How villagers understand that material world is also through the symbolic representation found among the gods and goddesses of the Hindu Pantheon, with which this chapter is concerned. As Fuller (1992:5) notes, most ordinary people in India see their relationship with the deities as fundamental in their lives. They live in what Srinivas (1976:323) calls a “theistic universe”, in the sense that everyone in the village [Rampura of Karnataka] believed that god did exist, or more precisely, deities, male and female, and spirits, did exist. What is more, ideas about how these deities interact, behave, and impact on the world are socially and culturally constructed. Like all religions, Hinduism is constructed by its members, as well as by non-Hindus, and is thus representational or at least consistent with the structure of society as a whole. Accordingly, and as Fuller (1992:8) rightly states, popular theistic Hinduism is in fact about relationships among members of Indian society.

The aim of this chapter then, is to describe what role religion plays in shaping social relations, and the meanings given to them, by people in Mudharamsar. In order to examine how religion shapes and is shaped by social relations there are two key elements of religion in Mudharamsar that need to be considered. The first element is the everyday rituals and festivals that characterise peoples' lives in Mudharamsar. What can these tell us of contemporary social relations and how, if at all, do they appear different from people's perception of religiosity in the past? The second component is concerned with what is out of the ordinary or specific to Mudharamsar, and how do these activities fit with present day understandings of religion, and what they may tell us about changing social relations. In this regard, I follow Peabody (1997: 560) in emphasising that religion does not just reinforce existing social relations, but can also be a space for contesting, altering and remaking authoritative orders.

I am therefore concerned with religion as a sociological phenomenon. I will for example, describe how religion is used for socio-political ends by actors in the village. Here, religiosity is used to shape alternative status claims, support upward mobility through the Sanskritisation of a key Rajasthani deity, Ramdev, and as part of a larger tradition of Sanskritic Rajputisation among Meghval women. I will describe how religiosity among the wealthy Meghval women further highlights the process of Sanskritisation and Rajputisation. Similar to the cult of Ramdev, women's religious practices incorporate both high and low caste practices. Their role as protectors of the family, 'traditional values', and economic mobility and stability are central themes that will be discussed.

I will also explore how Ramdev informs political choices among his followers, and helps to provide justification for political involvement and upward mobility. The role of religion in shaping political discourse in India is widely noted in the ethnographic record, for example, Michuletti 2008, Hardiman 2007, Khan 2003, Jaffrelot 1996, Lynch 1969 to name a few. Religion is, therefore, also used to characterise the interests Beteille (1974: 35-55) suggests serve to order the relations among groups and classes.

Whilst the perspective above is largely the position taken in this chapter, there are, however, moments in the symbolic world of the gods and goddesses where these interests overlap. This overlap is two-fold; firstly, it represents a collective consciousness concerning the

universal role of the deities in preserving and protecting the village, its lands, and people, even if few actually perform rites to them. The second moment exists at the level of religious rhetoric or discourse, where community distinctions and status concerns are actively broken down, even if only to be built back up again and reinforced. This temporary breakdown of caste and status is, therefore, very specific to particular deities and certain religious occasions. Unlike elsewhere in Rajasthan, there are very few times when villagers in Mudharamsar will come together to celebrate a common festival. Instead, villagers prefer to perform the various rites or festivities within the confines of their caste, family or area of the village. For these reasons, and others as we saw in previous chapters, Mudharamsar is a village of spaces with at times, clearly defined ritual and social boundaries. What is more, the religious occasions detailed here come to represent and define the important social relationships people have in the village.

What is important to note of these practices is that they are hidden from public view, inducing an air of potency and power beyond the usual activities of everyday ritual and social life. Moreover, these 'ritual moments' are seldom discussed by practitioners and are kept secret, yet for others are a great source of gossip, conjecture and prejudice. As will be described, these moments, however, say less about existing social relationships than they do about those of the past. This is because such moments are in decline and as a result the central village deity, Hinglaj Mata, has also lost much of her potency.

Whilst the physical coming together of all of Mudharamsar's people is rare, all do on an ideological level. They are agreed on the village Pantheon and the deities' roles in protecting the village. There is also, as Fuller (1992: 128) notes of village India more generally, little dispute over how there should be a harmony between the deities and the people for whom they watch over, even if the material world is littered with disputes and conflict.

In sum, this chapter is concerned with religion and religious practice within Mudharamsar village and its neighbouring areas. This will entail, in the first instance, a description of the kinds of deities, deity places, and the common festivals of the village and how these highlight ruptures and unities among specific actors in the village. I will then focus in detail on the three religious traditions, Ramdev, Kunda *Panth*, and Bhomiya. I will highlight the central role Ramdev has for the Meghval and how this deity has undergone considerable

Sanskritisation and Rajputisation by his followers. I will also show how he is used by Meghvals as the political champion of caste abolition and therefore a logical choice of hero for the politically inclined and upwardly mobile.

What will also be shown is that each of the traditions in Mudharamsar intersects with the main village deity, Hinglaj Mata, where her role as village protector is agreed by all, even though the practices and ritual activities denoting her presence are greatly divergent. Where once Hinglaj was revered and rites were performed in her honour by past Paliwal rulers, today her temple has been taken over by a Sadh priest. She is no longer regarded as having any unique qualities by most in the village and is instead seen more generally as representational of all the main Hindu goddesses (specifically Parvati, Sita, Sati, Durga and the well known Bikaneri goddess Karni Mata).

Today Hinglaj Mata only finds specific representation among Kunda Panth followers who are largely regarded as deviant by non-practitioners in the village. Consequently, much of the detailed data regarding the Kunda Panth and its relationship to both Hinglaj and Ramdev presented here is for academic posterity as there is very little literature concerning the specific rituals associated with her. The exception is the detailed ethno-historical studies of Dominique-Sila Khan, and as a result many references (1994, 1996, 1998, 1999, 2003 [1997]) are made to her work.

These traditions, including that of Bhomiya, in their general form do also contribute to our understanding of contemporary social relations in the village. This is because the discourses villagers have of these traditions highlight unities and cleavages in the existing social structure. As such, specific attention will be paid to three aspects of these traditions. Firstly, how Ramdev is being Sanskritised away from his association with low castes on the one hand, whilst also being claimed by them on the other. Secondly, how some of the wealthiest members of the village are also followers of the Kunda Panth, and thirdly, how Bhumiya worshippers are predominantly regarded as backward and ill-educated. In other words, I aim to describe the interests behind contemporary religious practice in Mudharamsar and how it varies or is consistent with perceptions or practices of the past.

As a brief note, I have avoided using the term 'sect' as its connotations of Christian denominational practice are misleading in this context. Therefore, I will refer in general to the different religious practices as 'traditions', but I will also use the language of my informants where terms such as *Panth* (cult/sect) or *Dharm* (religion/ religious teaching/ path) are used frequently to denote these traditions. Moreover, most of the village inhabitants would class themselves as Hindu with the exception of two families who are Muslim. Whilst I spent considerable time with Muslim informants, this chapter is primarily concerned with the Hindu traditions of the village. This is not to exclude other religions; as will be shown there are places where the boundaries between religions blur, and Muslim, as well as Jain informants, made important contributions to the material presented here, and where appropriate these exegeses will be given.

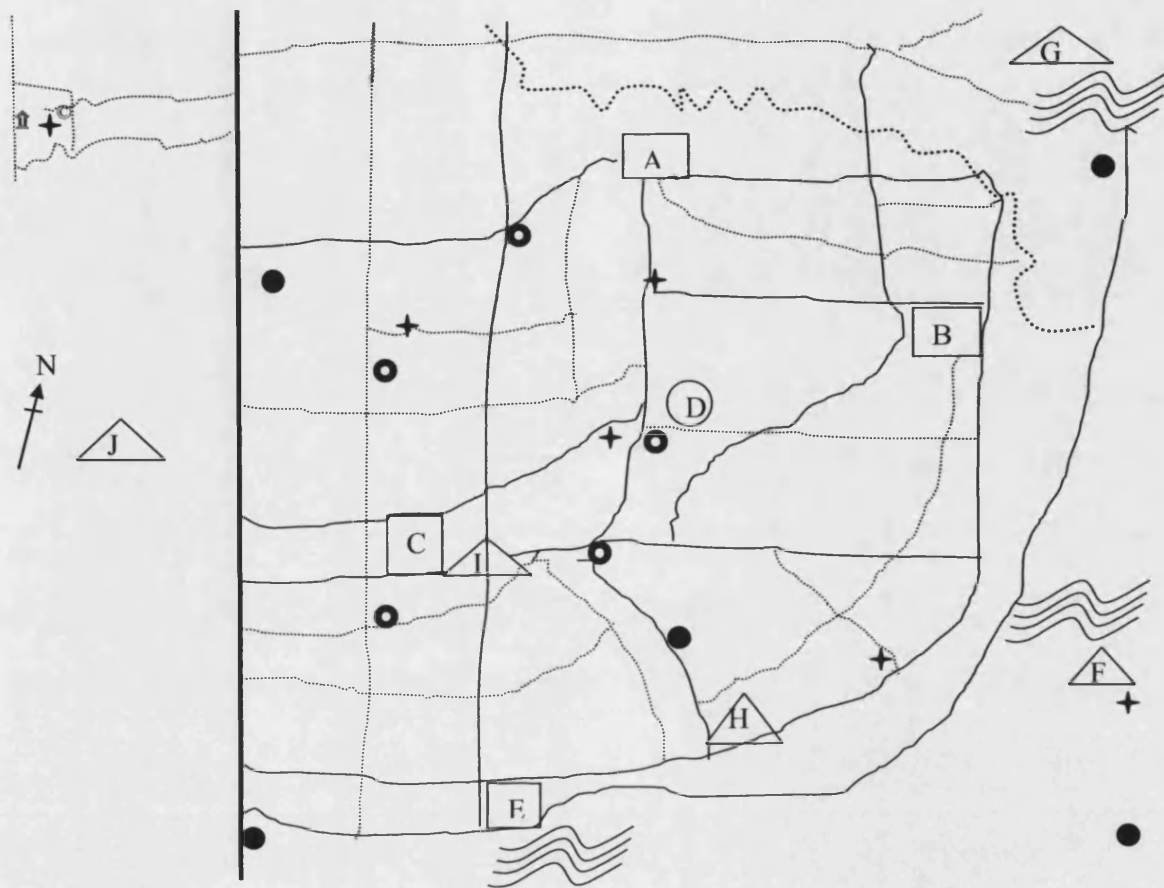


Figure 19. Map of Mudharamsar showing main pathways, temples and shrines (not to scale).

	Surfaced road		Yogi Shrine
	Non-surfaced pakkā road		Jain Stupa
	Non-surfaced kuccā road		Bhumiya Shrine (Mool Singh ji)
	Dried-up riverbed		Dali Bai Shrine
	Pond/ step well		Mata Tree Shrine/ Meghval only
	Hinglaj Mata Temple		Bhumiya Devliya
	Krishna Temple		Kali Mata/ Kalbelia only
	Ramdev Temple		Tube/ feeder well
	Government School		Bhairon Shrine or Devliya
	Hanuman Temple		

Part 1. Deity Places in Mudharamsar

There are numerous shrines, temples, deified stones, platforms and religious places in Mudharamsar, all with specific uses. The map above shows where these main deity places are located. It is important to bear in mind, however, that the above list is not exhaustive as there are countless *kuldevis* or family deities, ghosts that occupy people's houses, and threatening deities that linger around the boundary of the village, altogether too numerous to count. Many of the types of deities are common throughout Rajasthan and one has to be careful not to lump them together. As Anne Grodzins Gold (1988) rightly points out, whilst indicating a geographical uniqueness, the grouping of "village deities and shrines" encompasses an extensive range of potent places which differ in quite significant ways from region to region. This difference indicates the specificities of life in Mudharamsar village and the range of social and metaphysical relations that exist. Who goes to which temple, who is excluded from which ritual practice, and which god will be most accommodating to your needs are all questions intimately linked to how people define their lives and the lives of others in the material world.

There are numerous terms given to the deity places in Mudharamsar. These terms range from the formal and specific Hindi word *mandir* for temple, to the broad term *devasthan*, literally places of the gods, to the Rajasthani, *devaro* or *devliya* indicating a divinised locale normally marked by a stone or platform. Mudharamsar's deity places number approximately twenty-one, among which several distinct kinds can be described. The first category of places pertains to temples for which the Hindi term *mandir* is used by informants. Whilst generally temples tend to enshrine a form of the pan-Hindu "Lord" (*bhagvan*), who can then be broken down into either Vaishnavite or Shivite, some of the temples in Mudharamsar contain deities that are not easily classified in these strict terms (c.f. Grodzins Gold 1988)

In Mudharamsar there are four deity places that villagers refer to as temples. The main and largest one is to Hinglaj Mata associated with the Shivite tradition and two are associated with the Vaishnavite in the forms of Krishna and Hanuman. The fourth temple is to a local Rajasthani deity, Ramdev, with links to both Krishna and Shiva. Ramdev is also regarded as a *Pir*/ religious saint among Muslims and so is a highly eclectic deity. What also marks these

temples out as distinct from the other deity places to be discussed below is that they are, according to the keepers of them, open to all castes. The second category of deity places are large shrines of which there are five: one is to an unnamed Jogi or Yogi associated with the Nath *Panth* traditions, Bhairon and Shiva, one is Jain, one is to Mool Singh ji a protector of the village who died an untimely death and referred to as the Mool Singh ji Bhomiya, one to Dali Bai, the female disciple of Ramdev and his personal protector in the eyes of many, and finally one to the Mother goddess, the ultimate protector deity. The third category of deity places are dedicated to the fierce manifestation of Shiva Bhairon, Bhairo, Bhairava. These come in the form of small platforms or stones painted in red either near to trees, water or crossroads in the village. The fourth category is Bhomiya *Devliyas* or divinised stones dedicated to active “protector” spirits in the village. The final category includes domestic shrines and ghosts that occupy various parts of the village, as well as the houses of some ‘unfortunate’ families.

The Main Deities of the Village: Temples and Shrines

Anne Grodzins Gold offers a beautifully accurate simile when describing how temples are viewed by worshippers: “He ascends the temple as mountain to reach the inner sanctum as divine peak” (1988: 34). In this way, temple going, regardless of how far one is to travel to get there, is like pilgrimage. Similarly in Mudharamsar the phrase, “*mandīr mai ai’nge*” (I am going to temple) is always met with approving nods of respect. Like pilgrimage, however, the most auspicious way to go is with a group of people. To go anywhere alone, especially as an unmarried woman, is considered dangerous, although going to the temple alone is allowed. On the numerous occasions when I searched for some quiet time alone, for example, although greeted with “let me come with you” or “I’ll send a child with you”, going to temple was a semi-legitimate way to seek some solitude. Either way, “going to temple” is regarded as a good and righteous activity that should ideally be performed everyday. This, however, contrasts quite significantly to some of the shrines in the village, which are regarded as highly potent and going alone is not only socially admonished, it is considered physically dangerous, even fatal. Whilst

there were no accounts of extreme spirit possession whilst I was in the village, I was told stories of fatal possessions and was often warned against going to the shrines at night.

Most everyday ritual activity should ideally be communal, as not only is there safety in numbers around more wrathful deities, but functionally the benefits of going can touch more people. This is seen clearly in the act of offering *Prasad* or blessed food to as many people as you can upon your return, particularly from pilgrimage. By offering these morsels to as many people as possible, the receiver consumes the ritual power of the deity as if they had been to the temple themselves and the giver receives spiritual merit²¹. Practices aside, the act of going to temple is viewed as very rewarding, and attending the main temple in the village even more so.

The main temple in the village is to Hinglaj Mata. Not only is it seen as the main temple by all villagers, it is also regarded as a highly auspicious temple throughout the surrounding area and attracts a variety of worshippers from neighbouring villages and towns. The deity, however, has a somewhat opaque background and it is clear that the worship of her is in decline. The inner shrine contains no icons of her specifically but rather contains a *Shiva linga* or symbol linked to Shiva. This artefact is surrounded by images of Karni Mata whose famous rat temple is at Deshnoke (a local Bikaneri protector deity who rescued a village from the plague and was a confidante to Rao Bika, the son of the Maharaja of Jodhpur and founder of Bikaner), Kali Mata (the wrathful black goddess and avatar of Durga), Lakshmi (goddess of wealth and prosperity) and other goddesses such as Parvati and Sati. Moreover, the deity origin stories I collected are quite varied. Briefly, the most popular story of Hinglaj is a version of the famous myth of Daksa's sacrifice. Hinglaj Mata was the first wife of Shiva, also known as Sati and Ghorī. She was the daughter of a king named Daksha of Kunkal in Haridwar. Informants explained the story thus:

“The king went to visit 64 holy places and upon his return carried out a special worship in his home village. Shiva was angry with the king for he had not invited him to attend the special ceremony. Sati was deeply insulted that her father had not invited her husband to the ceremony

²¹ Merit is an important concept in Hinduism and Buddhism and is linked to one's *karma* – meritorious or unmeritorious action and its consequence for this or future lives, which impacts on one's position in the cycle of rebirth (*samsara*).

so she jumped into the fire. After Sati's death, Shiva went to Kunkal and punished the king by turning him into a goat. Shiva told the king that he now has to worship Sati”.

Other villagers state she was a real person who saved the village from an invasion by marauding Muslim warriors; others say she protected sheep from a tribe of invaders. According to informants there are only two Hinglaj temples: the main one located in Baluchistan, Pakistan and the one in Mudharamsar. It is believed by some that it was only because villagers prayed to Hinglaj that the village was saved during the partition fighting. Whatever the origin story, Hinglaj Mata is considered by all as the main protector of the village. Situated to the north of the village, the temple entrance faces south and the temple priest is a member of the Sadh caste.

The second largest temple, although unfinished and in disrepair, is the Krishna temple. This temple is situated close to the Sadh area of the village and like the Hinglaj temple is looked after by a Sadh family. The unfinished temple surround was built in the 1990s but the internal chamber dates back to the 1960s. This rather sorry structure houses the statues of Krishna, Shiva, Ganesha and Ram. Most villagers refer to this temple as the Krishna or Shiva temple, whereas the Nayak and one or two Kumbhar families call it the Thakur ji (Lord) temple. The entrance to the temple faces west.

The third largest temple is the Ramdev temple situated in the Meghval area of the village. Similarly to the explanation of Hinglaj Mata, there are numerous accounts and counter-accounts as to the identity of Ramdev. Whilst the range of stories this tradition encompasses will be explained in more detail below a brief description here is necessary. The most popular story begins with Ajmal, Ramdev's supposed father. He was a man born of a Rajput (Tanwar) royal family. He had no sons but desired them intensely. Through a troubled encounter with Krishna, Ramdev, Krishna's incarnation, was offered to Ajmal as his son. Ramdev then went on to perform numerous miracles that ranged from helping the sick and injured to making an inanimate cloth horse fly.

The temple is constructed on a raised platform with the entrance facing south east. Whilst villagers say that everyone has access to the temple it is clear that it is mainly Meghvals

that attend. The temple was built by the wealthy Meghval family in 1996. Villagers regard Ramdev as the protector of people, particularly the Meghval and low castes, although high castes are increasingly recognising him as an incarnate of Krishna and Vishnu. The final temple is the Hanuman temple, which is situated close to an old step well now used as a watering hole for animals. The temple is fairly small with its entrance facing west. Some villagers claim that the temple is out of use since a decapitated body was found in the pond over ten years ago. Whilst I could not find much evidence or information regarding this story, during my stay in the village I did not see anybody attend the temple and on only one occasion did I see that fresh Prasad had been offered to the deity. Generally, villagers regard Hanuman as the protector of water and cows in the village.

Whilst temples generally house pan-Hindu²² deities, the smaller shrines house lesser deities or specific avatars of the main deities. The shrines in the village vary in size, location and style depending on the deity to which they belong. Most of the shrines around the village are regarded in village discourse, as being open to all castes. However, in practice it is clear that certain castes will prefer to visit particular shrines. Whilst many of the key shrines will be discussed in relation to the three traditions in the village, two important deities/ divinised beings will briefly be described here. The first is Bhairon who is the fierce and dangerous side of Shiva and whose shrines can be found all over Rajasthan. The form Bhairon takes in the Bikaner district is generally as a *devliya* or stone that is said to grow from the ground. These stones are then painted red and often adorned with gold or silver foil. Occasionally, eyes are painted onto the stones to indicate the danger of Bhairon.

²² I use Pan-Hindu to refer to widely recognised gods delicately here, as although the idea is fully enshrined in contemporary Indian discourse, the idea of a Pan Hindu system is somewhat misleading. As Fuller points out “[it] was a product of western orientalist thought, which mis-constructed Hinduism on the model of occidental religions, particularly Christianity. Hinduism, in other words, came to be seen as a system of doctrines, beliefs, and practices properly equivalent to those that make up Christianity, and “Hindu” now clearly specified an Indian’s religious affiliation” (1992:10). Although this misconception continues to be promulgated and has been useful in promoting nationalist sentiment, there are certain deity stories that are widely known throughout India and temples to these deities occupy, in one form or another, nearly every village and town. These religious epics, such as the Ramayana and Bhagvad Gita detailing the lives of the key gods were made popular as Pan Hindu works through religious reform movements, such as the neo-Vedantism of the 19th century. Moreover, the televising of the Ramayana in 1987 gave further weight to the discourse of a Pan India Hinduism.

The literary tradition states that Bhairon was born from a conversation between Brahma and Vishnu. Vishnu asks Brahma who is the supreme creator of the Universe and arrogantly, Brahma tells Vishnu to worship him because he (Brahma) is the supreme creator. This angered Shiva who is seen as the creator of all things. In his anger Shiva incarnated into the wrathful form, Bhairon, in order to punish Brahma. In this angered state, Bhairon beheaded one of Brahma's five heads and in some images Bhairon is shown carrying the head of Brahma. Cutting off Brahma's fifth head made him guilty of Brahminicide, and as a result, he was forced to live in the jungle and to carry around the head for all eternity.

Another tale of the origin of Bhairon is similar to that of Hinglaj in being linked to the story of Daksha's sacrifice. Sati, the daughter of the king of gods, Daksha, had chosen to marry Shiva. Her father disapproved of the alliance because he saw Shiva as an ascetic associated with animals and spirits. Eventually, Daksha held a ritualistic sacrifice and invited all the gods, but not Sati and Shiva. Sati came to the sacrifice alone, where Daksha publicly admonished Shiva. Sati could not bear to hear her husband insulted and offered herself to the sacrificial pyre. Upon hearing of this, Shiva destroyed the sacrificial ceremony and killed Daksha by beheading him. Shiva then carried Sati's corpse on his shoulders and wandered the world for days. Since this would eventually destroy all creation, Vishnu used his divine discus to cut Sati's body into pieces, which then fell all around. These spots where Sati's body parts fell are now known as *Shakti Pithas*. In the form of the frightful Bhairava, Shiva is said to be guarding each of these *Shakti Pithas*. Through this story, Bhairon is closely associated with Hinglaj Mata, and informants belonging to the Kunda *Panth*, one of the three traditions, worship both these deities together during their rituals.

Whilst most informants are not versed in these origin stories, many see Bhairon as a revengeful deity that needs constant pacifying through offerings and the singing of Bhajans. He is linked to spirit possession and the lingering spirits of the dead. For example, informants often stated that if you felt you were being harassed by an evil spirit, it is most likely to be caused by Bhairon or by invoking Bhairon. The solution to evil spirits is also sought from Bhairon and possession ceremonies, informants' state, would always take place at a Bhairon shrine. Whilst these possession ceremonies are quite large affairs, and according to informants happen very

infrequently, minor possessions and annoyances from spirits are very common. An incident that occurred to me in the village could help to elucidate the everyday uses of Bhairon.

During a wedding of one of the sons of a Meghval family, I developed severe earache. Unable to concentrate on or even enjoy the proceedings, I retired to bed. When I awoke, members of the family were convinced a member of the groom's party had put the evil eye on me. Feeling a little better but slightly unsettled at the thought that I must have greatly offended someone at the wedding, I attempted to go and visit some people on the other side of the village. Whilst walking to the friend's house, many a passer-by leisurely inquired after my health stating they had heard the evil eye had been put on me. Thinking to myself that news travels very fast in this village and nobody other than me seems bothered that I could be cursed, the thought came that perhaps what cures the evil eye is equally mundane. I decided to ask people what I should do to rid myself of the evil eye. The response was unanimous: I should go and make an offering to Bhairon! Moreover, because it occurred at Raju's wedding, grandson of Rupa Ram and Rukmani Devi, I should be accompanied by his father, Ramchandhan, to the most potent Bhairon shrine positioned nearest the Hinglaj Mata temple.

The Bhairon shrines in the village are located along footpaths or at junctions where pathways cross. Informants state that the location of a Bhairon shrine is very important as it indicates the sites where *Bhuts* (ghosts) linger or where the divinised ghosts or Bhomiyas dwell. Bhomiyas come in various sorts, from heroes that die untimely deaths protecting cattle or villages, to family ancestors or children that occupy people's houses. The category of Bhomiya is generally, however, divided in two by informants. Informants state that it is only males of any age that die an untimely death that become Bhomiyas whereas if a girl or woman dies without being married, and the spirit lingers, it will manifest as a *Pittar*. An elderly Paliwal woman explained that if a child or woman returns as a *Pittar* they will manifest as a stone in the house and, if treated correctly, will help around the home protecting it from evil. She further explained that they must be worshipped by the entire family; however, occasionally they can go into other people's houses and help or harass them too. She explained that she has one in her house and because it is a child, it must be given milk in the mornings and sweets in the evenings. When I asked how you could tell if a *Pittar* is in the house, she explained you could tell by the miracles

that can happen. However, *Pittars* can, for no obvious reason, become angry and turn the fortunes of a family. She went on to explain that, like living young children, their needs could be very complex and difficult to understand. What is more, like a real child they can make or break a family. However, unlike with real children there is a form of support for uncovering the interests of a *Pittar*, Bhairon. It is only Bhairon who can speak the language of both *Pittars* and Bhomiyas. Thus, Bhairon is also used to translate the wants and desires of *Pittars*, Bhomiyas and ghosts more generally. This gives Bhairon considerable power over his worshippers.

Somewhat similar to Bhairon, the shrines of Bhomiyas are divinised stones said to rise from the spot where the person died. There are lots of these stones dotted around the village; however, a majority of them, the most significant of which are plotted on the map above, are situated around the outskirts of Mudharamsar. Villagers state that Bhomiya protects the boundary of the village and prevents evil ghosts from entering. There are some in the village who believe this strongly and perform specific rituals to support the Bhomiyas in protecting the village boundary. These people, along with the rituals performed will be discussed as one of the three traditions below.

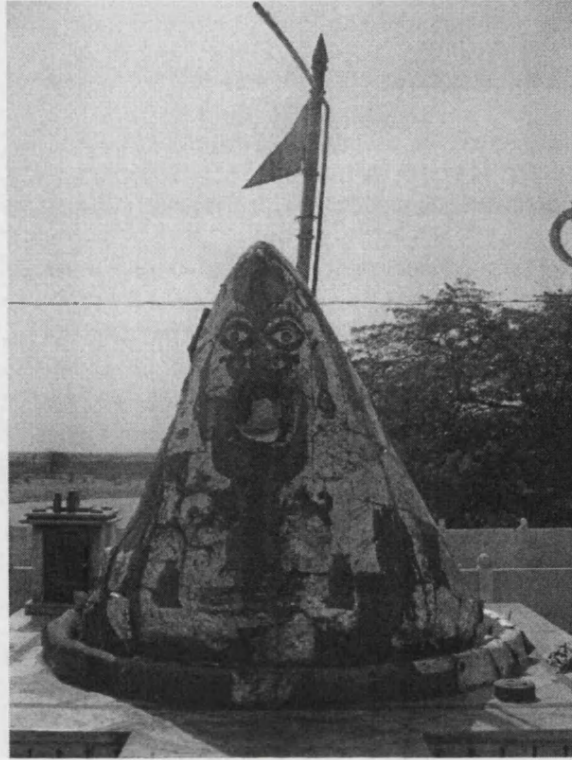


Plate 14. Bhumiya/ Bhairon shrine near to Mudharamsar.



Plate 15. Bhumiya/ Yogi burial shrine in the village.

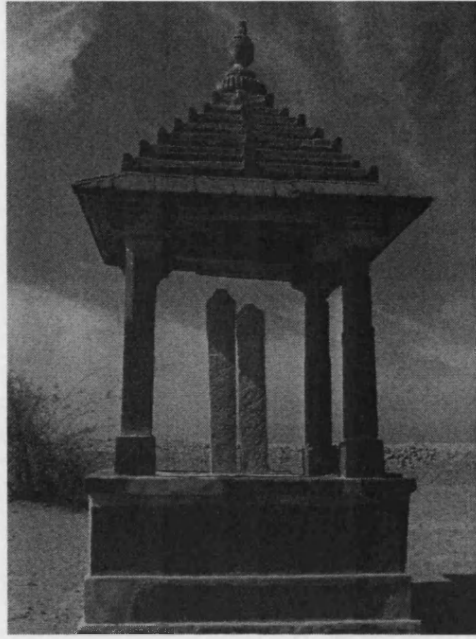


Plate 16. Jain Burial monument in Mudharamsar.

Before going on to discuss the three traditions in the village, a brief outline of the village festivals will be given. As mentioned above, there are very few festivals that are attended by all villagers. Generally, Mudharamsar's inhabitants prefer to see to these rites and festivities in the company of their own caste, area, and even family in the village.

Part 2. The Key Festivals in the Village

Festivals in the village provide occasions where people can pay homage to the gods and offer their thankfulness for the blessings they have received. There is also a recreational aspect to festivals, as they break up the routine of every day life. They involve specific behaviours such as the observance of fasts, the eating of special foods, the meeting of friends, and in some cases plenty of merry making. Most of the festivals described below are meant to be collective, that is they are meant to benefit the entire village. Listing the festivals chronologically would make the

most sense, particularly in terms of showing the cycle of village life etc. However, what are interesting for this thesis is not what the cycles of the village are necessarily, but who participates in them and how they are viewed. This is because by showing the absence, decline or rise in significance of certain festivals, the importance of specific festivals for the village community or part thereof, and who is involved or excluded we can understand the importance of religion and ritual practice for defining social boundaries and allegiances.

Before going on to explain the particular festivals, a brief note on the Hindu calendar must be made. The Hindu calendar is a complicated system based on a geocentric universe in which the earth is orbited by the “nine planets”, and two mythical ones. Rather than give the inconsistent accounts received from informants for what is a highly ordered calendrical system for which there are specialist interpreters, I offer Fuller’s (1992: 263-264) reliable description.

The Hindu year is divided into synodical lunar months, ending either on a full-moon or new-moon day, and each month is divided into 30 lunar days. The period of fifteen lunar days ending on full-moon (*purnima*), while the moon waxes, is known as the “bright fortnight”, and that ending on new-moon (*amavasya*), while the moon wanes is called the “dark fortnight”. In most of India, lunar months end on a full-moon day (*purnimanta* system), but in much of the west and south, as well as Nepal, they end on a new-moon day (*amanta* system). The bright fortnights of each month always coincide, but the dark fortnights do not, because the dark fortnight precedes the bright one in the *purnimanta* system and follows it in the *amanta* system. Because a year of twelve lunar months falls short of a solar year by about ten days, an intercalary month, which “repeats” a month, is normally inserted into the lunar year every three years. As a result, Hindu lunar months more or less coincide with the same solar months every year. There are seven weekdays (Sunday to Saturday); each day starts at sunrise, rather than at midnight. All pan-Indian festivals, with the exception of some events, occur on particular lunar days within certain lunar months. Lunar days vary in length and so one lunar day can be current on two consecutive weekdays, or two lunar days can be current during one weekday. Hence a festival lasting a specific number of lunar days can continue for more or fewer weekdays. Moreover, unlike a festival occurring in a bright fortnight, one celebrated during a dark

fortnight, even though held on the same day everywhere, is dated by different months in the two systems. The system used in Bikaner is the purnimanta system.

Holi

Holi, also known as the festival of colours, is one of the most boisterous of Hindu festivals and the most important festival in the village. It falls on the first day of the dark fortnight of *chaitra*, which in the Gregorian calendar falls March – April. This date, in the agricultural cycle, also signifies the harvest of the first *rabi* (spring) crop. Moreover, the first day of this month, known as Gudi Padwa in Rajasthan, is also the start of the Indian New Year. I witnessed two Holi celebrations during fieldwork. The first was in Bikaner city in 2005 and the second was in the village the following year. The celebration I recount here is from 2006 and involved three days of festivities in the village each with special events and rituals. These events took place in different areas of the village among different castes.

The first day of the festival I spent in the old part of the village among the Sadh, Rajput, Kumbhar, Dholi, and Nai as it appeared that little was happening in other areas of the village. This struck me as uncharacteristic, as accounts I had read from Marriott (1966, 1968), Mayer (1966 [1960]) and Chauhan (1999 [1967]) suggested Holi involved the entire village.

The first day involves Holi Burning or Holi Kama Dahnam. The morning was spent constructing the bonfire and men of Sadh, Kumbhar and Dholi caste were tasked with this duty. By nightfall the Sadh priest was called by the drumming of the Dholi and the bonfire was lit. The bonfire signifies the burning of Holika, an evil demonness who tried to kill a devotee of Vishnu, Prahlad, in a pyre. Kumbhar, Sadh, Rajput and Nai women bring vermilion, coconut, red cotton cord and some ghee on a plate. The thread is tied round the coconut and vermilion or *Tilak* is placed on the heads of each family member. The participants then begin to walk around the fire. The coconut is dipped in the ghee and then thrown into the fire as an offering and when the flames roar up the worshippers whoop and cheer. Before bed time, buttermilk is placed on the rooftops of the houses as an offering to the moon.

The second day of the festival is the day of colours where families use special coloured powder or *gulal* to throw at each other, or coloured dyes mixed with water which are then squirted at each other in what can become quite a frenzied game. This day I spent with my Meghval host family. Expecting to be dragged out of bed or woken by excited screaming as I was in the city the year before, I was surprised at the lack of activity. In fact, the children were sitting quietly holding water pistols and desperately trying to contain their desire to soak someone in coloured water. Rampiyari was making breakfast and Kamraj was doing puja at the family shrine. For all intents and purposes it felt like any other day in the village, the only difference being the anticipatory glances of the children sizing me up for the first drenching.

By this time I knew the family well so did not believe their restraint was for my benefit, but rather this was just Holi, a day like any other. During breakfast shouting came from the compound yard and Raju, Umesh, and Prinka came banging at the door shouting “Holi, Holi”. The kids leapt up, looked at their father, who nodded, at which they squealed and dashed outside clutching their fully loaded pistols. Rampiyari collected buckets and filled them with coloured water, whilst Kamraj took a deep breath as if bracing himself and gathered up the plastic bags of *gulal*. I went outside and as anticipated was duly soaked in pinky-purple water. Realising I was unarmed I ran to get some *gulal*, meeting Kamraj on the house steps. He greeted me and gently smeared my cheeks with the coloured powder with as much care as if he were applying *tilak* to my forehead. I returned the gesture and we both laughed. Heading back outside, Rampiyari, renowned at family weddings for her wonderful dancing was being coaxed to use *gali* or insulting words by her elder *jethani* female in laws and was dancing around the yard flailing a damp *chuni* (Rajasthani shawl). Then she began shouting: “*pati me accha nahi hai, usko bahut mota aur bekar hai*” (my husband’s no good, he is fat and lazy). As if on cue Kamraj approached teasing that she had been possessed by Kali and that he had always believed her to be “*bahut pagali hai*” (totally mad). As he approached her she lashed him with her shawl in a pretend rage. Everyone laughed and other family members joined in teasing each other and throwing water and coloured dye in all directions.

Informants often explained that Holi was a day when everything is “turned on its head” and the normal rules of contact and engagement between people are dropped. Sweets are eaten by everyone and I was told that some of the men, particularly amongst the Nayak, Meghvals and Sansi, will drink alcohol and some younger men will drink Bhang Lassi, a yoghurt drink made with cannabis. Later I discovered that among Rajputs in the village, it is common for a goat to be sacrificed on this day and the meat to be eaten as Prasad of Vishnu and Krishna.

The third day of celebrations is known as Holi Ram Ram among Meghvals. Ram Ram is a greeting often used in Rajasthan and by devotees of Rama elsewhere in India. Like the namaste greeting in India, saying “*Ram Ram*” or “*Ram Ram Shah*” is accompanied by pressing the hands together and bowing the head. On this day, visiting relatives or friends that you did not see the day before is seen as highly auspicious. Among the men of my host family, these visits involve congregating in the men’s house, a room situated separate from the main house of the Panwar Meghval. Some of the men will drink alcohol, while others eat sweets, chew *supari* (betel nut), smoke *bidis* (cigarettes made from a tobacco leaf) and discuss the news of the day. The women meet in the courtyard of the main house, drink tea and catch up. That particular year (2006) I had the good fortune to be treated as an honorary man and my research assistant and I was granted permission to sit in the men’s house, chew *supari* and *elichi* (cardamom pods) and eavesdrop on their conversation.

Over the years, I was told, the way Holi has been practised has changed in the village. Older informants recounted how it used to involve all members of the village and each community had a special role to play such as the Dholi who would play drums during Holi Kama Dahnam and a Sadh bhopa would recite mantras as the worshippers threw their coconuts into the fire (cf. Mayer 1966: 106-110). Whilst this allocation of roles still occurred in the old part of the village, it no longer involved the entire village, but rather a select few who had apparently decided to do things separately.

Many explained how the place of the bonfire used to be situated in a caste neutral place near the first pond and Hanuman temple. However, today the largest fire takes place in the Sadh/ old Mohollah and only Rajputs, Sadh, Dholi, Kumbhar and Nai families attend. Nayaks

prefer to have their own fire in their area and Meghval informants stated they no longer celebrate Holi Kama Dahnam at all preferring to have private puja and a meal in the house and play Holi with family the following day.

Some mentioned that certain communities were concerned at the levels of alcohol consumed by some and others stated that it was the Sadh who felt they should celebrate Holi away from the Meghval. These divisions and shifts are said to have occurred fairly recently. Many informants when asked both before and after the event insisted that it was a festival that should include everyone and that the second day is concerned with turning everyday social mores inside out (cf. McKim Marriott's expressive description 1966: 200-212). However, it appears that in Mudharamsar this characterisation is only part of the picture.

Day two of Holi certainly involves aspects of Marriott's (1966:209) inverse to the social and ritual principles of routine life. However, it differed on one central aspect. For instance the merry making that occurred in Mudharamsar among Meghval men and women was, conversely to Marriott, structured around existing kinship relationships and specifically among regulated affines. That is, Meghval wives in the Mohollah were beating Meghval husbands rather than the fascinating example of the lower caste "cabal of wives" beating and taunting higher caste men of Marriott's fieldsite. As Fuller points out, in most villages the jollity of Holi is in fact carefully restrained to existing kinship relations, even though the theme of reversal is prominent (1992: 131).

In Mudharamsar, such jollification also took place in the confines of compounds and only rarely did the play escape into the lanes. In this regard the activities of Holi were thus restrained geographically as well as physically. The festival of Holi, like other aspects of the village, is, therefore, equally representative of the village's spatial constraints as well as changes in the social structure of the village. Like the specific pathways designated by the higher castes, the Meghvals had designated the limits of their activity to the boundary of the compound, avoiding the lanes. When asked, informants regarded playing Holi with others as dangerous and preferred to play with family only.

Such restraint signifies a clear break from the old order of the village where high castes presided over festivals, lower castes had specific duties to perform, and the festival, as Mayer (1966:106) showed, involved and benefited the entire village. Instead, the festival in Mudharamsar highlights the contemporary conflicts between the wealthy Meghval family and others in the village. Confining the festival of colours to the compound highlights avoidances among actors and specific relations between men and women, perhaps expressing a desire to protect the family and the 'purity' or temporary 'impurity' of Meghval women. What was clear was that women would not go beyond the compound. Stepping outside the compound during this period was deemed unsafe as the women in their inverted form could be seen by other women and indeed men in the mohollah.

Threats and danger during Holi are quite well known and in the city the year before I was constantly reminded to avoid the streets as they were 'dangerous'. As such, the contemporary restraint of Holi among my host family could be symptomatic of a more general fear of violence. However, I would suggest these observances are more likely to be linked to the restricted movements of the daughter-in-laws of Rupa Ram and Rukmani Devi. Having observed this festival among Rajputs in the city, there are some key points of similarity. The Rajput women would play just as vigorously as the men but they would not step outside the garden. Whilst some of the men ran round to the front of the house, women remained in the gardens at the back of the house. Similarly, some of the Meghval men would spill into the lanes when playing Holi, whereas the women would stay within the compounds perimeter wall. These similarities are characteristic of an orientation among the wealthy toward the Rajput castes and this process can be seen in many of the festivals of the village.

Holi festival also highlights the unusual unities that characterise other aspects of everyday life in the village. As such, the composition of castes performing Holi burning is not that surprising as these groups are similarly connected through the exchange of village services, as we saw in Chapter one. The Dholi and Sadh priest received money for their involvement in the festival and all participants chipped in with firewood to construct the bonfire. Thus their celebration of the festival is more similar to the descriptions of Holi forty years ago, such as

those of Marriott and Mayer. For the Sadh, Kumbhar, Dholi and Nai this festival brings them closer together, it represents their mutual interdependence and reinforces the re-traditionalised and idealised interests of ritual status these communities share.

As such, it can be said that the significance of Holi as a festival of good over evil has been translated into the preservation of particular types of social relations. For those in the old part of the village it is about maintaining and reinforcing their interdependency, separateness, and 'traditional' values in the social world, whereas among the Meghval it is expressing the importance of kinship, relations between husband and wife, and the Panwar *Gotr*. Unfortunately, I was unable to observe Holi in other areas of the village, but from asking informants after the event it seems that, similar to the Meghvals, celebrations are fairly private and only involve family or other members of the caste. Nevertheless, the rhetoric of open and free behaviour where the status quo is inverted still lives on in peoples' imaginations. Thus the ritual moment may, in one sphere, transcend ordinary behaviours, as in the case of Meghval women beating their husbands in public. However, this behaviour is still confined by the wider social parameters and interests of caste, kinship and locality.

Shiva Ratri or The Night of Shiva

Shiva Ratri is celebrated on the 13th day of the first fortnight of *Phalgun* (between end of February and end of March). Informants stated that Shiva Ratri was like a Birthday (cf. Chauhan 1999:186), where for the entire night and day Shiva is worshipped. On this day Shiva is said to have performed the dance of primordial creation. Fires are meant to be built in each Mohollah in the village and all night devotional songs sung to Shiva by certain communities. However, I was told that only two small fires were built in the village: one in the old part of the village and another in the Nayak area. During the day, I saw that offerings were made at the Hinglaj Mata temple by a range of people and small offerings of money or food are given to the Kalbelia, Sansi and Bhat who come to beg at the houses of the other villagers. Women of the Meghval community tend to fast on this day and only eat *kucca* food. Other communities in the

village will eat as usual, with the exception of the Nayak caste where both the men and women will fast.

I was told that Nayak women sing *bhajans* until the early hours of the following day whilst the men dance around the fire. What is more, villagers from other castes, particularly among Sadh women, seem to gossip about the antics of the Nayak on this day and state that even the women will consume alcohol and opium in large quantities, whilst they sing. One woman commented: “how else do you think they can sing for so long!” Similar to Holi, Shiv Ratri among my host family is also carried out privately in the home. This includes puja at the family shrine and a family meal. Thus similar to Holi, Shiv Ratri has also become a private affair with individual castes and even nuclear families choosing to celebrate separately.

Vat Savitri Puja

Vat Savitri is a festival performed for the safety of husbands. It is carried out on the 13th day of the bright fortnight of *jyaishtha* or May – June, by married women. Wives should fast and tie a red thread to a banyan tree, but as there are no Banyan trees in the village informants fast and tie red chunis to any tree that is near to water. Worship on this day is meant to bring well-being and a long life to husbands. This ritual is carried out for Savitri and her husband who was destined to die within one year. However, he was brought back to life as a result of Savitri’s devotional penance. Unlike many of the other festivals in the village, this festival is observed by all women irrespective of caste. When discussing this festival, women often stated that it was their duty to honour their husbands and Savitri they believed was the best example of such wifely devotion.

When I discussed this festival with the women it was clear all believed it to be greatly important and that if you did not respect this custom other people in the village would see you as a bad wife. This sentiment was especially significant, because it implied that the worship needed to be public and that women needed to be seen performing the devotion by other women. It was clear from conversations after the festival that those in the mohollah not seen performing the rite were subject to gossip and analysis.

Thus Savitri is regarded as the ideal wife and women in the village aspire to show each other, through worshiping this goddess, their devotion to their husbands. However, because the movements of more well to do women are heavily controlled they tend to perform the ritual close to their mohollah with women from their compound or family. Meghval women married to husbands descended from Mungla Ram, for example, would go together to perform the rite. Sometimes younger unmarried girls would accompany them and on the way to the well married women would explain the importance of the ritual. On the way back, however, the older women would joke and comment on how lazy husbands are and how women have to work so hard to look after them.

In this respect the ritual is more about presenting and maintaining the image of devotion and indeed the women were diligent in tying the chunis to the trees and muttering prayers under their breath. Yet, once the ritual was over, and they were heading back to the compounds, the women relaxed and began to detail the difficulties of being a wife and how demanding husbands were.

Hindu women have 'usefully' been regarded as the preservers of 'traditional' family values. For example, Raheja and Gold (1994: 6) highlight how Gandhi essentialised tradition and female sexuality in his nationalist cause, at the expense of other more defiant and less passively submissive women of Indian history²³. In doing so he particularly evoked mythological figures such as Savitri, Draupadi and Sita as archetypes for female restraint and forbearance (cf. Fuller 1992: 201). The discourse among Meghval women is also supportive of this belief in patience and a life of toiling for one's husband. Bagwe (1995: 197-198) shows how among rural low caste women these gender stereotypes conform to the 'greater tradition' in India and are part of the process of Sanskritisation.

In this respect the Meghval women have themselves undergone Sanskritisation, largely internalising these normative gender values where once they would have had more freedom. Today, the women married to the sons of Rupa Ram and Rukmani Devi (my host family) have

²³ As Raheja and Gold (1994: 6) point out the Gandhian legacy of women's movements in India is highly complex and is further debated by Katrak 1992. See also Sharma (2002: 203-205) for a more contemporary example of women's role as domestically driven arbiters of peace in communal conflicts.

more in common with Rajput women than with other Meghval women. Observing a form of *parda* or seclusion, these women do not travel unaccompanied beyond the confines of their mohollah. Historically, Rajput women's movements were, and to a large extent still are, greatly controlled and they would have always performed such rituals to their kuldevis (ancestor/family goddesses) in the safety of their own homes (see Harlan 1992). Meghval women, conversely have more freedom to move around the village, attending their shrines, mixing with others and going out to work.

Today the movements of the daughters-in-law of Rupa Ram and Rukmani Devi are similar to those of Rajput women. The exception is Jyoti Devi who will go to the farm alone or accompanied by children on her bullock cart, to keep the male workers in check. However, when she is around older male relatives in the home she will cover her head (as do the other women) and show deference toward her husband. However, unlike the other women she is generally more outspoken with her husband, and some of the others suggest she is a little too crude with her jokes.

The importance of keeping up an appearance of wifely devotion and purity in front of non-affinal kin and men is a powerful socio-religious theme among the women of my host family. Whilst together they may be more relaxed, when in public their behaviour would change. Thus the public nature of Savitri puja among the women I spent most of my time with was an important statement of Sanskritisation and Rajputisation. This process of Sanskritic Raputisation among Meghval women can also be seen in the other festivals of the village.

Navratri or Nine Nights

This festival occurs on the first nine lunar days of *ashwina* or September – October and for nine nights all the mother goddesses in the village are worshipped. Leading up to the festival informants recounted the following description of how the celebrations were performed

A few pitchers are filled with water and covered with wet mud, into which some seeds are sown. During the nine nights, the seeds begin to grow. The pitchers are placed both in the Hinglaj Mata temple by the Sadh priest and inside the house by other villagers, near to the mother deity for seven nights. On the eighth night the pitchers are taken from their shrines and placed outside. On the Ninth day shoots are then pulled from the pots and placed in one of the wells. Informants state that this practice is to ensure good rains and a good harvest. On the following day, the shoots are taken out of the well by some people and fed to their cows or offered to the goddess.

Informants explained how very few people in the village perform these rites and most prefer to fast, eat special food and recite mantras to the goddess. No pitcher is taken to the Hinglaj temple and no specific rites are performed there. I spent this festival among my host family who did perform some rites that were in no way similar to those described for the village. For example, during this festival Rampiyari (Kamraj's wife) would fast by declining to eat her evening meal for each of the nine nights. Instead, after the other family members had eaten, she took the children into the back room shrine and recited prayers to the female goddesses. This involved dipping a rupee coin into vermilion and touching the coin to the images of the goddesses and praying to the deities. When I asked her why she did this she just responded that it was her *dharma* (duty or custom) to protect the family. What is more, because the Navratri *vrata* (vow to fast) is generally performed to protect husbands (Harlan 1992:88), fasting for Rampiyari also signified sacrificing herself for her family. The use of coins in the ceremony is indicative of protecting the household and its income. Similar to the past rites that involved praying for rains to produce a good harvest that would feed and provide work for the entire village; today praying for a good income is still a strong motif. However, it is confined to the economic prosperity of the nuclear family. Rampiyari's rituals are not dissimilar to the Rajput practice of this festival in Rajasthan.



Plate 17. Rampyari leading the Navratri puja at the back room shrine.

Harlan (1992: 87-88) notes that Rajput men in the past would sacrifice a buffalo or goat during Navratri to prove their worth as warriors. However, because women had no part to play in such sacrifices they would fast instead. Among Harlan's present day informants it was common for men to fast as well. This, Harlan suggested, was a less bloodthirsty return to the protection motif and concerns of earning a living, which today would not originate in warfare.

Dashehra

Dashehra is the festival on the tenth day after Navratri and marks the final day of the *Ram Lila*. The festival is not celebrated in the village but a big fanfare is made in Bikaner city, and many villagers will take the bus ride to the city for this event. The festival celebrates Ram's victory over the demon king Ravana who stole Sita, Ram's wife, and held her captive in Lanka. In the city, a procession of the key actors in the story takes place through the main streets where people dress up as Ram, Ravana, and Hanuman. The procession ends at the Karni Singh stadium where huge puppet effigies of Rama and Ravana stand 50 ft tall and can be seen from

most spots in the city several weeks prior to the event. A wooden house is built to signify Lanka and the story is acted out with these figures ending in an explosive finale where Ravana is set alight and Lanka smashed to the ground by people dressed as Hanuman, mimicking Hanuman's devotion to Ram and his courage in destroying Ravana (cf. Peabody 1997).

Dīvali

Divali or the festival of lights is one of the largest and most well-known of Indian celebrations. It is observed as a day where Lakshmi, goddess of wealth and prosperity, is worshipped and begins on the 13th day of the dark fortnight of *ashwina* and ends on the 2nd day of the bright fortnight of *karttika* or October – November. Informants state the festival signifies light returning to the world after years of darkness. This light is bought by Ram who on this day, after years of exile, returned to the world or Ayodhya in the standard story (Fuller 1992:33). For many, it also signifies the last harvest of the year before winter begins.

Preparations for the festival in the village start some weeks before when the houses are thoroughly cleaned, repainted if necessary, and any minor repairs put off in the year will be done during this time. Women make a white chalk paste which is then used as a paint to make elaborate designs or *rangooli* on the floor outside the main door to the house. The festival is very family orientated and is mainly celebrated in the home, and is quite a private affair with only close family and friends invited. The main ritual is Deepak Puja where each household will make *Deepak* or oil lamps by constructing wicks from cotton wool and placing them in small clay pots filled with camphor.

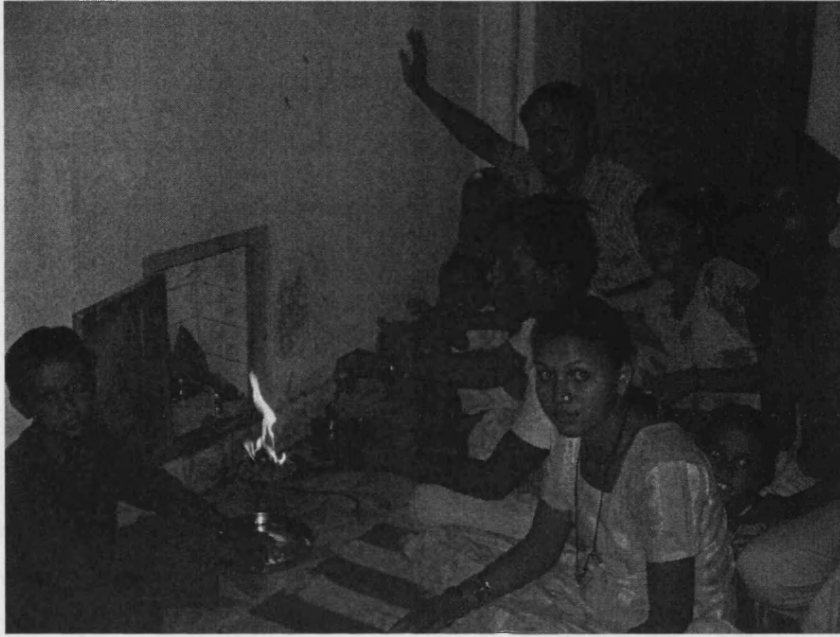


Plate 18. Divali puja at the household shrine of Ramchandhan & Jyoti Devi.

Members of the family take the *Deepak* and distribute them around the house making sure that each corner is covered. The male head of the house will recite mantras while the women begin preparing food. The family then congregates around the household shrine, prayers are spoken, tilak is placed on the images of the gods and incense is burnt. Food is then consumed and fireworks are set alight in celebration. Following this, everyone then returns to the house for Lakshmi *Puja*. The *puja* is carried out by the female head of the house and involves placing gold and precious items around the shrine and image of Lakshmi. *Tilak* is applied to the goddess and jewellery, money, fruit and other items of wealth are distributed around her image. Kamraj's wife, on this occasion, led the singing of *bhajans* to Lakshmi and she and the children recited prayers and songs whilst facing the deity. The following day is Divali Ram Ram where, similar to Holi Ram Ram, relatives are visited.

As we can see from the above, the most common form of festival celebration is among family, friends and one's caste. Seldom do villagers come together to celebrate the more common festivals/ rituals mentioned here. Where in the past they may have worshipped together, today there is little mixing, which further highlights the social spaces that divide the castes in the village today. Thus, in these contexts the ritual moments where people may come

together are few and far between. Most informants do bemoan the loss of a 'friendlier' past but do not envisage things changing, which begs the question whether in fact the past was ever friendlier.

This longing for a lost "golden era" is part of a state discourse popular among Rajasthanis (mentioned by Gold & Gujar 2002, Lodrick 2001, Erdman 2001, Harlan 1992, Carstairs 1968 [1957] to name a few). What the festivals in Mudharamsar highlight is how far things have been removed from the 'traditional' or idealised role of religion in maintaining ritually hierarchical and interdependent relationships between castes. However, because the material world in Mudharamsar today contradicts the normative ideals of the past, the festivals no longer represent those hierarchical relations. Instead, they are beginning more-and-more to emphasise other social relations. The relationships that are most commonly highlighted during festive celebrations are those of kinship and gender roles in the family. This is particularly true for Vat Savitri, Navratni, Divali and Holi among the Meghval. Whilst Holi in the old part of the village represents relations between those castes and families engaged in a wider exchange of services, for others in the village it highlights the importance of the nuclear family and the role of women in the household.

It is likely as Harlan's (1992:88-89) analysis shows, that the conceptualisation of women as family protectors has resulted in a reliance on women to organise and supervise household rituals. Among the Meghval women of my host family the added emphasis on emulating the ritual practices of Rajput women is also symbolic of the prevalence or perceived value of stereotypical gender roles. As such, the Rajputisation of their rituals also expresses their upward mobility and higher status.

The Rajputisation of rituals is a fairly common occurrence in Rajasthan where this martial caste has been deeply romanticised²⁴. Having originated in the Rajput exploits of the 13th to 16th centuries (Lodrick 2001: 7-8), the importance, status, and value attached to the practices of this caste have been firmly imprinted onto the minds of most non-Rajput Rajasthanis (Ibid: 30). The work of James Tod (2002 [1832]), a British political agent who first went to the region in 1818,

²⁴ This process was coined, by Erdman (1985:14), the 'Nostalgic-Romantic tradition' in Rajasthani culture.

also continues to be instrumental in maintaining Rajasthan's romanticised royal past and every Rajasthani school child is well rehearsed in his descriptions of Rajput lineage, honour and prestige. Thus the Rajputs, rather than Brahmins, have more presence in the popular imagination of Rajasthanis and are thus a logical caste to emulate.

A fascinating case of Rajputisation is thoroughly documented by Molund (1988). Beginning in Ajmer, Rajasthan, the highly organised Koli-Rajput movement of the 1920s sought to mobilise the Kori, an untouchable caste of weavers. New dress codes and sub caste commensality were introduced along with the abolition of child marriage and claims of descent from famous Rajputs were used as inspirational discourses during caste meetings (1988:204-205). Their ultimate aim was to get the Koris excluded from the list of Scheduled Castes. However, no sooner had they achieved this goal when a large backlash from Koris uneasy with the idea of abandoning the opportunities given them by being members of the Scheduled Castes, ensued (1988: 201).

The fact that my host family performed such rituals in their respective households also represents changes in the economic independence of the Meghval. Rather than publicly showing dependence and deference to other castes through performing hierarchical festival celebrations with other castes, the Meghval either no longer require or desire such allegiances. In fact, the emphasis on the nuclear family in ritual signifies a shift in the unit of economic focus. In this respect, the nuclear family among the wealthy Meghval has become the primary economic unit. Where once economic fortunes were tied more to the village or the endeavours of extended kin, today among my host family at least, there is greater emphasis placed on the immediate family.

This would explain the key role women have in the rituals of various festivals. However, it is important to note that it is the men who perform daily puja to the household shrine. Among Meghval landlords, it is common to find two shrines in every house. One that is similar to a small cupboard situated at the base of west facing wall (see plate 18) and a second at the back of the house in a separate room, and principally containing the female goddesses, (although not exclusively (see plate 17)). The men will perform daily puja openly to Ramdev at the smaller shrine, whilst the women will pray more secretively away from husbands at the back room

shrine. Informants suggest this separation, although not necessarily strictly observed, helps wives to concentrate their devotion on protecting the family.

This attention to the nuclear family, particularly among the Meghval landowning families not only highlights the changes in the relations between castes, but also indicates the internal differentiations within the Meghval caste. According to older informants, in the past Meghvals of the village would have congregated to celebrate these festivals together, but today they remain distant from each other. The emphasis on private ritual, like other activities in the village highlights the general move away from the normative caste roles and expectations toward the more insular nuclear family. This is further reinforced by the role women play in the household celebrations, which further emphasises a break from the past.

The fact that villagers are choosing to worship in a different way to the normative ideal highlights the fragmentation of village relations. Choosing where and how to worship tells us about what is significant in people's lives. Whether they choose to worship separately in the privacy of their own homes, in front of their family altars, or at anonymous large scale gatherings outside of the village, all suggest changes in the worshipping patterns of Mudharamsar's inhabitants, which in turn highlight changes in the social relations among villagers. In particular, it highlights how, for those engaged in a relatively modern yet re-traditionalised system of exchanging services, such as among the Dholi, Kumbhar, Sadh and Nai, joint celebration of rituals is more common. However, amongst those not engaged in village services, festivals tend to be private family affairs or celebrated with kin.

On the other hand, however, all the villagers are still bound together under the doctrinal discourse of village protection. This doctrine of protection is universally applied to all in the village, which has the affect of reifying the village community to a sacred, undivided, and timeless space wherein all are protected by the gods, irrespective of their caste or class. However, whilst this exists at the level of normative discourse, in practice this protection motif is most notable among the private religious practices of women or amongst particular neighbours in certain areas of the village. Thus whilst a dominant discourse of village protection exists, in practice protective rites are limited to village neighbourhoods and families.

This enduring theme of a collective protection of the village and its people does however have some representation in the three traditions of the village. However, the actual rites of these traditions are seldom carried out. What we see instead is the Sanskritisation of a traditionally low caste deity, a diminishing sect of Hinglaj Mata, and the disappearance of village rites.

Part 3. The Religious Traditions

The First Tradition: Ramdev

Ramdev is the most popular deity of the Meghvals and other low castes in the village and images of Ramdev can be found in most household shrines. Whilst he is recognised as the protector of Mudharamsar's people by most castes, most also understand his main beneficiaries to be the low castes and thus very few of the higher castes attend the Ramdev temple. Ramdev's relationship with untouchables is well documented in both the historical and ethnographic record. For example Khan's (2003 [1997], 1998) authoritative work on the ethno-historical record notes that the oral tales and devotional songs she collected often insist on the friendly relationship Ramdev kept with his father's impure servants, especially Sayar Megh (a Meghval as his name indicates). Ramdev's grandfather, a great devotee of Vishnu and the ruler of Naraina, Rainsi Tanwar, had similarly been the inseparable companion of an outcast bhakta, Khivan Balai. Khivan Balai was eventually martyred in Delhi by the Sunni Muslim sultan (D.S. Khan 1998:22, S. Bishnoi 1989:18-20). It is not, however, only in Rajasthan that Ramdev is associated with lower castes (Pinney 1992:50, Mathur 1969:118). Mayer found that Ramdev or Ramdeo also had a high caste following in a Malwa village (1960:99-100).

Although generally associated with the low castes, Ramdev is being both Sanskritised and Rajputised (Kahn 2002: 62-63). He is often depicted as a warrior saint astride a powerful horse and is believed by some to be of royal Rajput lineage. However, and what will be highlighted below, is how malleable the cult of Ramdev is. Different castes and communities

have different versions of his life and teachings. Whether it is among low caste ex-untouchables or high caste Brahmins, the story of Ramdev has, today at least, meaning for a wide variety of followers. Conversations with my host family, neighbours, friends, priests and worshippers at the various Ramdev shrines in the area and beyond, revealed the following about the identity of Ramdev. The first story of Ramdev I ever heard was explained to me by Ramdial and his mother, Rukmani Devi, and starts with the story of Ramdev's father.

Ajmal was a great king born of a Rajput (Tanwar). He had no sons but desired them intensely. One day he was out walking during the monsoon time. He passed a farmer who was on his way to the fields. The farmer saw Ajmal and thought him inauspicious so he did not go to the fields but turned around and went back home. Ajmal was very upset that he did not have any sons so he travelled to Dwarkha in Gujarat where he knew of a special Krishna temple. Ajmal was very angry with God for not granting him any sons. In the heat of his anger, he threw some sweets (ladhu) at the statue of Krishna [rather than delicately resting them at his feet]. He left the temple shouting –“How can I find Krishna?” One bystander witnessed Ajmal's blasphemy and in his anger replied, “You can find him down the well”. Ajmal, so caught up in his anger and desperation, jumped into the well even though he knew he could not swim. Lord Krishna parted the water and saved Ajmal. Krishna made Ajmal promise to be faithful to him and in return for his compliance offered Ramdev, Krishna's incarnation, as his son.

The popular story among Rajputs and some Meghvals follows the previous story with the addition that Ajmal's wife then gives birth to a son, Ramdev. However, many Meghval informants state that Ajmal never received a son so he decided that the next family who bore a son in his kingdom would have to give the child to him, in exchange for one of his daughters. Meghval informants have stated, along with some Nayak informants, that the first son to be born in the kingdom was from a Meghval family. The King named the boy Ramdev. These informants also strongly assert this aspect of Ramdev's identity, protesting that it benefits high castes to believe he was born a Rajput, as otherwise they would lose status if seen to be worshipping a low caste.

Another story that ties Ramdev to Meghvals is the relationship between Ramdev and his devotee or adopted sister, Dali Bai. Some state that Dali Bai was actually the real sister of

Ramdev and that Ramdev was not Rajput but born into a Meghval family (cf. Khan 1998, 2003). Dali Bai is, either way, regarded by all as a low caste Meghval. Rampiyari, Kamraj's wife, for example, stated in a conversation about Dali Bai, "Many people do not believe that she was the real sister of Ramdev because that would mean they were of the same caste and that many people like to think he was high caste".

Meghval informants talk passionately about Ramdev and often invoke his relations with low caste groups. People often draw on Ramdev's close relation with Dali Bai as proof of this. A story made popular by a Rajput-produced film states that Dali Bai was simply a devotee of Ramdev who later became his adopted sister. Moreover, higher castes make the claim that it is common for royalty to show compassion to their devoted followers. This notion suggests that Ramdev's relationship with Dali Bai is comparable to that of master/ servant. However, many Meghval informants, such as Rampiyari, discredit the popular film and believe that Ramdev was, in fact, born into a Meghval family and that Dali Bai was Ramdev's biological sister. This view among the Meghval is likely to have originated in a letter and set of queries published from 1980 to 1996 from Ram Prakash, the publisher of the *Brahma Purana* in Ajmer, that questioned the Sanskritised and Rajputised version of Ramdev (See Khan 1998: 26).

It is, however, important to note that my Meghval informants were not wholly dismissive of this Rajputised version of the Ramdev tradition. Rather, some have subsumed these renditions into their belief system and even those who have not, do recognise it as useful. The fact that Ramdev has become so Rajputised and therefore acceptable means that Meghvals are able to lay claim to a higher caste status. This orientation of beliefs is also manifest in styles of life and the adoption of a piety/ *bhakti* (devotee) identity that further elevates their status. For example, those that claim to be Ramdev *bhakt*s have also become vegetarian and teetotal. This Sanskritisation was part of the political effort to uplift the caste that was agreed in the 1950s.

The exact relation between Ramdev and Dali Bai is difficult to ascertain, nonetheless, Dali Bai is an important figure in the Ramdev tradition for a majority of the Meghval community (cf. Khan 1998). A temple dedicated to her is situated two kilometres from the Ramdev pilgrimage site of Ramdeora-Runicha, and inside the main Ramdev temple a large bangle, said to be hers, can be found close to her Samadhi, which rests next to Ramdev.

However, the exact location of Dali Bai's temple is a point of contention between Meghvals and higher castes. This is because currently it is near to a small village just outside the boundary marker to Ramdeora. There are no signs and it is marked by a small shrine under a tree. Meghval informants state that this is the true location of Ramdev's death place. The popular story amongst Meghvals is that Ramdev was buried alive in a deep meditative state, the true and right death for an ascetic, and Dali Bai chose to sacrifice herself in the same way near to Ramdev's Samadhi²⁵ (cf. Khan 1999).



Plate 19. Ramdev temple in Ramdeora.

²⁵ The custom of jivit Samadhi consists of having oneself buried alive in a state of deep meditation (Samadhi). The body is then supposed to become immortal. The platform built over this spot is also referred to as Samadhi.



Plate 20. Main Samadhi/ Durgah to Ramdev at Ramdeora/ Runicha (unfortunately I was not allowed to take a photo of the actual Samadhi so this photo is kindly borrowed from the Runichadham blogspot).



Plate 21. Dali Bai's Bangle.



Plate 22. Samadhi's/ Durgahs at the Ramdev temple in Ramdeora.



Plate 23. Dali Bai's 'real' Samadhi.



Plate 24. Footprints at the Ramdev temple in Kolayat.

However, most Ramdev followers say that Ramdev's death place is inside Ramdeora town where the current temple now stands. Whilst this temple is today run by Rajputs and Brahmins, most Meghval devotees suggest it was the Kamad community who should traditionally protect Ramdev. Briefly, Kamads are often said to be the gurus of the Meghval caste (Khan, 1996, 2003, Hildebeitel 1999, Kothari in Bharucha 2003). Historically they were a community of religious singers who sung devotional songs to Ramdev. Whilst many Kamads still hold devotional recitals, they are also often the priests at smaller Ramdev temples and can be seen lingering around larger ones. Mohan Das, a friend and Kamad priest at the Ramdev temple in Kolayat, made additions to the above story of Ramdev.

He explained that Ramdev was born in Bhadrapada, August – September in the year of 1469 in the Vikram Samat or 1412 in the Gregorian calendar. The story of Ramdev's life, according to Mohan Das, is as follows:

When Ramdev was a small baby of about 2 to 6 months, he made his first miracle. He was inside his cot and he could see the milk on the cooker boiling and overflowing. Ramdev walked over to the pot and took the pot off the cooker. When he walked back to the bed, he made a red footprint on the floor and this red footprint has become the symbol of Ramdev. (This miracle is depicted at every Ramdev shrine and on the flags of Ramdev pilgrims by a pair of small red footprints). People did not believe that Ramdev could perform such miracles and as he grew older attempted to test him. A tailor made a horse out of cloth and asked Ramdev to ride the horse. Ramdev

mounted the horse and the horse began to fly. (In shrines and temples, Ramdev is often depicted upon a horse and cloth horses are commonly found accompanying this image).



Plate 25. Inner chamber of the Ramdev temple in Mudharamsar. There are several things to note, firstly, the footprints, secondly, the marble tablet at the centre. This tablet pictures Ramdev with a moustache, while thirdly the colour picture on the right has him with a beard. The marble tablet was commissioned by Rupa Ram whereas the colour picture is the mass produced image affordable to most.

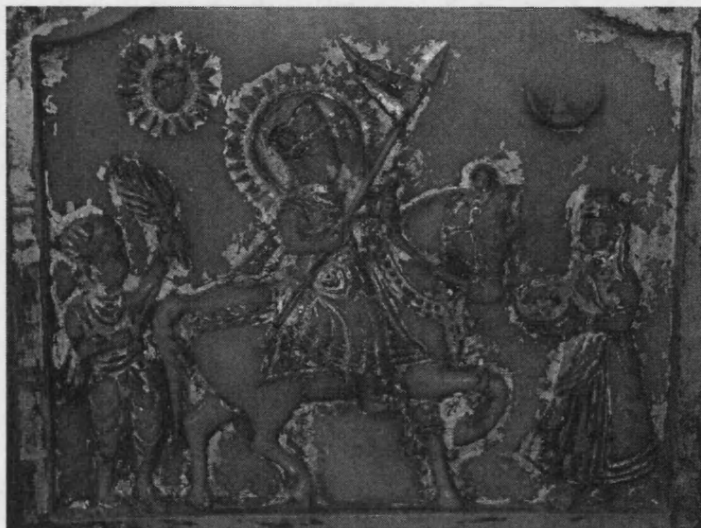


Plate 26. Popular image of Ramdev.

When Ramdev grew older, a businessman passed through Runicha carrying sweets on an Ox cart. As he passed, Ramdev asks him “what are you carrying?” The businessman, worried that he may have to pay a tax²⁶ for carrying sweets, explained he was carrying salt. Ramdev knew that it was sweets and to teach the merchant a lesson for lying to him turned the sweets into salt. When the merchant returned home he realised the sweets had been turned to salt. He went back to Runicha to find Ramdev to apologise. During this meeting, Ramdev said he could only change all the open bags of salt back into sweets and not the closed bags. Why this was so is unclear, however, some have said he did it to teach the businessman a lesson as he would have to pay the tax on the open bags and would lose money on the salt.

Ramdev is also popular among Muslims and one element of his life story specifically depicts Islamic involvement. The story suggests that *Panch Pir* or five holy men visited him from Mecca, who asked to be fed with beef. Some Hindu renditions claimed Ramdev was offended by this request as Ramdev being a Rajput Hindu was not permitted to kill or eat cattle. Nevertheless, it is said he realised that he was being put on trial, and that these men were divine Hindu representatives. In deference to their wishes, Ramdev killed a *bachhada* (calf) and served its meat to the *pirs*. This, however, was not enough for them. They wanted to eat the meat from their own vessels and plates, which had been left behind in Mecca, and without which they refused to eat. Therefore, using his miraculous powers, Ramdev managed to transport those very vessels for them to use. The Rajputised version claims that after they had finished eating, Ramdev requested them to leave all the bones of the meat on the *dastarkhān* or the cloth on which the food is served, and not in any other place. Thereafter, Ramdev placed his hands over the bones and said, “*Jeevto vejā*”, and the calf came to life again. Muslim informants stress how the *pirs* were hungry and required food but because they were holy needed to eat on their special plates. They stress it was for the miracle of retrieving their plates that Ramdev began to

²⁶ According to my informant, in the past a tax was charged of hawkers and merchants by the ruling maharaja for carrying sweets through their district.

be regarded as a *Pir*²⁷. It is important to note that this element is greatly underplayed by contemporary high caste Hindus.

As mentioned above and further supported by the literary tradition, it is believed that Ramdev, for certain ritual sessions, required the presence of a woman. For this he selected the untouchable girl, Dali Bai, who became his co-disciple (*guru bahan*), since his own wife, the princess Netalde, refused to join him (Khan 1998:22). Ramdev's association with untouchables is often explained as highly natural in the context of devotional worship, even though many also claim they were related. Moreover, to support this view untouchable devotees of Ramdev often mention Ambedkar and Mahatma Gandhi.

For example, when drawing on the relation between Ramdev and Dali Bai, Meghval informants often assert that Ramdev preached equality between the castes. Many of the politically active Panwar informants are also Congress supporters and pictures of Gandhi, Nehru, Indira Gandhi and Dr. Ambedkar can be found next to images of Ramdev in the family shrines. Many politically minded informants state that Ramdev was the first to talk about equality and the unfairness of casteism. Some informants have made direct parallels between the ideas of Dr. Ambedkar and those of Ramdev. An elder Panwar Meghval informant stated that:

“Many Ramdev followers support the ideas of Ambedkar as Ramdev wanted to help poor and low people and raise their position, in this way, Ambedkar is like Ramdev”.

He went on to say,

“It was man who created caste but God made only one human being, we are all human beings. This is the message of Ramdev”.

A number of Meghval informants have expressed similar sentiments when discussing their beliefs on caste. The discourse concerning political involvement among the well-to-do Meghvals in the village often draws on religious metaphors. For example, informants

²⁷ See also Komal Kothari 2003 “Rajasthan an Oral History” for an account of this particular miracle.

consistently claim that Ramdev was the first caste abolitionist and that because his teachings and practices encouraged low caste involvement, he sought to break down caste barriers. And, because of this it is regarded as only 'natural' that the Panwars would be interested in politics. In doing so, they claim a long lineage of worshipping Ramdev and it is this that has made them ideal political actors. Kamraj for example frequently filled his political discussions with metaphors and references to the Ramdev tradition.

"Reservations are one method for making society more equal. Before it was very unequal low castes had nothing, no education, food or jobs. All the good jobs were taken by high caste people. With the reservations come opportunity and a chance to better your position. However, today it is still unequal and many people are poor and without jobs. God says there is only one caste: we humans have made caste, not God".

Here Kamraj draws attention to how caste is unfounded in religion. Moreover, by implication he suggests that those who practise caste discrimination are not true to god. This is a powerful rhetoric and one that was used continuously by the Meghval landlords. Consequently, Ramdev's association with caste abolition has become one of his most valuable traits.

Interestingly, Khan notes how these caste neutral qualities of Ramdev have also been kept alive in the literature (Khan 1998: 22 & 2003: 158). Whilst Ramdev's relationship with untouchables is heavily muted in the Rajput accounts of his life, the message of caste equality is physically represented time and again by low castes. For example, the old Ramdev temple in Kolayat is in an area known as Ambedkar Circle and positioned behind a small, recently constructed (1990s), roundabout containing a large statue of Dr. Ambedkar. The images of Ramdev as a strong, low caste democratic king/ landlord are symbols that the wealthy Meghval lineage uses to explain their social position.

The use of religious imagery in constructing low caste identity is found elsewhere in India, most notably amongst the Yadav political classes of Uttar Pradesh. Michelutti (2004, 2007, 2008), for example, highlights how Yadav politicians utilise a political language that depicts Krishna as muscular, democratic and socialist. She shows how these images are

combined with ideologies of caste essence and martial heroic caste narratives to mobilise their audiences, “and by ordinary Yadavs to legitimise their way of ‘doing’ and ‘participating’ in politics” (2008:163).

Similarly, members of the Meghval lineage use the imagery of Ramdev as a democratic caste abolitionist to vindicate their involvement in local politics. Moreover, they also benefit from the Rajputised/ Sanskritised version of Ramdev, and associated high caste piety observances as this serves to disconnect them from their ‘polluted’ heritage. Unlike among the Yadav political classes, however, the two ideological premises of the Ramdev tradition work paradoxically to unite and divide the Meghval caste. Both rich and poor Meghvals, for example, utilise the image of Ramdev as caste abolitionist and the democratic representative of low castes. However, the adoption of the piety/ Sanskritised practices of teetotalism and vegetarianism occurs among the wealthy of the caste only, at least this is the case in Mudharamsar. In adopting both these ideologies, the wealthier Meghvals are not only reinforcing their superiority, consciously or not, over the poorer Meghvals in the village, they are, on an ideological level, able to maintain it by ‘dressing down’ their class privileges in favour of caste unity. I expect, like Hardiman’s (2007: 77) discussion of the motivations behind adivasis mobility toward Brahminical notions of purity, Meghvals through their caste council were originally interested in democratising the values of purity by appropriating them within their religiosity. However, this process has only been partial. What is clear in my data is that such processes have the most value or impact on the creamy layers. Thus the Meghval lineage both substantialises the caste by drawing on Ramdev whilst simultaneously expressing their distance through adopting the Rajputised and Sanskritised elements that their poorer castes mates avoid.

Consequently, among the more politically minded Meghval the Rajputised aspect of Ramdev is incredibly helpful for their social mobility. Similar to Hardiman’s (2007: 77) analysis of Salahbai’s ‘Sanskritisation’, the Rajputised/ Sanskritised element of Ramdev is more about power than values regarding purity or caste status. That is not to say, of course, that the purification of Ramdev and in turn his followers are not also useful to the landowning

Meghvals. In fact, the two elements combined means they are able to reconcile many aspects of their identity and practice.

As discussed in previous chapters the Meghvals descended from Karna Ram Panwar are also the political and economic elites in the village. As landowners on the one hand, but passionate anti-caste abolitionist on the other, Ramdev's dual identity as both Rajput and anti-caste serves to support the wealthier Meghval in all their endeavours. Moreover, because he is also still worshipped by the Scheduled Castes, the political elites can similarly galvanise political allegiance through their status as Ramdev Bhakts.

The reality of how Ramdev *bhakts* are perceived by other communities in the village is, however, quite different. Worship of Ramdev in the village also has a "darker side" to the one outlined above. Among some villagers he is linked to the tantric tradition of the Kunda *Panth* and whilst he is accepted as a deity by high castes, this element does affect his overall approval by higher castes.

Followers of the Kunda *Panth* suggest Ramdev performed tantric rituals and was in fact the patron of this tradition. As Khan (1998) reveals this association with left-handed tantrism and untouchables was, from a high-caste point of view, further aggravated by the fact that, although believed to be twice-born, Ramdev chose to be buried in a grave and not cremated. Moreover, his descendants and followers did and continue to do the same. Some high castes referred to this aspect as a "low caste *mleccha* custom". (Originally, this Sanskrit word refers to all "foreigners", but later it also became, for Hindu fundamentalists, a synonym of Muslims). This practice, however, has more-or-less been accepted and integrated into the new high status understanding of Ramdev by reinterpreting it as a "living Samadhi", a custom typical of Shaiva ascetics and connected with their supernatural powers.

The fact that many of my Meghval informants also subscribe to the idea of Ramdev as Samadhi further suggests their interest in maintaining the new high status doctrine. In fact, it was mainly female informants that insist Ramdev was buried after he died. Many of the Meghval brothers, on the other hand, were quite adamant he was buried alive as a Samadhi. For example, one rather pugnacious informant, connected to the powerful family, with whom I had many a conversation about Ramdev stated:

“Still Ramdev is misunderstood by many backward people. Many of these people are old and they do not understand that he was a God. He performed miracles and was able to make a cloth horse fly. Some people think of him as a simple man and in many ways he was but he also had the special powers that made him different from normal people. Some people in my caste say he died and was buried in the way that is tradition among some people in my caste but he did not die – he was close to God and asked to be buried alive as a Samadhi.”

Wishing to mark him apart, this informant makes a clear distinction between what he considers are the backward aspects of his caste. What is more, through his concern over the portrayal of Ramdev’s status, he is signifying his personal concerns regarding his own status. Thus, in presenting this polarised image of the death of Ramdev, he is making a direct statement about the polarisation of his caste.

The insistence that Ramdev was interred, whether as Samadhi or not, can equally be evidence that he was either an untouchable or a renouncer. Moreover, this motif of burial vs. *samadhi* is mirrored in the actual mortuary practices of the Meghval caste. What is clear is that the caste is divided amongst those that bury their dead and those that cremate their dead. When asked if the above informant’s family buried their dead he answered “not any more”. It is important to recognise, however, that this family’s case was actually uncommon in the village as most Meghvals, including the descendents of Mungla Ram, continue to bury their dead in the traditional way. This informant and his family had in fact fully adopted the Sanskritised element, while the landlords considered themselves Bhakts and therefore wished to be buried as renouncers and the poorer Meghvals considered it to be something they had always done.

It is important to note that there are risks with the Sanskritisation of a deity. The main risk is that the deity will become palatable to the higher castes who will ultimately take over the tradition. This process is already underway in Rajasthan’s more urban and literary centers. The media has played a large part in this process with the making of a film but is also highly visible at the annual Ramdev Mela.

Ramdeora: The Ramdev Mela, Temple, and Social Differentiation

Every year at the supposed time of Ramdev's birth, between the months of August and September a great festival or mela takes place. Pilgrims travel from all over North West India to attend the festival and some even travel from as far away as Kashmir and the North East of India, such as West Bengal. The popularity of Ramdev can be clearly seen in the weeks leading up to the mela when the National Highway 15 (running 3-4 kilometers from Mudharamsar) is lined with stalls providing refreshments to the hordes of pilgrims that make the journey, in the most auspicious method, by foot. Groups of people from a range of economic backgrounds can be seen walking along the Highway carrying the popular symbol – a white flag with the two-red-footprint motif – among low castes of Ramdev and images of a Rajput hero among the higher castes. From women in well-made shalwar suits and Reebok trainers, to the traditional mirror-worked *lhenga chunis* of the Kalbelia and Bhat tribal groups, all will walk the same route to the birth and death place of the Lord of Runicha. Once reaching the pillars indicating the entrance to Runicha, the most devoted pilgrims, and judging by the appearance of the shoes, poorer devotees will remove their chapals (sandals) and walk the remaining 3 km bare-foot.



Plate 27. Sandals/ Chapals outside Ramdeora/ Runicha town limits.

During the 2005 mela, I carried out a small survey of the pilgrims visiting the tomb or Samadhi of Ramdev. The pilgrims were from a wide range of high and low caste groups. Low caste groups were in the majority, but many of the poorer among them had come to beg of the wealthy. Among the random sample of 50 pilgrims interviewed, inter-faith representation was high. For example, Sikhs, Muslims, Jains and Hindus were all present at the mela.

There was a range of high and low castes all of whom queued up together to enter the temple, and took *Prasad* (blessed offerings such as sweets and coconut) from the hands of the same priest. The bustling stalls leading up to the temple and those situated all around the town sold a range of *Prasad* bags, flags and general memorabilia. The section closest to the temple entrance was lined with expensive shops selling costly bags of *Prasad* sweets, devotional CDs and Ramdev artifacts. Moreover, there were numerous boarding houses and restaurants in the town and when I asked informants where they were staying during the mela, it was clear that there were different lodging houses and eateries for different castes (cf. Khan 1998: 21-22). What is more, there is considerable tension between the various communities who live in Ramdeora over whom should look after the temple and which community is the rightful heir of the tradition.

Bharucha (2003) suggests that when the Kamad were included among the scheduled castes along with their patrons the Meghvals, Balai, and Bhambhi they tried to disassociate themselves from their earlier affiliation with these low castes. However, they wished to do so whilst still claiming ritual authority as the priests of the Ramdev tradition whose main patrons were the Meghval. It is important to note that specific tensions between the Kamad and Meghval castes over who historically has the ritual authority over Ramdev worship is tied up with notions of status (Khan 2006 pers. comm.). There is also, however, a political edge to these tensions which correspond to the historical identity and caste heritage of the two communities. This is exacerbated by the wider competitions over the control of Ramdeora and subsequent ownership of Ramdev's divine legacy.

The politics of reservations and the notification of both the Kamad and Meghval as Scheduled Caste conflate their identities in the public domain. Whilst historically they occupied different status positions, where the Kamad performed private ritual ceremonies for Meghval

patrons, today their joint classification as Scheduled Caste makes both communities 'equal' to one another in the eyes of the law and among high castes. This weakens their position in the face of high caste competition. The Kamad and Meghval are instead in competition with each other over their respective historical claims of ownership over the Ramdev phenomenon. This has inadvertently enabled higher castes to make counter ownership claims. For example, currently there is a big dispute among Rajputs, Kamads and Meghvals in Ramdeora concerning who should be the keepers of the main Ramdev temple. All three communities claim to have genealogical authority over the caste origins of the saint.

As Khan (1998) notes, today the main shrine to Ramdev is occupied by Brahmins and the Tanwar Rajputs who also own the entire village and its surroundings. These groups collect the revenues from the temple and the offerings to the shrine. The Meghvals and Kamad, on the other hand, look after Dali Bhai's shrine and receive only the collections and coconuts brought by the pilgrims to her shrine, which the upper caste devotees rarely visit (Ibid.: 24). What is more, these two communities (Kamad and Tanwar Rajput) were once very close in kind economically. However, with the appropriation of Ramdev by the higher castes, the popularity of the mela, and the associated worship of Tanwar Rajputs, has raised the lot of this Rajput community considerably. Thus, the true success of the Ramdev tradition has been among the high caste Tanwar Rajputs at the expense of the Meghval and Kamad.

Ramdev is claimed, however, by many communities with more or less success, as Dominique-Sila Khan notes:

"Tradition has portrayed the god himself – a 15th century warrior-saint – as trespassing caste prohibitions and singing bhajans (devotional songs) in the company of untouchables. If these oppressed groups have preserved a highly emotional approach to Ramdev as their protector and saviour, the Rajputs perceive him proudly as a heroic ancestor. Even the Muslims, drawing from other oral sources, can view him as a powerful Pir (an Islamic spiritual teacher). As in the case of some other "ambiguous" saints of the sub-continent, the Lord of Runicha can be claimed by every community with more or less success, depending on the current circumstances. However,

the dominant trend nowadays is to view Ramdev as a high Brahminical god, an incarnation of Vishnu-Krishna belonging to the upper categories of the Hindu Pantheon²⁸ (Khan 1998:22).

The trend today, highlighted by Khan, helps to explain the competing status claims within the village. Suffice to say; although Ramdev is still not a pan-Hindu deity, he has become central to the devotional cult of lower castes in Rajasthan. In many ways, he acts as the unifying deity of the lower castes and untouchables, although, as mentioned earlier in the thesis, groups below Meghvals (such as Sansi and Kalbelia) virtually never attend his temple in the village. Moreover, as my fussy informant above pointed out, the styles of worship do indicate the status differentials within Ramdev's allegedly favoured caste, the Meghvals.

Ramdev is, however, the most important deity of the Meghvals and both early morning and evening worship is carried out in the households of most families. However, it is clear that different sections of the caste lay different emphases on aspects of his life, teachings, and the contemporary expressions of devotion toward him. In this respect, the contemporary worship of Ramdev in Mudharamsar is also symbolic of the internal differentiations within the Meghval caste and the particular Meghval lineages that claim special attachment to him. In particular, the Panwar Meghvals claim to be the true bhakts of Ramdev.

The exact relation between Ramdev and the Kunda *Panth* is quite vague. However, Kamad and Meghval informants have stated that Ramdev was a member of the Kunda *Panth*, Sat *Panth* or Shiv *Panth*. The former two are the "acculturated" names of the Indian *Nizari* tradition (see below) and were often used by Meghval informants. For example, many contemporary devotees from higher castes deny Ramdev was associated with any *Panth*, particularly an Ismaili one, as the *Nizaī* link indicates²⁹. However, certain practices and events mentioned in the traditional literature of Ramdev hint at his close connection with the Kamad community (a community associated with Meghvals and the Ramdev tradition) and his relationship to the *Nizar Panth* or *Nizari Dharm*. Briefly, the *Nizari Panth* is a renegade branch

²⁸ Khan notes that Ramdev has been accepted by the Hindu fundamentalist body, the Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP), which at the same time rejects other folk-deities such as Goga and Teja, as well as ancestor worship (Ibid. endnote p.27).

²⁹ Khan (1997) highlights how in Gujarat Ramdev is currently being invoked as Shāh Nizār and in mantras as Nikalank Dev Nizār (D.S.Khan 1997:68, 1993:43, 1995:321).

of Ismailism, the second largest denomination of Shia Muslims, who claim allegiance to and descent from a wronged *Caliph* (of the 11th Century), or religious ruler of an Islamic community, named *Nizar*.

Some traditional literature suggests that the Chief of Pugalgarh in whose family Ramdev's sister is said to have been married refused to let her go to Ramdev's marriage. He stated that: "we are the lords of Pugalgarh, he (Ramdev) is a Kamad, how can we be related?...In our houses one plays the *naupat*, at his home one hears the sound of the *tandura*" (Bishnoi 1989: 403). A *tandura* is a five stringed musical instrument played by male *Teratali* musicians. *Teratali* is a ritualised dance form with similarities to Sufi musical practices. Moreover, the dance actually was stopped by the Kamad community during the post independence period; however, more recently it has made a comeback (cf. Khan 1996 for a detailed account of the banning of *Teratali*). Briefly, the *Teratali* dance is primarily performed by women of the Kamad community, whose patrons were primarily Meghval, and is a mode of Ramdev worship where devotional songs associated with the life and teachings of Ramdev are sung.

The Second Tradition: The Kunda *Panth*

The following data describes the Kunda *Panth* in some detail. This was quite difficult data to retrieve as informants were very reluctant to talk about it. As mentioned before, this sect is in decline and most of the accessible members were fairly old. Many of those I was able to locate explained that there had not been any new recruits since the 1990s. Whilst this data is not directly related to the central themes of the thesis it does highlight, how in the past, this was a powerful *Panth* containing many of the village's ruling elite.

My Kamad informant, Mohan Das, stated that all Kamads have to be Kunda *Panth* members as well as 12 Nath castes, Sanyasis and some Meghval sub-castes. He explained, for

example, it was only Vasira Meghvals who could become Kunda *Panth* members, and not their lower status Jata counterparts. Conversely, other informants have said that anyone can join the *Panth* including high castes and women. When asked about membership to the Kunda *Panth* it was said that membership can be both *maurusi*, hereditary, or through choice. Whichever way, an initiation ceremony is held in which the individual must recite a secret *Nizari* mantra. Some of the *Teratali* devotional songs sung by the Kamad community at Ramdeora are also linked with secret ritual sessions among Kunda *Panth* and Nizar *Panth* known as *jagrans* or *Jama* – originating from an Arabic term meaning congregation of the faithful.

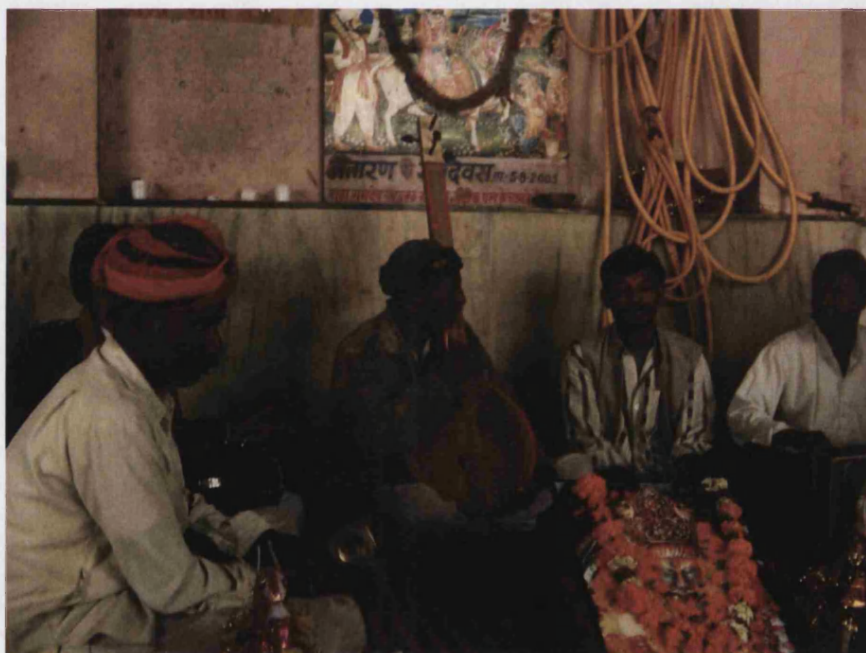


Plate 28. Kamad performers at Ramdeora. The tandura is the stringed instrument in the centre of the photo. Note also the image of Ramdev at the front of the group. Here he is depicted as pale blue, similar to Krishna, with a classically Rajput moustache.

Meghval and Kamad informants have stated that Kunda *Panth* members also worship Hinglaz or Hinglaj Mata and that Hinglaj was the *Kuldevi* (family or caste deity) of Ramdev. The main temple of Hinglaj Mata is situated in Multan in the Baluchistan region of Pakistan. That shrine is dedicated to Agni Devi of Hinglaj, known also as Hinglaj Devi, Hinguda Devi and the Red Goddess. She is also worshipped by Muslims and for them is known as Bibi Nani Ma and as Parvati, Kali or Mata by some Hindus. Evidence collected by Briggs in 1938

indicates that the main shrine was predominantly being looked after by Muslims and formerly, a Muslim woman who performed conversions. For example, Briggs writes: “Candala Mai, in charge of the place made Muslims of all Hindu pilgrims who went there”, (1938:106).

Members of the Kunda *Panth* believe that the *Panth* was born at the point when Hinglaj was named. However, Khan (2003) highlights how there is no clear position on the origins of the Kunda *Panth* and that some traditional literature suggests it originated during the early Mogul period. Whilst there are a variety of explanations regarding the traditions of Ramdev and the Kunda *Panth* and much of this can be explained by their idiosyncratic character. Followers are, however, agreed on the central role of Hinglaj Mata as the protector of both Ramdev and the Kunda *Panth*.

The Kunda Panth in Mudharamsar

In theory, a secret cult is one a person can join without even close relatives knowing. A son, mother, or father could, in theory, all be members of the same tradition incognito. The Kunda *Panth* in Mudharamsar is, however, slightly different. The *Panth* in this area has material assets at its disposal, which are used to regulate kin membership. I was informed that it mainly falls to one family member or to a married couple depending on the time of death of the previous kin member. Moreover, male kin are favoured over female kin. There are six male Kunda *Panth* members in Mudharamsar village. Four of these belong to the Meghval caste and three to the Panwar *Gotr*; one is Kumbhar and another member is Nath (Kalbelia).

One Kunda *Panth* informant explained that there were twelve members in the *tehsil* including the Kamad priest in Kolayat, his wife, and several women in the village. I had on numerous occasions tried to ascertain who the female members were but was largely unsuccessful. Only one informant indicated a relationship with the Kunda *Panth* and she was the wife of one of the original Prajarpat families, Birba and Delad Ram, (Deepa Devi, see Figure 11). According to Chagan Lal, his grandfather and great uncle were enemies and during a fight, his grandfather was accidentally killed by Delad Ram. Although they do not know

exactly what happened or why they fought, some in the family have suspected that they argued over money and inheritance.

Informants have indicated that both Moti Ram and Rupa Ram Panwar were also members of the Kunda *Panth*. Upon their deaths, sons of each took over their position within the *Panth*. Informants mentioned that those who are *maurusi* (hereditary) members are also given small plots of land and that this is common practice to ensure the *Panth* continues in the family. For example, one of the sons, a disciple (*chela*) of Mohan Das, explained that when he had to take over his father's position in the *Panth* several extra bighas of land were given to him from the family's plot. These plots are expected to be reserved by every *Panth* member for future generations. Consequently, both the landowning Meghval and Kumbhar families have links to the Kunda *Panth* through the origins and inheritance of some of their lands.

Whilst my informants consistently refer to the tradition as the Kunda *Panth* or Shiv *Panth*, there are remarkable similarities to the sect known as the Maila *Panth*, literally 'dirty sect' and likely to be the non-practitioner term for the Kunda *Panth*, discussed by Komal Kothari (2003) and Khan (1994). Kothari describes how practitioners can be from higher castes such as Rajputs and Jains, and both male and female. These are claims also made by Kunda *Panth* members in Mudharamsar and surrounding villages. Kothari's informants similarly discussed the use of a particular *jjyot* (light, sacred flame), which according to my informants is called the "*hinglāz ki jjyot*"; the wick is made from a cotton fibre called *kokdi* and represents the light of Hinglaj. His informants stated that outsiders could not see the flame. If they did, they would have to join the *Panth*. Kothari, similar to the reports I gathered from other informants, suggests that there are many negative stories associated with this *Panth* and the Kunda *Panth* – stories associated with promiscuity, bodily fluids and other polluting elements. One such story of the *Kanchli Panth* reported by Kothari was that a woman's bodice or *Kanchli* is placed in an earthen pot or Kunda, and any man who picks it up can spend the night with her regardless of whether she is his mother, sister or whoever (2003: 194-195). One Sadh informant explained to me, for example, that one of the rituals of the Kunda *Panth* is to drink the semen of fellow members. Dominique-Sila Khan (1994:448) likewise reports that the Kunda *Panth* is linked to left-handed tantric practices that involve bodily fluids. She details that the *Panth* has two forms:

the *Bisa Panth* (literally the sect twenty), which is more secretive than the *Dasa Panth* (sect ten), which, according to Khan, does not have the approval of all members of the *Nizar Panth*.

In the *Dasa Panth*, the sect which my informants claim to belong to, a ritual copulation takes place and a woman must collect the semen of her partner (heavily disputed among practitioners), which she deposits into a round flat earthen vessel (*kunda*). At the end of the ceremony all the semen is mixed with *churmā* (a traditional food offering made of millet, ghee and sugar) and taken as *prasad* (sacred food also called *payal*) by all the members of the sect.

With a fine attention to detail, Khan makes several inter-ritual observations about *payal*. She notes, in common with Hindu rituals, *charanamrit* refers to the water or sacred liquid with which a divine image (or the feet of a guru) is washed. Here the water of the *kunda* is also called *payal*. The *payal* ceremony of the *dasa Panth* incidentally recalls a Sikh custom, which consists of drinking the water where the ordinary devotees have washed their feet before entering a *gurudwara*. Like the various types of *amrit* used for their initiation, this water is referred to as *pahul* (*payal*) (cf. Khan 2003: 131-133 and Kothari 2003: 316).

The Kunda Panth Rules and Rituals

According to Mohan Das, initiated male *Kunda Panth* worshipers must wear a cream coloured turban and shirt and wear the *rudraksh mala*. Both men and women must worship Shiv and Hinglaj/ Sati from midnight to four in the morning. Secret mantras are spoken during this time and sixty-four items must be used during the worship. He stated that the worship takes place in a small room behind the Ramdev temple in Kolayat.

Unfortunately, I was unable to witness the ceremony, as, should I have done so, I would have automatically become a *Kunda Panth* member, a life long commitment. The ceremony described below was recounted by Mohan Das Kamad, and presents an ideal picture of how the ritual is to be performed. The worship involves using a low wooden altar upon which a piece of red and white cloth (not orange as it was in the photo below) is spread over it. A pile of rice is placed in the centre and a square box design is made with the rice, which is also then sprinkled around the edge of the platform making a frame. In the top-left corner of the altar the sign of the

moon is made, to the right side a sun design is made, at the bottom-right of the altar a small pile indicating the Devi, in the middle is Bhairon and at the bottom-left is Hanuman. Four *Deepak* bowls are placed at each corner containing camphor with a cotton wick and a copper drinking pot is placed in the centre of the altar and filled halfway with ghee into which wheat flour is mixed. A small twig of the Sakunda tree is placed in the vessel and cotton wool is wrapped around it. *Gūar*³⁰, a desert plant yielding a sticky gum, is added to the mix. Several other ingredients are also added, including fenugreek, rose petals, white sandalwood powder, and red sandalwood powder.

The use of particular trees is highly significant and the exact combination depends upon the day the ceremony is carried out. Each day of the week is said to be characterised by a particular deity and a special wood is assigned to each. Mohan Das explained that the altar must always face north and all attendees must take a full body bath before the ceremony. Once the bathing is complete, the secret mantra can be spoken. Mohan Das explained that, following the mantra, a bowl containing milk and water is placed before the altar and silver and gold rings are placed inside the bowl to make them pure concluding the opening procedure, which takes up to four hours. What follows then are a series of practices that he could not tell me as to explain them would be to do them, and again commit me to a life of *Panth* membership.

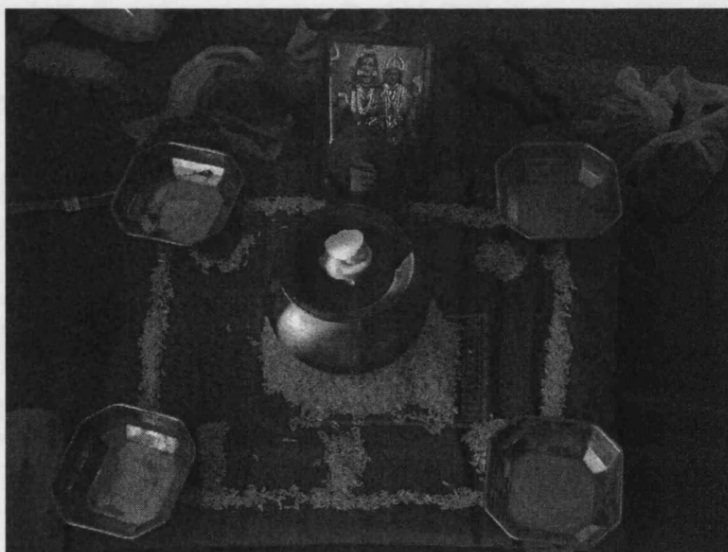


Plate 29. The Kunda *Panth* Altar.

³⁰ Some informants have indicated that this is the substitution for semen.

A further practice Mohan Das was able to explain was the mortuary ritual of a *Panth* member. On the twelfth day after the death of a member, the opening ceremony, outlined above, is also carried out but with some additions. Further to the above, a small statue of the deceased is made from wheat flour and water, and milk is poured over the statue. They repeat this for every person present. Mohan Das said this can be performed for all – men, women, and children – but if they are new they must wear a blindfold, and if they promise to follow the rules of the Kunda *Panth*, they can then see the ritual. After the funeral worship, they bury the flour statue outside. He stated that this is a group event, the members of which are from all castes. They are equal and they eat together from the same pot.

This practice shares some resemblances to the mortuary rituals of the Aghori ascetics' of Banares (Varanasi) cremation grounds, studied by Parry (1982). Parry highlights how ordinary Banares householders have a similar view of life and death to the necrophagous Aghori ascetic who occupy the city's cremation grounds. Among the householders, each day a *pinda* – a ball of rice or flour – is offered in the name of the deceased, each of which reconstitutes a part of the body. By the tenth day, the body is complete, and on the eleventh life is breathed into it and it is fed. On the next day a ritual is performed which enables the deceased to rejoin the ancestors (1982:84). For the Aghori, infamous stories abound as to their practices, ranging from sitting on the torso of the deceased to worship, to human sacrifice, eating the flesh of the deceased and having intercourse on the cremation grounds. However, almost all agree that after eating, the Aghori will use his powers to restore the deceased to life (Ibid: 90).

Like the Aghori, the Kunda *Panth* is associated with the secret rite of *cakra-Puja*, which involves the ritual use of five items (meat, fish, alcohol, grain and sexual intercourse). For the Kunda *Panth* these five items are included among the sixty-four items they have to use in order to worship successfully. Whilst there are countless stories of the polluting practices of the Kunda *Panth*, some of which are very similar to those of the Aghori, *Panth* members were quick to deny many of the more unsavoury. However, the mixed membership of the *Panth* does suggest that inter-generational incest could well occur. Kin membership is somewhat mitigated

through land allocation and the prevalence of male hereditary rights, thus reducing the risk of incest. However, inter-caste membership is encouraged, suggesting there is a high chance of inter-caste sexual activity. It is important to note, however, that most members of the Kunda *Panth* deny the use of the fifth element. Whether this is fact or a sexual taboo inspired fiction, is impossible to tell. Certainly, household data indicate that inter-caste relations are next to nil in the village. Either way, there is, at the very least, a potential for inter-caste sexual unions during the Kunda *Panth* rituals.

Informants' state that the eldest child of the family must do the Kunda *Panth* mortuary ritual after the father, who was a member, dies. However, most added that today, it is only people who have had the *Panth* in the family for a long time that continue the funeral puja. What is more, informants often explained it was the eldest child in the family who inherits the position in the Kunda *Panth*, and my survey data supports this. However, occasionally when the eldest has refused, or cannot commit for any reason, another sibling will take his or her place. For example, in one Meghval family there was a disciple of the Kamad who is a member of the Kunda *Panth* because his elder brother refused. The two elder brothers could not take over because they were to manage the families' land and the third brother succeeded in education and was coached for a good career in state politics, and thus it fell to this brother to fulfill the duties of the *Panth*.

In one of the Kunda *Panth* member's house is a shrine room containing images of Ramdev, Shiva, Kali Mata, Rajiv Gandhi, Dr. Ambedkar and Goraknath. Goraknath is the Guru of the Nath community and is depicted as a leather shoemaker and praying to Shiva. These links between the Kunda *Panth* and the Nath can be seen in the ceremonies of both groups. Dominique-Sila Khan has suggested that the *Sankhadhal* ceremony carried out by the Nath community 13 days after the death of a Nath is similar to the mortuary ceremony among the Kunda *Panth* and Aghori, explained above. Moreover, upon asking Kamad informants, this is further supported with the addition that this ceremony is also carried out by the Kunda *Panth* during Navratri, although with the omission of the flour doll that signifies the deceased person in the mortuary ritual. Moreover, many of the villagers refer to the Kalbelias/ Nath in the village as Jogis. Jogi is a generic term used to describe nomadic people belonging to the Nath sect.

Many of the male relatives amongst the Kalbelia in the village have Nath after their first name. Moreover, one of the 12 disciples of Goraknath was Nag Nath (snake) and the traditional occupation of the Kalbelia is snake catcher/ charmer. Kalbelia informants, therefore, claim direct descent from Nag Nath. The Kalbelia in Mudharamsar have explained that they do worship Ramdev and although they do not attend the temple in the Meghval area of the village, they do attend some joint rituals. Upon further pressing, a Kalbelia informant reluctantly admitted that the shared rituals took place at the Ramdev temple in Kolayat and were Kunda *Panth* rituals.

It is said by informants that Mudharamsar village has a special significance in relation to the Kunda *Panth*, Ramdev and Nath communities. The Kamad Priest, for example, is convinced that the Paliwal who built the Hinglaj temple in Mudharamsar were members of the Kunda *Panth*. He recounted that the Kunda *Panth* is associated with the formless god also called Gusav ji or Alaksya in the Nath tradition. This god is also linked to Samas Rishi or Shams Pir who is said to have been an Ismiali missionary from Iran (Khan 1998). Some have argued that it was Shams who converted Ramdev's grandfather Ransi Tanwar and a Meghval named Khiwan to Islam.

Moreover, the presence of a Kamad family in close proximity to Mudharamsar and the Hinglaj temple is significant in itself. Alf Hildebeitel suggests, for example, that Kamads are the priests located at cult centres or seats (*gaddi*) that link Ramdev with other figures (1999:327). Mudharamsar's proximity to the holy town of Kolayat further indicates that in its history it was likely that numerous mendicants, Bhopas and Sadhus passed through. Kolayat town is an important pilgrimage site for Hindus and Sikhs. Inhabitants claim that Guru Nanak met with Guru Gobind Singh and two other Sikh Saints at Kolayat, and that Kapil Muni³¹, to which there is a temple dedicated on the bank of the lake, is also said to have visited. Both Khan (1997) and Bharucha (2003) have discussed the Ismaili links between the Sikh ascetics and Ramdev.

³¹ Kapil Muni was a seer who developed the Sankhya philosophy, one of the six schools of Indian philosophy.

During the Medieval period, Kolayat was a highly important religious centre and only Brahmins and Sanyasis were able to reside within the town's limits³².

Thus far, we have seen how the data relating to Ramdev and the Kunda *Panth* links the Meghval, Kumbhar and Kalbelia castes. Even though the Meghvals and Kumbhars deny having anything to do with the Kalbelia, it is clear that those who are Kunda *Panth* practitioners will have close ritual dealings with them. The fact that the sect remains secretive in part shields this knowledge from the wider and more conservative village community and probably contributes to the general reluctance, on behalf of practitioners, to discuss it. Some authors, such as Mirium Robertson (1998) have raised how the Kalbelia are often seen to engage in prostitution and other 'unsavoury' activities, which further contributes to their general low status. As mentioned in Chapter one, the Kalbelia are viewed as illegal squatters in the village and most are regarded by other villagers with disdain. That being said, villagers that are more superstitious consider the Nath community to be endowed with special powers that can be used for both good and ill effect, and consequently avoid them. In the village, however, they are generally treated poorly. Unfortunately, it was impossible for me to observe what actually happens during a Kunda *Panth* ceremony. However, informants continue to defend its egalitarianism.

Ramdev and the Kunda Panth: Sanskritisation and Rajputisation

Whilst there is this secret, tantric side to Ramdev worship mentioned above, there is also the sanitised version. This version is often more popularly discussed by Meghval informants and highlights the Sanskritisation/ Rajputisation this cult has undergone.

Khan (1998) discusses a legendary event believed to have taken place in the middle of the 18th century that helps us to understand the claims to a higher status. As Khan suggests the

³² Alf Hildebeitel explains that the Sanyasi were a Brahminical order, but Akbar's Minister, Birbal, wished "[t]o initiate large numbers of non-Brahmins into the Sanyasi order and arm them for the protection of Brahmin Sanyasis" (Farquhar 1925: 442 in Ibid.: 334). The Kamad priest in Kolayat corroborated with this story and stated that many of those Sanyasis were Kunda *Panth* members and came from the Meghval and Kamad caste.

event below has a historical background and may well reflect, albeit in a distorted form, the beginning of this process of transformation, which would have led to the Sanskritisation of the Ramdev cult (Khan pers com.). The event is as follows.

The queen (*rani*) of Nawalgarh (the capital of the petty kingdom of Shekhawati, which is a district in Rajasthan currently bordering Bikaner, Jaipur, and Haryana, founded by her husband Nawal Singh in 1737) was secretly worshipping Ramdev whom she considered her *istdev* (favourite deity chosen by an individual worshipper). When he discovered this the ruler became angry and reproached her for worshipping “the god of the pariahs”, reminding her that, as a high status Rajput queen, she was only to revere the higher gods. Some time after this event, the Maharaja of Jaipur, Ishvari Singh, quarrelled with the ruler of Nawalgarh. Nawal Singh was then jailed and his principality taken over by the Maharaja. The distressed Rani invoked Ramdev. Answering her prayer, the god of Runicha appeared to Nawal Singh in his prison and declared, “The deity of the pariahs, Ramdev Kambariya (Ramdev the Kamad) has come to set you free.” At this point, the locks mysteriously opened and the ruler of Nawalgarh walked out of the jail. Impressed by this miracle, the Maharaja of Jaipur forgave him and returned his territory. The grateful Nawal Singh had a temple to Ramdev built in his capital and started an annual mela; he himself became a staunch devotee of the Lord of Runicha (Khan 1998:23).

However, not all the devotees of Ramdev became members of the sect (*Nizar Panth*/ *Kunda Panth*) associated with him. Khan suggests that as the number of worshippers increased, the secret sectarian tradition, *Kunda Panth*, transformed itself into an open cult of the Bhakti type. Thus it is likely that there were many more *Kunda Panth* followers in the village than are recorded today. Instead many have distanced themselves from the left-handed associations and links with Hinglaj to a general recognition of Ramdev and Hinglaj as tutelary deities. Khan suggests that such a transformation was only made possible through a subtle alteration of Ramdev’s personality. From a deified guru whose major disciples were untouchables, he became the saint-warrior we see today. This phenomenon is well illustrated in the rock-cut gallery of heroes and gods at Mandore, near Jodhpur, which is said to have been built by Maharaja Abhay Singh (1724-1750). As mentioned, many of the effigies of Ramdev depict him

on horseback, similar to other deified Rajput heroes of Rajasthan: the conventional Rajput moustache has often replaced Ramdev's beard and Krishna's blue skin colour added to colour images. The rock-cut shrine associates a number of warrior-saints said to be endowed with supernatural powers, to the Nath Jogis, including Gorak Nath. The Naths who were previously of rather low status came to be honoured as an efficient counter-power to the Brahmin gurus of the local rulers, and such was likely to be the case among the Paliwal who built the Hinglaj temple in Mudharamsar. In addition, with the Naths, the heroes endowed with siddhis (miraculous powers) would see their position raised in the traditional Brahminical hierarchy.

Ganga Singh, the Maharaja of Bikaner, perhaps made the ultimate move towards Rajputisation/ Hinduisation before Independence in the 1920s; through another subtle transformation he raised previously low deities (associated with low caste groups) to the level of hero-ancestor worship and bhakti. He surrounded the shrine of Ramdev in Runicha, which quite obviously looks like an Islamic *dargah* (see plate 22), with an enclosure wall and a few other buildings so that it would resemble a Hindu place of worship. However, he dared not desecrate the old sacred graves (to which ornate cloths or *cadars* are still offered in Sufi style) by replacing them with Hindu *chatris* or *chabutras* (pillared kiosks and platforms erected over the Samadhi of a Rajput king or hero). It is only when they built new *Samadhis* or temples that the Rajputs, and even the untouchables, started to introduce images and substitute the former symbols (replicas of *mazars* and footprints) with the effigy of a horse rider, a process through which the tradition could be made to fit into the pattern of ancestor and hero worship. This evolution enabled crowds of higher caste devotees to join the cult. Among new worshippers were wealthy merchant communities, Hindus and Jains.

When asking informants in the village what images they most associate with Ramdev many responded with the image of him astride a powerful horse. Only a few older Panwar Meghval women, poorer Meghval, Nayak, and Kalbelia informants returned with the image of footprints. The Sanskritisation that has coincided with the Rajputisation of the Ramdev cult has become highly important to some Meghvals. As mentioned above, the various versions of Ramdev are used by various actors as a vindication for their particular position in society.

A central aspect of both the Ramdev and Kunda *Panth* is the role of Hinglaj Mata. As mentioned, Hinglaj represents the ultimate protector deity in the village, even if worship of her is only found specific representation among the declining Kunda *Panth*. Nevertheless, the protective element of Hinglaj forms part of the collective conscious of the village, where preserving the village and all those who live in it is paramount. Moreover, Ramdev in his current depiction of warrior-saint is said to protect the people of the village. In the Kunda *Panth* Hinglaj also occupies the role of protector, or more specifically the protector of Ramdev. However, the Kunda *Panth* is heavily criticised by higher caste villagers, most notably the Sadh who look after the Hinglaj temple. The secret *Panth*, however, maintains a doctrine of caste equality and egalitarianism, which strongly correlates to the former style of Ramdev worship. Moreover, in the ritual moment, the Kunda *Panth* practitioners suspend the social divisions of the material world of the village in favour of a metaphysical world where, potentially at least, inter-caste unions can occur. The fact the sect is in decline also mimics the decline in village rituals, where even the main festivals of the village have become private.

The Third Tradition: Bhomiya

The Bhomiya or Bhumiya is a type of divinised hero found widely in India in connection with the hero stone or *devliya*, which often commemorates heroes slain defending cattle. As Kothari (1989:110) suggests, Bhomiya primarily refers to the generic names of warriors who died in pursuit of robbers of cattle. Whilst many informants also gave this definition some also added that they can be unmarried children and adults more generally that have died an untimely death. These unmarried spirits, however, are found inside the home, whereas the others are found outside.

The people who worship Bhomiyas consider them gods or deities and similarly to a deity, they require special attention, prayers and rites. Their power is generated by their terrible and powerful death which is channelled and transformed by the “growth” of a shrine. The image

of growth is highly significant as the power of the deceased's spirit is said to enter the ground at the point of death. However, because the spirit is so powerful the earth cannot contain it for long and so its power forces itself back up to the surface as a stone (hence the name *Bhom* or earth/soil). This manifestation of the Bhomiya is also used to explain why they are so restless. Their tragic deaths mean they will never achieve *moksha*, the spiritual release from the cycle of re-birth; instead, they are destined to remain as ghosts for all eternity. For the people of Mudharamsar, Bhomiya is another tutelary deity, albeit a potentially malevolent one, who protects the village boundary. Like with the Kunda Panth, however, Bhomiya worship is also in decline and many of the rites described here are practices of the past. Similar to the Kunda Panth, very little exists by way of data in the ethnological record, and therefore these descriptions from informants are useful for future scholars. The importance of this data for this thesis, however, is to further highlight how social relations have changed in the village. What will be shown here is that as with other aspects of religious life in the village, this communal practice of protecting the village boundary has all but disappeared in Mudharamsar. Instead villagers' attention is focussed on the household, kinship and economic relations. It is perhaps for this reason that Bhomiyas found in the house are still taken very seriously and ritual offerings to these deified entities are performed.

The main character associated with Bhomiya worship in the village is a Meghval *bhopa* of the Mundara *Gotr*. He explained that in some cases animals are offered in sacrifice to Bhomiya when the village requires special protection. These rituals are said to be open to all castes who will then share the meat as Prasad. Moreover, he explained that the site of the Jogi shrine is also associated with Bhomiya where the congregation sing devotional songs, similar to those performed by the Kunda *Panth*. However, as plate 15 shows this shrine has clearly not been used for some time. The Bhopa stated that the seven stones surrounding the central devliya of the shrine represent the dead cows that the Bhomiya was protecting. Other informants stress that the shrine is actually a burial monument to the death of a great Jogi who became a Bhomiya.

There are numerous Bhomiyas in the village, whose names have unfortunately been lost to history. However, one has remained in common usage, a Rajput Bhomiya, named Mool

Singh, who according to popular village discourse died a premature death protecting cows and the village from Muslim invaders. If the village is perceived to be under threat, a ceremony to assist Bhomiya is carried out on the first Friday of the New Moon before sunrise. The ritual involves pouring milk around the boundary of the village. When the flow of milk breaks, signifying a spiritual weakness in the boundary, worshippers dig a hole and fill it with milk and place a piece of metal, often a nail, in the centre. Another informant mentioned that this is a form of tantra that turns the impure pure by converting the iron nails, associated with the low caste Lohars (blacksmiths) who perform this part of the ceremony, into gold. Moreover, in Hinduism iron is associated with repelling bad spirits and informants stressed it is only after the threat is gone that the nails can turn to gold. Following this aspect of the ritual, the congregation returns to the shrine where a goat or chicken is sacrificed and the blood allowed to drip into the stone bowl that is situated behind the devliya. The blood and later the meat, after it has been cooked, are mixed with grains and eaten as Prasad.

Nowhere in the literature is Bhomiya worship described in the way my informants did to me. After some discussion with other villagers, it became clear that he was using the term Bhomiya to refer to the particular Jogi. Other informants explained that he probably used Bhomiya to show that the site is active with the power left by that Jogi. Kumbhar informants have explained that the power of a Bhomiya can be great and that it has to be pacified through daily offerings. However, informants added that these are household Bhomiyas and that it is only the deity Bhairon that can truly calm the influences of a Bhomiya.

In comparing the archaeological sites of other Jogi burial places in India, the site in Mudharamsar is of a similar assemblage to one in Jharkhand. In general, the burial place of a Jogi is marked by seven stones representing the different descendents of the main sectarian ancestor and each stone represents a seat or *gaddi* (cf. Peabody's 2003: 57-58 similar description of Vallabhacharya followers in Kota, Rajasthan). Mohan Das described the shrine in Mudharamsar in the following way. The first seat is for the saint, the second for Joginis, the third is for the *Sakhya* or witness, the fourth for *Bīr*. *Bīr* comes from the Sanskrit noun *vīra*, a brave, eminent man, hero or chief, or one who possess *vīrya* (see Coccari 1989:15). The fifth

stone is for the *Dhandari* or the cook of Goraknath, the sixth for Goraknath and the seventh for *Neka* or ant.

The penultimate burial rites of a Jogi are performed on the twelfth day after death, before sunrise. Informants have said that both the Bhomiya ritual and the mortuary rituals for a Jogi are to be carried out at four in the morning. According to some informants, the penultimate mortuary ritual performed for a Jogi involves the worship of two other deities, Mari Mai and Bahram Deo. Mari Mai is the Hindu Goddess of the plague and her name literally means “the mother of death”; she is a highly popular village deity throughout north India and has particular significance in Bikaner.

The plague was fairly severe in Bikaner and the district wide protector deity, Karni Mata, a confidant and oracle to Bikaner’s founder, Maharaja Rao Bika (Singh 1988), drew the plague-ridden rats away from inhabited areas to Deshnoke. Subsequently, rats occupy her temple and are said to be endowed with her holy essence. There are several references to Bahram Deo in historical accounts of 12th Century Malwar. For example, Elliott (2000) found accounts suggesting he was royalty from present day Pakistan who travelled to Malwar and saved the capital city, Ujjain, from a terrorising elephant. He was later divinised for this protective act. All of these deities share the theme of protecting boundaries and specific areas and consequently all are regarded as comparable to Bhumiya.

According to informants in the village, after a year and at every Sivratri, the *paduka* or footprint of the deceased is meant to be worshipped. An all night vigil, known by my informants as a *bharad*³³, which refers to a type of spiritual dance in honour of Bhairon, is performed. Such performances are also connected to Davre Jogis who are a branch of the Kanphata lineage, which according to Briggs (1938) shares an association with the Kunda *Panth*. This dance is performed in conjunction with the beating of drums for Bhairon and the Devi. In the dawn, before four in the morning, fish or meat is distributed. Informants have said that this is the ritual for the famous Jogi who was buried in the village after dying an untimely death protecting the boundary, and this is the Bhomiya. The emphasis that informants place on the protective

³³ Bharad is also the term used to describe an imposition or limitation on achieving *Moksha*. Interestingly, it is also a quality said to be found among Paliwals who, it is claimed, are neither fully Brahmin nor Rajput but straddle somewhere in between.

properties of Bhomiya is similar to the Banares *Bir* Babas studied by Diane Coccari. Her informants likewise stressed that the *Bir* were heroic martyrs who sacrificed their lives in defence of family, friends, caste group, village or religion. Moreover, some of her informants similarly considered *Birs* to be deceased Sadhus or Jogis and the shrines of these ascetics are sites of their lingering presence and power (1986:18-20).

There are clear thematic links between Ramdev, the *Panth* and Bhomiya. This conflation of identities is not uncommon, and is partly understandable in a context where hero legends and the functional similarities of their cults abound. For example, Hildebeitel (2001: 95) shows how the Rajasthani historical epic of Pabuji appears to have developed out of the tradition of honouring the powerful spirits of the dead. In particular, this epic draws on the Rajasthani tradition connected with Bhomiya. He suggests that the story of Pabuji is just another example of Bhomiya worship. Recounting Smith's informant's story of Pabuji, Hildebeitel shows how many historical epics also show a clear hierarchy of divinised beings. According to Smith's Bhopa informant, as the epic of Pabuji unfolds, nearing the end when Pabuji marries Gogo, the Bhomiya is placed toward the back of the deities in the divine processions, indicating its low status. However, Smith reinterpreting his informants' statement in a footnote claims that Bhomiya is actually the greatest of the gods and is situated above all the others. For example, "little gods of the previous age (Pabuji, Ramdev), are behind the "greater gods of the previous age (Rama, Krishna etc.)"; above them are "the greater gods themselves (Visnu, Shiva and the Goddess)", and above them "exists a being God to whom Parbu refers indiscriminately as *bhagavan*, the connotations of which are, respectively, Vaishnava, Shaiva and Islamic" (Smith: 95-96), and represent a single deity from which all others originate. This is similar to Fuller's findings, that in the final analysis, most Hindus agree that there is a single God (Fuller 1992). Thus for many in the village Bhomiya is viewed as the one god that encompasses all others.

What is particularly relevant is that two of the traditions (Bhomiya and Kunda Panth) are in decline and one has undergone considerable Sanskritisation and Rajputisation. What is more, in people's popular imagination there exist evaluations of purity and status between them, even though, once upon a time, they were all linked as part of a general village religiosity. What this highlights is the overall decline in collective village worship. This decline is a response to

changes in the social structure of the village where the ritually 'superior' castes have lost their power and instead have been replaced by a family of low caste but highly Sanskritised and Rajputised Meghvals.

Summary

In this summary I would like to discuss some of the central themes of this chapter in more detail. The main point of this chapter has been to highlight the Sanskritisation and Rajputisation of the Meghval, as well as explain how it fits into other forms of religiosity in the village, and how these have changed over time. It is, however, Sanskritisation and Rajputisation that I would like to focus my discussion on here.

Sanskritisation implies that a lower caste has chosen to adopt the behaviours of a higher caste so as to better their position (Srinivas 1971 [1966]). Sanskritisation, for Srinivas, however, only leads to *positional changes* in the system and does not lead to *structural changes*. That is because a caste moves up above its neighbours and another comes down, but all this takes place within a fairly stable hierarchical order. The system itself, therefore, does not change (1971: 7). Whilst this is largely the case in Mudharamsar, the way Sanskritisation works suggest that these positional changes have important implications for different groups within the caste involved. It is for example, the more well off Meghvals that have adopted aspects of both the Rajputised or as Pocock (1955: 71-72) coined it, Kshatriya model and the Sanskritised or Brahminical model.

For many of the powerful and politically motivated Meghvals of today, their change in occupation and ritual status is no longer a conscious move to reject their caste identity but a way to assert their 'true' identity as Ramdev bhakts. By the same token, however, they are the dominant caste in Mudharamsar and therefore their political power equally lends itself to the adoption of Kshatriya, or in the case of Rajasthan, Rajput traits. Consequently, there are two seemingly contradictory sets of factors utilised by the Meghval as part of their upward mobility: first, a kingly model, and second, a ritual Bhakti model. Whilst Srinivas and Pocock noted that

the two models shared similarities, viewing both separately highlights the divisions within the caste and the orientation of particular identities for the purposes of upward mobility.

The Meghval lineage in the village is eloquent in explaining the origins of their caste abolitionist discourses in the devotional teachings of Ramdev. These are supported by the early attempts at establishing the Meghval caste in opposition to the Brahminical order. Such caste reformist movements were fairly common during the middle of the nineteenth century when rights in property were established and colonial laws were imposed. The historical context was one of building the modern Indian state. As Hardiman (2007: 74-75) highlights, out of this state building emerged such low caste reformers intent on forging a cultural heritage which they believed would offer a more respected place in the new society. However, by the end of the nineteenth century the upper castes had already accepted the Meghval as Hindu and included their deities and belief systems as part of Hinduism. As a result of this appropriation, there have been many disputes amongst the Meghval concerning their identity and how to resist or gain prestige from their accommodation into the hierarchical Hindu order.

As such, the more politically astute among them are, of course, not without their own interests. And what followed is not just an internal Sanskritic Rajputisation of the Meghval caste but a process mirrored in the spread of worship amongst high castes of their main deity, Ramdev. Whilst many conflicts have arisen, and Meghvals and Kamads have fought to maintain their rights over the deity, it is the Rajputs that benefit most from the main Ramdev temple coffers. As a result of these public disagreements the Meghval shot into the public domain as the first followers of this deity. The historical records, helped along by radical dalit writers such as Swami Gokuldas (1950, 1982.), placed the worship of Ramdev by Meghvals firmly on centre stage as an anti-caste Bhakti tradition. Their Bhakti status is on the one hand a revolutionary negation of Hinduism and caste, but on the other reinforces their new found status within the Hindu hierarchical order. This is because the Rajputisation and Sanskritisation of Ramdev rose exponentially with the rise in Ramdev's anti-caste persona. As a result the better off Meghvals have the opportunity to choose which aspect of their saint's identity is most conducive to their advancement. In doing so, the caste council in the 1950s made the choice to combine Sanskritic elements with Rajput styles of kinship and worship. By combining these elements the Meghval

were also to a certain extent replicating the evaluative framework of the traditional caste system among themselves (cf. Moffatt 1979). Like Rajputs the emphasis on Gotr and private worship has increased amongst the Meghval.

What is clear in Mudharamsar, however, is that not all Meghvals have this option available to them. It takes a considerable amount of social capital to make their identity discourse function effectively in the public domain, particularly when most Meghvals are still poor, landless, and subject to social exclusion. Dumont (1974: 244 and 283) in a discussion of Srinivas's theory of Sanskritisation, pointed out that low castes who reform their way of life can hardly hope to enhance their status through such means alone. As Hardiman (2007) suggests, higher castes have to be forced through political action to concede such a status. As a result there tends to be a correlation between the political power held by a community and its position in the caste hierarchy (2007: 74). In Mudharamsar, it is mainly because the Meghval lineage also has political and economic power in the village that they are able to maintain their status. The less powerful working class Meghval, on the other hand, are unable to claim the same status as their powerful caste mates.

For example, in this chapter religion and ritual origins are one way for the Meghval lineage in their rural setting to regularly and visibly assert their status so that their new identity can be firmly imbedded in the minds of other villagers. For example, regardless of the objections from high castes, the wealthy Meghvals use the main temple, whilst their less wealthy caste-mates will not. The economic and political security of the Meghvals thus provides them the power and status to publicly reject the religiously sanctioned rules of the hierarchy because they are, in their own discourse, equal to them.

As such, these Meghvals have created a new moral order that they are successfully able to maintain in the village. However, this new moral order utilises the values of a range of groups that also includes the regionally dominant ruling class, who in the past would have been the actual local exploiters of the Meghval. The less powerful Meghval, however, do not have the political and social resources to follow suit, and consequently rely on the wealthier Meghvals for economic and political support. As such, maintaining the moral order politically also depends on the synthesis of the anti-caste discourse surrounding Ramdev. It is, after all, this

equality discourse that enables them to galvanise political support from the less wealthy Meghvals. The fact that the dominant Meghval lineage combines both Rajput and Sanskritic elements as part of their upward mobility points to the economic gains they have made, and in turn the unequal distribution of power within the caste.

Consequently, there is a central issue that has not been fully discussed in this thesis and that is the role of power in situating minority identity and upward mobility. What follows this is the conclusion to the thesis. However, rather than replay the 'events' contained so far, I want to draw out the key themes of the thesis by placing them within a wider discussion of power. This will provide a more cogent framework for concluding the contemporary experience of social change in Mudharamsar.

Conclusion: Class, Caste and Religion: A Question of Power, Status and Economic Security

The Meghvals descended from Mungla Ram have been the central characters in this thesis. Their social organisation, status, and position are unique and this has caused considerable rifts between them and other castes in the village. The Meghvals' position questioned the supremacy of the 'traditional' caste hierarchy, and queried the authority and legitimacy of high castes. The unusual status of this family has also highlighted the divisions within the Meghval caste itself which was made even more glaring by the mine closures. Taken together these divisions, and the economic context in which my fieldwork was carried out, threw into the foreground questions concerning the substantialisation of caste, the role of class, and the function of religion in producing conditions for economic security and social mobility.

Most of the former high caste rulers had long since left the village. The power vacuum caused by their departure, coupled with the mine closures, created a space wherein individuals, families, and communities had to compete more fiercely for the few jobs that remained. This led many to construct for themselves alternative statuses and identities as a way to cope with the altered village organisation. In exploring the status and identity constructions, the thesis was concerned to describe this process in the context of economic uncertainty. As such, my aim was to illustrate the various ways different people looked at their village and evaluated its new social organisation.

In the chapters of this thesis I have discussed four important aspects of social organisation in Mudharamsar: these are caste, class, politics and religion. Whilst some attempt has been made to treat each aspect separately, it has also been made clear that they are closely interwoven for the people involved. Each aspect of caste, class, politics and religion involve sets of "ideas and interests" that define the status, identity and interaction between groups, families and individuals. However, what is also apparent in the data is that it is very difficult to separate the two, ideas and interests, from or in everyday decision making and social relations,

particularly when the everyday life of many villagers had changed so dramatically. The mine closures left many villagers unemployed and in their search for economic security informants were forced to reassess their options. In doing so, many considered not only their class position and interests, but also what initiatives they could construct to enable them to gain security in the turbulent time. Moreover, all this was taking place in a context where the village elites were low caste.

The relative success or failure of the choices people made was largely dependent on their ability to form alternative social relations in order to cope with the changed social structure of the village. This ability to make and sustain new social relations, or to strengthen old ones, was also dependent for many villagers on their ability to construct, or utilise, existing social and economic capital. This ability to mobilise capital was characterised by the various evaluations people had of the social, historical, and religious world they inhabited. How effective those evaluations were for creating new social relations very much depended on the existing power relations in the village. Therefore as part of concluding the thesis, I would like to discuss the role of power. I would specifically like to look at how it helps us to understand the ways informants used social and economic capital to secure class, caste, and religious status and identity in a time of economic uncertainty. It is not however, my intention here to discuss power in all its various forms; rather my concern is to conclude the thesis by examining the relationship between power, status, security and change for the inhabitants of Mudharamsar.

Power, History and Social Change

Miller (1975) in his conclusion to *“From Hierarchy to Stratification”* writes: “Interests constantly involve evaluation, which results in conflict, creating pressure for change” (1975: 208). Power in this context is the ability to deal with change and conversely it is the inability to apply or respond to change that characterised powerlessness in the village. I largely follow the meaning Max Weber (cit. do. 1948:180) gave to power. “In general, we understand by power

the chance of a man or of a number of men to realise their own will in a communal action even against the resistance of others who are participating in the action". Thus power rests in the realisation and evaluation of the interests underlying a specific course of communal action.

The way in which power is distributed leads to divisions in the village into different groups: those with more power and those with less power. Within the first there are further subdivisions according to the sources from which power is derived. For example, there are people whose power was based upon ownership of land, whether they were a dominant caste, such as the Meghvals and Kumbhars, whether they wielded political power, or among those who controlled access to religious sites and associated rituals, such as the Sadh. However, power can also be found in less likely places, such as in the benefits to be gained from utilising small scale networks of kin or in leading particular family rituals in the home. It is, of course, amongst those who already have some power that are the most able to use it. In addition, mobilising capital, however far reaching or immediate, similarly required my informants to evaluate their practices and actions in the social world, and for the individual or group to recognise their position within that action. What is more, this process of gaining power by mobilising capital was strongly highlighted by the rise in unemployment which ultimately led to an accelerated re-evaluation of the existing social relations for everyone in the village.

We have seen many different examples of how individuals and groups have created ideas and interests out of particular aspects of social life. For example, we have seen the recognition of shared anti-caste interests and social mobility in the mobilisation of the Meghvals, and the choices to unite amongst the labour class in the face of the mine closures. However, what we have also seen is how inconsistent these constructions are, as they too depend on a certain degree of capital. As such, they also led, in particular contexts, to a form of powerlessness where the more individual pursuit of economic security governed the identity choices and evaluations people made. In the case of the labour class, the alternative evaluations made by the Meghval ultimately broke down the solidarities of class in favour of caste and kinship, as it also did for the Dholi. What is more, this process of rupture and unity created by economic uncertainty was observed in a variety of different social relations in the village. For

example, it was also articulated in the different ideas and interests that shaped the economic, political, and socio-religious differentiations within the Meghval caste itself. We saw how the powerful Meghval altered their ideas about Ramdev in order to Sanskritise and raise their status further, and we saw how the poorer Meghvals recognised their economic disadvantage which led them to view the wealthy amongst them as 'different' sorts of Meghval.

However, just as some will view a context and associated social relations as disempowering others will regard them as empowering; such was the case amongst Meghvals that chose not to Sanskritise. Couched in the various discourses outlined in this thesis, such as those of kinship amongst kin workers in the fields or traditional roles amongst the less numerically dominant Dholi, or the political discourses of Meghval landlords, informants regain power by recognising the relationship between their ideas, interests and the particular context they find themselves in. For example, whether it was employment and status, political support from employees, or cheap labour in the fields, all those listed above were able to make choices that not only provided economic security, but also offered some social or symbolic capital into the bargain.

In order to cement their choices in particular social relationships, and in turn mobilise the social and symbolic capital contained in them, informants used different ideas of history to define and give meaning to the choices they made. All the cases described in this thesis involved recognising normative discourses and either consciously reconstructing social relations to fit them or conversely de-constructing them to actively break and distance those involved from their constraints. For example, the Dholi viewed their exchange of traditional services in the village as representing past relations and it was in relying on a normative ideal of caste that enabled them to essentialise, and embed their practices in some notion of an authentic history. To this end, they chose very carefully who in the village they wished to offer their services to and only did so to intermediate castes such as the Sadh, Nai, Paliwal and Kumbhar. In the past however, the Dholi would have been indiscriminate in to whom they played their drums. The choices they made in the present instead linked their ideas of the past with their interests of today, and in doing so empowered them to gain some form of status and economic security.

In some respects the actions of the Dholi conformed to the relations between untouchables that Moffatt (1979) highlighted. Moffatt (1979: 3) suggested that untouchables reproduce the dominant caste hierarchy among themselves. In choosing which castes to exchange their services with, the Dholi made a clear statement about the value they placed on particular caste relations: however, instead of simply replicating their subordination in the caste hierarchy, the Dholi had constructed alternative ideas about what their position in the caste hierarchy was. Moreover, the success of the Dholi, Kumbhar, Nai and Sadh in creating a functioning set of exchanges was because they relied on the others involved to likewise re-evaluate their caste position and the rules of caste interaction. In the past, however, a majority of the castes exchanging services today would have in fact provided services for the entire village and not just for a restricted few (c.f. Fuller 1989). What is more, some such as the Dholi would have actually been excluded all together from any restricted exchanges in the past.

Fuller (1989) raises the important point that the *Jajmani* system of exchange has often been over emphasised in the ethnographic literature of India. By offering detailed ethnographic examples of village exchanges across India, he instead proposes that it is incorrect to assume there is a uniform village exchange system in either informants' conceptions or in empirical fact (1989: 39-40). The exchange relations created by my informants, were likewise not particularly systematic, but rather were influenced by other economic relations that involved cash exchanges, as well as an attempt to re-construct normative caste discourses.

The exchange of traditional services in Mudharamsar was instead constructed around an ideological conception of caste. However, the idea of caste that formed the basis of their exchange existed in discourse only and not in the actual relations observed. Therefore the system they had in fact created bore little resemblance to any idealised purity-based system of exchange they intended to reproduce. In re-positioning themselves to fit an ideal model, the castes involved in fact rejected the traditional ranking of their castes. This was because they were interested in the ideas of obligation, duty and honour that were part of conceived ideas about exchange relations in the past. In doing so, they attempted to re-create the long term reciprocity found in restricted systems of exchange.

Thus, the actors involved were primarily interested in reproducing the ideal benefit or power of the system, economic stability, and not its structural or hierarchical components. This was because the patrons in the exchange were Kumbhar an ex-untouchable potter caste. That is not to say that the hierarchical components had no value what so ever. It was the discourse that surrounded the exchange that contained the hierarchical elements. For example, the Dholi saw their exchange relations as a form of social mobility that likened them to higher castes. For them, the restricted exchange of their traditional services was a form of Sanskritisation that enabled them to raise their status and increase their economic security, as they were now tied to the fate of wealthier castes like the Kumbhar. It does well to remember that Sanskritisation is an established model of social mobility amongst low castes across India and most Dholi informants did claim their exchange relations raised their ritual status.

The actions of the Dholi are in fact closer to those observed by Deliege (1992:156). In reassessing Moffatt's (1979) argument, Deliege highlighted that there may not, in fact, be a link between replicating caste practices and conforming to the dominant caste hierarchy as Moffatt proposed. Instead, Deliege suggested that any link there may be between what he termed the 'replication and consensus' model of Moffatt is likely to be weak. He emphasised that not only do untouchables not accept their position within the caste system, but any link there may be between replicating caste relations, and therefore reinforcing the caste hierarchy, is more likely to be in response to the power of high castes.

In Mudharamsar, the Dholi in particular compared themselves to the Meghval and highlighted their close relationship with higher castes as a defining difference between them. Whilst the few remaining high castes were in actual fact pretty powerless in everyday life, castes like the Paliwal did still hold a symbolic power as the descendents of the former founders and rulers of the village. Similarly, the Sadh had taken over the main temple and consequently had come to form a ritual elite, even though members of the Meghval lineage took very little notice of them. Likewise, the Brahmin priest although inactive in village matters was well connected to other villages in the area.

What is significant in the relationship the Dholi had with these groups was the symbolic capital the high castes continued to hold in the normative caste hierarchy. Consequently, by

aligning themselves with higher caste as a form of opposition to the Meghval lineage, the Dholi were in fact mobilising that capital to reject the Meghval elite and construct a position of power for themselves. The main obstacle to their power was of course that no one else recognised it. Consequently, although they had constructed an ideological position that placed them above the Meghval, and therefore also above the traditional status they originally held in the caste system, they had no power to implement it. Therefore, one has to ask if recognising one's will in a communal action constitutes power, as Weber proposed, what happens if no one else participating in that action supports your will?

The rejection of the Meghvals, however, did not necessarily mean the Dholi wished for a high caste ruling elite to replace them. On the contrary, the Dholi extended their exchange relationships to include the Kumbhar, the Meghvals largest ex-untouchable rivals. Similar to the Meghvals, the Kumbhar family with which the Dholi engaged had also risen to occupy a prominent position in the village. However, unlike the Meghval the position of the Kumbhar was slightly more ambiguous in the traditional caste hierarchy. This ambiguity, coupled with their economic and political power, was clearly enough for the Dholi and the higher castes to be willing to form an exchange with them. The new social relations constructed by the Dholi were a direct response to the power of the Meghval lineage and the mine closures that led many to lose their jobs. As a way to supplement their lost incomes the Dholi not only returned to their traditional occupation and sought refuge in a restricted system of exchange, they were also being employed by the Kumbhar as agricultural labourers; even though they valued their traditional occupations above the cash in hand work in the fields. Whilst the Meghvals did recruit from a range of castes, their preference was for kin labourers and this resulted in the exclusion of the Dholi. Being aware of this perhaps, the Kumbhar who owned fewer fields than the Meghvals, but who had an interest in establishing a cheap yet 'dedicated' labour force, employed the Dholi as a way to secure further political support in the village.

It is not however, just the untouchables who reconstruct the past to make present practices conform to particular understandings of the caste hierarchy. Through designating reserved pathways through the village for their castes, higher castes such as the Paliwal, Brahmin, and Sadh were in fact replicating the more strict physical structure of villages

observed in some areas of South India. Moreover, like the Dholi, the development of these new restrictions was also in response to the shift in power to the Meghvals. High castes such as the Brahmin were outspoken about the current descendents of Rupa Ram and used their high position in the caste hierarchy as a basis for their condescension. However, because high castes no longer controlled the economic, political or even ritual life of the village the creation of physical restrictions was the only action available to them. By utilising the symbolic capital of their traditional high ranking caste status, high castes attempted to generate a change in the social order of village life by imposing physical restrictions on the area of the village occupied by the Meghval lineage, even though no one else adhered to them. As such, both the high and low castes utilise their perceptions of the past to create social change in the present. This was successful, particularly for the Dholi and Kumbhar, in so far as it benefited them financially during the mine closures.

In Mudharamsar the low castes did not concede their status, but rather negotiated a better position for themselves within the broader parameters, acceptable to those involved, of the caste system. Consequently, the re-traditionalised exchange relations that took place were much flatter in appearance than the hierarchical *Jajmani* relations deemed to exist in the past. The power generated from the contemporary exchange was possible because it was based on the ideas of obligation, honour, and duty that bound the actors together and enabled each party to realise their particular interests. For example, it enabled the Dholi to establish secure work and raise their status, the Kumbhar to gain a committed labour force and even political support, and the higher castes to feel useful and important again. As such, it was a clash of particular ideas of the past with the interests of the present, or future, that had enabled a thoroughly modern and new system of exchange to be generated (c.f. Engels 1968: 338-354, [1875-76]).

One of the main criticisms of Weber's definition of power has been his avoidance of specifying the origin or basis of power. This is partly because power may rest, as Weber argued, in the control over a very wide range of resources, both material and immaterial. Power, according to Weber, cannot be defined by formal criteria alone and frequent shifts in the power structure give to it a much more fluid character than that of caste or class. He suggested that some elements of the power structure cannot be seen as hierarchical at all such as the conflicts

between two rival parties or divisions amongst the elite. Power, for Weber, creates a hierarchy which is different from the hierarchies of class and caste. However, in Mudhamsar power nonetheless relied on existing systems of stratification in so far as such systems were institutionalised ideas and interests. This was because power was constituted from social action and therefore depended on the ideas people had of the social world, even if those evaluations were ideal systems.

Class, Caste, Status and Power

For Marx and Engels, of course, the interests that underpin different forms of social interaction are largely economic and the dialectic, brought about by contradictions in the economic structure of society, is a key component of power for them. Poulantzas (1973), for example, defined power as the capacity of one class to realise its interests in opposition to other classes. In this perspective power has the following characteristics; power cannot be separated from economic and class relations, power involves class struggle and not simply conflicts between individuals, and the analysis of power cannot be undertaken without some characterisation of the mode of production.

In Mudhamsar there are three overlapping modes of production. The idea of multiple modes of production in any given national or local context put forward by anthropologists such as Ward 1972, Sahlins 1972, 1976, Godelier 1977, Firth 1979, Copper 1984, Terray 1984, came under considerable criticism by anthropologists such as Marcus and Fischer (1986) in the 1980s and 1990s. Whilst I do not wish to replicate that debate here, I do want to tentatively explore how the notion of distinct combinations of forces and relations of production can be useful for understanding how social relations work empirically. It can specifically help us to understand the relationship between different classes and how those relations constitute modes of production.

Terray (1984: 87) suggests, a mode of production contains classes' particular to it. Therefore understanding the modes of production in Mudharamsar can in fact help us to further define the different types of social relations and classes observed in the village. Social relations in terms of production in Mudharamsar were largely relative to the ideas and interests of the groups or classes involved. The relations people had defined sets of productive processes and people were able to distance themselves from the productive relations of another mode through the ideas and evaluations they attached to it. For example, in Mudharamsar, agriculture and peasant production existed alongside industrial production, and both functioned alongside modes, such as kinship and the reinvented '*Jajmani*' style of production and exchange. We have seen how classes of actors moved between these distinct spheres of production during economic crisis. In addition, each mode contained different social relations that were so distinct as to enable actors to occupy different class or status positions within any given mode of production.

Terray (1984: 88) lists four possible classes that are constructed from Lenin's original definition of the position of a class: that the position of a class be understood by its relationship to the means of production. Briefly, the four classes are 1, producers disposing of the means of production (subsistent farmers, petty commodity production); 2, producers separated from the means of production (slave, serf, worker); 3, non-producers disposing of the means of production (slave owner, landlord, capitalist); and 4, non-producers separated from the means of production (classes and categories said to be unproductive). We can see such classes in the modes of production in Mudharamsar and how they overlap and breakdown when a particular mode is either replaced or subordinated by another.

For example, mining and agriculture were discussed in the thesis as two important areas of economic life. However, the mine closures had the effect of elevating agriculture to the primary source of employment. Observing the class antagonisms and power dynamics in mining and agriculture were in a majority of contexts fairly straightforward. For example, in the mines we saw antagonistic relations between mine owners, or capitalists, structural employees that had more control over the means of production, and daily wage manual workers that were separated from the means of production. In addition, these three classes were further defined by a lack of

commensality and the existence of a class consciousness. The labour class recognised themselves in opposition to structural workers because of the conditions of their labour and the unequal distribution of economic security they experienced.

It was, however, only in the context of the mine closures that this class became, as Marx proposed “a class for itself”. As such, this group of workers developed a more subjective class consciousness of the kind discussed by E. P. Thompson (1963) that enabled them to organise class action against the mine closures. However, class relations in this sphere of economic life were also greatly complicated by the closure of the mines and the resources people used to cope with this change resulted in a contextual shift in the autonomy of not only the industrial mode of production, but also in the class relations contained within it. We saw, for example, how the labour class had to seek alternative means of sustaining themselves and their families. The obvious choice for most people was to find employment in agriculture; but the way relations were organised in the largest agricultural sites, those owned by the Meghval, were such that they excluded certain workers.

Whilst some class relations in agriculture were the same, there were other classes that were organised by different criteria to that of the mines and thus tell us something distinct about the mode of production agricultural work falls under. For example, there were the daily wage, anonymous labourers that were separated from the means of production, there were the subsistence tenant producers disposing of the means of production, and there were large landlords (capitalists) who controlled the means of production. However, there was an additional class of producers that were not only separated from the means of production, but also had some share in it. These were the kin workers related to the Meghval landlords who were paid both in cash and in a share of the crops. Where once these workers shared a labour class identity with other castes in the mines, in agriculture they became the most favoured employees. As such, the value of kin labour was deemed to be greater than the value of labour from other castes. This unequal labour value was based on an exchange of long term or delayed reciprocity on the one hand, as well as a pragmatic analysis made by Meghval landlords of the quality of labour and therefore the end value of the crops at the corn exchange.

The choice to utilise kinship links to find work in the fields distanced the Meghval from their labour class identity and, although they occupied poorly paid positions in agriculture, those in the labour class regarded those Meghvals, who then chose to work for their wealthy relatives, as different. In this respect, class consciousness was entirely based on one's position as a daily wage manual worker and did not translate to other similarly low status economic positions. The specificity of this evaluation had the effect of placing the kin workers in a different class altogether. A class 'in itself' that was characterised by sets of ideas concerning obligation, duty and honour.

This shift from labour class identity to another class position was also mirrored amongst the Dholi. The Dholi workers had once occupied a labour class identity, but in choosing to return to their traditional occupations and re-traditionalise their exchange relations moved into a different class status position that elevated them above the labour class. However, because the choices of the Dholi were in response to the exclusivity of the Meghval lineage, and kin labour relations, they occupied a slightly different class to that of Meghval kin workers, even though the lineage mode of production was the same. This was because, although their relationship in the traditional exchange was based on reciprocity similar to the kinship relations of Meghval workers, they had no property or ownership rights other than over their drums, whereas the Meghval kin workers, although of slightly different lineages to the powerful family, could at some point be in line to inherit the property of the Meghvals. As such, the ability of the Meghval labourers to access such a long term, secure, and economically productive relationship, in fact, elevated them above the Dholi in terms of economic stability.

So what of the elite class in the lineage mode of production? Amongst the village elites, class solidarity was virtually nonexistent. Marx himself pointed out that there is a narrower definition of class where ownership or non-ownership of the means of production does not necessarily constitute the basis of a class. "In so far as there is merely a local interconnection among these small-holding peasants, and the identity of their interests begets no community, no national bond, and no political organisation among them, they do not form a class" (1968: 171 [1852]). As I discussed in the thesis, the village elites are made up of Meghval and Kumbhar

families who share little else but economic and political power and these two elements are derived from different sources. As discussed, politically the Meghval were Congress supporters, whilst the Kumbhar were BJP; the Meghval derived their incomes from government jobs and agriculture, whilst the Kumbhar gained theirs from private commercial endeavours in nearby towns, government jobs and, to a lesser extent, agriculture.

The village elites' community identity instead originated in their respective castes and consequently worked to actually fragment any class solidarity they may have had. The two elite families thus saw their caste identity, Meghval and Kumbhar, as most relevant, even though both did not accept their traditional caste ranking. What was significant, however, was that their newfound status was only made possible by their equal position in the wider village class hierarchy. For example, it was their shared position as government workers and village landowners that gave them their economic stability and successful social mobility.

For example, their class background also enabled them to enter politics, become successful political leaders in the village and caste activists, even though they had very different political ideas about their social mobility and change. However, their ideas about how to maintain their position were interwoven with ideas and interests concerning caste and social mobility. For example, both sought to use caste as a way to not only gain status, but to also galvanise political support. Consequently, the lack of class consciousness for my informants was largely determined by their status choices within the caste hierarchy. As such, the divisive use of caste for the purposes of social mobility was in this instance antithetical to class consciousness.

As such, the elites formed a "class in itself" in that they shared the position of the ruling elite and both controlled the lineage mode of production. The main difference between them was that the Meghvals owned more land and consequently had control over a greater amount of people in the village, whereas the Kumbhar, through the exchange of village services, had control over the old elites of the village. However, as mentioned, because the Meghval had stronger political connections, the fact the Kumbhar were closer to the few remaining high castes, had little impact on their lives. Both the Meghval and Kumbhar therefore, relied on their

position in the lineage mode of production for agricultural labour as well as their political support in the village; they just gained this through slightly different means.

As such, the lineage mode of production not only contained the widest variety of actors in the village, it also, unsurprisingly, came to subordinate the industrial mode of production during the mine closures, and elevate the agricultural mode. This was because the agricultural mode operated partly as a “slave mode”. It was “determinant” in that it required a constant source of labour to be at its disposal, yet it also had a definite cycle of production with peaks and troughs in the demand for labour. Consequently, the lineage mode not only provided that extra labour, it also ensured the commitment of the workers to be available as and when landlords dictated. This was a position that could be easily maintained in a context when the rival slave mode of production, mining, had been shut down. Thus part of the function of the exchange in traditional services could be understood as the lineage mode reproducing a flexible labour force for the purposes of agriculture.

Shifting Contexts: Caste, Class and Religion

The lineage mode of production relies on caste and kinship and the ideas of status, honour and obligation that come with it. Status, honour and styles of life in North Indian society are closely tied to ritual values and those that are highly esteemed are generally linked to a large number of ritual restrictions. Some, such as the Meghval, attempted to improve their status honour and styles of life by such processes as Sanskritisation. However, it was largely their political and economic power that enabled them to ignore many of the traditional sanctions placed on the movements and interactions of low castes, such as accessing the inner chamber of the main temple. This was because the Meghval controlled a major source of employment and restricted whom they chose to employ. It was because they controlled a large portion of the village that they were able to adopt the practices of higher castes whilst also ignoring the protests made by

such castes to their actions. As such, the Meghval lineage was able to construct new status honour for themselves that was sustainable through their control of work in the village.

Set in motion by the caste council's mobilisation efforts of the 1950s, the Meghval lineage had essentialised aspects of their caste identity and enforced new ritual and social restrictions such as wearing the thread of the twice born, adopting vegetarianism, teetotalism, and employing more restrictive kinship rules. Consequently, the Meghval lineage were experts in the upward mobility strategies of their forefathers and maintained the constructed ideas of the past so as to fit with the social mobility they enjoyed in the present. And, because their position as elite had become so stable they no longer had to fear high caste reprisals.

Restrictive styles of life, however, were not adopted uniformly by the entire Meghval caste. In fact, many poorer Meghvals actively held on to many of their low caste practices. The unequal adoption of such restrictions by different classes within the Meghval caste further expressed the power relations between them. This, however, led different classes within the Meghval caste to be seen as different sorts of Meghval, as Sanskritisation was accompanied by economic and political status. As such, the social representation of these differences in part replicated the ideas of caste and class that were found in wider village life. However, because none of the classes within the Meghval caste accepted the original low status of their caste the replication that occurred was only ideological as neither practiced avoidance of the other. Rather, this communal rejection of their traditional caste ranking was an important force for unity in the caste. Their rejection of caste, however, paradoxically enabled the Meghval to join together as a substantialised block to support the continued rein of a Meghval political leader, yet in doing so actually maintained the coherence of the caste.

The levelling of the economic and social differences between classes of Meghvals in the context of political representation is largely achieved through religious and political discourse. However, in everyday life they share very little other than caste name. In this way, the Meghval in certain contexts substantialised themselves as a united caste however; in other contexts this unity was fragmented. The fragmentation represented the different and unequal interests of those classes within the Meghval caste discussed above.

However, the lower class Meghval became united with their wealthier caste mates under two distinct conditions. Firstly, they came together under a relational world view that was based on a shared socio-political history, and secondly, under a non-relational or more individualistic world view that contained more pragmatic concerns of long term reciprocity, employment and economic security. However, achieving this unity was only possible through the use of symbolic power. This symbolic power incorporated a discourse of shared heritage and relatedness. The politically active Meghvals used political symbols of the inequality experienced in the past, coupled with a language of paternal reciprocity to put forward their interests. What is more, these two parts of the discourse were perfectly encapsulated by the saint of the Meghval, Ramdev.

Untouchability and religion as central forces for unity were also featured in the Meghval Caste Constitution and they were the only two elements of the constitution that were adhered to by all Meghvals in the village irrespective of class. The first element was recognised through the prohibition of their traditional occupation of removing dead animals and the second, was the central figure of Ramdev in their religious pantheon. The history of Ramdev's inclination toward lower castes lent himself as the perfect representative of caste abolition and it was on this issue that the Meghval united. The politically active members of the Meghval lineage situated their Sanskritisation within a Bhakti tradition where Ramdev was the central deity. In doing so, actors such as Ramdial were able to maintain their authenticity and legitimacy as a sound political leader by emphasising his religious devotion. For many Meghvals he represented the ideal candidate who would represent their needs politically and whose family would also provide for them economically by employing them in their fields.

Power, then, also has a positive capacity for achieving communal ends. As Talcott Parsons (1967: 57-65) argued power was analogous to money in the economy as a generalised capacity to secure the common goals of a social system. The function of power, for Parsons, was to facilitate the mobilisation of instrumental resources such as money and services. This mobilisation is seen as occurring through the promotion of binding obligations, which is symbolised by the willingness of those with power to resort to negative sanctions. Such

sanctions are also written into the Meghval caste constitution and any Meghval engaged in their traditional occupation, for example, was subject to a fine.

The symbolic world of religion constructed by the wealthier in their midst was not consistently recognised by the poorer Meghvals. Poorer Meghvals, as well as wealthy Meghval women, focused more on the traditional version of Ramdev and his low caste female confidante, Dali Bai, rather than the Rajputised version popular with the better off. This was because the Dali Bai version of Ramdev was closer to the ideals of caste abolition than the Meghval, and particularly the poorer Meghval, quite understandably, hold so dear. Moreover, she also represented a strong female role model for Meghval women who tended to lead rituals in the home. Moreover, as whilst the members of the Meghval lineage ignored high caste restrictions, the poorer less Sanskritised Meghvals were forced by economic position to adhere to them. Sanskritised Meghval women were similarly subject to wider social restrictions, particularly those that applied to Hindu women more generally, as well as gender restrictions set out in the caste constitution and the Rajputised gender roles adopted as part of a general Rajputisation amongst the Sanskritised.

The promotion of binding obligations as a way of exercising power was clearly revealed in the lineage mode of production. Long term or delayed reciprocity in that instance helped to ensure the commitment of the kin-based labour force. However, kin labourers were also aware they were being exploited and as such saw their wealthy kin as different. In this way both the ideas that constituted the 'Meghval' community and the interests that defined a class converged in such a way as to actually distance one from the other. They converged under the specific context of employment and labour relations, and since this context highlighted their unequal class position, the structural distance between them was then mapped onto other areas where they differ, such as Sanskritisation. Keeping this status distance was perhaps, one way for the poorer Meghvals to ensure they were successfully recruited as employees. After all, the power the wealthy Meghval had as landlords also meant they could have easily refused to employ their kin should they have wished. However, the poorer Meghval could have likewise refused to support their wealthy caste mates politically. As a result, the fortunes of both classes of

Meghval were intimately connected and relied on each other performing their various obligations.

Throughout this thesis I have described the social differentiation that existed not only between the Meghval but between them and other castes in the village. The extremely unstable economic context in which my fieldwork took place highlighted the malleability of caste, class and religion in constructing a range of social relations to secure employment, status and future security. I highlighted how the various configurations of identity and status amongst my informants used social and economic capital to generate security for those hardest hit by the mine closures. I was also interested to describe how the economic context also increased the status and power of those who did not depend on mining.

Social differentiation must not, however, be exaggerated. The harsh reality of my informants' lives ensured that even the wealthy amongst them had no running water and only a very limited electricity supply. The ability of the Meghval to also be able to reconcile their many differences cannot go unnoticed. Although this identity was at times cynically utilised for the exercise of power by the creamy layer it nonetheless had a deep resonance amongst all the Meghvals I spent time with. I opened this thesis with the quote "There is no such thing as Caste, humans created caste not God". I heard this quote, and versions of it, time and again by all kinds of Meghval and how it was expressed always appeared genuine. In the final analysis, it was clear that all Meghvals regardless of class were immensely proud that it was a Meghval family that had come to occupy a position of dominance in the village, even though many of the poorer Meghvals felt they would never be able to equal them.

Glossary of Hindi and Marwari Terms

Adhikār – religious duty

Angan – central part of the house

Anganbadī – village meeting house often used for kindergarten classes

Bachhādā – calf

Badā kāstikār – big landlord

Bai – sister in Marwari

Baluta – ‘traditional’ system of exchange in the village where services of one caste benefit an entire village not just individual family (different to Jajmani)

Bania – merchant

Bāñto – rent or share of a farmer’s agricultural production collected from the farmer for the king or landlord

Bhagvān – God

Bhajans – devotional songs

Bhaktī – devotional worship

Bharad – all night devotional gathering

Bhom – earth or soil

Bhopā – village priest or holy man

Bhujia – a fried snack famously made in Bikaner

Bhūts – ghosts

Bīgha – measurement of land and is equivalent to quarter of an acre

Bīr – hero or chief

Cakra-Pūja – secret rite using 5 different ingredients

Chachtī – father’s younger brother’s wife

Charanāmrit – sacred water used to wash the feet of the guru

Chatrī – is an ornate Hindu death monument often erected in memory of a Maharaja

Chaūtra – pillared kiosks and platforms erected over the Samadhi of a saint or hero

Chunī – rajasthani shawl

Churmā – offering made of millet

Dalit – meaning depressed and downtrodden

Dan – ritual gift

Dapa – brideprice

Dargah – is the burial place of a sufi saint and is usually depicted as a coffin like structure covered in a green cloth

Devasthān – literally places of the gods

Devaro or **devliya** – Marwari words indicating a divinised locale normally marked by a stone or platform

Dhārma – religion or culture

Dhatak putra – adopted child

Dhol - drum

Dīdī – elder sister

Elichī – cardamom pods

Gaddī – ritual seat of a particular deity, guru, or Jogi

Ghī – clarified butter

Gochar – common grazing land

Gūar – a desert plant producing a gum like substance

Gūlal – coloured powder used during holi

Gunās – qualities a caste is said to have

Guru bahan – co-disciple

Gurudwara – Sikh temple

Harijans – “Children of God” as defined by Gandhi. It refers to castes that were considered untouchable

Hingul/ sindhoor – red paste placed on the hair parting of married Hindu women

Jāgrans – congregation of the faithful (Arabic root *Jama*)

Jajmānī – ‘traditional’ exchange of services between castes in the village

Jamabandī – land records

Janeo – sacred thread worn by the twice-born

Jaṭī – subdivisions within the four main castes

Jyot – sacred flame that is lit during a ritual

Kacca – unripe or uncooked food

Kānchīṭī – bodice section of a woman’s undergarments

Khalīsa – crown lands

Khalsa – based on the ryotwari system

Kokṭī – cotton wick that the sacred flame is made from

Kul – line of patrilineal descent

Kunda – earthen bowl

Lathīs – long bamboo poles

Lhenga chunis – Rajasthani dress worn by women

Maṇḍī – corn exchange

Mara – strike or kill

Māurūsī – hereditary

Mendhī - henna

Mleccha – dirty or left-handed practices, today it is used to denote a foreigner and is often directed at Muslims by Hindu nationalists

Mohollah - neighbourhood

Moksha – the spiritual release from the cycle of re-birth

Mūnim – middleman

Pādūka – a footprint of the deceased

Pakka – reverse of Kacca. It is cooked food and can be eaten by a range of people

Pangat – a seating arrangement in an unbroken line that highlights commensality

Panth – sect or cult

Par – alien / enemy

Patwarī – village land accountant and record keeper

Pāyal – the water used during rituals

Pindā – small ball of rice or flour used in rituals

Pīr – Islamic saint

Pītal – brass

Pīttar – roaming spirit usually of a child

Prasad – blessed food

Pūja – prayer

Pūnā parivār – extended family

Purī – fried bread

Purohit - priest

Rabi – first crop

Rangūlī – white chalk designs applied to the steps and front porches of houses during festivals

Rotī – unleavened bread

Rudraksha Mala – beaded necklace worn by holy men

Ryotwarī – a system where the responsibility of paying land revenue fell to the cultivator

himself with no intermediary

Sakhya – witness

Samadhī – seat or sectarian congregation controlled by a jogi or Guru

Samaj – council

Sankhadhal – funeral ceremony carried out by members of the Nat sect

Sarkārī naukrī – government servant

Sāsūra – father-in-law

Shaivas – worshipers of Shiva

Shaktī Pīthas – places where pieces of sati fell in the Daksha myth

Shiva linga – phallic symbol linked to Shiva

Subje – vegetable curry

Suparī – betel nut

Tandura – stringed instrument

Tehsil – sub district

Tehsildar – officer

Teratali – ritual dancing

Thekīdar – mine or property owners who lease the sites from the government

Vaiṣṇava – pertaining to the worship of Vishnu

Varnadharmā – religion or culture of caste/ varna

Varnas – the original four castes

Bibliography

- Adams, J. & Bumb, B. 1973. The Economic, Political and Social Dimensions of an Indian State: A Factor Analysis of District Data for Rajasthan. *The Journal of Asian Studies*, Vol. 33, No. 1, pp. 5-23.
- Alvesson, M. & Willmott, H. 2002. Identity Regulation as Organizational Control: Producing the Appropriate Individual. *Journal of Management Studies*, Vol. 39, No. 5, pp. 619-644.
- Agarwal, B. 1994. *A Field of One's Own: Gender and Land Rights in South Asia*. South Asian Studies 58. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Bagwe, A. 1995. *Of Women Caste: The Experience of Gender in Rural India*. London: Zed Books.
- Bailey, F.G. 1957. *Caste and The Economic Frontier: A Village in Highland Orissa*. Manchester: Manchester University Press.
- Balzani, M. 2003. *Modern Indian Kingship: Tradition, Legitimacy and Power in Rajasthan*. Oxford: James Currey Publications.
- Barth, F. 1969. *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries: The Social Organization of Difference*. Boston: Little Brown and Co.
- Becker, H. 1963. *Outsiders*. New York: NY Free Press.
- Bell, D., Caplan, P. & Karim, W.J. (eds) 1993. *Gendered Fields: Women, Men and Ethnography*. New York: Routledge.
- Bernard, R. 1994. *Research Methods in Anthropology: Qualitative and Quantitative Approaches*. Newbury Park: Sage Publications.
- Beteille, A. 1974. *Studies in Agrarian Social Structure*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- 1983. *The Idea of Natural Inequality and Other Essays*. Delhi: Oxford University Press.
- 1991. *Society and Politics in India: Essays in a Comparative Perspective*. London School of Economics Monographs on Social Anthropology (63) London: The Athlone Press.
- 1996. *Caste, Class and Power: Changing Patterns of Stratification in a Tanjore Village*. Delhi: Oxford University Press.
- Bhargava, R.C. & G.R. Gupta. 1965. *Madh (Kolayat Tehsil, Bikaner District)*. Census of India 1961. Vol. 14, Part 6a.
- Bharucha, R. 2003. *Rajasthan, An Oral History: Conversations with Komal Kothari*. Delhi: Penguin Global.
- Bishnoi, S. 1989. *Bābā Rāmdev: itihās evam sāhitya*. Jodhpur: Scientific Publishers.

- Bjorkman, J.W., & Chaturvedi, H.R. 2001. Panchayati Raj in Rajasthan: The Penalties of Success. In *The Idea of Rajasthan* (eds) K. Schomer, J.L. Erdman, D.O. Lodrick & L.I. Rudolph, Vol. 2, pp. 117-160.
- Bloch, M. 1973. The Long Term and the Short Term: the Economic and Political Significance of the Morality of Kinship. In *The Character of Kinship* (ed.) J. Goody, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 75-87.
- Bloch, M. & Parry, J.P. (eds). 1982. *Death and the Regeneration of Life*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Bourdieu, P. 1977. *Outline of a Theory of Practice*. Translated by R. Nice, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- 1983. Ökonomisches Kapital, kulturelles Kapital, soziales Kapital In *Soziale Ungleichheiten* (ed.) R. Kreckel. Goettingen: Otto Schartz & Co, pp. 183-198.
- 1984. *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*. Translated by R. Nice, London: Routledge & Kegan Paul.
- Breman, J. 1974. *Patronage and Exploitation: Changing Agrarian Relations in South Gujarat, India*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- 1993. *Beyond Patronage and Exploitation: Changing Agrarian Relations in South Gujarat, India*. Delhi: Oxford University Press.
- Briggs, C. 1986. *Learning How to Ask: A Sociolinguistic Appraisal of the Role of the Interview in Social Science Research*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Briggs, G.W. 1938. *Goraknath and the Kanphata Yogis*. Delhi: Motilal Banarstdass.
- Carstairs, M. 1961. *The Twice-Born: A Study of a Community of High Caste Hindus*. London: The Hogarth Press.
- Census of India 1981 & 1991*. In National Council of Applied Economic Research, 2002. *West and Central India Human Development Report*. Delhi: Oxford University Press.
- Chandavarka, R. 1999. Questions of Class: The General Strikes in Bombay, 1928-29. In *The Worlds of Industrial Labour* (eds) J.P. Parry, J. Breman, K. Kapadia, New Delhi: Sage, pp. 205-239.
- Chauhan, B.R. 1991. *A Rajasthan Village*. Delhi: Vir.
- Coccarri, D. 1989. *The Bir Babas of Benares: An Analysis of a Folk Deity in North Indian Hinduism*. PhD. Dissertation, University of Wisconsin-Madison.
- Cooper, E. 1984. Mode of Production and The Anthropology of Work. *Journal of Anthropological Research*, Vol. 40, No. 2, pp. 257-270.
- Das, V. 1976. Indian Women: Work, Power, and Status. In *Indian Women from Purdah to Modernity* (ed.) B.R. Nanda. Delhi: Vikas.
- Deliege, R. 1992. Replication and Consensus: Untouchability, Caste and Ideology in India. *Man*, New Series, Vol. 27, No. 1, pp. 155-173.
- Dhali, R. 2007. History, Community and Identity: an interpretation of Dalibai. *Language Forum*, Jan-June, Delhi: Bhari Publications.

- Dirks, N.B. 2001. *Castes of Mind: Colonialism and the Making of Modern India*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Dumont, L. 1970. *Homo Hierarchicus*. London: Paladin.
- 1975. Terminology and Prestations Revisited. *Contributions to Indian Sociology* Vol. 9, No.2, pp. 197-215.
- Engels, F. 1968. Introduction to Dialectics of Nature. In *Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels Selected Works*, Progress Publishers, U.S.S.R., London: Lawrence and Wishart, pp. 338-354.
- Erdman, J.L. 2001. Becoming Rajasthani: Pluralism and the Production of Dharti Dhorān Rī. In *The Idea of Rajasthan* (eds) K. Schomer, J.L. Erdman, D.O. Lordrick, L.I. Rudolph, (Vol 1 & 2) Delhi: Manohar, pp. 45-79.
- Erskine, K.D. 1910. *A Gazetteer of the Bikaner State and Some Statistical Tables*. Ajmer: Scottish Mission Industries.
- Firth, R. 1979. Work and Value: Reflections on Ideas of Karl Marx. In *Social Anthropology of Work* (ed.) S. Wallman. London: Academic Press, pp. 117-205.
- Fuller, C. 1989. Misconceiving the Grain Heap: A Critique of the Concept of the Indian Jajmani System. In *Money and the Morality of Exchange* (eds) J.P. Parry and M. Bloch. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 33-63.
- 1992. *The Camphor Flame*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- 1996. *Caste Today*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Gandhi, M. 1933. *Speeches and Writings of Mahatma Gandhi*. Madras: G.A. Natesan.
- 1949. *The India of My Dreams*. Bombay: Hind Kitabs.
- 1960. *All Men Are Brothers*. Ahmedabad: Navajivan Publishing House.
- Gerth, H.H. & Wright Mills, C. 1948. *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology*. London: Routledge
- Ghurye, G.S. 1961. *Caste, Class and Occupation*. Bombay: Popular Book Depot.
- Godelier, M. 1977. *Perspectives in Marxist Anthropology*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Gold, A. & Gujar, B. 2002. In *The Time of Trees and Sorrows: Nature, Power, and Memory in Rajasthan*. Durham: Duke University Press.
- Gold, A. 1988. *Fruitful Journeys: The Ways of the Rajasthani Pilgrims*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Gorringe, H. 2005. *Untouchable Citizens: The Dalit Panthers and Democratisation in Tamilnadu*, New Delhi: Sage.
- Gould, H.A. 1963. The Adaptive Functions of Caste in Contemporary Indian Society. In *Asian Survey*, Vol. 3, No. 9, pp. 427-438.

- Gukuldas. 1950. *Maghvans' jāti ke rasm rivāz*. Dumrara: Seva Das Rishi.
- 1982. *Meghvans' itihās*.
- Gupta, A. 1995. Blurred Boundaries: The Discourse of Corruption, the Culture of Politics, and the Imagined State. *American Ethnologist*, Vol. 22, No. 2, pp 375-402.
- Gupta, D. 2000. *Interrogating Caste: Understanding Hierarchy and Difference in Indian Society*. New Delhi: Penguin Books.
- 2004. Caste in Question: Identity or Hierarchy?. *Contributions to Indian Sociology, Occasional Studies*; 12. New Dehli: Sage.
- 2005. Whither The Indian Village: Culture and Agriculture in 'Rural' India. *Economic and Political Weekly*. Vol. 40, No. 8, pp. 751-758.
- Hamersley, M. & Atkinson, P. 1995. *Ethnography: Principles in Practice*. London: Routledge.
- Hardiman, D. 2007. *Histories for the Subordinated*. Oxford: Seagulls Books.
- Harlan, L. 1992. *Religion & Rajput Women: The ethic of protection in contemporary narratives*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Henderson, C.E. 1994. Famines and Droughts in Arid Western Rajasthan: Desert Cultivators and the Problem of Periodic Resource Stress. In *The Idea of Rajasthan* (eds) K, Schomer, J.L. Erdman, D.O. Lordrick, L.I. Rudolph, (Vol 1 & 2) Delhi: Manohar, pp.1-29.
- Heuze-Brigant, G. 1996a. *Workers of Another World: Miners, the Countryside and the Coalfields in Dhanbad*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- 1996b. Work and Identity in India In *International Labour Review*, Vol. 135, No. 6, pp. 623-632.
- 1982. *Unite et Pluralite du Monde Ouvrier Indien*. In *Caste et Class en Asie du Sud*. (ed.) J. Pouchepadass, Collection Purusartha, Vol. 6, Paris: Editions de l'Ecole des Hautes Etudes en Sciences Sociales, pp.189-222.
- Hiltebeitel, A. 1999. *Rethinking India's Oral Epics: Draupadī among Rajputs, Muslims and Dalits*. Chicago: Chicago University Press.
- Hooja, R. 2001. *Greening the Desert: Motivating Settlers in the IGNP*. Delhi: Rawat Publications.
- Ishi, H., Gellner, D.N. & Nawa, K. 2007. Social Dynamics in Northern South Asia In *Political and Social Transformations in North India and Nepal*, New Delhi: Manohar.
- Jaffrelot, C. 1996. *The Hindu Nationalist Movement and Indian Politics: 1925 to the 1990s*. London: Hurst Company.
- 2000. The Rise of the Other Backward Classes in the Hindi Belt. *The Journal of Asian Studies*, Vol. 59, No. 1, pp. 86-108.
- Jamous, R. 2003. *Kinship and Rituals Among The Meo of Northern India: Locating Sibling Relationships*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Jeffery, P. & Jeffery, R. 1996. *Don't Marry Me to a Plowman! Women's Everyday Lives in Rural North India*. Oxford: Westview Press.

- Jeffery, P. & Basu, A. 1998. *Appropriating Gender: Women's Activism and Politicised Religion in South Asia*. London: Routledge.
- Jenkins, R. 2004. *Reservation Politics in Rajasthan*, paper presented for the Annual Meeting of the Crisis States Programme, December 2004.
- 1998. Rajput Hindutva: Caste Politics, Regional Identity, and Hindu Nationalism in Contemporary Rajasthan In *The BJP and the Compulsions of Politics in India*. (eds) C. Jaffrelot and T. B. Hansen. Delhi: Oxford University Press, pp. 101-120.
- Kakar, S. 1978. *The Inner World*. Oxford University Press: Delhi.
- Katrak, K. 1992. Indian Nationalism, Gandhian Satyagraha, and Representation of Female Sexuality. In *Nationalisms and Sexuality* (eds) A. Parker, M. Russo, D. Sommer & P. Yaeger. London: Routledge, pp. 395-406.
- Khan, D-S. 1994. Deux rites tantriques dans une communauté d'intouchables au Rajasthan. *Revue de l'histoire des religions*. CCX1-4/ 1994, pp. 443-62.
- 1996. The Kamad of Rajasthan – Priests of a Forgotten Tradition. *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society*, Vol 6. Part 1, pp. 29-56.
- 1998. Is God an Untouchable: A Case of Caste Conflict in Rajasthan. *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East*. Vol 18, No. 1, pp. 21-29
- 1999. *Sacrifice, Martyrdom & Samadhi in the Tradition of the Meghvals of Rajasthan*.
- 2003. *Conversions and Shifting Identities, Ramev Pir and the Ismailis in Rajasthan*. New Delhi: Manohar.
- Kapadia, K. (ed.). 2002. *The Violence of Development: The Politics of Identity, Gender and Social Inequalities in India*. London: Zed Books.
- 2002. Translocal Modernities and Transformations of Gender and Caste. In *ibid*, pp. 142-182.
- Kolenda, P. 1994. The Joint-Family Household in Rural Rajasthan: Ecological, Cultural and Demographic Conditions for its Occurrence. In *The Idea of Rajasthan* (eds) K, Schomer, J.L. Erdman, D.O. Lordrick, L.I. Rudolph, (Vol 1 & 2) Delhi: Manohar, pp. 64-116.
- Kothari, K. (1989) Performers, Gods, and Heros in the Oral Epics of Rajasthan. In *Oral Epics in India* (eds) C. Blackburn, C. Flueckiger, and S. Wadley. Berkeley: University of California Press, pp. 102-117.
- Lalas, S. 1962-1978. *Rajasthani Sabad Kos*. (9 vols.) Jodhpur: Rajasthani Sodh Sansthan.
- Lambert, H. 2000. Sentiment and Substance in North Indian Forms of Relatedness In *Cultures of Relatedness: New Approaches to the Study of Kinship* (ed.) J. Carsten. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 73-89.
- Leach, E.R. 2001. *Political Systems of Highland Burma, A Study of Kachin Social Structure*. London School of Economics Monographs on Social Anthropology (44). London: Continuum.
- Levine, L. 2002. The Unpredictable Past. Oxford University Press; New York In *Cultural Resistance Reader* Verso: New York, pp. 215-231.

- Lockwood, D. 1966. *The Blackcoated Worker*. London: Unwin University Books.
- Lodrick, D.O. 2001. Rajasthan As A Region: Myth or Reality? In *The Idea of Rajasthan* (eds) K, Schomer, J.L. Erdman, D.O. Lordrick, L.I. Rudolph, (Vol 1 & 2) Delhi: Manohar, pp. 1-44.
- Lynch, O.M. 1969. *The Politics of Untouchability: Social Mobility and Social Change in a City of India*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Mahalingham, R. 2003. Essentialism, Culture, and Power: Representations of Social Class. *Journal of Social Issues*. Vol. 59, No. 4, pp. 733-749.
- Maheshwari, S.R. 1985. *Rural Development in India : A Public Policy Approach*. New Delhi: Sage Publications.
- Malhotra, S.L. 1970. *Social and Political Orientations of Neo-Vedantism*. New Delhi: S. Chand & Co.
- Mandelbaum. 1970. *Society in India: Volume One Continuity and Change*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- 1972. *Society in India: Volume Two Change and Continuity*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Marcus, G.E. & Fischer, M.J. 1986. *Anthropology as Cultural Critique: An Experimental Moment in the Human Sciences*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Marriott, M. 1955. *Village India: Studies in the Little Community*. Comparative Studies of Cultures and Civilizations, No. 6, Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- 1966. The Feast of Love. In *Krishna: Myths, Rites, and Attitudes* (ed.) M. Singer. Honolulu: East-West Centre Press, pp. 200-231.
- Marshall, T.H. 1977. A Note on Status. In *Identity: A Reader* (eds) P. Du Gay, J. Evans, P. Redman London: Sage, pp. 304-311.
- Marx, K. 1852. The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte. In *Karl Marx and Fredrich Engels Selected Works*, Progress Publishers, U.S.S.R., London: Lawrence and Wishart, pp. 96-166.
- 1867. *Capital*. (ed.) D. McLellan 2002. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Mathur, U.B. 1969. *Ethnographic Atlas of Rajasthan (with reference to Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes)*. Census Publications, Gandhi Centenary Year.
- Mayer, A.C. 1966. *Caste and Kinship in Central India: A Village and its Region*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Mendelsohn. O. & Vicziany, M. 1998. *The Untouchables: Subordination, Poverty and the State in Modern India*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press
- Menon. N. (ed.) 1999. *Gender and Politics in India*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Michelutti, L. 2004. 'We (Yadavs) Are a Caste of Politicians': Caste and Modern Politics in a North Indian Town. *Contributions to Indian Sociology*, Vol. 38, No. 1-2, pp. 43-71.

- 2007. The Vernacularization of Democracy: Political Participation and Popular Politics in North India. In *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute*, Vol. 13. No. 3, pp. 639-656.
- 2008. We Are Kshatriyas But We Behave like Vaishyas: Diet and Muscular Politics Among a Community of Yadavs in North India. *Journal of South Asian Studies*, Vol. 31. No. 1, pp. 76-95.
- Miller, D.B. 1975. *From Hierarchy To Stratification: Changing Patterns of Stratification in a North Indian Village*. Delhi: Oxford University Press.
- Moffat, M. 1979. *An Untouchable Community in South India: Structure and Consensus*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Molund, S. 1988. *First We Are People...The Koris of Kanpur between Caste and Class*. Doctoral Dissertation. Stockholm Studies in Anthropology, 20.
- Morris, M.D. 1960. The Labour Market in India. In *Labour Commitment and Social Change in Developing Areas* (eds) W.E. Moore and A.S. Feldman, New York: Social Science Research Council, pp. 173-200.
- National Council of Applied Economic Research, 2002. *West and Central India Human Development Report*. Delhi: Oxford University Press.
- Omvedt, G. 1995. *Dalit Visions: the Anti-Caste Movement and the Construction of an Indian Identity*. New Delhi: Orient Longman
- 1994. *Dalits and the Democratic Revolution: Dr Ambedkar and the Dalit Movement in Colonial India*. New Delhi: Sage
- Osella, C. & Osella, F. 2000. *Social Mobility in Kerala: Modernity and Identity in Conflict*. London: Pluto Press.
- 1999. From Transience to Immanence: Consumption, Life-Cycle and Social Mobility in Kerala, South India. In *Modern Asian Studies*. Vol. 33, pp. 989-1020
- Ostor, A. Fruzzetti, L. & Barnett, S. (eds) 1982. *Concepts of Person: Kinship, Marriage, and Caste in India*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- Ossowski, S. 1963. *Class Structure in the Social Consciousness*, London: Routledge and Kegan Paul.
- Panini, M.N. 1996. The Political Economy of Caste. In *Caste: Its Twentieth Century Avatar* (ed.) M.N. Srinivas. New Delhi: Viking, pp. 28-68.
- Parry, J.P. 1970. The Koli Dilemma. *Contributions to Indian Sociology*, New Series, No. 4. London: Vikas Publications.
- 1979. *Caste and Kinship in Kangra*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul.
- 1982. Sacrificial Death and the Necrophagous Ascetic. In *Death and the Regeneration of Life* (eds) M. Bloch & J.P. Parry. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 74-110.
- 1994. *Death in Banares*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- 1999b. Lords of labour: Working and shirking in Bhilai. *Contributions to Indian Sociology*, Vol. 33, No. 1-2, pp. 107-140.

- Parry, J.P., Breman, J. & Kapadia, K. (eds) 1999a. *The Worlds of Indian Industrial Labour* New Delhi, London: Sage Publications
- Parry, J.P. & Struempell. 2008. Regionalism Biharis and Public Sector Mining. *Economic and Political Weekly*. Vol. 43, No. 19, pp. 61-72.
- Parsons, T. 1967. *Sociological Theory and Modern Society*. New York: Free Press.
- Peabody, N. 1997. Inchoate in Kota? Contesting Authority through a North Indian Pageant-Play. *American Ethnologist*, Vol. 24, No. 3, pp. 559-584.
- 2003. *Hindu Kingship and Polity in Precolonial India*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Pinney, C. 1992. Piercing the Skin of the Idol. In *Beyond Ascetics: Art and the Technologies of Enchantment* (eds) C. Pinney and N. Thomas. Oxford: Berg.
- Pitt, M. 1979. *The World on Our Backs: The Kent Miners and the 1972 Miner's Strike*. London: Lawrence & Wishart.
- Pocock, D.F. 1955. The Movement of Castes. *Man*: 55, pp. 117-172.
- 1962. Notes on Jajmani Relationships. *Contributions to Indian Sociology*, No. 6, pp. 78-95.
- Poulantzas, N. 1973. *Political Power and Social Classes*. London: New Left Books.
- Pradhan, M.C. 1966. *Political System of the Jats in Northern India*. Delhi: Oxford University Press.
- Raheja, G.G. & Gold, A.G. 1994. *Listen to the Heron's Words: Reimagining Gender and Kinship in North India*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Redfield, R. & Milton. S. 1954. The Cultural Role of Cities. *Economic Development and Cultural Change*, Vol. 3, pp. 53-73.
- Robertson, M. 1998. *Snake Charmers: The Jogi Nath Kalbelias of Rajasthan*. Jaipur. Illustrated Book Publishers.
- Rosin, T.R. 1981. Land Reform in Rajasthan. *Current Anthropology*. Vol. 22, No.1, pp. 1-30.
- Rudolph, L.I. & S.H. Rudolph. 1967. *The Modernity of Tradition: Political Development in India*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.
- Sahlins, M.D. 2004. *Stone Age Economics*. London: Routledge.
- 1976. *Culture and Practical Reason*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Scott, J. 1985. *Weapons of the Weak: Everyday Forms of Peasant Resistance*. Yale University Press: New Haven.
- Sengupta, R. 2005. *Report on ASM in Rajasthan*. Jodhpur: Mine Labour Protection Campaign.
- Shah, A. 2006. The Labour of Love: Seasonal Migration from Jharkhand to the Brick Kilns of Other States in India. *Contributions to Indian Sociology*. Vol. 40, No. 1, pp. 91-119.

- Sharma, A. 2003. *Hinduism and Human Rights: A Conceptual Approach*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press.
- Sharma, K.L. 1974. *The Changing Rural Stratification System: A Comparative Study of Six Villages in Rajasthan, India*. Delhi: Orient Longman.
- Sharma, K. 2002. Violence, Difference and Women's Movements: Surviving Violence and Making Peace Women in Communal Conflict in Mumbai. In *The Violence of Development: The Politics of Identity, Gender and Social Inequalities in India* (ed.) K. Kapadia. London: Zed Books, pp. 183-206.
- Sharma, S.R. 1996. *Society and Culture in Rajasthan C. AD 700-900*. Delhi: Pragati Publications.
- Singh, K. 1988. *Bikaner: A Fifth Centenary Commemorative Volume*. Delhi: Cross Section Publications.
- Singh, S. & Ghose, B. 1980. Geomorphic significance in the environmental problems of the Rajasthan Desert, India In *Arid Zone Research Development* (ed.) H.S. Mann. Jodhpur: Scientific Publishers, pp. 35-52.
- Snodgrass, J.G. 2006. *Castling Kings: Bards and Indian Modernity*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Spencer, J. 1997. Post-Colonialism and the Political Imagination. *The Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute*, Vol. 3, No. 1, pp. 1-19.
- Srinivas, M.N. 1955. The Social System of a Mysore Village In *Village India* (ed.) M. Marriott Chicago: Chicago University Press, pp. 1-35.
- 1957. Caste in Modern India. *The Journal of Asian Studies* Vol. 4, pp. 529-48.
- 1962 *Caste in Modern India and Other Essays*. London: JK Publishers.
- 1965. *Religion and Society among the Coorgs of South India*. New Delhi: Oxford. University Press.
- 1971. *Social Change in Modern India*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- 1976. *The Remembered Village*. Berkeley, London: University of California Press.
- 1987. *The Dominant Caste and Other Essays*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- 1996. (ed.) *Caste: Its Twentieth Century Avatar*. New Delhi: Viking.
- Srinivasulu, K. 2002. *Caste, Class and Social Articulation in Andhra Pradesh: Mapping Differential Regional Trajectories*. Working Paper 179. Overseas Development Institute.
- Srivastava, V. 1997. *Religious Renunciation of a Pastoral People*. Delhi: Oxford University Press.
- Parsons, T. 1937. *The Structure of Social Action*. New York: McGraw-Hill.
- 1951. *The Social System*, New York, Free Press.

- 1954. A Revised Analytical Approach to the Theory of Social Stratification In *Essays in Sociological Theory* (Revised Edition) T. Parsons. New York: Macmillan Publishing Co. pp. 386-439.
- Tambiah, S.J. 1965. Kinship Fact and Fiction in Relation to the Kandyan Sinhalese. *The Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute*, Vol. 95, No. 2, pp. 131-173.
- Tenekoon, S. 1988. Rituals of Development: The Accelerated Mahavali Development Programme in Sri Lanka. *American Ethnologist*, Vol. 15. No. 2, pp. 294-310.
- Terray, E. 1984. *Classes and Class Consciousness in the Abron Kingdom of Gyaman*. In *Marxist Analysis and Social Anthropology* (ed.) M. Bloch. London: Tavistock Publications, pp. 85-136.
- Tiemann, G. 1970. The four-got-rule Among the Jat of Haryana in Northern India. *Anthropos* Volume 65, pp. 166-77.
- Thompson, E.P. 1963. *The Making of the English Working Class*. London: Gollanz.
- Tinker, H. 1959. Authority and Community in Village India. *Pacific Affairs*, Vol 32. No. 4, pp. 354-375.
- Tod, J. 2002. *Annals and Antiquities of Rajasthan and Western Rajpoot States of India*. London: Routledge.
- Turner, V. 1982. *From Ritual to Theatre: The Human Seriousness of Play*. New York: PAJ Publications.
- Uberoi, P. (ed.) 1993. *Family, Kinship and Marriage in India*. Delhi: Oxford University Press
- Vincentnathan, L. 1993. Untouchable Concepts of Person and Society. *Contributions to Indian Sociology*. Vol. 27. No. 1, pp. 53-82.
- Ward, B. 1972. A Small Factory in Hong Kong: Some Aspects of Its Internal Organization. In *Economic Organization in Chinese Society* (ed.) W.E. Willmott. Stanford: Stanford University Press, pp 353-386.
- Weber, M. 1964. *The Theory of Social and Economic Organisation*. Collier-Macmillan: London.
- Wicks, D. 2002. Institutional Bases of Identity Construction and Reproduction: The Case of Underground Coal Mining. In *Gender, Work & Organization*. Vol. 9, No. 3, pp. 308-335.

Websites

<http://apnakhata.raj.nic.in/>

<http://bor.rajasthan.gov.in/>

<http://runichadham.blogspot.com/2007/08/blog-post.html>

www.epw.org.uk

www.frontlineonnet.com/

www.gisdevelopment.org

www.gits4u.com/raj/raj11.htm

www.ima-na.org/about_industrial_minerals/ball_clay.asp

www.infoexchangeindia.or

www.ncasindia.org/articles/erosionofrights.htm

www.rajasthan.gov.in

www.rajasthan.gov.in/rajgovresources/actnpolicies/MINERAL.html

http://www.thaindian.com/newsportal/politics/rajasthan-to-move-bill-on-quota-for-economically-backward_10062043.html

<http://worldsikhnews.com/4%20June%202008/What%20Gujjars%20want%20and%20Why.htm>

Multi-Media

CensusInfo India 2001, Version 2.0. 2005 (CD-ROM).

Census of India 2001. Primary Census Abstract - Haryana, Delhi, Rajasthan. Vol. 2 (CD-ROM).