

# Dynamics, Hierarchy and Commensalities: A Study of Inter Caste Relationship in a North Indian Village

K. Pandey

**Abstract**—The present study is a functional analysis of the relationship between castes which indicates the dynamics of the caste structure in the rural setting. The researcher has tried to show both the cooperation and competition on important ceremonial and social occasions. The real India exists in the villages, so we need to know about their solidarity and also what the village life is and has been shaping into. We need to emphasize a microcosmic study of Indian rural life. Furthermore, caste integration is an acute problem country faces today. To resolve this we are required to know the dynamics of behavior of the people of different castes and for the study of the caste dynamics a study of caste relations are needed. The present study is an attempt in this direction.

**Keywords**—Hierarchical groups, jajmani system, functional dependence, commensalities.

## I. INTRODUCTION

THE general outlines of the caste systems are similar in some degree all over the country. But it is also true that there are numerous and important differences. An understanding of these differences as well as similarities is essential to a true knowledge of a caste system. Comparative accounts from the different areas are therefore needed. Simple comparison of structure will not suffice, what is required is intensive inquiry into the basic attitudes underlying the structure—what life values and perspectives do they of themselves and of each other? How do the different castes define the social arrangements? When we have found answers to these questions in respect of number of different castes, we will understand more fully and more systematically the nature of caste, its structure and its function. This understanding will in turn contribute to our knowledge of what is and what is not possible in social relations.

The present study is a functional analysis of the relationship between castes which indicates the dynamics of the caste structure in the rural setting. The researcher has tried to show both the cooperation and competition on important ceremonial and social occasions. The real India exists in the villages, so we need to know about their solidarity and also what the village life is and has been shaping into. We need to emphasize a microcosmic study of Indian rural life. Furthermore, caste integration is an acute problem country faces today. To resolve this we are required to know the dynamics of behavior of the people of different castes and for the study of the caste dynamics a study of caste relations are needed. The present study is an attempt in this direction.

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Majumdar wrote a lot about the social composition of Indian population and its correlation with the tribes and castes of India in his books. [1] He reveals in his book the deep knowledge of Indian social structure and social mobility. He has recorded that the aspect of caste system in India which was at that time believed to be more or less rigid system of hierarchy—its dynamic, flexible nature which was decades later developed into the concept of Sanskritization by Srinivas whose words are quite similar to those written by Majumdar. [1]. One of the reasons caste has excited sociological imagination is because it is seen as a representation of pure status, based on religious and ideological grounds [11], [7], [9] with class inequalities being epiphenomenal to caste.

While Weber largely relied on writings by colonial bureaucrats in the Indian Civil Services (acting as amateur anthropologists) for data on Indian society, anthropological villages studies of the 20th century by Indian as well as western scholars provided a foundation for Louis Dumont's work [7]. With the publication of *Homo Hierarchicus* in 1966, Dumont presented a canonical formulation that has framed the conversation about caste over the past four decades and provided a rationale for status hierarchy. In emphasising the ideological over the material his formulation has much in common with his predecessors [9] and successors [11]. This narrative of caste has excited tremendous passions from diverse groups with wide-ranging critiques [2], [5], [12], [10], [8], [6].

While studying a *Chhor ka gaon* (fringe village) Majumdar found that tribe caste relations in their multiple aspects here presented a unique situation which could be regarded as of great importance in the context of village life in India. Majumdar outlined the process of social change particularly in a situation of culture contact. Subsequently with the help of the Malinowski's functionalism and his own theoretical model of MARC (the base of the culture being the function of four variables—Man, Area, Resources and Cooperation), he analyzed cultures as wholes. Subsequently he thought that culture could be graded and through contacts some cultures grew or evolved while some cultures stagnated and died. Majumdar was of the view that tribal contacts with caste Hindus resulted in tension and conflict and brought about what he called 'the decline of the primitive tribes of India'. He referred to or labeled cultures as dominant and decadent without hesitation and emphasized that decadent cultures could hardly hope to survive except by surrendering their values and even identifying completely with the dominant culture [14].

## II. AREA OF STUDY

Uttar Pradesh (UP) (20 Crore) is the most populous State in the country - population is more than the population of Brazil. Population of Uttar Pradesh as per Census 2011 is 199581477 (Approx. 20 Crore) which is much higher than Census 2001 data which show 16.6 Crore population of the state. Uttar Pradesh is also having 29.7 children in the 0-6 year age group. Meanwhile India's new national census has put the population at about 1.21 billion people, or 17% of the world population, the census commissioner said. The population comprising 623.7 million males and 586.5 million females is almost equal to the combined population of the United States, Indonesia, Brazil, Pakistan, Bangladesh and Japan put together. The population has increased by more than 181 million during the decade 2001-2011, the report said. The growth rate in 2011 is 17.64 per cent in comparison to 21.15 per cent in 2001.

The Scheduled Tribe (ST) population of Uttar Pradesh is 107,963 as per 2001 census, constituting 0.06 % of the total population (166,197,921) of the State. The decennial growth of ST population has been 42 per cent, which is 16% which is higher than the growth of total population (25.8 per cent) during 1991-2001. The State had a total of five (5) Scheduled Tribes and all of them have been enumerated at 2001 census. The tribal population of the State is predominantly rural with 88.8 per cent of them residing in villages. District wise distribution of Scheduled Tribe population shows that Kheri district has the highest proportion of Scheduled Tribes (1.2 per cent), followed by Balrampur (1.1 per-cent), Shrawasti & Bahraich (each 0.4 per-cent) districts. Out of five STs, Tharu is the most populous tribe, having a population of 83,544; they constitute 77.4 per cent of the total tribal population of the State. Buksa is the second major tribe, having a number of 4,367, followed by Bhotia, Jaunsari and Raji. These four tribes along with generic tribes constitute the balance 22.6 per cent of total ST population. At the level of individual tribe, Tharu are primarily concentrated in Kheri, Balrampur and Bahraich districts. Buksa have the highest concentration in Bijnor, followed by Farrukhabad districts. Other three STs, Bhotia, Jaunsari and Raji have returned maximum population in Agra, Kheri and Gorakhpur districts respectively. Among the five STs, Buksa and Raji tribes have been recognized as Primitive Tribes. Together, they constitute 5 per -cent of the total tribal population of the State. However, the Government of India has included the following Castes in the list of Scheduled Tribes by Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribe Order. (Amendment) Act. 2002:-

- Gond, Dhuria, Noyak, Ojha, Pathari, Rajgond (In districts Mahrajganj, Siddharth Nagar, Basti, Gorakhpur, Deoria, Mau, Azamgarh, Jaunpur, Balia, Gazipur, Varanasi, Mirzapur and Sonbhadra).
- Kharwar, Khairwar (In districts Deoria, Balia, Gazipur, Varanasi and Sonbhadra).
- Sahria (In district Lalitpur).
- Parhia (In district Sonbhadra).
- Baiga (In district Sonbhadra).
- Pankha, Panika (In districts Sonbhadra and Mirzapur).

- Agaria (In district Sonbhadra).
- Patari (In district Sonbhadra)
- Chero (In districts Sonbhadra)
- Bhuiya, Bhunia (In district Sonbhadra).

### A. Dudhi –Site

Dudhi lies in the south of the kaimur range and is between the parallels of 23°55' and 24°54' north latitude and 82°32' and 83°33' east longitude. It is bounded on the north by the parganah Agori; on the east by Polan and Sarguja; on the south by Sarguja and on the west by Farganah Singoruli. The river kanhar flows in the east of the parganah. Dudhi is a tehsil for administrative purposes and is divided into four administrative blocks- Dudhi, Myorpur and Babhni. Dudhi has an area of 706.43 square miles. It includes 102 villages with a population of 1,25,515 peoples (survey done in the year 2011). The total population as per the official survey conducted by of the Social Welfare Department in the year 2003-04 was 54776. The Density of population is 178. In the forests of the area, the tigers are not much but leopard is fairly common, wild bear; sambhar cheetal and chikara are plentiful. There are a number of prehistoric caves in the hill ranges; and implements of Neolithic age are found at places. These caves are known to contain rock-paintings.

### 1. History of Dudhi

The parganas of Dudhi have been under proprietorship of many rajas but in 1781 Dudhi sovereignty passed nominally into the hands of British after Chet Singh's expulsion. The first settlement took place in 1788-89. Rents were generally fixed in cash. The permanent settlement of 1795 followed it. The villagers in Dudhi government Estate were, however, again surveyed in 1940, but their boundaries and the areas then under permanent cultivation were surveyed. The sub-divisional officer is stationed at Sonbhadra and the litigants had to traverse about 100 miles each way on foot or on bullocks; but now government have started bus service. The new collar roads have been made to connect tehsil Dudhi with Robertganj. But at present Dudhi is connected to Robertganj by private bus services. But still the way is very dangerous.

### 2. Bidar Village

Bidar is a village in tehsil Dudhi, in Sonbhadra district. It is situated at a distance of 1<sup>1/2</sup> miles south-west of the Dudhi tehsil. The north-eastern part of Bidar is surrounded with hills which are covered with forests. The area is called as reserve forests area, which includes the Maugrahar, Samundrawa, Mahua ghat, Sughwa Mountains and Basburva nala. In the south west border of Bidar lines the village of Rajkhar. The village Garaidarwa falls on the north western border and in the south east is surrounded with Dhauwara village and in the east lies the villages of Baraidod and Maldewa. The river Lauwa flows from south east of Bidar and goes on to the east defining the eastern boundary of the village. The area of the village is nearly six square miles and it is the biggest village in Dudhi tehsil. The village is about two miles in breadth and three miles in length. The road, which connects Dudhi tehsil with Robertganj, divides the whole village in two parts. The road

starts from the south east of the village and ends at the north-western border.

As observed from the eastern end of this road the whole village is divided into the left and right zones. The population of the left zone is less than that of the right one. Mostly the left zone, at the eastern end, the Panikas and the Chamars live by the side of the same road. On the right side of the road at the eastern end the Chamars are inhabited and the area is called Chamar tulia. Neighboring to them on the north-eastern side the Panikas are again inhabited.

In general, the population is thick on both the sides of the road. In the middle of the village by the road-side mostly, the Kurmis or Kurmis, Koeris and Chero castes and tribes live. The population of the village according to the census taken by us is 1,600. But the whole village is quite scattered. There are only two houses of Brahmins. One of them is situated just into the heart of the village and is surrounded by the houses of Kurmis and koeris. The whole village is dominated by the Kurmis, which are considered to be second highest in status and are inhabited in the heart of the village. An attempt has been made to show a rough distribution of various castes in the village.

There is a basic primary school in the village, which is at-present running under the management of the deputy project executive officer. The school is situated on the side of the road and nearly in the centre of the village. There is no compulsory education. Small bundhis (small water resources) are also observed throughout the village to irrigate the fields. There is also a dam near the Rajkhar and Bidar border. But the last three years there has been no rain in this area. So the whole village is in a great trouble. There, crops are nearly dried up as there is no water for the irrigation in those small bundhis. But the government has already chalked out its plans and the water in those bundhis is expected by this year.

Agriculture is the primary economic enterprise of the village. But the villagers are leaving agriculture and adopting labour and artisan works, at different places. Those who do agriculture bear the main produce of rice, barley, oats etc. Sugarcane is also produced in some parts, mostly by the Kurmis. The people of this area are most backward. The chief cause of this backwardness is the defective communication. Their poverty is proverbial. About 80% to 90% of the population suffers from venereal diseases [4]. The out still system whereby liquor is sold at 50-60 rupees a bottle prevails. The drink evil, however, has in its train, brought prostitution.

According to our census which was carried for the first five days of our field tour, there are 3350 people having 2152 males and 1198 females, the sex rates being very close. The dominant caste is Kurmi with 200 families having 800 males and 600 females. A particular feature here is a low female ratio among higher castes as also observed in north India. The female ratio increases as one goes down the caste ladder. Table I shows the number of castes, males and females and families among all the castes in this village. The villagers come to Dudhi on market days i.e. on Thursdays and Sundays, and as often as they want. They come on foot and sell their

products and purchase things for their requirements.

TABLE I  
VILLAGE POPULATION TAKEN IN THE MONTH OF OCTOBER 2012

| SN | Castes             | No. of Families | Males       | Females     | Total       |
|----|--------------------|-----------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|
| 1  | Brahmin            | 01              | 15          | 05          | 20          |
| 2  | Kurmi              | 200             | 800         | 600         | 1400        |
| 3  | Koeri              | 100             | 350         | 100         | 450         |
| 4  | Ahir               | 01              | 12          | 06          | 18          |
| 5  | Chero              | 55              | 150         | 100         | 250         |
| 6  | Manjhi             | 07              | 20          | 10          | 30          |
| 7  | Nai                | 02              | 15          | 10          | 25          |
| 8  | Dhobhi<br>(Muslim) | 02              | 15          | 07          | 22          |
| 9  | Teli               | 25              | 80          | 45          | 125         |
| 10 | Panika             | 35              | 150         | 50          | 200         |
| 11 | Chamars            | 125             | 500         | 250         | 750         |
| 12 | Christian          | 12              | 45          | 15          | 60          |
|    | <b>TOTAL</b>       | <b>565</b>      | <b>2152</b> | <b>1198</b> | <b>3350</b> |

### III. DESCRIPTION OF VARIOUS CASTES AND THEIR GENERAL ECONOMIC CONDITION

The principal castes of the village are the Kurmis, the Koeris, the Chamars and the Panikas, who are numerically strong. The Kurmis and the koeris, who are the most powerful castes of the village, are socially respected. The Kurmis are united by a bond of kinship and belong to the sub-caste of Chandan. Nearly all of them are cultivators and some are sugar-cane pressers. Most of them own land and cultivate it themselves. In comparison to their castes they are the richest people and in all social, economic, and political matters of the village they have an unchallenged voice.

Like the Kurmis, the Koeris are also depended on agriculture. Numerically, they are the second highest in the village. They mostly grow vegetables and sell them in Dudhi market and thus meet their daily requirements. The Ahirs, Cheros and Manjhis also depend on agriculture but they are rather poorer than the Kurmis and the Koeris.

Among the Panikas it was observed that nearly half of them are purely agriculturists and the rest have adopted weaving as their subsidiary occupation. They prepare hand-loom cloth known as *Motia-Kapra* and mostly female dhotis. They sell their products in the Dudhi and Sonbhadra markets.

The Chamars, numerically, fall on the third group. Most of them have left their traditional occupation of leather work and have adopted agriculture. There is only one house of the Brahmin in the whole village. It is situated just in the heart of the village and it was said that there was another house of the Brahmin, was a new settler near the river Lauwa at the south eastern end of the village. The new settler was an old man who had settled here to pass the rest of his life and had devoted himself to instrumental music. The other one had also adopted agriculture as his subsidiary occupation, although he was continuing his traditional priesthood among some of the Koeris. There are only two houses of Nai (barber).

The *Nai* also possesses some land and he cultivates it. There are also some families of Christians, which also depend

on agriculture. There people were the Chamars and Panikas, who have converted themselves to Christianity.

The Manjhis are regarded as the real inhabitants of this place and they claim themselves as gond. The Cheros, Manjhis and the Panikas are the tribal people, but they have now formed a tribal caste. Baiga is elected from the Cheros and this election is hereditary. The *baiga* is the general medicine man of the whole village and performs all the religious ceremonies. He, in return of his performances, gets some grains from all the cultivators as his '*haq*' (rights). He is socially more respected than other castes except the Brahmins. The general economic condition of the village is not good and it is on the poorest area. There have been no rains for a few decades. All the people of the village are suffering from the acute shortage of rains. Irrigation is not possible as the canals and the small water resources have no water. Further the wells are not enough and most of them are private. Due to this acute shortage of water there has taken place a change in the occupation of each caste. Most of the lower castes have become artisans and are also working as labourers in constructing road and other such government works. The percentage of labourers is high among the lower castes and low among the higher castes. It was also observed that even the females are working as labourers and this has given rise to prostitution.

There are very few people who are literate. The percentage of literacy is high among the Kurmis, Koeris and Christians and is nearly nil among other lower castes. Today it has become very difficult for them to satisfy even their basic economic needs due to poverty.

#### IV. HIERARCHAL GROUPING OF CASTES

According to the Hindu Social System, castes are grouped into one or the other of the four **varnas (castes)**- Brahmin, Kshatriya, Vaishya and Shudra. There is a fifth class called 'untouchables'. Each of these groups occupies a particular and definite position in the social frame. But in actual practice the relative position of the castes, which come in one or the other major division, become difficult to assign. Here any attempt to show the hierarchical status of each caste in the social frame is not made. However, from the point of view of social and economic status, the castes of the village can be roughly divided into the five caste groups. The castes in the area were classified into five hierarchical groups as follows:-

- 1<sup>st</sup> Group - Brahmin.
- 2<sup>nd</sup> Group - Kurmi, Koeri and Ahir.
- 3<sup>rd</sup> Group - Chero, Manjhi, and Nai.
- 4<sup>th</sup> Group - Teli and Panika.
- 5<sup>th</sup> Group - Chamars.

The basic factors that separate the one caste group from the other caste group are the following:-

1. The Brahmins represent the highest varna of the Hindu social system. They are the priests and ritual heads of the system. The Kurmis, Koeris and Ahirs are equally treated with the Brahmins. They are socially more respected than the other lower groups.

The Kurmis, who are the most influential group of people in the village, consider themselves inferior only to the Brahmins. But there is a constant struggle between the Kurmis and the Koeris for the status. The Koeris impose their superiority and claim themselves as Kushwaha Kshatriyas. This movement was more emphasized in the year 1951. The Koeris had a meeting for it at Dudhi and Shree Dhru Narain Sinha, advocate at Sonbhadra court, was invited to conduct the proceedings. It was decided there by the caste *panchayat* (meetings) that the Koeris are the Kushwaha Kshatriyas. Since then the Koeris have started writing '*Singh*' after their names. They also started wearing '*Janeu*' (sacred thread). By this decision they imposed their superiority over the Kurmis.

In return the Kurmis did not raise any objection to it. They gave only one reason of their superiority and that was abstinence from Liquor. Drinking liquor is prohibited in their society and is regarded as a degraded thing which breaks the social solidarity. Some of the Koeris drink liquor. Now it was quite justified that the Koeris are inferior to the Kurmis in caste status. The researcher came across a Koeri named Raj kishore Singh (name changed), who was badly drunk and enjoying the company of Vishwa Nath Panika (name changed).

2. Only the castes of the upper rank are authorized to put on *Janeu* (sacred thread). The Ahirs, who have recently started wearing '*janeu*', are often criticized for the same. But in general all the three castes i.e. Kurmis, Koeris and Ahirs, are equally respected by other castes.
3. The profession of the Brahmins is traditionally associated with learning and priestly functions. They are still priests. The Kurmis are mainly agriculturists. But the Koeris who are traditionally vegetable growers and the Ahirs who are cattle breeders, have also become agriculturists. The second rank is distinguished from the other lower rank on the basis of abstinence from liquor to a certain extent. Drinking liquor is not socially accepted by the upper rank castes.

Preceding to the third group it was observed that there is a constant struggle among the Cheros and the Manjhis for their status. Manjhis claim themselves to be the original inhabitants of the place and think themselves equal in status with the Brahmins. But the only justification given for their status is that they have not been inviting the Brahmins to perform their ceremonies. They have been performing their ceremonies themselves. But now they have started inviting 'Brahmins' to perform the same. Furthermore they are the *manjhwars* (fisherman) as asserted by other castes.

The cheros enjoy higher status than the Manjhis. Among the Cheros one man is elected as *Baiga* to act as a general medicine-man and to perform religious ceremonies of the whole village. This election is hereditary. This fact is given as justification by the other castes for the superiority of the Cheros over the Manjhis. The *nai* falls lower than the Manjhis. He is invited by other castes on all the ceremonial occasions.

Coming to the 4<sup>th</sup> group we find that the Telis are prohibited from attending the ceremonies in any of the higher caste

group. To see their face in the way, when one is going for some ceremonial occasion, is regarded as inauspicious. More plainly, they are tabooed. The Panikas claim themselves to be Manjhis. But the assertion made by other castes is that they are lower in status. The reason is that they are doing the weaving work and are the *julahas* (weavers). The Chamars form the lowest rank. The basic features that distinguish the 1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> caste groups from the other lower caste group are:-

- Neither '*kachcha*' (uncooked food) or *pakka*(cooked) food, nor water from the lower caste group is accepted by the higher caste groups.
- The first three caste groups are 'clean' the last two are 'unclean' and are said to be ritually impure. The last group is associated with the professions that are ritually polluting.
- Economically the 4<sup>th</sup> group is backward and the 5<sup>th</sup> group even more backward. They are, in general, the poorest section of the village.
- Socially they constitute the lowest strata of society and form the lowest part of the caste structure. On the basis of the above facts we can draw a diagram as shown in Fig. 1 to show the hierarchical grouping of the castes more clearly.

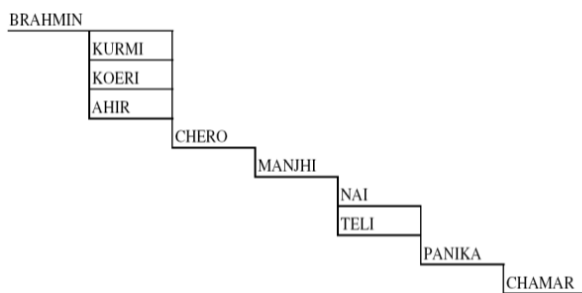


Fig. 1 Hierarchical Grouping of the Castes in the Village

#### A. Commensalities

The Brahmins do not accept '*kachcha*' (uncooked) food from the Kurmis and on the other hand the Kurmis do not accept '*kachcha*' food from the Brahmins. Both of them can take '*pakka*' food and water in metal vessels from each other. But *sarpanch* (head) of the Kurmis caste *panchayat* (meetings) said that now some of the Kurmis have started taking '*kachcha*' food in a Brahmin's house and in return the Brahmins have started drinking water in clay pots in a Kurmis house. The reason he gave for this is that the Brahmins enjoy the highest status so there is no harm in taking '*kachcha*' food from them. This shows that the caste system is at-present, not as rigid as it was in the earlier days. They do not observe much difference and are quite cooperative to maintain the social solidarity. Furthermore the Brahmins and the Kurmis can also smoke in one *Chilam* (smoking pipe) and can sit together on one cot.

Both the Koeris and the Kurmis do not accept '*kachcha*' food and water in clay pots among themselves. They only accept '*pakka*' (cooked) food and water in metal vessels. But

at-present, some of the Kurmis and the Koeris have also started accepting '*kachcha*' food and water in clay pots when they go on picnic or on other such occasions to recreate themselves. This is only due to the intimate relations amongst themselves. The Koeris and the Kurmis can also smoke in one *chilam* (smoking pipe) and they do not observe any distance in sitting together.

The Ahirs and the Kurmis are more or less on equal footing with each other. Both of them accept '*pakka*' food and water in metal vessels among themselves, but they do not accept '*kachcha*' food and water in clay pots. Both of them can smoke in one *chilam* and sit together on one cot. But Hari Prasad Kurmi (name changed) told me that these traditional regulations are undergoing a change and commensality relations are not so rigid now as were formerly.

The Cheros only accept '*pakka*' food and water in metal vessels from the Kurmi but the Kurmis do not accept the same. They can only accept water in metal pots from the Cheros. But Goverdhan Chero, (name changed) who is the '*baiga*' of the whole village, said that this restriction of '*pakka*' food participation is becoming loose and some of the Kurmis have started accepting '*pakka*' food from Cheros. This may be due to the fact that the '*baiga*' is elected from the Cheros who performs all the religious ceremonies of the village and some of the social ceremonies. Both the Cheros and Kurmis can smoke and sit together equally.

The Halwai and the Kurmi both accept only '*pakka*' food and water in metal vessels from each other. They also sit together on feasts and also in daily life. They can also smoke in one *chilam*. The Manjhis accept both '*pakka*' food and water in neither metal vessels nor '*kachcha*' food and water in clay pots from the Kurmis. They have also not been participating in the ceremonies among the Kurmis, but now they have started the same. They also sit with the Kurmis and smoke in one *chilam*.

The Dhobi accept both '*kachcha*' and '*pakka*' food and water from the Kurmis but the Kurmis do not accept the same from them. In most cases due to the '*jajmani*' system they get some *sidha* (gift including food grains, clothes and some money) from the Kurmis. There is no restriction in sitting and smoking among the Kurmis and the Dhobis. The Kurmis do not accept even the '*pakka*' food and water from them. The Kurmis do not accept food and water from the Muslims, but the Muslims accept both the '*pakka*' and '*kachcha*' food and water from the Kurmis, whenever a Muslim is invited in '*kachcha*' or '*pakka*' *dawat*, (feast) he is given a separate seat. But the noticeable feature is that the Kurmis do not observe any restriction in smoking in a *Chilam* with the Muslim and both can sit on one cot.

The Telis are not invited by the Kurmis on ceremonial occasions but in general life the Telis accepts '*pakka*' food and water in metal vessels from the Kurmis. The Kurmis do not accept food and water from them. Both can smoke in one *chilam* and can sit together in '*pakki*' *dawat* (feast) in a Kurmi's place and also in daily life.

The Panikas have been accepting both the '*kachcha*' and '*pakka*' food and water from the Kurmis. But Jagat Panika

(name changed) told me that now they have stopped taking '*kachcha*' food and water in clay pots from the Kurmis. The male members in some cases are taking '*kachcha*' food and water in clay pots but the females have totally stopped it. It is because they are dissatisfied with the humiliating and degrading position in the society as the Chamars have. Not even this some of the Panikas have also stopped taking '*pakka*' food and water in metal pots from the Majhis. By this they claim themselves to be superior to the Manjhis. They have also left attending the ceremonies among the Manjhis.

They can be invited to attend the ceremonies among the Kurmis and can sit in the same line with the Kurmis in a '*pakka*' dawat. They can also sit on one cot with the Kurmis and can also smoke in one *chilam*. Some of the Panikas and Chamars have become Christians. They accept both the '*kachcha*' and '*pakka*' food and water from the Kurmis. They can be invited in '*pakki*' (cooked) or '*kachchi*' (uncooked) feast and can also sit and smoke together with the Kurmis. But those Chamars, who have become Christians, are not allowed to sit and smoke with the Kurmis. The same social distance is followed as with the Chamars.

The Chamars are on the lowest social strata. They accept both '*kachcha*' and '*pakka*' food and water from the Kurmis. They are invited in all the ceremonies and are one of the important pillars of the *jajmani* system. Mostly the Chamars get some *sidha* on ceremonies. They cannot take food in a line among the Kurmis and are given separate seats. Even in daily life they are not allowed to sit with the Kurmis and any other caste. They cannot smoke in one *chilam* with any of the caste. They cannot even touch the utensils of any caste. Like Panikas, the Chamars are also very dissatisfied with their present degrading position in society. With the spread of the Harijan uplift movement they became more conscious of their low position in the caste hierarchy and naturally began to clamor for status. Some of the Chamars are thinking of equality and assimilation with the higher caste. With this end in view they refuse to take even '*pakka*' food from the Panikas. There is a desire among the Chamars to lead a respectable life. There have been two groups among the Chamars-

1. Sanwars
2. Purabis

The main line of distinction between them, according to Jagdeo Chowdhry (name changed) of the Sanwaris, is that the Purabis keep pigs and hens and other such things, which are tabooed for the Sanwaris. Further the Purabis indulge in excessive drinking and the indulgence is permitted even in *panchayats*, marriages and other festivities. Jagdeo said that he attempted to bring a check on the liquor consumption and even pressed the Chowdhry of the Purabis to prohibit it in their group. They even got something in black and white but reluctantly be said that all efforts in these lines proved useless and these persons were continuing with their drinking habit. But in the class of Jagdeo i.e. Sanwaris, most of them have left it simply to increase their social status. Due to the poor economic conditions and consciousness of their low status in society most of the Chamars have left their traditional

occupation of leather making and have adopted agriculture as their main occupation. They have also engaged themselves as laborers in the PWD (Public Works Department) for constructing roads etc.

#### V.ROLE OF JAJMANI SYSTEM

*Jajmani* is a term commonly known as '*malik*' or master. This system is prevalent only among Hindus. In this system it is a practice that certain people, irrespective of their social status, willingly do certain specialized services for the member of other castes at religious and social function and ceremonies. The person, who renders the services, is called as '*parjan*' or '*parjama*', while those for whom the service are offered are referred to as '*jajmans*'. The payment is predetermined and unquestioned. This payment is made both in cash and in the form of crops. The '*parijans*' claim this payment as their hereditary right. Neither of these categories is covered by the caste hierarchy and in certain spheres of social intercourse is unmindful of their caste differences. As for example a Brahmin can also be a '*parjan*' of a lower caste but he is commonly called as the '*purohit*'. But as he is higher in status, he does not accept food from the lower castes. He only accepts some *sidha*. The relations in the *jajmani* system, between the *jajmans* and the *parijans* can be more adjustable when there is a mutual obligation in terms of service and payment. The main castes, which are headed in the *jajmani* system in this village, are – the Brahmins, the Nai, the Chero (baiga), and the Chamars. The researcher has shown their participation and the return they usually get at various religious and social ceremonies and rites.

##### A. At Birth

At the birth of a Kurmi child it is not necessary to call the *Pandit* or *Purohit* or Brahmins to note the time of birth and prepare the '*janampatri*' (horoscope) of the child. They usually call the eldest member of their family or a senior neighboring man. In some cases they call their *sabhapati* (member of the panchayat) for the same. When Komal Prasad Kurmi's daughter Sirivanti devi (name changed) was born nearly seven months back, Pheku Ram *sabhapati* (also known by the name of Bhuru ram) was called to note the time and prepare the *janampatri*. But in case the Brahmins are called for the same, he does not get anything in cash or kind due to the *janampatri* system. The *pandit* or the *purohit* is called at *chatti* (sixth day after the birth) to take *pakki dawat* (feast). He is also called for the *nama-dheya* (naming ceremony) rite which is performed on the tenth or the twelfth day after the birth of the child when it is given a name. (The question of naming is important according to some authorities, and certain broad rules have to be followed here in order that the name may refer to the family, the community and the social class to which the person belongs. In Manu's opinion, for instance the name given to the new-born baby should be such as to signify his *varna*). The *purohit* reads some Sanskrit *slokas* and performance the *gaury-ganesh puja* (worshipping Lord Shiva and his wife Parvati). He usually gets Rs. 501 for the performance of the *nama-dheya* ceremony. After the *nama-*

*dheya* rite there is another and more important ceremony known as *nama-dheya* (*anna* – boiled rice, cooked food; *prasana* – eating. This rite is performed in the sixth month after birth. The child is now fed with cooked food for the first time. Here the problems of the up-keep and maintenance of the growing body of the child occupies the mind of the parents). The *purohit* reads some *sanskritslokas* and performs the *gauri-ganesh* (also known as *gobar-ganesh*) *puja* and says the '*katha*' of *satyanarain* (story reading of one of the gods among hindus). Here he gets something in cash or kind and takes *prasad* (small amount of fruits with sweets) and *pakki dawat*. On these occasions any of the castes can give gifts to the new-born, but there is no compulsion. Mostly, these gifts are offered by the near relatives. All the castes can be invited and the invitees get *pakki dawat* on the *chatti* rites, but the intra-caste people get *kachchi dawat* (gift containing uncooked grains).

At *chatti* (sixth day of the new born) the Nai cuts the hair of the invitees and also shaves them. Both the Nai and the Naain paints *mahavar* (a kind of red colour) in the feet of the females. For this he or she gets a *neg* (gift) of Rs. 21 plus five seers (approx. 1 kg.) *kachcha sidha* (which include either flour or barley or rice and is equal to three seers in weight). The Nai also acts as the messenger and invites all the relatives and friends to the feast. He also collects the material for the *gauri-ganesh puja* at the *nama-dheya* rites and on the *annaprasana* (first time giving of full meal to the new born) rite and gets some *sidha*. The *naain* massages the mother and the child with *tel* (mustard oil). She also applies *ubtan* (*ubtan* – it is used instead of soap in the village. It consists of wheat flour, powdered turmeric and mustard oil) on the body of the mother and the child on the ceremonial bath at *chatti*. The Chamaarin (wife of the person belonging to the chamaar caste) is always invited for cutting the umbilical cord and attends to the expectant mother during confinement and after child birth to *chatti*. For all her services she gets a *neg* (cash reward) of one hundred and one rupees in the case of baby boy and fifty one rupees in the case of a girl baby and *five seers kachcha sidha* (approx three kilograms uncooked rice, wheat flour, pulse, salt, turmeric, potato and red dried chillies) The Chamars are also invited to beat the *dhols* (drum – a kind of musical instrument) on *chatti* and in return they get either *kachchi dawat* or some *sidha*.

The dhobis are also called to wash the clothes of the mother at *chatti* after the ceremonial bath of the new born. But, as there is only one dhobi in the whole village and who is a muslim, the Kurmis have their dhobi *parijans* in the Dudhi tehsil. He gets some *sidha* in return for his service.

In the birth ceremony of Sirivanti devi, daughter of Komal Prasad Kurmi, nearly 35 persons were invited. The prominent persons, of the other castes, among the invitees were – master kanhaiya ram koeri, ram dulare Manjhi, Ram dhan chero, Vishwa Nath Panika and Bhuru Ram Kurmi, Manjeet Nai, their *parijan* got Rs. 251 and 8 seers '*kachcha sidha*' for all his performances. Mundel chamarin got Rs 151 and 5 seers '*kachcha sidha*' and Bhekhu chamar and his party got Rs. 151 in cash and 5 seers (*sidha*) *kachcha* in return of his

performance. Pandit Ram Autar was called from Dudhi to perform the birth ceremony. In return of his performances he got Rs. 501 in cash and 5 seers '*kachcha sidha*'.

#### B. At Mundan

Among the Hindus this ceremony is also known as '*choora-karma*' or '*jhalari*', where the first tonsure of the hair, (for the sake of dharma), is performed in the first or the third year, or at any age according to the tradition in the family. This ceremony is perhaps intended to celebrate the child's introduction to the rules of bodily hygiene. The Kurmis usually do not give much importance to this ceremony, but in case of *manauti* it is given more importance. (*manauti*:- at the birth of a child it is declared by the father of the child that if his son will survive he will perform a '*mundan*' ceremony at a particular place, usually on a holy place. It is mostly done by those, whose children do not survive). The *purohit* decides the most auspicious day for *mundan* or *jhalari* and the hour for the ceremony. This is known as '*saiit-vicharna*'. The *purohit* recites some Sanskrit *slokas*, invoking to god to give a happy long life to the child; for this he usually gets 51 rupees and some '*sidha*', which depends on the economic condition of the person. The *nai* cuts the hair of the child on the decided place and for his service he gets a *neg* of 101 rupees in the case of a boy and 51 rupees in the case of a baby girl and 1 kg *sidha*. The *jhalari* is floated in the river where *mundan* ceremony is performed. In the case of *manauti* a goat is also sacrificed and is accepted as *Prasad* by all the attendants, even by the *purohit*. After the ceremony is performed, the father of the child distributes some sweets mostly *laddoos* (sweets) to all the invitees relatives and neighbours. In some cases, if the economic condition of the person is sound, '*pakka* feast' is also given to the neighbours and friend and *kachcha* feast to the *baradari* (relatives). All the castes, expect *telis*, can be invited to attend the ceremony and gifts can be accepted from all the castes. But due to the poor economic conditions mostly gifts are offered to the child by the near relatives. When Siddhan Kurmi's son Chandrika was born nearly 4 years back, the prominent persons among the invitees were:- Henda Chamar, Kanhaiya Ram Koeri, Bishrain Panika and Pheku Ram Kurmi, Ram Autar, their *purohit* performed the ceremony and in return he got 3 kgs *sidha* and 51 rupees in cash. Manjeet Nai, in return of his service got 51 rupees and 1 kg *sidha*. This was the third son of Siddhan and the other two died young. So he had a *manauti*. He distributed 20 kg of *laddoos* (sweets) and also gave *pakka* feast to the other caste people. Inderjeet gave 25 rupees to the child, Bishrain gave a shirt, Pheku ram gave 25 rupees and one cap to the child. Other gifts were also offered by the intra-caste people and relatives.

#### C. At Janeu

The *janeu* ceremony is mostly performed at the time of marriage. In earlier days the Kurmis have not been wearing *janeu* (sacred thread), but now they have started it because they claim themselves as the second highest in status. In the case of *manauti* the ceremony becomes important, but still it is

not a compulsion. It is not an important feature and its performance depends on the economic condition of the person. But whenever, mostly at maturity i.e. from 15 to 20 years of age, the ceremony is performed *pakka* feast is essential. The *purohit* performs the *gaur-ganesh puja* and reads some Sanskrit *slokas*. He also says *katha* and performs *havan* (the holy fire) after the performance of *yagopavit* or *janeu* ceremony. In return he gets something in cash and, or, kind and also takes *pakka* feast and *Prasad*. The Nai does not have much importance. He gives invitation to the relatives and friend and collects the material for *gaur-ganesh puja* and *katha*. In return for his services he gets something in cash and some *sidha*. Shen Arjun Kurmi's (age 15 years) son of Ram Rattan, *janau* ceremony was performed; *pandit* Ram Autar got 51 rupees in cash and one *dhoti*. He also took *pakkidawat* and *Prasad*. Manjeet Nai got 2 kgs of *sidha* for his services. The Telis are not invited to attend the ceremony among the Kurmis. All the other castes can be invited to attend the *janeu* ceremony. The invitees get *pakka* feast and the *biradari* (relatives) get *kachchi* feast. They can also offer gifts in both cash and kind to the person, whose *yagopavit* is done.

#### D.At Marriage

The *vivah* (marriage) ceremony marks the individual entry into the *grihasthasharama*. This ceremony may be said to seal (the socialization proper to the individual), for here he takes the pledge to assist in the continuation of the race, and actually commences his efforts in that direction. Among the Kurmis, at-present, marriage is prevalent in two ways. In the first instance if the boy wants to marry himself with some particular girl, his father has to pay the amount desired by the father of the girl. In the second instance, if the girl's father is in direct need of getting his daughter married with a particular boy, he pays the amount desired by the boy's father. Both these amounts are paid at the *tilak* ceremony. But as the village is very poor, marriage by exchange is prevalent, as for example – if a father has one son a daughter and the other has a son and a daughter, they will marry their issues on mutual understanding without any heavy cash payment at *tilak*. But in this village due to the scarcity of girls mostly the desired money is paid by the father of the bride groom. This tendency is giving rise to marital relations. Those Kurmis whose economic condition is sound, have more than one wife. Divorce cases are quite frequent. As a consequence of this, intra-caste clashes are found in a great many number for a Kurmi can marry only in his sub-caste (chandan is the sub-caste of the Kurmi in this village).

In the marriages of Kurmis, the *pandit* or *purohit* performs the *tilak* and *sankalp* when the bridegroom's father sends some clothes, ornaments and the mutually agreed cash as well as *narial* (coconut) and *suparis* (betelnuts) etc. the *purohit* performs the religious ceremony of *chawkpurna*, and the *gaur-ganesh*. The bride sits in front of the *chawk*, along with her father. The *purohit* reads some Sanskrit *slokas* (verses) from a sacred book, which completes the ceremony. For performing the *tilak* ceremony the *purohit* does not necessarily gets anything due to the *jajmani* system. His reward if he gets any

depends on the economic condition of the person. He also takes *pakka* feast after the ceremony. The *purohit* also accompanies the marriage party to perform the religious ceremony of *dwar-puja* when the marriage party visits the bride's house for the first time. The *purohit* reads some Sanskrit verses and performs *havan* (sacred fire) at the *dwar* (main gate) of the religious ceremony called *barned*. The *purohit* performs the *ganesh puja* and the *bhasur* (elder brother of the groom) presents some ornaments, clothers and some cash to the bride. At the *gotra-uchchar* ceremony he calls the names of three generations of both the groom's and the bride's ancestors.

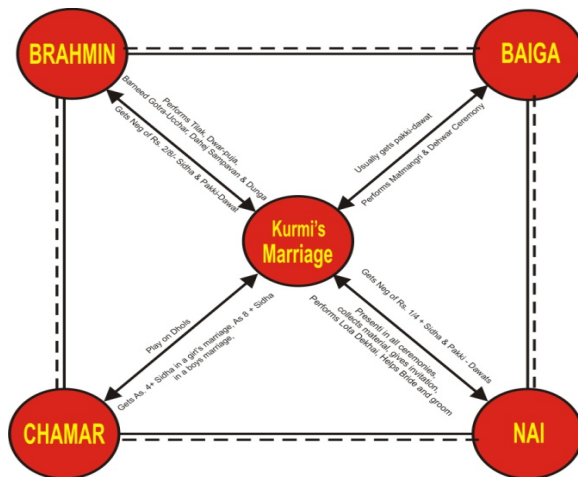


Fig. 2 Interdependence of castes at Kurmis' Marriage

The *purohit* also directs the *bhawren* ceremony (the bride and the bridegroom take seven rounds of the holy fire). The *purohit* ties the corner of the groom's shirt to the corner of the bride's saree. He then again performs the religious ceremony of *gaur-ganesh* and chants different verses for the various rituals performed by the bride and bridegroom. He then takes the *sendur* (vermillion) from the palm of the groom's father, reads some mantras and fives it in the groom's palm, who fills the parting of the bride's hair. The ceremony is called as *sendur-gadhan*. After this he extracts an oath from both the bride and bridegroom to lead a happy and peaceful life in harmony, treating each other as equal and with consideration. The *purohit* also accompanies the bridegroom with his father, brother and near relatives for eating *khechari* (a kind of *kachcha* food prepared with rice and dal). Before eating *khechari* he stands up and reads some Sanskrit verses praising the co-operative spirit of the *baratis* (those who accompany the marriage party), binding the *biradari* (relatives) with the strong tie of *kachcha* food and praising god for a happy and prosperous life of the couple. Here the *purohit* takes *pakki dawat*.

At *daheja sampavan* ceremony, when the father of the bride presents some ornaments, clothes and metal vessels etc. to the bridegroom at *janwasa*, the *purohit* reads some Sanskrit verses, which literally mean a request to the bridegroom to the place where the marriage party stays, accept the same and



again expressing the groom's acceptance to the bride's father. On this occasion the *purohit* acts as a mediator and usually gets 101 rupees in cash but not necessarily. At *gauna*, which is either performed immediately after *daheja-sampavan* ceremony, when the bride proceeds for the groom's house, the *purohit* performs the religious ceremony of *gaur-ganesh* and reads some Sanskrit *slokas* (verses). The *purohit* takes *anjari* in his hands, which includes some rice, *gur*, *supari* (betelnuts), some fruits and one piece, touches it to the *gaur-ganesh* and *kalash* (metal vessel) and gives it in the palms of the groom. The bridegroom throws it slowly on the *pattal*, kept on the ground, touching the palms of the bride. When the ceremony is over, the bride leaves for the groom's house along with the *barat* (marriage party).

In *dunga* which is either performed after fifteen days or a month or a few months after the *gauna* in the case of late marriage or at maturity, the *purohit* does not accompany the bridegroom. From *tilak* to *gauna* that is for the whole marriage ceremony the *purohit* gets a *neg* 51 rupees and five kg *sidha* from both the sides. The *purohit* may also get more both in cash and kind, which depends on the economic condition of the person. Ram Autar, the *purohit* of Kurmi caste in Bedar accompanied the marriage party of Basdeo Kurmi with Mahajri and performed all the marriage rituals. For his services, he got rupees 101 and 10 kgs *kachcha sidha* from the bridegroom's side and 10 Kgs *kachcha sidha* from the bride's side.

In a Kurmi marriage as shown in Fig. 2 both the *Nai* and *naain* accompany the marriage party. At all the occasions when the *purohit* performs the religious ceremony of *gaur-ganesh* the *nai* prepare the *gaur* and *ganesh* of cow dung, draws the *chawk* (a square bearing some religious significance) on the ground with dry wheat flour and collects other materials needed in performing the ceremony. He also shows *lota* (a small metal vessel) filled with water to the *baratis* (marriage party) after the performance of each ceremony which means a request to the *barat* from the bride's side to proceed for *janwasa*. This is known as *lota-dekhai*. He also helps and directs the bride and the bridegroom on each ceremonial and religious performance. He accompanies the bridegroom at each ceremony. He also calls the *baratis* (marriage party) from the *janwasa* before the performance of each ceremony in the bride's house. Before the *bhawren* ceremony the *nai* cuts the nail and hair of the groom. He also massages the groom. The ceremony is called as *koni karahi*. Here the *nai* gets determined for his *haq*. The fulfillment of his *haq* depends on the economic condition of the bridegroom. At the *bhawren* ceremony he also takes seven rounds of the holy fire along with the bride and the bridegroom. He helps the bridegroom in throwing the *bedi* (a small collection of rice under the *marav* having some religious significance) after each round. The *nai* paints *mahavar* (a kind of red colour) in the feet of the bride and the bridegroom before going for the *anjari* ceremony.

In return, for his work in a Kurmi's marriage the *nai* gets a *neg* of Rs.151 and 2<sup>1/2</sup> approx. 2 and a half kg *kachcha sidha* from both the sides. He may also get more in the form of

*nichawar* (some money payment) but all this depends on the economic condition of the persons. In the marriage of Basdeo Kurmi, Manjeet Nai (their *parijan*) was called. He in return for his services got Rs. 200 and 5 kg *kachcha sidha* from the side of the bridegroom and Rs. 151 plus 5 kgs *kachcha sidha* from the bride's side. He also took *pakka* food with the *baratis* (marriage party). The *dhobi* does not have any ceremonial importance in a Kurmi's marriage. He may be called to wash the clothes of the *baratis* (marriage party) and also of the bride's relatives and for his service he is paid in cash or kind, as mutually agreed.

At the marriage of a Kurmi the Chamars are called to beat the *dhols* (drum, a kind of musical instrument). They accompany the *baraat* and beat the *dhols* on each occasion, when the bridegroom goes to the house of the bride for the performance of a ceremony. The Chamars are also called from the side of the bride separately for the same purpose. Their presence is necessary from the beginning to the end of the marriage ceremony. In a girl marriage they hire them, 2 to 4 days prior to the occasion and they get *kachcha* food on all the days.

In return for their service they get a *neg* Rs. 101 and 2<sup>1/2</sup> kgs *kachcha sidha* in girls marriage and a *neg* 151 plus 2<sup>1/2</sup> kgs *kachcha sidha* in a boys marriage. In the marriage ceremony of Chandrika Prasad Kurmi, son of Baldeo, Bheku Chamar, with two other Chamars, was called. The party got as Rs.500 and 5 kgs *kachcha sidha* and also took *kachcha* food in a separate line. The *baiga* is invited to perform the *matmangri* ceremony in a Kurmi's marriage from the side of the bride. He digs the *marav* (the place under which *bhawren* and other ceremonies are performed) and is blind-folded with a piece of cloth. He then throws the soil for 5 times with his palms on his backside, where it is collected by the *bua* (bride's father's sister). The *baiga* also performs the religious ceremony of *dehwar*, when the *barat* proceeds from the house of the bride after the completion of marriage ceremony. The *barat* goes to the *dehwar* (the place at the boundary of the village where all the religious ceremonies are performed) and the *baiga* throws some *gur* and *ghee* on the grounds and reads some *mantras*. The groom bows down on the holy ground and pays respect to it. For all his performances the *baiga* does not get anything as his *haq* due to *jajmani* system.

In the marriage ceremony of Chandrika Prasad, son of Baldeo, Goverdhan Baiga was called to perform the *matamanri* and *dehwar* ceremony. He in return got 1 *dhoti* at the *dehwar* ceremony. The *Telis* are tabooed and they cannot even show their faces on such occasions like marriage, death, birth and the *mundan* ceremonies. Their visit or appearance on such occasions is regarded as a bad sign. All the other castes can be invited to attend the marriage party and they can also offer gifts both in cash and kind to the bride as well as to the bridegroom on the occasion of *muhdekhai*. It was observed that in earlier days the *manjhis* did not participate in the marriage ceremony of a Kurmi but now they are as loyal as other castes are. All the *biradari* (relatives) also get *kachchi dawat*. In the marriage ceremony of Chandrika Prasad Kurmi 45 people were invited and out of these 20 people belonged to

other castes. The prominent persons among these were:- Inderjeet Koeri, Kanhaiya Ram Koeri, Vishwa Nath and Bishrain Panika, Jagdeeo Chero, Salamat Dhobi and Kokhu Mishra Brahmin. All the invitees returned the invitation with Rs.101 in order to help the Baldeo and took *pakka dawat* at the bride's home.

#### E. At Death

The *antyeshti* or the funeral rite, performed at death, marks the end of the human career of the individual and his entrance into the realm of ancestors (pitris). When a Kurmi dies the *purohit* accompanies the funeral procession of the dead of the burning *ghat*. At *tijnahana* (3<sup>rd</sup> day after death) the *purohit* performs the *ghant* ceremony by *sankalp* through *mentras*. (*ghant* is a clay pot filled with water, piece, supari and some rice which is hanged on peal tree by the person who gives fire to the deceased). At *barhan* (12<sup>th</sup> day after the death) he performs the *pind-dan* ceremony at the *marghat*. He accompanies the funeral party and throws the *pindas* in the river after reading some Sanskrit *slokas* and *mantras*. (*pind-dan* includes five pieces, *gur*, *ghee*, *sewan*, *supari*, milk and the *pindas* are made of the barley flour). He then returns to the house of the deceased and performs the religious ceremony of *gaur-ganesh*. On this occasion the *purohit* gets something both in cash or kind, which depends on the economic condition of the person and also takes *pakka* food. At *barhi*, which may be performed after the *terahen* (13<sup>th</sup> day after the death) or after 3 or 6 months, but usually is performed after one year of the death, the *purohit* gives *pind-dan* at the house of the deceased. After performing the *barhi* ceremony he gets something in cash or kind which depends again on the economic condition of the person. (in earlier day the *purohit* used to get a cow and other such gifts). He also takes *pakki dawat* after the performance of *barhi*. It is believed that the soul of all the dead ancestors of the family visit the house. The *purohit* also performs the *gaur-ganesh* ceremony and says *katha* of *satanarain* in order to protect the relations from the visiting souls and cause no harm to them as shown in Fig. 3.

In the death rite of Dunia Kurmi, son of Balram, Pandit Ram Autar was called to perform the funeral rites. He in return for his services got a total amount of Rs. 500 and took *pakka* feast at *barahwan* and *barshi*. There is a sub-caste among the Brahmins, called Maha Brahmins or *mahapatra*. At *daswan* (10<sup>th</sup> days after the death) he accompanies the funeral party to *marghat* and gives *panda-dan*. At *ekadasa* or *ekgrahni* (11<sup>th</sup> day after the death) he again gives *pind-dan* and in return for his services gets *dan* (gifts) from others, who accompanied the funeral procession. He also gets the cloths and other personal belongings of the deceased if the bereaved family can afford to part with them. The *mahapatra* also breaks the *ghant* and takes out *Jur* at *ekadasa*. He then returns to the house of the deceased along with others and takes *pakka* food.

In the death rite of Dunia Kurmi, Gaya Prasad *maha-patra* was called from Dudhi. In return for his services, he got a pair of shoes, 2 shirts, 2 *dhotis* and one cot. He also got Rs. four Hundred in cash and 5 kgs *kachcha sidha*. The Nai

accompanies the funeral procession and shaves the head of the person, who gives fire to the deceased at *marghat*. At *tijnahana* the Nai collects the material for binding the *ghant* and performs the *jur bandhwana* rite near the bank of the river at *marghat*. All the relatives of the deceased give water, *tel* (oil) and *jao* (barley) to the *jur* and *ghant*. It is believed that in this way the deceased will get enough of water and food in heaven. At *daswan*, the Nai gives invitation to those who had accompanied the funeral procession of the deceased and shaves their head. In return for his services he usually gets Rs. 70-80 and five kgs *kachha sidha*. He also attends the *ekadasa* and *Bharawan* rites and gets *pakka* food at the *bharawan*. At *barshi*, the Nai again shaves the heads of those who were shaved at *daswan* and return for his services he usually gets Rs. 10 and five kgs *kachha sidha*.

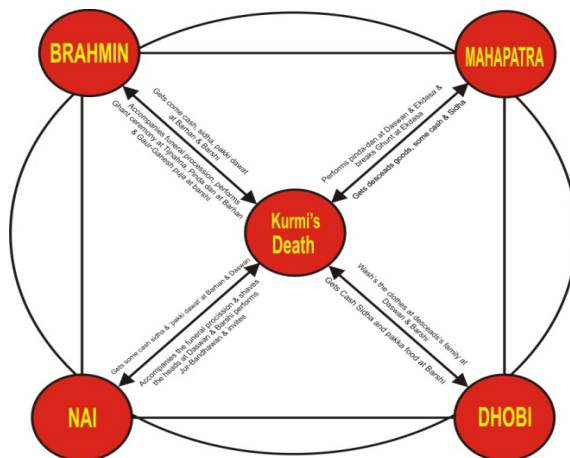


Fig. 3 Interdependence of castes at Kurmis' Death

The Dhobis do not form part of the funeral procession of a Kurmi. The Dhobi is called at *daswan* and *barshi*. He washes the clothes at the bereaved family and of others who join the funeral rite. He, in return for his services, usually gets Rs. 100 and 2<sup>1/2</sup> kgs *kachcha sidha*. He may or may not be called at *barshi* or *pakka dawat*, which depends on the economic condition of the person.

In the death rite of *dunia*, *bharosey* Dhobi was called from Dudhi and he got Rs. 100 and 6 kgs *kachcha sidha* in return for his total services. He was also called for the *pakka-dawat* at *barshi*, which was performed after 3 months of *dunia's* death. All other castes can join the funeral procession of a Kurmi, but the Telis are tabooed. The *biradari* (relatives) have a compulsion to attend and join the funeral procession. If any one does not attend the death rite, a severe step is taken against him by the caste panchayat. He generally out caste. Nearly 3 years ago when Shiv Rattan Kurmi died at the age of 31 years the prominent persons who attended the funeral rites were:- master Kanhaiya Ram, Inderjeet Koeri, Vishwa Nath Panika, Bhekhu Chamar and Ram Dulare Manjhi, Goverdhan Chero. These people took *pakka* feast at *barshi* and also attended the *katha* and took *Prasad*. No other castes have any work to do at the death of a Kurmi.

### F. At Katha

Katha is mostly performed at the *Puranmashi* (full moon) in the month of *baisakh*. In the usual course, *katha* is essential when there is any social charge, *manauti*, at *annaprasana*, and at *barshi*. It is also performed when there is a famine or epidemic. They believe that by saying *katha* they will be protected by god. The Kurmis invite all the castes to attend the *katha* at their place and take *Prasad*, but here again the Telis are tabooed. The Kurmis also accept the *Prasad* from other castes when there is *katha*. The Kurmis even attend the *katha* and take *Prasad* from a Chamar's house. But according to Ambika Prasad Kurmi, the Kurmis do not attend the *katha* in a Chamar's house. But they go in the *kathas* arranged by the Dhobis and accept *Prasad* only if it is prepared by Brahmin, Ahir or Koeri. Similar is the case with Panikas and usually Kurmis avoid going to their house. The *purohit* is invited to say *katha* at a Kurmis house. He first of all performs the religious ceremony of *gaur-ganesh* and then says the *katha* of *satya narain* from a holy book. In return for this he gets some amount in cash and also accepts *sidha* from the person in whose house it is arranged. He also gets some amount as *nichawar* when the *aarti* is taken by the invitees at the end of the *katha*. He also accepts *Prasad* from the Kurmis and joins the *pakki dawat* if arranged. The *Prasad* is *panjiri* which consists of roasted flour with sugar and certain fruits or *batasa* of sugar. Among the lower castes the *Prasad* is always prepared by the Brahmin. At the death rite of a cow nearly 20 days before Prem Kurmi invited Ram Autar *purohit* to say *katha*. Ram Autar, in return, got Rs. 50 and 5 Kgs *kachcha sidha* from him and also took *pakka* food. He also got Rs 35 and Rs 10 as *aarti*. The Nai is also invited at *katha* in a Kurmi house. He gives invitation to the people, as directed, on behalf of the person, who has arranged the *katha*. The Nai also collects the material for the religious ceremony of *gaur-ganesh*. He usually gets half of the amount which the *purohit* gets and 2 kgs *kachcha sidha*. He may also be invited to take *pakka* feast. At the *annaprasana* of Sirivanti devi, daughter of Komal Prasad Kurmi, Manjeet Nai got 3 and 2 kgs of *kachchca sidha* at *katha*.

## VI. CLASHES

### Ambika vs Raj Kishore

An incident was narrated by an old person which shows that the relations between Kurmis and Koeris are not as cordial as they profess to be. Durga, Mahto (sarpanch) of the Kurmi panchayat of Bidar, had three sons Balram, Girjanandan and Bhgrignandan. After the death of Durga, Balram, his eldest son succeeded as the *Mahto*. Balram married twice; by his first wife he had one son Ambika and by other he had four sons. Balram died in 1945, and left behind some property which consisted of three bullocks, one house and fifteen *bighas* of land. One day soon after his father's death, Ambika had gone to the jungles to collect some fuel and had taken two of his father's bullocks to help him carry the wood. His three brothers i.e. Chinda, Dunia and Kamal thought that he had taken the bullocks with an intention to sell them. They

followed him to the woods, and after having some altercations with Ambika they beat him. He was badly injured and was admitted in Dudhi hospital for about ten days. Joti was not present at the time of incident. The statement of both the parties, about the cause of the beating incident is identical, but the reason provided by them does not seem to be easily understandable. On enquiry from Jwala, Dil karan (refer chart for their relationship with Ambika), the cause was found out to be a family dispute over the partition of the father's property. The police prosecuted the three step brothers of Ambika. To fight this case the three brothers felt the need of money, which they got by selling two buffaloes (one of them died) to Ram Dhari Kurmi. In due course the case was decided and the three accused were fined Rs. 1000 out of which Rs. 400 was to be paid to Ambika as compensation. The three brothers again felt the need of money to pay the fine, lest they should be sent to jail. The mortgaged five *bighas* of land out of the fifteen *bighas* of inherited land; four *bighas* was mortgaged with Raj Kishore Singh Koeri for Rs. 5000 while the rest one *bigha* was mortgaged with Ram Dhari Kurmi. The mortgaged were made in writing, the three brothers having signed the paper. Out of the five *bighas* of land mortgaged by Chinta, Joti and Komal, Ambika was entitled to get his share of one and one quarter *bigha*, which was given to him by the three brothers. Up to this time all were quite satisfied with the state of affairs. No cause for any dispute arose. All the property was divided and the accused in the criminal case had also been punished.

In 1947, Ambika and Joti started negotiating with Ram Dhari and Raj Kishore for their land that was under the latter two's possession. They wanted that Rajkishore should leave the mortgaged land after receiving back the mortgaged money. To support their statement and establish their rights, Ambika and Joti pleaded that in the mortgaged deed signed by Chinta, Dunia and Komal, they had not signed, so it was not a legal document. In any dealing with the ancestral property, the consent of all the five brothers (members of a joint family) was necessary. Ram Dhari was convinced by the pleading and he agreed to give back the one *bigha* land under his possession on receiving the mortgaged money. Ambika and Joti paid some money to Ram Dhari and took the one *bigha* land under their possession. Raj Kishore did not agree to this deal and went on cultivating the four *bighas* for another three years. Raj Kishore's plea was that the three brothers had tendered their resignation for the field to the *superdar* from whom he later on obtained a *patta* for the said fields. He did not leave the land and continued to cultivate it for another year.

In February, 1948, Ambika, Joti and 36 other persons, including 28 Kurmis and their *harwahas* (servants) belonging to other low castes, tried to forcibly take possession of the field. Ambika and his supporters cut the standing crop, set fire to it and showed a lot of anger to Raj Kishore, but as Raj Kishore was alone, he tried to prevent the mischief mongers. The field was situated quite far away from the inhabited part of the village, very near to the jungle and hill (near their holy place *bavanjharia*) as a consequence of which he could not get any help, and not could anyone come to mediate. All the 38 persons were *challaned* (fined) by the police and were

punished by the court for trespass of field and crop stealing. In his defence, Ambika and Joti pleaded that as they had not signed the mortgaged deed, so it was not a legal document, and thus they were the rightful owners of the field. The court contended that as at the time of incident Raj Kishore was in possession of the field and the accused had tried to forcibly snatch the possession, the guilt is proved. For the dispute about rightful ownership of the field, Ambika was advised by the court to file a civil suit. In 1950, Ambika filed a civil suit in the court against Raj Kishore claiming his right over the fields. In this case Ambika uncle Firjanandan also joined him. The case is Ambika Prasad and Girjanandan vs. Raj Kishore Singh. After six months of the filing of the suit, Firjanandan died, his place in the case being taken by Jwala and Gajadhar. Between periods of three years, the case came up fifteen times for hearing before the court but still it could not be decided. Due to scarcity of fund, Ambika and others could not continue to fight the case, as a consequence of which the whole matter is now a closed chapter. As a result of this, feelings are running high in the village. Both the Kurmis and the Koeris always look for a chance to get hold of the others. The other castes are not taking interest in these affairs but in general they are not satisfied with the Kurmis as they want to dominate over them.

#### VII. CONCLUSION

The foregoing description of functional relationship between castes indicates the dynamics of the caste structure in the rural setting. In a closed and symbiotic arrangement, cooperation and conflict both are manifest, but conflict does not assume ugly proportion, due to the social brakes applied by the dominant caste or castes. As leadership rests in the dominant castes and interdependence in economic life becomes a necessity in a self-sufficing economic unit like that of a village, the castes run on the rails and the passive cooperation of the numerous castes is equated with rural peace and tranquility. Today, after the abolition of Zamindari and the frequent contacts the villages have with urban and immigrant people, the cloak of solidarity has been pierced and the functional relationships have been undergoing reorientation. It is as a social scientist put it, birth followed by decay and decay by rebirth. A new type of inter-caste relations is shaping in the villages in which the old attitudes are being slowly transformed and what is in the offing is not tension of hostility but greater concern for group survival and an evaluative code of inter-caste patterns of behavior. There is a general complacency about our village solidarity and integration. We have idolized our village life and find human response in the cry of 'go back to the village'. But we need to know what has been and what the village life is shaping into, before we fall a prey to panegyrics. We need to emphasize microscopic study of Indian rural life to enable us to form correct perspectives about our rural life. Any action therapy must necessarily be oriented to the 'facts of rural life' [3], [4].

The village under study shows how cultures adopted traits from each other and how tribal cultures fare in this process. The Panika has less gained but other tribes like Cheros and

Manjhis have benefitted and have developed what Majumdar calls a *modus vivendi* and gained strength through acculturation. The study also focuses on the inter-relationships of all the castes but they consider Brahmins as the superior most caste and Koeris impose their superiority over the Kurmis and claim themselves as Kushwaha Kshatriyas. This study also examines the concepts given by Srinivas as *Sanskritization* and dominant caste which was also discussed by Majumdar. *Sanskritization* in Srinivas studies come out as a process where certain traits peculiar to the higher caste adopted by the lower castes in their endeavor to improve their status. It shows that the process of acculturation is a two-way traffic and there is both *sanskritization* and *desanskritization* [13]. The upper castes are adopting the customs of the Baiga which gives rise to a pattern of community living in a village with significant cultural implications.

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