

**Politics
of a
periurban
community
in India**

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Edited by
A. H. Somjee

This book consists of a series of studies of six villages having the same socio-economic structures, and all subjected to the urban influences of the same nearby town. The contributions throw light on the peculiar problems of village politics and their implications as also their significance for the rural planner.

The reluctance of the upper castes to share their age-old powers and privileges with the lower castes and their deep sense of insecurity at the prospect of the rising claims of the latter are some of the significant observations of the study. Though as a result of proximity to the city, the lower castes have, generally, made notable advances in terms of employment and education, yet the severe social disabilities from which they suffer in some of the villages have considerably restricted their progress and curbed their ambition. While factors like lack of leadership, dearth of political experience, and poor social status have handicapped their struggle for equality, their numerical superiority and the favourable response of the Government have been a source of encouragement for them.

A striking fact revealed by this study is that the villagers belonging to the lower castes have remained rather indifferent to the political activities of their village and that interest in village politics is largely confined to the middle and upper castes.

Professor Somjee's Introduction very elegantly sums up and evaluates the material presented, and points to the conclusions that might be drawn. Oddly enough, nearness of a town seems to retard rather than promote local political consciousness and activity for as Professor Somjee points out, "the nearness of the town provides a diversion to the villagers and seriously interferes with their civic interests and responsibilities. Each day more and more villagers become town-minded and feel less and less concerned with what goes on in their villages."

POLITICS OF A PERIURBAN
COMMUNITY IN INDIA

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POLITICS OF A
PERIURBAN COMMUNITY
IN INDIA

Edited and with an Introduction by

A. H. SOMJEE, Ph.D.(Lond.)

Professor of Political Science

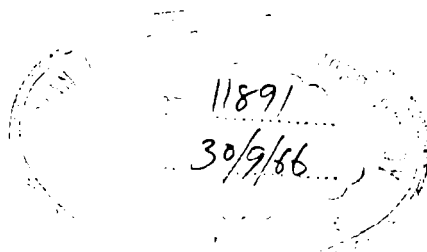
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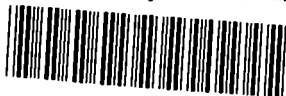
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PREFACE

PAPERS on six different villages presented in this volume are the outcome of an experiment conducted by the Department of Political Science, M. S. University of Baroda in sending postgraduate students to villages and in making them write dissertations in lieu of two papers at the M.A. level. Till recently students of Political Science did not pay much attention to villages. Whenever they did, their attention was largely confined to the study of local government and local self-government machinery. Occasionally studies concerning voting-behaviour, leadership, etc. appeared, but very few concerning the day-to-day politics of our rural areas. In that sense this is one of the few studies of its kind.

The villages discussed here lie within the nine-mile radius of Baroda, well within the economic pull and urbanising influence of the town. Each investigator had spent nearly six to nine months in these villages under my supervision. The problems of village politics discussed in this volume are those which they came across during the course of their investigation. Each of them forms a part of a wider study which they had undertaken.

These studies are not without their own limitations. Newness of the subject, lack of maturity, etc. have no doubt exercised a limiting influence. Nevertheless, each of them tells us something about the peculiar problem of the village which remains at the centre of its politics.

The labour of the contributors would be amply rewarded if the volume helps the reader in familiarising himself with some of the peculiarities of politics of Indian villages and warns him against any hasty generalisation as to their nature.

Adhyapak Niwas, Baroda
20th March 1964

A. H. SOMJEE

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CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION*

by A. H. SOMJEE

VERY little is known about the day-to-day politics of rural areas in this country. This is so in spite of the great desire on the part of thinking men and women to know how democracy is shaping itself in rural, or traditionally Indian India. These six essays, with all their limitations, are an attempt in that direction. They do not however deal with villages which are away and untouched by influences of the town. On the contrary, they deal with villages which reveal different degrees of urban influence on all walks of life including the political. Politics of remote Indian villages, with a handful of exceptions, still remains unexplored.

The title *periurban* is suggestive of the fact that the villages referred to in this volume are on the periphery of the town. They are Manjalpur (three miles south), Bariapur (pseudonym—six miles south-west), Kalali (four miles south-west), Gorwa (five miles east), Harni (three miles east), and Bhaili (eight miles west) of central Baroda. Although the social system, economic structure, political institutions, level of literacy etc. of these villages, being within the nine-mile radius of central Baroda, are more or less similar, each of them presents a unique political problem which seems to be at the centre of village politics. This is largely a function of disparity in the numerical strength of contending social groups and their level of literacy and economic development, availability of a particular type of leadership, outstanding local issues, etc. In the following pages I shall make a few general observations regarding the peculiarities of the periurban villages and

* I am grateful to the editor of *Asian Survey* for his permission to reproduce extracts from my paper in Vol. III, Number 7 of the Journal,

their politics and then go on briefly to state the significance of the six different political problems discussed in this volume.

All the villages under review here are well connected with Baroda by means of buses, and in some cases, by railway. Besides, the availability of good roads makes the distance coverable by bicycle without much hardship. Consequently, every day a number of persons from these villages go to the town for work, business, shopping, education, amusement, looking up friends and relatives, etc. The villages therefore remain well conversant with what goes on in the town, while on the average nearly ten copies of Gujarati dailies are bought by these villages, personal accounts of town-goers are listened to with special interest.

Most of these villages are threatened with the expansion of Baroda municipal limits into their territory. Some of them have already lost large chunks of their land to factories, aerodrome, army, T.B. Hospital, railway yard, highways, etc. After the bifurcation of the composite Bombay State, particularly, there has been a vigorous drive on the part of industrialists to purchase land in this area for factories and housing colonies. As this is being written the Baroda municipal limits are going to be expanded once again bringing within their field portions belonging to the villages discussed in this volume.

Practically every villager in this area is resigned to the idea that sooner or later his land would be under the industrial wheel rather than the farmer's plough. He has seen and known far too many cases where factories have sprung on land which was once used for cultivation. This does not make him less tenacious or unduly depressed. As a farmer he no doubt remains attached to his land. But he also knows the fact that in case he has to sell his land he will get about the best price there is for it. Rise in land prices has given him a great deal of assurance. So far as the loss of the hereditary profession of cultivation is concerned, the average farmer invariably rationalises his position by saying that these days there are far

too many rules and regulations concerning land and there is not much point in continuing to be a farmer any longer. Big and medium sized landholders invariably start business of their own or invest money whereas smaller cultivators gradually get absorbed in factories.

Being pretty close to the town, administrative functionaries and officials connected with these villages prefer to live in the town. This is particularly true of most of the panchayat secretaries, revenue accountants, and schoolteachers. They all live in the town and go to work in the villages by buses or on bicycles. Consequently, their influence on these villages, particularly, of the village schoolteacher, is very limited. Villagers invariably speak of this kind of arrangement in a complaining tone.

On the other hand, people who have very little or nothing to do with these villages have steadily increased in number. Housing difficulties in Baroda have invariably compelled a section of factory workers to seek living accommodation in villages close to their factories. Their interest in the day-to-day life of the village remains pretty superficial.

Limited distance from the town reacts on the psychology of administrators in two different ways. On the one hand they expect the sarpanchs and police-patels to visit them with their papers rather than the other way round. On the other hand such villages often become objects of superficial interest on the part of administrative officials. Whenever higher officials and visiting dignitaries express their desire to see a village, they are invariably taken to a periurban village. While the list of visitors to such villages may be impressive, the routine visits of officials concerned often get neglected.

The periurban villages, no doubt, have the *look* of villages and the way in which people go about their business appears to be fairly rural, in actual fact they are exposed to a great deal of urban influence. Neither their outlook on life in general nor on specific issues such as employment, education, politics,

etc. is altogether rural. Work in factories, with its fixed income, is no longer looked down upon by the villagers. Petty landholders welcome it as an opportunity to supplement their income, whereas landless labourers give to it about the highest priority. Often the level of their general information bears no relationship with the literacy gradations used for classifying Indian villagers. Far more informed, independent and questioning in their attitude than what one normally thinks Indian villagers are, the people of periurban community invariably bring into their politics some sort of diluted urban approach. Either in their electioneering machinations or in malicious questioning of opponents in public meetings or indeed in skilful endorsement in public of privately arrived at decisions, the periurban villagers display a remarkable degree of influence of the town on their day-to-day politics.

One also notices in these communities the disappearing psychological unity of the village. The nearness of the town offers an alternative social life to those who find themselves in a socially disadvantageous position. It also provides a similar alternative to those who, for personal reasons, would have as little to do with their fellow-villagers as possible. Examples of the former are to be found in the various segments of the Harijan community. Some of them having obtained employment in factories and also having improved their educational standards, feel far more attracted to the town where they can conceal their social identity in the urban mass and freely enter cinemas and restaurants without being questioned. In the periurban villages more and more such people are becoming town-minded. Examples of the latter are to be found in numerically limited higher castes such as the Brahmins and the Banias and stray individuals from other castes who prefer to keep out of village conflicts and antagonisms by cultivating more and more friends in the town. The net result of all these has been lesser and lesser appeal of the terms such as 'our village', 'prestige of our village', etc. in either terminating a quarrel

or in reaching a unanimous decision or in making the villagers overcome their indifference towards a public cause. Such terms are often suspected to be used to advance the cause of interested people.

Even a casual meeting with villagers of the periurban community makes one feel that its social structure no longer rests on a solid foundation of acceptance, which it did for all these centuries; that now there are far too many people questioning their position of inferiority in the social hierarchy and verbally claiming higher social origin and status for themselves. On the other hand, those who are in a socially advantageous position no longer enjoy a sense of permanence with regard to their status and privileges. They are intensely aware of the fact that the spirit of the time, Government policy, education, economic advancement and occasional political assertion of the lower strata of the village society might, one day, nullify the very basis on which their position of privilege rests.

The situation as it exists amply speaks of the release of forces and drives which are bound to work towards a significant social change. The claim of the upper castes as intrinsically high is no longer a matter of undisputed acceptance by the rest. It invariably faces a challenge of equally high origin and of comparable ritual standards from the middle and the lower castes. Assigning of lower occupations to the lower castes is often regarded as a product of an unholy conspiracy on the part of the higher castes so that they may monopolise all the privileges. In the post-Independence period, particularly, one notices an all-round drive and desire on the part of the lower and the left out communities to improve their position. Towards such an effort, the government, because of its social, economic and educational legislation, is considered to be an ally. Individually, they all lay great emphasis on education, intelligent cultivation and training for skilled jobs, and on political assertion wherever that is possible. These are now coming in conflict with the traditionally assigned positions of the

higher and the lower. In the initial period, a drive towards a better deal, has expressed itself in the need to consolidate one's social group. That is one reason why the economic and political consolidation of castes in the post-Independence period was very much in evidence. Such an expression, however, may not exhaust the tremendous dynamism which lies behind it. It is bound to go further in the direction of a greater and greater degree of individualism.

The extension of democracy to rural areas, particularly of electing the panchayats on the basis of adult suffrage, has resulted in the increasing participation of the lower castes in the political life of the periurban community. The nature and extent of their actual participation differs from village to village. In two villages out of six, discussed in this volume, the Barias, a lower middle caste of this area, have successfully challenged the monopoly of political power enjoyed by the Patidars, a higher middle caste. And in one village, the Vankars, who are considered to be Harijans, after getting themselves elected to the general seats in the panchayat, played a fairly important part in its politics. Unlike the Barias, the Vankars, as we shall see, due to their socially disadvantageous position, had to accept frustrating limits to their own political ambition.

The Barias are one of the largest castes in the villages in this area and they constitute about fifteen to sixty per cent of the population of the villages under review here. For a long time they were kept out of statutory panchayats even in villages where they are in a majority. Nomination to the pre-Independence panchayat was largely on a matter of social and economic background. Consequently, very few Barias could become its members.

During the last few years, however, the Barias of some of the villages progressed in all directions. The bulk of landless

labourers among them got absorbed in the industries which came up in Baroda during this period. Educationally too the Barias advanced pretty rapidly. Finally, able political leaders in some of the villages made them conscious of their political rights and with the coming of the elected panchayats they were in a position successfully to challenge the Patidar monopoly of political power. In villages where they were not in a position to offer a fight, due to economic dependence or lack of leadership, they merely grumbled and complained but did not openly come out against them. The Barias asserted themselves whenever they had the hope of succeeding. Unlike them, however, the Patidars who possess large chunks of land in this area, and whose educational standards are slightly higher, and who also possess political experience, confidence of belonging to a higher caste, connections, etc. never give up the struggle for political power even when they are less than ten per cent of the village population.

The Barias did not always get the support of the lower castes in their attempt to capture the panchayat. The feeling that they are not a high enough caste to rule the village continues in the lower communities. Complete reliance on themselves invariably made the Barias sectarian in their approach in office.

In a couple of periurban villages under discussion here, the Kshatriya Sabha has established its branches. It aims at advancing the cause of the entire Rajput hierarchy including the Barias. Its interest in the day-to-day politics of villages is, however, limited. So far it has heavily concentrated its attention on the general elections. There too it has not always succeeded in mobilising all the Barias in this area. This is because the top leaders of the Sabha are Rajputs from the landed aristocracy and the average Baria is inclined to view their attempt at equality among the Rajputs as artificial and as guided by political considerations.

The other lower caste which has been able to take some

interest in the politics of the periurban community is that of the Vankars. In recent years the Vankars have done very well, both economically and educationally. Being weavers by occupation, they were the first to be affected by the growth of textile industry in Gujarat. During the last few years a good many of them have succeeded in getting employment in factories. This has not only given them a steady income but has also made them better informed and smarter. Even their standard of cleanliness is about the highest in these villages. So is their emphasis on education.

Being Harijans they are not able freely to participate in the politics of the village in spite of the fact that their consciousness of political issues at the local, regional and national levels is comparatively pretty high. In most of the villages they have been able to get into the panchayats through the seats reserved for backward castes. Only in one village out of six have they been able to capture the general seats.

The Vankars are intensely aware of the fact that on account of their socially disadvantageous position, they have very limited scope in village politics and that no matter how enlightened they might become the village will not forget the fact that they are Harijans. Consequently, a great many of them feel politically frustrated and a few of them think on the lines of participating in the regional or the state politics.

The Barias and the Vankars feel greatly attracted towards the ruling political party because of its social and economic policies. In some of the villages, due to the influence of a few left-wing trade union leaders, few Barias and Vankars talk in terms of the need to end exploitation. During the third general election, the Vankars remained firm supporters of the Congress; whereas the Barias in some cases, disregarded the directives of Kshatriya Sabha to support the Swatantra Party and actually voted for a Nutan Mahagujarat Janta Parishad candidate who, as chairman of a co-operative society of a number of villages, advanced them loans and also expressed radical views.

So far as the other lower castes of this area are concerned they have not been able to take much interest in the periurban politics.

A word may be mentioned about the great facility provided by democratic politics and its mechanism of election, to social groups which stand in a relationship of higher and lower with one another. For a long time the higher castes, with their status in their village, claimed almost all the seats in the panchayat. Electoral politics provided the facility of effectively challenging it in the field of politics. Success in politics encouraged them to come out with challenges, in other fields. This is one reason why the leaders of the upper castes in these villages attribute anything that goes wrong to the democratisation of village politics.

The politics of the upper strata of the periurban community, particularly of the Patidars, is guided by the consideration of ensuring the continued enjoyment of political power wherever they have it and of regaining it wherever they have lost it. In stray cases a Brahmin or a Bania has played an important part in the politics of periurban villages, but always in his individual capacity, by crossing over to the Barias.

The Patidars range from nearly eight to forty per cent of the population of the periurban villages. Their average land-holding is higher than that of the others. Being pretty hard-working and receptive to new ideas and techniques of cultivation, the Patidars make very able farmers. The Land Tenancy Act threatened them with the loss of land wherever they cultivated on the basis of partnership with their tenants. Consequently, most of them have now taken complete charge of the work of cultivation.

For a long time the Patidars enjoyed the monopoly of political power in these villages. In almost all of them they were and are in charge of law and order under the *matadari system*, whereby, the post rotates among four or more impor-

tant families in the village. Visiting officials always called on them and were guided by the advice given by them in administrative matters relating to the village. Heads of prominent Patidar families were also nominated to the panchayat. For a long time, therefore, their claim to power was not even disputed by others.

The coming of democracy to the village gave them a big jolt. The leaders of the older age-group could no longer adjust themselves to the changes that were being introduced. They could not persuade themselves to go round the various caste localities in search of electoral support. Consequently, quite a few of them retired from the scene leaving behind the younger leaders to deal with the increasing complexities of village politics.

Possession of land, social superiority, education, political experience of the past, etc. conferred a good many advantages on the Patidars vis-a-vis other castes in these villages. Consequently, a good many Patidars genuinely believe that they are the natural leaders of the village and that they ought to be in power, democracy or no democracy.

Psychologically speaking, because of the position of advantage enjoyed by them for a number of years, the Patidars have now developed a deep-seated urge to have an upper hand in almost everything in the village administration and politics. Socially speaking, political positions are still considered by them to be a privilege, which should go to a high enough caste such as theirs. Alternatively, the passage of political power to the Barias or others would be a matter of shame for the Patidars in other villages as the same would be attributed to either their quarrelsomeness or the lack of skill in dealing with their political opponents. Economically, the Patidars have much more at stake in village politics than other communities. This is because being agriculturists they have quite a lot to do with the panchayat. It can affect their livelihood in all kinds of ways, particularly by means of water

facilities, taxes, etc. Politically, their connections with the ruling political party and the administrative machinery are a source of strength to them. Consequently, all these factors put together not only furnish them with the justification to enter into politics but also put them in an advantageous position vis-a-vis other communities.

Participation in the politics of the village is for the Patidars a social and economic necessity. That is not the case with the Barias. The latter are still at a stage where their rise depends very much on their personal effort in working hard, cultivating intelligently, producing more, taking more education, getting skilled jobs, etc. and as a rising group also enter into politics. Very few Barias have so far grasped the idea of developmental returns of their participation in politics. With most of them a seat in the panchayat still remains a matter of political justice to the Baria caste. The Patidars on the other hand have achieved all those objectives which the Barias hope to realise in the next few years. Their main problem now is to continue to remain at the *controlling end* which has been threatened as a result of the rise of the Barias. The membership of the panchayat is, no doubt, largely a matter of prestige for the Patidars, as it is for the Barias. For the former, however, it is a little more than that. It is in fact an important instrument of safeguarding their interests.

While the Patidars have a few advantages over the Barias in their politics, there are three factors which seem to go, directly or indirectly, in favour of the latter. Firstly, the Barias enjoy a numerical superiority over the Patidars in most of the periurban villages. They are now gradually becoming aware of the part which their numerical strength can play in an elective system. This becomes pretty significant in all those villages where they are economically independent of the Patidars and also possess a bold leadership. Secondly, as opposed to the Patidars, the Barias possess the *élan* of a rising group. This is true particularly of villages where they have success-

fully challenged the Patidars. There the approach of the Barias displays a positive outlook and a great degree of confidence as opposed to the obstructionist politics of politically displaced Patidars. Finally, the average Baria is convinced that the government is on the side of the poorer section of the village. Economic and social changes introduced in recent years, repeated visits of government officials, speeches of leaders, etc. make them feel that the 'sarkar' would stand by them. Although their confidence in the government is not always justified, the average Baria does not fail to notice the changes which took place after Independence.

The policy of the government towards the poorer section of the community has made the Patidars intensely suspicious of the ruling party. They do not always welcome its encouragement of the hitherto suppressed community in matters of education and jobs. Nor do they welcome its rural policy, particularly the Land Tenancy Act, in spite of the fact that they have lost much less land compared to the Patidar landowners of the neighbouring district. They are therefore forced to pursue what may be called *protective politics*. For this reason some of them have openly supported the Mahagujarat Janta Parishad, the Swatantra Party, etc. although at the time of the general elections, a number of them, due to personal considerations, may have voted for the Congress.

A word may now be mentioned with regard to the place of political parties in the periurban community. Neither in the panchayat election of the villages under review here nor in the day-to-day politics, have the political parties taken any direct interest so far. They have mostly centred round local issues and local participants who mobilise political support for themselves from their kin-groups, caste-groups, dependent castes, factions, etc. For elections to the District Local Board, the State Assembly and the Union Parliament, however, party organisations from Baroda pick up influential men from these villages and mobilise support for their parties on more or less

personal basis. Political parties are so much identified with electioneering work in these villages that they hardly exist in any other form. Nevertheless, when a public problem of some magnitude, which gets a notice in the local newspapers, arises, party organisers visit these villages, with the ulterior motive of getting support at the time of general elections. Their interest in such problems is indeed very great when the elections are in the offing. The organisers of the ruling party particularly succeed in getting themselves invited to these villages for the inauguration of a school building or a water-works.

In some of these villages there are a few Congressmen who were active in the days gone by. Even now they wear Khaddar but support the party with some reservations. Most of them are Patidars. The Barias and the Vankars, who openly express their gratitude to the 'sarkar', do not identify themselves with the ruling party but welcome its policy and invariably support it at the time of elections. In a couple of villages discussed in this volume, the Kshatriya Sabha has its branches. So far it has not succeeded in enrolling many members. During the third general election its directive to support the Swatantra Party was not very much appreciated by the Barias of this area. In some villages the Barias *en bloc* opposed it. Then there are communist trade union leaders who occasionally visit these villages largely with a view to be in touch with their trade union followers. So far they have not shown any interest in village politics. This is true even of those villages where they have a trade union following.

Having stated some of the social and political features of the periurban community, let us now briefly examine the significance of the six specific problems of periurban politics discussed in this volume. The paper on Manjalpur provides an interesting illustration of the struggle between the Barias and the Patidars for political power in the village. It also analyses

the nature and extent of political change as reflected in the panchayat, in the co-operative society and in the leadership of the village. The paper on Bariapur speaks of the inability of the village panchayat to tap the sources of revenue which lie within its jurisdiction and empowered authority. It also reveals the element of interference on the part of important men in the political parties and the administrative machinery in a problem which primarily concerns the village and the temple. The paper on Gorwa shows the growing indifference of the working class population of the village to its public life. The working class of the village seems to consider the trade unions as a legitimate sphere of its politics, leaving the village politics to the agriculturists. The paper on Kalali presents an illustration of how the ruling political party tried to win back the support of a village which had backed a rival candidate in the District Local Board election. The entire manipulation takes place round the construction of a water-works in the village at the public expense. The paper on Harni shows the nature and extent of factionalism in village politics. Finally, a note on Bhaili points out how the presence of a voluntary organisation becomes a rival to the panchayat in matters of development work in a village where the ruling caste is split by kinship considerations.

The picture of the periurban politics as it emerges from the material presented in this volume does not speak of a community vigorously pursuing its politics. The impact of the town and the far-reaching social and economic changes taking place in the community have not permitted its politics to settle down to a definite pattern. At the moment the following three features appear to be most conspicuous in the politics in transition. Firstly, interest in village politics in this community is largely confined to the two agriculturist middle castes, namely, the Barias and the Patidars. Each of these villages have a number of factory-workers who take some interest in trade union activities but are indifferent to what

goes on in the village. Secondly, the nearness of the town provides a diversion to the villagers and seriously interferes with their civic interests and responsibilities. Each day more and more villagers become town-minded and feel less and less concerned with what goes on in their villages. Thirdly, political parties have not so far fully explored the possibility of participating in the day-to-day politics of the periurban community. Consequently, upto now it is very much guided by purely local issues. Its character is bound to be different when overriding considerations of political parties begin to exercise their influence.

CHAPTER II
POLITICAL CHANGE IN THE
VILLAGE MANJALPUR

by AMARJEET CHAWLA

IN recent years, a gradual but definite political change occurred in the village Manjalpur. The political power slipped away from the Patidars, a fairly high and economically prosperous caste, into the hands of the Barias, who are socially, as well as economically their inferiors. Along with that the participation of the Vankars (weavers), who were till recently considered to be untouchables, increased in the public life of the village. These changes are reflected in the working of the village panchayat as well as in the village co-operative society. They are also reflected in the changing pattern of village leadership. In this paper I shall examine the nature and extent of the political change that has occurred in this village.

The village is situated at a distance of nearly three miles south of Baroda city. It was an Inamdari village given to a Maratha family by the Gaekwads. Its population is 3,881 with nearly twenty-five castes and sub-castes. Among these, the Barias, the Patidars and the Vankars are important from the point of view of their participation in the politics of the village. The Barias constitute 60 per cent of the village population, the Patidars 12 per cent and the Vankars 5 per cent. The remaining 23 per cent consist of Brahmins, Bantias, Sonis, Darjis, Bhils, etc. They do not play any part in the politics of the village.

The caste factor plays a vital role in the social life of the village in spite of the fact that it is losing its rigidity. To some extent the lower castes may be said to be in a state of revolt against the status of inferiority assigned to them in the social, economic and political fields by the higher castes.

Their revolt is against the higher castes rather than the caste system as such.

The Patidars play a very significant role in the political life of the village. This is because of certain social and economic advantages enjoyed by them. Their place in the social hierarchy is pretty high. Nearly 80 per cent of the cultivable land of the village belongs to them. Their educational standards are also comparatively higher. In spite of their being a minority these factors have enabled them to capture and retain political power for a long time.

Political power during the Inamdari period was concentrated exclusively in their hands. The police-patel who is in charge of law and order in the village was always appointed from among the Patidars. Even in the statutory panchayat of this period most of the members were Patidars. When panchayat elected on the basis of universal adult franchise came into existence in 1952, the hold of the Patidars did not relax. They continued to dominate it till they themselves resigned from it over a land dispute.

The Patidars are a fairly well-organised community. They have a caste panchayat of their own and a youth organisation. They give stability as well as scope for improvement to this community. There are however two factions in it which till recently did not affect its political fortunes. In recent years they have confronted the hostility of the Barias in public life. Consequently their importance in public life has been considerably reduced.

The other important caste in the village is that of the Barias. They, however, do not enjoy the social prestige of the Brahmins, the Baniyas and even of the Patidars. They are as a matter of fact considered to be somewhere between the Patidars and the artisan castes in the social hierarchy. Economically they are pretty backward. Nearly 23 per cent of them are petty landholders, 40 per cent work as farm labourers and the remaining go to factories or do odd jobs. Although the Barias

are in a majority in the village their all-round low standard prevented them from taking any effective part in the politics of the village for a long time.

Gradually they became conscious of their economic conditions and exploitation by the Patidars. Rapid industrial expansion of Baroda provided employment opportunities to landless Barias. The Land Tenancy Act safeguarded the economic rights of those who cultivated land as tenants. During the last few years education also made great strides in this community. Then a stage came when the Barias of this village under the inspiration of its leaders and organisers of the Kshatriya Sabha started calling themselves Kshatriyas or Rajputs. Now they resent being called 'Barias'. Nearly forty of them are official members of the Sabha. The leaders of this organisation emphasize the need for education and the discontinuance of expensive ceremonies. Their growing solidarity and numerical strength have enabled them to successfully challenge the Patidars of the village.

While the Barias have displayed greater and greater solidarity, the Patidars have entered into mutually hostile groups. At the moment there are two factions among the Patidars which have arisen as a result of kinship differences and petty squabbles. The lack of harmony among the Patidars also contributed to their decline as a political force in the village.

Then there are the Harijans of the village, particularly, the Vankars who have played some part in the politics of the village. Till recently they were regarded as 'untouchables'. They have given up their traditional occupation of weaving and have started working as workers in factories, building labourers, masons, bricklayers, contractors, etc. Economically as well as educationally, in the last twenty years, they have advanced a great deal. They no longer like to be called 'Vankars' and have adopted for themselves classic Rajput surnames such as Parmars, Vaghelas, etc. Like the Barias they also claim to be of Rajput origin.

Rapid spread of education and improvement in economic conditions among them, induced the Vankars to participate actively in the public life of the village. In the present panchayat there are four Vankars out of ten. One of them is a prosperous building contractor who had offered Rs. 6,000 as donation towards the school building fund, provided it bore the name of his mother. The Patidars of this village resisted it for a long time as the Vankars were regarded, till recently, as untouchables. While some compromise had been reached for naming one wing of the school after the Vankar lady, the Vankars themselves feel that they do not have much scope in the public life of the village.

Let us now examine the political change in the village as it is reflected in the co-operative society, the panchayat, and the village leadership.

The co-operative society reflects such a change in a clear manner. The village has a multipurpose co-operative society which was established under the initiative and guidance of a Brahmin leader in 1957. Before that there was a registered co-operative society which functioned between 1943 and 1953. It was dominated by the Patidars with only three Baria members in it. The Patidar domination of it discouraged the Barias from joining it. This society was liquidated in 1953, because of financial loss and mismanagement.

The Patidars were extremely jealous of their power in this co-operative society. So much so that they did not allow a retired middle class Brahmin to become its member lest he should get into a position of importance. When the co-operative society was liquidated, the Brahmin persuaded the Barias to start another. The Barias agreed. In the beginning the Patidars tried to boycott it. This, however, did not discourage the Barias. Soon after that the Brahmin became its secretary and succeeded in attracting a faction of the Patidars to this organisation. The Patidars needed fertilisers and the co-operative society was the sole means of getting them at the official rate.

The society has at present 132 members; out of which 90 are Barias, 33 Patidars and the remaining from the other castes. Barias who are in the majority control its managing committee. Repeatedly the Patidars tried to get into it but did not succeed.

The society under the leadership of Baria-Brahmin alliance has not been able to do much work in the village. So far it has undertaken the distribution of sugar and fertilisers. It has also advanced some loans to its members. The village Banias continue to be its greatest rivals. With regard to marketing of grains, the existence of some of the private unregistered co-operative societies among the Patidars, Barias and Vankars is also hindering the work of this society.

While the registered co-operative society of the village has not been able to do much, it clearly reflects the decline of the domination of the Patidars in this particular area. The Barias with their numerical strength and the organising ability of the Brahmin have been able to successfully defy the Patidars. Their clash of interests inside the society intensifies the desire of the Banias to hang on to the position of advantage which they have at the moment.

A similar change is to be noted in the Panchayat. Although a statutory panchayat has been in existence in this village for nearly fifty years or more, most of its representatives used to be nominated from among the important Patidar families. The police-patel, the man in charge of law and order in the village, was also a Patidar.

With the coming of the elected panchayat in 1952, a great change came in the politics of the village. The first elected panchayat had five Barias, four Patidars and one Bania with a rich Patidar as its chairman. The second elected panchayat of 1956, which was also controlled by Patidars, consisted of 5 Patidars, 4 Barias, 1 Bania and 2 Vankars. It also had a Patidar sarpanch. During its tenure a dispute arose in the village between a Maratha family to which the former

Inamdar had given some land. The panchayat had claimed this land as public property. A faction among the Patidars which did not approve of the policy of the panchayat, dominated by another Patidar faction, supported the Maratha family. This resulted in the resignation of all the five Patidar members, together with one Baria and one Bania in July 1958. The truncated panchayat consisted of 3 Barias and 2 Vankars.

The resignation of the Patidars and two other sympathisers gave an opportunity to the Barias to capture the panchayat. A Baria, who was a retired schoolteacher, became its sarpanch.

In the third elected panchayat of 1961, no Patidar could become its member. It consisted of 5 Barias, 1 Rajput, 4 Vankars and 2 reserved seats for women which have not been filled. Before the election to the third panchayat it was decided in the Gram Sabha meeting that election should be avoided and that the distribution of seats should be as follows: 6 Barias, 2 Vankars, 3 Patidars and 2 ladies.

But the Patidars, paralysed as a result of intense factional struggle among themselves, first of all asked for more seats and then completely boycotted the panchayat. Thus slipped away the control of another public institution from the hands of the Patidars to that of the Barias.

Ever since the Barias gained control of the panchayat its meetings have not been regularly held and quite often the prescribed procedure was disregarded. It is also alleged that the Baria sarpanch is a little lenient in the collection of panchayat arrears from the fellow Barias. Nor has the panchayat been able to undertake much constructive work in the village. All these problems are no doubt inevitable in a period of transition. The Barias might soon realise that the panchayat can be an important instrument of village development and they might start working in that direction. The younger leadership among the Barias, as we shall presently see, is clearly

dissatisfied with the way in which the panchayat is managed by their elders.

The political change in the village is also to be noticed in the changing pattern of the village leadership. Among the Patidar leaders who were held in high esteem fifteen years ago, not only by Patidars but by other castes as well, have lost their influence inside as well as outside their caste. An old and once venerated leader of the Patidar community, who is now in his seventies, finds it very difficult to come to terms with the rising Barias and the Vankars. He, therefore, has handed over the responsibility of leadership to a younger member of his family and caste. Day by day the democratic politics of the village, which is no respecter of age, status or dignity, comes out with new challenges. Having been used to occupying a position of advantage in a fairly static society, the older generation of Patidar leaders is handing over the political leadership to a younger generation and remains contented with leadership in social matters.

The Barias on the other hand have their active political leaders among the middle-aged group. The older Baria leaders are not altogether in favour of an open fight against the Patidars as they have lived in close association with them for a number of years. The middle-aged leadership is semi-urbanised, militant but not enlightened enough. While it has effectively brought about the transition in the village, it has not been free from criticism coming from its own younger members. It seems that the younger leaders of the Barias have greater feeling for the village along with the feeling for their own downtrodden caste. They very much want the middle-aged Baria leaders to take into account the interest of the village as a whole.

The Vankars who seem to be politically more informed than any backward caste in the village are passing through a period of political disillusionment.

While elder Vankar leaders readily lend their services for

factional struggle of the Patidars and intercaste discord between Patidars and Barias, the younger leadership among them aspires to be treated as equals in the village politics. As they do not find it possible in the village itself, they now look forward to a wider area of politics, where their caste might not be a handicap.

These then are the areas where political change has revealed itself. It is not only a change of a lower caste replacing a higher caste in public institutions but also a change of attitude to public life and one's ability to participate in it.

CHAPTER III
THE TEMPLE IN THE POLITICS
OF VILLAGE BARIAPUR

by KALPANA MEHTA

BARIAPUR is nearly six miles south-west of central Baroda and three miles from its municipal limits. It is on the Baroda-Padra road and also has a metre-gauge railway station. It is well connected with Baroda by means of state transport buses.

The population of the village is 1,672. It has nearly eighteen different sub-castes. Of these, Barias constitute 60 per cent, Patidars 8 per cent, Vasavas or Bhils 15 per cent, Harijans 9 per cent and other communities consisting of Brahmins, Banias, Kumbhars, Valands, etc. 8 per cent.

The main occupation of the people in the village is agriculture. Nearly 80 per cent of the village population depends, directly or indirectly on land. Then there are villagers who work in factories. They constitute nearly 15 per cent of the village population.

The villagers follow four different religious sects, namely, Ram Nandi Dharm, Shiv Dharm, Vaishnav Dharm and Swami Narayan Dharm. Apart from these there are innumerable gods and goddesses worshipped in the village for various reasons such as curing diseases, getting a son, protection from snakes, etc. To the villagers these are extremely important. Innumerable panchayat and Gram Sabha resolutions deal with the collection of money and of appeasing of these deities. Majority of the villagers are the followers of Ram Nandi Dharm although there is a large Swami Narayan temple at the entrance of the village. This temple has its following among the Patidars who believe in the Bochasan Swami Narayan sect. Not more than four or five families in the village follow the Swami Narayan Dharm. The existence of such a huge temple in the

village, in spite of its negligible following, is a source of indirect influence on village politics and a channel of administrative interference in the affairs of the village. In a number of ways, however, the temple has tried to be of use to the village.

The temple is supposed to have plenty of funds at its disposal. In the village it has by way of its property a huge building and nearly fifty-three acres of land for cultivation. It also has land outside the village. The management of the temple is carried on through a trust which also looks after similar temples in Bochasan, Sarangpur, Gondin, Gandhla, Ahmedabad and Bombay. The general impression created by the temple in the village is that it can do almost anything with the help of money and influential followers in order to spread Swami Narayan Dharm. But so far as this village is concerned this is not true. As a matter of fact its following in the village in recent years has declined. Whatever benefits the villagers got from it, it did not increase its influence on the public life of the village. The villagers put a negative interpretation on these benefits and maintained that through these benefits the temple helped itself rather than the village.

Years ago Swami Shri Yagna Purushdasji came to live in this village. He left Vadatal, the seat of formerly undivided Swami Narayan sect, on account of his differences with the temple authorities there. In Bariapur he searched for a suitable piece of land to build another temple. A wealthy local landlord from the Patidar community came to know of the Swami's arrival and his desire to build a temple. He invited the Swami and promised him nearly 72 acres of land as a gift. He however imposed a condition that a full dish of *prasad* should be sent by the temple to his family every day. Even to this day, the descendants of his family receive the dish every day.

The temple was constructed nearly eighteen years ago. The land donated to the temple included a Bhangi locality and a small pond. The temple authorities in exchange for these

built a new Bhangi Colony across the main road. This was done without much trouble but the problem of the pond was not satisfactorily solved. Although its water was drained out and the surface levelled, the temple did not build a culvert to ease the flow of water during monsoon. This invariably resulted in the accumulation of water. The village panchayat did not approve of it and passed nearly five resolutions and sent several notices bringing this fact to the notice of the temple authorities. At last after numerous requests from the panchayat and the people, a culvert was finally built in 1958. The delay in the construction of the culvert marked the beginning of the strained relationship between the temple and the village.

But the actual trouble started with the problem of the school building. The village school was situated very near the temple. In course of time, the temple needed more space and therefore wanted to purchase the school building. Hence it sent an application to the chairman of the District School Board on 24 November 1955, requesting him to give it the permission to buy the land occupied by the school so as to meet the growing needs of the temple. In return for the old school building and its premises, the temple promised a new school building on the other side of the village with additional space and more facilities. The chairman of the District School Board carefully examined the proposal. The existing school building was pretty old and needed renovation, whereas the proposed new building had added facilities of one more room, a water room, a toilet and big open space all around. Moreover the temple authorities were prepared to accept the plan and the place decided by the School Board. The chairman of the District School Board forwarded this application with his favourable recommendations to the District School Board office. The value of the old school building was fixed at approximately Rs. 7,040, whereas the estimated cost of the new one was nearly Rs. 20,000. The District School Board imposed the following conditions:

(i) That the temple, first of all, should pay Rs. 5,000 as deposit.

(ii) No extra cost incurred by the temple in the construction of the school building would be borne by the Government.

(iii) The proposed site, on which the school was to be built, should be transferred as a gift.

(iv) The new building should be constructed in accordance with an approved plan.

The temple agreed to all these conditions and after a formal order from the School Board the construction work started. The entire construction work including the purchase of material and labour employment was undertaken by the temple under the supervision of the District Local Board. The cost of the new building was about Rs. 16,300.

When the building was under construction, the village panchayat had passed three resolutions against it. Most of the villagers did not want the new building although it was bigger in size and better in design compared to the old one. The reasons for their disapproval were numerous. One of them was the fear that the temple might inscribe its name on the school building. The Barias of the village particularly felt that the temple might make it appear as a gift to the village while other communities argued that the new school building was across the main road and that it was not safe for the children to cross the road with pretty heavy traffic. To my mind, the main reason which the villagers did not openly express, was that the school should have been built by a sect which they did not follow.

On 28 November 1958, six members of the panchayat out of seven passed a resolution against the construction of the new building. They also formed a committee to go into the details and to convey the feelings of the villagers to the District School Board, the District Local Board and other

influential people. They also sent a copy of the resolution to the Ministry of Education at Bombay. The committee consisted of three Barias, one Patidar and one Bania. The president was a Bania who is an influential leader of the village. The committee was empowered to offer *satyagraha* if it failed to get justice from the authorities. The committee also appointed an adviser who was an influential leader of the Mahagujarat Janta Parishad, a political party which was fairly active in this area before the bifurcation of the composite State of Bombay.

In reply to the resolution of the panchayat the Local Board and the Government authorities maintained that the District School Board had full powers according to Section XI of the Primary Education Act, 1947, Bombay, to take decision in the matter.

While the village was engaged in agitation, the school building was gradually coming up. The villagers were directly or indirectly expressing their anger. On 2 December 1958, the District School Board received a pretty strongly worded note from the adviser of the village school committee saying that the authorities had been taken in by the offer of a ready-made and well-built school building with more facilities and space, and that they did not care to listen to the opinion of the villagers. Such an attitude according to him was neither fair nor democratic. Although the District School Board had written a reply a few days later, on 7 December 1958, the chairman of the District School Board had called a meeting of the members of the panchayat at his office in Baroda. He explained to them that the village had not suffered any loss by having the new building. On the contrary it had more facilities. At the meeting, however, the members of the panchayat said nothing. They were apparently overwhelmed by the presence of a highly placed public official. A few months later on 9 May 1959, they passed another resolution in the panchayat inviting the chairman of the District School Board

and the District Local Board to the village. Their invitation was not accepted.

On 13 July 1959, the School Board received a completion certificate from the temple as well as the engineer of the District Local Board. After that the District School Board sent a notice to the headmaster of the school asking him to take charge of the new building. The villagers vehemently opposed this order and started picketing at the entrance of the new school building. The chairman of the District School Board gave a strict warning saying that police action would be taken against the mischief-makers. This dispersed the picketers. On 24 July 1959, the villagers reluctantly took charge of the new school building. The incident is still fresh in the minds of the villagers and they cite it as an example of what the temple can do with its connections in the administrative machinery against the will of the people of the village.

Next we go on to the examination of the pilgrim tax which created a lot of ill feeling between the temple and the village. In 1957-58, the village panchayat had passed a couple of resolutions regarding the pilgrim tax. But the chief Swamiji on behalf of the temple had approached the higher authorities to prevent the introduction of this tax and he did succeed. In the following two years the village witnessed the rise of the Barias as a political force in the village. In 1960 they came to power in the panchayat and reintroduced the pilgrim tax. They estimated that the panchayat would receive about Rs. 2,000 per year by way of this tax. They felt that it was too big an amount to forego.

Before passing a resolution in the panchayat concerning the pilgrim tax, the proposal was placed before a general meeting of the villagers. The villagers expressed no objection towards it. Later on the panchayat passed a formal resolution and sent

it on to the District Local Board. There are three occasions when people from outside come to the temple in a great number. They are Annakot (Annapurna), Vasant Panchmi and Janmashtami.

The Swamiji on behalf of the temple wrote to the Collector and the District Local Board against the introduction of this tax. It is alleged that a few Patidars from the village also wrote against this tax. The latter were not happy about the possibility of getting more funds for the panchayat through the intervention of the Barias. The members of the panchayat requested the Swamiji to discuss the problem with them. The Swamiji maintained that there were many benefits which the village received from the temple and that whenever it undertook any development work, the temple would be willing to help them. The villagers, however, were not satisfied with this reply. In order to convince the members of the panchayat, a Patidar, who is a strict follower of the temple, sent for an influential Congressman from Baroda. The Congressman argued that it was not proper to levy taxes on matters concerned with religion. It might even displease god almighty. He also argued, without carrying much conviction, that the repercussions of such a tax would indeed be harmful. The village had acquired a high status in Gujarat because of the temple and it should be grateful to it, and should give it its co-operation. During the few days that followed few more leading Congressmen came to the village and argued against the tax on the same lines. Moreover, the Swamiji said that if the panchayat levied the tax, he would then go on a hunger strike. The members of the panchayat finally decided to drop the tax for the time being.

It is interesting to note that the panchayat has not levied taxes other than the water tax on the temple out of sheer respect for a place of worship. Even in connection with the pilgrim tax, their argument was that it concerned the panchayat and the worshippers and not the temple. During the

festivals, the youth organisation of the village, on behalf of the panchayat, collects the tax from shops and hawkers. Except these the panchayat does not receive anything even when thousands of pilgrims congregate at the time of festivals. Nearly three years have passed since the temple promised generous donations towards construction work in the village. But so far nothing has been received by the panchayat. Whatever benefits have accrued such as a railway station are of an indirect nature. The Railway Board was ready to have a station at Bariapur if it could promise an income of Rs. 15 per week. For nearly six months in the beginning, the temple paid Rs. 15 to the Railways. The station was as much in the interest of the pilgrims as it is in the interest of villagers.

The relation between the temple and the panchayat are far from cordial. The panchayat is fairly active. It has undertaken many projects in the village. The villagers are quite satisfied with its work. They want it to undertake more ambitious work and raise the status of the village in the district. For this the panchayat needs funds and it is therefore natural that it should look for fresh sources of income including the pilgrim tax.

The panchayat and the villagers look at the temple authorities with some amount of suspicion. They do not like the temple successfully to challenge what it is empowered to do by the Panchayat Act.

Recently the panchayat wanted to build a guest-house and therefore it approached the temple for its contribution. The temple agreed to give Rs. 2,000 which was considered to be rather insufficient by the villagers. Moreover, the panchayat expected the temple to set the ball rolling with its own donation, whereas the temple demanded a prior collection from the village. The matter has been postponed for the time being.

For the last two to three years the temple has become more and more indifferent towards the village. It has got its required land and therefore it does not look to the village for

any more favours. The authorities of the temple have reduced their contact with the village to a minimum. The president of the trustees of the temple is an important union minister. He visits the temple at least twice a year. So do some important Congressmen. The panchayat complains that the authorities of the temple never informed it about the arrival of important men so that the village could give them a fitting welcome. Moreover when important officials visit the village, arrangements to receive them are invariably made by the temple authorities. The village believes that by doing so, they are in a position to influence them. This annoys the villager more than anything else.

Earlier the temple authorities used to send invitations to all the leaders of the village to take part in their festivals. But nowadays excepting two or three Patidar leaders, none else is invited from the village.

In recent years what has annoyed the villagers most is the participation of the temple in the panchayat election. In the third panchayat election of 1960, the temple with its good number of votes supported a candidate, who in turn supported it in the panchayat. The villagers argued that to the temple all the villagers should be equal and that its Swamis ought not to come out for or against some one in particular at the time of election.

In the third general election also the Swamis had participated in a conflicting manner. In the village it is said that they supported a non-Congress candidate for a seat in the assembly because he was their follower; whereas they went and canvassed in another constituency for an outstanding Congressman who is in the union ministry. They supported diverse political parties but the followers of their own sect.

The temple has a following among persons occupying important positions in the ruling party and the administrative machinery. Consequently, in its struggle against the panchayat in the village, it invariably gets their sympathy and even sup-

port. The village, at the moment, is paralysed by clashes between the Patidars and the Barias. But when it emerges from it, the temple will then occupy the attention of the villagers once again.

CHAPTER IV
WATER-WORKS IN THE POLITICS OF
VILLAGE KALALI

by GHANSHYAM SHAH

KALALI is four miles away on the south-west of Baroda city. It is situated on the eastern bank of river Vishwamitri. It is neither on the railway line nor on the bus route. The nearest railway station is Vishwamitri which is about two and a half miles from the village. The state transport bus however touches a point which is about a mile and a half from the village.

Kalali is a middle-sized village with a population of about 946 persons. They are divided among various castes as follows: Brahmins 21; Patidars 302; Barias 282; Valands 34; Artisans 12; Rathods 90; Untouchables 160; and others 45. Practically all these castes excepting Brahmins have their own localities. Brahmins and Patidars live in the centre of the village and Barias and Valands all around it. Untouchables are at some distance from the centre of the village.

Among all the castes of the village the Brahmins are at the apex and the Harijans at the bottom of the social hierarchy. The Brahmins do not participate in the public life of the village. This is so because of their occupation of priesthood which requires them to maintain good relations with everyone. At the other extreme the Harijans are unable to participate in the public life of the village due to their socially disadvantageous position. Among the rest of the castes, the Patidars and the Barias are in a position to participate in the politics of the village.

The Patidars of the village belong to one kin group. Whenever they have conflicting views they hesitate to express them publicly. In an interesting election to the District Local Board,

in 1957, a Patidar candidate from the village was supported not only by his blood relations in the village but also by those in the surrounding region.

The Barias on the other hand are divided into various kin groups with little unity among themselves. This proves to be a great handicap to them whenever they wish to participate in the politics of the village.

The main occupation of the village is agriculture. Most of the inhabitants are engaged in agricultural work either as landless labourers or as landowners. All the Patidar families possess land. And they employ Barias, Rathods, Harijans, etc. as labourers on their farms. The artisan castes render services in return of cash or kind. Thus all the communities more or less depend on Patidars for their livelihood.

A statutory panchayat was established in the village as early as 1904. After 1956, when an elected panchayat came into existence, a Baria became its member. Although the Barias constitute nearly 30 per cent of the village population, they are not in a position to exercise any influence on the politics of the village.

The Patidars of the village have remained by and large the supporters of the Congress. At the time of the Haripura Congress Session, which was held in 1938, four Patidars of this village attended it. Even in the Congress Session held at Bhavanagar in 1961, seven Patidars became members of the reception committee by paying Rs. 10 each. Today about twenty-two Patidars are members of the Congress party and nearly five of the Swatantra party.

In the first and the second general elections in 1952 and 1957 respectively, the Patidars sided with the Congress even when they were beginning to lose faith in it. In the District Local Board elections of 1957, however, they worked against the Congress candidate. This is because a person from the village had contested the election. He had tried to get the Congress ticket and later on the Mahagujarat Janta Parishad

ticket but was refused by both. He then contested as an independent candidate with the help of the villagers. The status enjoyed by his family was a great asset to him. He had spent a good deal of his time in East Africa and the village had seen very little of him. He was able to overcome their hesitation in supporting him with the help of the influence of his well-to-do brother. The latter owns a Rayon Mill in Bombay. The villagers respect him immensely. As said earlier he also exploited the factor of kinship not only inside the village but outside it as well.

The Congress on its part also committed a mistake of not canvassing in this village once the nomination of its local candidate was announced. That annoyed even its loyal supporters in the village. It, therefore, lost the support of a few people who might have resisted the appeal to their kinship.

Owing to the great efforts, spirit of unity and kinship-mindedness, the Patidars of the village got their candidate elected by a considerable majority against two prominent personalities representing the Congress and the Mahagujarat Janta Parishad.

The result of the election came as a shock to the Congress. Upto 1960, the Congress had totally neglected the village. No one was sent to enlist members for the Mandal Congress Committee. When the village needed a water-works for itself, the ruling party tried to re-establish its hold on it. Here it is interesting to note how the defeated Congress candidate tried to win back the confidence of the village by helping it to get its much-needed water-works. This we shall examine in some detail.

The water-works was one of the main problems of the village Kalali. It experienced great scarcity in the supply of drinking water practically all the year round. It has a pond, a river and a few wells. They provide water to the villagers. The pond is

small and shallow. The rain water collects there for a few months. The river is also narrow and shallow. Its flow is very slow and it dries up a few months after the monsoon. Its water cannot be used for domestic purposes. Sometimes the drainage water also flows into this river and contaminates it. The village has about nine wells. They are mostly in the centre of the village. Other wells are privately owned. Among them two are owned by Brahmins and five by Patidars. The other two belong neither to any villager nor to the panchayat. One of them is used by the Harijans. But the Dheds do not allow the Bhangis to use it. The Bhangis are untouchables to the Dheds, who are themselves untouchables to the rest of the village along with Bhangis. Normally the Dheds draw water from the well and pour it into Bhangis' vessels. When the Dheds are not there to pour water, Bhangis have to go without drinking water. On such occasions they sometimes use the river water for domestic purpose.

Two years ago the Mamlatdar came to the village to look into the problem of drinking water. He persuaded the Dheds to give up their discrimination against the Bhangis. The Bhangis were sent for by him and were asked to draw water from the well belonging to the untouchables. Some of them were afraid to do so because they felt that the villagers would punish them. Others had told him that they could go to the well only when the officer was present. After all they had to live in the village. The Bhangis went to the well and drew water while the Mamlatdar was there but when he left the village, they went back to their old practice. For this the Dheds went to the extent of taking help from the Patidars. They said that they would draw water from Patidar wells if the Bhangis did not stop using their well. The Patidar leaders called the Bhangis and asked them to give up their intention of using the Harijan well.

At last the Bhangis got fed up with the situation and sent an application to the Mamlatdar informing him of their dif-

facilities. He referred the matter to the panchayat. The panchayat, dominated by the Patidars, unanimously passed a resolution saying that there was no such problem. They then called the Bhangis and told them that what they had done was improper and that when the village got its water-works, they would be given a separate water connection.

This problem still remains unsolved in the village in spite of many attempts by officials and social workers. But apart from this it is necessary to know that certain changes are taking place in the attitude of the people. This may however be confined to form rather than substance. One should not overlook the fact that for the first time the Bhangis had resented the treatment meted out to them and the Patidars were unable to beat them. The village apparently had moved from the stage when every word of the Patidar was a law to the lower communities.

On account of the following reasons, the village panchayat and the leaders put forward a demand for a water-works:

Firstly, there was a perennial shortage of water, which was felt acutely during the long summer months; and secondly, during the last decade most of the villages in the neighbourhood were in a position to get water-works of their own. The villagers, therefore, felt that they should also have an adequate arrangement for water supply.

The government on the other hand had set up certain agencies to implement development schemes. In the First and the Second Five Year Plans priority was given to the provision of drinking water in villages. The District Local Board, the National Extension Service and the District Development Board were expected to look after this problem. The District Development Board consists of representatives of Local Bodies and social workers; with the Collector as its chairman. One of the members is elected as the Vice-President. In this area particularly the District Development Board had a Congressman as its Vice-President. He was in fact the same man who

was defeated by a person from this village in the Local Board election. The District Development Board works through various agencies such as the District Local Board, the Bharat Sevak Samaj, etc.

In its 1956-57 budget the village panchayat had put forward the demand for a water-works. Later on it passed a number of resolutions repeating its demand. In fact nearly seventeen resolutions were passed asking for water facilities. For this purpose the village was carefully saving money and abstaining from spending on any other facility.

The first scheme for water-works was prepared in 1957. In each of its six following meetings, the panchayat made a strong case for the water-works in its resolutions. Its demand was then approved by the District Development Board. Out of the total cost of Rs. 23,000 the District Development Board was prepared to pay Rs. 10,000. In order to collect its own share, the village panchayat had appointed a village committee. It decided to collect Rs. 125 from every Patidar and Brahmin family in the village.

According to this scheme only two Patidar localities were to get the benefit of water supply by means of two water posts. The scheme was opposed by those who lived at some distance from the proposed stand-posts.

The committee had decided to get a loan from well-to-do people in the village. One of them, who was willing to advance the loan, insisted on a water-works committee and the registration of it so that the collected amount may be properly used. This was not acceptable to the villagers. Meanwhile the District Local Board was not favourably inclined towards such a suggestion. In spite of the fact that the village had collected nearly Rs. 6,000, the acrimonious talks which it gave rise to were responsible for shelving the scheme and returning of the collected money.

The village was now thinking in terms of another scheme. During this period the Bharat Sevak Samaj, which undertakes

the work of social and economic development, showed some interest in the problem of water-works in this village. In this District it was managed by an enthusiastic young man. He invited applications from various villages for the construction of water-works. The panchayat of this village made an application and it was enthusiastically supported by the Vice-President of the District Development Board, who considered it to be an opportunity to regain the confidence of the village.

The village leaders met the organisers of the Bharat Sevak Samaj and got the scheme approved by them. Within a few days after that the panchayat gave the amount which was due as deposit. On 7 September 1960, the panchayat unanimously passed a resolution accepting all the conditions put forward by the Bharat Sevak Samaj. They were as follows:

(i) The village would be responsible for the maintenance and repair of the water-works.

(ii) The construction work would not be given to a contractor.

(iii) The village was asked to give 5 per cent of the grant received from the Government to the Bharat Sevak Samaj.

(iv) The construction should be considered as having been undertaken by Bharat Sevak Samaj.

As soon as the plan was approved the panchayat appointed a village committee to undertake the work and to complete it. This committee consisted of seven members, three of them were from the panchayat. The sarpanch of the panchayat was the chairman of the committee. Out of the seven members two were from the opposition group. The idea was to make them feel that they had also participated in the making of a vital decision. The committee rarely met in a formal sense of the term. When decisions with regard to the collecting of village contribution, of giving of the contract, and of inviting the president of the District Development Board were made, the

minority group was not even consulted even when one of its members was the village representative to the District Local Board.

The village committee had decided to collect Rs. 140 from every Patidar and Brahmin family. A well-to-do Baria family was also asked to pay the amount. Other Barias had opposed the scheme because of the distance of the water-post from their residence. The contribution of the members of the opposition group was received after a good deal of taunting and malicious commenting.

Although the village was expected to employ the village labourers and thereby help them to donate their labour, what the organisers actually did was to allot the construction work to a contractor. The village, in other words, not only broke the promise given to the Bharat Sevak Samaj, of not employing a contractor, but also prevented the poorer communities of the village from having any claim on the water-works. The Patidars of the village also succeeded in getting the two water-posts in their own localities in spite of the fact that most of the money for building the water-works came from public funds. Out of the total cost of Rs. 20,000 they had contributed only one fourth of the amount.

When the foundation-stone for the water-works was laid the villagers had invited the Vice-President of the District Development Board. They had also invited the president of the District Congress Committee to preside over the function. It should be noted that they were invited in connection with a development project in the village and not for party propaganda as it turned out to be. Some leaders were keen on showing their loyalty to the Congress visitors, whereas others did not like the idea of the ruling party getting credit for itself in a matter which was possible entirely due to public funds and the village contribution. In his speech, the Vice-President of the District Development Board said, "The Congress is yours. You should not forget the Congress party. It is always

ready for you. The doors of the Congress are always open for all; you can come and meet us regarding your difficulties. . . .” Whereas the President of the District Congress Committee said: “Now that you have turned towards the Congress, I have a message for you all. The message is that Congress session would be held in Gujarat and I request you to become the members of its reception committee.”

It is interesting to note here that the ruling political party did not reprimand the village for having supported a rival candidate, but on the contrary subtle methods were tried to break down its hostility through public agencies like the District Local Board and welfare organisations such as the Bharat Sevak Samaj.

CHAPTER V
WORKING CLASS IN THE POLITICS OF
VILLAGE GORWA

by RAMESH SHAH

THIS paper attempts an examination of the interest and indifference of a working class section in the village towards its politics. When I undertook the work for this paper, it was also my intention to study some of the problems of the growing trade union activities and its effect on the village politics.

In the village Gorwa, the majority of people earn their livelihood by working in nearby factories. In that sense, the village has a regular working class living in it. The purpose of this paper is to throw light on the character of working class politics in this village.

Before I start examining the problem, I would like to introduce the village. It is situated about five miles north-east of central Baroda and is hardly a furlong away from its municipal limits. It is well connected with the city by means of state transport buses which run pretty frequently.

The population of the village is nearly 4,000. It is divided into various castes, of which the important ones are Patidars, Barias, Garasias, Muslims, Harijans, etc.

The Patidars possess most of the cultivable land of the village. A bulk of them therefore live on income from the land. They also employ farm labourers from lower castes, who fail to find employment in factories. A few Patidars go to work in factories.

As opposed to the Patidars a large number of Barias work in factories. In recent years the rapid industrialisation of Baroda, resulted in the setting up of factories on land previously used for cultivation by Barias and Patidars of this village. Practically from every caste villagers have started

going to factories for work. At the moment their numbers are as follows:

Patidars	73	Patanwadias	10
Brahmins	10	Muslims	23
Barias	223	Harijans	27
Garasias	97	Others	27

The rapid industrialisation of this area created a three-fold problem for the village. Firstly, it made the farm labour extremely scarce. People of the village, particularly from the lower class, who for a long time worked as farm labourers, preferred to work in factories. Secondly, the population of the village nearly doubled itself in the last twenty-five years. Those who got jobs in factories but not accommodation in the town started pouring into the village. Today there are nearly 150 families which have only residential connections with the village. The growing population of the village made its residential area extremely crowded. Thirdly, there was a great demand for land because of industrial expansion and temptation to sell it. As time passes more and more land is being sold to the industries.

Let us now take into account the part played by the industrial labour in the politics of the village, particularly in its panchayat. So far hardly three workers could become members of the panchayat. In the present panchayat there is no working class member. Gorwa has had a statutory panchayat since 1904 and one would expect a few working class members in it. This did not materialise even when the panchayat was elected on the basis of adult suffrage in 1954. As a rule, it appears, the landowners and cultivators seem to be more interested in the panchayat than the factory workers. Whenever a factory worker got himself elected to the panchayat, he invariably came from a family which also possessed land. He was therefore elected not because he was a factory worker but because he came from a family of cultivators.

It appears that for various reasons working class villagers have not been able to take interest in the panchayat and secure their election to it. Some of their explanations were as follows:

Few of them maintained that they would very much like to contest the panchayat elections, provided they were sure of winning them. This they cannot be sure of because voting in the village is very much on the lines of caste and group.

Some of the workers found the election manoeuvres so very dirty and so full of intrigues that they did not have any desire to participate in it.

Most of the workers, particularly from the Patidar community, are young and those who are engaged in politics in this community are essentially old and venerated leaders of their castes. The young Patidar workers find it extremely difficult to come out openly against their parents and elders. Consequently, the Patidar workers do not find any scope for politics in the village.

So far as factory workers from the Baria community are concerned, internal dissensions, jealousy and growing indifference towards the village and its politics prevented them from taking any part in the politics of the village. Sometimes Patidars were also interested in keeping them out of the panchayat. This was never treated as a challenge by either the Baria community as such, or the working class group within it.

Although the Harijans of the village had a reserved seat in the panchayat, they too remained indifferent to it. The Harijans who go to factories are not employed there on a permanent basis. Consequently, the need to maintain themselves is so great that any interest in politics on their part is out of question.

It is interesting to note that almost every factory worker that I interviewed in the village showed little or no interest in the panchayat, or in the politics of the village. Even towards the Gram Sabha meetings of the village, the working class

had shown great indifference. Most of them were not even aware of the fact that its meetings were held.

Behind this lies their failure to understand the objectives of the panchayat. They never regard it as their own institution. The factory workers particularly seem to identify the panchayat with the cultivators. They invariably argue that their entire day is spent outside the village. Consequently, those who remain in the village should take interest in it.

It is interesting to note that although the working class villagers do not participate in the public life of the village, they do not refrain from discussing some of its outstanding problems in their own gossip-groups. While one does not find them excitedly talking about such problems, awareness and interest in them is invariably noticeable.

Different kinds of explanations were given by them as to why they were indifferent to the public life of the village. Some of them maintained that after eight hours' work in the factory they were in no position to take any interest in the affairs of the village when they reached home. Others argued that they had to look after their domestic chores by helping their families in their work such as chopping wood, drawing water, etc. Still there is a third group which claimed that the panchayat and its work was a matter for people with means and leisure and since they had neither they preferred to keep away from it.

The industrial employment for the villagers of Gorwa is more or less a matter of recent times. So many of them who go to factories now were, a few years ago, landless labourers, seasonally employed in the village. Most of them therefore came from families which did not possess land. Nor did they take any interest in the panchayat. Consequently, the going to factories could not possibly have altered their attitude to the panchayat in a short period.

Among themselves the factory workers of the village do not meet as factory workers. There is no such consciousness

to be found in them. This is because most of them work in different factories. Consequently, when they return to the village in the evening they either meet their own people or, at the most, a factory co-worker. It is extremely unlikely that they meet a factory worker as such. Nor does the membership of a common trade union affect their relationship. In the order of fellow feeling, the trade union membership remains as remote as the membership of a village. Before them come one's relatives, people of the same locality and people working in the same factory.

A great many of them bring to the village not so much the militancy of the factory worker as their frustration. In the factory they feel pretty powerless against their employers in spite of their trade union membership. Whatever the union guarantees is taken for granted. Whatever is not achieved looms large in their horizon. This overpowers the feeling of what is achieved by the union. The feeling of helplessness is carried back to the village. One therefore invariably comes across answers which repeatedly emphasize "What can we do."

When all is said and done, there is more talk about what goes on in the village in those gossip-groups where workers participate. Some of them are well informed about what goes on in the village. Others believe that it is their duty to keep themselves informed about it. This however does not induce them to participate actively in the affairs of the village. It nevertheless induces them to exercise a subtle influence on the character of the village politics.

The working class section of the village seems to be pretty indifferent to trade union activities as well. While the majority of them are members of the three trade unions, namely Mazdur Mahajan (Congress), Kamdar Parishad (P.S.P.), Lal Vavata (Communist), very few of them are either aware of the political affiliations of their unions or regularly attend their meetings. For diverse reasons they joined trade unions, but mainly because, their departmental co-workers belonged to

a particular union. Practically all of them pay their membership fees but very few of them show any inclination to attend "jampa meetings" (meetings at the gate). Fewer still, ask questions or volunteer to do the work of collection of membership fees for their union. At the bottom of their indifference lies the fact that they come from a section of the village society which lived on the starvation level as farm labourers till a few years ago. Industrial employment is too much of a blessing to them to go into the details of conditions of work or increment in wages. Some of them have developed an outlook which makes them feel that whatever benefits come to others would also come to them.

Of the two, that is, the trade union and the panchayat, the working class section of the village is more interested in the activities of the former. The trade union is connected with the problems of their livelihood and therefore it becomes, to whatever extent it is, a legitimate area of interest and activity. A village worker therefore tends to regard the union activities as something concerning them and that the activities of the panchayat concern the cultivators rather than the entire village. However, whenever they take interest in the affairs of the village, while joining a gossip-group, discussion with a leader or in Gram Sabha, they are inclined to ask more questions than the others. Quite often they tutor others to do so out of a feeling that they have very little or nothing to do with the village.

CHAPTER VI
FACTIONS IN THE POLITICS OF
VILLAGE HARNI

by SURESH PARIKH

THE village Harni is about three miles east of Baroda. It is situated on the Baroda-Pavagadh road. It is also connected with Baroda by another road which goes to Fatehpura, which is a part of the town. The Baroda aerodrome is on the outskirts of Harni.

Harni has changed considerably in recent years. Rapid means of communication connecting the village with the town, industrialisation of Baroda, providing employment facilities to villagers, etc., have had a great deal of influence on the social and economic life of Harni.

The village is nearly seven hundred years old and the Patidars claim that they were the first to come to this area and establish the village. According to them the Barias and the Rathods came to the village later on. The population of the village is nearly 1,550. It consists of various castes such as Brahmins, Rajputs, Patidars, Barias, Kumbhars, Luhars, Bharwads, Rathods, Harijans, etc. Out of these the Rathods are 28 per cent of the village population, the Patidars 26 per cent, Bharwads 15 per cent, and the Barias 12 per cent. The Bharwads live nearly a quarter of a mile away from the village and take very little interest in its politics. The Rathods however are in a great number but their economic backwardness prevents them from taking any part in the village politics. The same is true of the Barias. Consequently the Patidars are the only people to participate in the village politics.

The village has a very interesting pattern of leadership. The leaders of all those major groups differ in their peculiarities and approaches. The leaders of the Patidars are known in the

village for their doggedness, authoritativeness and political skill. In practically everything that takes place in the village they are at the forefront. Compared to them, the leaders of the Barias are pretty subdued and keep on grumbling about their difficulties. Socially and economically they are not in a position to challenge the Patidars. Finally, the leaders of the Rathods have practically no say in the politics of their village. And they have cultivated a completely non-political outlook.

In recent years the village lost nearly 568 acres of its cultivable land to the aerodrome and the army. Practically all the castes were hit by it. However, the Patidars who make use of modern means of cultivation recovered from it earlier than the others. The Barias, the Rajputs, the Harijans, etc. could not overcome the loss of land and eventually some of them became either landless labourers or factory workers.

The panchayat in this village is about forty years old. In the past it had five members, one of them being the police-patel. In 1953, the popular panchayat, presided over by the sarpanch, was constituted. The village has succeeded in avoiding elections thrice since Independence. This however does not mean that there is unity and accord in the village. On the contrary, few villages in this area display the complex factionalism which is in existence in this village.

Factions are at the basis of the politics of this village. There are factions among the Patidars, the Barias, the Rajputs and the Rathods. Factional differences among the Patidars and the Rajputs are deeper than those which are found among the Barias and the Rathods. These have arisen due to a number of reasons. Some of them are as follows:

One of the biggest disputes leading to the formation of two factions among the Patidars arose as a result of land dispute between two cousins. This developed into taking of sides and not attending of marriage ceremonies performed by each faction. Then there are factions which have come as a result of the rivalry between the present and the past sarpanch of the

panchayat. The ex-sarpanch and his group did not want the present sarpanch to get more credit for the work that he might do in the panchayat. Consequently, he had succeeded in forming a faction with the help of the critics of the present sarpanch.

Factions which have developed in this manner, have been strengthened by economic ties and the ability to get work done with the help of connections in the administrative machinery. These factions sometimes cut across the kinship ties of the Patidars in the village.

At the time of constituting a new panchayat, the factional struggle among the Patidars reach its climax. Some sort of a compromise is invariably brought about by the neutrals so that the contending Patidars may not yield a seat to a non-Patidar. Such compromises however are temporary and confined to the period of panchayat elections only. As soon as the new panchayat is constituted loyalty to these factions revives. This results in the want of quorum and slowness in the execution of the work of the panchayat. Even now the village, after nearly eight years of demand for electricity and water-works, has not been able to get them in spite of the fact that the panchayat has a lot of money lying with it unspent.

Factions among the Rajputs are a result of a dispute on the distribution of property between two brothers. They went to the court of law and incurred heavy expenses. The Rajputs of the village took one or the other side. It is alleged that the Patidars, instead of helping the Rajput brothers to dissolve their differences, tried to aggravate them.

Factions among the Barias are the results of an incident at the time of a marriage ceremony. Some of the Barias felt slighted by the treatment meted out to them and walked out of the bride's residence. These factions, despite agreements on minor matters, have continued and interfered with the possibility of a united political effort on the part of Barias at the time of panchayat elections.

Finally, the factions among the Rathods. Like the Barias, they too had a faction-stimulating incident in one of the wedding ceremonies. It has equally divided the Rathods into two mutually hostile groups. Apart from the fact that socially, economically and psychologically, the Rathods are not in a position to play an effective part in the village politics, the factions keep them busy plotting against each other.

The factions in the village Harni keep each of these four communities busy with their internal politics. While the factional struggles among the Patidars go right up to the panchayat and affect the village politics, those of other communities take away the political potentialities of a united caste-group in democratic politics. There are occasions when the Patidars have tried to bring about alignments of factions across castes but these have been short-lived, due to the fact that the Patidars have not so far experienced any serious challenge to their authority in the village. To conclude, the factional struggle among the Patidars have reduced the panchayat to a state of near-paralysis and those among the Rajputs, the Barias and the Rathods have compelled them to subsist at a sub-political level.

CHAPTER VII
VOLUNTARY ORGANISATION IN THE POLITICS
OF VILLAGE BHAILI

by HASMUKH AMIN

THE village Bhaili is situated about eight miles west of central Baroda and six miles from its municipal limits. It is connected with Baroda by regular bus service. It also has a metre-gauge railway station. The population of the village is 3,004 with nearly twenty-seven castes and sub-castes. Among the main castes are Brahmins, Patidars, Barias, Harijans, Bhils, etc. The Patidars who entirely dominate the public life of the village are well over 45 per cent of the village population. The Patidars of the village are a fairly advanced community. Some of the educated Patidars have become teachers, doctors, lawyers, engineers, etc. Others go out to East Africa and earn some money. Those who have left the village and have not returned are not considered unworthy.

In the village, Patidars are mostly engaged in the cultivation of land. With the passage of the Land Tenancy Act, the Patidars were discouraged from renting out a portion of their land. They are considered to be fairly hardworking farmers, growing tobacco, cotton, rice, etc.

The Patidars attach great importance to voluntary organisations in the village. There is a Mahila Mandal (Women's Association) which looks after the welfare of Patidar women. Then there are two youth organisations which undertake the work of catering at the time of weddings and maintaining cleanliness in the village. But the most important of them all is the *Pragati Mandal* which runs a high school, a dispensary and a kindergarten school.

The Patidars are not free from factions. Broadly speaking they are divided into two kin-groups, which are known as the

Lal Darwaja group and the rest. In the field of economic undertakings they have been working at cross purposes. They have two co-operative societies to assist them in their day-to-day economic life.

Other castes in the village are Brahmins, Barias, Dheds, Bhangis, Bhils, etc. Neither numerically nor economically are they in a position to play any part in the politics of the village. A great majority of panchayat members are Patidars and the politics of the village centres round them.

The factionalism among two groups of Patidars as mentioned earlier has in recent years intensified. This is due to a couple of reasons. Firstly, the Patidars of the Lal Darwaja constructed a water-works with the help of money advanced by their own co-operative society. They were willing to give water connections to the other Patidar group but the latter found its charges pretty heavy. They therefore refused to have it. Unable to manage the water-works by themselves, the Patidars of the Lal Darwaja group wanted to sell the water-works to the panchayat. The panchayat was then controlled by the other faction. It therefore refused the offer. Finally it was decided that the advice of two prominent villagers, who have now left the village, should be sought.

The other issue which aggravated the factionalism among the Patidars is the question of contribution on the basis of land possession for setting up a multipurpose voluntary organisation, called the *Pragati Mandal*. The Patidars of this village possess land inside, as well as outside the village. The question then was whether the tax was applicable to land outside the village or not. The Patidars of the Lal Darwaja who had more land outside the village wanted an exemption from such a tax. The others thought that it was not fair that they should go without paying the tax. The matter was then referred to outsiders who had strong connections with the village and it was decided that people with land inside the village should pay Rs. 3 per acre and those outside the village Rs. 1.50 per acre.

The need to establish the voluntary organisation arose as a result of the need to provide better educational facilities to village children. As early as 1927, a school was established in the village but it did not always have high school classes. The Patidars were unwilling to send their children, particularly girls to Baroda for their education. What the village therefore wanted was not only a school but also an organisation to look after the school and other requirements of the community. In addition to a high school, therefore, the *Pragati Mandal* also came into existence which has now under its supervision a Balmandir and a dispensary.

The prevailing factionalism among the Patidars also affected the working of the *Pragati Mandal*. The main organisers of this body are Patidars from the Lal Darwaja group. Quite often therefore, one comes across instances where the other group refuses to give its co-operation in the activities of the *Pragati Mandal*.

In its constitution the organisers of the *Pragati Mandal* emphasized education and health as its main objectives. It was also stated in the constitution that the organisation ought not to work for any particular section but for the entire community. At present it has employed seven teachers, and a peon for the high school, a lady teacher and a lady attendant for the Balmandir and a doctor and a compounder for the dispensary. Their work is supervised by the organisation.

The President of the organisation is from the Lal Darwaja group, whereas the sarpanch of the village panchayat is from the other group. The relationship between these two institutions on account of the kinship differences among their presiding officials were not always very cordial. Quite often they did not give their co-operation to each other for collecting rates and taxes from their respective followers.

So far as the other castes are concerned they are quite impressed by the activities of this voluntary organisation. No doubt they feel that through this organisation, the Patidars

would continue to dominate them but under the circumstances, particularly when the panchayat is inactive, this seems to be the only alternative.

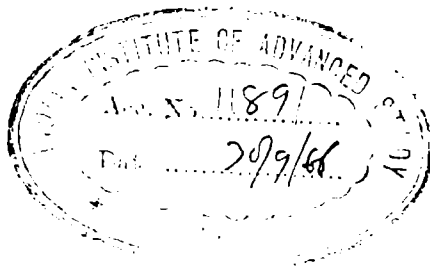
As said before the relationship between the people who contest for a seat in the panchayat and those who contest for a seat in the voluntary organisations are not one of harmony but of rivalry. Quite often they try to outsmart or obstruct or belittle one another. This is now known to the entire village and sometimes people complain that as long as these two organisations remain the instruments of conflicts in the hands of warring kin-groups, the interests of the village as a whole would suffer.

Financially also these two organisations do not seem to rest on a sound basis. The panchayat is not always sure whether it would be helped by members of the *Pragati Mandal* in either introducing a new tax or in collecting the arrears. Nor can the *Pragati Mandal* count on the support of the group which dominates the panchayat in matters relating to the improvement in the sources of its income.

The presence of the voluntary organisation as a matter of fact has threatened the very existence of the institution of panchayat. This is so, because most of the development and welfare projects have been undertaken by it. It has left to the panchayat matters relating to routine administration. There is no doubt that the panchayat can, if it is able, take up the responsibility of providing amenities like roads, electric lights in the street, etc. to the entire village. But for this it needs funds and the co-operation of the entire village including the Lal Darwaja group.

Government officials who visit the village invariably put an adverse remark on the performance of the panchayat. The Block Development Officer is supposed to have said that the village appears to be more progressive than its statutory council. By comparison the performance of the voluntary organisation must have impressed them.

The kinship differences among the Patidars have plagued the public life of the village with petty, personal and factional differences. All new proposals at once become a question of *who* is proposing them. The groups in the Patidar community, almost as a whole never take a decision on the merit of the case but on purely kinship grounds.



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