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First We Are People...

The Koris of Kanpur between Caste and Class



Stefan Molund

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The Koris of Kanpur between Caste and Class

by Stefan Molund

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ABSTRACT

This study is concerned with a group of Scheduled Caste, mainly working-class Koris in Kanpur, the industrial center of the state of Uttar Pradesh, north India. Its analytical point of departure, discussed at some length, is that urban society in India is a complex mixture of caste and class, and its aim is to elucidate the nature of this mixture in the perspective of the Koris. Starting with an overview of the city and its main lines of social stratification, including some of those internal to the working class, it goes on to a more detailed investigation of what it means to be Kori in such a context. One chapter describes the material and cultural conditions of one particular Kori neighborhood, a second deals with caste as a principle of closure in social interaction, a third with the importance of kin and caste as social capital, and a fourth with efforts of caste mobilization and reform within and between subcastes. The resulting picture is one where caste divisions remain of considerable importance, although in a transmuted and gradually eroding form. The society of the future, as the Koris tend to read it from the present, is a class society in the Weberian sense of the term, an egalitarian society where life chances are more exclusively dependent on the possession of property and skills. While still a force in the present, caste is widely seen as slowly disappearing into the past.

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Contents

1. Introduction: Caste, Class and The Kori	1
Caste and class	5
Caste and closure in urban India	11
The present study	19
Fieldwork	27
2. A City of Violence	32
Industrial developments	36
Problems of urban development	39
Divisions of religion and caste	41
Class	48
The stratified working class	54
Trade unions	58
Politicians	65
Emergency	69
3. A Kori Neighborhood	73
Koriyana	73
Devi Street	76
Distinctions of class and standard of living	80
Distinctions of education and life style	87
Political divisions	95
Honoring Devi and fighting for honor	102
4. Ahirwars and Parjats	112
The disintegration of the old order	113
Big castes and small castes	120
Interacting with low-caste neighbors	128
Interacting with Muslims	137
Outside the neighborhood	140
Talking about caste	154

5. The Importance of Kith and Kin	164
Networks of kinship and marriage	164
Domestic groups	175
Kinsmen in migration	183
Getting access to housing and work	187
Occupational diversification	192
The importance of kith and kin	198
6. Efforts of Caste Mobilization	201
The Koli-Rajput movement	202
The Koli Rajputs of Kanpur	209
The Scheduled Caste issue	215
The issue of political representation	225
The revival of the Sanyukt Kori Mahasabha	231
Further criticisms	239
Arranging a caste conference	246
Reforming efforts within the subcaste	255
7. The Past and the Future in the Present	263
Notes	272
References	277
Maps	
1. Ahirwar home region	23
2. Ramnagar Koriyana	74
3. Home Territory of the Ahirwars of Kanpur	113
4. Residential distribution of castes and subcastes between <i>ahatas</i>	123
Tables	
1. Basic division of labor, 1961.	38
2. Distribution of population by religion, 1961	42
3. The Scheduled Castes, 1961.	43
4. Distribution by percentage of Scheduled Castes and Non-Scheduled Castes (including Muslims) between main sectors of the economy, 1961.	45
5. Distribution of workers by religion and caste in cotton textile industry, 1965.	48
6. Occupational Structure, 1961.	50
7. Number of apartments per house	77
8. Approximate time of arrival of family in Kanpur, Koriyana, and present living quarters	79

9. Households divided by size and number of earners	83
10. Expenditures in two households, May, 1976	85
11. Levels of formal education	89
12. Results of local municipal elections	98
13. Distribution of households by religion, caste, and residential status	121
14. Geographical distribution of marriages	166
15. Relation to village or town of origin	168
16. Composition of households	179
17. Sponsors in migration	186
18. Occupational distribution	197
Diagrams	
1. Segment of a local kinship network	170
2. Kinship Connections	171
3. Wedding guests divided by caste, kinship, and residence	173
4. Kinsmen in migration	184
5. Kinsmen in labor recruitment	189

Introduction: Caste, Class and the Koris

This is a study of a group of Koris in the city of Kanpur, the big industrial center of the state of Uttar Pradesh in north India. The Koris, who are artisan weavers by caste, have traditionally been regarded as Untouchables or near-Untouchables and are now one of the Scheduled Castes of Uttar Pradesh. In Kanpur, where they have resided in sizeable numbers for nearly a century, they constitute a small segment of the urban working class. They are particularly numerous in the large-scale textile industry, Kanpur's biggest industry, but are also found in other working-class occupations. In recent decades a few of them have even started to climb out of the working class, usually on the ladder reserved for the Scheduled Castes.

The analytical issue with which I am primarily concerned is that of caste and class. As some Marxists understand it, this is an issue of false consciousness; the question to be explained is essentially why workers and peasants in India are taken in by the ideology of caste, when it would clearly be in their best interest to forget about caste, and get on with their historical task of forming a revolutionary class. In this book, however, I do not regard caste as a mere ideology or element of superstructure, nor do I base the discussion on any preconceived notion about what the people under study should regard as their true, objective interests. The metaphors of caste as superstructure and distorted vision I regard as extremely misleading, as they would seem to suggest that caste is merely a form of

delusion, a disease of the mind, beyond which lies a different reality more tangible and more consequential than the one perceived. The structures of caste are no less real than those of class; in a Marxist idiom I would say that they belong to the base as well as to the superstructure. Furthermore, there is also a sense in which those who subscribe to these views would seem to overrate the importance of caste. It is at least questionable whether caste has ever been such an important obstacle to the concerted action of the exploited as these views imply. In any case, among the Koris of Kanpur there are not only those who share the Marxist view of caste as an obstacle to class formation. Those who have not been subject to Marxist therapy and consciousness raising are usually also well aware of the fact that they have important interests in common with persons of other castes, and where it seems feasible they are ready to engage in collective action to promote those interests. As we shall see later on in this book, in recent years it has in fact proved to be more difficult to mobilize the Koris for their sectional caste interests than for those interests of class which they share with others. Indeed, the question is whether there are any important interests around which the Koris could unite as a body.

My analytical point of departure, explained more fully below, is that urban society in India is a mixture of caste and class, and what I shall try to do in this book is to elucidate the nature of this mixture in the perspective of some of the Koris of Kanpur. While we have a fairly good idea of how India's villages are socially and culturally constructed, our knowledge of the cities is more fragmentary. According to one view, now somewhat obsolete perhaps, caste is practically a thing of the past as far as urban India is concerned. According to another view it is disintegrating, but mainly at the upper levels of the society. Among the urban working classes it still provides the fundamental framework of thought and action. The view from Kanpur is rather that whereas caste is still a major principle of social organization within the working class, the sharply dualistic model of an emancipated, so-called modernized middleclass sitting on the shoulders of an irredeemably caste-bound working class does not fit the facts. The people described in this book inhabit a world that is structured by caste, but it is by no means a world totally encompassed by caste, nor is it a world where caste is merely taken for granted.

For the most part what follows is an analysis of the present. Yet I have tried to describe the present not as a timeless structure, but as the momentary outcome of historical events. The historical data may lack depth

and thickness, but they are essential to the story. For some time, it has been fashionable to focus on the old and the enduring rather than on the new and the changing. Some anthropologists seem indeed to have stepped out of history altogether, preferring to brood over the mysteries of the Unchanging East. Yet the Koris of Kanpur live in a changing world, and they are very much aware of it. Some of them may complain that things are changing too slowly or too rapidly or that the direction of change should be different, but in either case they are deeply conscious of the sheer fact of change. If there was ever a time when events seemed only to repeat themselves, that time has gone. In the perspective of most of the Koris with whom we will be concerned, the society is not a natural or divine given, but a human artifact, made and remade in the course of history.

The plan of the book is as follows. In this chapter I make an effort to clarify some of the conceptual and empirical aspects of the issue of caste and class. As social scientists have defined these terms in many different ways, and as some of them have even claimed that the issue of caste and class is a non-issue, the conceptual framework should be clearly stated. Beyond this the present chapter provides some introductory information about the Koris and a short account of the background of this study and the fieldwork on which it is based.

Chapter 2, "A City of Violence," presents the larger setting. In a summary fashion it describes the development of Kanpur as an industrial city, some of the present divisions of religion, caste, and class, the formation and endless re-formation of trade unions, and the dismal history of urban government and leadership. Towards the end it provides a few glimpses of the local manifestations of the state of national emergency that obtained for the greater part of my fieldwork.

Chapter 3, "A Kori Neighborhood," deals with the neighborhood where most of the principal actors of this book reside. More precisely, it deals with one of the streets of this neighborhood, a street which I have called Devi Street. It begins with a few notes on the history of the neighborhood, goes on to describe some of the local distinctions of material living standard, education, political orientation, and life style, and ends with an account of a major dispute revealing some of the local forces of conflict and cohesion.

Chapter 4, "Ahirwars and Parjats," is a chapter about caste as a principle of closure in social interaction. The word Ahirwar is the name of the subcaste to which most of the Koris of Devi Street belong, and Parjat is a

word by which the Ahirwars refer to people who are not Ahirwars. The chapter starts with an account of the relations between the Ahirwars of Devi Street and their non-Kori neighbors, and continues with a discussion of what it means to be an Ahirwar and a Kori in other contexts of interaction. Throughout I stress the fact that there is a great deal of variability in intercaste relations. Not only do different Ahirwars take different attitudes towards persons whom they would traditionally regard as inferior, depending on occupation, education, and so forth; they themselves are also differently treated by persons of higher caste.

Chapter 5, "The Importance of Kith and Kin," describes the internal structure the Ahirwar subcaste as it appears in the perspective of the local caste group in Devi Street. In analytical terms the chapter is mainly concerned with the question of the importance of kin and caste as social capital. To what extent do the Ahirwars depend on their kin and caste in such vital matters as migration, housing, or finding a job? To what extent do they depend on the assistance of outsiders? What is the nature of the solidarities involved?

In chapter 6, "Efforts of Caste Mobilization," we are concerned with collective efforts of social advancement among the Koris of Kanpur over a period of four decades. It starts with an account of a social movement that originated among the Koris of Ajmer in Rajasthan in the late 1920's and reached Kanpur a decade later. It traces the development of this movement during the 1940's, and describes how it eventually crumbled on the issue of the inclusion of the Koris among the Scheduled Castes. Thereafter follows a discussion of the more recent efforts of a caste association known as Sanyukt Kori Mahsabha to bring about a unity of all the Koris of Kanpur, irrespective of subcaste, and a shorter discussion about a recent campaign for social reform among the Ahirwars under the auspices of an association known as the Ahirwar Kori Sangh. Neither the Sanyukt Kori Mahasabha nor the Ahirwar Kori Sangh were very effective while I was in Kanpur, and one of the purposes of the chapter is to explain why.

Chapter 7, "The Past and the Future in the Present," finally, provides a summary discussion in the perspective of the larger issue of caste and class.

Caste and class

The issue of caste and class is an old one in Indian studies. Karl Marx raised it in the 1850's, when he confidently predicted the imminent breakdown of the caste system under the crushing weight of modern industrial capitalism (Marx 1969: 132-9). There were hardly any modern factories in India at the time, but the first railways were under construction, and Marx expected that the sound of factory whistles would soon be heard all over the country. Yet, while an impressive number of factories, mostly textile mills, were built in Bombay, Calcutta, Ahmedabad, Kanpur, and elsewhere, there was no industrial revolution, no large-scale transformation of the society. By the 1950's, when the modern study of Hindu society got started, the castes were still very much alive, not just in the villages but also in the cities. Pointing to the proliferation of caste associations, voluntary associations of caste-fellows established for purpose of social mobility and reform, and to the role of caste solidarities in politics and on the modern labor market, the prominent Indian sociologist M.N. Srinivas (1962) even argued that caste had been growing stronger since Marx made his prediction. This was perhaps a rather extreme view, but the idea that caste is a peculiarly resilient phenomenon has been widely accepted. Its most radical advocate is perhaps the French anthropologist Louis Dumont (1971, 1976), who claims that the basic framework of Indian society is the same today as it was before the arrival of the British. As Dumont puts it, there has been much change *in* the society but no change *of* the society. The encompassing structure of caste, based on the uniquely Indian subordination of (secular) power to (ritual) status, remains essentially intact.

But there are those who take a different view. In a well-known rejoinder to Nur Yalman (1960), who with reference to Sri Lanka had taken a position similar to that of Srinivas, Edmund Leach (1960) claimed that what the change from interdependence to competition really signified was the very opposite of reinforcement. The reason why Yalman had failed to see this was that he had a faulty conception of the caste system. His argument rested on the unstated assumption that the caste system was essentially nothing but a collection of closed status groups. The distinctive feature of this system, however, was its peculiarly organic character in the Durkheimian sense of the term. It was a system where each unit had its own exclusive niche in the social division of labor, and where payment for services rendered were made in accordance with custom and status rather than market forces. Hence castes which were competing with each other

for opportunities and rewards in the manner described by Yalman and others were not strengthening the system, but subverting it. Furthermore, as the description of the factual situation given by these writers was not in dispute, it followed that while there were still castes in India and Sri Lanka, the *system* of castes was largely a thing of the past. The prevailing system of stratification, Leach suggested, was basically a class system with the disconnected remnants of the caste system somehow added to it.

Few anthropologists would agree that the caste system has disappeared from the Indian countryside, but the view that there is no caste system in the cities is not uncommon. According to S.A. Barnett (1975), for instance, not only are the relations between castes more competitive in the cities than in the villages, but the very concept of caste is also different in important respects. Following McKim Marriott (1968a, 1968b), he argues that a defining feature of caste lies in its strictly corporate character. It is based on the principle that caste status is a collective status for which every caste member is equally responsible. If any individual caste member violates the established code of conduct in the ritual matters relevant to the status of the group and refuses to make appropriate amends (where this is deemed possible), he must be excluded from the group or it will suffer a loss of status. In the villages this is still the principle governing the interaction between caste groups, but in the big cities (or at least in Madras, where Barnett made his study), castewide codes of conduct are upheld only in relation to the Untouchables and then not quite consistently. In other relations high-caste persons are not much constrained by collective proscriptions, but can act more or less as they see fit. On the ideological level this change, which Barnett describes as a change from caste to ethnicity, is accompanied by a new conception of caste purity. Formerly a caste was considered pure to the extent that its members were pure in blood and pure in conduct; now it is primarily the purity of the blood that counts. Whether caste purity is understood in this way in other Indian cities is hard to say; I did not encounter the idea in Kanpur. As even Dumont would agree, however, it is certainly true that urban concepts of purity and pollution everywhere tend to be somewhat diluted and that urban individuals generally have considerably more freedom of action in caste matters than their rural castemates (cf. Saberwal 1973).

As this brief and incomplete review indicates, the modern debate about change in the caste system has been a debate about the correct definition of caste as much as it has been a debate about empirical facts. The

same is true of the closely related debate about class. Thus, James Silverberg (1978) rejects Leach's view that there has been a transition from caste to class on purely conceptual grounds. Caste and class are not mutually exclusive alternatives, he says. They are perfectly compatible and in Indian society they have always co-existed. If this has not been recognized it is only because social scientists have been too much concerned with the phenomenon of caste or have failed to define class properly. Arguments to the same effect have been advanced by Andre Béteille (1969, 1971), Joan Mencher (1974), and Claude Meillassoux (1973), among others. For these writers, as apparently for Silverberg, a class society is simply a society stratified in terms of the relations of production. The question of how access to roles and rewards is given or denied, which would seem to be the crucial question for Leach, they do not regard as pertinent to the definition.

As a further complication there are writers who take class consciousness and class cohesion as necessary features of class. For these writers Leach's definition of the concept would seem to be too broad rather than too narrow. Those amongst them who accept his definition of caste could very well argue that while it is true that Indian society is no longer a caste society in the strict sense of the term, it is not true that it has become a class society. Consider, for instance, Gerard Heuzé's (1982) argument against the existence of an industrial working class in India. In Heuzé's view the Indian workers fall short of the concept of class for several reasons. They do not have a common culture setting them apart from other classes. They do not have separate political organizations and their trade-unions are dominated by professional politicians and other outsiders. Internally they are not only fragmented along the primordial lines of religion and caste, but are also deeply divided in terms of income, security of employment, and occupational status. The most privileged among them, the protected and often relatively well-paid workers in the modern large-scale factories, have more in common with the white-collar workers in the same factories than with manual workers elsewhere.

The problematic of class consciousness is obviously important to any analysis of class, and I will not ignore it in this book. Yet I do not regard class consciousness as a defining feature of class. Nor do I regard class as a form of social inequality existing wherever one can identify a category of non-producers exploiting a category of producers.¹ On the issue of definition the position adopted here is close to, and perhaps even identical with,

that of Leach. My starting point is Max Weber's (1968) well-known distinction between two types of stratified societies, status societies and class societies. A status society is a society where roles and rewards are for the most part allocated in accordance with an authoritatively established order of precedence and privilege, a class society is a society where the predominant mechanism of distribution is the market, an impersonal institution which "knows nothing of honor" (ibid.: 936) and is "fundamentally alien to any type of fraternal relationship" (ibid.: 637). In a status society, the basic components of which are status groups united by a common conception of social honor and a common life style, as well as by common privileges, the individual's life chances, his chances of "procuring goods, gaining a position in life, and finding inner satisfaction" (ibid.: 302), are primarily determined by his placement in the hierarchical order of status. In a class society, where the fundamental strata tend to be more diffuse aggregates of people distinguished in the terms of economic power, the individual's life chances are primarily determined by his possession of property, diplomas, and marketable skills. In a status society access to resources and rewards tends to follow status, in a class society status tends to follow access to resources and rewards. A status society is typically an aristocratic society or a theocracy, a class society is typically a bourgeois society.

In saying that a class society is a society where the market is the predominant mechanism by which rewards are distributed one need not ignore the obvious fact that property and other marketable resources are transmitted through the family and that individuals therefore enter the market differently endowed. A class society is not a society of equal opportunity, but a society where the preservation or improvement of one's position depends on market performance. In a status society of Weber's pure type, the pattern of social stratification is part of the formal structure of the society. In a class society it is not. The state upholds the market and the system of property, but does not give formal recognition to the social inequalities sustained and generated by these institutions. From the point of the view of the state the basic components of the society are neither classes nor status groups, but individual citizens, all of whom are formally equal in status.

Nor should we take Weber's insistence on the impersonal nature of the market to mean that in a class society social solidarities play no role in the competitive struggle for income opportunities. In Pierre Bourdieu's

(e.g. 1973, 1980) terms, when the individual enters the market he is not only equipped with variable amounts of economic and cultural capital, including educational certificates, but has also a social capital of outstanding claims to assistance and preferential treatment that he may attempt to use for personal profit. A society would not be a class society if its members systematically sacrificed their market interests for the sake of amity, but there is nothing to prevent them from assisting others when this is compatible with or beneficial to their own interests. Nor is there anything to prevent them from forming coalitions and interest groups on the basis of common market interests. As Randall Collins (1975), Frank Parkin (1979) and others have stressed, a crucially important part of the study of class is the study of how groups and individuals try to strengthen their market position by restricting access to their occupational niches, limiting the supply of their products or services, or otherwise manipulating the market to their advantage. In a class society the difference between the privileged and the disprivileged is to a large extent a difference in the degree of exposure to the market.

Yet it remains the case that the more rewards and opportunities are distributed by non-market principles, the less the society is a class society and the more it is a status society. By the Weberian definition, a full-scale, ideal-type status society is a society which is divided into a number of hierarchically ordered status groups, each of which is assigned to a particular role in the social division of labor and a particular level on the scale of rewards, and each of which is also a narrowly exclusive grouping in other important areas of social interaction, notably those of connubium and commensality. The competitive market is basically alien to such a society, for not only may market transactions upset the established distribution of material rewards, creating impoverished nobles as well as rich commoners, being oriented to commodities rather than to persons; the market also implies a notion of equality that is entirely inconsistent with the ruling principles of status inequality. If there is a market at all, it can only be a highly restricted one.

The distinction between status societies and class societies is obviously not a classificatory scheme into which all stratified societies can be easily fitted. Some societies are ambiguous in terms of the distinction, and to argue that they are essentially the one rather than the other would be a waste of time. In the case of precolonial India, however, there would not seem to be much room for disagreement. If there ever was a status society,

this was it. The economy may not have been as strictly regimented in terms of status as Leach suggests (especially not in the cities), but the market was certainly not the predominant mechanism by which roles and rewards were distributed.²

Modern urban India presents a far more complicated case. I agree with Leach that the increase in competition between castes in modern times cannot be understood as a reinforcement of the caste system. In the Weberian perspective it can only be seen as a change in the general direction of a class society. The increase in caste consciousness mentioned by Srinivas I regard as an expression of the conflicts and tensions generated in the process. Something similar seem to have happened in the transformation of the European old regime, when 'the labouring poor' were gradually transformed into the 'working class,' a rather more assertive body of people (cf. Briggs 1960, Perkin 1969). The difference, and it is of course a major difference, is that while in the European case the predominant response to the loosening of the hierarchical bonds of the old society was a more clearly oppositional class consciousness, the corresponding response in India was a more assertive form of caste consciousness. As Dumont (1971: 275) has described it, the Indian response was one where the castes became in some degree 'substantialized.' Partly released from the fetters of the old order and increasingly aware of new opportunities, they started to act as if they were a species of collective individuals, essentially alike and essentially independent of each other.

What the fact of competition in terms of caste also signifies, however, is that the transformation from status society to class society remains incomplete. This follows directly from the definition of a class society as a society where the individual's life chances are primarily determined by his possession of property, educational credentials, and skills. Exactly how one should characterize the present society depends on the extent to which caste distinctions and caste alignments are actually effective in the competition on the market, as well as on how far they determine the individual's fate in other contexts. What one needs to know, in other words, is how far caste still serves as a mechanism of closure in the society. The more it effectively channels access to roles and rewards the more the society is a status society and the less it is a class society. In the analytical perspective adopted here it is as simple or as difficult as that.

Caste and closure in urban India

It is important that we have a clear idea of what is involved in the concept of closure. This concept does not only refer to the exclusion of certain categories of persons from certain particular roles or types of roles, although this is an essential part of it. It refers also to what Ulf Hannerz (1980: 151-2) would describe as closure in relational access and relational conduct. By closure in relational access is meant the familiar situation where a person is allowed to act in a certain role, but only in relation to certain categories of others, as under rules of exogamy or endogamy, for instance. Closure in relational conduct, on the other hand, refers to the situation where a person has access to a particular role but is deprived of some of its usual rewards because he is expected to mould his conduct to fit some other attribute of his, such as his gender, ethnicity, or caste. A female bureaucrat who in relation to her subordinates is expected to be less demanding or less insistent on the symbolic prerogatives of her office than her male colleagues would exemplify this form of closure.

Notice also that closure in one area of social life tends to affect the distribution of roles and rewards in other areas of social life, and, more specifically, that relational closure in the domains of family, friendship, and neighboring by themselves tend to generate patterns of differential access to opportunities and rewards in the market. As we have already noticed, such a relation between closure in the status order and the distribution of economic advantages is bound to exist even in a class society of Weber's pure type, for while in such a society the status order is subordinated to the distribution of economic advantages rather than the other way around, it is hardly conceivable that the individual's placement in the order of status would not affect his chances in the market. Not only is real property transmitted by inheritance; through the family and the other primary relations of the status order the individual is also provided with a more or less expandable and more or less convertible fund of cultural and social capital to be used in the competition on the market.

What the question of caste as a mechanism of closure amounts to, therefore, is a number of different things. It is a question of the extent to which caste is used as a principle of relational closure in the contexts of family, friendship, and neighboring. It is a question about the extent to which there is role and relational closure on the basis of caste in economic, political and religious life. It is a question of the existence of caste closure in conduct in all contexts where there is neither role closure nor

relational closure. It is a question of the extent to which caste as a principle of relational closure in the crucial domains of family, friendship, and neighboring affects the differential distribution of the various forms of capital in the society. And, finally, it also a question of the extent to which groups and individuals manage to resist or circumvent the forms of closure imposed upon them.

To generalize about contemporary urban India with regard to these questions is obviously bound to be difficult. There are differences between one city and another, and moreover, each city is an extremely complex entity harbouring a great many castes, each of which is a cluster of smaller endogamous units (so-called subcastes), rather than a single, unified group. For interactional purposes this complexity is reduced to more manageable proportions. Yet how this is done may vary from one group to another, and even from one individual to another. In other words, not only may different castes and different subcastes of the same caste subscribe to different principles of inclusion and exclusion; in the city even members of the same endogamous unit may differ significantly in the way they deal with persons belonging to other castes and subcastes.

There are nonetheless certain broad uniformities of social structure and organization frequently noted in the literature. One is simply that caste endogamy everywhere remains the rule. Deviations from this rule occur from time to time, especially among the more educated, but apparently not very often. At the subcaste level intermarriage seems to have become rather more common; in some cases subcaste boundaries may have lost their significance altogether. But, again, the predominant norm is probably the old one of marrying within one's own subcaste. As we shall see further on, among the Koris, as presumably among the other low castes of Kanpur, intersubcaste marriage is a rare option, seriously considered only when a suitable match cannot be found within the subcaste. Furthermore, that under certain circumstances one is ready to marry outside the subcaste does not necessarily mean that one is ready to marry into all the subcastes of one's caste. Distinctions are frequently made between the pure and the impure, or the close and the distant.

Another common feature is that many of the traditional rules of closure relating to commensality and sociable intercourse are losing force. This tendency is perhaps most pronounced in the area of occupational life; when the individual returns into the company of kinsmen and neighbors

he frequently becomes more circumspect in these matters. As Harold Gould (1965), Milton Singer (1972) and others have noticed, the situation is sometimes one of sharp compartmentalization, the individual living by two quite disparate sets of norms, each of which he regards as right and proper in its own situational context. Yet the opposition is not always quite as categorical as that. There are people who are willing to set aside some of the traditional prohibitions at home as well as at work, and there are also people who insist on caste distinctions at work, as any low-caste person working among high-caste people knows by experience. Were this not common, there would be no reason for low-caste persons to try to hide their identity from their high-caste colleagues, as many of them apparently do (cf. Isaacs 1972, Berreman 1975). The general rule is presumably that the willingness to forget about caste increases as the differential in traditional rank diminishes. Where interaction with Untouchables is concerned pragmatic considerations would generally seem to be very important: the more powerful and resourceful the Untouchable the greater the likelihood that people of higher caste will ignore his lowly background and treat him as an equal.

Yet as a rule high-caste people do not depend on the favors of low-caste people. By the controversial system of reservations for the Scheduled Castes in politics and government employment, a small but significant fraction of the low-caste population have risen in society, but otherwise low-caste persons are rarely in a position of command and patronage vis-à-vis their traditional caste superiors. In the social division of labor their role is overwhelmingly that which it has always been; to provide heavy manual labor and perform the tasks regarded as particularly polluting and degrading.

This is not surprising. By traditional occupation and life style as well as by material circumstances the castes were preadapted for different roles within the modern occupational order and as the new opportunities opened up they largely followed the pathways of mobility inscribed in their material and cultural heritage (Gould 1973). They frequently managed to find employment in occupations by which they could preserve their relative standing in terms of material and symbolic rewards, and in many cases they also tended to gravitate towards occupations which had a closer affinity with their traditional occupation. In the north of India Brahmans and Kayasthas, the traditional literati of the region, filled the ranks of the administration and the professions; Thakurs, who used to be

landowners and warriors, frequently entered the army and the police; Baniyas and other merchant groups adapted their old secrets of trade to new areas of business; Koris left their handlooms to become weavers in the mills, and so forth.

Still one must not exaggerate the extent to which the traditional division of labor has been reproduced in the new. Right from the beginning of the modern period there was probably much competition along the lines of caste, and this competition increased as income opportunities became more scarce. To defend their occupational niches against intruders the already entrenched have sometimes tried to impose some form of closure, either by trying to sustain a monopoly of knowledge and skill or by trying directly to control the channels of employment. These efforts have rarely been quite successful, however, and with the passage of time occupations have become increasingly heterogeneous in terms of caste, and castes increasingly heterogeneous in terms of occupation. To be sure, a certain clustering by caste remains. In Kanpur the trading castes would still seem to be the dominant castes in commerce and industry, especially in the high-profit areas of wholesale trade and large-scale industrial production, and Brahmans and Kayasthas are probably also the most prominent of the castes in the administration and the professions. Yet these castes are by no means alone in their preferred fields of specialization, especially not the Brahmans and the Kayasthas, who now face strong competition from the ascending middle castes as well as from the Thakurs and the merchants' castes. Their position has also been adversely affected by the system of job-reservations for the Scheduled Castes, a system which brings new kinds of people into the administration, and also increases the competition for the jobs which are not reserved. At present the only urban occupations which are preserves of a single caste are probably some of the traditional caste occupations, such as those of the sweeper, the leatherworker, the washerman and the barber. Apart from the fact that they are also practised by Muslims, these occupations, few of which are notably rewarding in material and symbolic terms, would seem to be caste monopolies in the cities as well as in the villages.

Furthermore, we must not forget that even in the past the caste occupation, the occupation traditionally associated with the caste and frequently inscribed in its name, was not always the occupation actually practised by the majority of the members of the caste. Among the Brahmans of Kanpur, for example, the great majority are probably descended from poor

and barely literate farmers rather than from well-to-do scholars and priests. If some of them are now well established in the administration and the professions it is certainly not just because they have followed their inherited cultural disposition. By the dictates of their background they should rather have become factory workers, as, indeed, many of them have. Next to the Koris the Brahmans are in fact the most numerous of all the castes in the textile mills of the city. And this is not the result of recent developments; according to the admittedly meagre sources, they have constituted a fairly numerous segment of the work force in this industry for seventy-five years or more.

Nor are the Brahmans alone among the higher castes to be represented among the workers of Kanpur. Among the Kayasthas and the trading castes there would not seem to be many manual workers, but Thakurs, the old warriors, are frequently found in manual occupations, and so are many members of the agriculturalist middle castes, such as the Kurmis, the Ahirs, and the Lodhis, and the clean artisan and menial castes, such as the Sunars, the Lohars, and the Kahars. Thus while the upper sections of the occupational hierarchy is largely the preserve of the higher and, to a smaller extent, middle castes, the lower sections are populated by all or almost all kinds of castes. The situation is probably not radically different in other big cities.

To what extent, then, does caste operate as a mechanism of closure in the occupational domain? The question is of course very difficult to answer with any degree of precision. The system of reservations for the Scheduled Castes in government service is one form of closure on the basis of caste, although it is meant to undermine rather than strengthen the system. It is often said, not least among Scheduled Caste people, that the high-caste bureaucrats who are charged with the task of implementing this system tend to be strongly prejudiced and often try their very best to obstruct it, usually by declaring Scheduled Caste applicants unfit and thereby opening reserved jobs for general competition. Moreover, as has frequently been noticed, there is a tendency among the higher castes to regard jobs which are not specifically reserved for the Scheduled Castes as jobs reserved for the higher castes, which means that Scheduled Caste applicants are disqualified in advance. Thus there is not just an official closure in favor of the Scheduled Castes, but also, it seems, more covert forms of counter-closure directed against them. How widespread these covert exclusionary practices are, nobody knows.

Nor do we know to what extent direct closure on the basis of caste occurs elsewhere in the occupational system. There are certain occupations, particularly those which are sensitive from a ritual point of view, where one would expect caste to make a difference. It would hardly be surprising to find that low caste persons are excluded from certain types of jobs in the catering business and the food industry, for instance. One would also expect high-caste people to resist the employment of low-caste persons in all kinds of jobs where they would have command over their caste superiors. While it is true that the caste hierarchy is primarily a ritual hierarchy, it is also true that it involves and indeed requires the subordination of low-caste people in secular matters. Low-caste persons dominating high-caste persons goes against the grain of the system almost as much as high-caste persons eating from the hands of low-caste persons. One reason why the former situation is likely to be regarded as repulsive is indeed that it suggests the possibility of the latter. Yet from general considerations such as these we are hardly entitled to draw any inferences about what happens in practice.

What is often stressed in the literature is not that there is exclusionary discrimination in occupational recruitment (although this aspect of the situation is rarely ignored), but rather that certain castes are disadvantaged in the competition for certain kinds of jobs because the persons controlling the channels of instruction and employment are under the obligation to favor their own kinsmen and caste-fellows wherever possible. In other words, groups are excluded not because some particular stigma attaches to them, but rather because differences in social capital between castes and subcastes generate a pattern of differential access to opportunities and rewards.

A particularly strong statement on the importance of caste as a source of social capital is provided by Gerald Berreman (1975: 305). Noticing first that urban males normally spend a great deal of time outside the narrow circle of their kin and caste and in the process get involved in numerous relationships of a more or less personal kind, he goes on to say that these intercaste relationships tend to be comparatively superficial. They are never allowed to compromise the paramount obligations toward kin and caste. A person's kinsmen and caste-fellows represent superordinate commitments, overriding any commitment to bureaucratic impartiality as well as any further personal commitment. This holds true on the labor market as well as in other competitive contexts. What appears to the

foreigner or the bureaucrat (sic.) as corruption or nepotism, appears to the actor imbued with the culture of the land as exemplary tokens of fraternal love and obligation.

Sweeping statements of this kind are very common. In the article referred to above, Srinivas (1960: 89), for example, claimed that in the administration of what was then known as Mysore state hardly an appointment was made the basis of merit. Diplomas were required, of course, but at the final stage of selection the decisive credentials tended to be those of kin and caste. Gould (e.g. 1971, 1973) is a little more careful but claims nonetheless that kin and caste are of primary importance in most contexts where people seek access to resources and opportunities. It is indeed largely because caste groups are important for such purposes that they have survived in urban India, he argues. Were it not for the competitive function of caste solidarities and caste networks, even caste endogamy might have disappeared, at least in the more affluent sections of the society, where as a result of the culturally and socially integrative effects of the higher educational system caste groupings are now rapidly losing whatever cultural distinctiveness they may once have had.

A rather different view is that of Mark Holmström (1976). In a study of factory workers in Bangalore, Holmström raises the question of the importance of caste ties for the purpose of finding a job. He notices that there are many workers who claim that caste and other primordial ties are of vital importance in job recruitment in the city, but suggests that such statements should often be regarded as convenient explanations of failure and misfortune rather than as faithful representations of actual states of affairs. It is true that people appeal to the solidarities of caste when they are looking for employment, but then it is also true that they appeal to every other possible solidarity as well. From mere statements about the importance of caste one can hardly draw any definite conclusions about the effectiveness of caste ties as opposed to other solidarities and interests. Within the family the element of obligation tends to be quite strong, but where the relationship is merely one of common caste or even common subcaste it may not carry much weight. Moreover, in sharp opposition to Berreman, Holmström claims that it is not true that the values of caste solidarity are invariably raised above those of merit and bureaucratic impersonality. Many workers firmly believe that the society should be run on meritocratic principles. They may still seek assistance from castemates, but they will then tend to justify their action by the similar actions of

others: Who can afford to act morally in an immoral society?

Milton Singer (1972: 328) is also sceptical towards the type of extreme statements made by Berreman and others. In the industry of Madras, or at least in the large companies of that city, forms of address and patterns of informal association often follow caste lines, but recruitment is increasingly made in terms of skill, education, and performance. To the extent that castes still tend to cluster in particular occupations, one should not look for an explanation in terms of traditional caste concepts. Such clustering is rather the outcome of "previous experience, education, access to capital and opportunities, job protection through seniority, and preference given to children of job-holders" (ibid. 345). The latter, which is a fairly common practice in Indian industry, has little to do with caste as such. It favors whatever castes are already entrenched in the industry, but its primary purpose is not to further the interests of particular castes. Where it has been instituted by the employer it is largely a device for increasing control over the work force, it seems, and where it is the result of trade union action it is meant to protect the interests of workers rather than castes.

Thus the question over the significance of caste as a source of social capital would seem to be just as difficult to answer in general terms as that of caste as a principle of direct closure. While we can often find out what people believe to be the case, it is usually much more difficult to decide to what extent beliefs correspond to actual states of affairs. And this is also true with regard to the importance of caste in the formation and distribution of cultural capital. As we shall see later on in this book, it is the firm opinion of social reformers and political leaders among the Koris that nowadays the educational and economic backwardness of their caste is due less to direct discrimination in the market (still a factor of some importance), and more to their social segregation from the higher castes. As a result of this segregation the Koris are not only deprived of social capital, a very serious disadvantage in entrepreneurial activities as well as on the labor market, but also and even more importantly of the means of acquiring the values, attitudes, and skills that would be necessary for their social advancement. The culture of the Koris and the other low castes, they effectively say, is a culture of poverty, ignorance, and oppression that reproduces its own preconditions. As long as it persists it is hardly necessary for the higher castes to raise any further barriers. The low caste masses will passively remain in their place, grumbling perhaps, but not seriously trying to improve their situation.

Is this also how social scientists understand the situation? Not necessarily. In a recent discussion concerning the future of the system of protective discrimination for the Scheduled Castes I.P. Desai (1984) claims that what determines life chances in contemporary India is not caste but mere possession of property and skills. He is aware of the fact that the low castes are socially segregated, but as he does not consider the larger consequences of this fact, one must assume that he takes them to be of negligible importance. As Ghanshyam Shah (1985) argues in a rejoinder, however, (and as most social scientists would probably agree), this is not a view that stands scrutiny. With data from a study of educational achievement in rural Gujarat, Shah demonstrates that while poverty is a barrier to educational advancement among all castes, it is significantly more difficult for a low-caste child of poor family to succeed in the educational system than it is for a high-caste child of similar economic circumstances. This finding - not a very surprising one - can perhaps be interpreted in different ways, but that caste-related differences of culture are an important part of the explanation seems most likely. What we can probably say, therefore, is that the differences of culture, life style, and self-image corresponding to the divisions of caste have an impact on the distribution of life chances in the society. Yet it is hard to say how important that impact is. This is a badly neglected area of Indian sociology.

The present study

The Koris are a fairly large caste of artisan weavers found in the greater part of Uttar Pradesh, some of the adjacent districts of Madhya Pradesh and Rajasthan, and beyond this region in certain industrial centres like Bombay, Ahmedabad and Indore (cf. Crooke 1896, R.V. Russel 1916). In 1931, when there were 726 000 Koris in U.P., they were 6.9% of the so-called Depressed Classes, the castes which nowadays constitute the bulk of the Scheduled Castes (Singh, Mohinder 1947, appendix III). Since 1956 they have been divided for official purposes into one section belonging to the Scheduled Castes and another section belonging to the so-called Other Backward Classes. In 1961 the Scheduled Caste section, which included all the Koris of the state except those residing in the districts of Agra and Meerut divisions, consisted of 701 242 persons - 4.6% percent of the Scheduled Caste population of the state and slightly less than one percent of the population of the state as a whole. The census gave no figures for

the section of the caste falling outside the Scheduled Caste fold, but presumably it was only about half as big as the Scheduled Caste section.³

About the origin and history of this caste very little is known. Crooke (1896) conjectured that the name of the caste is derived from that of the Kols, a low caste of tribal origin nowadays mainly found in the Himalayan hill-tracts. Yet neither Crooke nor any other ethnographer has suggested that the contemporary Koris are pure descendants of the ancient Kols. Quite the contrary, most of the early ethnographers who used to speculate about the origin of castes - including Baines (1912), Ibbetson (1916), and G. Briggs (1920) - thought that the bulk of the Koris derived from the Camars, the large caste of untouchable leatherworkers found everywhere in north India. In support of this theory they pointed to a similarity in "customs and manners" between the two castes, and to the fact that some of the Kori subcastes carried the same names as some of the Camar subcastes. Important to their argument was the existence of the so-called Kori-Camars or Korchamras, who were Camars who practiced weaving and seemed to be in the midst of a process of becoming Koris. Given the similarity in culture and subcaste nomenclature between the Koris and the Camars, it seemed likely that the contemporary Kori-Camars were merely the last of a long train of Camars passing into the Kori caste over the centuries.

True or not - and there would seem to be no reason why the caste should not have recruited members from other sources as well - this theory accords with popular ideas prevalent in the region. While the Koris are usually granted a somewhat higher status in the caste hierarchy than the Camars, they are also felt to be much the same kind of people as the Camars. In Kanpur this sentiment is inscribed in the derogative expression "Kori-Camar," which refers not to the Korchamras mentioned above but to the Koris and the Camars regarded as an indiscriminate mass of backward and uncivilized people. The Koris themselves would normally not accept the view that they are so closely related to the Camars. Nowadays there are Koris who subscribe to the theory that all the Scheduled Castes, and possibly some of the middle castes, are descendants of the same original sons of the soil, the people who were subjugated by the invading Aryans very long ago. More often, however, they probably see themselves as people who have fallen from a higher position in the society. Not so long ago many of them proudly asserted that they were the descendants of the house of the Koliyas, the royal family to which Lord Buddha was

related on his mother's side as well as through his wife. In some places this theory is still quite popular, but among the Koris of Kanpur it has largely fallen into disuse. In my experience the latter are indeed not much concerned with such questions of origin at all.

Much has been written about the fate of India's artisan weavers under British rule. The most common view, made popular during the years of nationalist struggle, is that the weaving industry was largely demolished as a result of the colonial penetration. In the beginning of the colonial period, when their products were exported in large quantities to Britain and Europe, some of the weavers may have enjoyed a certain prosperity, but later on, when Britain drastically reduced its textile imports and started to transform India into a vast market for its own rising textile industry, they suffered badly. The fact that India soon got a large-scale textile industry of its own was good for the country but did not improve the market situation of its artisan weavers.

As modern historians seem to agree, however, one must not imagine that the pre-colonial situation was a very comfortable one for the weavers (G. Pandey 1983). Presumably they had always been a rather miserable lot, frequently subjected to exploitation by financiers and middlemen controlling their markets. As early as the late eighteenth century, when the mills of Lancashire had not yet been built, colonial administrators described the weavers as an impoverished section of the population, living on a very narrow margin of subsistence (Baines 1912). Furthermore, it is now argued, even if it is true that the Indian textile industry received a hard blow in the nineteenth century, one must not forget that the impact varied between regions and sectors of production. Most severely damaged was apparently the production of high and medium quality textiles, a line of production which in north India was largely the preserve of Muslim Julahas. The famous weavers of Benares, for example, were Julahas, and so were the weavers of Mubarakpur, Mau, and Tanda, three important centers of fine weaving in the state of Awadh (G. Pandey 1983). The Koris were mostly engaged in the production of coarser varieties of cloth for everyday popular consumption, a sector of production which seem not to have been seriously exposed to modern competition until well into this century. Yet they may still have suffered, for it is likely that many skilled Julahas shifted to the production of coarser materials as they lost their own traditional income opportunities (*ibid.*). Furthermore, while the production of ordinary cloth largely remained in the hands of artisan weavers, the mills tended

to take over the spinning of the yarn, which in many places had been part of the weaver's occupation. The mills of Kanpur, for example, were in the beginning largely spinning mills, producing yarn for the artisan textile industry for the surrounding region.

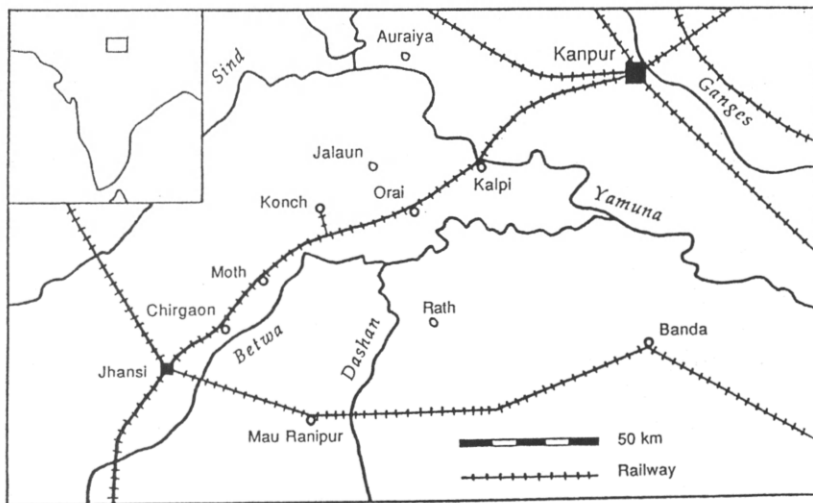
What is most certain is that large numbers of Koris have come to the mills of Kanpur in search of employment. Today there are probably more Koris in this city than in any other city of the country, although they are still only a minor fraction of the total population. In the middle of the 1970's, when the population of Kanpur was well above 1 250 000, something like 3%, 35 to 45 000 persons, were Koris. This is a rough estimate based on previous census figures. I could not possibly have made a census of the local Kori population by myself, for the Koris of Kanpur do not reside in one single place or constitute a unitary group. Like other castes, they are divided into several different subcastes, and these subcastes are again divided into separate residential clusters, some of which consist of only a few households or even a single isolated household.

As I was interested in caste associations and other forms of fraternization across subcaste boundaries, I tried at an early stage to find out exactly how many Kori subcastes there were in the city, and how, approximately, they differed from each other in size, occupation, residential distribution, political participation, and so forth. As it turned out, there were more than a dozen separate groups, more than I could possibly have studied closely on my own. Yet this inquiry was only a preliminary step, and later on I embarked on a more intensive study of one particular subcaste, a relatively large and occupationally diverse group known as the Ahirwars. According to Crooke (1898), the name of this group derives from the ancient town of Ahar, in what is now Bulandshar district of western U.P. The Ahirwars of Kanpur, however, have no connections with Bulandshar. Their traditional home territory is an area extending from the southern part of Kanpur district, westwards in Etawah district, and southwards, across the river Yamuna, into Jalaun, Jhansi, Hamirpur and the adjacent district of Madhya Pradesh, i.e. into the region known as Bundelkhand (see map 1).

In the past there was apparently a fairly large artisan textile industry in Bundelkhand, the products of which had a market as far away as Bareilly, Pilibhit, and Nepal (Drake-Brockman, 1909a, 1909b, 1909c, Bayly 1983). Along with the general decline of this formerly rather prosperous region which started in the 1830's and within a few decades trans-

formed it into one of the stagnant backwaters of North India, this industry began to wither away, however, and by the beginning of the present century most of the artisan weavers, a large fraction of whom must have been Ahirwars, had drifted into other occupations or moved away to become weavers in the mills of Kanpur, Gwalior, Indore, Delhi, Ahmedabad, and other places. Today it is only in and around the small town of Mau Ranipur in Jhansi district that one finds a good number of Ahirwars practicing their ancestral craft. In the villages the great majority are engaged in farming, usually as laborers or share-croppers, and in Orai, Konch, Jalaun, Rath, and other local towns they have taken to many different occupations, including tailoring, petty trading, construction work, portage, and the manufacturing of *bidis*, indigenous cigarettes. The artisan weavers are probably no more than five percent of the male working population of the group. Furthermore, for some of those who are still weavers, weaving is apparently only a seasonal occupation which they practice for a few months per year.

Map 1. Ahirwar home region.



It is impossible to date the arrival of the first Ahirwars in Kanpur, but by the turn of the century there was a community of millworkers and their families residing there. As long as the textile industry was expanding, i.e.

up to the end of World War II, this community continued to grow by a steady inflow of new recruits from the countryside. More recently the streams of Ahirwar migration have taken new directions, and now it seems that more people are leaving Kanpur than coming from the outside to settle there. Delhi is a common destination for the Ahirwars who are leaving the city, but some go to other places, including the towns of their traditional home region. This does not mean that the local Ahirwar community is getting smaller, for if there is a now net outflow by migration it is more than compensated for by the endogenous growth of population. It is even likely that the community is growing more rapidly now than in the past, but no figures are available. About the present size of the group I can only guess. Its members are scattered between at least twenty different neighborhoods. The smallest of the residential clusters consist of only five or ten households, the largest of more than three hundred. As a relatively recent phenomenon there are also some Ahirwars who reside away from their caste-fellows in various housing estates and squatter settlements, but these persons are as yet not very many. As a very rough estimate, I would say that there are something like one or one and a half thousand Ahirwar households in the city, which means that the population is somewhere between five and nine thousand.

Just as I spent most of my time in Kanpur in the company of Ahirwars, so I spent most of my time among the Ahirwars in one particular Ahirwar neighborhood, a neighborhood which is locally known as Koriyana, 'the Kori neighborhood.' For many purposes I had in fact to confine my attention to one of Koriyana's several streets, a street which I will here call Devi Street. As I will explain below, the reasons why I decided to study the Ahirwars rather than any of the other subcastes, and Koriyana rather than any of the other Ahirwars neighborhoods, were not purely academic. To some extent these decisions were influenced by sheer practical considerations. Some of the Koris with whom I first made friends were Ahirwars with good connections in Koriyana, but there were also other considerations involved. The fact that the Ahirwars seemed to be one of the most diverse of the subcastes was important, as was the fact that Koriyana was a large multi-caste neighborhood containing Ahirwars of different occupations and levels of education, as well as people belonging to other castes and subcastes. Furthermore, Koriyana was the place where a caste association known as the Sanyukt Kori Mahasabha, 'The United Kori Great Conference,' used to assemble. The purpose of this association was to ad-

vance the common interests of the Koris and to encourage fraternization and mutual support across the boundaries of the subcastes. Its members belonged to different subcastes and came from different parts of the city, but it was in Koriyana that they usually held their meetings, and it was also there that a few of the most prominent amongst them resided. By making Koriyana my base of operation I would be able to observe this organization in action, and through its members I would presumably also get access to other Kori subcastes and other Kori neighborhoods.

And there was still another reason why Koriyana seemed to be particularly suitable for my purposes. The reason why I had come to Kanpur in the first place was that this city was north India's oldest, and for a long time only, industrial city. If any north Indian city should be looked at in the theoretical perspective of caste and class it was surely Kanpur. Here, I somewhat naively assumed, the forces eroding the caste system would be at their strongest, and so would the forces making for class formation and class consciousness. What I had vaguely intended, in other words, was to make a study of the emergence of an industrial working class in the classical Marxist sense of the term, a class emerging as a class for itself on the ruins of the caste system. Having read Arthur Niehoff's *Factory Workers in India* (1959), a book about industrial workers in Kanpur, I understood that caste was still a factor of some importance among the workers of this of this city, but this was by no means a problem since it was the process of class formation itself that interested me. Furthermore, at this time the question was debated whether the caste system looked the same from the bottom as from the top, a question raised in the wake of the publication of the English translation of Louis Dumont's *Homo Hierarchicus* (1971). Dumont's view, it seemed, was that there was no essential difference, hierarchy being basically taken for granted at all levels of the society. On purely theoretical grounds this seemed to me a dubious proposition, although I was also rather suspicious of some the statements by Dumont's critics, which seemed to suggest that low-caste people looked at the caste system in much the same way as Western liberals.

My decision to study the Koris of Koriyana, then, followed from an interest in such matters. The Koris were not only one of the Scheduled Castes; they belonged to the real veterans of Kanpur's industrial working class. Members of the caste had been employed in the textile mills of the city for a very long time, and some of those who were now working there were the grandsons or even great-grandsons of millhands. If there was a

class-conscious and radically anti-caste working class in Kanpur, I reckoned, some of the Koris would have to be part of it. Furthermore, Koriyana seemed to be a particularly suitable place to look for these egalitarian, class-conscious Koris. As I learned very soon, this neighborhood, and especially Devi Street, was known as a communist stronghold. In Kanpur the communists had largely confined their organizational efforts to the factories. During elections they campaigned in the neighborhoods, as did other political parties, but usually they were not very active there. Koriyana, or more particularly Devi Street, however, seemed to be an exception. Here the communists had managed to build a base for themselves, especially among the Ahirwars. They had been particularly active in the later 1950's and early 1960's, before the traumatic China war and the subsequent nation-wide split of the party. In those years professional party workers had visited the neighborhood regularly in order to give lectures, preside over educational discussions, and - as the Ahirwars fondly remember - even participate as honored guests at local weddings.

When I came to Devi Street all this was history. Yet many of the Ahirwars were still in sympathy with the communists, and few of them were even party members, usually of the CPI(M) but in some cases also of the CPI. Indeed, one of the young Ahirwars of Devi Street, a man called Ram Shankar, was a professional CPI(M) leader in charge of the party unions of a couple of factories. He did not have much time for neighborhood affairs, and did not in fact reside in the neighborhood any more. Many of the local Ahirwars were extremely proud of him, however, and most of his old friends regarded him as their leader and consulted him regularly in matters of local dispute and intrigue. Thus by choosing Koriyana as my primary unit of observation, I would get a view of the political organization of the working class from below and I would also be able to study the reception and transformation of communist party ideology among a group of workers. That these workers were also members of a Scheduled Caste would not make such a study any less interesting. As members of a traditionally stigmatized caste one could expect them to have a somewhat ambivalent attitude towards the communist credo. On the positive side was the fact that the communists held out a promise of a casteless as well as classless society, and that in their political practice they were known to be relatively egalitarian. On the negative side was perhaps the fact that they were not particularly concerned with the special problems of the Scheduled Castes. For the communists of Kanpur, as for communists everywhere, the

fundamental contradiction of the society was of course that between exploiter and exploited, capitalist and worker, not that between the pure and the impure. Was this view of the society fully compatible with the experience of the Koris? Were the Koris not at all attracted by the message of the late Dr. B.R. Ambedkar, the great Babasahab of the Untouchables, who had discarded communism and spent the best part of his life trying to create a unity of Untouchables rather than a unity of workers? In Kanpur, even in Koriyana, Dr. Ambedkar had a great many followers and I expected that there would be interesting arguments between them and the communists.

Fieldwork

I arrived at Kanpur Central one early morning in October in 1974 with a letter of introduction to Professor K. N. Sharma of the Indian Institute of Technology, Kanpur, in my pocket. Professor Sharma kindly put me in touch with one of his graduate students, who had just completed a survey of Scheduled Caste white-collar workers, and with equal kindness brought me along to meet a few of his respondents, one of whom, a man called Shiv Prasad, became my friend, part-time assistant, and, for a while, chief informant. Shiv Prasad, who was a Camar by caste, worked as a clerk in one of the government offices of the city, and in his spare time he also worked as an assistant to a couple of the lawyers at the local district court. For economic reasons he had not been able to complete his own legal education, but he still hoped that he would become a certified member of the local bar one day. In the meantime he spent a great deal of time in the company of a group of high-caste lawyers, one of whom had been his teacher at law school. At the office he was a leading member of the Scheduled Caste Employees' Association. Had he not been a government servant and the sole provider of a large family, he might very well have become a successful Scheduled Caste politician, for he had considerable oratorical skills as well as a vast and diversified network of friends and acquaintances.

Shiv Prasad offered his assistance at our very first meeting, and gave me right away a long, engaging lecture on the sufferings of low-caste people. In conclusion he said that I had better see for myself; everything that he had said was true. At our next meeting, which occurred a couple of days later at his house in a poor, predominantly Camar neighborhood hidden behind more respectable buildings in one of the more affluent parts of the city, he again lectured me on the evils of caste, although this time he

put the blame on his own backward caste-fellows rather than on the Brahmans and the Thakurs, who had been the main targets of his previous assault. To me he seemed to be contradicting himself, but this he would not accept, and so we got involved in the first of a long series of instructive discussions concerning a wide variety of topics, not least our shared experiences as anthropological fieldworkers.

To get in touch with the Koris was not difficult. Shiv Prasad had no close Kori friends, but through a Kori employee of his office, a subordinate office worker who owed him some favor, he got us introduced to a few members of the caste, and thereafter it did not take long before we got in touch with the Sanyukt Kori Mahasabha, the caste association mentioned above. Here we were very well received, although there were also one or two persons who became a bit suspicious when it turned out that we did not only want make a study of the Koris, but if possible also include the association itself in that study. Yet most of the members of the association accepted our presence at their meetings, and were also very helpful and accommodating in other respects. One of them, a young Ahirwar who appears in this book under the name of Girja Shankar, was the person who introduced me to the people of Devi Street. He himself did not reside there, but some of his friends and relatives did, the closest of whom were the family of Ram Shankar, the communist trade-union leader mentioned above. As a matter of fact, Ram Shankar was probably also involved in my introduction to Devi Street, although at this early point I had still not met him in person. In any case, those who acted as my chief informants, guardians, and sponsors at the initial stage were all Ram Shankar's friends and followers. Had it not been for their generous support I would hardly have been able to get as close to the people of the street as I eventually did.

And the process of entering into the social life of Devi Street was in some ways a very trying one. First of all there was the language problem. When I first arrived in Kanpur my Hindi was extremely bad, and it was in fact only fairly late in the fieldwork that I had acquired some fluency and was able to engage in ordinary conversations without much difficulty. Furthermore, there was the problem that I was a commuter, residing in a much more affluent neighborhood at some distance from Koriyana. This created practical problems, and slowed down the process of mutual familiarization, which even under more favorable circumstances would have been a time-consuming one. To most of the people in the street my presence was basically incomprehensible. It went against the grain of all their

previous experience. Why should a white man, by their standards seemingly wealthy - and some of them had never seen such a creature at all before - care to spend so much time in a low-caste corner of Kanpur, when he could hardly even speak the language and could presumably have had a much better time elsewhere. What was he up to?

One answer, which to some of the people of the street seemed more likely than any other, was that I was a spy of some kind, perhaps from the CIA, an organization which even some of the Koris of Kanpur have heard about. When I first got to know that there was such a rumor I became rather worried, but one of my closest local associates, a young man called Moolchand, said that there was nothing to fear; the majority of the local people were more sensible than that. The rumor probably had something to do with the Emergency, he said, as a result of which people were unusually afraid of the authorities. As I learned later, however, my presence had for a while been much more controversial than the polite and friendly Moolchand had wanted to admit. He himself had in fact been worried. As he explained shortly before I left the city, he had never seriously doubted my credentials during his waking hours, but he had had one very uncomfortable dream, where I had behaved in a most suspect manner. In the midst of one of our sessions at the street corner I had abruptly left, saying that I had to go and urinate. Immediately thereafter a policeman had come up to him and asked about my whereabouts. Moolchand had answered that I would soon return, but when the policeman had left he had wondered whether I had really told him the truth. Had I perhaps run away so abruptly because I did not want to meet the policeman? Was I perhaps not the person I claimed to be?

Furthermore, even when the people of Devi Street had become so used to me that they did not care to worry any more, I remained a stranger to most of them, although a rather familiar and even popular one. As I gradually came to realize, the fact that the friends of Ram Shankar had taken me into their circle was not altogether beneficial to my work as an anthropologist, as I became encapsulated within their group and did not get much involved with others. This, I am sure, was not their intention. What happened was rather that a kind of division of labor developed around my person, one by which most of the people of the street seemed to take it for granted that I was mainly the responsibility of these young men. When none of my friends were present I would be talking to persons outside their group, but when one of them appeared these persons would tend to with-

draw into silence and leave after while. And this was only what I should have expected, since the members of my peer group were also some of the most educated of the local residents. To their neighbors, I assume, it seemed natural that I should associate with them. They were the ones with whom I had most in common, and they were also the ones who would be best able to answer whatever questions I might have. At the street corner the uneducated usually kept a very low profile in the presence of the more educated, and when I turned to them with my questions, the answer was not infrequently that I should ask someone of greater knowledge and understanding.

As the months went by, my circle of associates expanded. A very important step forward was a series of interviews with one hundred of the Ahirwar householders of the street selected at random. By these interviews, carried out with the assistance of a local youth when Shiv Prasad was no longer my co-worker, I did not only manage to collect valuable data. I also got an opportunity to talk at some length with persons with whom I had previously only exchanged a few words, and thereby also establish some new relations of a more personal kind. Yet to the very end my staff of key informants was a rather restricted one in terms of education and occupational status. I eventually developed some very fruitful relations with persons of lesser education, but for the most part I did not get my information from such persons. This is clearly reflected in the text.⁴

Yet whatever its limitations, it was through my fieldwork in Devi Street that I eventually came to feel that I had really visited India. Outside Devi Street and Koriyana I also had some important connections, not least those with Girja Shankar, Shiv Prasad, and, I should add, the well-to-do family of Punjabi merchants with whom I resided for most of my time in Kanpur. For the most part, however, these relations were of a more fleeting kind, and if I still learned a great deal from them, I did so only because I also had a deeper kind of field experience to fall back upon. Anthropologists working in big cities are bound to meet a lot of people in many different settings. Yet like their colleagues working in smaller places, they are crucially dependent on a restricted number of key informants, persons who supply them with a great deal of information, and also to some extent let them into their lives, thereby providing them with an essential context for the interpretation of that information. The persons who make it possible for the urban anthropologist to get a hold on his subject, in other words, are primarily those persons who present themselves to

him as actors as well as informants. It is in the nature of things that there cannot be many such persons.

Finally, I want to say a few words about the text itself. In the writing of this book I was presented with some delicate problems of research ethics. None of my informants had a clear idea of what kind of a book I wanted to write; they could have little idea of what anthropology was. Yet in the following pages there are some things which they would probably not have expected to find there. Some of the more sensitive among them might feel that I have betrayed their confidence by putting these things in writing. To these people I wish to say that I have tried to give a truthful and sympathetic account of my experience, an account which by my own understanding should not be harmful to anyone. That the names of the Koris figuring in this book are pseudonyms should serve as a reminder of the fact that this is a book about a particular kind of social and cultural experience, rather than a book about particular individuals. Furthermore, if I have dwelt on some unfortunate disputes and quarrels, I have done so with the knowledge that these are now old affairs. Since the book is largely written in the ethnographic present, this is a point other readers should also be reminded of. The fieldwork on which this book is based was carried out between 1974 and 1976, and what is part of the present in the book is therefore very much part of the past from the standpoint of the year 1988, when it is finally completed and published. My excuses for the long delay go primarily to the Koris, some of whom have now probably even forgotten that there was once a strange visitor among them who said that he wanted to write a book about their caste, a caste about which the people of his own distant country knew practically nothing.

A City of Violence

Kanpur lies on the bank of the river Ganges in the heartland of Hinduism, but it does not figure in the sacred geography of the region. Like Bombay, Calcutta, and Madras, it is a product of British colonialism. Its history goes back only two centuries, to 1778 to be exact, when in accordance with the treaty of Faizabad in 1773 it was established as a military and trading outpost of the British East India Company on the territory of Awadh, one of the successor-states of the Moghul Empire (Majumdar 1960). Today, when it has a population rapidly approaching one and a half million and is the largest of the cities of the state of Uttar Pradesh and the eighth largest of the cities of India, it is best known as a center of large-scale industry producing textiles, leather goods, and military equipment. It is also important as a commercial centre, but its administrative status is merely that of a district headquarters. In the educational field it is not very prominent either, although here its reputation has improved in recent decades with the establishment of a medical college and the Indian Institute of Technology, Kanpur.

Kanpur is not a city one would recommend to tourists. Bishop Heber (1829, Vol 2: 40) of the Church of England, who travelled through Kanpur in 1824, wrote to his wife that "few places of its size can be named where there is so absolutely nothing to see." Much the same can be said today. There are no ancient monuments, and no impressive modern buildings ei-

ther, except perhaps the Rada Krishna Mandir, a local version of the Birla Mandir in Delhi, built by the powerful Singhanias, the leading industrialists of the city. Apart from this huge temple in white marble, more notable for its size than its beauty, the most prominent buildings of the city are the central railway station, (a rather insignificant example of late Anglo-Indian orientalism that arrogantly turns its undecorated back towards the old Indian city), and a number of old textile mills with high, smokey chimneys pointing towards the sky. Nor are there any other special attractions. That the city is located on the bank of the Ganges one hardly notices, for between the city proper and the river lie the Civil Lines and the Cantonment, the old British station, dotted with factories, government offices, educational institutions, residential bungalows, and quarters for servants and workers. This is perhaps just as well, for - as if by dislike of a foreign intruder - the Ganges has over the years taken a new course, leaving only a tiny stream of sacred water below the bathing *ghats* of the city.

Although it has a big population and is often described as one of India's metropolitan cities, Kanpur is really more like an overgrown town than a big city. It lacks at least many of the characteristics that one normally associates with the idea of a metropolis. The city center, the hub of trade and commerce, is a labyrinth of narrow streets and lanes intersecting at all possible angles. Outside this area are some wide thoroughfares, such as the old Mall Road, now officially known as the Mahatma Gandhi Road, and its prolongation Dr. Ambedkar Road. In these wide roads as well as in a few administrative compounds located at various points in the city one finds some big offices, hospitals, and educational institutions, but otherwise the factories and the other odd structures mentioned above are the only big buildings of the city. Residential buildings of more than four stories are quite the exception.

The life that goes on in this relatively small-scale environment is distinctly provincial in character. The traffic is crowded, but it is not exactly of the kind that one expects to find in such a big city. In the main thoroughfares there are endless numbers of rickshas, bullock-carts, *ekkas*, bicycles, and pedestrians, at least at certain times of the day, but the motorized vehicles are surprisingly few even by Indian standards. Here and there one comes across a car or scooter with an angrily honking horn, but buses and lorries are rare, and the black-and-yellow taxis and scooter-taxis so common in other big Indian cities are for some reason altogether miss-

ing. Or take the people themselves. Amongst them one sees many of the typical characters of urban North India. There is the sleepy, big-bellied shopkeeper sitting cross-legged on his *gaddi* with the cash-box near at hand; the black-coated lawyer on his way to the district court; the emaciated *rickshavala* struggling ahead with an enormous load of women, children and luggage on his vehicle; the young men in fancy shirts and trousers joking and laughing outside the teashops, the poor but respectable schoolteacher passing by on bicycle with nothing but worries on his mind; the ragged shoemaker with his primitive tool-box and odd assortment of leather and rubber scraps squatting on the footpath; and so forth. Conspicuously missing, on the other hand, are the kind of people who set the pace with regard to life style and consumption in places like Delhi, Bombay, and Calcutta: that affluent jet-set of Andies, Freddie's, Dannies, Jimmies, and Bunnies of which V. S. Naipaul (1976) has written with such biting irony. Such people are not altogether absent, but moving around in the city one does not come across very many of them. Even more rare are their female counterparts, the young and not-so-young ladies in fashionable and expensive clothes, whom one can admire in the exclusive shopping areas and restaurants of Delhi or Bombay. Outside their own comfortable homes these ladies can hardly find much entertainment. They can go down to the Chinese beauty parlor on Mall Road or spend a couple of hours chatting at the Cawnpore Club, two survivals from the colonial period, but unless they are interested in charity work, there is not much else for them to do. It is understandable that among affluent Indians of a more westernized kind Kanpur is considered to be the most drab and backward of all the major cities of the country. Among such people, I gather, it is regarded with almost the same repulsion as one traditionally reserves for the Untouchable in the hierarchy of castes.

But it is not only for its lack of culture and urbanity that Kanpur has acquired a negative reputation. It is also seen as a city of violence, and as such it first became known to the world at large. This was during the so-called Indian Mutiny, the rebellion of 1857, when the entire British colony of the city - more than five hundred persons, mostly civilians - were wiped out by the local rebels.¹ Reconstructed in cruel and vivid detail by newsmen who knew little about what had actually happened, this tragic event caused much racial hatred in England as well as among the British in India. Karl Marx, working as the London correspondent of the *New York Daily Tribune*, reported to his American readers that the entire Eng-

lish nation, including the clerisy, had been seized by "a tiger-like appetite for blood" (Marx 1969: 280). This ferocious craving was to some extent satisfied when British soldiers recaptured the city and took a terrible revenge on the civilian population. Long after the initial fury had subsided and working relations had been reestablished in the city, the Kanpur massacre served the British as a powerful symbol of the white man's burden. In Kanpur it was most visibly commemorated by the Memorial Well and its surrounding Memorial Gardens, a sanctuary built on the very spot of the massacre, where Indians were not allowed to enter.²

On the Indian side the events of 1857 were given a rather different interpretation. The massacre was not an expression of the innate cruelty of the rebels, as the British would have it, but a more or less spontaneous reaction to previous cruelties on the part of the British troops, who looted, burned, and killed as they advanced towards the city. Nor were the leaders of the uprising, the famous Nana Sahab and his lieutenant Tantia Tope, regarded as murderous barbarians, the view taken by British chroniclers. They were rather seen as heroes in the struggle against the foreign intruders. In Kanpur they were honored as such after Independence, when the city fathers proclaimed that the Memorial Gardens should be renamed as Nana Rao Park and the Memorial Well replaced by a statue of Tantia Tope.

While the events of the Mutiny no longer cast their shadow over the city, Kanpur still has a reputation for violence. Older people have not forgotten the big *balwa* of 1931, one of the worst of all the communal riots that occurred in India in the pre-independence period (cf. Barrier 1976), and both before and after that event there have been many violent confrontations in the industrial field. A particularly serious example, widely reported even in the European press, occurred in 1977 when the police opened fire on some of the workers at the big Swadeshi Cotton Mills. Officially eleven workers were killed and forty-three wounded, but according to an independent enquiry the real figures may have been much higher (Chakravartty et al. 1978). The workers, who were protesting against the company withholding their legitimate wages, had apparently committed no greater crime than that of putting a couple of the directors under *gherao* and perhaps also of throwing a few stones at the police.

And let us also notice that Kanpur has a longstanding reputation for what some would call structural violence. For many years it has been known as one of the most crowded and unsanitary of all the cities of India.

Back in the early twenties, in 1922 to be precise, it had the terrifying infant mortality rate of 49.5%, probably an all-India record at the time, and as late as 1937 the figure was still as high as 33.9% (Tinker 1954: 294). Since then life chances have improved significantly, but the same cannot be said about the general standard of living. Walking through the working class neighborhoods of the city one cannot help thinking of Engels' gloomy descriptions of Manchester in *The Condition of the Working Class in England* (1969). Jawaharlal Nehru, who visited a few of these localities in 1952, is said to have been so upset that he asked for the immediate dismissal of the then existing Development Board and especially of its president, a person whom he thought deserved to be hanged (Mehra 1952: 185). Yet, although the Development Board was soon superseded along with the Municipal Board, nothing nearly so drastic was done about the neighborhoods themselves. In 1975 most of them were still in existence, and although some minor improvements had perhaps been made here and there, they must have looked much the same as when Nehru saw them.

Industrial developments

During the first half of the nineteenth century Kanpur was primarily a provisioning depot for the Bengal Army and a commercial satellite of Calcutta (cf. Bayly 1975). It had some small-scale industries, the most important of which was an artisan leather industry producing saddlery, footwear, and other equipment for the Company troops. The development of large-scale industry did not begin until after the Mutiny, when the big East Indian Railway from Calcutta to Delhi via Allahabad and Kanpur had been inaugurated. The first modern factories to be built in the city, both of which started production the early 1860's, were the Government Harness and Saddlery Factory, an ordnance factory that carried forward the tradition of leatherwork already existing in the city, and the Elgin Cotton Spinning and Weaving Mills, the first textile mills to be built in North India. No further developments occurred in the 1860's but in the following decades several factories were set up, most of which produced either textiles or leather goods. By 1911, apparently the first year for which comprehensive statistics are available, the number of registered factories was 47 and the total industrial work force about 17 000 (S.M. Pandey 1970: 14). This was not much in comparison with the huge industrial agglomerations of Calcutta and Bombay, but by North Indian standards it

was quite impressive.

A few of the smaller factories apart, Kanpur's industry was at this early stage largely a British affair. In several cases Indian merchants figured in the background as financiers and junior partners but they were rarely involved in the running of the business, and when their services were no longer required they were invariably made to disappear (V.B. Singh 1968: 13-20). After World War I, however, when the nationalist movement was rapidly gaining ground and it gradually became clear to Indians and British alike that the long period of colonial rule would come to an end, the Indian business community took the lead.³ Two cotton mills controlled by British firms were set up in the early 1920's, but thereafter all major initiatives came from the Indian side. By far the most enterprising of the Indian businessmen were Messrs. Juggilal Kamlapat Singhania, a firm of Agarwal merchants of Rajasthani origin who had established themselves as bankers and traders in the city back in the 1860's. During the 1920's and 1930's the J.K.'s, as the firm is called, set up half a dozen big factories in the city, including two cotton mills, one jute mill, one oil mill, and one steel rolling mill. By the middle of the 1960's the family controlled more than sixty companies (many of which were located outside Kanpur, however), and were by far the most powerful of the industrialists of the city (Hazari 1966: 152-56).

During World War II Kanpur's industry experienced an unprecedented boom. Within the short span of six years, from 1939 to 1945, the industrial work force more than doubled from about 56 000 to about 116 000 (Pandey 1970: 14). The increase was the result partly of the setting up of new factories, (mainly in the defence sector), partly of an expansion of the already existing factories, many of which were heavily engaged in the war effort. As soon as the war was over, however, there was an equally sharp decline, and within a few years the level of industrial employment had fallen to a point only slightly higher than before the war. Here it remained for more than a decade before it slowly started to rise again. One of the major problems was that the textile industry, the backbone of the urban economy, had reached the peak of its long expansion and was entering into a more or less permanent state of crisis, from which it has still not recovered (cf. V.B. Singh 1968, Chakravartty et al. 1978, Dietrich 1984).⁴ In 1961 nearly forty percent of the registered workers of the city were employed in manufacturing, but a large proportion of these workers were self-employed artisans and workers in small-scale industry. As shown

in table 1, the workers who were employed in those larger units which were registered under the Factories Act, 1948, (i.e workers in permanent manufacturing units using power-driven machinery and employing ten workers or more and workers in units not using such machinery but employing twenty workers or more), were not even one-fourth of the total, which is rather less impressive in view of Kanpur's reputation as an industrial city. The great importance of the large-scale textile industry, consisting mainly of a dozen big mills employing between one thousand and eight thousand workers each, is evident from the fact that it engaged more than fifteen percent of the work force of the city and almost seventy percent of the workers in large-scale industry. The workers employed in the large-scale leather industry, by contrast, were less than two percent of the total and only seven percent of the so-called organized industrial work force.

Table 1. Basic Division of Labor, 1961.

	Male Workers	Female Workers	All Workers	% of Total
Cultivation	11 684	963	12 647	4.0
Manufacturing	116 684	2 404	119 088	37.6
Registered Factories	-	-	71 861	22.7
Reg. Textiles Ind	-	-	49 258	15.6
Non-registered units	-	-	47 487	14.9
Construction	7 801	203	8 005	2.5
Trade and Commerce	55 585	1 500	57 085	18.0
Transport	25 148	195	25 343	8.0
Other Services	86 026	8 104	94 130	29.7
Public Services	-	-	36 002	11.4
Total	303 213	13 368	316 581	100.0

Source: Census 1961. Uttar Pradesh District Census Handbook 27; Kanpur District. Table B-I & B-II, pp. 14-15. Lucknow: Superintendent, Printing and Stationary, U.P. 1965.

More recently considerable advances have been made in the production of metals and engineering goods, chemicals, electrical accessories, and a variety of other industries that were either non-existent or very little developed in the past (H.H. Singh 1972). After the China War in 1962 and the subsequent wars with Pakistan, moreover, the military industry has probably also expanded a great deal, although I have no figures of employ-

ment. These developments have not radically altered the situation, however, for while the city may now have more factories and more industrial workers than ever before, it also has a much larger population. Before World War II, in 1931, there were 243 000 persons in the city. Ten years later the figure was 487 000 and thereafter it increased to 705 000 in 1951, 961 000 in 1961, and 1 273 000 in 1971 - an increase of almost 425% in forty years. If the population continues to grow with the same phenomenal speed in the future it will surely be a long time before the industrial sector regains its former position of pre-eminence within the urban economy.

Problems of urban development

Before 1857 Kanpur - or rather its Indian section, the so-called Native Town or Black Town - had been allowed to expand without plan and regulation and practically nothing had been done to provide it with such basic amenities as water, drainage, and sanitation. W.H. Russel (1860, Vol:1: 180-1) of *The Times*, who visited the city in 1859, described it as "an aggregate of houses perforated by tortuous paths, so that a plan of it would resemble a section of worm-eaten wood." The only sign of British rule that he could find was the *kotwali*, or police station - "a large native house, from the top of which floats a flag, and in front of which is a group of natives in blue cotton tunics, with red pipings and tulwars by their sides." Only a few years later, however, the colonial authorities started to take an interest in questions of urban development. Under the authority of the Cawnpore Municipal Committee, established in 1861 and reorganized in 1866, and its successor the Cawnpore Municipal Board, established in 1884, the city was gradually provided with a system of sanitation, including a conservancy steam tramway, a filtered water supply, a system of sewers and drains, a couple of slaughterhouses, a few wide thoroughfares, and, to crown it all, a public park (Mehra 1952).

Yet these measures were by no means adequate to the needs of the city, and by the turn of the century living conditions had in fact deteriorated rather than improved. As repeatedly noted by the local authorities, this was largely because the city was becoming more and more congested. To tackle this problem the Cawnpore Improvement Trust was set up in 1919. Its main job was to acquire and develop new areas for housing and industry, and if possible it should also engage in slum clearance. In neither task was it very successful. Extensive areas were cleared for housing, but the rate of

expansion was slow, and many of the new neighborhoods were soon almost as closely packed with houses, people, and animals as the older ones. In the task of renovating the old city it failed completely, largely, it seems because the members of the Municipal Board, were more concerned with keeping taxes down than with improving the quality of life in the city.⁴

In 1945 the Improvement Trust was replaced by the Development Board, an organization which proved to be even less effective than its predecessor. By 1953, when it was superseded along with the Municipal Board, its only major accomplishment was 2 400 workmens' quarters, half of which were let out to the Punjabi refugees who came to the city after partition (Brass 1966: 187). During the next seven years, when the city was directly administered by the state government, some of the old schemes worked out by the Improvement Trust were taken up for implementation and a number of new ones were added. This work continued through the regime of the Kanpur Municipal Corporation (which lasted from 1960 to 1969, when the government decided to take over again), and is still in progress.

So far the result of these efforts are mainly to be seen on the outskirts of the city, in places like Shastri Nagar, Kidwai Nagar, Govind Nagar, Armapur Estate, Juhi, and Jajmau, where many new housing colonies have been constructed. In the inner city, however, the problems remain unsolved. Not that every part of it is equally overcrowded and dilapidated. The central business district (roughly the area circumscribed by Halsey Road, Meston Road, Mahatma Gandhi Road, and Birhana Road), which is also a residential area with a population of approximately one hundred thousand people, most of whom are Hindus of high caste and most of whom would also seem to be comparatively affluent, contains a few dilapidated pockets but is otherwise not in such a bad condition. The big problem is the so-called *ahatas* located in Coolie Bazaar, Butcherkhana, Laxmipurwa, Talaq Mohal, Colonelganj, Beconganj, Raipurwa and other areas where the urban working class predominates.

The word *ahata* means simply an enclosed compound containing a number of separate residential quarters. Under different names such compounds are common in urban North India and in Kanpur they are found everywhere in the inner city, including the main business area mentioned above. In official parlance, however, the word has acquired a more narrow meaning, referring only to the substandard compounds inhabited by industrial workers and other poor people. The oldest of these *ahatas*

look very much like rural villages, except for the fact that they are far more congested and have no open land surrounding them. Those which have been constructed more recently consist of one or several big tenements of brick and cement. In either case living standards are extremely low. According to an official survey conducted in the early 1960's 86.6% of the apartments or houses had only one room, 11.3% two rooms, and 2.1% more than two rooms (the corresponding percentages for the city as a whole were 62%, 24% and 13%) (H.H. Singh 1972: 79). Watertaps and latrines were nearly always shared, often between dozens of households, and arrangements for drainage, ventilation and sanitation were as a rule highly deficient, if not altogether lacking (cf. Majumdar 1960).

Divisions of religion and caste

The people who inhabit the city are mainly drawn from the nearby districts of the surrounding Gangetic Plain. Among those who have come from more distant places the most prominent are the Rajasthani and Punjabi merchant communities who settled in the city in the nineteenth century, and the Sindhi and Punjabi, frequently Sikh, refugees who arrived after the partition of the country in 1947 and are now rapidly rising on the scales of wealth and influence. While numerically insignificant, these communities are of great economic and political importance, especially the Rajasthanis, who have controlled major areas of local trade ever since they first came to the city and are also dominant in the industrial field.

Among the religious divisions, presented in table 2, by far the most important is that between the Hindus and the Muslims, which as elsewhere in north India is marked by suspicion, tension, and occasional outbreaks of violence. While instances of open hostility between the two communities occurred as far back as the early nineteenth century (Bayly 1983), the present situation is largely the result of developments that started with the dissolution of the Congress-Khilafat alliance in 1922 and the subsequent atrocities of Multan and Malabar. These events seem to have had an immediate impact in Kanpur, and in the following years both communities were mobilizing for conflict. On the Hindu side communalist leaders, some of whom were Congressmen, addressed crowds on the need for *shuddhi*, the reclamation, or literally purification, of converts, and *sanghtan*, the building up of physical strength and martial virtues among the Hindus. On the Muslim side there were the complementary movements of *tabligh* and *tanzim* (Barrier 1976). A first outbreak of violence

ce occurred in 1927, but far more serious was the big confrontation of 1931, which apparently started when some of the local Muslim shopkeepers refused to close their shops and join the *hartal* arranged by the Congress in protest against the execution of the famous nationalist Bhagat Singh, who

Table 2. Distribution of population by religion, 1961.

Community	Popul.	% of Popul.
Hindus	736 218	75.8
High Castes	586 150	60.3
Scheduled Castes	150 068	15.5
Muslims	200 254	20.6
Sikhs	23 816	2.4
Christians	7 614	0.8
Jains	2 410	0.2
Buddhists	610	0.0
Total	971 062	100.0

Source: Census 1961, Uttar Pradesh District Handbook 27, Lucknow: Superintendent, Printing and Stationary, 1965.

had been sentenced to death for the assassination of a British military officer in Lahore. In the riots, which lasted for more than a week, more than three hundred persons were killed, (one of whom was Ganesh Shankar Vidyarthi, the widely known president of the Provincial Congress Committee and leader of the Kanpur Mazdoor Sabha, Kanpur's only trade union at the time), and many more wounded. The damage to property was considerable; forty-two temples, eighteen mosques, and four or five hundred residential houses were set on fire and innumerable shops were looted (*ibid*). Furthermore, in the midst of the turmoil there was a veritable exodus of frightened Hindus from neighborhoods dominated by Muslims, and of equally frightened Muslims from neighborhoods dominated by Hindus, resulting in a permanent rearrangement of the residential pattern of the city. Not since 1857 had the city experienced such a terrible eruption of naked violence.⁵

These and later riots have caused a great deal of damage to the local Hindu-Muslim relations. In the past, before World War I, old people say, Hindus and Muslims got along fairly well together, even to the extent of

courteously participating in each others' religious festivals. At present there is much less interaction of a sociable kind, although it is by no means non-existent. The dominant mood is one of suspicion, if not hostility. Hindus claim that Muslims are not fully committed to India, and Muslims complain that Hindus regard India as their own property and refuse to give Muslims equal access to resources and opportunities. Whether the latter allegation is true or not is difficult to say, but the Muslims are certainly a rather backward community by high-caste standards. There are a few sectors of the local economy, especially the leather industry, where Muslims seem to do reasonably well, but on the whole there are not many Muslims in the upper echelons of the business hierarchy. Nor would the Muslims seem to be well represented in the administration. For the most part they are a poor community of petty traders, artisans, and industrial workers.

While the Hindus stand united against the Muslims, they are internally divided by caste and subcaste. Among the Scheduled Castes, who in 1961 constituted 15.5% of the total population of the city and 20.4% of the Hindus, there are at least thirty different castes, each of which is further fragmented into subcastes. As shown in table 3, however, the large majority of the Scheduled Caste population belong to a cluster of seven castes, which is dominated by the Camars and, to a lesser extent, the Koris.

Table 3. The Scheduled Castes, 1961.

Caste	Trad. Occup.	Popul.	% of S.C. Popul.	% of Hindu Popul.	% of Total Popul.
Camar	Leatherworker	55 928	37.3	7.6	5.8
Kori	Weaver	25 262	16.8	3.4	2.6
Pasi	Laborer	16 775	11.2	2.3	1.7
Balmiki	Sweeper	16 144	10.6	2.2	0.9
Khatik	Veg. seller and butcher	8 717	5.8	1.2	0.9
Dhanuk	Laborer	6 709	4.5	0.9	0.7
Dhobi	Washerman	6 374	4.2	0.9	0.7
Others	-	14 159	9.4	1.9	1.4
Total		150 068	100.0	20.4	15.5

Source: Census 1961, Uttar Pradesh District Census Handbook 27. Lucknow: Superintendent, Printing and Stationary, 1965.

Among the higher castes there is apparently a similar pattern of distribution, with the Brahmans and the Banias as the most numerous. Back in 1891 the Banias were 11.3% of the urban population and the Brahmans 8.2%, but as the Muslims and the lower castes were then relatively more numerous than today (Nevill 1909), it is likely that these two groups as well as the higher castes collectively, have somewhat increased their share of the urban population in more recent times.

The division between the Scheduled Castes and the higher castes is inscribed in the residential pattern of the city, although not in the same way as the Hindu-Muslim division. In the latter case, there is a pattern of segregation reminiscent of that of Blacks and Whites in the cities of the United States, a very large proportion of the Muslims being concentrated in a few big enclaves of their own, while the rest of the city is largely the preserve of the Hindus. The pattern of segregation between the Scheduled Castes and Hindus of higher caste, on the other hand, is for the most part a more fragmented one. In the central business district mentioned above the Scheduled Castes are only three to four percent of the population, and in some other prosperous areas of the city the percentage is perhaps even lower, but this is mainly because of the great poverty of these castes. In the areas dominated by working-class people the pattern of segregation involves smaller units, such as neighborhoods (*mohallas*) and *ahatas*, which usually seem to have a fairly clear profile in terms of caste. Frequently there is also a clustering by caste within such units, separating not only the low castes from the higher castes but also individual caste groups or subcaste groups from one another. While as a result of the steadily increasing shortage of housing in the city, this pattern of segregation is no longer quite as clearcut as it used to be, it is still a major feature of social organization, especially in the older parts of the city.

That the divisions of caste are also important in the division of labor is clearly brought out in table 4, which shows how the Scheduled Castes were distributed between the major sectors of the economy in 1961. As we can see here, there are major differences of occupational distribution between the Scheduled Castes and the rest of the population, and there are also differences of this kind between one Scheduled Caste and another, as for example between the Dhobis and the Khatiks or the Koris and the Balmikis. Such differences between individual castes, largely reflecting differences of traditional caste specialization, could no doubt also have been found among the higher castes. As argued in the introduction,

wherever there is a marked difference of traditional occupational specialization, there is likely to be a noticeable difference of adaptation to the urban occupational order as well.

Table 4. Distribution by percentage of Scheduled Castes and Non-Scheduled Castes (including Muslims) between main sectors of the economy, 1961.

	Agri- cult.	Manu- fact.	Cons.	Trade/ Comm.	Other Trans.	Serv.
Non-S.C.	4.0	33.8	2.2	20.7	8.3	30.9
S.C.	3.9	54.1	3.7	7.0	6.8	24.9
Balmiki	0.5	48.1	0.4	2.0	6.8	42.2
Camar	4.2	59.9	3.2	6.2	7.3	19.2
Dhobi	0.8	19.6	0.5	6.2	1.6	71.1
Khatik	1.8	61.3	7.2	17.0	4.6	8.2
Kori	3.8	58.5	7.1	5.9	9.7	15.2
Pasi	10.8	53.3	5.8	6.2	9.6	14.2
Total popul.	4.0	37.6	2.5	18.0	8.0	29.7

Source: Census 1961, Uttar Pradesh District Census Handbook 27. Lucknow: Superintendent, Printing and Stationary, 1965.

Equally important are the castewise differences of occupation and occupational rewards internal to the different sectors of the economy. Between one Scheduled Caste and another, or even between the Scheduled Castes and some of the clean menial and artisan castes, such as the Gadaris, the Kahars, or the Kumhars, these differences may not be great, but between the Scheduled Castes and the four dominant of the higher castes, the Brahmans, the Thakurs, the Banias, and the Kayasthas, they are considerable. While it is true that large numbers of Brahmans and Thakurs are no better off than many Scheduled Caste people, it is also true that the higher the level of material and symbolic rewards, the lower the relative strength of the Scheduled Castes. In the sector of trade and commerce, where the Scheduled Castes constituted only 7.4% of the total registered work force in 1961, they are almost exclusively itinerant traders and petty shopkeepers, and in manufacturing, where they were 27.3% of the total by contrast, they are overwhelmingly ordinary manual workers. The only sector of the economy where these castes have been able to make major advances is the service sector, more particularly the sector of

government service, where some of them, especially the Camars, have benefited from the system of reservations. Yet even here they are quite backward. In 1973, when 18% of the jobs in the administration of U.P. were reserved for the Scheduled Castes, the percentage of Scheduled Caste persons actually employed in the two uppermost of the service categories, Class 1 and 2, was merely 2.04%, and in the two lower service categories, Class 3 and Class 4, where menial workers are included, only 5.99% and 6.77% respectively (Commissioner for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes, 1974).

In the large-scale industry the composition of the work force by caste varies between branches, factories, and even departments of factories. Where the percentage of Scheduled Caste workers is highest is presumably the leather industry, although here there are also large numbers of Muslims, frequently in the more skilled occupations. For high-caste Hindus, as well as for some of the lower castes, including the Koris, leather work is traditionally taboo, of course, but there is nothing to prevent them from working in the office and elsewhere where they are not directly dealing with the polluting raw materials. At Tefco, for example, a big government factory producing army boots and other footwear, I was told that while the manual work force, comprising nearly two thousand workers, consisted of Muslims and low-caste Hindus, mainly Camars, the managerial and clerical staff were divided between a majority of high-caste Hindus and a minority of Muslims. Among approximately 120 persons employed in the office only two were Camars.

Another industry where there is a relatively large proportion of Scheduled Caste workers is the textile industry. As there are no major ritual barriers to the entrance of high-caste persons here, and as factory employment, even in the crisis-ridden textile mills of Kanpur, tends to have many advantages over employment in the so-called informal sector, this may seem odd. In the past, however, when conditions were different inside as well as outside the mills, high-caste people were less willing to work in the mills than today. They did not stay away altogether, but there were apparently certain kinds of work, including weaving, which they largely avoided. According to the Koris, there was indeed a fairly clearcut division of labor by caste in the factories. In the offices Europeans and the high castes predominated, in the weaving departments Koris and Julahas, in the bleaching departments Dhobis, in the dyeing departments Rangreez, and in the warehouses Brahmans, Thakurs, and other high castes. The only

department which had no clear profile in terms of caste and religion was that of spinning, where the workers belonged to all kinds of castes, mainly low castes. Furthermore, while this distribution of tasks was to some extent the spontaneous outcome of choices on the part of persons seeking employment in occupations consistent with their inherited aptitudes and conceptions of self, it was also, I am told, the result of employment practices consciously adopted by the British employers. According to my informants, the British were actively recruiting Koris and Julahas to the weaving sheds in the early days, as they believed that these groups were particularly well suited for the job. As factory weaving was then not very different from artisan weaving, and as the British seem to have relied on indigenous character stereotypes in other areas as well (cf. Carroll 1978), this does not sound altogether implausible.

In more recent times, especially since the 1940's, the proportion of high-caste workers in the mills has gradually increased in all departments, including weaving. Among the Koris there are those who think that they may eventually take over altogether, but this has not yet happened. As shown in table 5, the Scheduled Castes were in 1965 still 40.1% of the work force in the cotton mills, which is quite impressive considering that they were in 1961 only 27.3% of the workers in the manufacturing sector as a whole and only 15.5% of the urban population. As for the Koris, they were still the most numerous of the individual castes. While less than three per cent of the urban population, they constituted 17.5% the work force in the cotton mills, and 22.3% of the weavers. In the weaving departments they were more numerous than all the high-caste workers (Brahmans, Thakurs, Kayasthas, and Banias) or all the middle-caste workers (Ahirs, Kurmis, Lodhs, Telis, and others) taken together. Except for the Muslims, who were even more numerous, only the Brahmans with 12.5% of the weavers came anywhere near them.

What the situation is in the defence industry and other large-scale industries I cannot say, but the proportion of Scheduled Caste workers cannot be as large here as in the textile industry. In the small-scale manufacturing sector, on the other hand, the Scheduled Castes seem to be well represented. Yet here the Muslims and the clean artisan castes, such as the Barhais, the Lohars, and the Kumhars, who frequently practice their traditional occupation, are also found in large numbers.

In political life the position of the Scheduled Castes is very much the same as in the economy. As Paul Brass (1966) has shown, the political eli-

Table 5. Distribution of workers by religion and caste in cotton textile industry, 1965.

Factory	Muslim	High Caste	Middle Caste	S.C.	Kori
Kanp. Text	7.7	21.2	16.0	55.1	36.7
New Victoria	10.0	28.3	21.1	40.6	9.0
Elgin 1	14.2	21.5	20.6	43.7	16.0
Elgin 2	21.8	14.1	17.6	46.5	19.0
Muir Mills	13.7	19.1	14.1	53.1	17.3
L.R.C.M.	11.2	11.2	29.8	47.8	24.2
Athert. West	44.0	20.5	17.9	27.6	16.1
Swadeshi	23.0	23.6	23.0	30.3	9.6
J.K.	6.7	29.3	28.8	35.1	26.8
J.K. Manuf.	6.6	51.2	27.8	17.4	5.7
All Mills	15.4	23.1	21.1	40.1	17.5

Note: Based on a random sample of 2012 workers taken in 1965 by a team of researchers led by Prof. V.B. Singh of Lucknow University. The figures are derived directly from questionnaires, which Prof. Singh kindly allowed me to consult.

te of the city has always been recruited from the higher castes, especially the Brahmans and the trading castes. Even in labor politics these castes have always dominated. Indeed, during the entire history of trade unionism not a single leader of major reputation has come from the Scheduled Castes. As the top leaders of the tradeunion movement have for the most part not even been workers, this is hardly surprising, but even so it is a fact of some importance.

Class

When I use terms like "middle class," "working class," and "proletariat" in describing the patterns of social inequality in Kanpur, I am using a set of terms that are readily understandable to the people in the city. Not only are these terms familiar to local English-speakers, there is a similar vocabulary of class in Hindi. The dictionary term for the concept of class itself is *varg*, which occurs in compounds such as *madhyam varg*, 'middle class,' *buddhjivi varg*, 'intellectual class,' *officer varg*, 'officer class,' *mazdoor varg*, 'worker class,' and *pujnipati varg*, 'capitalist class,' but which can also refer to 'classes' of a more traditional kind, notably the four *varnas* of

the classical Hindu social order. According to some of my Kori informants, one can even speak of occupational groups, such as shopkeepers, painters, or betel vendors, as different *vargs*, the basic conceptual element of the term being work, or *kam*.

While there is such a term for class, however, it is not commonly used in everyday discourse. Instead of *pujnipati varg*, 'capitalist class,' one simply says *pujnipatis*, 'capitalists,' or *maliks*, 'owners,' and instead of *mazdoor varg*, *mazdoors*, 'workers,' or *mazdoor log*, 'worker people.' Also common are the terms *babu log*, 'clerk people,' *sahab log*, 'master people,' and *rais*, 'magnates,' referring to subordinate white-collar workers, superior officers and managers, and wealthy merchants and industrialists as broad status categories distinct from that of *mazdoor log*, 'worker people.' Finally there are the distinctions between *amir* and *garib*, rich and poor, and *bare log* and *chote log*, 'big people' and 'small people,' both of which are very frequently used in popular discourse. Whereas the former tends to evoke the image of a society dichotomously divided in terms of wealth, the latter suggests an equally sharp division in terms of power and status. The 'big people' are the ones who have influence and move about in society with pride and self-assurance, the 'small people' the humble and ignorant ones who act on command and deferentially bow to their superiors. One can also speak about *bare jat* and *chote jat*, 'big castes' and 'small castes,' but these terms belong to a different domain of discourse. The opposition between 'big' and 'small' has much the same meaning in both the cases, but when one speaks about 'big people' and 'small people' caste need not come into the picture. The 'small people' of Kanpur belong to all kinds of castes and are Muslims and Christians as well as Hindus.

The working class, the 'worker people,' constitutes the majority of the population of Kanpur. As table 6 shows, in 1961 no less than 46.3% of the local working population were registered as production workers. And these production workers, most of whom were more or less regularly employed by others in factories, workshops, and elsewhere rather than independent craftsmen, were only the core of what one would normally have regarded as the working class. Among those who belonged to this class were also most of the transport workers, including the six thousand ricksha drivers, most of the service and recreation workers, including the many thousands of domestic servants and sweepers, and all the gardeners and farmworkers. Many of the street vendors would probably have defined themselves as *vyaparis*, business men, rather than as workers, *mazdoor*,

Table 6. Occupational Structure, 1961.

Occupation	Earners	%
Administrative, Executive and Managerial Workers, incl. Working Proprietors	29 072	9.5
Ditto in Public Employment	23 468	7.7
Traders and Shopkeepers	29 732	9.7
Wholesale	1 153	0.4
Retail	28 579	9.3
Professionals and Technicians	12 410	4.1
Teachers	6 369	2.1
Clerical Workers	17 857	5.8
Sales Workers, Shopassistants etc.	10 186	3.3
Street Vendors	8 390	2.7
Unskilled Office Workers	5 496	1.8
Craftsmen, Production Process Workers, and Laborers	141 770	46.3
Skilled and Semi-skilled	108 486	35.5
Unskilled	33 284	10.9
Transport and communication Workers	18 445	6.0
Rickshadriivers	5 944	1.9
Services and Recreation Workers	20 794	6.8
Personal and Domestic Servants	10 128	3.3
Sweepers	5 031	1.7
Gardeners, Farm Workers, etc.	3 687	1.2
Ritual Experts and Artists	3 262	1.1
<u>Residual</u>	<u>5 132</u>	<u>1.7</u>
Total	305 962	100.0

Source: Census 1961, Uttar Pradesh District Census Handbook 27, Table B-V.

but economically and socially the members of this floating occupational corps, as indeed quite a few petty shopkeepers, tend to be very closely allied to the working class; some of them being indeed former workers or workers temporarily out of job. And something similar applies to unskilled office workers and subordinate salesworkers, who for certain purposes might identify with their superiors and employers, rather than with the working class to which they are socially attached. Yet even if such groups are not counted as members of the working class, this class is very

large. In 1961, as presumably also at present, it included nearly 60% of the local population, or even more.

Note that this estimate refers to the working class as it is locally defined. Heuzé (1982), echoing similar statements by Holmström (1976) and others, claims that among the lower classes of urban India the really important divide is not that between the class of subordinate white-collar workers and moderately successful trading people and the class of manual workers, but rather that between the statutory workers in large-scale industry, on the one hand, and the disprivileged armies of casually employed workers, on the other. The statutory workers of urban India, he says, belong to the middle classes (ibid. 190). While this statement may be valid for some other cities, however, it is hardly one that fits the situation in Kanpur, at least not if one takes the local view - which is also the Weberian view - that the privileges and disprivileges of class comprise all the good and bad things in life that tend to vary with the possession of property, educational certificates, and skills; not just income and job security, important as they may be. Thus, in so far as social status, or respect, *izzat*, is concerned, the manual workers are clearly inferior to *babu log* and other white-collar workers as well as to small shopkeepers and the like. Many workers would indeed deny that they are inferior to these people, but they are at the same time clearly aware of the fact that society at large is of a different opinion. In relation to the white-collar workers the difference is partly one of education and educationally transmitted culture, the majority of the manual workers of Kanpur, including those employed in the factories, having either very little formal education or none at all. Along with this difference of participation in the realm of high culture, moreover, goes an equally significant difference in proximity to the societal centers of power, the white-collar worker sitting comfortably on a chair in the office, and being frequently also the appointed representative of those centers of power vis-à-vis the manual worker. In relation to petty shopkeepers and other small trading people, on the other hand, the difference is partly one of material working conditions, the worker having to exert himself physically, often in a very unhealthy environment, while the shopkeeper calmly chats with his customers. Even more important are the differences of personal independence and opportunity. While the shopkeeper is his own master, the worker is constantly at the beck and call of others. There are workers who have kind and considerate employers, but even such workers are bound by the employment situation and cannot

make their own decisions. Basically they are mere servants. Furthermore, while a small shopkeeper can always try to become a bigger shopkeeper, a worker will most likely remain in the same subordinate position throughout his working life. Thus, while running a business of one's own may have its own problems, it is a more dignified way of earning a living, or so say most of my Kori acquaintances.

Economically the boundary between white-collar workers and factory workers is not so sharply drawn. In the estimation of many dissatisfied white-collar workers their own economic situation is indeed worse than that of the ordinary factory worker employed in the textile industry or the leather industry. The earnings of many white-collar workers are smaller than those of the factory worker, and in order to properly maintain himself and his family a white-collar worker needs more money than the latter. As one such worker explained to me, the life styles (*rahn-sahn*) of the two groups are markedly different. Mixing closely with the *sahab log*, the white-collar worker cannot walk about in *kurta* and *pajama*, but must be more expensively dressed. He also has to spend much more money than the worker on the education of his children, and when he eventually arranges their marriages he incurs very heavy expenses. As he cannot send his wife or children to work, as many manual workers do, especially among the lower castes, this means that he cannot eat as well as the latter, nor spend as much on liquor and other enjoyments. On the whole, his life is an endless series of worries. If he were less obsessed with status, not bothering so much about appearances, he could perhaps have a happier life. Yet it is not merely out of status pride that he tries so hard to be middle in every aspect of his life - even buying middle-priced tickets at the cinema. If he failed to maintain himself in his status he would not get any respect from the superiors on whom he depends.

But this is hardly an altogether correct description of the situation. It is true that many white-collar workers, including large numbers of school-teachers, for example, earn less than some of the factory workers of the city, and it also true that the life style of white-collar workers tends to be more costly. Still, the average income for low-level white-collar workers, at least in public employment, would seem to be well above that of the average factory worker. While the net monthly income of a permanently employed weaver in the textile industry is Rs. 350 or thereabouts, for example, that of a lower-division clerk is more likely to be Rs. 450 or more. And one must also not ignore the informal income opportunities of

many white-collar workers, opportunities which are said to be very common in the departments of the local administration dealing directly with the public, such as the departments for income and sales taxation, sanitary inspection, and building and public works. An ordinary sanitary inspector, charged with the task of controlling the sanitary conditions of restaurants and other eating establishments, for example, can probably earn an extra, informal, income that exceeds his regular income several times, and a clerk strategically posted at the sales or income tax department can perhaps do the same. Yet those who profit most from such sources of illegal gratification are some of the people higher up in the administrative hierarchies. Take the case of an inspector in the income department. As a chartered accountant elaborately explained to me, while the regular monthly income of such an officer may not be more than Rs. 1 200 or so, his informal monthly income can hardly be smaller than Rs. 5 000, and may even be as high as Rs. 10 000 or 15 000.

Furthermore, the informal benefits accruing to the occupants of such positions are not only monetary. One can also use his formal powers to build up social capital, a fund of outstanding claims to assistance and preferential treatment that in the name of amity or reciprocity can be drawn upon as need arises. To have such capital, what the people of Kanpur would describe as a set of good and reliable "sources," is considered essential for a great many purposes, including finding a job, getting promotion, getting admission to educational institutions, avoiding harassment by the police, speeding up the working of the bureaucracy, and securing adequate medical treatment. According to the people of Kanpur it is in fact always desirable to have a "source" when one is dealing with public authorities. In order to secure the best possible treatment for one of his daughters, who had been admitted to one of the local hospitals because there was something wrong with her leg, my assistant Shiv Prasad spoke to no less than seven different persons, all of whom he had helped in one way or another in the past. Two of them he asked to use their influence to make the nurses look after the girl properly, three of them he approached because he expected that through further intermediaries they would be able to bring some influence to bear on the doctor in charge of the case, and another two he spoke to in order to get in contact with a specialist in orthopedics at another hospital, the general idea being that people are much more likely to do a good job if there are personal relationships involved. What came out of this mobilization of "sources" in the

end we need not go into here; the point I wish to emphasize is simply that the citizens of Kanpur assume that such connections are crucially important in the allocation of public services and resources, and that their unequal distribution between individuals and groups is a major dimension of social stratification (cf. Sharma 1969).

The stratified working class

While I insist that in Kanpur the distinction between white-collar workers and manual workers is of considerable importance, I agree that the distinction between permanently employed workers in large-scale factories and other manual workers, including the large fringe of casual or semi-casual workers in the same factories, is also an important one; although perhaps not quite as important as some of the writings on the so-called formal and informal sectors would seem to suggest. What the permanent workers have in common as against other manual workers are the important privilege of formal security of employment and a number of associated privileges, such as regular and relatively short working hours, fixed overtime payment, paid holidays, employer's life insurance and provident fund contribution, gratuity, and notice pay, none of which exists outside the so-called organized sector. In terms of wages, working conditions, and status, however, these workers do not constitute a privileged class within the working class. On the average the earnings of permanent workers are no doubt a great deal higher than those of other workers. Yet there is also much overlap, some of the workers in the small-scale sector having incomes that would be considered high even by the standards of the large-scale sector, and some of the permanent workers of the large-scale sector having incomes that are fairly ordinary even by the standards of the small-scale sector.

In the area of status there are similar variations. Speaking in general terms, some people would indeed argue that the distribution of status is identical with the distribution of income, money being in their estimation the only thing that commands genuine respect in the society. As soon as one gets down to a discussion of the relative merits and demerits of different kinds of jobs and occupations, however, it becomes clear that even such people recognize a multiplicity of criteria of evaluation. Ritual criteria of purity and pollution are still important, not least in the cases of sweepers, leatherworkers, and the like, many of whom are employed in the organized sector of the economy. But one also gives much importance to

the social and physical aspects of the work situation, the extent to which the worker is treated with respect and consideration in the work situation, or, conversely, the extent to which he is forced to sacrifice his personal dignity and physical well-being in order to make a living. While those who have to make the biggest sacrifices in these regards are ricksha drivers, porters, unskilled construction workers, and the like, many permanently employed workers in the large-scale sector also have to pay very dearly for their income.

Furthermore, it must not be forgotten that the right of permanent employment is a conditional one; it does not give any protection against unfavorable market conditions and incompetent and fraudulent management practices. This does not apply to the defence industry and some other secure citadels of government employment, but in the worn-out and badly mismanaged textile industry, where temporary close-downs have been very common during the last few decades, the workers are constantly reminded of the insecurity of their position. While I was in the city, three of the textile mills, employing together more than ten thousand workers, stood silent, and nobody knew if or when they were going to be reopened. As it turned out all three were eventually taken over by the government and brought into production again, but by the time this happened many long months had elapsed. In the meantime, the workers had been left to provide for themselves; many of them had not even received their wages before they were discharged.

Even with these qualifications, the distinction between permanent and non-permanent workers is important, not least within large-scale industry itself. In the textile industry the workers are divided into three separate categories. There are the permanent workers who are regularly employed, eight hours per day six days a week, and cannot be dismissed unless they are shown to be surplus or proven guilty of gross misconduct before a labor court. There are the substitute workers, the semi-casual reserve army of so-called *badlis*, who also have an enduring contract with the employer, but who may not be put to work more than three or four days a week and who are also deprived of some of the other benefits of permanent employment, such as paid holidays and gratuity. Finally, there are also the temporary workers who are normally employed to perform special tasks or to serve as substitutes in periods of exceptionally high absenteeism, but may also be engaged for other purposes, and increasingly so in recent years (Dietrich 1984). Unlike the permanent and substitute workers, these

workers do not have a stable contract with the employer but are hired for limited periods, usually a month at a time, often through a labor contractor who stands as their official employer and pays them their meagre wages.

The relative size of the three categories varies from one factory to another. According to an agreement made in the early 1960's, the so-called Sampuranand Award, the proportion of substitutes should not exceed twenty per cent or thereabouts, but in several of the mills it is probably considerably larger. In the middle of the 1960's V.B. Singh (1973: 20) and his associates at Lucknow University found that almost 35% of the workers in the textile industry were substitutes and temporaries. Among the workers of Laxmi Ratan Cotton Mills, one of the mills which had been taken out of production when I was in the city, the percentage was as high as 62%. Many of these workers expected to be made permanent in the future, but they knew that they might have to wait a long time before this happened. Among the substitutes 22.7% had been working in the same factory for more than five years; among the temporaries the corresponding figure was 33.7%. As Singh (*ibid.* 22-3) mentions, keeping the workers as substitutes and temporaries for as possible long is a deliberate policy on the part of the millowners, by which they save money and increase their control over the work force.

Outside the organized sector the lack of formal job security becomes the rule rather than the exception, and a permanent predicament rather than a passing phase of a career. Some workers may have a certain security of employment because they possess skills that are in short supply, but this is hardly a compensation for their lack of enforceable legal rights. Nor should we imagine that moral rules may serve as a substitute. In some of the writings on the informal sector, notably those of T.G. McGee (1973, 1976), it is suggested that the chief organizational principles of this sector are the primordial ones of family and kinship. This is certainly not the case in Kanpur. The informally employed worker may try his best to infuse the relationship with a binding moral and affective content - lacking support from state and trade unions this may indeed be the sole protective strategy available to him - but whether this will effectively insure him against arbitrary treatment and discharge is an altogether different matter. For all that I know, a worker may not enjoy much security of employment even when the employer is a kinsman or personal friend.

Take the case of the brush and bristle industry, where large numbers

of Ahirwar Koris are engaged. This industry consists of a dozen small factories falling under the Factories Act, and a larger number of smaller workshops producing semi-finished goods for the larger units. Among the smaller entrepreneurs, locally known as *tekedar*s, contractors, there are some Ahirwars. These men, who started their careers as ordinary workers and are still engaged in manual work, buy pig hair from villagers in the countryside. Assisted by family members and a handful of employed workers, who may be kinsmen as well as caste-fellows and neighbors, they then clean, sort, cut, and tie it into bundles suitable for the further manufacturing of brushes. When the job is completed they deliver the goods to one of the larger factories, and are paid by the quantity and quality of their bundles. No expensive tools are required, and the work is normally performed at the residential quarters of the *tekedar* and his hired workers.

The relationship between *tekedar* and hired worker is often a regular one in the sense that it may last for long periods of time and that there may be a mutual expectation that it will continue until further notice. The only right of employment that the worker, or *karigar*, is likely to have, however (and then only informally), is that he shall not be arbitrarily replaced by another worker. What he does not have is a right of regular work and regular payment. The rule is that he works as long as there is something to work on, and is paid by the end of the day in accordance with his performance. When the *tekedar* has no raw materials to supply, as is often the case in this irregular and seasonal business, the relationship is suspended. While it remains so, the *tekedar* has no obligations towards the worker whatsoever. If he agrees to lend him money or assist him in some other way, as he may very well do, it is regarded as a personal favor, not as the fulfillment of his obligations as an employer. How long the relationship between them has lasted makes no difference. The *tekedar*'s sense of affection and responsibility may increase with time, I presume, but not the worker's rights. Even a worker who has served the same employer for many years is basically nothing but a day laborer, and this is clearly understood on both sides.

Despite its often lasting character, the relationship between *tekedar* and *karigar* is thus structured on the model of two autonomous economic units, rather than as a corporate relationship between interdependent members of the same unit. In this respect it is more like the relationship between the *tekedar* and the factory owner to whom he delivers his

goods, or even the transient relationship between the ricksha driver and his customer, than the relationship between employer and permanent employee in the organized sector. Certainly it has very little to do with the morality of family and kinship, but is rather the perfect example of the atomistic morality of the market. Where kinship and other primordial solidarities may have some importance, it seems, is mainly in the process of labor recruitment. Presented with the choice the *tekedar* might feel obliged to hire a kinsman rather than a non-kinsman, at least if the former is a close kinsman and can be relied upon to do his job as well as the non-kinsman.

As many writers on urban India have noted, kinship, caste, and other primordial solidarities may also be important in the recruitment of labor in the large scale-sector. For every job in the public sector that is advertised in the newspapers or at the labor exchange there are hordes of applicants. Formally, the selection is to be made strictly on the basis of educational credentials or other impersonal criteria, but it is commonly assumed that the stated requirements can be circumvented or are just minimum requirements to be supplemented by other kinds of credentials. Thus among the workers as elsewhere in the society, job-seekers mobilize all sorts of informal "sources" and resources, including their networks of kinship and caste, in their efforts to get appointed. In the textile industry there is an agreement that permanent workers should be recruited from the ranks of the substitute workers according to a principle of seniority, and that new substitutes should be taken on through the employment exchange in accordance with the same principle of seniority. Among the workers in the cotton mills interviewed by V.B. Singh's (1972: 13) assistants, however, only 13.6% said that they had been recruited straight through the employment exchange, as against 30% who said that they had been assisted by relatives and 56.4% who referred to friends, jobbers, labor officers, and other agents. While these figures are deficient in important respects - no mention is made of the fact that the categories of helping agents need not be mutually exclusive, for example - they suggest at least that various informal practices are very important in the recruitment of labor in the so-called formal sector.

Trade unions

The trade union movement of Kanpur, which is largely confined to the organized sector, was founded during the turbulent years following World

War I. Before the war the industrial workers had no formal organizations, and the few strikes that nonetheless occurred were shortlived outbursts of discontent confined to a single factory or even a single department of a factory. In reply to a government inquiry in 1892 the millowners reported that the only strikes which the city had experienced so far were a few "mild disputes" caused by "mischievous workers in the role of ringleaders" (Upper India Chamber of Commerce 1892: 81). Twenty years later, when they were still in undisputed control, the millowners would have expressed themselves with equal self-assurance, had it not been for a dark cloud in the sky. As one of them observed in an address to the local British business community in 1911, England had recently experienced several outbreaks of hostility between capital and labor - perhaps the most bitter since the Chartist riots. There was no immediate danger of something similar happening in India, it seemed, but he still felt that this should be taken as a reminder of the importance of keeping the laboring classes as contented as possible (Upper India Chamber of Commerce 1911: iii).

Yet this was exactly what he and his colleagues failed to do. From the outset the relationship between capital and labor had been structured in accordance with familiar market principles. It was regarded as a strictly contractual relationship limited to the exchange of a specified amount of money for a specified amount of labor power. What happened to the worker outside the factory and outside the terms of the contract was in principle, and for the most part also in practice, none of the employer's business. At the beginning of the century a couple of the employers constructed a few so-called "model villages" for their workers, and one or two of these settlements were even provided with a primary school. But this was done at a time when the city had been hit by the plague and there was a great shortage of labor in the industry.⁶ Neither before nor after that did the employers concern themselves with the general welfare of their workers to any great extent. This, they insisted, was the responsibility of the government.⁷

Where the government should not be allowed to interfere, on the other hand, was in the fixing of the terms of the contract between capital and labor. When it was suggested that working hours should be limited by law, for instance, the factory owners raised a storm of protest. How long the operatives remained at work was sufficiently regulated by "the natural laws of supply and demand." That the working day was considerably

longer in India than in England - in the textile mills of Kanpur the average was between twelve and thirteen hours at the beginning of the century - was due to the special characteristics of "the Asiatic worker," notably his lack of skill and efficiency, or, more bluntly, his low level of intelligence and his incurable laziness. People who felt pity for him should know that he had a much better life inside the factory than outside. As one of the millowners explained: "the Indian worker has no home life... All his 'home' means is a place where his food is cooked and where he sleeps. The rest of his time he passes in the factory, if he is employed in one, or in roaming the bazaars. In the factory he washes, bathes, washes his clothes, smokes, shaves, sleeps, takes his food, and is surrounded as a rule by his relations."⁸

One of things that happened in the wake of World War I was that while the millowners were making huge profits the material conditions of their workers deteriorated rapidly. Their wages remained the same in nominal terms, but as the cost of wheat and other basic necessities increased sharply, they fell dramatically in real terms. Even more important was probably the change of political climate that occurred all over the country. Before the war the nationalist movement was still very weakly developed, not least in Kanpur where the new educated middle class of lawyers, medical doctors, teachers, and students, the people who provided the leadership of this movement, was comparatively small. After the war, however, there was a sharp increase in political activity, resulting among other things in a mobilization of industrial labor. In Kanpur an Arya Samaj social worker called Pandit Kam Datta seem to have taken the first step in this direction, (V.B. Singh 1967), but the person who is usually regarded as the real founder of the local labor movement is Ganesh Shankar Vidyarthi, the prominent Congressman mentioned in a previous section, who along with some other politicians helped to established the Kanpur Mazdoor Sabha in 1919 and during the following decade acted as its main spokesman.

No sooner had the Kanpur Mazdoor Sabha been formally established than a strike notice was served on the employers in the textile industry. The demands - and there were a whole lot of them - included a doubling of the existing wage rates, a reduction of the excessive working hours from twelve to ten, and a more humane treatment of the workers by the European supervisory staff (S.M. Pandey 1970: 26-27). The employers' first reaction to these demands was a flat refusal, but after a week of general strike and the intervention of the Lieutenant-Governor of U.P.

they reluctantly changed their mind and agreed to negotiate. In the final settlement the workers got somewhat less than they had demanded, but probably a great deal more than they had expected. On balance, the strike proved to be a big success for both the workers and the union.

Greatly encouraged by this initial victory the workers soon raised further demands and in the next few years there was a whole series of strikes in the textile industry. The employers witnessed this development with increasing alarm. It was true that the workers had suffered a substantial loss of real wages during the war, they admitted, but this had already been taken care of; now they had nothing to complain about. Why all the unrest then? The answer was obvious. It was because of the "evil influence" of Vidyarthi and his friends. By their exaggerated demands and inflammatory speeches these men had destroyed the amicable relations that formerly existed within the industry. Their purpose was clearly political; they wanted to enroll the workers in their own struggle and create trouble for the British (Upper India Chamber of Commerce 1919-24). In keeping with this view the employers refused to deal with the Kanpur Mazdoor Sabha as a representative union. They could not ignore it altogether, but they stubbornly refused to grant it the status of a legitimate counterpart speaking on the workers' behalf.

One wonders whether they would have been equally uncooperative if they had known what kind of trade union leaders awaited them in the future. Throughout the 1920's Vidyarthi and the other Congressmen were the undisputed leaders of the Kanpur Mazdoor Sabha. Now and then strikes occurred without their authorization - something that the employers also held against them - but there were no other outside leaders with a commanding influence in the union or amongst the workers. In the early 1930's, however, the communists made their appearance in the trade union field. They arrived at a time of retrenchments, rationalization, and wage-cuts in the textile industry, and being not only more militant than the Congress leaders but also more zealous in their organizational work, they soon became quite popular among the workers. By the middle of the decade they were in effective control of several of the mill committees, the basic building blocks of the union, and also had a strong position on the central executive council.

The real challenge to the Congress leadership of the union came after the provincial elections in 1937. While the Congress was getting ready to assume office and play a more moderate and 'responsible' role than be-

fore, the communists in the Kanpur Mazdoor Sabha were intensifying the struggle against the employers. Within the Congress this was apparently regarded as a provocation - which perhaps it was - and when the new ministry had been installed, several months after the elections, a few of the leading communists were promptly put behind bars for disturbance of the public order. As this drastic measure did not put an end to the unrest, however, the Congress changed its policy. First the government asked the employers to enter into negotiations with the Kanpur Mazdoor Sabha, and when the employers refused to comply with this request the Congress leaders within the union joined hands with the communists. The peak of unrest occurred in 1938, when the entire textile industry was paralyzed by a general strike for seven long weeks. The settlement was brought about by the government, which more or less forced the employers to sign an agreement generally regarded as quite favorable to the workers.

It was primarily the communists who got the credit for this victory, however, and in the union elections held in the wake of the strike they captured a majority on the executive council. They remained in control through the war, until the mid-1950's. By this time, however, the Kanpur Mazdoor Sabha was no longer the only union in the field. In 1946, with the coming of independence and regular party politics, the Congress leaders had left it to set up a union of their own, the Suti Mill Mazdoor Union, and in the next few years there had been several further splits, first as the Congress Socialists became the Socialists and formed the Kanpur Mazdoor Congress, and then as the Suti Mill Mazdoor Union was divided two or three times on factional grounds. In 1954, when there were five or six major unions in the textile industry, all the unions, except one Congress union which remained faithful to the government and the Gandhian doctrine of trusteeship, merged into a single body in order to fight the employers on the issue of rationalization. Yet the merger was only a temporary one, and in 1955, after a general strike that lasted for eighty days - the biggest strike in the history of the city - the process of fragmentation started all over again. In the middle of the 1960's, after the China War, it also reached the communists, dividing them between one group attached to the rightist CPI and another group attached to the leftist CPI(M).

At present the union territory is as fragmented as ever. In a single factory there may be as many as five or six unions or branches of unions (cf. Tripathi 1968) and in the textile industry as a whole there are nearly

twenty-five (S.M. Pandey 1970: 141). The top leaders of these unions are nearly always educated middle-class persons with no experience of manual work whatsoever. Some of them are mere "case-pleaders," persons with a legal training or at least a working knowledge of the complexities of labor law who have made it a profession to deal with cases of dismissals, retrenchments, and victimization in the labor courts (ibid. 153). Normally, however, union leaders are deeply involved in politics. This is especially true of that select gathering which S.M. Pandey (ibid. 186-88) refers to as "the big name leaders". To this category belongs (or belonged until recently), Arjun Arora, who besides being a prominent trade union leader has also been a Congress member of the Rajya Sabha, the upper house of the parliament; S.P. Awasthi, who represents the Congress in the U.P. Legislative Council; Raja Ram Shastri, a leading socialist, who has also been an M.P. and is now a member of the Legislative Council in Lucknow; Sant Singh Yusuf, who represents the CPI in the U.P. Legislative Assembly; and half a dozen others. These are men who have been associated with the trade-union movement of Kanpur for a very long time and are known to every industrial worker in the city.

The most legendary of them all is probably comrade Sant Singh Yusuf, whose peculiar name is a combination of Sant Singh, his parental Hindu name, and Maulana Yusuf, a Muslim name which he adopted for himself in the early 1930's while he was hiding from the police. Yusuf came to Kanpur in 1935, when he had already acquired some experience of trade union work in Ahmedabad and Bombay. Soon after his arrival in the city he got involved in the organization of a gatemeeting at one of the mills - the first meeting of that kind to be held in the city, he claims⁹ - and this led to further engagements. During the big strikes of the late 1930's he was one of the leading figures, and so he has been many times since. His reputation rests largely on the fearlessness with which he conducts his agitation. More than once he has been very roughly treated by the hired hoodlums or *goondas* of the employers or by the police. It is widely remembered how he was beaten unconscious outside the Lakshmi Ratan Cotton Mills and had to spend more than a month recovering at the home of Raja Ram Shastri, one of his chief rivals. On another occasion (and I have this story from a millworker who was not present at the time but nonetheless had a very vivid image of what had happened), he was agitating on behalf of the workers at the Lal Imli Woollen Mills. There had been disturbances in this factory for some time because the management was holding back the pay-

ment of the dearness allowance. Eventually a worker threw himself out of a window in desperation and anger. As soon as the body had been wrapped in the Hindu fashion the workers led by Yusuf and another trade union leader called Brijendra Bahadur set out in procession towards a nearby factory. On the way they had a brawl with the police, and both Yusuf and Bahadur were badly beaten. Yusuf lost consciousness and when he woke up he found himself at the Kotwali, the police headquarters. Here both of them received further blows and were utterly humiliated, not least Bahadur whose moustaches were torn off hair by hair.¹⁰

Not all the big leaders are as highly respected as Yusuf. Nor indeed is Yusuf himself always praised. There are those who dislike him because he is a communist - among the industrial workers as among other people in the city there are many who feel that the communists are lacking in patriotism. He also gets his share of the deepseated distrust of all union leaders that exists among the workers. Having witnessed several decades of factionalism in the arena of labor politics many of the workers have come to the conclusion that what motivates their leaders is a selfish desire for personal power and recognition more than anything else. When a strike is called it is just as likely that it is for the benefit of the leader as for the benefit of the worker and the same is true when a strike is called off. As one of my Kori acquaintances put it: "At one moment it is 'Fight! Fight! Fight!', the next 'Compromise! Compromise! Compromise!.' How can we know what they are up to? In this country the worker has absolutely no value; the only ones who count are the *parhe-likhe log*, 'the reading-writing people.'"

Yet, if the millworkers of Kanpur are suspicious of their trade union leaders, they are even more suspicious of the millowners. By long experience they have not only learned that there will be no improvement of their situation without struggle, but also that one can never be sure that the millowners will abide by agreements. Quite the contrary, one can be almost certain that given the opportunity they will use any dirty trick to deprive the workers of their rightful wages. When it serves their insatiable craving for money they will even plunder their own factories, as revealed by several well-known scandals. Any suggestion to the effect that they would have a sense of responsibility towards the workers would be regarded as unbelievably ridiculous.

Among the Ahirwars of Devi Street, as presumably among other workers in the city, there are even those who hold the local millowners re-

sponsible for the murder of Mahatma Gandhi. Towards the end of his life Gandhiji wanted to create a society without capitalism (*puj'nigiri*). Much worried by this the big capitalists assembled at Kamla Tower, the headquarters of the Singhanias, and decided to have him killed. They engaged the Maharastrian Nathuram Godse to do the job, assuring him that they would take care of his family if he were caught. They did not keep this promise, however, for nowadays the members of Godse's family are living like beggars.

Politicians

An attitude of pervasive distrust exists not only towards capitalists and trade union leaders but also towards political leaders in general. In Hindi a politician is known as a *neta* and politicians as a category as *neta log*. The ideal image of a *neta*, formed during the period of nationalist struggle and with roots deeper down in Indian history and culture, is that of a person selflessly devoted to the welfare of those he represents. He has no personal axe to grind; in relation to his chosen constituency he is merely a social worker, a *samaj-sevak*. Ideally, he should be the secular counterpart of the religious renouncer.¹¹

To many people the worldly incarnation of this elevated ideal is the famous Bengali nationalist Subhas Chandra Bose. Bose, or Netaji,¹² as he is usually called, disappeared in August 1945 on his way from Burma, where he had been trying to organize a military invasion of India, to Tokyo. In all likelihood he died when his plane crashed in Taiwan, but his body was never found and even today there are people who believe that he is alive and will return to India one day - if, indeed, he has not already come. In 1974, when there was a great deal of unrest in the country as a result of Jayaprakash Narayan's campaign against political corruption, it was announced that Netaji was about to return and that it was in Kanpur of all places that he would make his first appearance. Unfortunately I was not in the city at the time, but I understand that more than fifty thousand people had gathered to take his *darshan* (i.e. to be blessed by the sight of him). When he did not turn up disappointed crowds took to the streets, and there were riots in the city.

While they continue to wait for the Messiah the people of Kanpur will have to deal with *netas* of a different order. What we may call the factual image of the *neta*, i.e. the stereotyped image of the *neta log* as they supposed to be in reality, is just the opposite of the ideal image. Every *neta*

will present himself as a friend and servant of the people. In reality, however, he is likely to be a man without principles who thinks only of himself and is prepared to do almost anything to reach a position of power. Once he has managed that he will reward himself abundantly. He will fill his pockets with embezzled money; he will surround himself with a bunch of reliable *chamchas*, sycophants or, literally, 'spoons', who praise and flatter him from morning to evening; and once in a while he will descend to the public vilifying his opponents and glorifying himself and his patrons.

To some extent this negative image of the existing corps of politicians is a product of the very loftiness of the ideal, but it is also true that the people of Kanpur have good reasons to be dissatisfied with their political leaders. To get an idea of working of politics in Kanpur one should read Paul Brass' (1966) chapter about the city in his well-known monograph on factional politics in U.P., and Ram Ratan Gupta's (1962) autobiographical sketch *My Story*, a truly remarkable document written by a person who for many years was a leading *neta* in the city and who in 1959 managed to become Kanpur's first mayor. Gupta, who will reappear in the background later on in this book, belongs to a wealthy merchant family of Rajasthani origin. He entered politics in the late 1920's, during the second non-cooperation movement, and his first achievement was to organize a procession of businessmen, "the like of which had not been seen anywhere in the country" (ibid. 1). At the head of this procession went Lala Kamlapat Singhania, with whose firm and family Gupta was soon to establish close ties. The Singhania's had just emerged as the leading industrialists of the city, but had not yet been able to acquire a commensurate position in social and political affairs. Here Gupta offered his services and for some years he acted as their ally and promotor in local and regional politics. Among other things this got him involved in an abortive attempt to win control over Kanpur's two labor constituencies in the provincial elections in 1937. For more than six months Gupta, with a staff of twenty clerks, was busy manipulating the electoral rolls. The whole scheme failed in the end as it was discovered that Lala Padampat Singhania's private secretary, a well-known Congressman, had been included on the list of voters. The situation was highly embarrassing, but the poor secretary "played the gentleman" and took the blame on himself (ibid. 8).

To make up for the loss of public esteem that the firm had suffered because of this affair and the big strikes that followed in the wake of the

elections, Gupta devised "a scheme to enlarge our social relations" (ibid. 15). First he assisted Lala Padampat Singhania in becoming President of the All-India Vaish Mahasabha, a caste association claiming to represent all the Vaishyas, i.e. all the traditional trading castes, of India (cf. Heimsath 1964: 284-85), and later, when there had again been Hindu-Muslim disturbances in the city, he formed the Hindu Sangh, a paramilitary organization soon to be affiliated with the Hindu Mahasabha. As a result of these measures the "bitterness against the Kamla Tower (i.e. the Singhania) began to melt and fade and we secured the right of leadership of the Hindu population of Kanpur" (Gupta 1962: 16).

The relationship with the Singhania was discontinued in 1943. In his booklet, which is nothing but a long indictment, Gupta accuses Lala Padampat of not having treated him as an equal and of having tried to prevent him from becoming a leader in his own right. There had also been quarrels about business matters. In 1934 Gupta and the Singhania had started the Lakshmi Ratan Cotton Mills as a joint venture, and they had also collaborated on other projects. By the time they were falling out they openly accused each other of cheating, and to get things straightened out they had to go to court. In the partition Gupta got control over the L.R.C.M, and as he also had several smaller companies he came out of the association with the Singhania as an independent industrial baron.

Politically he was also a man of importance for in the same year as he left the Singhania he had been elected to the Central Legislative Council in Delhi. As he soon came to realize, however, he needed to strengthen his position within the local Congress. In 1947 and 1948 there were repeated strikes in the textile industry, and the situation was particularly bad in his own factory. (S.M. Pandey 1970: 128-33). This, it seems, was partly because Gupta was pushing forward his rationalization schemes more ruthlessly than any of the other millowners - in 1949 he dismissed his whole work force because it would not accept the increased workloads that he proposed - partly because his political opponents within the Congress wanted to harm him.

To defend himself Gupta moved ahead on two fronts. First, and most importantly, he threw himself into a struggle for leadership of the local Congress. When he had won that battle, he ousted the existing trade unions from his factory, replacing them with a reliable union of his own making, the first company union to be organized in the city (ibid. 128-33). In 1959 he won a further victory as he was elected Mayor of Kanpur's newly esta-

blished Municipal Corporation, and from there he moved on to the Lok Sabha in Delhi in 1962. This was as high as his star rose. In 1964 an election tribunal found that he had got into the parliament by tampering with the ballot papers, and as there was nobody who would "play the gentleman" this time he had to resign.

According to Brass (1966: 184), the years when Gupta stood at the head of the Municipal Corporation was a period of "stalemate and corruption." This is not something that Gupta alone should be held responsible for, however, for when he had left for Delhi things remained just the same, and in 1969 the state government decided that it was time to suspend the so-called "deliberative wing" of the Corporation and entrust the task of running the city with the Civic Administrator and his staff.

By this decision the municipal councillors, the corporators, of the city were deprived of their formal position but not necessarily of their function. In Kanpur, as elsewhere in the country, the everyday task of an ordinary local politician is to act as a middleman between the public and the administration. Once in a while he carries forward collective demands for better sanitation, street lightning, water supply, and so forth, but more often his job is to assist individuals who are in trouble with the municipal authorities or the police, or who are trying to get access to scarce government-controlled resources, such as jobs, land, housing, education, and government contracts. Sometimes he stands on the side of law and justice, redressing genuine grievances or trying to make government officials stick to the rules. At other times he is rather subverting the established bureaucratic order, extracting various forms of preferential treatment for his clients and friends.

What is needed for this job is influence rather than formal position. Before the suspension of the municipal corporation there were many local politicians who had very little influence despite their formal position, and afterwards there were some politicians who continued to wield a great deal of influence despite their lack of formal position. What are then the sources of influence? Upward connections in the direction of the state government in Lucknow or even the central government in New Delhi are by far the most important. A local politician who is known to enjoy the direct or mediated support of a minister or some other important figure in Lucknow or Delhi will normally not encounter much resistance as he moves around in the local administration. The administrator, bureaucrat or police officer, knows that if he does not comply with the politician's re-

quest he may have great difficulties in his further career. He may not get the promotion he has been waiting for, he may get transferred to some ugly little place far away from civilization, or, if his past record is not spotless, he may even have to suffer public exposure and suspension. If, on the other hand, he cooperates with the politician his future prospects may improve. He may get his promotion more rapidly, he may get posted at Lucknow or some other exciting place, he will perhaps be able to find a good job for his brother or son, and he will most probably be allowed to continue with whatever shady dealings he is involved in. As every government official knows, exchange is the name of the game.

A politician who lacks patronage from the centres of power is normally in a much weaker position, but he need not lack influence altogether. He may be feared for his so-called "nuisance value," i.e. for his ability to bring the misdeeds of the established powers into public attention and, if need be, organize some form of public protest. The politicians who have the greatest amount of "nuisance value" are found in the trade union field - the local prototype of such a leader is indeed Sant Singh Yusuf - but there are also other politicians who have a reputation as troublemakers and on that account may enjoy a certain amount of influence in the administration.

Emergency

1975 and 1976 were not good years for troublemakers, however. Nor were they altogether good years for government officials. Cornered by Jayaprakash Narayan, an old leader of tremendous "nuisance value" who for some time had been travelling around the country speaking about the need for a "total revolution" of the political and administrative system, Prime Minister Indira Gandhi made the President Fakhruddin Ali Ahmed proclaim a state of national emergency on June 26, 1975. Within a few weeks thousands of opposition politicians and other dissidents on the right and the left of the ruling Congress and the loyal CPI and RPI (the Republican Party of India) had been detained, and many of them remained so for as long as the state of emergency lasted. Among those who escaped arrest some went underground, others just kept silent, and a third group, which seemed to be rather large, made amends and joined the Congress. The media were kept under close surveillance. The message conveyed was a simple one. India had been drifting towards chaos; now it was time to give order a chance. Discipline, hard work, and cooperation were

the keywords of the period. Beyond this there was the tremendous personality cult centered on the Prime Minister herself and her son Sanjay Gandhi. The latter, acting as his mother's leading spokesman and as chief patron of the Youth Congress, made frequent tours around the country in the President's aircraft and was received with garlands, feet-touching, and endless flattery wherever he came. It was truly a time for *chamchas*, or, as one of my acquaintances preferred to put it, for *shakti puja*, 'worship of power.'

Kanpur was not honored with a visit of the Prime Minister or her son while I was there, but other Congress potentates came to deliver the message. There were, for instance, U.S. Dixit, Minister of Shipping and Transport, who stopped by to inaugurate a regional Congress conference, Mrs. Shushila Rothagi, another minister in the central cabinet, who told a Congress meeting that "the morale of the people of Kanpur was very high and that every citizen stood behind the P.M." (*National Herald*, June 27, 1976), and the Chief Minister of Uttar Pradesh H.M. Bahuguna, who had been invited to preside over the celebration of the Ganesh Shankar Vidyarthi Diamond Jubilee and at the same time took the opportunity of addressing an RPI conference and of paying a visit to Sakkar Mill ka Kalwa, an old and dirty *ahata* inhabited mainly by Scheduled Caste people. The visit to this *ahata*, which had been arranged by some leading Scheduled Caste *netas*, was a highly ritualized event. For several days dozens of young men and a contingent of municipal sweepers had been busy with the preparations. Along the main road leading up to the locality a number of high poles dressed with green leaves had been erected, and the road itself had been carefully swept. Inside the *ahata* a special path had been laid out for the minister and his following. It went in a winding circle through lanes and squares, and like the main road it was decorated with green leaves and meticulously swept. Where it crossed over dirty ditches filled with grey, stagnant water, small bridges had been constructed with bricks and old metal sheets, and at certain places where the ground was damp it had been covered with fresh sand. Big heaps of old garbage had been covered with white calcium powder, and outside every hut the ground had been nicely smeared with cowdung as a gesture of welcome. The visit itself was a more rapid affair. First came the police squads and then Bahuguna himself, surrounded by a few prominent Congressmen. Guided by the members of the local reception committee the big man walked along the path, stopping here and there for a brief chat with the expect-

tant crowd, and then, when that had been done, he gave a brief and reassuring speech with many references to the Prime Minister and her famous 20-point program.

Not everything that happened in the city as a result of the emergency was quite as ceremonial as this. Of the sterilization campaign that was pursued with such ruthlessness in other places I heard practically nothing, but there were other things that marked the period as an exceptional one. As elsewhere in the country, strikes were banned, and although a few spontaneous work stoppages occurred in the textile industry the labor arena was unusually quiet. There were also the drive to unearth black money, which by the beginning of January 1976 had given Rs. 410 000 000 by voluntary disclosures alone (*The Pioneer*, January 2, 1976), and the repeated efforts of the Civic Administrator and his staff to clean and beautify the city, efforts which resulted in the removal of a few thousand truck loads of garbage and several hundred encroachments from the streets of the inner city. Moreover, there was the campaign against various types of "rackets" and "malpractices" in the local administration and elsewhere in the society. This campaign led to a number of arrests and suspensions that were duly reported in the press. There was the municipal clerk who had taken Rs. 300 from a sweeper who wanted to get a permanent job; the four police constables who had "harassed innocent persons and also realized illegal gratifications from them"; the municipal waterworks inspector who had demanded Rs. 100 for writing a letter of recommendation for a plumber; the orthopedic surgeon who had charged Rs. 200 for furthering a medical advance application; the head clerk at the Harijan Welfare Department who had been caught redhanded taking Rs. 100 from a Scheduled Caste student in payment of his legitimate scholarship; the municipal officer who had cancelled a suspension charge against a subordinate for a fee of Rs. 500; the proprietor of a blood-bank who had paid the donors Rs. 15 instead of the officially stipulated Rs. 25 and allowed them to give blood twice a day instead of once every three months; and so forth.

Some of these measures were widely appreciated, but as people in the city pointed out they were ridiculously inadequate to the size of the problems and were not likely to have a lasting impact. How, for instance, could one possibly expect government officials to be honest and impartial when their salaries were so low and they were all the time beleaguered by hordes of petitioners seeking their favors, including the Congress *netas*

and their own kinsmen and friends? How could one possibly expect them to sacrifice their own personal interests for the sake of the public interest when it was so obvious that the big leaders of the country did not? And what about Sanjay Gandhi? Now the entire country was crawling in the dust before him, but where would he have been without his mother? These were the sort of comments that one frequently heard in the city, especially during the early stages of the emergency.¹³ Later on the political discussion tended to abate. This was not because people changed their mind, but simply because they began to take the new order for granted and did not care to talk about it any more. Moreover, just as many people had predicted, the pressure from above gradually diminished. The ban on political meetings and strikes remained in force, but otherwise there was a noticeable relaxation. This meant that most of those customary practices that had been wholly or partly suspended could be resumed. Little by little things became more or less what they had always been, at least for the large majority of ordinary citizens without direct involvement in party politics, or large heaps of undeclared gold hidden in the house.

A Kori Neighborhood

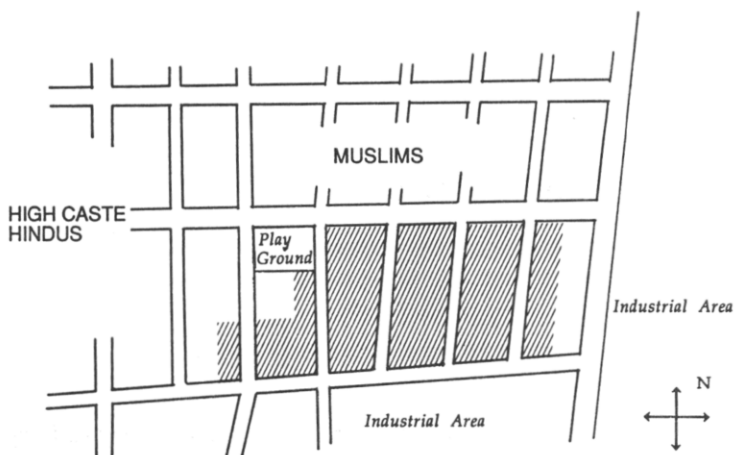
We turn now to the principal actors of this book, the Ahirwars of Koriyana and Devi Street. This chapter begins with a few introductory notes on the history of the neighborhood and continues with a description of some of the distinctions of living standard and life style among the residents of Devi Street. A brief account of political divisions follows, and towards the end there is a description of a major local dispute, revealing some of the forces of conflict and cohesion in the neighborhood. The patterns of interaction between the Ahirwars and their neighbors, as well as the networks of kinship and friendship among the Ahirwars themselves, will be discussed in later chapters.

Koriyana

Koriyana is located near the geographical centre of Kanpur, in a densely populated tract which I refer to as Ramnagar. As indicated on map 2 below, it borders on Muslim neighborhoods to the north and the east, on an area of small-scale industry to the east and the south, and on neighborhoods where Hindus of higher caste predominate to the southwest and the west. Internally it is divided into five parallel streets. The houses standing along these streets have one, two, three, and, in a few cases, four storeys. The local population, which includes people belonging to other Kori sub-castes and other castes as well as Ahirwars, is something like five or six

thousand, a staggering figure considering that the neighborhood covers a strip of land that measures no more than approximately 350 by 125 meters.

Map 2. Ramnagar Koriyana



Koriyana is not one of the oldest of the Ahirwar neighborhoods of Kanpur. Along with the rest of Ramnagar, it was built in the late 1920's and the 1930's under one of the schemes of the Cawnpore Improvement Trust. The city planners laid out a neat, rectilinear pattern of streets, blocks, and plots for housing, and the latter were then offered for sale at concessional rates so that people of relatively small means also would be able to buy them. The Improvement Trust did not construct any of the residential buildings. Nor did it make any special provisions for the diversity of people who were going to inhabit the area. Since the plots were not sold serially, however, the settlers were to some extent free to inject their own conceptions of social structure into the impersonal framework furnished by the authorities.

As they availed themselves of this opportunity the area was gradually divided into one Hindu section and one Muslim section, and within the former into neighborhoods of predominantly high-caste composition and neighborhoods of predominantly low-caste composition. To some extent this differentiation by religion and caste was probably facilitated by the fact that different portions of the area had been differently valued even

before they became associated with different social categories. The land on which Koriyana was built had previously been used as a dumping ground, and even when it had been cleared for housing it was regarded as impure and unhealthy. This and the fact that the plots were somewhat cheaper here than in other parts of the area probably explains why it became a low-caste preserve.

It was also important that people frequently moved into the area along the channels of already existing social ties rather than as unattached individuals or households. The Ahirwars, who along with other Koris gathered in Koriyana and thereby gave the neighborhood its name and its separate identity, constituted a single network of kinsmen, neighbors, and friends. First came a number of persons who were prosperous enough to buy land and build a house, then others who settled as their tenants. The former, incidentally, were the first of the Ahirwars of Kanpur to become independent houseowners; in the *ahatas* where they had previously resided all the Ahirwars had been tenants.

It was not only by dividing the area along the lines of religion and caste that the settlers subverted the order suggested by the impersonal layout of streets and blocks. The residential buildings which they constructed were also notably out of line with the neat gridwork, if not one by one, then at least collectively. In Koriyana, where most of the settlers were ordinary working-class people, the houses tended to be quite modest, sometimes mere huts. As time passed and savings accumulated, they were usually enlarged and improved upon, but this was a slow and intermittent process extended over many years. In the more prosperous sections the houses were perhaps more substantial from the start, but even there they were not always erected at one stroke. Despite the neat pattern of streets and blocks, Ramnagar soon presented a rather disorderly appearance, at least to persons with a taste for large-scale uniformities - such as the owner of the big Swadeshi Cotton Mills, Mr. H. Horsman, who visited the area in 1936. Describing his impressions before the members of the Upper India Chamber of Commerce, Horsman complained that there was not a trace of that "dignity of design" that one might have expected as the area was part of a publicly funded development project. The street frontages were everywhere broken by "ugly, empty gaps," and the houses, of all shapes and sizes, had for the most part been left unfinished. Even the installations of the Improvement Trust were deficient, for in several places the streets were unpaved and the drains were choked (Upper In-

dia of Commerce 1937).

Forty years later, when I came to Kanpur, Ramnagar had changed a great deal, but not in a direction that Horsman would have approved of. It is now a densely crowded area in the heart of the city. The last vacant plots must have disappeared long ago, and apart from a few dusty parks and playgrounds, hardly worthy of the name, there is not a single piece of open ground in the vicinity. In some parts of the area the houses are kept in good repair, but in Koriyana and other poor neighborhoods they usually look old and worn-out. The architectural disorder remains, but far more depressing is the fact that such basic amenities as water, drainage, and sewage remain inadequate. In Koriyana the drains work well in the dry season, when they are not much needed, but during the rains the streets are sometimes flooded by dirty water. At the same time there is a serious shortage of drinking water. In some of the houses there are private wells and watertaps, but many of the residents depend on a few public watertaps posted at various points in the locality. Often these taps dry up and the buckets, if not their owners, must stand in queue for hours on end. Furthermore, only some of the residents have latrines in their houses. Large numbers of people have to share a few public ones located in one of the corners of the neighborhood. More examples of the same sort could be added.

Devi Street

Devi Street is the easternmost of Koriyana's five streets. Like the other streets, it presents a crowded picture at almost any time of the day. In the hot season it is indeed crowded even at night; by nine or ten in the evening it is lined with stringbeds on both sides and looks like an open-air dormitory. In daytime the street is used for a variety of purposes. For the many children it serves as a rather safe playground, for there is hardly any other traffic than the pedestrian. For most of the men it is primarily a recreational space, a place where one may gossip with neighbors and spend a few paise on something to smoke, a mouthful of betel leaves, or a cup of tea from one of the local teashops. For the women it is also a place of work. Many families reside in small, dark quarters facing the street, and for domestic purposes they have to appropriate a few square meters on the outside. Passing along the street one sees women making fire in simple stoves, cleaning rice or lentils, nursing children, or doing other domestic work.

The visitor will also notice a few small grocery shops housed in dingy sheds. The proprietors are local people, in several cases retired men who would have been sitting in the street even if they had no business to attend to. A number of artisans perform their tasks in small workshops open towards the street, or simply on the doorsteps of their living quarters. A couple of them are tailors, one or two are shoemakers, and one is a part-time goldsmith. Finally, there are the more or less regular visitors: the vegetable vendor pushing his cart up and down the streets of the neighborhood twice a day; the milkman bringing his buffalo along to be milked in front of suspicious customers; the outside customers of the local artisans; the itinerant traders of various description; the religious mendicants and the mere beggars; the postman; the patrolling policemen from the nearby *chauki*; and so forth.

Many of the local residents live in quarters facing the street, but more commonly they live inside *ahatas* hidden behind the front rows of buildings. There are 16 such *ahatas*, each with a separate entrance from the street. Although no *ahata* looks exactly like any other, they are not very different from each other either. There is invariably a central courtyard, surrounded by houses and high, empty walls of separation. In a few of the *ahatas* the courtyard is shaded by a tree, but often there are neither trees nor any other plants in sight. The people residing on the ground floor use the courtyard for domestic chores, those living upstairs have a balcony or a portion of a balcony for the same purposes. The apartments are usually small. Most of them have only one room, but two-room units are also fairly common. Kitchens, storerooms, and separate latrines hardly exist, not in rented quarters at any rate. Often there are no windows, and both light and air must enter through the door. Furniture is sparse: usually only a few string beds and a couple of coffers. Apart from the cooking gear, a bicycle leaning towards a wall, and an occasional table fan or sewing machine there is nothing expensive in sight.

There are 44 separate houses in the street, most of them fairly small. As shown in table 7, only six have ten separate apartments or more,

Table 7. Number of apartments per house.

Number of Apartments	1-3	4-6	7-9	10-14	15-19	20 >	Total
Number of Houses	15	16	7	3	1	2	44

and only two more than twenty.

The families who own the houses are not always identical with those who originally constructed them; some of the houses have changed hands not only once but twice and thrice. About a third now belong to people who do not reside in them, but keep them for the sake of the rent or, more frequently, the property value. A few of the non-resident owners are local people, but most of them reside elsewhere in Kanpur or even outside the city. In the process there have also been changes in the distribution of ownership by caste, diminishing the proportion of Ahirwar houses from about three fourths in the beginning to about one half at present. In several cases Ahirwar houses have passed into the hands of Brahmans and Banias, but other groups have also taken a share. At present, the non-Ahirwar owners represent almost a dozen different castes, including besides the Brahmans and the Banias, Sunars, Pasis, Camars, Thakurs, and Muslims.

Owning a house gives security and prestige, but it is usually not a major source of income. In most cases the rent was fixed long ago, and under the prevailing system of rent control it is apparently difficult to raise it. For a one-room apartment the monthly rent may be anything from five to twenty-five rupies, but usually it is closer to five than to twenty-five. For a two-room apartment it may be the same or a bit more. This means that the average houseowner with his four or five tenants, collects between thirty and forty rupies per month; a large sum of money for many people, but still not more than a tenth of the monthly earnings of a permanently employed millworker. Yet there are also a few houseowners who get considerably more than this, at least if they manage to collect the rent from their often recalcitrant tenants. There is a Brahman who owns a big house with nearly sixty tenants, the largest of all the houses in the street, and there is an Ahirwar who has one house with more than thirty tenants, a second with about fifteen, and a third with three or four. Both these men may get something like six or seven hundred rupies per month from their tenants - a respectable, although not very high, income by middle-class standards.

Just about a tenth of the households of the street are owner households. The rest are tenants who have found their way into the street and their present apartments through a variety of personal channels. If they were not directly connected with the landlord before they moved in, they had at least an intermediary to recommend them. By now many of the tenants have resided in the street for a considerable length of time. Among

the Ahirwars (I did not collect any statistics from the other groups), more than 90% of the male heads of household were either born in the street or settled there before 1950. In many cases they have resided in the same apartment all along, but as shown in table 8, which refers to a random sample of one hundred of the Ahirwar households of the street¹, there are also those who have changed apartment since they first arrived. Back in the 1940's new tenants were usually recruited from other neighborhoods or directly from the countryside; nowadays, when there is a great local demand for housing, more people are leaving the neighborhood than moving in from the outside. Often the competition for vacant flats is quite fierce - in a few cases people have simply broken into the vacant apartment, taking possession of it without the owner's permission.

Table 8. Approximate time of arrival of family in Kanpur, Koriyana, and present living quarters.²

Time of Arrival	Lenght of Stay	Kanpur	Ramnagar Koriyana	Present Quarters
-1899	76>	18	-	-
1900-19	56-75	32	-	-
1920-29	46-55	19	17	16
1930-39	36-45	14	56	40
1940-49	26-35	5	8	10
1950-59	16-25	5	6	14
1960-69	6-15	4	1	4
1970-75	0-5	-	1	4
		97	97	97

Note: By the arrival of the family is meant the arrival of the present head of the household himself, his brother, father, widowed or divorced mother, father's father, or father's father's father. Other close kinsmen may have come earlier, but have here not been counted as members of the family.

The distribution of the local population by caste will be presented in detail later on. Here I need only mention a few basic facts. Among approximately three hundred households a little more than four fifths belong to five different Scheduled Castes. By far the most numerous of the Scheduled Caste groups are the Koris, just about 60% of the local population. The non-Scheduled Caste population is divided between nine Hindu castes and a tiny minority of Muslims. Several of the castes are further divided

by subcaste. Among the Koris there are not only Ahirwars but also Banaudhas, Kamalvanshis, and Shakywars, and among the Camars, the second largest of the local castes, Jatavs, Jaiswaras, and Kureels. The Ahirwars, who are about 45% of the local population, are not only more numerous than the three other Kori groups taken together, but are by far the largest of all the groups residing in the street.

These figures refer to Devi Street. Not only are some of the castes and subcastes of Devi Street not found in the others streets and vice versa, there are also differences of proportion between the streets. Yet the Scheduled Castes are everywhere in large majority, and the Koris are everywhere the largest of the individual castes. The Ahirwars constitute a smaller segment of the population in the other streets, but are still quite numerous. I have not counted them, but there must be at least three hundred Ahirwar households in Koriyana as a whole.

Distinctions of class and standard of living

Koriyana is a working-class neighborhood with a lower middle-class and (in one or two cases) even middle-class sprinkling. Among the Ahirwars of Devi Street 71.5% of the working males are manual workers, 6.5% white-collar workers, and 22% petty traders, shopkeepers, and entrepreneurs of various kinds. The category of manual workers is quite diverse. It includes weavers, spinners, turners, moulders, tailors, embroidery workers, brush-workers, painters, printing press operators, packers, and several others. About 40% have relatively secure jobs in the large-scale, organized sector, the rest are self-employed artisans and workers employed on a non-formal, often short-term basis in smaller factories and workshops. The monthly net incomes range from Rs 600 at the top to around Rs 60 at the bottom. Not surprisingly, the lowest incomes are found among youths who have recently entered the labor market without occupational skills and among the elderly and disabled.

The small group of white-collar workers includes a couple of clerks, a couple of checkers, a primary school teacher, and one or two young men who are not regular schoolteachers but support themselves by giving private tuition to lower middle-class children. In terms of occupational status these men are clearly superior to the manual workers, or this is at least the case with those amongst them who have regular jobs and are, so to speak, publicly confirmed in their white-collar status. But their incomes are not always very high. One of the clerks and the two checkers have com-

paratively high incomes, but the schoolteacher's monthly salary is only Rs 290. He gets another hundred or so from private tuition, but even with this additional income he earns less than the better paid among the manual workers.

It is in the entrepreneurial category that we find the most prosperous of the local Ahirwars. By far the most affluent is a man called Hira Lal, the big Ahirwar landlord mentioned in the previous section. Hira Lal buys cotton-waste from the textile mills and sells it to handloom weavers in the countryside, and he is also the proprietor of a small hosiery workshop located in the building where he and his family reside. In the cotton-waste business, which he manages together with two of his sons, he employs half a dozen people, sometimes more, and has several agents posted at various places in the countryside. The legal aspects of the business are taken care of by two lawyers, one in Kanpur and one in Orai, a town in Jalaun district, near Hira Lal's ancestral village, where the family has substantial property, including a big tenement giving shelter to more than 150 families, and a *dharmshala*, a public resting house, which he and his late father built many years ago to honor God and acquire prestige for themselves and their caste. When he visits Orai and other distant places he travels in the family's Ambassador car, Devi Street's only car. A foresighted father, he has also invested money in the education of his six sons, four of whom have university degrees and two of whom will most likely enter the university in the near future. His several married daughters are also well educated by Ahirwar standards, although none of them have been to college.

For the most part, however, the members of the entrepreneurial category are not particularly well off. Some of them are just as poor as the poorest among the manual workers, although more commonly they report monthly incomes ranging from Rs. 250 to Rs. 350. To describe them collectively as a kind of petty bourgeoisie would be misleading. For some of them trading is a career and a lifestyle more or less freely chosen, but for others it is merely a way of surviving from one day to the next. Although they usually value their personal independence, quite a few of them would much rather have a steady job in a factory.

If we look at the local population as a whole the picture does not change significantly. If there is a difference it is that the proportion of manual workers and petty traders is even larger in the total population than among the Ahirwars taken separately. Among the high-caste residents the

working-class component is not as predominant as among the Ahirwars, but among the other Scheduled Caste groups it is even more so. There are no persons like Hira Lal and his sons among these groups, and even moderately successful entrepreneurs are rare. White-collar workers are usually lacking altogether. Moreover, whereas among the Ahirwars a fairly large proportion of the manual workers have relatively secure and well-paid jobs in the organized sector, in some of the other low-caste groups nearly all of the manual workers are employed in the non-organized sector, frequently as unskilled laborers.

In Devi Street, as in other working-class neighborhoods, women are also gainfully employed, especially among the Scheduled Castes. In the sample of one hundred Ahirwar households previously referred to, I found 18 women working outside the household, usually for a very small income. Some of these women are brushworkers, others are workers in the cotton-waste business, one or two are petty hawkers, one runs a tiny teashop, and a few clean vegetables in the market. Among the women above age fifteen in the sample they constitute 14%. This may seem insignificant, especially in comparison with the corresponding percentage for the men, which is nearly ninety. Yet it must be remembered that most of the women have children to look after. Among the women who are not prevented from working by this or other circumstances, the percentage of working women is approximately fifty. Furthermore, there are women who work at home for outside employers. Some are more or less regularly employed by local bristle entrepreneurs, others manufacture *bidis*, indigenous cigarettes. In Kanpur the *bidi* industry is largely organized on a putting-out basis. The entrepreneurs, who are non-Ahirwars, supply the raw material and pay according to a fixed piece-rate when they collect the finished product. The pay is extremely low.

There are some high-caste households in the street who receive additional income from agricultural property. Among the local Scheduled Caste groups, however, this is not common. In the Ahirwar sample referred to, there are two men who own some land in the countryside, but in both cases the supplementary income derived from the land is very small. The rest have no agricultural property whatsoever. As we shall see in a later chapter, quite a few of the Ahirwars keep in touch with their ancestral villages, but only for family purposes. Economically and socially the Ahirwars of Devi Street are for the most part a community of urban proletarians. A few of those who have arrived in the city in recent

years see themselves as temporary residents of the city and look forward to the day when they will be able to return to the countryside. As a rule, however, the Ahirwars regard their quarters in Devi Street as their permanent home. Most of them would not hesitate to move if they could make a better living elsewhere, but that is another matter.

In Devi Street as elsewhere, differences in standards of living reflect differences in the composition of households as well as differences of earnings. As table 9 shows, while most of the households have only one or

Table 9. Households divided by size and number of earners.

Number of Earners	Number of Persons in Household										Total Househ.
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10>	
1	5	7	6	10	7	7	4	4	1	-	51
2	-	4	-	4	7	9	6	4	3	-	37
3	-	-	1	1	3	1	1	-	1	1	9
4	-	-	-	1	-	-	-	-	-	1	2
5	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	1
	5	11	7	16	17	17	11	8	5	3	100

two earning members, the number of dependents varies greatly from one household to another. Most commonly the single earner is a person who has four or five dependents to provide for, but there are those who have seven or eight as well as those who have only themselves to look after. Among the households with two earning members there are similar variations. Thus even in the absence of income differences between households there would have been significant differences in standard of living. Not infrequently, however, the difference in income is so great that the members of a larger household can afford to lead a much more comfortable life than the members of smaller household with the same number of earners. Among the five single-person households, for example, four consist of aged persons whose material circumstances are much worse than those of most of the larger single-earner households.

To get a better idea of the differentials in living standards obtaining within the street we may briefly compare the patterns of consumption in two households, one headed by an Ahirwar called Ram Lal, the other by a Banaudha Kori called Param Lal. Ram Lal's household, which is one of the more prosperous of the Ahirwar households in the street, includes besides Ram Lal himself and his wife, their eldest son Moolchand with wife

and two minor children, their two sons Ramesh and Rajendra, aged eighteen and thirteen respectively, and their orphaned grand-daughter, a girl of three. Param Lal's household, which is a more ordinary household of almost the same size, is composed of Param Lal and his wife, the former's retired father, and their four children, the eldest of whom, a boy of eighteen called Anand Ram, is a close friend of Ram Lal's son Ramesh. Ram Lal and his family have a house of their own with four or five rooms, Param Lal and his family are tenants residing in a single-room apartment.

In Param Lal's household there is only one earning member, Param Lal himself who is permanently employed as a weaver in a textile mill and has a net monthly income of approximately Rs 350. In Ram Lal's household, on the other hand, there are two earning members, Ram Lal and his eldest son Moolchand. Like Param Lal, Ram Lal is a weaver in a textile mill, but he also has a subsidiary job as a salesman with a Muslim shopkeeper in a nearby market. His average monthly income is almost Rs 600. Moolchand is employed as a turner in one of the armament factories of the city, and he too brings home approximately Rs 600 per month. Before the obligatory deductions his monthly wages are more than Rs. 700, which is an exceptionally high income for a manual worker. Moolchand belongs to a small corps of elite workers who have been given formal occupational training by the government. Originally he had planned to become a white-collar worker and it was not until he had finished his B.A. that he changed his mind. As a manual worker he is not only exceptionally well paid, but also exceptionally well educated.

As shown in table 10 below, which summarized the expenditures in Ram Lal's and Param Lal's households during the month of May, 1976, food and fuel were the major items of expenditure for both. Yet, while Param Lal and his family spent 62.6% of their income on food and fuel, as against 29.6% for Ram Lal and his family, they fell short of the latter's level of food consumption by Rs 135. They were still able to eat most of the things that were eaten in Ram Lal's house. Apart from their daily *roti* and *dal*, unleavened bread and pulses, the staple foods in all the households of Devi Street, they had rice, vegetables, fruit, fish, meat, and even milk and yoghurt. While there was not much difference in the variety of foods consumed, however, there were considerable differences in their quantity, quality, and frequency of consumption. Fish and meat - which, to the extent that one can afford them, are consumed by the great majority of low-caste residents as well as by some high-caste residents - were ser

Table 10. Expenditures in two households, May, 1976.

Item	Ram Lal		Param Lal	
	Rs	% of Income	Rs	% of Income
1. Food and Fuel	355.50	29.6	219.25	62.6
2. Rent	-	-	12.00	3.4
3. Clothing	-	-	6.00	1.7
4. Tobacco, Betel, Tea-shop, etc	56.81	4.7	14.60	4.2
5. Women's and children's personal expenses	61.20	5.2	13.95	4.0
6. Liquor	62.60	5.2	-	-
7. Medical expenses	26.00	2.2	-	-
8. Miscellaneous	40.83	3.4	17.55	5.0
9. Savings	598.00	49.8	78.68	22.5
	1200.74	100.0	350.00	100.0

ved only four times in Param Lal's household, and the total expenditure on them was only Rs. 12.25, whereas in Ram Lal's household they were served six times at a total cost of Rs. 44. Since the price of one kilo of meat was ten rupies or thereabouts, and the corresponding price for fish seven to eight rupies, one understands that very little of these luxuries was served to the members of Param Lal's household. In the case of milk, another costly item, the difference was similar, although here it is to some extent accounted for by the fact that Param Lal's children are older than those of Ram Lal's household. Among adults and older children milk is normally only used as an ingredient in tea. Yet even if Param Lal's children had been smaller they would not have been given milk very often. In households like Param Lal's the children get milk to drink only when they look weak or ill, and then only in small quantities.

The members of Ram Lal's household bought no clothes during this month, and in Param Lal's household the sum spent on clothing was only Rs. 6. What their annual expenditures on clothes would amount to I cannot say. Yet in matters of dress the habits of both the households are for the most part very simple. The women wear *sari*, blouse, and headcloth of inexpensive country varieties. Ram Lal and Param Lal, like other manual workers of their generation, wear *kurta* and *pajama* or *kurta* and *dhoti*. Moolchand, Ramesh, and Anand Ram frequently wear this dress in the

neighborhood, but in other settings they usually appear in shirt and trousers, which is the standard wear at work and on formal occasions among white-collar workers, students, and other men of a supposedly modern outlook. Moolchand's outfit is of a most ordinary kind, but Ramesh and Anand Ram, who like most students have a taste for fashion, dress more extravagantly as well as a bit more expensively. Their seniors do not object. They believe that a good appearance will make the boys more attractive on the matrimonial market, and they also consider it important that they make a good impression on their teachers and schoolmates. As Moolchand knows from personal experience, to be a low-caste student in a school where the majority of the boys, as well as the majority of the teachers, are of high caste is not always easy, especially not if one looks poor and backward.

The difference in expenditure between the two households were of much the same kind under the rest of the headings as under food and fuel, except for the fact that Param Lal and his father, who are teetotalers, did not buy any liquor. Like Ram Lal and Moolchand, Param Lal and his father spent a little more than four percent of the family income on tobacco, betel, and tea, but as Param Lal's income was so much smaller than theirs, they spent much less in terms of rupies and paisas. Param Lal managed to buy himself a cup of tea and a piece of chewing tobacco at the factory every day, and sometimes he could also afford himself the same luxury in the neighborhood. But he was rarely in a position to entertain his friends in the manner of Ram Lal and Moolchand. Nor could he be as generous towards his children as they were. Percentagewise he gave his children just as much as they gave theirs, but the sums involved were again significantly smaller, although not perhaps in the case of Anand Ram, the future provider of the household, whom Param Lal tries to support as much as he can. Not only is Anand Ram the one who shall take care of Param Lal and his wife in their old age; Param Lal probably also hopes that he will be able to make a financial contribution to the marriage of his younger sisters. By himself he will hardly be able to provide them with educated husbands of good financial prospects. While Ram Lal and Moolchand saved nearly six hundred rupies in this particular month, almost twice Param Lal's monthly income, the latter's savings amounted to no more than Rs. 78. To save substantially more he would have to bring his family to the brink of starvation.

I will spare the reader further tables of patterns of household ex-

penses. It must be understood, however, that these two households do not represent the extremes of the continuum. Ram Lal's household stands rather close to the top, but that of Param Lal is a fairly average one. In Devi Street there are households of the same size as Param Lal's who have a monthly income of less than Rs. 250. In these households, as in other very poor households, the meals normally consist of very little but *roti* and *dal*, and the other kinds of expenditures are similarly reduced. There are people for whom even a cup of tea at one of the local teashops is a rare luxury. Some of these people are continually indebted to neighbors and moneylenders, usually at very high rates of interest. Others are too poor even to borrow. The local moneylenders, several of whom are shopkeepers, usually require a collateral of some kind, which many of the poorest do not have. Neighbors can be more generous, especially to old people who have nobody to look after them, but only within the narrow limits set by their own poverty.

Distinctions of education and life style

As a newcomer to Devi Street one's first impression is one of great homogeneity. After a while one becomes aware of the fact that despite the general poverty there are considerable differences in material living standards. Nonetheless, it takes some time before one is able to appreciate the magnitude of these differences. The residents of the neighborhood usually dress in a simple, unobtrusive manner, and from their public appearances one cannot always draw any definite conclusions as to their economic circumstances. One cannot fail to distinguish the poorest amongst them, for the conditions of these people are visibly expressed in their undernourished and haggard looks. Yet the very poorest, the 'poorer-than-the poor,' the *garib-se-garib*, have a tendency to become invisible. Many of them work from early morning to late evening, and when they do not work they often withdraw into the privacy of their apartments, too tired, too depressed, or even too ashamed of themselves to enjoy the company of their neighbors. Out in the street they tend to be spectators and listeners rather than actors and speakers, so that even if one notices them one is not likely to pay them much attention. There are some notable exceptions to this, but for the most part it holds true.

It also takes some time before one becomes aware of the considerable differences of life style and cultural preference, which relate to a variety of factors, one of which is caste. In traditional popular consciousness

the main polarities of the caste system are those associated with the four *varnas*, the Brahmins, the Kshatriyas, the Vaishyas, and the Shudras. Conceptually, this quartet represents not only four different social functions, but, more broadly, four different modes of life and conduct, the austere one of ritual and learning, the less ritualistic one of honor and dominance, the puritan one of industriously amassing wealth, and the not fully civilized one of mere physical labor. The category of Untouchables can be seen either as a subdivision within the ranks of the Shudras or as an additional category of its own. In either case it is negatively defined in opposition to the three dominant *varnas*. Apart from the fact that they are ritually impure, the Untouchables are culturally defined as the people who lack the virtues of knowledge, courage, and industry and who have no sense of an orderly, cultured life. They are the people who indulge in all kinds of vices, who are as lacking in self-control as they are lacking in control over others.

But this model can certainly not be taken as an accurate representation of the patterns of cultural differentiation among the residents of Devi Street. Not only are many of the high-caste residents of the street leading a life very remote from the stereotypical life styles of their respective *varnas*, the low-caste residents do not fit the model either. Economically exploited, barred from access to literacy and knowledge, and largely excluded from sociable interaction with their superiors, low-caste people have indeed retained or developed a mode of life which in some respects is markedly different from that of the higher castes, especially that of the Brahmins and the Vaishyas. As the low-caste residents of Devi Street explain, their traditional concept of the good life is one that stresses the immediate pleasures of the here and now, especially such hot, sensuous things as food, drugs, alcohol, sex, and gambling. This taste for sensuous pleasure, one elderly Ahirwar pointed out, is even shared by many of their deities, who will not be satisfied unless they are given offerings of meat and liquor. The gods worshipped by Brahmins and other high-caste people, on the other hand, prefer fruits and flowers. No wonder, he jokingly said, that such people do not know how to eat and how to drink.

While this traditional orientation to life has by no means disappeared, there has been much change in recent decades. Even among the Ahirwars taken separately there is now a whole spectrum of life styles and cultural preferences, reflecting different levels of education and different modes of participation in the wider society. Among the women formal

education is a recent phenomenon. In the age-groups above thirty in our sample there are only four women who have had any formal education, and none of these four have passed beyond the primary level. Among the women below thirty, by contrast, several have completed one or several standards of secondary and higher secondary school, and there is even one young woman, the daughter of a communist millworker, who has a college degree, which is quite unique as the Ahirwars of Kanpur are concerned. In the future the level of female education is likely to continue to rise, although perhaps not across the board. The reason for this is not so much that education is regarded as valuable in itself, but rather that an educated girl can make a better match than a girl without education. Among young men of higher education educated girls are in great demand. It is commonly believed that an educated girl will make a better mother than an uneducated girl, and even more important is that an educated man needs an educated wife if he is going to interact on close terms with his high-caste peers. As every student knows, a wife without education can be terribly embarrassing and a real obstacle to one's social prospects and occupational career. Stories about educated men of Scheduled Caste divorcing or abandoning their uneducated wives for such reasons are frequently told. They are told with much disapproval, no doubt, but for an educated youth of marriageable age their moral is not merely that one should not abandon his wife.

Among the men formal education is not such a novelty. As shown in table 11, even among the men above forty in the sample the majority have

Table 11. Levels of formal education.

Age	0	1-3	4-6	7-9	10-12	Univ. Degree	Total
11-15	16	4	8	10	1	-	39
16-20	8	2	4	11	8	-	33
21-30	2	1	6	14	6	4	33
31-40	6	1	5	14	2	3	31
41-	17	15	16	6	-	-	54
All	49	23	39	55	17	7	190

had some formal education, and a few have even completed higher secondary school. It is only more recently, however, that some of them have passed on to the intermediary level and university. In the table, which only covers persons permanently residing in Devi Street, there are seven men

with university degrees, four of whom are sons of the wealthy Hira Lal. Had I also included men who have broken away from their parental households, setting up new households elsewhere, there would have been another three or four with such degrees, all in the same age groups.

What should also be noticed is that while from the most senior of the age-groups down to the men between twenty-one and thirty the proportion of those who have had no formal education or only primary education is steadily decreasing, it increases again among the youths between eleven and twenty. How this trend should be explained I am not certain, but economic factors would seem to be involved. Admittedly, there is no perfect correlation between family income and education: there are boys from extremely poor households who go to school, and there are boys from more prosperous households who do not. Yet most of the boys who drop out of school at an early age or do not go to school at all belong to poor households. More specifically they seem for the most part to be the sons of bristleworkers and other workers in small-scale sector occupations. The conditions of such workers are frequently marked by much insecurity and irregularity, not least those of the bristleworkers whose market situation seems to have deteriorated in recent years, and apparently it is also among these workers that drinking and drug abuse are most common. While the fixed routines of millworkers and other workers in regular employment tend to counteract such habits, the conditions of bristleworkers and some other small-scale sector workers, would rather seem to encourage them: on a good day one drinks to celebrate, on a bad day to soothe one's nerves. And there is also a difference of social ambience and cultural exposure. While millworkers and other workers in large-scale factories interact with people of different caste and religion in a fairly continuous manner, many of the workers in the small-sector are either incapsulated among people of their own kind or interact with others only in a rather superficial manner. They are still exposed to influences from the surrounding society, no doubt, but not as intensively as the others.

This serves also to make the general point that occupational involvement is a source of cultural or subcultural variation independent of education. One sees this clearly at the top of the educational ladder, where those who seem to be most anxious to conform to dominant high-caste, lower middle-class standards of dress, language, food habits, household management, religious worship and so forth, are persons who interact closely with high-caste, middle-class people at work. Our friend Moolchand, on the

other hand, who is highly educated but still only a manual worker, has a much more relaxed attitude. He is certainly rather different from some of his less educated neighbors in terms of knowledge, but in his personal habits he is not so far removed from the rank and file of the caste. Discussing the problems of the Scheduled Castes he stresses the importance of education and is also well aware of the need for moderation in the use of intoxicants. Yet he does not recommend a wholesale adoption of high-caste culture. He believes, among other things, that the Scheduled Caste practices of divorce and widow remarriage, which are looked down upon by high-caste Hindus of a traditional outlook, are humane and should be preserved.

For a similar contrast at a lower level of the educational ladder we may compare the Banaudha Kori Param Lal with a rather successful Ahirwar clothvender, bristle entrepreneur, and occasional moneylender called Pyare Lal. Neither of the two have had much formal education. Param Lal, now in his forties, went to school for only a year, but he is able to read and write and I often saw him engrossed in a Hindi daily available at one of the local teashops. He was in fact one of the few who regularly consulted that publication; even among the more educated residents of the street reading is not very common. One of the local betel vendors keeps a small library of cheap novels, which he lends at the rate of Rs. 0.20 per day and book, but his customers are few. Param Lal is certainly not one of them, for while he enjoys reading, he is not interested in mere fiction. He is an intellectual, self-improving man, whose passion is politics. Back in the 1950's he was an active member of the local communist group. Now he does not engage in political activity outside his factory, and is connected with the party only by his trade union membership. He likes political discussions, however, and although his knowledge is fairly limited he is not without opinions on Indian and international affairs. In the big dispute of international communism he sides with China, a country which despite its poverty gives foreign aid to sixteen countries and expects nothing but friendship in return. The Soviet Union he holds in low esteem, largely because of its nefarious influence on Indian communism. It was the Russians who persuaded the Indian communists to betray their country in 1942, and it is the Russians who now make some of them betray the Indian working class by supporting the ruling Congress. The latter he regards as a party dominated by capitalists and landowners. He is particularly critical of the INTUC, the Congress federation of trade unions, the Kanpur branch of which has always been more sympathetic to the millowners than to the workers. Yet he

is not very happy about the local communists either. Their leaders may not be as corrupt as the others, he says, but they are certainly not always as morally upright as they claim to be. Like all politicians they tend to place their own interests before those of their followers.

While he may be critical of the communists, Param Lal is heavily indebted to them. It is largely by participating in the communist movement that he has become the person he now is. The party and the trade union have been his schools and what they have given him is not merely a certain amount of knowledge of the world of politics, important as it may be, but also a set of rather puritan values which guide him in his everyday conduct as householder and worker. I am not saying that he owes these values entirely to the party. His aged father is a headman of the local Banaudhas and is known to be an upright and respectable person. Still, it is largely through his association with the communists that Param Lal has acquired his self-improving, in certain respects almost middle-class, attitude towards life.

Pyare Lal, who is Param Lal's junior by several years, is a different kind of man. He spent four years in school and has an elementary knowledge of reading and writing. If he has any use of these skills today, however, it is for the purpose of improving his business rather than his mind. He is not uninterested in politics, but his politics is not the politics of nations, parties, or classes, of which he is largely ignorant. It is rather the local politics of the street and the peer group, a never-ending battle for personal pre-eminence and reputation. Here he has had some success, although persons like Param Lal do not think very highly of him. They criticize him for his drinking habits, his bad language, and his lack of social and political commitment. Some of them would even regard him as the kind of person whom one should hold up as a warning example to one's children. Yet there are also those who find him attractive, who do not object to his life style and attitudes, but rather envy him for his good life. He is just the kind of man that they would want to be: a tough, clever, and easy-going fellow, who knows the laws of the urban jungle, being frightened neither of police officers nor of ruffians.

Pyare Lal set out on his career as a businessman when he became a bristle *tekedar* in partnership with his elder brother. He is still involved in that business but in recent years he has also started an enterprise of his own, selling "third medium quality" cut-pieces for trousers and shirts in the temporary markets in and around the city. In this business, which is largely based on fraud, he engages the services of one or several of his local

friends. Their job is not to act as regular salesmen, but as impartial bystanders or co-customers. In these roles they make the innocent customer believe that he is being offered a very favorable bargain, while in reality the price may be exorbitant. When the customer, usually a poor, illiterate person, understands that he has been cheated, which may not happen until he comes to the tailor or washes his new clothes for the first time, Pyare Lal and his friends have often disappeared. If they are still around, they will return the money and let the customer keep the merchandise. The police is rarely a problem. If the local constables are aware of what is going on, one simply offers them a share of the profits.

Pyare Lal is by no means ashamed of his fraudulent business practices. Not only are there many hawkers who do the same thing, he says, the big merchants and capitalists of the city engage in practices which are much more reprehensible. A certain amount of fraud is part of every commercial undertaking. There is no reason why he, Pyare Lal, should not be regarded as a businessman among others. While this may be true, there is another way in which Pyare Lal does not really fit the local stereotype of a businessman. As usually portrayed, a businessman is not only a person who makes two rupies out of one, he is also a person who is extremely reluctant to part with his rupies. He prefers to hoard them or invest them in new ventures. To some extent this is also Pyare Lal's philosophy. Without it he would not have reached his present position. Yet he obviously does not regard accumulation of wealth as an end in itself. It is rather a means to the enjoyment of the good life. Indeed, even as a consumer he does not seem very ambitious, for despite his reputation as a man with money in his pockets, his general standard of living does not appear to be very high. It may be true that he eats well and drinks a lot, but for the rest he does not seem to differ much from his neighbors. Thus he is not just a businessman, but a businessman of a special breed, a kind of working-class entrepreneur still rooted in the traditionally dominant values of his caste and class.

In this Pyare Lal differs sharply from Hira Lal, the cotton-waste trader, a person whose wealth remains a perplexing mystery to most of his neighbors - the most common explanation being simply that Hira Lal's late father Bhagwan Din, who started the business back in the 1920's, had the good fortune of finding a big treasure of gold in the ground when he built his house in Devi Street. This explanation is perhaps not entirely wrong, for there was indeed an element of luck involved. According to Hira Lal himself, it was crucially important that Bhagwan Din got the support of a British

weaving superintendent in the mill where he had previously been employed as a weaver and that he also had the good fortune of finding a Rajasthani merchant who was willing to enter into a partnership with him, a partnership which has now been broken. Beyond this, however, one must also take into account the singlemindedness and extreme frugality of both father and son. Even today Hira Lal has retained the simple habits of his youth. He is withdrawn, pious, and modest in consumption. He lives well, no doubt, but is a strict vegetarian and would not even think of drinking or smoking. Now and then he goes on pilgrimage with members of his household to holy places like Benares, Allahabad, Hardwar, or Badrinath. Like other Hindu businessmen, he reckons that his wealth is a divine blessing. The British weaving superintendent and the Rajasthani merchant were both important, but only because God so desired.

What is interesting to notice is that while Hira Lal himself conforms very closely to the conventional image of a Hindu businessman, he has not been able to keep some of the attitudes and values represented by Pyare Lal out of his household. As already mentioned, he has four adult sons, all B.A.'s and M.A.'s. The one who is most like his father is the second eldest, Kishore Lal, a man of thirty-five who has been groomed to take over the cotton-waste business. Kishore Lal does not wear the traditional costume of his father, but he resembles him closely in habits and outlook. The oldest of the four, Moti Lal, who is in his late thirties, is also a bit like Hira Lal, especially in so far as religion and personal habits are concerned, but he lacks his business acumen. For a while he was planning to become a shopkeeper selling general merchandise. The shop itself had in fact been built on the ground floor of the house where the family resides, and there was even some merchandise on the shelves. As he rapidly realized, however, shopkeeping was not his line of business, especially as he would have to compete with two nearby Sindhi shopkeepers. Now he helps his father and younger brother with the cotton-waste business.

The two remaining adult sons, Gopi Charan and Prem Chand, are different kinds of persons. The former, aged thirty-one, is employed as a checker in a government factory; the latter, aged twenty-six, runs the family's hosiery workshop. Both have a record of social work, and both are also highly sociable persons who like to enjoy life in the manner of their common friend Moolchand. Both keep their drinking habits within bounds, but there are educated persons within the caste who say that they spend far too much time on the street corner; had they resided among dif-

ferent kinds of people in a different kind of neighborhood they would surely have had a different attitude towards life. There is probably some truth in this. As already suggested, the men who are most anxious to conform to the dominant high-caste, lower middle-class culture would generally seem to be white-collar workers who associate closely with high-caste colleagues at work and also have high-caste friends with whom they interact outside work. The pressure for conformity would seem to be at its maximum among government servants posted in distant cities away from home, where they are not only working among high-caste people but also have high-caste people as neighbors. Such men may seek each other out and gather in their own Scheduled Caste cliques, but even so they will normally try to adjust to the ways of their workmates and neighbors. The situation of Gopi Charan and Prem Chand, however, is different. Both are economically secure, which means that they need not worry about their careers. Nor need they worry about the opinions of their high-caste peers. Prem Chand's company consists almost exclusively of local low-caste men and Muslims. Gopi Charan interacts with high-caste colleagues at work, but belonging to a wealthy family he does not seem to have as much status anxiety as some of his caste-fellows. Moreover (and this is an important point), not all high-caste people are as puritan in life style as I may inadvertently have suggested. If food and drinking habits were all that mattered, Gopi Charan could easily satisfy his need for companions among the higher castes.

Political divisions

As mentioned in the first chapter, Koriyana has been known as something of a communist stronghold. This, I am told, is largely due to the efforts of one person, a Brahman partyworker from a nearby neighborhood called B. K. Shukla, who started to build up a local branch of the party in the early 1950's. Even before that some of the local people may have been sympathetic to the communists. This was certainly the case with some of the Ahirwars, who had known them as militant tradeunion leaders since the 1930's, when they first entered field of tradeunion politics. At a very early date there were in fact a few Ahirwars who were registered party members, although none of them resided in Koriyana. For the Ahirwars of Koriyana, however, as for the other residents of the neighborhood, communism was apparently a rather remote concept in those days, as indeed it is for many of them even today.

Comrade Shukla devoted almost ten years of his life to the task of in-

roducing communism in Koriyana. Visiting the neighborhood in an informal manner several times a week, and from time to time arranging educational programs where such prominent party leaders as Maulana Yusuf, Ram Asrey, and Sultan Niazi appeared as lecturers, he gradually built up a following consisting of local low-caste workers and Muslim workers from the adjacent neighborhood. According to Param Lal Banaudha, who in spite of his poor education was the secretary of the local party branch for a while, the peak of activity occurred in the late 1950's and early 1960's, when there were about seventy-five registered members (about twenty of whom were Muslims), and a large fringe of non-registered sympathizers and supporters. Thereafter came the China War and the related split of the party, both of which were serious setbacks of lasting effect. In Kanpur as elsewhere, the communists were made scapegoats for the national defeat. Ever since 1942, when they broke the nationalist front by deciding to support the British war effort, the communists had been known as "The Traitors of 1942," *sanbyalis ke gaddar*, and now, it was commonly said, they were again betraying their country. Some leading communists such as Maulana Yusuf and Ram Asrey were temporarily put behind bars for their alleged pro-Chinese activities (S.M. Pandey 1970), and in Koriyana there was a similar reaction as some persons, including our friend Moolchand, the son of Ram Lal, organized demonstrations against their communist neighbors and even threatened to attack them physically. As a result some of the members of the local party branch defected, and shortly thereafter, when the party split into two, the remaining ones were divided between the CPI and the CPI(M). As a further blow, Comrade Shukla turned to new fields of activity. He did not sever his ties with the neighborhood altogether, but he became much less active than before.

Even before these events occurred, however, the communists were a minority group within the neighborhood. Many people were more or less indifferent to politics, and there were also those who favored other parties, especially the Congress, to which many Scheduled Caste people are attracted for the simple reason that it is the most powerful. None of these parties had a local party apparatus like that of the communists; nor had they ever tried to build one. Yet in the first elections to the Municipal Corporation in 1959, where Koriyana was part of a so-called double-member constituency also covering a couple of the adjacent Muslim neighborhoods and a smaller section of the adjacent high-caste area, both the contested seats went to the Congress candidates, one of whom was a Muslim, the other an

Ahirwar. The Ahirwar, a local man called Har Narain, defeated his communist competitor, a Banaudha Kori called Duli Chand, by several hundred votes. As he now explains it, his victory was due partly to the prestige of his party, partly to his own record as a trade-union worker and social worker. For five years he had been a joint secretary of one of the Congress unions in the city, and for many years he had also been actively engaged in the uplift of his caste. People simply seemed to have confidence in his ability to help them. According to Duli Chand, however, the reason why Har Narain managed to win was largely that he had the support of one of his relatives, an Ahirwar called Baldeo Master, who was a foreman in Laxmi Rattan Cotton Mills, the factory owned by the big Congress chief Ram Ratan Gupta mentioned in chapter 2. It was on the recommendation of Baldeo Master that Har Narain had been given the place on the Congress ticket in the first place, and Baldeo Master had also helped him to gather votes, first by putting pressure on L.R.C.M. workers residing within the constituency, and then also by bringing in L.R.C.M. workers from the outside to cast the votes of persons who had left the constituency or were prevented from voting for some other reason. Yet even if this story is true - and I have heard it from several persons, including Baldeo Master's own son, who quite openly told me that the roof of his house was packed with workers the night before the elections - it can only account for a few hundred votes. Most of the votes given to Har Narain, as well as most of the votes given to the other candidates, who were at least a dozen, were surely genuine ones. The fact is that out of a total of something like seven or eight thousand votes Duli Chand got only about 1 000, as against approximately 1 500 for Har Narain and slightly less for the other Congress candidate. A large proportion of Duli Chand's votes came presumably from Koriyana, not least from Devi Street, where the communists were particularly strong. Yet even in Koriyana and Devi Street there must have been many people who voted for Har Narain or some other non-communist candidate.

In the elections that were held in 1968, shortly before the suspension of the Municipal Corporation, the communist candidates made very poor results. As shown in table 12, they were defeated by all the other official party candidates, including those of the Jana Sangh, a party with a pronounced Hindu image which has practically no support among Muslims and tends to be rather unpopular among the Scheduled Castes as well. The CPI(M) candidate, a Banaudha millworker called Bhagwan Das, who got merely 193 votes, was also defeated by most of the independents, several of

Table 12. Results of Local Municipal Elections, 1968.

Size of electorate: 13 963. Valid votes returned: 8 348. Number of candidates: 23. Number of independent candidates: 11. Number of Kori candidates: 7. Number of Ahirwar candidates: 4.

Candidate	Party	Religion/ Caste	Number of Votes	% of Votes
1. M. Rizvi	Ind.	Muslim	1 706	20.4
2. J. Kumar	Congress	HC	1 528	18.3
3. M. Husain	Congress	Muslim	1 260	15.1
4. A Mohammed	SSP	Muslim	1 253	15.0
5. A Verma	SSP	HC	1 171	14.3
6. Gopi Charan	Ind.	Ahirwar	752	9.0
7. Nathu Ram	RPI	Shakywar	719	8.6
8. P. Dixit	BKD	HC	547	6.6
9. Parash Ram	Jana Sangh	SC	497	6.0
10. M. Ali	Ind.	Muslim	488	5.8
11. Laxman Prasad	PSP	HC	472	5.7
12. Raja Ram	Ind.	Banaudha	452	5.4
13. Shyam Sundar	Jana Sangh	Ahirwar	451	5.4
14. Gaya Ram	CPI	HC	430	5.2
15. Kripa Ram	Ind.	Ahirwar	412	4.9
16. L.R. Tiwari	Ind.	HC	369	4.4
17. M. Baksh	Ind.	Muslim	351	4.2
18. R. Yaseen	Ind.	Muslim	346	4.1
19. Bhagwan Das	CPI(M)	Banaudha	193	2.3
20. Ram Din	Ind.	Ahirwar	191	2.3
21. Moti Lal	Ind.	SC	159	1.9
22. Ganga Ram	Ind.	SC	108	1.3
23. L.R. Singh	Ind.	HC	87	1.0

whom had almost no political record. Candidate no 12, the Banaudha Raja Ram, for example, who got 452 votes, defeating the CPI candidate as well as Bhagwan Das, was a young man whose chief merits were that he had a college degree and belonged to a relatively well-to-do and well-connected family. Similarly, candidate 15, the Ahirwar Kori Kripa Ram, who received 412 votes, twice many as Bhagwan Das, was a bristle entrepreneur similar in outlook and character to our friend Pyare Lal and his brother Putti Lal. As my informants in the neighborhood understood it, Kripa Ram's ambi-

tion had been merely to establish a reputation for himself as a man of importance, the general idea being that for a person who wants to be regarded as a leader, losing an election is better than not fighting an election at all.

Probably there were several reasons for this poor performance on the part of the communists. Apart from the fact that the communists had lost some of their organizational strength and may still have suffered from the attacks launched against them in connection with the China War, it was perhaps of some importance that their candidates were rather insignificant figures, lacking the personal strength and reputation that might have compensated for the somewhat tarnished reputation of their respective parties. What was even more important was that large numbers of people who would normally have supported the communists voted for one of the independents, candidate no 6, the Ahirwar Gopi Charan. Gopi Charan, whom we have already met as one of the sons of Hira Lal, the wealthy cotton-waste trader of Devi Street, represented a group of young men interested in politics and social work who a few years before had established an organization known as the Mohalla Sudhar Committee, 'The Neighborhood Improvement Committee.' The leader of this group was one of Gopi Charan's caste-fellows in Devi Street, a slightly younger man called Ram Shankar. Ram Shankar, who like several of his friends in the Committee was now a college student, had become a communist supporter at a very early age. In 1961, when he was merely twelve or thirteen, he had accompanied two of the local communist millworkers to a big CPI rally in New Delhi and during the general elections in 1962 he had been putting up posters and been doing other odd jobs for party. In setting up the Mohalla Sudhar Committee - and Ram Shankar was apparently the moving spirit right from the beginning - he clearly wanted to further his political cause, but as the name of the organization indicates he intended to do so primarily by way of social reform. In a sense, this was indeed what all politicians in Kanpur, including those of Koriyana, tried to do, for as I have said before there is no politician who does not present himself as a social worker unselfishly devoted to the poor and the needy. In the estimation of Ram Shankar, however, the social work performed by the local politicians of Koriyana was not really worth the name. One of the major purposes of the Mohalla Sudhar Committee was to make this clear to the entire neighborhood.

Furthermore, by choosing the strategy of social reform Ram Shankar presumably reckoned that he would be able to reach out to people who

were suspicious of the communists. Not even his friends in the Committee were in fact unambiguously in favor of the communists. One of the active members was our friend Moolchand, who only a few years before had wanted to drive the local communists out the neighborhood. By this time he had changed his mind, but he was still not a communist of the pure, *pakka*, variety. He had certainly a much stronger attachment to the person of Ram Shankar than to the communist party of which he was not even a member, and the same was probably true of several of the other members of Committee, including Gopi Charan. As shown by the fact that almost all of its regular members were young men residing in Devi Street, the Committee was essentially nothing but Ram Shankar's old peer group transformed into a formal organization for social reform.

The Mohalla Sudhar Committee engaged in a variety of different activities. As we shall see in the next chapter, following the slogan originally coined by the communists that "first we are people, then we are poor..." (*pahle manushya haim, uske bad garib...*) one of their main concerns was to loosen up local caste boundaries. Also very important was a campaign against the harmful practice of drinking tinctured ginger, illicitly distilled alcohol seasoned with ginger, which is common among the Ahirwars and their low-caste neighbors. Another major endeavour was that of encouraging education. In Kanpur private tuition is commonly regarded as indispensable for educational success, and for many poor schoolteachers it is a major source of extra income. In Devi Street, however, there were many parents who could not afford it. The members of the Mohalla Sudhar Committee, most of whom were students, therefore decided to give tuition free of charge. For a couple of years or more they used to assemble a group of children on the roof of one of the local buildings and help them with their school work. Furthermore, and this was perhaps where they interfered most directly with the activities of the local *neta log*, they tried to assist persons who were in trouble with the police. As I have said before, the role of the local politician tends to be that of acting as mediator between the government and the citizen. In Koriyana and other poor neighborhoods the government is most frequently synonymous with the local police. When people get arrested for quarreling or drunkenness, as not infrequently happens, the *neta log* are the persons who are most likely to be able to get them out. Often they tell their clients that a bribe is needed to get the arrested person released, which is probably true. What may not be true, however, is that all the money is meant for the police. In Koriyana it is generally believed

that some part of it goes into the *neta's* pocket. In their efforts to put end to this business of so-called *dalali*, 'brokerage,' - which not all the local politicians engage in - the members of the Committee encouraged their neighbors to come to them with their problems. Although the *neta log* remained in business, it happened on a number of occasions that the members of the Mohalla Sudhar Committee successfully managed to get arrested persons released by organizing demonstrations in front of the police station, or so at least I am told.

In the 1968 elections the Committee candidate Gopi Charan got 752 votes and defeated not only both the official communist candidates, but several other party candidates as well, including the RPI candidate, a Shakywar Kori also residing in Koriyana. Presumably most of the votes came from Devi Street, where the members of the Committee had most of their supporters. It is likely that some persons voted for Gopi Charan because he was the son of Hira Lal, although Moolchand and others deny that there were many such voters. The reason why people voted for Gopi Charan, they say, is that they respected the members of the Committee for their good work. According to Moolchand, even more people would have supported the Committee if Ram Shankar had been their candidate. Gopi Charan was a popular person, no doubt, but he was not a good speaker and did not have the stature of Ram Shankar, who was admired and respected by everyone, including the most senior politicians of the neighborhood.

But the Mohalla Sudhar Committee did not remain in operation for more than a few years. Ram Shankar soon left the neighborhood to become a fulltime party worker, and the others started to worry about their family obligations and careers. Moolchand, for example, left the city to get trained as a turner. When he came back he still regarded himself as a social worker, but his social work is now mostly confined to upbraiding unruly boys and settling disputes among his immediate neighbors. For the rest he is a family man, enjoying his leisure in the company of his old friends. Nor are there any younger men who have picked up where they left. Moolchand's younger brother Ramesh, for example, is for the moment more interested in cinema, teasing girls, and having a good time with his peers, and the same is the case with his friend Anand Ram, the son of Param Lal Banaudha. Still, there is not necessarily any great difference in outlook between these youths and such members of the Committee as Moolchand and Gopi Charan. What is now lacking is outside encouragement and leadership of the kind provided by Ram Shankar. For Moolchand and his friends the

running of the Mohalla Sudhar Committee was not much of a personal sacrifice. Not only did it earn them a good reputation, which has not yet faded, it also gave them a satisfying sense of personal efficacy. For a while they had the feeling that they were able to influence the course of historical events, if only in a very small way, and even today they speak about the years when they were actively involved in social work as the most exciting period of their life.

Honoring Devi and fighting for honor

Regardless of occupation, income, education, personal life style, or political orientation, there is one thing which all the Ahirwars of Devi Street have in common, namely their devotion to Devi, 'the goddess.' The worship of Devi occurs most prominently in the *javara* rituals of the *navratra*, the first "nine nights," of the lunar month of *chaitra* in April-May, at the beginning of the hot season. In concluding this chapter I shall describe how these rituals, which among the Koris of Kanpur are practiced only by the Ahirwars and Shakywars, were organized in Koriyana in the spring of 1976. The local *javara* rituals of this year were not only an important cultural performance, but also the occasion for a major social drama bringing to the fore some of the forces of conflicts and cohesion inherent in the social life of the neighborhood.

The main features of the *javara* rituals have been described by Lawrence Babb (1975: 132-40) in a study of popular Hinduism in Chhattisgarh, a region of Madhya Pradesh lying south of the traditional home territory of the Ahirwars. As Babb points out, these rituals are not devoted to the goddess under any particular name; she can be worshipped in the shape of Mahamaya, Durga, Shitala Mata, Kali, and others. What is important is that these are all goddesses who are associated with malevolence, disease and death. Through the *javara* rites one attempts to appease the goddess and obtain her protection.

The rituals begin on the first day of the *navratra*, when seeds of wheat, known as *javara*, are planted in a secluded altar of manure. These seeds, which are regarded as the goddess herself, are tended with ritual circum-spection, and at the end of the period, when they have grown a few inches, they are taken out in the open and carried in a procession to a village tank where they are first immersed in water and then given to the male participants, who put them behind each others' ears as a sign of friendship. The most spectacular part of the ritual is the procession, which starts after the

slaughter of a goat. First come the men, chanting and dancing to the beat of drums, and then the women with the *javara* in pots or baskets on their heads. Now and then the procession comes to halt, as persons, male or female, fall into possession, or as a man or a boy steps forward to have his cheek, lip, or tongue pierced by a sharpened iron rod. The piercing looks rather frightening, but it is carefully done by ritual experts and does not cause any bleeding. After a few days there is hardly even a mark left on the devotee's body, which is interpreted as a miraculous sign of the favor of the goddess. One submits to this ordeal in order to express one's faith in the goddess. According to the Ahirwars, there is a good chance that a person who has thus proved his trust will be protected from disease.

In most of the Ahirwar neighborhoods of Kanpur the *javara* rituals are performed in much the same way. Goats are no longer slaughtered (not as far as I know at least), and the destination of the procession is a temple or shrine rather than a tank, but otherwise there would not seem to be much difference. In Koriyana, however, the *javara* procession has in recent years been combined with a *rathyatra*, a procession of chariots carrying images of deities, mainly goddesses. This has transformed it into a much more elaborate affair, attracting Ahirwar participants and spectators from all over the city; by 1976 it had become so big that the piercing of the body with iron rods had to be dropped for practical reasons.

Even without this practice, however, the procession was an exciting spectacle. It was headed by two festively decorated elephants and a group of men dancing acrobatically with swords, spears, and burning torches. Thereafter followed in approximate order a uniformed brass band playing loud music of the kind one hears in marriage processions; a group of youths dressed as the monkey-god Hanuman and his female companions; a thick throng of men and boys dancing and singing; a handcart with two boys representing the god Shiva in the company of a holy rishi; homemade images of demons with faces hideously glowing in the light of kerosene lamps; a handcart with a boy representing the militant nationalist Chandra Shekar Azad with pistol in hand; a handcart with three boys representing doctor, nurse and profusely bleeding patient in the midst of a sterilization (the announced purpose of the scene being, strangely enough, to support family planning); a handcart with the nationalist hero Bhagat Singh under torture; a handcart with an image of Kali Devi with red tongue sticking out of her mouth and blood dripping from her fingers; a handcart with an equally fearful image of Shitala Mata, the goddess of smallpox; a handcart

with an image of the god Ganesh; a big rented so-called swan car (a car decoratively rebuilt to serve as a vehicle in ritual processions) carrying a splendid image of the goddess Santhoshi Mata (who has become enormously popular in Kanpur through a film where she benevolently protects a young married woman against her evil in-laws); a second rented swan car with an equally impressive image of the goddess Saraswati, the tutelary deity of poets and writers; a large group of women dressed in their finest saris carrying the *javara* on their heads; a huge swan car with the goddess Durga majestically seated on a throne; and another large detachment of men and boys. All along the procession went torchbearers and volunteer guards.

Responsible for the transformation of the *javara* procession into a *rath-yatra* were apparently Ram Shankar and his friends in the Mohalla Sudhar Committee. How these youths came up with the idea I do not know, but as they now explain it, they wanted not only to increase their good-will in the neighborhood, but also earn some money for other kinds of social work. Although the people of the neighborhood were sympathetic towards the activities of the Mohalla Sudhar Committee, raising money for these activities was usually difficult. To make them support the *rath-yatra* was easier, for giving money for the performance of a ritual is a major way of earning religious merit.

There is nothing remarkable in the fact that these young comrades sought the financial assistance of the goddess. They were aware of the fact that the high priests of communism regarded religion as an opium for the people, and their own view was that certain aspects of established Hinduism, especially the caste system, were reprehensible. Yet their critical attitude towards religion was not a radical, atheistic one. Gods and goddesses belonged to their life world in much the same way as they belonged to the life world of their neighbors and fellow citizens, as did indeed lesser deities and spirits of various kinds. Discussing the local attitude towards *bhuuts* and *chaureels*, malevolent ghosts causing illness, mental disorder, and even death, one of them explained that while nobody in the neighborhood believes in the existence of these dangerous creatures, there is nobody who is not terribly afraid of them either. This, I assume, was also his own attitude.

In 1976, however, the group of persons involved in the organization of the *javara* procession was more broadly based. As usual most of them came from Devi Street, but apart from some of the old guards of the Mohalla

Sudhar Committee, such as Moolchand and Gopi Charan, there were also the bristle *tekedar* and clothvender Pyare Lal, Kripa Ram, one of the candidates in the 1968 municipal elections mentioned above, and several others persons who had never taken part in the activities of the Committee. For the latter, as for the former, organizing the *javara* procession was not merely a way of expressing concern for the welfare of the community, but also and just as importantly a way of putting forward or validating claims to leadership and esteem.

As it turned out, they could not reap the fruits of their efforts. More money was collected than ever before and the procession itself was a great success. But this was not what the inhabitants of the neighborhood were talking about during the following weeks. What they discussed was a quarrel between some of the members of the organizational committee that started during the procession itself and culminated in fighting as soon as it had been dissolved. The immediate cause of the quarrel was apparently that in defiance of a previous agreement Pyare Lal, the clothvender, and his elder brother Chote Lal had put a couple of their children in one of the swan cars. When two other members of the organizational committee named Kem Chandra and Bhagwan Das (both of whom had previously belonged to the Mohalla Sudhar Committee) objected, Chote Lal responded with abuse. Later when Pyare Lal refused to apologize, they attacked him with *lat-his*, heavy bamboo sticks of which there are one or two in almost every household. In the fight, which was soon interrupted by neighbors, they were supported by a youth called Tula Ram, who had not been involved in the quarrel a couple of hours before and was also not a member of the organizational committee, but apparently bore a grudge against Pyare Lal and felt that this was a good opportunity for giving him a blow or two.

The next day everyone in the neighborhood had been informed about these events, and there was much speculation as to what would happen next. That the bruised Pyare Lal would not suffer his humiliation passively was obvious. As it transpired, he and his brother had in fact already taken action. Immediately after the fight they had contacted a local RPI *neta*, a Camar called Mathura Prasad, and with him as their advisor they had proceeded to lodge a complaint at a nearby police station. Kem Chandra, Bhagwan Das, and Tula Ram had probably expected something of the kind to happen, and to avoid arrest they had fled from the neighborhood and would not return until several days later when things had cooled down a bit. In order not to appear guilty, moreover, they also lodged a counter-

complaint at the Kotwali, the police headquarters of the city.

As it appeared to most of the people I talked to, the quarrel was essentially a personal one. It was recalled that there had been some tension within the organizational committee right from the start. Pyare Lal had been rude and overbearing in his usual manner, bragging about the fact that he was the one who had raised most of the money. Moreover, this was not the first time that Pyare Lal and Kem Chandra had been at loggerheads. There had been at least two disputes between them in the past, both concerning the payment of debts. On one occasion, Pyare Lal had allegedly encouraged one of his neighbors not to pay interest on a loan which he owed to Kem Chandra, and on a second occasion he had interfered when Kem Chandra tried to collect some money that he had won from another neighbor in gambling. On both occasions Pyare Lal and Kem Chandra had quarrelled and abused each other. Such things are never forgotten, people said. Years may pass without a harsh word being uttered, but this does not mean that the feelings of animosity have disappeared. It may seem so, but in the end they will inevitably flare up again.

Very soon, however, the dispute was raised beyond the level of mere personal animosity. To strengthen their case with the police, perhaps, and to win sympathy from their neighbors, Pyare Lal and his brother announced that they were the victims of a communist conspiracy. Kem Chandra and Bhagwan Das had not acted on their own initiative, but were merely the tools of Comrade Duli Chand, the local communist politician who fought against Har Narain in the 1959 municipal elections. In support of this allegation they pointed to the fact that Duli Chand had been a passive witness to the fight. Why had he not intervened? Surely he could easily have prevented the fighting. Duli Chand's own explanation, which he soon presented to everyone who wanted to listen, was that there was nothing that he could have done since both parties had been drunk and terribly upset. A sickly, middle-aged, man, he could hardly have used force. But this did not satisfy Pyare Lal and his brother. On their account Duli Chand had in fact even planned the assault. The reason was that he was jealous of Pyare Lal. He simply could not accept that a non-communist had played a leading role in the organization of the *javara* procession.

Among the supporters of Kem Chandra, Bhagwan Das, and Tula Ram this was rejected as ludicrous. There was indeed a political conspiracy, some of them said, but it was not a conspiracy of communists. The real crooks were the local Camars, and especially the Camar followers of the

RPI. Several persons claimed that they had heard Camars making gleeful remarks about stupid Koris. Moreover, as it soon transpired Pyare Lal and his brother had not only sought the assistance of Mathura Prasad - an extremely mischievous person in their view - they had also sought legal advice from a Camar lawyer called Kali Charan residing in an adjacent street. The latter, who was the leader of one of the local factions of the RPI, was not only a notorious anti-communist, he and his caste-fellows had been fighting with their Kori neighbors for years. By supporting Pyare Lal and his brother they would divide the Koris and at the same time harm the reputation of the communists. What could please them more?

How would the police react? Would Kem Chandra and the other two be arrested? Their supporters suspected that this might happen. Quarrels of this kind were not uncommon, and frequently the police merely warned the culprits not to quarrel again. Yet with such experts in the art of intrigue as Mathura Prasad and Kali Charan involved one could not be certain. Both were known to be well-connected at the local police station, and it was quite possible that they could make the police officers accept a bribe from Pyare Lal. After all, it often happened that the police arrested people merely in order to extort money from them. To forestall this possibility contacts were taken with a Kori police superintendent posted in a neighboring town. This man had previously been the superior of the police officer in charge of the local *thana*, and it was believed that he would be able to protect Kem Chandra and the others. Whether he did intervene on their behalf or not is impossible to say, but as it turned out the police merely warned the parties not to continue the conflict. Wisely, they did not even take action a couple of weeks later when someone informed them that Duli Chand, Kem Chandra, Kem Chandra's politically ignorant cousin Kamta Prasad, a clothvendor spending most of his time smoking *ganja*, and a local Camar communist called Gaya Ram went around the neighborhood openly criticizing the Prime Minister and her 20-point program, the sacred charter of the Emergency. The four of them were called to the *thana* for interrogation, but nothing more serious happened to them.

This was only a partial relief, however, for Pyare Lal and Chote Lal did not only try to get Kem Chandra and his accomplices arrested by the police. After a few days they decided to take the dispute to court. I do not know what the exact charges were, but that does not matter. As Pyare Lal himself explained, the reason why he had taken this step was not merely that he wanted to prove that he was right and they were wrong. More importantly

he wanted his enemies to suffer economically. Litigation can be very expensive, and neither Kem Chandra nor his friends were wealthy men. As Pyare Lal pointed out, Tula Ram did not even have a steady job, and the others were not much better off. He himself could easily raise the money. He would just have to cut down his daily household expenses by ten or fifteen rupies for a while. Since he and his family lived very well, this would not make much of a difference.

Both parties had their supporters. Yet, while most of the local Ahirwars tended to lean toward one or the other of the sides, they were not very anxious to get involved in the dispute. It was commonly said that even if one of the parties was less to blame than the other, both were basically in the wrong. If the fighting had served any purpose, it was only to give a bad name to the caste. An Ahirwar visitor from Delhi went so far as to suggest that the *javara* rituals should be abolished altogether. Unlike such festivals as Holi and Divali, he said, these rituals were not proper Hindu rituals. Why perform rituals which not only gave rise to fighting but also marked the Ahirwars as a low and backward caste? The Ahirwars should be more concerned with their reputation in the larger society.

Even some of the persons who were more directly involved in the dispute tried not to commit themselves. The brother of Tula Ram, for example, a millworker called Beni Lal, continued to chat and smoke with his neighbor Pyare Lal as usual, and when I asked him about it he simply said that he was not responsible for his brother and that the quarrel was none of his business. He had always been against fighting. Another person who tried to remain neutral was Moolchand. His sympathies were basically on the side of Kem Chandra, but as his father Ram Lal and indeed even Pyare Lal himself kept reminding him, the latter was a fairly close kinsman and should be treated as such. Yet even if he had not had any such obligation towards Pyare Lal, he would hardly have taken sides. As a social worker he wanted first of all to restore amicable relations in the neighborhood, and as a communist he had the same desire. Pyare Lal and his brother had had some success with their story about the communist conspiracy among those who were already suspicious of the party, and the dispute had become a cause of tension among the communists themselves. The person who felt most estranged from his comrades was Pyare Lal's younger brother Babu Lal, who apart from being a regular member of the CPI(M) - one of the few in the street - was also a personal friend of comrade Duli Chand, the presumed mastermind of the plot against his brother. Now he was not only com-

pelled to withdraw from Duli Chand - both his brothers insisted on that - he was no longer quite at ease with Moolchand, Gopi Charan, and his other communist friends either.

Several efforts were made to bring about a settlement of the dispute. On the day following the fight Moolchand, Gopi Charan, and a few others arranged an open meeting, the purpose of which was to gather facts and to find out whether Pyare Lal and Chote Lal were at all interested in some form of compromise - that Kem Chandra and his companions would not be adverse to a settlement was clear from the beginning. As they might have expected, however, it was much too early to talk about peace. What both Pyare Lal, who still had the beating in fresh memory, and Chote Lal wanted was revenge, not reconciliation. Moolchand and his friends should not try to make Pyare Lal forget his injuries, they said, but help them to find their absconding enemies. Anyway, what was the point of holding a meeting of reconciliation when one of the parties to the dispute was not even present?

Yet Moolchand and his friends persisted in their efforts. What seemed to be required apart from time was a mediator having the confidence of both the parties. This was also the opinion of Ram Shankar, whom Moolchand consulted a week or so after the quarrel. Normally, Ram Shankar would have been called upon much earlier, but being a fairly prominent member of the CPI(M) he had been forced into hiding when the Emergency was declared, and when the news about the quarrel reached him he was not even in Kanpur. Now he suggested that Moolchand should seek the assistance of Har Narain or some other prominent *netas*. He did not particularly admire these men, but he reckoned that they might be able to make Pyare Lal and Chote Lal accept a compromise. Even under ordinary circumstances he would not have been able to act as mediator himself. While Pyare Lal and Chote Lal had known him as a close neighbor for years and bore no grudge against him, they would presumably not trust his impartiality.

The person who eventually assumed the mediator's role, however, was another communist, namely Comrade B.K. Shukla, the man who had introduced communism in Devi Street in the 1950's. Under his guidance a first meeting was held about three weeks after the fight. Like other meetings of its kind it was a public meeting and at least seventy or eighty persons were present. Most of them were Ahirwars and most of them were from Devi Street, but there were also others, including a couple of rather prominent Kori *netas* residing elsewhere in the neighborhood. Apart from Shukla

and the chief protagonists of the dispute the principal actors were the Camar *neta* Mathura Prasad, the CPI(M) *neta* Duli Chand, and a few of the members of the *javara* committee, including Moolchand. All these persons were asked to present their views of what had happened. Kem Chandra and Bhagwan Das described how Chote Lal and Pyare Lal had insulted them; Pyare Lal described how he had been working hard for the success of the procession and then been beaten for no good reason; Mathara Prasad described how he had come to the assistance of Pyare Lal; Duli Chand described how he had been falsely implicated in the quarrel; and so forth. All of them repeated their stories as they had told them innumerable times before, and when they were finished it was already late in the evening. As much more discussion was required it was agreed that another meeting should be held a few days later.

At this second meeting Shukla played a more active role. To begin with he interrogated several of the protagonists on points that seemed to require further clarification, and then he gave his own summary view of what had happened, a view according to which all the participants in the quarrel had committed some fault or other. If he had hoped that this view would be acceptable to all the persons involved, he was mistaken. None of them was prepared to admit any guilt on their own part, especially not Pyare Lal and Chote Lal. Changing approach, Shukla then suggested that the case should be arbitrated by a jury of five, a so-called *pancayat*. This was accepted with some hesitation on both the sides, and a jury consisting of Shukla and four local men was elected. The council would assemble within a few days and then deliver a sentence. As someone suggested when Pyare Lal and Chote Lal had already left, however, they would not gather until both the parties had signed a written declaration that they would abide by whatever settlement the five found reasonable.

In the next few days there was a great deal of speculation about the impending settlement. Kem Chandra and his friends were extremely worried that the sentence would go against them. They feared that they would have to pay damages to Pyare Lal and reimburse him for the expenses he had incurred in taking the dispute to court, neither of which would be fair in their estimation. Discussing the personal characteristics and known loyalties of the five members of the council they came to the conclusion that only one of them could be relied upon to advocate their own case, and that this person was not Shukla. The latter they regarded with much suspicion. He seemed to be rather too friendly with Babu Lal, Pyare Lal's younger

brother, and it was also remembered that he and Ram Shankar had not always stood on the same side in the factional disputes within the party.

Whether their fears were well-founded or not they were never to know. As it happened Pyare Lal and Chote Lal were just as suspicious of the council as their opponents, and when they were eventually asked to commit themselves in writing, they changed their mind and decided not to let the five pass judgement on their conduct. When Shukla was informed of this he decided to withdraw from the case. As he told me later, the reason why he had accepted to mediate in the first place was that he wanted to restore the good relations between Babu Lal, Pyare Lal's younger brother, and Duli Chand, his friend and comrade. He had also been concerned with the survival of communism among the Ahirwars. Devi Street is gradually turning yellow (i.e. Congress), he said. The workers follow us in the mills, but when they return to their neighborhoods they come under the influence of reactionary *netas*. You may think that these leaders are ignorant and backward, but if you take a closer look at them you will see that they are extremely skilled in manipulating people. They were born anti-communists and their profession is to exploit petty quarrels for their own selfish ends. Pyare Lal and Chote Lal are merely the pawns of their game. The *netas* make them feel important while they empty their pockets and confuse their minds. From beginning to end the dispute is their creation, concluded Shukla.

Among the former members of the Mohalla Sudhar Committee the decision of Pyare Lal and his brother not to sign the declaration caused no surprise. This is what one would have expected, they said. In cases like this one can only wait for the heat to disappear. The animosity will always remain and quite possibly there will be another quarrel in the future, but until then the rest of us will at least have some peace of mind.

And the situation had in fact already cooled down. Not only had most of the inhabitants of the street started to talk about other things, the protagonists themselves seemed to have accepted status quo. Pyare Lal had not withdrawn his case from the court, but he knew that the court works slowly and that nothing would come out of it in the near future. In the meantime he had to accept the fact that Kem Chandra, Bhagwan Das, and Tula Ram walked about in the street as if nothing had ever happened. He could avoid speaking to them, but he could not have them banished from the neighborhood.

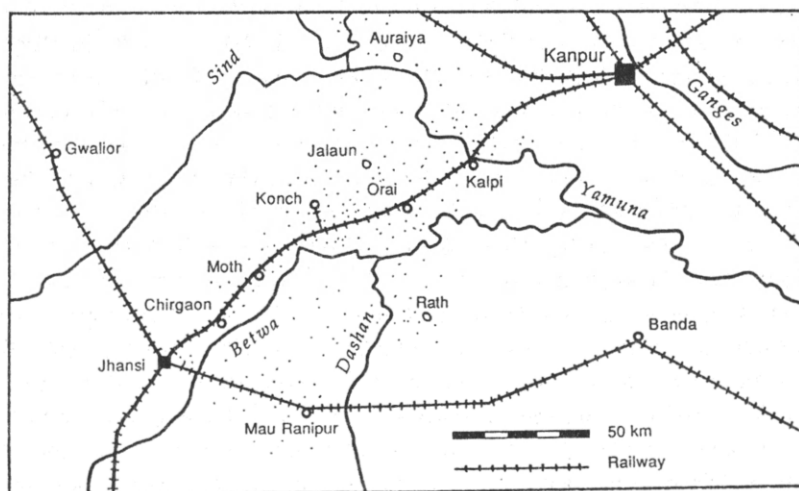
Ahirwars and Parjats

The word *parjat* that figures in the heading of this chapter is a compound of the word *par*, which means 'beyond', 'on the other side' and the like, and the word *jat* or *jati*, which is the common word for caste and subcaste but can also refer to other groupings of a presumptively separate, self-reproducing kind, including humanity as a whole or some other species of living beings (cf. Bêteille 1964). The Ahirwars use the word *parjat* when they speak about other Koris as well as when they speak about non-Koris. In this chapter, however, I shall mainly discuss the relations between Ahirwars and non-Koris - how the Ahirwars relate to other Koris will be more extensively dealt with later on. The analytical issue is primarily that of the importance of caste as a principle of closure in the area of friendship and sociable interaction: To what extent are the Ahirwars of Devi Street and their caste-fellows elsewhere subject to discrimination by members of other castes, and to what extent do they themselves use caste as a principle of discrimination in their dealings with others? To begin with I shall briefly describe some recent changes in the internal organization of the subcaste, changes which have profoundly affected the ways in which the Ahirwars relate to the surrounding society. Thereafter I describe the present patterns of intercaste interaction, first in Devi Street and then outside the neighborhood. Towards the end there is a discussion about the way the Ahirwars look at the caste system and their own situation within it.

The disintegration of the old order

Sociologists sometimes describe the subcaste as the solid atom of the caste system, in contrast to the caste which is taken to be a mere cluster of subcastes. Yet the Ahirwars have always been too widely dispersed to form anything like a cohesive, organized group. Again, the home territory of the Ahirwars is a large area extending from the southern part of Kanpur district westwards into Etawah district and southwards into Jalaun, Jhansi, Hamirpur, and the adjacent districts of Madhya Pradesh. Those who have settled in Kanpur come predominantly from a smaller section of that area, stretching from Auraiya in the north to Moth in the west, Mau Ranipur in the south and Rath in the east (see map 3). Ahirwars from other parts of the wider subcaste region have more frequently migrated to other cities. The Ahirwars of Jhansi, for example, have settled in large numbers in Gwalior, Indore, and Bombay.

Map 3. Home Territory of the Ahirwars of Kanpur.



Even within this restricted portion of their home region the Ahirwars have never formed a single corporate unit in the organizational sense of the term. Not only is this area also large; in the past, and to some extent even today, there was a social boundary dividing the Ahirwars residing in the area around Konch and Orai in Jalaun district from their caste-fellows in

the area enclosed by the two rivers Betwa and Dashan further south. The two groups, known as the Caurasis, 'the Eighty-Fours,' and the Nadiyaparis, 'Those across the river,' respectively, seem to have been indirectly related to one another by way of the Ahirwars of Jhansi city, but there were no direct matrimonial relations between them. One important reason why the Caurasis refused to have such relations with the Nadiyaparis was apparently that the latter lived in great poverty and periodically even resorted to begging. It was known among the Caurasis that begging was not a legitimate way of earning a living amongst the Nadiyaparis, but even if those who engaged in this disreputable occupation did so secretly in distant centers of pilgrimage, like Hardwar and Benares, as was apparently the case, it was bad enough. The Nadiyaparis, on the other hand, regarded the Caurasis as alien in culture and religious practice. Most important, it is now said, was the fact the Caurasis worshipped a fearful deity or demon known as Rakash, into whose orbit of power the Nadiyaparis were reluctant to enter. My Nadiyapari informants have nothing much to say about Rakash, except that he was greatly feared, but this is perhaps what I should have expected, as even their forefathers may not have known much about him. Some Nadiyaparis may have resided in Caurasi territory and vice versa, but otherwise the interaction between the two groups was probably confined to fleeting encounters in the markets of Moth, Konch, and Rath.

Whether these accounts really explain the cleavage between the Caurasis and the Nadiyaparis or not is a question that we may leave aside. What should be noticed here is merely that there was such a cleavage and that it was perpetuated in Kanpur. Exactly when the Ahirwars started to migrate to Kanpur nobody remembers, but by the turn of the century there was apparently a fairly sizeable community in the city. The members of this community consisted of Caurasis, and people directly connected with the Caurasis by relations of kinship and marriage. The Nadiyaparis did not come to the city until the 1920's, and when they arrived they did not merge with the Caurasis but formed a separate community of their own. Members of the two groups got to know each other as workmates in the mills and in some places even as neighbors, but this did not immediately erase the boundary between them. On the contrary, the initial reaction was apparently one of further estrangement, especially among the Nadiyaparis, who with dismay discovered that some of the Caurasis had taken to bristle work, an occupation which the Nadiyaparis regarded as unclean

and degrading.

Both the Caurasis and the Nadiyaparis had a system of headmen and councils, so-called *pancayats*, the main purposes of which were to maintain orderly relations within the group and supervise the conduct of the members in matters relevant to their corporate ritual status (cf. O'Malley 1974, Blunt 1932, Mayer 1960). Among the Caurasis, with whom we will be primarily concerned in the following pages, the base of the system consisted of groupings known as *farshe*, 'carpets,' or *shafre*, a simple transformation of the same word. These groupings, each of which was composed of a number of neighboring households and many of which did in fact possess a big carpet to be used at formal gatherings, were units of ritual cooperation and social control similar to the *thoks* among the Jatavs of Agra described by Owen Lynch (1974: 182-88). On a higher level, the *farshe* combined into neighborhood councils, and these again came together in a council known as the Brigadi Pancayat (i.e. the 'Brigade Council'), embracing all the Caurasis of Kanpur. At the apex of the system stood the Caurasi Pancayat, the supreme council of all the Caurasis, which used to assemble at a Devi temple in the village of Ait, near Konch in Jalaun District, in connection with an annual peasant fair. I believe that it was from the name of this council, incidentally, that the Caurasis derived their name. Together with 7 and 360, 84 belongs to a cosmological series of numbers widely used in traditional Hindu society to designate totalities of different degrees of inclusiveness. According to various traditions there are 84 major places of Hindu pilgrimage, 84 main yogic postures, 84 places of punishment in hell, 8 400 000 different species of animals in the world, and so forth (Elliot 1869, Vol 2: 47-78). The Caurasi Pancayat, by the same token, may simply have been the most inclusive of the councils among the Caurasis, and the Caurasis themselves merely the people subject the ultimate authority of this council.

Every *pancayat* had a permanent headman, a so-called *mahate*, and usually there was also a subordinate functionary known as the *chaharidar*, whose job was to announce the impending meetings of the council and collect fines meted out at previous meetings. The *mahate* was the *sarpanc* of the *pancayat*, i.e. the head of the five so-called *pances*, who form the presiding committee or jury of a *pancayat*, and, in the literal sense of the word, indeed are the *pancayat*, 'the assembly of five.' In higher-level councils, notably the Caurasi Pancayat and the Brigadi Pancayat, all the members of the committee would normally have been headmen, but apparently only one of them, the headman of that particular council - in the case of the Brigadi

Pancayat the so-called *sola-anne mahate*, the 'Sixteen-Annas Headman' (i.e. the headman of the whole rupie) - was a permanent official. The others were headmen of lower-level councils, appointed on the strength of their personal reputation and influence. At lower levels, other leading members of the group could also appear on the committee. Whatever the composition of the committee, its members were regarded as equal for the purpose of decision-making.

Superficially, the hierarchy of councils may have had some resemblance to a hierarchy of modern courts. Unlike the higher courts of a modern judicial system, however, higher-level councils were not essentially tribunals of appeal. Their primary function was rather to deal with issues that directly involved a wider group, and therefore could not be handled effectively by a lower-level council. A dispute involving people from several local caste groups would have been such an issue, as would a proposal to change or modify a rule of conduct applying throughout the community. Furthermore, the position of the presiding committee was rather different from that of the judge and the jury within a system of modern courts. As Marc Galanter (1963, 1972) and others have noted, the British colonial government recognized the right of properly established caste authorities to take disciplinary action against caste members in matters not pertaining to civil and criminal law, but unlike traditional Hindu rulers (O'Malley 1974), it did not use its coercive apparatus to uphold or enforce such action. The ultimate sanction existing within the system of *pancayats* was a form of social boycott known as *hukka-pani bandh*, 'pipe-water boycott.' A person condemned to *hukka-pani bandh* was not only excluded from formal gatherings within the group, such as wedding and funerals, but was also cut off from normal, everyday interaction with his castemates. In serious cases the ban would extend to the members of his household, making it impossible for his children to get married, among other things. Normally, such a boycott was a punishment of limited duration, revocable on the payment of a fine or the giving of a feast to the *pancayat*, but it could also be made permanent, in which case it was equivalent to excommunication.

Powerful as it was, *hukka-pani bandh* was not a punishment that the *pances* could inflict at their own discretion. They could always pronounce the sentence, but without the backing of the community it would remain void and empty. The task of the presiding committee could therefore not be that of mechanically applying a transcendent body of law or custom, but was rather to construct viable compromises and formulate sentences con-

sistent with prevailing sentiments and interests. As every experienced headman knew, the limits of the effectiveness of the council were the limits of effective consensus within the larger group. The latter were not always immutable and a skilled headman might sometimes be able to construct a working consensus where none seemed to be possible, but even so the existing structure of interests and loyalties severely circumscribed his authority. The wise headman was indeed often the one who refrained from taking any action at all.

Today the system of *pancayats* has all but disappeared. In the countryside there are still some remnants of it, although the Caurasi Pancayat has not assembled since the late 1950's. In Kanpur councils are occasionally held to deal with a particular issue, usually a dispute between in-laws or neighbors. But there are no permanent councils of the kind that existed in the past and there are no headmen. The *farshe* had been dissolved by the middle of the 1950's and the Brigadi Pancayat much earlier. I was told that in one neighborhood a group of restless youngsters persuaded an elderly, somewhat demented neighbor to become their headman some years ago. Parodying the traditional ceremony for appointing headmen, they solemnly put a turban on his head and made him distribute a box of sweets amongst them in return. Yet no other headman has been put into office since the 1940's. In Koriyana, which is a predominantly Caurasi neighborhood, a couple of the former headmen are still around. They are sometimes greeted with traditional deference and it happens that they are given a seat of honor at weddings, but they have hardly more authority than the old man elected by the boys.

The Ahirwars give various explanations for the disintegration of the *pancayat* system. One of the most popular is that people turned away from the headmen because the latter had started to abuse their powers. They embezzled common funds, they frequently took bribes, and they invariably took a more lenient attitude towards the strong than towards the weak. In their personal lives many of them freely engaged in the very misdemeanors and vices that as headmen they were set to guard against, or so it is commonly said. The question, however, is whether it was the conduct of the headmen that changed, or the attitude towards that conduct on the part of other members of the group. Partiality and corruption may have become more widespread as the group gradually became more differentiated in terms of wealth and power, but a much stronger case can be made for the latter alternative. As will be described in a later chapter, in the 1930's the Caurasis

were drawn into a broad movement for social advancement, which was rapidly spreading among the lower castes of the region at the time. Like other low caste reformers, the Caurasi pioneers of this movement were convinced that the goal of social advancement could not be achieved lest their caste-mates could be made to adopt a more responsible and, by high-caste standards, more respectable way of life. As the headmen were the pillars of the established order, it was of course especially important that they were made to accept the message. While many of them were probably attracted by the promise of a better future, however, they did not always take it seriously enough to fall into line with the reformers - not even when they became targets of the latter's criticism, as inevitably happened.

Yet I am not suggesting that the headmen lost their authority merely because they fell victim to the reformers' spears of criticism. Even those amongst them who supported the reformers were automatically deprived of some of their authority, since by doing so they effectively admitted that the latter had a superior understanding of the requirements of the present time and that they themselves were no longer leaders but followers dependent on the guidance of more knowledgeable men. What happened, essentially, was that the authority of the traditional cadre of headmen was usurped by a new leadership that seemed to be better equipped to deal with the problems of the day. The headmen were pragmatic guardians of status quo, organically associated with a small-scale society minutely fragmented into castes, subcastes, and local sections of subcastes. The new leaders, on the other hand, were part and parcel of the emerging order of a large-scale society, and it was as such that they tended to present themselves. They were neither wealthy nor well educated, but their claim to provide ideological orientation did not rest on such credentials. When they spoke, they spoke as representatives of larger forces, including not only the Kori caste associations to which they belonged, but in a sense also the nationalist movement itself.

As the headmen lost their ideological leadership, so they lost their function as mediators in disputes. This happened little by little, as people started to take their grievances to the new leaders, first the reformers and later on also the politicians. These men often tried to settle matters in a customary fashion, but they were also largely responsible for the introduction of another way of resolving personal differences, namely that of going to the police and the court, which, apparently, was not very common in the old days, when the Caurasis usually regarded both with a great deal of fear, as in-

deed many of them do even today. Exactly how this practice came about I am not sure, but all my informants are agreed that it was started by the new leaders, a few of whom were indefatigable litigants, constantly fighting their enemies at court.

More important at this juncture, however, is how the headmen were gradually deprived of their role as chief guardians of the ritual status of the group, a development that started as the early reformers set out to rectify the life style of their caste-fellows and in the process managed to create a great deal of tension and hostility within the group. As will be described in chapter 6, a major conflict arose on the issue of bristlework, an occupation that had been adopted by some of the Caurasis of Kanpur during the early years of this century, presumably with the consent of the local headmen. The dispute, which divided the entire group into two hostile camps, was eventually referred to the Caurasi Pancayat, where it was declared that bristlework was a dishonorable occupation and that those who practiced it, especially the women amongst them, should leave their jobs. As the latter refused to accept this decision, however, it merely served to expose the weakness of council authority. Yet the result would probably have been much the same if the council had taken a different decision or refrained from intervening altogether. The real problem was that the consensual foundation of the traditional system of authority was crumbling as a result of the reformers' crusade.

The idea of purifying the life style of the group became less important later on, when Caurasi social reformers and politicians began to propagate the anti-caste ideas of Dr. Ambedkar, the Congress, and the socialists. These ideas were perhaps primarily used to criticize high-caste discrimination of Koris and other Untouchables, but they were also critically applied to the discriminatory practices of the Koris themselves in relation to castes lower down in the caste hierarchy and occasionally they were even translated into acts demonstratively challenging these practices. Among the Ahirwars of Devi Street this happened for the first time in the early 1950's, when one of the young communist millworkers mentioned in the previous chapter, a youth called Mihi Lal, symbolically exchanged lunch packets with a Camar friend and workmate, a young man who also happened to be his next-door neighbor and comrade-in-arms. In doing so he merely followed the example of prominent Congressmen, many of whom were then publicly performing similar acts of symbolic transgression. Quite a few of his Ahirwar neighbors were still outraged, however, not least the local head-

men, who promptly declared that he should be placed under social boycott. Yet this proved to be another ineffective measure on the part of the representatives of the old regime. Not only was Mihi Lal supported by a fair number of radicals of his own sort. A couple of the leading local Ahirwar politicians, both of whom were regular members of the Congress, also came to his assistance. One of them, a politician from Devi Street called Baij Nath, who will reappear in a later chapter, even repeated the sacrilegious act, ceremoniously accepting food from the very same Camar.

In the following years the Ahirwars of Devi Street experienced several similar incidents. To the extent that they were meant as challenges to the authority of the headmen these actions achieved their purpose, and as efforts to erase or loosen up caste boundaries they also had an impact. Many younger men embraced the anti-caste message, although there were also those who refused to be converted, at least when it came to fraternization with lower castes. Yet there was no factional polarization of the kind that had occurred during the dispute over bristlework. The conservatives were grudgingly forced to accept that they were not in a position to enforce the traditional code of conduct, and the reformers understood equally well that they lacked the authority to impose a common code of conduct of their own making. The emerging order was one where the local caste group, not to speak of the larger group of Caurasis, was no longer a coordinated whole governed by a more or less uniform set of precepts, but a collection of families, peer groups, and individuals organizing their lives on disparate principles. To be sure, certain uniformities of conduct remained. Endogamy, for example, is very much the rule even today, although a few inter-subcaste marriages have been arranged in recent years. Moreover, the entire group is clearly drifting in the same direction, and the more conservative are often only a few steps behind the more progressive. Nevertheless, the diversity is real enough, at the level of conduct as well as at the level of attitudes and values.

Big castes and small castes

Table 13 below shows how the households of Devi Street are divided between individual castes - in the case of the Koris also subcastes - as well as between the two larger categories of Scheduled Castes and non-Scheduled castes, the *chote jat* and the *bare jat*, the 'small castes' and the 'big castes,' as they are most commonly known.

Table 13. Distribution of households by religion, caste, and residential status.

Religion, Caste, Subcaste	Traditional Occupation	Owner Househ.	Tenant Househ.	All Househ. Number	%
Sched. Castes		24	231	255	82.8
Kori	Weaver	23	163	186	60.4
Ahirwar		23	115	138	44.8
Banaudha		-	33	33	10.4
Shakywar		-	14	14	4.5
Kamalvanshi		-	1	1	0.3
Camar	Leatherworker	-	58	58	18.4
Pasi	Laborer	1	6	7	2.3
Dhanuk	Laborer and Midwife	-	3	3	1.0
Dhobi	Washerman	-	1	1	0.3
Other Castes		8	40	48	15.6
Brahman	Priest and Landlord	4	10	14	4.5
Thakur	Warrior and Landlord	-	9	9	2.9
Sunar	Goldsmith	1	7	8	2.6
Kahar	Servant	-	5	5	1.6
Bania	Trader	2	1	3	1.0
Tamboli	Betel seller	1	2	3	1.0
Gadariya	Shepherd	-	1	1	0.3
Kalwar	Distiller	-	1	1	0.3
Muslim	-	3	2	5	1.6
Total		35	273	308	100.0

Within the two major categories the groups have been listed in accordance with their relative size. To get the Ahirwar picture of how they are traditionally ranked relative to one another within the caste system, we would have to make a few changes. Among the non-Scheduled castes we would have to put the Banias in the position immediately below the Thakurs, the Tambolis on par with or in the position immediately below the Sunars, and the remaining ones more or less on the same level. The ma-

major distinction here is that between the Brahmans and the Thakurs, the traditional ruling castes, frequently referred to by the compound Brahman-Thakur, on the one hand, and all the other groups, on the other. Among the Scheduled Castes we would have to put the Dhankus below the Dhobis, the Banaudhas on the same level as the Kamalvanshis, and perhaps the Pasis on the same level as the Camars. This, I repeat, is how the Ahirwars would roughly rank the groups. The Banaudhas, Shakywars and Kamalvanshis, for example, would hardly admit that they are inferior to the Ahirwars, although they would agree that the Koris are superior to all the other *chote jat*.

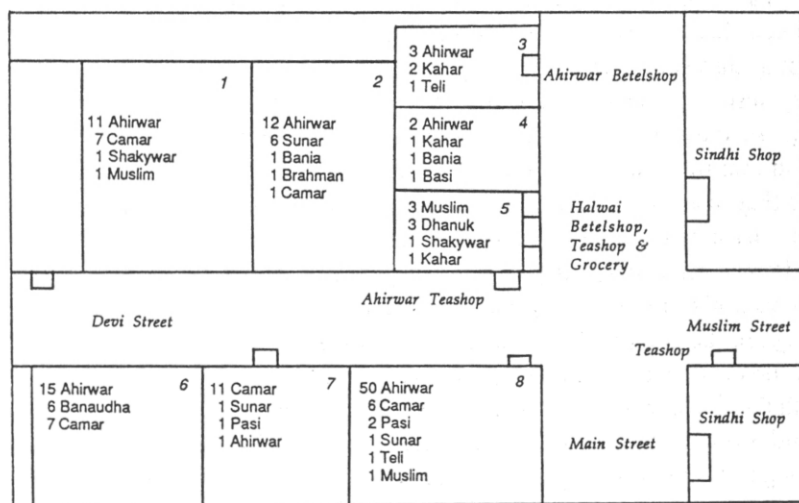
Many of the caste groups listed in the table have resided in Devi Street since the 1930's and 1940's and so have many of their constituent families. I deliberately say families rather than households here, for the latter are often recent offshoots of parent households with a much longer record of residence in the street. Among the more recent arrivals are the Banias and the Thakurs, both of whom came fifteen to twenty years ago and are to some extent still regarded as newcomers. Overall there has been a gradual increase in the proportion of high-caste residents, although the low castes are still in large majority.

The residential pattern is not a sharply segregated one. It was somewhat more segregated in the past, but with the arrival of new groups and the movement of people between *ahatas* and houses it has become increasingly blurred. Thus while several of the *ahatas* are dominated by Ahirwars and one or two by Camars, none is the exclusive preserve of one group. Nor are the Scheduled Caste residents collectively segregated from the high-caste residents, as is often the case in rural villages and frequently also in urban neighborhoods. As shown on map 4 below, which represents the northern end of the street, there is one *ahata* where Banias and Kahars are neighbors with Ahirwars and Pasis; another where Sunars, Banias, and Brahmans reside together with Ahirwars and Camars; a third where there are Brahmans and Thakurs along with Camars, Banaudhas, Ahirwars, and several others; and so forth. And there is a similar, although less pronounced, pattern of caste mingling at the level of individual houses. In *ahata* 2, for instance, there is one house with Ahirwars, Camars, and Sunars, a second with Ahirwars, a third with Brahmans, Sunars, and Banias, and a fourth with Ahirwars and Sunars.

The gradual increase in the number of high-caste residents over the years is largely to be explained by the mounting pressure for housing in

the city. Some of the Sunars are old-timers who settled in the neighborhood in order to make a living as local jewelers and money-lenders, a profession that one or two of them still practise on a part-time basis, but those who have come later are mostly people who could not find an equally cheap accommodation in a high-caste neighborhood of convenient location. One of the Brahman houseowners, a moderately prosperous shopkeeper called Premnath Tiwari, whose family I shall take as a first example of high-caste adaptation to the neighborhood, was not even aware of the social composition of the locality before he took possession of his house some twenty years ago, or so at least claims his son, a young journalist called Surendranath. He regretted it afterwards, the latter says, but at the time he was simply too preoccupied with the idea of becoming an independent houseowner to worry about the surroundings.

Map 4. Residential distribution of castes and subcastes between *ahatas*.



The house which Pandit Tiwari acquired so carelessly is a three-storied building facing the street. Here the Tiwari family occupies the second floor. On the top floor there are two high-caste families, and on the ground floor, in apartments with entrances directly towards the street, two Ahirwar families, both of which resided in the house long before the arrival of the present owners. The reverse arrangement would not have been accepta-

ble to the Tiwaris, since the Ahirwar tenants would then have been intruding on their domestic space, including the roof where the members of the family, especially the women and the children, spend much of their time. This they would never permit, for by their own standards, which are by no means exceptional among Brahmans, the low-caste people of the street lead a thoroughly repugnant kind of life. One of the things that they dislike most about their neighbors is their lack of cleanliness, and even more obnoxious are their dietary habits, the fact that they eat all kinds of non-vegetarian food, except beef. They also drink a lot, and in the process often quarrel. As the Tiwaris see them, the low-caste people of the street are indeed lacking in self-control and good manners even when they are sober. The abuses which the women frequently hurl at one another, for example, are outright chocking to sensitive Brahman ears. Even if there had not been a problem of pollution, the Tiwari women would not have considered the low-caste women suitable company, nor would they have allowed their children to mix with the children of these women.

Thus the Tiwaris do not interact closely with the low-caste people around them. At Holi, the great spring festival, they show their neighborliness by throwing a few cakes of cow-dung on the local communal fire, and they also give small financial contributions to other communal undertakings, such as the *javara* procession described in the previous chapter. Beyond that they do not participate in neighborhood activities. Some years ago they made a financial contribution to the building of a small temple, but they have not visited it since it was completed. Surendranath's mother, a pious woman, frequently visits temples elsewhere and goes almost every day to a high-caste neighborhood in the area to sing *bhajans*, devotional songs, in the company of women of her own kind. Otherwise she remains for the most part behind the protective walls of the house, interacting only with the members of her own family and her high-caste tenants. Her husband Premnath is equally restrictive in his choice of companions, although he often exchanges a few words with his low-caste neighbors when he passes through the street. He is particularly friendly with Hira Lal, the wealthy Ahirwar cotton-waste trader previously mentioned, but he does not forget that the latter is a low-caste man, and would never dream of entering into a closer relationship with him.

Surendranath is the partial exception. As a child he had few opportunities of interacting with the low-caste boys of the neighborhood, for, like his younger brother at present, he was not allowed to play in the street. Yet

the situation changed when he became older and got to know one of the local Camars, a youth called Balkishan, who was a college student like himself. The two boys did not go to the same college, but as their colleges were located in the same part of the city, at almost an hour's walking distance from Devi Street, they frequently made company in the mornings. Surendranath, who had a bicycle, used to catch up with Balkishan midway and from there they used to ride together.

Balkishan, who was a member of the Mohalla Sudhar Committee mentioned in the previous chapter, introduced Surendranath to Ram Shankar, Moolchand, and the rest of the group, and for a while Surendranath was almost a member, at least an honorary one. Yet this involvement was only a passing episode in his life. While he even now regards the members of the old committee as his personal friends, especially Ram Shankar, whom he greatly admires, he does not see them very often. In fact, he now relates to his low-caste neighbors in much the same way as his father, although his attitude towards caste is certainly different.

To explain why his relationships to Balkishan and the others have not been sustained, Surendranath refers to the latter's "inferiority complex." While none of his friends is as meek and humble as the older low-caste inhabitants of the street, some of whom may even touch his feet when he meets them, their attitude towards him is still fundamentally deferential, he says. Afraid of intruding, they never visit him at home, and make no other efforts to maintain the relationship either. Yet this is only one part of the story. The other part is that Surendranath's own involvement was always a limited one. He interacted with his local friends only to the extent that it did not interfere with his more important engagements, all of which belonged to a different world altogether. Now that he is a journalist, there is very little time left for the old boys.

But not all the high-caste residents of the street are quite as restrictive in their dealings with their low-caste neighbors as the Tiwaris. A rather different case is that of a group of Thakur households residing as tenants in the same building as Param Lal, the Banaudha communist introduced in the previous chapter. In their villages, where they are apparently still strongly rooted, these Thakurs are members of the local dominant caste. As such they are used to treat low-caste people as subjects and servants, and would certainly never accept them on equal terms. In the city, however, they are ordinary manual workers, and cannot expect to be treated as lords, certainly not in Devi Street, where they are a small minority surroun-

ded by low-caste people on all sides. Here they mix with the low-caste residents in a friendly, seemingly egalitarian manner, although according to Param Lal they would surely prefer to have it in the customary way. They do not invite their neighbors into their tiny apartments, nor do they accept food and water from them. In everyday interaction, however, this does not make such a big difference, since among working people the apartment is mainly a space reserved for the members of the household anyway, and food and water are rarely exchanged even among equals. As one of my Ahirwar informants ironically remarked, moreover, what would remain of the caste system if Brahmans and Thakurs started to entertain the Untouchables in their houses?

As a third example I would mention the proprietors of the Halwai shop shown on map 4 above. I should in fact rather say shops here, for what was originally a single grocery shop has been divided into three separate units, one teashop, one betel shop, and one grocery shop. The latter is run by the senior member of the Halwai family, a man called Bhawani Lal, and the others by his two sons, Lakhan Lal and Puran Lal. While the grocery shop is gradually crumbling under the competition from the Sindhi groceries across the street - according to one of my friends it serves now mostly as a cover for the money-lending in which the family also engages - both the teashop and the betel shop have many customers, including a steady circle of regulars, some of whom are Ahirwars.

The Halwais, who are confectioners by caste and belong to the *bare jat*, are not listed in table 13 above. The reason for this is that they do not reside in the street, but in a house on the opposite side of Main street, about a hundred meters away. They are very much involved with the neighborhood, however, and Lakhan Lal, if possibly not the others, even regards himself as one of its members. He made this very clear in an exchange with one of his regular Ahirwar patrons, the communist Mihi Lal mentioned towards the end of the previous section. The latter, now a middle-aged man in his late forties working as a line-jobber in one of the textile-mills, had been complaining about the quarrelsomeness of his neighbors. He was frustrated because people in the neighborhood were constantly fighting; in his own *ahata* some of the youths often provoked disputes merely for the fun of it. This, indeed, was one of the reasons why he preferred to sit at the teashop, he said.

There was nothing controversial in this; such sentiments are expressed all the time. Yet one of those who were present, the wealthy Hira Lal's son

Prem Chand, objected. You should not exaggerate, he said. Do not forget that Stefan Sahab is writing a book about us. And Lakhan Lal, who considers himself a close friend of Hira Lal's family, immediately came to his assistance. Do you mean to say that I am also a quarrelsome person, he asked. Of course not, Mihi Lal answered. I am only talking about the people of this neighborhood (*mohalla*). What do you mean? Am I not a member of this neighborhood, Lakhan Lal inquired. No, you are not, Mihi Lal said. You have a shop here, but you live in another neighborhood. This made Lakhan Lal angry. What you are saying is that there is no relationship between us. No, not at all, Mihi Lal protested. People can have a good relationship with each other, even if they do not reside in the same neighborhood. But Lakhan Lal, now deeply offended, took this as a mere evasion. I understand you well enough, he said. There can be no relationship between us. We are simply too far apart.

Mihi Lal and Lakhan Lal were obviously using different concepts of neighborhood. While the former defined the neighborhood in residential terms, the latter defined it in terms of community. What is more interesting at this point, however, is the question why Lakhan Lal cared to argue at all, and why he got so upset in the end. It would surely have been more in keeping with his role as a shopkeeper to sidestep the issue and let Mihi Lal have it his own way. It is difficult to imagine the Sindhi shopkeepers across the street, or a person like Premnath Tiwari, for that matter, getting involved in such a dispute. Yet Lakhan Lal is much more deeply rooted in the neighborhood than these persons. He has lived in the locality for his entire life, and as a child he was even a member of the neighborhood by Mihi Lal's reckoning. At that time the family resided as tenants in *ahata* 8 on map 4 above, in a house belonging to Hira Lal's family. Now he sits from morning to evening in the shop, and his low-caste customers are not just customers but friends and companions as well, at least some of them. He is well aware of the distinctions of caste, and when it comes to matters of ritual significance he and his family are for the most part just as restrictive as the Thakurs mentioned above. Unlike the latter, however, he has a few intimate friends among the low castes, most notably Hira Lal's second son Kishore Lal, whom he regards as a particularly close friend. Often friendships across the great divide of the *bare jat* and the *chote jat* have an air of secrecy about them, but this one is entirely official, at least in the neighborhood. I remember well how during the final moment of the Holi festival, an important occasion for the ceremonial display of mutual regard, the two men

walked about on the street corner affectionately holding hands, a conventional sign of close friendship.

There are not many such relationships in Devi Street. Some of the low-caste men have high-caste friends elsewhere, but in the neighborhood they tend for the most part to interact with high-caste persons in a more superficial manner, if at all. A person like Param Lal, who lives in a building where there are more than a dozen high-caste households, most of which occupy small, crowded apartments and can therefore not withdraw from their low-caste neighbors in the manner of the Tiwaris, is bound to see a great deal more of high-caste people than, for example, the inhabitants of *ahatas* 1 and 6 on map 4, who have no high-caste neighbors at all. Yet even those who have high-caste people as next-door or next-to-next door neighbors generally do not interact with these persons very closely, especially not if they are Brahmans, Thakurs, or Banias. One low-caste man summed up the situation well: "There is no enmity between us, but no love either. Each goes his own way."

Interacting with low-caste neighbors

The patterns of interaction between the Ahirwars and their low-caste neighbors cannot be so easily summarized. To begin with, let us simply notice that sheer propinquity is one of the determinants of association, especially among women and children, who as a rule associate mainly with their immediate neighbors, their *paros*. There are women who work outside the neighborhood, and there are women who visit relatives or friends residing elsewhere in the neighborhood, but many women do not leave their *ahatas* without company unless they have to fetch water, visit a local shop, or go to the communal latrines. A woman, or at least a young woman, who appears to have none of these reasons for moving about in the neighborhood will most likely be suspected of having a clandestine affair. To sneak away without anybody noticing it is almost impossible, which means, incidentally, that illicit liaisons are most likely to involve persons who are neighbors or otherwise closely related.

Men are not placed under any such restrictions. Nevertheless, they, too, often spend most of their time in and around the *ahata*, chatting and smoking with close neighbors, most of whom they may have known since childhood. Among the Ahirwars as well as among the other groups there are men who almost never appear in the street, except when they are going to or coming back from work. Some of these men work exceedingly long

hours, and have little time and energy left for sociable interaction in the neighborhood; others simply prefer the company of their closest neighbors. The Camars of *ahata* 7, for example, a group of Jaiswaras from the district of Rae Bareli, whom the Ahirwars refer to as Purbias, Easterners, are all busy workers who tend to stick to themselves when they are not working. They must see a great deal of the single Ahirwar household residing in their *ahata*, a family that settled amongst them fairly recently, but they do not mix much with the residents of other *ahatas*. Among the Ahirwars of *ahata* 8, likewise, there are many men who associate chiefly with members of their own group. In their *ahata* - owned almost entirely by Hira Lal and his family - there are some *parjat* tenants, but as the *ahata* is a very big one and several of the *parjats*, including the single Muslim household, live in apartments facing the street, many of the Ahirwar tenants are encapsulated within their own group in much the same way as the Jaiswaras. Some of the women have hardly any *parjat* acquaintances, not to speak of *parjat* friends.

Equally important are the differences in attitude towards caste, which are considerable within as well as between the groups. In the past, when they were still governed by headmen and councils and had more uniform attitudes in matters of caste, the Ahirwars were not much less restrictive vis-à-vis their low-caste neighbors than, for example, the local Thakurs at present. Nor were the other low-caste people of the street, at least not the other Koris, who were just as exclusive towards the Ahirwars as the Ahirwars towards them. The differentials of status and life style were here not as big as in the Thakur case, but in ritually relevant areas of conduct the boundaries were still quite sharply drawn. With Camars, Pasis, and Dhobis the Ahirwars had apparently no commensal relations whatsoever, and with the Dhanuks, a group engaged in the highly polluting occupation of midwifery, they seem not to have associated in sociable manner at all. In the local terminology there was not even a relationship of *uthna-baithna*, 'rising-sitting,' between the two groups.

Today the situation is different, although some people still have a fairly strong attachment to the old order. Such people, popularly referred to as *purana type-ke-log*, 'old type people,' are presumably found in all the groups, and in one or two of the groups they even dominate. Among the Ahirwars, however, the more progressive have the upper hand, and this is also the case among the Jatavs, one of the Camar subcaste groups, residing in several of the local *ahatas*, notably *ahatas* 1, 6, and 8, as well as else-

where in the neighborhood. These two are also the groups which are the most advanced in terms of education and occupation. Practically all the low-caste men of the street who have received higher education are in fact either Ahirwars or Jatavs, and it is also among the Ahirwars and the Jatavs that we find most of the men who have been actively involved in politics and trade union work. The other groups consist almost exclusively of poor, illiterate and semi-literate workers. Among the Banaudhas, for example, there are a couple of persons like Param Lal and one or two young students, including Param Lal's son Anand Ram, but on the whole the Banaudhas are a somewhat backward lot by Ahirwar standards, as are indeed all the others.

I have already mentioned the event that initiated the process of loosening up the relations between the low castes in the street: Mihi Lal's sharing of food with his Camar, more precisely Jatav, friend and neighbor in the 1950's. It is quite possible that Ahirwars and Jatavs had shared food before that, but not in public, and not with the explicit intention of questioning the established order of caste. Nothing nearly so provocative had happened before, nor, indeed, would anything quite so provocative happen for another several years. With the formation of the Mohalla Sudhar Committee in the 1960's, however, the local conservatives were in for new challenges, the first of which was the presence of two leading Jatav youths at a wedding banquet held at the house of one of the Ahirwar members of the Committee. As my Ahirwar friends rarely forget to mention, the two Jatavs (one of whom, a youth called Kali Charan, we have already met as the legal counsel of Pyare Lal and Chote Lal in the *javara* dispute), were even asked to sit in the same *pangat*, or line of eaters, with the Ahirwar guests. This was apparently more than they had expected, but the members of the Committee ushered them demonstratively into the main line. Had they not done so, they would clearly have failed their purpose, which was to make a strong public statement about caste, not just to entertain a couple of friends. The two Jatavs, neither of whom resided in Devi Street, were in fact not very close friends at all, although Ram Shankar, the leader of the Committee, had seen a great deal of Kali Charan in school. They were invited because they were leading figures among the Jatavs, and as such lent weight and importance to the event. What makes the *pangat* part of the story memorable, incidentally, is partly that it is so strikingly inconsistent with the public image of the two Jatavs, both of whom have a reputation as ultra-radical Ambedkarites. Who would have suspected that persons of such radical convictions should behave so deferentially at a Kori wedding?

And this was only the beginning. Not only did Ahirwars later on participate in Camar weddings in the same way as the two Jatav brothers participated in this Ahirwar wedding. Gradually the level of participation was raised to include the cooking and serving of the wedding food. Nowadays it happens that people who can afford it engage a professional caterer, often an Halwai, to supply the food for the wedding banquet, but normally it is prepared at home with the assistance of close neighbors and kinsmen. Traditionally, this work is strictly reserved for the members of the subcaste, and so is the actual serving of the food, a highly honorable task that male representatives of the family and the local caste group perform with their bare hands. As a result of the efforts of the members of the Mohalla Sudhar Committee, however, it now also happens that Ahirwars participate in these ritually sensitive activities - especially the serving of the food - at Camar weddings and vice versa. It is by no means common, but among the more progressive it occurs occasionally, apparently without causing much trouble. At the wedding referred to above some of the guests were quite displeased to find a couple of Camars amongst them and a few even left in anger. Yet such open acts of protest seem not to be common at present. Many Ahirwars certainly would not invite Camars to assist them with their own wedding preparations, and there are presumably those who would not even invite them as guests. Wisely enough, however, they do not try to prevent others from doing so. The wealthy Hira Lal, for example, who is fairly conservative in these matters, is not even able to prevent his sons from eating at Camar weddings. He objects mildly, but that is all. Certainly he does not treat them as unclean, nor does he so treat their Committee friends.

With the other local caste groups the Ahirwars have not entered into such close ritual relations. With the partial exception of the Dhanuks, however, this is not because they regard these groups as too low or too polluting. From the traditional point of view the Banaudhas, Shakywars, and Kamlavanshis should indeed be more easily acceptable as ritual equals than the Camars. As I have said before, however, these groups consist for the most part of uneducated persons with whom the progressive Ahirwars are not very closely involved. Furthermore, in the case of the Banaudhas there is another obstacle. While the more progressive amongst the Ahirwars are ready to remove some of the ritual barriers between the two groups, the Banaudhas, who are still living in the age of headmen and councils, are reluctant to do so. They, or rather the domi-

nant majority amongst them, including most of the headmen of the so-called 'seventeen villages' of the Banaudha community of Kanpur, insist that they are superior to the Ahirwars, and see no advantage in a ritual rapprochement.

This was made perfectly clear a couple of years before I came to the city, when the Banaudha headmen fined one member of the group, a woman called Kamla Devi, for interacting too closely with her Ahirwar neighbors of *ahata* 6. In this *ahata* - which is also the *ahata* of comrade Mihi Lal and his Jatav workmate, the bristle entrepreneur and clothvender Pyare Lal, Balkishan, the Camar friend of the Brahman Surendranath, and (formerly) Ram Shankar, the leader of the Mohalla Sudhar Committee - intercaste relations are unusually free of ritual restrictions: Ahirwars, Jatavs, and Banaudhas enter each other's apartments, accept water and food (including ordinary, so-called *kaccha* food) from each other, and assist each other on ritual occasions. While some of the residents do not participate in this interaction as freely as others, nobody is ostracised by his local caste-fellows because he mixes too closely with the *parjats*.

Kamla Devi's crime was not that she behaved improperly in the *ahata*, at least not in the first instance. It was rather that she brought one of her Ahirwar neighbors, the wife of Pyare Lal, along to participate in the preparation of ritual food with the Banaudha women of another *ahata*. She had previously been invited to Pyare Lal's house for the same purpose, and now, apparently, she wanted to reciprocate. What she had not reckoned with was that her Banaudha kith and kin were used to different customs. I do not know if they were already aware of the practices of *ahata* 6, but they were certainly not ready to have them introduced amongst themselves. Pyare Lal's wife was brusquely sent home with her cooking gear, and Kamla Devi was severely scolded and later fined by the headmen. Some of the Banaudhas, including Param Lal, may not have liked this, but they preferred not to challenge the headmen and the dominant opinion behind them.

While this was a big insult to the Ahirwars, the more progressive among them simply wrote it off as an expression of the backwardness of the Banaudhas. As they now say, they are ready to remove the commensal boundary any time, just as they have already removed it in relation to the Jatavs. At present there is only one caste towards which some of them seem to have a strong sense of ritual aversion: the caste of Sweepers, the Bhangis, Mehtars, or Balmikis, as they are variously known. No Sweepers

reside in Devi Street, but there is a cluster of households residing adjacent to the neighborhood latrines, a couple of hundred meters away along Main street. Members of this group, mostly women, regularly visit Devi Street in order to sweep the street and clean the private latrines, but they are not involved in any sociable relations with the Ahirwars and the other low-caste groups. Nor, indeed, are they involved in such relations with their more immediate neighbors.

While none of the Ahirwars associate with the local Sweepers, however, there are at least a few who have Sweeper friends elsewhere. For example, there are two local youths who regularly associate with a Sweeper friend at college, and have once even had tea at his house, although only with some hesitation. One of them wanted in fact to back out of the situation, but the other, not wanting to offend their friend, assured him that they had nothing to worry about, since the house looked so neat and clean. By the traditional concept of hereditary corporate pollution this was hardly a good reason for staying. As should be clear by now, however, this is not a concept to which all the Ahirwars subscribe. Along with an increasing number of their caste-fellows, not only the members of the Mohalla Sudhar Committee, these youths would presumably argue that all or most forms of pollution are removable. An extreme view is that impurity can be washed off as easily as dirt, a less extreme view is that it can be removed by a change of occupation or life style (cf. Saberwal 1973). I would not suggest that such views are always consistently acted upon; merely that they are quite commonly expressed. The view that impurity is an inborn quality transmitted through the blood is definitely less common.

Nor should this case be taken as indicative of the limit to which the Ahirwars of Kanpur are willing to go in their dealings with Sweepers. Among the Ahirwars of Devi Street these two youths may represent the extreme, but elsewhere there are persons who are even less restrictive. One of my Ahirwar acquaintances, a well-educated man employed as a clerk in a government office, even invited a Sweeper to the recent wedding of his daughter. There were indeed two Sweepers present at the banquet, but one of them, an old man dressed in ragged clothes, was there to collect the left overs. The one who figured among the guests was a leading Scheduled Caste politician representing the Congress in the State Legislative Assembly at Lucknow. Such an important person should be treated with much respect, and so far as I could see he was not just a guest, but a guest of honor.

According to the traditional logic of pollution, inviting a Sweeper to a wedding banquet is of course a less serious offense than having tea with a Sweeper at his house. Yet one must also consider the extent to which an act is a public one, officially defining the relations between entire groups, or merely a private one involving a restricted number of individuals. Although it makes no sense in terms of the concept of ritual contagion, it is very much part of the culture of caste that the more public the offense and the more directly it involves the collectivity as a whole, the more damaging it is for caste status. By this rule the presence of the Congress *neta* at the wedding banquet was clearly a more serious breach of custom than the youths' visit at their friend's house. Yet, again, there was no quarrel within the caste. Nor would there have been much opposition, I believe, if the wedding had been held in Devi Street. Some of the more conservative members of the local caste group might have grumbled, but most of them would probably have found some consolation in the thought that the Sweeper in question was not only a relatively clean Sweeper, but also an uncommonly powerful and influential one.

At the end of the previous section I quoted a low-caste man saying that between the *bare jat* and the *chote jat* there is neither amity nor enmity, but mere separation. As should be clear by now, this statement does not quite fit the relations among the *chote jat*. Among the Ahirwars as well as among the other groups there are persons who do not interact much with *parjats*, but generally speaking the low-caste groups have much closer relations with another than with the *bare jat*. Note, however, that closeness can breed enmity as well as amity. In the street immediately adjacent to Devi Street there is a longstanding dispute between Ahirwars and Shakywars, which occasionally flares up into fighting, and in one of the other streets, the street where the Jatav lawyer Kali Charan resides, there has been serious fighting between Ahirwars and Shakywars, on the one hand, and Jatavs, on the other, leading among other things (or so it is generally assumed) to the still unresolved murder of a locally prominent Ahirwar *neta*. In the first case the original cause of dispute was an illicit love affair between an Ahirwar girl and a Shakywar boy, while in the second personal rivalry between leaders has apparently generated most of the heat.

In Devi Street there has apparently not been any large-scale disputes along the lines of caste or subcaste, partly, perhaps, because nearly 45% of the local population are Ahirwars; in the streets where caste fighting has occurred the groups involved are more evenly balanced. Yet, while the ca-

ste groups of Devi Street do not act as units of combat, questions of caste are frequently brought into disputes. A good example of this was given in the description of the *javara* quarrel in the last chapter, where I mentioned that some of the old hands of the Mohalla Sudhar Committee countered Pyare Lal's theory that he was the victim of a communist conspiracy with the suggestion that he and his brother were merely the puppets of Camars wanting to create disunity among the Koris. Their main suspects were Kali Charan and Mathura Prasad, especially the former, but they also suggested that one or two of the local Jatav communists might be involved in one way or another.

Caste was in fact also invoked by one of their chief adversaries, the RPI and Camar *neta* Mathura Prasad; while the latter frequently referred to the communist conspiracy, he sometimes also argued that the whole thing was a result of the proverbial backwardness and stupidity of the Koris, which, incidentally, was also how a few of the high-caste residents of the street understood it. Shrugging her shoulders, one Bania woman suggested that the dispute was entirely consistent with the Kori character. Apparently she was referring to the fact that the Koris along with the Muslim Julahas are traditionally known as particularly simple-minded, even stupid people. Just as their are innumerable popular stories and sayings about the Brahman's greed, the Thakur's exaggerated pride, the Kayastha's cunning, the Camar's uncleanness and backwardness, and so forth, there are many such stories and sayings about the mental peculiarities of Koris and Julahas (see e.g. Risley 1915).

Mathura Prasad was more specific. During one of many discussions outside the Halwai teashop he started out with an elaborate tirade against communism and communists. Communists are people who create unrest and dissatisfaction, he said. They take the workers out in strike, but when the latter have sacrificed their wages for many weeks, they come to terms with the millowners and leave the workers stranded. Nor has the country benefited from their services. Was it not because of Krishna Menon, Pandit Nehru's ill-chosen friend, that India had lost the China War? While he was defence minister one of the ordnance factories of Kanpur was manufacturing bicycles! Better to support Dr. Ambedkar and the RPI, as he himself had done for his entire life. In 1964 upwards of 500 000 supporters of the RPI had performed a *satyagraha* at Lucknow, the biggest *satyagraha* in the history of the country. Now, many years later, the RPI demands were about to be implemented by Indira Gandhi.

Comrade Mihi Lal, who was part of the gathering, protested. What Mathura Prasad had just said about the manufacturing of bicycles was sheer fantasy. Furthermore, the 20-point program now being launched by Indira Gandhi was largely a communist program. Maulana Yusuf - the prominent tradeunion leader mentioned in chapter 2 - had been talking about these reforms for ages, long before the RPI even existed. Unlike the RPI, the CPI was a very old party. Even Bhagat Singh (the militant nationalist executed by the British in 1931) was a communist.

Changing tactics, Mathura Prasad now switched to caste. The Kori caste is a very stupid (*buddhu*) one, he said turning to me. They are absolutely nothing in politics. There used to be one or two MLA's amongst them, but now there is none. The Camars, on the other hand, are prominent in both politics and offices. There are in fact only two castes who rule India today, the Brahmans and the Camars. Whatever the others may get, they get with our permission only. The caste that you have chosen to study is a very simple and backward one.

You are absolutely right, Mihi Lal replied. We Koris are a very simple (*sidha*) caste. We have always been humbly engaged in the peaceful occupation of weaving. But your caste is different. You are a martial caste used to violence. Your occupation is to cut the flesh of animals, although merely dead ones.

Sure, we know how to fight, Mathura Prasad replied. There is even a Camar regiment in the Army. It is known as the Mahar regiment, but the Mahars - the caste of Dr. Ambedkar - and the Camars are one and the same people (*quom*). The Mahars are the Camars of Maharashtra.

And so it went on for a while, the argument drifting more and more into the framework of caste rivalry, until one of Mihi Lal's Ahirwar neighbors eventually interrupted. How can you speak like this, he said turning to Mathura Prasad. Have you forgotten that it was Mihi Lal who first dared to oppose the headmen and eat with a Camar? Have you forgotten all that has been done to establish friendly relations between Ahirwars and Jatavs? Let us not destroy that friendship.

A couple of days later, however, when none of his adversaries were present, Mathura Prasad returned to the subject of caste. While he had been accused of stirring up trouble among the Koris, he had in fact merely assisted a couple of old-standing friends. The real cause of the *javara* dispute was the backwardness of the Kori caste. He and his family had in fact been harassed by their Kori neighbors for years. Only a few days before,

when was returning home late in the evening, someone had even tried to drop a brick on him from the roof. To a large extent the problem was political. His neighbors could not tolerate the fact that he was not a communist. They were also jealous of his economic situation. As a businessman - he is a small craftsman manufacturing shoes with the assistance of family members - he could afford to rest several month a year and still eat and drink well. The Koris on, the other hand, had to send their wives to work and were still starving. Finally, and most importantly, there was the question of caste. The Koris were simply more prejudiced than the Camars. True, some Koris were better than others. A few of them, including a couple of his Ahirwar neighbors, were indeed his very good friends. Yet, for the most part the Koris were quite backward and narrow minded, he insisted, much more so than the Jatavs. Constantly preoccupied with gods and ghosts, they were not even genuine communists. Like quite a few of his caste-fellows in the past, one of his Kori neighbors even believed that he was a Rajput, adorning his body with the sacred thread, the *jenou*. How utterly stupid!

Interacting with Muslims

Before we turn to the interaction between Ahirwars and *parjats* outside the neighbourhood I want to say a few words about the relations between the Ahirwars and the local Muslims, including those residing in the adjacent neighborhood across Main street. In terms of frequency and sometimes also closeness of interaction, the Ahirwars residing at the northern end of the street (in the *ahatas* represented on map 4 above), are in fact more intimately related to some of these Muslims than to their own caste-fellows living at the opposite end of the street, not to speak about those living at the opposite end of Koriyana.

I remember one of my early visits to Koriyana, during the festival of Diwali in 1974. My host was a Shakywar Kori living at another corner of the neighborhood; I had still not been introduced to the Ahirwars of Devi Street at that time. Late in the evening we climbed the roof of the building, where we had a good view of the thousands of Diwali lights glittering over the city. Yet lights had not been lit everywhere. In one direction, not far away, there was a large area of what seemed to be complete darkness. That is where the Muslims reside, my host explained. They do not celebrate Diwali, nor any other Hindu festival. They live in Pakistan, we live in Hindustan.

As I soon realized, the Pakistan-Hindustan metaphor was more than a metaphor. In Devi Street, as indeed elsewhere in the city, Hindus commonly believed that the Muslims were more strongly committed to Pakistan than to India, and that although they did not say so, they really hated to see Pakistan defeated by India, whether it was in war or in cricket. One of my Ahirwar friends, a youth who had resided for most of his life in Devi Street and knew the Muslims across Main street quite well, claimed in all sincerity that during the last war with Pakistan the people of that neighborhood had sent important information to the enemy by wireless. He did not know the exact nature of that information, of course, but he believed that somewhere in that neighborhood, or perhaps some blocks further away, persons had been busy transmitting military secrets of some sort. How did he know? It was common knowledge. He had it from different sources.

In view of the history of Hindu-Muslim relations in Kanpur and the country as a whole, such ideas and attitudes are understandable. In Devi Street there are persons who remember the terrible riots of 1931. Koriyana was not directly involved in those riots, but some of its present inhabitants were then residing elsewhere in the city, at the very centers of the turmoil. It was in fact to escape from the horrors of that event that a few of the Ahirwars hurriedly decided to join their kith and kin in Koriyana. Moreover, there have been riots more recently, one or two of which have even touched upon Ramnagar and Koriyana. That this could easily happen again nobody doubts, certainly not the local police authorities, who at times of actual or expected trouble habitually send heavily armed police squads to Main street as well as to other places where Hindus and Muslims directly face each other. This occurred a few times while I was in the city. On one occasion a Sindhi trader had been murdered by his Muslim business associate just a couple of blocks away. When it became known in Devi Street that the body of a Sindhi had been found buried in a Muslim's courtyard the police were already lining up along Main street. The people of Devi Street talked a great deal about the event, of course, but they were not very upset about it - perhaps because they do not particularly care for Sindhis - and they were by no means contemplating an assault on their Muslim neighbors. Nor, however, did they seem to think that the police were taking unnecessary precautions. Between Hindus and Muslims there is a deepseated categorical mistrust, and the common view is that trouble could start any day.

In everyday interaction, differences of dress and language serve to

remind Hindus and Muslims of the boundary between them. Traditionally, the Muslim male wore *kurta* and *pajama* or *kurta* and *lungi*, a checkered loincloth. On the head he had a small cap, and often he had a beard but no moustache. His Hindu counterpart wore *kurta* and *dhoti*, a different kind of loincloth, and while he had neither cap nor beard, he normally had a moustache. Now the more educated and 'modern' wear shirt and trousers in both the groups, and *pajama* and *lungi* have been adopted by the Hindus. For the rest, however, the distinctions largely remain. With regard to language one notices immediately the difference of script. The signboards of Hindu shops are written in Devnagari and English, those of Muslim shops in Arabic and English. The differences in ordinary speech are by no means so sharp, but a person who wants to stress his communal identity can easily do so by pronunciation and vocabulary. On one occasion, for example, one of the local Muslims, a man of some education, remarked on my lousy pronunciation. In a proper pronunciation of the word *khatm*, a word of Arabic origin meaning 'finished,' the first syllable should come from the throat, as in Urdu, he said, not from the mouth. My way of speaking, which was highly unbecoming of an educated person - like dipping the nails into the curry - was typical of uneducated Scheduled Caste people. Yet, he hastened to add, the same blood is running in all of us; he did not mean to criticize my low-caste companions.

Despite their differences, however, there is a great deal of friendly interaction between Hindus and Muslims. Not only do they mix at the tea-shops, there are also relationships of a more intimate sort. The family of Hira Lal, for example, exchange wedding gifts with two local Muslim families, one of which is that of the local Muslim milkman living with its buffaloes a couple of hundred meters of a way. There is no commensality involved, and Hira Lal himself would certainly not accept food from a Muslim. His sons are less strict in matters of commensality, however, and at least two of them have Muslim friends from whom they accept food. From a traditional point of view, this is almost as bad as eating with a Sweeper. Yet both of them insist that there is no problem. They would never eat beef, they say, but otherwise they are ready to eat anything that their Muslim friends might serve them. Nor is this open attitude unique. Several of the more progressive of the Ahirwars are equally, or almost equally, accepting of Muslim hospitality. On one occasion I ran into one of my Ahirwar acquaintances, a middle-age millworker, just as he was going to a marriage reception at the house of a Muslim workmate. Will you eat there, I asked. Of

course, he replied. How could we be friends if we did not accept to eat with one another?

Yet it would be somewhat misleading to let this man have the last word. One must not forget that the friendly interaction between Hindus and Muslims occurs within the framework of what I have just described as categorical mistrust. A more typical comment is that of another Ahirwar with reference to the amicable relations between one Hindu family and one Muslim family residing as neighbors on Main street. You should not just look at the surface, he said. In the depth of their hearts Hindus and Muslims are always deeply suspicious of each other.

Outside the neighborhood

Seeing the women gathered at the communal watertaps, the men gossiping at the teashops or resting on stringbeds outside their residential quarters, the local leaders fighting endless battles for preeminence, and so forth, one feels that Koriyana is very much like a village community. But the comparison cannot be taken very far. While Indian villages may not be self-contained wholes in the way imagined by nineteenth-century writers, they are certainly much more so than Koriyana and other urban neighborhoods. In the present perspective the difference is largely one between working in the fields and working in a factory, between living and working in one place and living in one place and working in another. There is movement between home and work in both the cases, but while in the one case this movement is internal to a single social field, in the other it tends to involve a more radical change of social environment.

Yet the extent to which the Ahirwars of Devi Street have a life outside the neighborhood varies. Since the women are for the most part confined to the *ahata* they are obviously also for the most part confined to the neighborhood. Like other North Indian women, they stay for extended periods of time in their parental villages or neighborhoods, especially in the early years of marriage, and sometimes they also pay shorter visits to other close kin in Kanpur and elsewhere. Otherwise they do not leave the neighborhood very often, unless they have outside employment, as most of them have not. Normally they visit nearby markets, and more recently it has even become popular among some of the younger ones to go to the cinema. But on these infrequent excursions, when they are invariably accompanied by their husbands or some senior women from the neighborhood, they do not interact much with the strangers around them. For the

younger ones the surrounding city is a distant world, furtively examined from behind the edge of the headcloth. Among the working women there are only a few who are employed outside the neighborhood, and they are mostly elderly women who do not seem to be closely involved with *parjats* in the course of their work.

Among the men there are considerable variations, largely depending on differences of occupation. Only twenty or thirty years ago the great majority of them were still employed in the textile mills, mainly as weavers. Often they worked side by side with persons who were not only caste-fellows, but even neighbors and kinsmen. Nowhere, however, were they completely encapsulated amongst themselves. In every mill and every department of a mill the workers belonged to different religions and castes. In the weaving sheds they were mainly Muslims and low-caste Hindus, but Hindus of higher caste, including Brahmans and Thakurs, were also well represented, although perhaps not equally so in every mill. Furthermore, there were the superior shopfloor staff and the clerical staff, consisting of high-caste Hindus, Muslims, and, at an earlier stage, Europeans. Ahirwars were sometimes promoted to the rank of foreman - as I shall discuss in the next chapter a few of them had a great deal of executive power - but they did not reach higher levels of the managerial hierarchy.

It has been suggested, somewhat along the lines of Max Gluckman's (1961) well-known statement that "an African townsman is a townsman...," that the Indian worker is a worker inside the factory and a member of his caste group outside the factory. In our case, however, there was apparently no sharp compartmentalization of this kind. Breaches of normal rules of ritual conduct did occur in the mills, most flagrantly perhaps in the common practice of sucking the thread from the shuttle of the loom without bothering much about the contagious substances left there by previous operators. As my Ahirwar informants explain, however, the high-caste workers denied that this practice had any ritual implications. In their view one had to distinguish between acts of a voluntary kind and acts that one had to perform as part of the job. In so far as the voluntary acts were concerned they abided for the most part by the traditional rules, avoiding, for example, to eat in the company of low-caste workers and keeping separate buckets of drinking water. It was even inscribed in the factory regulations, I am told, that a low-caste worker touching the food-packet of a high-caste worker should pay compensation. And similar restrictions applied to the interaction among the low-caste workers themselves. Some workers may not

have cared much for these rules of everyday ritual practice, but as they were normally surrounded by caste-fellows, they still had to observe them. (Remember how comrade Mihi Lal's dining with his Jatav friend was promptly reported back to the neighborhood).

Nor was caste irrelevant in public places outside the factory. The streets were open to all, but teashops and taverns were not, at least not without discrimination. An ordinary low-caste worker entering a teashop where he was not one of the regular customer was likely to be interrogated by the proprietor about his caste, the standard question being "What kind of Thakur are you?" (*Kaun Thakur ho?*). If he answered that he was a Kori - and not many Ahirwars would have been bold enough to tell a lie in this situation, my informants say - he was either asked to leave or was served in a cup of clay to be broken when he was finished. Knowing that this might happen, the Ahirwars would normally have avoided such confrontations. Yet the point is not that they were constantly humiliated in this fashion; visiting teashops and taverns outside the neighborhood was probably not a common practice amongst them anyway. It is rather that caste was an all-encompassing identity that they carried along wherever they went, or very nearly so.

The present situation is rather different. Not only have there been important structural and ideological changes in the larger society, variously affecting the ways in which low-caste persons are treated. Over the last few decades the Ahirwars themselves have experienced a process of occupational diversification, resulting in a differentiation of modes of involvement with the world outside the neighborhood and the caste. While formerly they tended to have fairly similar experiences of the surrounding society, they now relate to that society in different ways, largely because they have different kinds of jobs. At the one extreme, there is a comparatively large group of locally employed bristleworkers, who in their work situation interact only with caste-fellows, mostly neighbors. At the other extreme, there are a number of hawkers continuously dealing with *parjats* in the course of their work, although not very intimately, and a few white-collar workers, most of whom tend to associate more closely with *parjats*. In between there are variations too numerous to be described in a few words. One contrast, however, is that between men who at work interact mainly with low-caste persons, like some bristleworkers and brushworkers employed in larger workshops and factories, and men who interact with high-caste persons as well, like the millworkers, the white-collar workers, and a number of men employed in

the ordnance factories.

As a result of the process of occupational diversification the number of Ahirwars who interact regularly with high-caste persons in the course of their work has probably decreased. At the same time, however, those who do interact with high-caste persons at work are now more frequently able to associate with these persons on an friendly basis, at least as long as the latter are not their superiors in terms of command or occupation, as they often are. I have not been able to observe the patterns of association and interaction within the textile mills, but according to my acquaintances among the Ahirwar and Kori millworkers, there has been a great deal of change over the last couple of decades. Now there is not much overt discrimination in ritual matters. Everyone drinks water from the same bucket, it seems, and there is apparently no segregation of commensal groups either. As in the past high-caste workers tend to prefer high-caste company, not least outside the factory, but there is still room for interaction of a sociable kind, which occasionally develops into genuine friendship.

To illustrate this I refer again to one of our chief informants, Comrade Param Lal, the Banaudha communist, who interacts a great deal with his high-caste workmates, and has one close Brahman friend with whom he often associates outside as well as inside the mill. The two men sometimes visit each other at home, and on these occasions there are very few ritual restrictions between them, although the Brahman is a vegetarian and cannot eat the food that Param Lal likes best. Param Lal is even served water from his friend's *lota*, or water-jug, an intimate gesture which he highly appreciates. Yet the relationship is not without complications. The Brahman once invited Param Lal to accompany him to his village, but Param Lal declined when he understood that his friend intended to introduce him as a high-caste man, not as a Kori. He was not offended, he explained to me, for his friend had merely wished to save them both from trouble. At the same time, however, the incident revealed a basic limitation of friendship across the boundary between the big castes and the small castes. Even when there was no lying and hiding involved, such friendship tended to be a strictly person-to-person affair; as a rule it did not involve the families concerned and therefore had no visible impact at the level of entire caste groups, the *samajik*, or 'societal,' level. It happened that he was invited to high-caste marriages, he said, but as he was then often expected to sit by himself or in the company of other low-caste persons, he preferred not to go.

Some of the Ahirwar millworkers could tell similar stories, and so could

some of the workers employed in the ordnance factories and other places where high-caste workers and low-caste workers are rubbing shoulders. Yet those who tend to be most closely involved with high-caste people are not the manual workers, nor the traders or the entrepreneurs, but the students and the white-collar workers, although here again there are considerable variations. Some of these persons have indeed had exactly the same experience as Param Lal. Thus one youth told me about his very dear Brahman friend who had no prejudices whatsoever. The two often went to the cinema together, and sometimes they just went for a walk in the city. The problem was that the Brahman would not introduce him as a Kori to his other friends. To avoid embarrassment or worse, he suggested that the latter should masquerade as a Brahman, and to make sure that the deception would work he instructed him in Brahman customs and manners. According to his pupil, my informant, the scheme worked quite well, and now he used in fact to present himself as a Brahman whenever he ran into high-caste people in anonymous settings, even when his friend was not there to support him. For all practical purposes he had become a part-time Brahman.

Most of the educated members of the group, and indeed many others too, know what it feels like to misrepresent one's identity and try to pass as a person of higher caste. Such passing occurs mostly in fleeting encounters with strangers, as when one of my friends managed to get into a *dharm-sala* in the town of Allahabad by presenting himself as a Thakur, and another had to tell some persons at a roadside village in the district of Jalaun that he was a Thakur in order to get some water from the village well. Yet there are also those who misrepresent their caste in more permanent relations. To be able to do so one must first of all have a suitable name. Like other Hindus, the Ahirwars commonly get their personal names from Brahman pundits. On the basis of astrological calculations the Brahman suggests one or several names, all of which have the same initial syllable. Frequently, but by no means invariably, he also takes caste into account, giving his low-caste clients names which immediately serve to identify them as such. One of my Ahirwar acquaintances told me that his great grandfather had been called Sure, which means blind, his grandfather Ballu, which means nothing in particular, and his father Buddhu, which means stupid. He himself had been given the name of Magan, another nonsense name clearly suggesting a humble origin, but this low-sounding name he had rejected long ago and now he was known by the more respectable Suresh Chandra.

When his first son was born he had not even cared to consult the Brahman but had chosen a name on his own.

There is also the question of the surname. Among the working classes surnames are not very common, especially not among low-caste workers. In factory registers as well as in other official records, these workers usually appear under their personal names, with the personal name of the father added as a further means of identification. One worker is Sure son of Ballu, another Panna Lal son of Buddhu, a third Ram Lal son of Nathu, and so forth. For a member of the *officer varg*, however, a surname is a must; a white-collar worker without a surname would be just as odd as a Congress *neta* without homespun. Yet one cannot choose just any surname. One common practice among the lower castes is to turn the name of the subcaste into a surname. Among the Camars, for example, there are quite a few persons who call themselves Jatav, Kureel, Ahirwar, and so forth, and among the Koris there are those who call themselves Banaudha, Kamalvanshi, Kashyap, and the like. Yet the Ahirwars, who generally do not like to be identified with their namesakes among the Camars, usually prefer a different type of name. Some of them adopt the name of their ancestral village, others take more idiosyncratic names, such as Azad, after the nationalist hero Chandra Shekar Azad, or Gautam, after Lord Buddha. The problem with such names is that they tend to suggest that the owner belongs to the low castes. To be able to pass as a high-caste person one must take a name that is current among the higher castes, which, indeed, is what the Ahirwars most frequently do even when they have no intention of hiding their caste on a more permanent basis. Verma, Gupta, and Singh are a few of the names most favored among them.

Yet the name is only a small part of the problem. The real difficulties begin when one has to answer questions concerning one's personal background. Such questions can to some extent be avoided by not engaging with others in too personal a manner, but as soon as one gets friendly with a person one will have to supply some credible information about kith and kin. Despite the difficulties involved there are persons who manage to pass on a more permanent basis. Our friend Moolchand, the son of Ram Lal, for example, who received his training as a turner in the town of Dehra Dun, made his landlord believe that he was a Sunar, and a man called Girja Shankar, one of the absentee landlords of Devi Street, worked for almost a year in a government office in the city of Lucknow pretending that he was a Kurmi. As Girja Shankar explained, he had been afraid that if he revealed

his true identity his subordinates would not accept his authority. Taking up a new job in Kanpur, however, he felt that he had better put an end to the make-believe. The risk of being exposed would obviously be much greater in Kanpur than in Lucknow, and apart from that he did not particularly like to play with false cards. Ironically enough, however, he seemed to be more convincing as a Kurmi than as a Kori. In answer to the obligatory question about his caste, his *jati*, he first replied that he was a human being - humanity as a whole being also a *jati*, it will be recalled - and then declared that he was a Sweeper. When he finally admitted that he was a Kori his colleagues seemed to think that he was still joking, and even as they realized that he was quite serious they found it difficult to believe him. How could a person of such a strong and healthy physique - such a good "personality" - and such an excellent academic record be a mere Kori? Perhaps he was one of those clever fellows who pretended to be a Scheduled Caste person in order to get access to the reserved labor market.

In the long run even someone who departs radically from the common stereotype of a low-caste person would find it difficult to avoid exposure. Prem Chand, one of the wealthy Hira Lal's sons, was quite certain that despite his good education and the anomalous affluence of his family he would never be able to keep up the facade. He would be exposed as soon as someone from the office came to his house, which was bound to happen sooner or later. Seeing the big house, the car, the shop, the telephone, and so forth, the guest would be sustained in his belief that Prem Chand was really the person he claimed to be, but as soon as he heard the women of the household speak, or saw his host's mother's bracelets and tattoos, he would discover the truth. Still - and this is a measure of the depth of the fear and anxiety that some low-caste persons feel - there are also those who lie about their caste to their workmates in Kanpur. When Girja Shankar had just started to work at the new office, he was approached by a distant kinsman who had been employed there for several years, all along saying that he was a Thakur. Now he begged Girja Shankar not to tell anybody that they were relatives and caste-fellows. If the truth came out, he would become the laughing-stock of the office, if nothing worse. Girja Shankar assured him that he had nothing to worry about; he would treat him as if they had never met before. Yet, as he later discovered, some persons at the office seemed already to suspect that his relative was lying about his caste, presumably because he was so evasive about his background and social life outside the office. So far they had not openly questioned his credentials, but

this could happen any day. Even now his situation was a miserable one: constantly worrying about a lie that nobody really believed in.

To find an example of a person whose deception has actually been exposed, I must turn to another subcaste, a small group known as the Kashyaps. Among these people, none of whom resides in Koriyana, I met a comparatively well-to-do manufacturer of iron utensils called Salig Ram, who told me how his friendship with a Bania shopkeeper had abruptly come to an end when the latter found out that he was a Kori, not a Bania as he had pretended. The two friends used to go down to Ganges every morning to take a bath. One morning, however, Salig Ram was ill and did not turn up at the usual rendez-vous. Going to Salig Ram's house to enquire about his whereabouts, the Bania came across a man whom he recognized as one of his friend's poor Kori neighbors. To his great surprise, he discovered that this Kori was not only well informed about Salig Ram's state of health, he talked about him as if he was one of his own relatives. When he mentioned this to Salig Ram, the latter claimed that the Kori in question was merely a village-kinsman, a person from the same village to whom he was related by fictive kinship. The Bania was not convinced, however, and shortly thereafter he broke all his earthen vessels as well as the friendship.

Similar things can happen to persons who hide their caste in distant places far away from home. One Ahirwar white-collar worker, a man called Ram Prasad, who grew up in Devi Street but now resides with his wife and children in a town in western U.P., told me how one of his low-caste colleagues was inadvertently betrayed by his own father. The latter, a simple washerman living in another part of the state, entirely ignorant of his son's shift of identity, unexpectedly turned up at the office one day to inform his son of the sudden death of a close relative. The son was not at the office when the old man arrived, and his colleagues' first impression was that the humble figure asking for Mr. So-and-So was a messenger of some kind. Soon enough, however, they realized that he was in fact the father of that person. When the offender returned to the office he was abused and beaten by his high-caste colleagues.

Ram Prasad did not have much sympathy for this man. One should not lie about his caste; the harsh treatment meted out to him was entirely justified. Yet, while he was still a college student residing in a hostel in the city, Ram Prasad himself seems once to have committed an act of deception which by Ahirwar standards was far more deplorable. I am not familiar with

the details, but according to his caste-fellows in Devi Street, who frequently mention this event as an example of extreme moral corruption, what apparently happened was that Ram Prasad introduced his father, a poor, illiterate ricksha driver, as a servant when he accidentally visited him at the hostel one day. As the story goes, he even abused him in front of his hostel friends, perhaps to make the act more convincing. What was at stake in this case, however, was not caste as such. If I am not quite mistaken, Ram Prasad's friends knew very well that he belonged to the Scheduled Castes. This, indeed, was clearly indicated by his surname. He may still have been upset by his father's appearance, however, for what makes low-caste persons feel embarrassed and even ashamed of themselves is not merely that they belong to such-and-such a caste, nor even that they are traditionally regarded as ritually polluting, but frequently also that they and their families are poor, uneducated, and, by the dominant high-caste standards, lacking in culture. Remember, for example, the brief discussion in the previous chapter about the problems of having an uneducated wife when one is an educated person interacting closely with high-caste peers.

In Ram Prasad's emphatically stated view, wealth, power, and education are indeed the only things that really matter. Especially important, he said during one of our conversations, is education. The higher the education, the better the service, and the more the respect (*izzat*). Money is an independent source of respect, but education and service have more weight, as shown by the fact that it is the capitalist who has to call on the government officer rather than the other way around. Caste, on the other hand, Ram Prasad argued, is of little importance. It is true that there is a great deal of discrimination on the basis of caste, especially in the villages, but such discrimination is possible only because low-caste people are poor and powerless. As soon as you get power nobody will treat you badly, and if you also add a certain amount of style and good manners to your power you will be treated very well indeed. He knew this from personal experience. In the town where he now worked as a clerk his neighbors were all Jats - a landowning caste similar in status and power to the Thakurs. They were all familiar with the fact that he was a Kori but that seemed to make no difference to them. His wife was quite friendly with their wives, his kids played with their kids. In the office he himself mixed with people of all kinds. Caste was really not much of a problem. Returning to Devi Street made him feel depressed, although this time he did not expect to see much of his neighbors. He had come to the city in order to prepare himself for the entrance

examinations to the Indian Administrative Service together with one of his high-caste friends from college. Neither of the two liked reading, but by mutual support they hoped to make it.

There is certainly a great deal of truth in Ram Prasad's view about the connection between power and life style, on the one hand, and respect, on the other. During my first few months in Kanpur I met quite a few members of the local Scheduled Caste elite. On one occasion I was invited to a wedding reception at the house of a Camar (more specifically Jatav), Class 2 government servant employed in an important position at the local income tax office. At this reception, which was rather different from the more traditional wedding banquets previously referred to, there was a large number of guests, including not only government servants, but also many well-to-do businessmen. All the prominent guests knew perfectly well that they were dealing with a Camar, but that was hardly a problem, especially not as the food, or rather the snacks, were served by professional caterers of high caste, and the invited relatives were educated people like the host himself. Nor, as I learned later, did this man have much difficulty in finding high-caste company in other situations. He was even a member of the Rotary Club and the Cawnpore Club, two very exclusive associations where only leading citizens of Kanpur are members. Furthermore, when he suddenly died some months later, large numbers of wealthy and respectable high-caste persons joined the funeral procession down to the Ganges. I was not present, but according to Shiv Prasad, my part-time assistant, who had known the man for years, and probably exaggerated a bit, there were at least a thousand persons in the procession, only a few of whom were relatives of the deceased.

Unlike Ram Prasad, however, this man did not regard caste as a minor problem. His major grievance was that his superiors resented his good fortune and tried their very best to prevent him from rising further in the bureaucratic hierarchy, as indeed they tried to prevent all low-caste men from rising in society. I never had the opportunity to ask him about the details of his complaints, but the case of one of his low-caste colleagues, a Class 1 officer of even higher standing in the department, will serve the purpose illustration equally well. This man, a Camar called J.P. Kureel, had been employed in the office for almost ten years, longer than anybody else in his category, and was due for promotion. Some time before he had in fact been put on a list of 122 persons to be promoted, but when the actual placements were announced it turned out that he and two others, both of whom also be-

longed to the Scheduled Castes, had not been given new jobs. There had been only 119 vacancies and as he and the other two had been put at the bottom of the departmental ranking they would have to wait for new vacancies to appear. Now, more than a year later, they were still waiting. They had presented their case to persons in high places, such as Jagjivan Ram, the Camar minister in the central cabinet, but so far nothing had happened. Believing that he was entitled to a much higher ranking, J.P. Kureel had indeed complained even before the promotions were made; in his view there had been at least forty persons less qualified than himself in the batch. In his own view the reason why he had been given such low marks was simply that he was a Camar. He had experienced something similar in the 1960's when he appeared for the first time as a candidate for Class 1 service and was rejected after failing in the oral test. All the questions of that interview concerned Tulsidas' *Ramcaritamanas*, a book containing passages insulting to low-caste people. This was surely no accident, he said. The interviewer, who was a Brahman, must have known that many low-caste people do not hold this book in high regard and, indeed, often refused to read it.

Nor was J.P. Kureel entirely satisfied with his situation outside the office. With reference to his late friend, he said that I should not pay too much attention to invitations to weddings, membership in clubs, and the like. Such things did not necessarily reveal true sentiments; quite the contrary, they belonged for the most part to the order of business. What really mattered were relationships of a more intimate sort. In the housing colony for government servants where he and his family resided he had "greeting-relationships" with almost everyone. Yet there were not many people in the neighborhood with whom he and his wife were more intimately linked. Real intimacy, he said, exists only when the wives invite each other into the inner regions of the apartments. While many of his male acquaintances were little concerned with the ritual aspects of caste, however, their wives were usually more conservative. For this reason he and his family were somewhat marginal in the colony, despite the fact that they had now resided there for a long time. The people with whom they were most comfortable were people of their own kind. Yet in the colony there were hardly any such people.

Notice in passing that J.P. Kureel here seems almost to stand Param Lal, the Banaudha communist, on his head. The latter, it will be recalled, argued that while friendship was possible across the divide between the

high castes and the low castes, it was usually not recognized at weddings and other ceremonial occasions where the relations between groups are publicly stated. Yet, apart from the fact Param Lal and J.P. Kureel were speaking about different kinds of friendship, friendship between isolated individuals in the one case and friendship involving entire families on the other, there is also a difference of class to be taken into account. In the working-class world to which Param Lal belongs weddings and similar events are still organized on traditional lines, and the people invited are for the most part kinsmen and neighbors. Among the middle classes, on the other hand, a wedding is also an occasion for the affirmation of relationships of a more transactional nature, or rather of symbolically casting such relationships into a mould of amity. The businessmen present at the wedding reception mentioned above were not there primarily because they were friends, but because they regarded the host as a useful connection, especially in matters of taxation, or so at least Shiv Prasad suggested when I naively asked him why they seemed to take so little notice of the ritual proceedings themselves. They have already done their job, he explained. Beyond the gift of money and a few polite words nothing is expected of them.

A contrasting view from lower down the middle-class ladder is that of our friend Girja Shankar. Now a leading social reformer or social worker among the Ahirwars of Kanpur who will reappear as such later on in this book, Girja Shankar is the son of a millworker; he was still a child when his father died. When he grew up his chief guardians were his mother and his grandfather. The latter, a foreman in one of the textile mills and a fairly important man in the community, wanted Girja Shankar to become a tailor or something of the kind, and it was not until his grandson got a scholarship nearly as big as the earnings of their Ahirwar relatives in the countryside that he changed his mind and decided that education might not be such a bad thing after all. The mother, however, wanted Girja Shankar, her only child, to become an educated man right from the beginning. For many years she followed him to school every day, afraid that he might get hurt, and at home she kept reminding him of his duties. Flying kites from the roof top or playing marbles in the street were not activities which she approved of.

Girja Shankar has many *parjat* acquaintances, but his closest friends have always been Ahirwars. As a child he often visited Devi Street where his two maternal uncles resided, one of whom had no children of his own and therefore regarded him with special affection. Here he became a very close friend of Ram Shankar, the founder of the Mohalla Sudhar Commit-

tee, who is the grandson of his second uncle. The two boys met every week and in the summer vacations they went together to the city of Jhansi to stay with relatives. Later on when Ram Shankar got engaged in social work and politics, Girja Shankar followed suit. Although he resided in a different neighborhood, he was in fact one of the active members of the committee, being particularly concerned with the campaign against tintured ginger for which he wrote a long edifying pamphlet. His communist involvement was never as intense as that of Ram Shankar, but through the latter he nevertheless got in touch with several major CPI(M) leaders, assimilating a lot of communist ideology in the process. One of the things which he liked most about the communists was their unprejudiced attitude in matters of caste. One of them, a leader of great renown, whose portrait now hangs on his wall, not only encouraged Ram Shankar to become a member of the party; he brought him into his own house, treating him like a son and a *chela*. He also treated Girja Shankar very kindly, as did indeed several of the prominent figures of the party. That he does not see these people very often today is more a question of class than of caste. While they are the friends of the working class, some of these communists are definitely not working class people themselves. Despite the fact that he is an educated person and comparatively prosperous by Ahirwar standards, Girja Shankar cannot help feeling that they belong to a world rather different from his own.

Apart from Ram Shankar, Girja Shankar's closest friends are a couple of educated Ahirwars of his own kind residing within easy walking-distance from his house. In the neighborhood where he lives he interacts also with high-caste persons, but only in a fairly superficial manner. There are even a few high-caste families among his tenants, but they are ordinary working-class people with whom he has little in common. Where he is most deeply engaged with *parjats* of higher caste is at the office. Here it is now well known that he belongs to the Scheduled Castes, but this has not prevented him from making friends with several of his high-caste colleagues. A few of the latter are indeed quite good friends, whom he sometimes meets outside the office, visiting them at home and vice versa. There is no interaction on a family basis of the kind referred to by J.P. Kureel, but this is not something that Girja Shankar mentions as a problem, although he is certainly well aware of it.

Yet while Girja Shankar normally gets along reasonably well with his high-caste colleagues he is sometimes unpleasantly reminded of his separate identity. He has not had to face the difficulties of J.P. Kureel; he got his

job as a clerk in open competition, and when he was recently promoted on a reserved quota there was no problem. As he knows very well, however, all his high-caste colleagues, including those whom he regards as his personal friends, are intensely opposed to the system of reservations, which they consider very unfair. Generally, they do not raise this issue in front of him, but he cannot help hearing some of their critical remarks, which often hurt him even when they are not directed against himself. Once he was in fact also publicly attacked, although the person attacking him did not openly reveal his identity. This occurred just before Holi, the spring festival, which traditionally includes a moment of ritual licence when the established order of social persons and relationships can be criticized with impunity, at least within certain limits (cf. Marriot 1971). In Girja Shankar's office, as perhaps in other offices, this moment of license takes the form of anonymously written, satirical but not openly hostile comments on colleagues and superiors. Every year a list of such remarks, often just a nickname, is compiled and circulated in the office. A person by the name of Singh who rarely moves from his chair may be described as Kursi Singh, 'Chair Singh,' a Brahman of dubious honesty in financial matters may be described as Ganga ji ka Panda, 'the *panda* of the Ganges,' the *pandas* being Brahman priests of somewhat shady reputation, and so forth. The remark that on this occasion was attached to Girja Shankar's name, however, was of a different, rather less humorous kind: "*Mujhko reserved seat do!*" - 'Give me a reserved seat!' Understandably enough, Girja Shankar found it difficult to take such a blatant expression of hostility as an innocent joke.

And it is not only on the subject of reservations that he may come into conflict with his high-caste peers. Once he was discussing the Arya Samaj, the Hindu reformist organization founded by Dayananda Saraswati, with one of his colleagues. The latter said that Scheduled Caste people should be grateful to the members of the Arya Samaj; without their criticism of the caste system they would not have made as much progress as they have. In Girja Shankar's view, however, the Arya Samaj did not go far enough in their critique of the society. While they said that caste status should not be hereditary, they still subscribed to the doctrine of the four *varnas* enshrined in *Manusmriti*. Furthermore, they believed that the Vedas were written by God and that the Aryans were the original inhabitants of India, neither of which was true. The Aryans were invaders; the first inhabitants of the country were the Dravidians. Yet this was not what his friend wanted to hear. You are just like other Scheduled Caste people, he

angrily retorted. You are all hopelessly quarrelsome. At bottom you are simply resentful because you were never given any respect by the society.

From such experiences Girja Shankar has learned that are things which he cannot share with his high-caste peers, things which he has to avoid in order not to destroy friendship. In his view there are indeed things which he would never be able to share with these persons, even if they had a more understanding attitude. This he stated quite forcefully one evening when Shiv Prasad and I were visiting him at his house. Shiv Prasad had told us some ghastly stories about the persecution of the Camars of his ancestral village in Hardoi district in the old days, and I said something to the effect that I understood how terrible it must have been. No, you do not understand, Girja Shankar said with much feeling. Such things can only be understood by those who have personally experienced them. Have you noticed the well in the alley outside my house? This well belongs to my Brahman neighbors. When I was a child I was repeatedly told that I should never touch this well, or we would all get into serious trouble. Even today it happens that I tremble when I pass it. Such memories remain engraved in your mind for as long as you live.

Talking about caste

The idea that the caste system is somehow part of a cosmic scheme is clearly not one to which many of my Ahirwar acquaintances consistently subscribe. To be sure, Brahman priests are commonly employed for ritual purposes. As already mentioned, they are frequently called upon in connection with namesgiving, and normally they are also employed for finding auspicious dates for weddings. Some of those who can afford it also hire a Brahman to perform the wedding rituals. In the countryside Brahmans do not serve at Ahirwar weddings, but in Kanpur there are Brahmans who are willing to do the job. According to Surendranath Tiwari, the Brahman journalist residing in Devi Street, no self-respecting Brahman priest would ever serve at a Kori wedding, and those who do so would hardly dare to tell their caste-fellows about it. For the Ahirwars who employ these Brahmans, however, even a degraded Brahman is better than no Brahman. In Devi Street there is an Ahirwar millworker called Mohan Pandit, who has learned some of the secrets of Brahman priestcraft by reading books. For a very low fee he is ready to perform almost every important life-cycle ritual. Yet he has hardly any clients; even those who cannot afford to hire a Brahman usually prefer to do without him. I am not quite certain why, but two reasons seem

to be important. One is that people do not take his ritual knowledge quite seriously, the other is simply that not being a real Brahman his presence does not add any luster to the event.

Yet many of the those who hire Brahmans for ritual purposes would make some kind of distinction between Brahmans as priests and Brahmans as a caste. One fairly common view, presumably inspired by the teachings of the Arya Samaj, is that the present order of caste is a perversion of an original social order where status was more directly tied to occupation. The Brahmans were the highest in that society, too, but only because they performed a particularly meritorious kind of work. Nobody was treated with respect just because he was born a Brahman, nor was necessarily birth the principle by which occupations were distributed. The traditional view that Brahmans ought to be respected merely on the basis of their birth is certainly less common, although it has its supporters, especially among the older people. One person who curiously enough seems to take such a view is Mohan Pandit. Although it would seem to be inconsistent with his attempted appropriation of the Brahmans' ritual function, he likes to dwell on the futility of trying to change the established order of caste. Once he told me a story about a group of Camars who had complained to the police that some of their Brahman and Thakur neighbors would not let them draw water from a local well. The police officer in charge, who preferred not to take action, asked a group of Sweepers to invite the Camars to dine with them. Realizing that they were caught in a trap the Camars dropped the charge against their high-caste neighbors. On another occasion he came up to me with a very dark look and said that mankind is heading for destruction. Not only were the young people of his own caste lacking in decency, even young Brahmans had no sense of duty. As he had recently read in a book, Brahmans going abroad for studies did not even observe the commensal rules of their caste, the rules of *khan-pin*, 'eat-drink,' but mixed with the foreigners indiscriminately. Everything was better fifty years ago.

Hira Lal, the cotton-waste trader, appears to have a similar outlook. Not only is he opposed to fraternization with Camars and others whom he regards as inferior to the Koris, he is also very deferential towards Brahmans. According to Gopi Charan, one of his sons, honoring Brahmans is one way in which he expresses his gratitude towards God (Bhagwan) for the wealth bestowed upon him. The Brahman who is most frequently the object of his worship is one of his own commercial agents, a slightly younger man who is his inferior in every respect except caste. I am not so sure that

this Brahman gets any particular favors in commercial matters, but whenever he visits Hira Lal at the shop, the latter bows respectfully and touches his feet. Often he also orders food for him from some nearby restaurant - feeding Brahmans being traditionally regarded as highly meritorious.

Yet this is an attitude which he has not been able to transmit to his sons. Introducing the Brahman agent to me, one of the latter disrespectfully took him by the shoulder and said that nowadays all people are Brahmans. There were some old-fashioned persons who still followed the traditional ways, but younger persons did not bother. Even the agent's own son, he said with a big laugh, was very keen on such hot things as meat and liquor.

This was obviously meant to impress the anthropologist; normally Hira Lal's sons would behave more respectfully towards the Brahman, not least because he is their senior in age. Nonetheless, they are all convinced that caste is a human construction and that by nature or creation all men are equal (*barabar*). They agree with their father that their good economic fortune is a divine blessing, but they do not see God (Bhagwan) as the great architect of the caste hierarchy; nor, I assume, do they endorse the karmic doctrine that the individual's placement in the caste hierarchy is a result of his actions in previous lives. I did not discuss the latter question with them in detail, but I got the impression that they agree with the common view that caste falls outside the scope of karmic causation.

To elucidate this view a little, I summarize a conversation which I had with Param Lal Banaudha and an Ahirwar brushworker called Moti Lal. It started with my saying that I found it strange that while Hindus refused to kill animals they often seemed to treat them very badly while they were alive. Would it not be more humane to kill a sick and starving dog rather than letting it suffer? No, that is not how we see it, Moti Lal answered. We Hindus believe that such suffering is willed by God. What happens to us here and now is the result of our actions in previous lives. Do you then also believe that this is the reason why you are a Kori rather than a Brahman, I inquired. No, that is a different matter altogether. The caste system is a human thing. If a man gets blind it is because of God (Bhagwan), if he is born into a low caste it is because man has created a society of castes. What about wealth then, I continued. Is it true that Hira Lal's good fortune is willed by God? Yes, I think it is, he replied. I was told by my father that Hira Lal's father found a treasure of gold when he built his house. Why was it not my father who found that treasure? Surely because it was meant for somebody else. Does this also mean that it is because of God that the Koris

are generally so poor, I inquired. No this is because the Koris spend their money on useless things and do not help each other. Look at the Sindhi shopkeepers accross the street. The reason why they have been so successful is that they support each other. The Koris, on the other hand, are extremely selfish and always jealous of each other; who has ever heard of Hira Lal unselfishly helping his castemates? But how, I persisted, is it possible that while the wealth of one person is due to God's will, the wealth of another is due to his own efforts? Well, he replied, God has not made it impossible for us to try to improve our situation; as we do not know what awaits us in the future we should at least try to make the best of the situation.

I will not attempt to analyse this conversation here; as Ursula Sharma (1973), Lawrence Babb (1983), and others have made clear, concepts of karmic causation must be seen within a wider cultural framework of alternative explanations of good and bad fortune. Illness and disease, for example, are more frequently attributed to malevolent ghosts and sorcery (*ojha-giri*) than to karmic causation. What I want to stress at this point is simply that among the Ahirwars, as among low-caste people elsewhere (see e.g. Kolenda 1964), the doctrine of karma does not provide a legitimization of caste in the manner suggested long ago by Max Weber (1958). Nor, as we have seen, does it necessarily lead to a fatalistic outlook in matters of occupation and education, as Weber also argued. To account for their own backwardness the Ahirwars tend to reason in a straightforward historical and sociological manner, although the historical arguments are at times a bit fanciful.

One such account was provided by an Ahirwar *neta* from a rural town of Jhansi district, visiting my friend Moolchand in the company of one of Moolchand's distant relatives. While drinking the liquor that Moolchand served us, the *neta* explained that it was really because of the Koris that humanity had taken the step from nature to culture. Originally man was not fully human. He lived in the jungle naked as an animal, collecting food wherever he could find it. One of these proto-humans, the original ancestor of all Koris, discovered a small worm spinning thread. Learning from this tiny animal, he invented the art of spinning, and after a while he moved ahead to weaving, thereby completing his great mission of bringing humanity to the stage of culture and civilization. Seeing that this founding father of humanity was no longer naked, but dressed in clothes, others became jealous. They offered him and his weaving relatives food in return for cloth, and later on, when agriculture had been invented, they invited the weavers to

settle amongst them. As it turned out, however, they did not treat the weavers as they had promised. The latter were transformed into mere servants, and eventually they were defined as Shudras and Untouchables.

That the Koris should be regarded as Untouchables was quite incomprehensible, for there was absolutely nothing unclean about their occupation. If the Koris were unclean, so were necessarily their high-caste clients. The Kori weavers did not only supply ordinary clothes to these people, they also manufactured their sacred threads and the various kinds of cloth that they needed for ritual purposes. Producing these things they inevitably polluted them by their bodily emissions; their children sometimes even pissed on them. As the higher castes could not go naked, however, they had to pretend that their clothes were not infested with the impurities of their lowly producers.

While things were not quite as bad nowadays as in the past, the higher castes were still trying to prevent the progress of the Koris and the other low castes. Recently the Koris of his hometown had started to build a magnificent temple. Money had been collected within the community; high-caste people had contributed nothing. Yet now, when it was almost completed, some Thakurs had moved a stay-order, claiming that the land on which the temple was being built belonged to them. This was by no means surprising. High-caste people hated the Koris and tried to obstruct their efforts by every possible means.

Moolchand's reaction to this should be noticed. A polite host, he did not argue with the *neta*, but as he explained later he had been quite annoyed by his attitude. Much of what the *neta* had said regarding the oppression of the lower castes was obviously true; there was no doubt about that. Yet he profoundly disliked people who quarreled about such questions as who had invented culture, who were the original inhabitants of the country, and so forth. What the *neta* seemed not to understand was that the low castes and the high castes had to come to terms with one another. Rather than always stressing the conflicts and the differences, one should try to enlarge the area of common interest and understanding. It was not only the higher castes who were to blame for the present situation; the lower castes had to abandon many of their traditional habits and improve themselves. The *neta* and others of his kind, including some of the followers of Dr. Ambedkar, were like the proverbial frog in the well who did not know that there was an entire world beyond the narrow confines of his prison. Such people were a positive hindrance to the advancement of the lower castes. By their

aggressive outpourings they just created further hatred.

Moolchand's view is fairly typical of the more educated among the Ahirwars. While Girja Shankar, for example, sometimes indulges in the kind of reveries about the distant past which Moolchand here criticizes, he would largely endorse the latter's philosophy of accommodation and reform, and so would indeed Ram Shankar, Ram Prasad, Gopi Charan, Prem Chand, Mihi Lal, Param Lal Banauadha, and most of the other progressives introduced in this and the previous chapter. As they all realize, however, the creation of a better society is a long-term project. One major obstacle, they argue, is the cultural backwardness of low-caste people. A handful of persons have been able to break out of their inherited culture of oppression and poverty, but the large majority of low-caste people are still its prisoners and will remain so indefinitely if they are not made to change their ways. An effective way of solving the problem, Girja Shankar once suggested, would be to destroy all low-caste neighborhoods and resettle their inhabitants among high-caste people. This would automatically lead to the desired change, he said, for it is in the nature of man to imitate the people with whom he regularly associates. As this was not a practical proposal, the more educated members of the group had to engage in social work, patiently encouraging their caste-fellows to change their ways. Yet, while most of the educated liked to talk about the need for social reform, they did not usually translate their ideas into practice. Some of them were selfishly preoccupied with their personal careers, others were simply too busy supporting their families to have any time left for their less fortunate caste-fellows.

While not all the educated members of the group are as concerned with the fate of the caste as Girja Shankar, they commonly share his view about the pervasiveness of environmental influence. Thus one important reason why our friend Ram Prasad does not want to return to Devi Street on a permanent basis is that it would harm his children. See what is happening to the sons of Hira Lal, he said. They are all wealthy and well educated, but they do not live in a way befitting their material circumstances. They have a car and a telephone, to be sure, but their style of life is still largely that of ordinary working people. As you may have noticed, they do not even have a sofa-set for their guests and customers, although they could easily afford one. This is because the society, the *samaj*, influences them in the wrong direction. If you associate with people who dress well, you will also want to dress well; if you associate with people who have sofa-sets, you will

also want to have a sofa-set; if you associate with people who put their children in good schools, you will also want to put your children in a good school.

Even among the peons of his office, Ram Prasad went on to argue, there are in fact people who have a better style of life than Hira Lal and his family. Interacting constantly with clerks and officers, they become very similar to them in outlook. They even dress like their superiors. They are given uniforms free of charge, but despite the fact that they earn very little, they prefer not to wear them. Instead they give these clothes to parents and relatives. This is ridiculous, of course, but it shows how people are influenced by their surroundings. Compare with the millworkers, for example, who do not care much about their outer appearance. The problem with Hira Lal and his family, Ram Prasad concluded, is simply that they do not mix with the right people.

A second major obstacle to the social integration of the lower castes is thought to be the system of reservations. While the old ritual prejudices seem to be disappearing, this system gives rise to new forms of discrimination. Many of the educated complain that their superiors and colleagues never give them any credits for good work, but rather seem to take it for granted that they are by nature unfit for their jobs. The dominant view, it appears to them, is that reserving jobs for the Scheduled Castes is as wasteful of natural talent as it is unfair. For persons who are not merely concerned with their material circumstances, but also want to get accepted as social equals, this is of course extremely painful, especially as they are not entirely convinced that the argument is false. When they calmly think about it, they certainly do not believe that they are by nature less fit for intellectual or administrative work than others. Yet as they have grown up among people who often take a very negative view of themselves, and as they were usually not employed in open competition, there is still some room for doubt. Furthermore, since there is usually less competition in the reserved labor market than in the open labor market, there are indeed, they readily admit, some low-caste persons who have been promoted a little too easily. Thus what most of the educated Ahirwars really desire is that they shall one day be able to prove their merit in open competition. For the present, however, they usually believe that this or some other kind of protective system, one based on economic criteria, for example, is necessary. A few persons have in fact done well without government support, but they are the exceptions. Without the system of reservations the Ahirwars, like other low-caste

people, would hardly have been able to make much progress.

Thus to be a protégé of the government, to be what one of Moolchand's high-caste teachers in a moment of anger described as a "son-in-law of the government," a *sarkar ka damaad*, is not easy. Girja Shankar once compared it with being a recipient of foreign aid. In the same way that a country becomes dependent on another country through foreign aid, he said, we become dependent on the government through the system of reservations. In both the cases the recipient is caught in a form of mental slavery. We would all very much prefer to stand on our own feet, but we lack the requisite strength of character. I do not mean, Girja Shankar continued, that those who are poor and illiterate should be deprived of the support; it is indeed very important that they continue to get it for many years still. I am thinking of persons like myself, educated persons who are already employed in good jobs. We should simply cross out the Scheduled Caste entry on the employment form: not applicable. Yet, although it injures our pride and prevents us from getting accepted as equals, we do fill out the entry. We can simply not resist the temptation. Even Jagjivan Ram, the powerful Camar minister, who is second only to Indira Gandhi, has never had the courage to fight an election in a non-reserved constituency, and I am pretty sure that he has never seriously considered the possibility of doing so. Yet we are not the only ones to be blamed. The system of reservations is a political thing. It is used by the ruling Congress to secure the support of the Scheduled Castes. As long as it serves this purpose it will not be abolished or reformed.

But this concern with questions of acculturation and integration is mostly a concern of the more educated. They are the ones who are most closely dependent on high-caste people, and it is also they who are most likely to have a direct personal experience of caste discrimination. As I have said before, quite a few of the manual workers work in the company of other low-caste persons and have hardly any close relations with high-caste persons outside work. Although they may still have definite views on the problems of caste, they are inevitably less preoccupied with those problems than the educated. And this would indeed also seem to be the case with most of the workers who work side by side with high-caste persons, such as the millworkers and the workers employed in the ordnance factories. Initially I was puzzled to hear these workers say that caste was a relatively minor problem in their lives, but so they did. Their view was rather that the really urgent problems were those of work and subsistence. They were by no

means ignorant of the fact that life chances and income opportunities tend to vary with caste, but even more prominent in their consciousness was the fact that there are thousands and thousands of high-caste people who are no better off than themselves. That many of these high-caste people, including some of their own workmates, regard them as polluting and refuse to associate with them, is not a matter of indifference, but as they rarely fail to mention, these high-caste people are after all just ordinary working people like themselves. Unlike their peers in the villages they cannot order them about or otherwise harass them. Furthermore, while they are not frequently harassed because of their caste, they are continually reminded of their poverty and lack of power. As noted in a previous chapter, in factories and offices relations between superior and inferiors tend to be extremely asymmetrical, the latter often being required to humiliate themselves in a most abject manner. Even in public places poor people are in fact expected to make room for their superiors, as shown for example by the extremely brutal way in which many cardrivers conduct their vehicles. Thus rather like our friend Ram Prasad, and indeed many other middle-class persons, most of the manual workers tend to argue that the really important things in life are wealth and power. The major division of the society, they commonly say, is not the division between *bare jat* and *chote jat*, 'big castes' and 'small castes,' but the divisions between *bare log* and *chote log*, 'big people' and 'small people,' and *amir* and *garib*, rich and poor.

Nor do the rank and file of the group generally look at their culture in the same perspective as the educated. Like the latter they are often quite critical of their own way of life, but as they are usually less familiar with the contents of high-caste culture and as their comparative reference groups tend to be drawn from the working class rather than from the middle class, their criticisms tends to have a somewhat different emphasis, stressing differences of social skill rather than differences of character, and differences of group solidarity rather than differences of personal orientation. The view of one of the Ahirwar *netas* of Koriyana, a man of moderate education who runs a teashop in the neighborhood, may serve as a final illustration. One of our great weaknesses, he explained, is that we squander our money on meat and liquor, and do not think of the future. Equally important, however, is that we broadcast our shortcomings to the world. Drinking and eating meat is common in all castes, even among Brahmins. Yet while high-caste men are very discreet about it, low-caste men roam about in the streets with the meat in the one hand and the bottle in the other. Similarly, while

high-caste women are just as prone to behave immorally as low-caste women, it is usually kept secret. Among us such things immediately become public knowledge. And then there is the very important problem of our lack of unity. When there is a fight between high-caste people and low-caste people the former always win, and this is so despite the fact that the low-caste people are nearly 75% of the population of the country. The difference is that while they fight with us, we fight with one another. We simply do not know how to defend ourselves.

The Importance of Kith and Kin

In this chapter we are mainly concerned with relationships internal to the Ahirwar community. To begin with I describe briefly the networks of kinship connecting the Ahirwars of Devi Street with one another and with caste-fellows in other places. Thereafter I address the question of the importance of these networks for instrumental purposes. Who are the persons from whom one may seek assistance in the business of survival? After a brief analysis of the structure of domestic groups, the basic units of cooperation among the Ahirwars, I deal with the supportive relationships involved in the processes of migration and getting access to housing and work. Throughout the focal question is a very simple one: Who helps whom?

Networks of kinship and marriage

In conformity with the standard north Indian pattern (cf. Vatuk 1972), the Ahirwar system of kinship and marriage is a patrilineal, virilocal system based on a categorical distinction between agnates and affines. Between agnates, who are united in nature, by shared blood, *khun*, the prescribed code of conduct is one that stresses symmetry and reciprocity. Affines, on the other hand, are related to each other asymmetrically as bridegivers and bridgetakers, or more simply, givers and takers, *denevale* and *lenevale*. By the transfer of a woman from one group of agnates to another, an act for-

mally known as *kanya dan*, 'the gift of a virgin,' the roles of givers and takers are fixed once and for all. As long as the relationship lasts - and it is supposed to last into the next two generations - the initial gift of the bride is continually reaffirmed by further prestations, not least in connection with the marriage of the woman's daughter, where her mother's brother, her *mama*, gives a major share of the dowry, the *dahej*. It is imperative that the flow of prestations is not reversed. For a woman's junior kinsfolk, especially her younger brother, who serves as a kind of middleman, the rules are somewhat relaxed, but her senior kin, especially her parents, must carefully avoid all situations where they would have to accept the hospitality and generosity of her husband's family. Among the Ahirwars there are those who say that as a matter of principle they would not even accept a glass of water from the families to whom they have given their daughters. Consequently, there can be very little sociable interaction between senior in-laws; the general rule is rather that they should avoid each other as much as possible.

Given this pattern of avoidance local intermarriages would be rather impractical, and in fact such marriages are ruled out by the fictional notion that the local caste group constitutes a single agnatic brotherhood. In other words, the idea is that men and women who were born and raised in the same locality should regard each other as brothers and sisters even when they are not true, genealogically related kinsmen, so-called *sage ristedar*.¹ Under such a concept local intermarriages would verge on the incestuous. In Koriyana, however, it is not the neighborhood as a whole, but each street taken separately, which is defined as the exogamous unit: within the street marriages are, if not forbidden, at least strongly disapproved of; between the streets they are permissible, although not very common. It is part of practical wisdom that one should not marry within too short a distance. The bride, it is said, will adjust more easily to her husband's family if her own close kinsmen are not there to interfere. On the other hand, one does not usually want to send her too far away either, as this would make communication difficult.

How these and other demands are reconciled in practice is shown in table 14, which summarizes the geographical distribution of marriages contracted by the Ahirwar households of the sample.² As shown here, the marriages, those where the bride was a girl from Devi Street as well as those where she was girl coming from the outside to marry a local boy, are spread in almost equal proportions between the city and the countryside. In Kan-

pur there are more than fifteen neighborhoods where marriages have been contracted; the Ahirwars of Devi Street are in fact affinally related to all the major local Ahirwar caste groups of the city. Outside Kanpur marriages have been contracted in a dozen towns and cities and nearly fifty different villages, all of the villages and most of the towns and cities being located in the traditional home territory of the group. Furthermore, there has been no significant change over time in this regard. In the beginning, when the urban community was very small, most marriages were made in the countryside, but since the 1940's or so, the distribution has apparently been the same. The only notable change in recent decades is that fewer marriages are made in villages and more in towns than before, but this is mainly because there are fewer Ahirwars residing in the villages today than in the past.

Table 14. Geographical distribution of marriages.

	Koriyana		Elsewhere		Other		Villages		Total
	Nr	%	Nr	%	Nr	%	Nr	%	
Brides given	9	7	48	37	41	32	31	24	129
Brides taken	3	3	35	37	33	34	25	26	96
Total	12	5	83	37	74	33	56	25	225

The persistence of this pattern of distribution is partly due to the fact that the Ahirwars of Kanpur are still too small a community to be matrimonially self-sufficient, but it is also related to the way in which marriages are arranged. Like other people in the area, the Ahirwars use their already established networks of kinsmen, neighbors, and friends to find spouses for their children. When a boy or a girl is old enough to get married information will almost automatically spread through this network into the villages and towns of the countryside as well as into other neighborhoods of the city. To repeat, people usually prefer not to send their daughters too far away. Yet this is not a consideration of first importance. What a girl's parents are primarily looking for is a boy who will be able to support her at a level of material comfort at least as high as that which she has become used to in her parental home, and who is also an attractive person in other respects. As the girl will be closely dependent on her parents-in-law, it is also essential that they are known to be good and respectable people. The boy's parents,

on the other side, are also concerned with the reputation of their prospective in-laws, and beyond that they will normally look to the size of the dowry. Most parents cannot expect a big dowry, but those who have educated sons will often demand a bigger one in order to compensate themselves for their previous expenses and to give their son a good start on his career. The boy himself, as mentioned before, is likely to be equally concerned with the educational status of the girl, and most probably he will also want her to be a beautiful girl of fair complexion, a dark skin being regarded as a disturbing sign of humble origin as well as something intrinsically ugly. Given these criteria of selection, it is by no means easier to make a good match in the city than in the countryside, not even for those who are more affluent or more educated than the average. In the past there was a difference of living standard and education between Kanpur and the countryside, but today the Ahirwars of Orai, Jalaun, Konch, Moth and other rural towns would generally not seem to be any worse off than their relatives and caste-fellows in the city. With respect to housing and the physical environment their situation is indeed better, although this is hardly a major consideration in matchmaking.

On the agnatic side social relationships do not range widely. Genealogical memory may not go beyond the third ascending generation, and there are no large-scale clans or *gotras* based on assumed or putative ties. Among the groupings based on known genealogical connections the most inclusive is the *khandan* or *gharana*, a shallow lineage of somewhat indefinite boundaries, which is important mainly in certain ritual contexts. When a man speaks about his *khandan*, he may refer to all his known agnates, but in a more narrow sense the term refers only to agnates with whom one has a recognized a social relationship. Minimally such a relationship involves mutual attendance at weddings and, less obligatory, funerals, occasions at which the spirits of the paternal ancestors are also asked to attend. Ideally, one should have such a relationship of *ana-jana*, 'coming-going,' with all one's known agnates, but in practice this is seldom the case. With the passage of time and generations agnates are gradually estranged from one another, and eventually there comes a moment when they are mere natural or genealogical kin, as it were. Furthermore, disputes may easily arise over the proper interpretation of agnatic solidarity, leading to the disruption of the relationship at an earlier stage.

The geographical dispersal of agnates occurring as a result of migration is also a factor of some importance here. Not surprisingly, it is the first-

generation urbanites, the men who are themselves migrants, who tend to be most strongly attached to their ancestral village or town. As shown in table 15, referring to the male heads of household in the sample, the large majority of these men keep in touch with the place where they formerly resided. Only two own agricultural land, but there are several who have parents or brothers whom they visit regularly, sometimes several times a year. Among those who have broken the relation or have only a very weak relation left, there are a number of elderly men who have lived in Kanpur for most of their adult life. A few of them have only distant kinsmen in the village, others have no kinsmen there at all. A couple of younger men who have come more recently visit the village in spite of the fact that they have no kin and caste there, but they are clearly exceptional; as a rule visiting ceases when there are no such people left. After that one may occasionally go the ancestral village or town to worship local deities, especially in connection with *mundan*, the hair-shaving ritual performed on children to remove birth-pollution, but then one will usually not stay for more than a few hours.

Table 15. Relation to village or town of origin.

	Generations in Kanpur				
	1	2	3	4	
Number of respondents	26	41	26	5	98
Relatives in place of origin	19	24	9	0	53
In contact with place of origin	21	17	6	0	44
Lost contact with place of origin	5	24	20	5	54
Never visited place of origin	0	7	15	5	27

Key: first generation = adult self; second generation = parents; third generation = paternal grandparents; fourth generation = paternal great grandparents.

In the second generation, which includes some men who came to the city with their parents at an early age and a few men who were adopted by close relatives in the city, less than half the respondents keep in touch with their ancestral home. The relations are usually confined to mutual visiting on ceremonial occasions, chiefly weddings, although there are also those who visit the countryside for mere leisure, sometimes as often as once a year. Their closest kinsman in the village is at best a FB, FBS, or BS, but

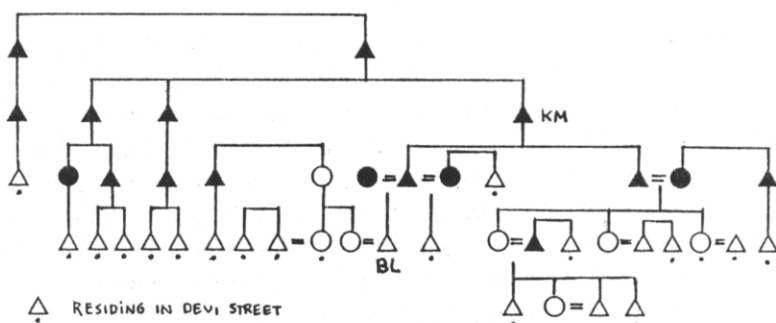
sometimes he is merely a FFBS, FFBSS, or FFBSSS, relatives who tend to be more remote socially as well as genealogically. In some such cases, however, the relationship is strengthened by the fact that the rural kinsman has further reasons for visiting Kanpur and Koriyana. He may come to visit a kinsman who is closer to him than the respondent, a son or a brother, for example, or he may come for business reasons. Several petty clothvenders from the districts of Kanpur and Jalaun usually stay with their relatives in Devi Street while they are in the city to renew their stock. Ram Lal and his son Moolchand, for example, are regularly visited by the Ram Lal's FBSS, a hawker who is their closest agnatic relative in the countryside. Staying with Ram Lal and Moolchand this man also gets an opportunity to meet other kinsmen in the city, including a couple of more remote ones from home, a small town in the southern part of Kanpur district.

More frequently, however, the second-generation urbanites have lost contact with their ancestral village or town. In some cases this is because the relationship with the remaining kinsfolk has been broken through a dispute, but usually there are simply no kinsfolk left. And this is even more common in the third generation, where more than half the men have never visited their village or town of origin. In the fourth generation, finally, there are one or two men who do not even know where their forefathers used to reside. One of these men remembers his parents telling him that the family comes from a village in Kanpur district, but he has forgotten its name and exact location. This is not a matter of regret, however, for he is quite satisfied with the knowledge that his great grandfather came to Kanpur and that his family has resided in the city ever since.

The local caste group in Devi Street is shot through with kinship relations, although not just agnatic ones. Among the one hundred male heads of household in the sample more than a third have a brother residing in a separate household in the street and there are almost as many who have some other close agnate (BS, FB, FBS, FFBS, FFBSS, FFBSSS) residing there. Furthermore, there are about twenty-five who have close cognatic kinsmen on the mother's or the father's side in the locality (MB, MBS, MZS, FZ, FZS, FZSS), as well as another twenty who have close local relatives through their wife (WF, WB, WBS, WZ). These relatives are not evenly distributed between the householders, but if distant ties are also taken into account almost everyone has a fair number of kinsmen among his neighbors. As an example we may look at the local kinship network of a tailor called Bihari Lal, the main portion of which is shown in figure 1. Thus

Bihari Lal does not only have a brother living nearby, his local network of kin includes also one FFFBSS, four FFBSS, one FFBDS, three FBD, two FBDHB, one FBDS, one FBDDHB, one FBWBS, one FWB (the brother of his father's second wife), one WZH, one WZHB, and one WMBS, all with spouses and children. And these are only some of the local people to whom he can trace a genealogical connection. Going further into the web

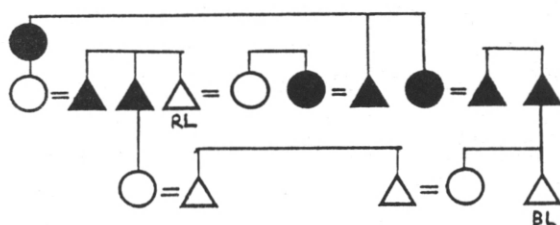
Fig 1. Segment of a local kinship network.



of relationships, Bihari Lal would probably be able to trace such a connection to almost every Ahirwar in the street. To convince me that this was really the case, he more or less randomly picked out a dozen of persons who do not appear in the diagram above, including the brothers Tula Ram and Beni Lal, who turned out to be his ZHZBS, Comrade Mihi Lal and his two brothers, who were his MZSWZHB, and Ram Lal, the father of Moolchand, who was simultaneously his FBWZDHB, FBWBWZH, and ZHBWFB, as in figure 2. Given time and interest, he said, every Ahirwar would probably be able to trace some kind of relationship to all his caste-fellows, including those in the countryside.

Yet most of the persons mentioned are fairly marginal figures in Bihari Lal's life, and even where they are not, their importance does not necessarily derive from the fact that they are kinsmen. Terminologically and otherwise any distant genealogical relationship can be treated on the model of a closer one; the system itself provides no definite genealogical criteria by

Fig 2. Kinship connections.



which kinsmen can be distinguished from non-kinsmen. Bihari Lal, however, regards many of these persons as neighbors rather than kinsmen. The men with whom he is connected through his wife, for example, were his neighbors before he got married, and it is as such that he still tends to regard them. Even some of the agnates are in fact his kinsmen only in a theoretical sense. Referring to one of his several FFBSS, a man called Pota Ram, who resides in a house facing his own, he said that while Pota Ram was a member of his *khandan*, there was no longer a relationship of *ana-jana* between them. They were just neighbors, and not very close ones at that. While this may be so, however, the sheer fact of interconnectedness remains important, as it tends to create or reinforce a feeling of commonality vis-à-vis the surrounding world of *parjats*. In relation to that world, the Ahirwars are not only, or even primarily, a community distinguished by its hereditary occupation; but a group of people united in nature, a big family, as it were, although not necessarily one that stands united in thought and action.

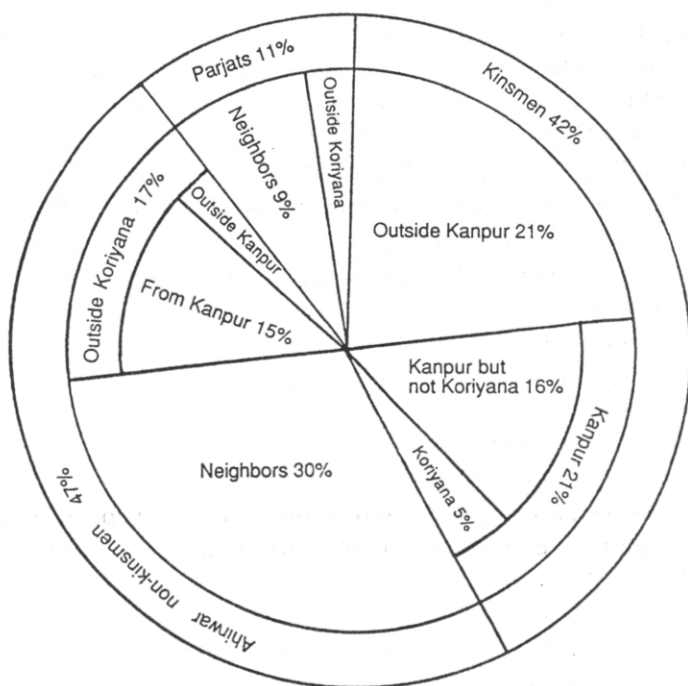
To get a better idea of the size and range of the socially recognized networks of kinship and marriage among the Ahirwars, we may look at the the local records of the monetary transactions occurring in connection with weddings, the small notebooks containing information on money given and received in *ana-jana* relationships, one of which is found in every family. One could hardly manage without such a book, for the number of people with whom one is involved in *ana-jana* relationships is often quite large. The principle underlying the exchange itself is a simple one. If A initiates the relationship by giving one rupee at a wedding in B's house, the latter will later on reciprocate with, say, two rupies, one of which counts as a repayment of A's initial gift, the other as his own counter-gift. Thereafter A and B,

or rather the families of A and B, may continue to exchange two-rupee notes and one-rupee gifts indefinitely, one of them being always in debt to the other. If, at any point, one of the parties would give only one rupee, the relationship would be automatically dissolved, since he would then make the accounts balance and restore the situation existing before the relationship got started. The purpose of the exchange is largely economic: giving small sums of money at the weddings of kinsmen and friends is a way of saving for a future wedding in one's own house. Beyond this it would seem to serve as a symbolic means of expressing the nature of relationship itself. By its strictly reciprocal character it occupies a middle-ground between altruism and egoism, contrasting both with the non-calculating give-and-take that ideally prevails between members of the same family, and the one-way flow of 'pure gifts' associated with the relationship between bridegivers and bridgetakers, on the one hand, and the short-term, profit-oriented exchange characteristic of relations in the market place, on the other. This makes it an appropriate symbol of a friendly, sociable relationship between persons who are neither fully united by common interests, nor fully divided by conflicting interests.

The wedding that I have chosen as an example is that wedding held in the early 1970's for one of the daughters of Hira Lal, the cotton-waste trader; a girl called Kumari Devi. The 150 persons, or I should again rather say families, who gave money to Hira Lal and his family in connection with this wedding have been roughly classified by caste, kinship, and residence in figure 3. The small group of *parjats* consisted of local people who were invited as neighbors, tenants, and friends, and few persons from the outside, foremost among whom were Hira Lal's two lawyers. Among the Ahirwars there were kinsmen and non-kinsmen in almost equal proportions. The non-kinsmen were mainly people residing in Devi Street. Among those residing elsewhere some were old neighbors from the *ahata* where the family used to live before they settled in Devi Street, others were kinsmen of neighbors or neighbors of kinsmen, and still others were simply identified as important men of the caste. None of them, incidentally, came from outside the city. Among the kinsmen, many of whom were rural people, by contrast, only seven were agnates; the rest were affines and other relatives through Hira Lal's father, mother, sisters, wife, sons, and daughters. For the most part they were quite closely related to the hosts, but a few were so distantly related to them that their presence at the wedding requires a special explanation. For instance, there was a FFBSSWB from the town of

Orai, called Mata Din, whom Hira Lal felt close to because the connecting FFBSS, Mata Din's ZH, a railway inspector called Shiv Sahay, was one of his personal friends, and also valued because he was an important business associate buying large amounts of cotton-waste. Similarly, there were some persons, including one SWZHF, one SWFBDH, one SWMZH, who had the additional qualification of being Hira Lal's old neighbors from the *ahata* where he used to reside before the family settled in Devi Street. These persons would most probably have been invited even if there had been no kinship connection involved, and so would presumably a couple of Hira Lal's present neighbors, whom he also preferred to identify as kinsmen, although they were rather distant in genealogical terms. Comrade Mihi Lal, for example, was invited as a kinsman rather than as a neighbor because his sister was married to one of Hira Lal's FFBSS, a brother of the railway inspector Shiv Sahay mentioned above.

Fig. 3. Wedding guests divided by caste, kinship, and residence.



As weddings are major occasions for the display of material resources and social connections, a wedding held at the house of a rich man like Hira Lal cannot be a typical one. Yet while the material arrangements of the wedding of Kumari Devi were probably far above the average, the people invited were for the most part quite ordinary members of the caste. Even among the in-laws, who were the relatives of their choice, as it were, there were none who could match the hosts in terms of wealth and education. Those who came closest were the fathers-in-law of Hira Lal's two eldest sons, both of whom were fairly well-to-do shopkeepers from the district of Jalaun. As a reflection of the general lack of wealthy and educated people among the Ahirwars, however, the in-laws of Gopi Charan and Prem Chand were mere millworkers, and the husbands and in-laws of their married sisters were also fairly ordinary people. In terms of numbers there was probably more of a discrepancy, although even among those who are less affluent the ceremonial networks of kinsmen, neighbors, and friends can be quite large. At the recent wedding of one of Moolchand's father's brother's sons, for example, more than 130 families contributed money. Closer to the average, however, was the wedding of one of Ram Shankar's younger brothers, a youth called Govind Das, where 74 families contributed money, and a wedding held at the house of one of Moolchand's neighbors, a factory worker called Tulsi Ram, where the number of such families was only 42. The smallest wedding that I heard about was one where the bridegroom's father paid for all the arrangements; the bride's father, a bristleworker called Jiya Ram, known to spend most of his money on liquor, did not give as much as a rupee in dowry. As this marriage was a blatant violation of the whole concept of bridegivers and bridgetakers, most of the people on the bride's side refused to attend. A common view in the neighborhood was that Jiya Ram had sold his daughter, and that those few who had attended the wedding had indirectly participated in the crime. Had Jiya Ram been sick or otherwise unable to provide for his daughter's marriage, he might have been excused, it was said, but as he was an able-bodied person no less capable of earning a living than others he stood disgraced.

Notice, finally, that Hira Lal and his family will have to reciprocate when occasion arises. In a single season they may in fact be invited to a dozen weddings or more. As he is an elderly man of a somewhat withdrawn character, Hira Lal himself is often not very keen on going, but his sons, especially Gopi Charan and Prem Chand, tend to enjoy it. It provides them not only with a welcome opportunity for drinking and having fun, but also

with a chance to meet caste-fellows whom they would otherwise not come across. It is indeed largely through participation in weddings that they and their Ahirwar neighbors reach beyond the narrow confines of their immediate kith and kin into remoter regions of the subcaste network. None of them is acquainted with more than a small fragment of that widely dispersed network; even if their partly overlapping personal networks were combined into a larger collective network representing the extra-local contacts of the group as a whole only a fragment of the subcaste would be included. Nonetheless, the number of caste-fellows with whom one interacts in this way is often very large.

Domestic groups

In contrast to these large ceremonial networks, the networks of kith and kin that one can rely upon for instrumental purposes tend to be quite small. Listening to the Ahirwars speaking about the cooperation or rather lack of cooperation between kinsmen and neighbors one can indeed easily get the impression that there are no such networks at all. A common view, endlessly repeated, is that there is no love, no solidarity, and no sense of obligation in this world, even between kinsmen. As long as it does not intrude upon their own interests people may help each other, but where a personal sacrifice is required nobody will give a helping hand, especially not to the poor. The world that we live in is basically one where every man stands alone, divided by the evils of selfishness and jealousy from his kith and kin, as well as from the rest of humanity. As one of my acquaintances put it when I asked him why one of his friends would not give him a badly needed loan of money: "Why should he? Nobody likes to see another person become his equal. Here it is only your father and mother who want you to progress."

Nonetheless, while such sentiments are widespread, the Ahirwars are indeed surrounded by persons from whom they can expect some material support, although sometimes only very little. Normally, the most important of these persons are those with whom one shares a household. In Indian studies the household is commonly defined as a group of people, usually but not necessarily kinsmen, who "share a cooking hearth, pool their incomes, and have their living expenses in common" (Mayer 1961: 177). This is an analytical concept, however, without any exact counterpart in the vernaculars. In Hindi the nearest equivalent is the word *ghar*, which literally means house, but metonymically also refers to a group of people residing together. Normally the residential unit is also a household by the

present definition, but this is not invariably the case. In Devi Street there are several Ahirwar households that occupy more than one apartment as well as a few residential units that consist of two separate households. Furthermore, the definition of the concept of household is itself slightly problematic, as it seems to rest on the assumption that all people can be unambiguously assigned to one and only one household. Among the Ahirwars, however, there are persons who straddle the boundaries between households. Not only are there a few so-called "touring widows" (Vatuk 1974), alternating between the households of their several married sons living in different places. There are also some elderly people, again mostly women, who are more or less simultaneously involved with several households in Devi Street itself. The parents of the clothvender Pyare Lal, for example, reside with their youngest son Babu Lal, but are for the most part fed by Pyare Lal and their third son Chote Lal, both of whom have shifted to separate apartments with their wives and children. By the standard definition the household affiliation of this elderly couple is hardly self-evident.

Still, the basic norms governing the formation of domestic groups are quite clear. As among other people in the region, the major ones are simply that parents should take care of their children and that adult sons should remain in the household of their parents, supporting them in their old age; the incorporation of the bride into the household of the bridegroom follows as a mere corollary. Furthermore, in the absence of the father the responsibility of taking care of his widow and junior children falls in the first place on his eldest son, and then, if the son is still a child, on his brothers. One of the son's primary duties is to arrange the marriages of his still unmarried sisters and keep in touch with those who have already been married, and he is also expected to look after his younger brothers, finding brides for them and helping them to find a job. Once the brothers are old enough to look after themselves, however, his responsibilities towards them are much reduced, and he will probably expect them to set up separate households of their own. In accordance with the dominant values of the kinship system it is indeed an ideal that brothers should remain together beyond this stage, but it is also clearly recognized that fraternal solidarity may be difficult to combine with one's interests as husband and father. Speaking about this in general terms, the men tend to blame their wives. While men try to act in the interest of the group as a whole, being careful not to favor their own wife and children, women, they say, are partial, jealous, and thoroughly quarrelsome. On a more balanced account, however,

it would seem that conflicts are built into the very structure of a joint household of the fraternal type, and that these conflicts involve the men as well as the women. For example, brothers may easily quarrel over the size of their financial contributions to the common purse. As long as the father is alive such disputes are often kept at bay, but when he is gone they are likely to disrupt the household. This course of development is in fact so much taken for granted that households are divided in anticipation of disputes which have not yet occurred.

The most complete realization of this normative framework is a household of the kind headed by the wealthy Hira Lal, which apart from the senior couple includes two or several married sons with wives and children plus a few children still to be married. In the realm of cultural ideals such a household occupies a position of preeminence comparable to that of the nuclear household of husband, wife, and children in western society. Even though it may be full of tension it is regarded as the happiest of households, a household blessed by the gods. Indeed, for a person like Hira Lal, who has also been blessed with much wealth, it is probably difficult not to think that money and children derive from the same divine source of fertility. Yet even in the best of worlds a household of this kind would only be a passing moment in the continuous process of domestic development. As we have just noticed, when the father has passed away, the sons are likely to set up nuclear households of their own. If things go well these households will expand until they too reach the ideal stage, but it is more likely that this will not happen. In the world inhabited by the Ahirwars many parents do not live to see their sons marry, and others have only daughters, or no children at all. Furthermore, even those who have enough sons and do not die prematurely may not be able to keep the family together. Even where the members get along well together, they may be forced apart by lack of adequate housing or lack of work.

To see how such contingencies affect the process of domestic development we need a typology of household composition. The one adopted here, a typology constructed by Pauline Kolenda (1967) and refined by Sylvia Vatuk (1974), looks as follows:

1. Nuclear: a married couple, with or without unmarried, widowed, separated, or divorced offspring.
2. Subnuclear: a group of kin not including a married couple.
3. Supplemented Nuclear: a nuclear household plus one or more additional kinsmen who do not themselves constitute a married couple.

4. Lineal Extended: two or more married couples, with or without offspring, between whom there are lineal links.
5. Supplemented Lineal Extended: a lineal extended household plus one or more additional kinsmen who do not themselves constitute a married couple.
6. Collateral extended: two or more married couples, with or without offspring, between whom there are sibling bonds.
7. Supplemented Collateral Extended: a collateral extended household plus one or more additional kinsmen who do not themselves constitute a married couple.
8. Lineal-Collateral Extended: three or more couples, with or without offspring, linked both lineally and collaterally.
9. Supplemented Lineal-Collateral Extended: a lineal-collateral extended household plus one or more kinsmen who do not themselves constitute a married couple.

Most of the households in the Devi Street sample fit nicely into this scheme, but there are also a handful of ambiguous cases which should be mentioned. First, there are a few households from which one of the male members is temporarily absent, working in another city. While away, these men must make their own domestic arrangements, but to the extent that they are expected to return and in the meantime contribute economically to the household in Devi Street I regard them as members, as they indeed regard themselves. Second, there are a few "touring widows" alternating between the households of their several sons. These women I have decided to regard as members of the households where they happened to reside when the survey was made. In cases like that of the parents of Pyare Lal mentioned above, who constitute a third group of problematic cases, I take it that the elderly persons in question belong to more than one household. For the purpose of classification, this means that in the case referred to there are three households of the lineal-extended type, rather than, say, one such household and two nuclear ones.

As shown in the table 16, the great majority of the households in the sample were either nuclear households, subnuclear households, several of which were single-person households, or supplemented nuclear households, where the 'supplemented' member or members were usually widowed parents and unmarried or divorced siblings of the male head of the nuclear unit. The extended households, on the other hand, were very few, only 12% of the total to be exact. What is more, only one of them, the giant household of Hira Lal, had the ideal composition described above; the re-

maining ones were extended households of the lineal type, such as the household of Ram Lal and Moolchand described in chapter 3.

Table 16. Composition of households.

Household Types	Number of Househ	Number of Persons	% of Popul.	Persons/ Househ.
Nuclear	52	253	45.9	4.9
Subnuclear	11	32	5.8	2.9
Suppl. Nuclear	25	140	25.4	5.6
Lineal Etended	6	52	9.4	8.7
Suppl. Lineal Ext	5	43	7.8	8.6
Collateral Extended	-	-	-	-
Suppl. Collateral Ext.	-	-	-	-
Lineal-Collateral Ext.	1	31	5.6	31.0
Suppl. Lineal-Collat. Ext.	-	-	-	-
Totals	100	551	100.0	5.5

To account for this distribution we should first look at the demographic situation: if there were no difference between the number of actually existing households of the extended types and the number of such households that would have existed if there were no other constraints on the process of household formation than those of demography, we need obviously go no further. If such a discrepancy exists, on the other hand, we may try to identify other factors which may have prevented the formation of a joint household. As it turns out, there was indeed a discrepancy, although in the case of the lineal and lineal-collateral types not a very big one. Among the heads of household in the sample only another seven could possibly have been members of such households; the others simply lacked the requisite set of kinsmen. Furthermore, among these seven at least six could give very good reasons for the separation: in four of the cases the family had been divided as a result of migration, one or several members leaving the parental household in search of employment, and in another two cases housing was the problem. In the remaining case, which involved the family of our friend Ram Shankar, father and son had separated after a quarrel, starting with the son, Ram Shankar's younger brother Govind Das, accusing his father Mangli Prasad, of being an irresponsible drunkard evading his responsibilities towards the family. While the surrounding neighbors had some sympathy for Govind Das, they also felt that he had

gone much too far; a son should stick with his father even if he was not a very good one. That Ram Shankar had also deserted the household was a different matter altogether. In becoming a full-time social worker he had not abandoned his filial obligations, but rather transcended them. The supreme proof of his sincerity, it was commonly said, was that he had sacrificed the pleasures of married life, living like a true renouncer in the party office. Moreover, although he was now a fairly prominent member of the party, entrusted with the affairs of several unions, he was a very modest and considerate person, treating even the poorest among his kinsmen and former neighbors with much regard.

That there were no households of the collateral extended type cannot be accounted for in such terms, however, for among the householders in the sample no less than thirty-seven had a married brother living nearby in Devi Street and a few of them even shared living quarters with their brother. Yet, as I have already explained, it is not really expected that brothers will have a common household, and where such households nevertheless exist they are usually transitional arrangements to be terminated when the younger brother finds a separate apartment for himself and his wife and children. In Devi Street one such household was recently dissolved even before that. This happened as Beni Lal, the elder brother of Tula Ram, one of the protagonists of the *javara* dispute, decided that since his younger brother did not even pay for the support of his young wife, who had been a member of the household for several years, she might as well be sent back to her parents. The parents were presumably not very happy about this, but as not even Tula Ram himself seemed to care there was nothing that they could do to prevent it. As for Tula Ram himself, he continued to reside with Beni Lal, although the latter would probably have wanted him to leave too. As he explained, he had done everything he could to make Tula Ram a responsible person, including helping him to get a job in the textile mill where he was employed. Tula Ram had soon quit this job, however, being fed up with the fixed routines. Now he worked irregularly as a painter and construction worker, which was perhaps just a well. While he was employed in the mill he had been a real nuisance, borrowing money in his brother's name and doing other kinds of mischief. It was surely time for Tula Ram to look after himself, but as he had nowhere else to go, Beni Lal felt that he could not just throw him out. In spite of everything they were still brothers.

Particularly interesting from the point of view of the question who is

supporting whom is what happens to elderly people who have no sons to look after them in their old age. In Devi Street, where about half the Ahirwars are below age sixteen and only 9% above fifty-five, such people are not very numerous, but even so they pose a problem. Are they incorporated into the households of more distant relatives? Are they supported by their neighbors? Are they left to look after themselves? Most briefly, the answer is that it varies from case to case depending on the circumstances. For a man the solution most in keeping with kinship values is to join the household of his brother or brother's son, and for a woman it is to join the household of her husband's brother. In the parental household of Ram Shankar, for example, which typologically is a household of the supplemented nuclear kind, one of the member's is Mangli Prasad's elderly father's brother Hulasi Ram, who in the past lived next door with his wife and daughter. When Hulasi Ram joined the household of Mangli Prasad, which did not happen until he had become a widower, he was not only a co-owner of the house where the family resides, but also an active money-lender able to contribute significantly to the support of the household. Now, when the house has been sold to his brother's daughter's son Girja Shankar and there is nothing left of the money-lending business, his economic position is weaker, but he is apparently still able to pay for his own upkeep and more. In terms of kinship values this should not make much difference to the way he is treated, perhaps, but in practice it may very well do so. Where the father's brother has no means of his own or has not been closely involved with the household of his brother's son in the past, he seems often to be more marginal and may not be a member of that household at all.

The situation of those who have no brother or brother's son to rely upon tends to be more precarious. In Devi Street there is one elderly man called Gokul Baba, who resides by himself in a tiny shed belonging to Hira Lal, the cotton-waste trader, paying rent at the rate of one rupee per month, a symbolic fee meant primarily to remind him of the fact that he is a tenant. His closest relatives are a daughter, who resides with her husband and children in another neighborhood of the city, and three father's brother's sons, one of whom lives with his family in Devi Street, only a few steps away. From the daughter he cannot seek any assistance, as that would go against the rules governing the relations between bridegivers and bridgetakers, and from the father's brother's sons, there is not much to be expected either. To make a living he dresses as a holy *baba* and goes begging in the

city. With his long grey beard, saffron *dhoti*, and tulsi beads around the neck he looks genuine enough, although his kinsmen and neighbors, who know that the principal object of his devotion is the bottle, regard him as a fraud. But they do not care to bother him about it, and, as witnessed by the fact that he was asked to sit at the feet of the goddess Santoshi Mata during the *javara* procession-cum-*rathiyatra* previously described, they rather like him and do not mind making use of his talents, if only for theatrical purposes.

Gokul Baba's situation is by no means unique. In the sample there were not only another four elderly men living by themselves, but also several nuclear households consisting of an elderly couple without children to look after them. Several of these persons had married daughters, but like Gokul Baba they did not rely upon them for material support. A few of them may have had some savings to fall back upon, but hardly very much. Apart from a few who were too sick or too old to work, all of them earned their own upkeep. One old couple, a retired millworker and his wife, sold biscuits from a basket on the footpath, a few persons were irregularly employed by Hira Lal to sort out cotton-waste, one old woman cleaned vegetables in the market, and so forth. One of the persons who had reached the stage where he was no longer able to work, a former millworker called Chunni Lal, was fed and looked after by the neighbors. As it was clear that Chunni Lal was not going to live much longer and as he had no son or other agnatic kinsman to perform his funeral rituals, one of the neighbors even offered him to adopt his son. According to some of the people in the street, however, this was not as noble a gesture as it seemed. While Chunni Lal, who had worked for the better part of his life in the textile industry without ever getting a permanent job, had no money whatsoever, he had something else that was quite valuable, namely the apartment where he had resided alone for the last twenty years. Since the neighbor in question had never been particularly helpful to the old man before, it was said, it was surely the apartment he was after. As it turned out, however, he was not able to take possession of it. As soon as Chunni Lal had died he and his son moved in with some of their belongings, but the landlord, who was also suspicious of the adoption and wanted to give the apartment to somebody else, called the police and managed to get them evicted. In the meantime the body of the deceased Chunni Lal had been hurriedly brought to a graveyard, where Ahirwars and other low-caste people usually dispose of their dead, as it is considerably cheaper than having the corpse burned at the bank of the

Ganges. Normally, a feast, a so-called *tehri*, would have been held thirteen days after the death, but since Chunni Lal was a poor man without close kinsmen in the city it was cancelled.

Kinsmen in migration

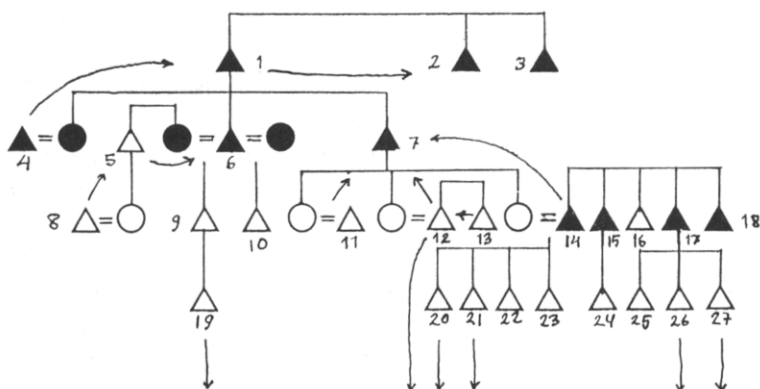
The Ahirwars have come to Kanpur and Koriyana by a process of serial or chain migration, and what I want to do now is to look briefly at the social relationships involved in this process: Who are the persons whom one is most likely to depend upon for the purpose of migration? Discussing this question with reference to a group of migrating villagers from the district of Faizabad, Harold Gould (1970) suggests that while *parjats* are not likely to assume the sponsor's role, the range of caste-fellows who may do so is a fairly wide one, including distant kinsmen as well as close kinsmen, and non-kinsmen as well as kinsmen. "The quest for a personal tie," he says, "overrides all the usual distinctions between affine and consanguine, lineal and collateral relative once the peasant steps beyond his rural environment" (ibid. 142). As we shall presently see, this is not the case among the Ahirwars. When the Ahirwars move to the city the sponsor is usually not only a kinsman, but also a very close kinsman.

Figure 4 presents a small segment of the larger chain of Ahirwar migration. Its originator, a man called Kallo Mistri (1), who was the grandfather of the tailor Bihari Lal mentioned a previous section, came to Kanpur from a village in Jalaun district towards the end of the last century with the assistance of his two brothers (2, 3), who had already settled in the city. Both the brothers may have been involved in bringing further people to the city, but here we are only concerned with the persons appearing on the chart.

Kallo Mistri had three children, one daughter, Vimla Devi, and two sons, Chunni Lal (6) and Ram Lal (7), all of whom were raised in the city. By the early 1920's Vimla Devi had been married in a village in Jalaun district, not far from Kallo Mistri's own village, but there she resided only for a few years, until Kallo Mistri helped her and her husband (4) to settle in Kanpur. During the same decade Chunni Lal and Ram Lal were also instrumental in bringing relatives to the city. While Chunni Lal made arrangements for the migration of his wife's brother Munna Lal (5), Ram Lal did the same for one of his daughters, Jagrani Devi, who had previously been married in the town of Auraya and now returned in the company of her husband Moti Lal

(14). During the 1930's and 1940's, when Kallo Mistri was already dead and the whole group had shifted from one of the older *ahatas* to Devi Street, Ram Lal helped his remaining two daughters, Dulari Devi and Parvati Devi, to settle in Kanpur with their husbands Lacchi Ram (11) and Babu Lal (12), and Moti Lal, the husband of Jagrani Devi, arranged for the migration of his four brothers Chakki Lal, Sita Ram, Khasi Ram, and Dhani Ram (15, 16, 17, 18).

Fig 4. Kinsmen in migration



After World War II, when it became more difficult to find employment in the city, the process of migration was temporarily interrupted, at least as far as this particular group of people was concerned. Further migrants did not arrive until the 1960's, when there was a big demand for tailors and other skilled workers in the defence industry. One of the persons who then settled in the city was the son-in-law of Chunni Lal's wife's brother Munna Lal, a tailor from the town of Etawah called Putti Lal (8). Two others were Mewa Lal (24), the son of Moti Lal's brother Sita Ram (14) and Bala Din (13), the brother of Babu Lal (12). Some fifteen years before, Sita Ram had come to the city with the assistance of Moti Lal, but as he could not find a permanent job and did not like the city very much he had soon returned. Now when his son Mewa Lal came to the city the person who acted as his sponsor was Moti Lal's son Hore Lal (23). Bala Din, on the other hand, was helped by his brother Babu Lal. The latter, about to retire from the mill

where he was employed, had decided to return to his village, but before he left he managed to get both his job and his quarter in Devi Street transferred to his brother.

With Bala Din the migration to Kanpur comes to end, at least for the time being. As indicated on the chart, however, there are also a number persons leaving Devi Street to be accounted for. One of them is the son of Bihari Lal's brother, the youth Ramesh Chand (19), who left his father's household in the early 1970's to settle in Lucknow, where his sister's husband helped him to get work and accommodation. Another two are Moti Lal's two sons Binda Prasad (20) and Roshan Lal (21), one of whom left for Delhi, where his father-in-law helped him to set up a small tailoring workshop, the other for another neighborhood in Kanpur, where his father-in-law had found a vacant apartment for him and his wife. Finally, there are the deviant cases of Chakki Lal's two unmarried sons Devi Din (26) and Ghasi Ram (27), both of whom left the neighborhood after the death of their father to lead a vagrant sort of life in and around the city, while their younger brother (25) joined the household of their father's brother Moti Lal.

Thus the migration of Ahirwars appears as a rather monotonous story of one close relative helping another. The same relationships keep recurring from beginning to end: Kallo Mistri helped his son-in-law to come to the city, and so did his son Ram Lal; Chunni Lal assisted his brother-in-law in coming to the city and his grandson Ramesh Chand left the city through the same relationship; and so forth. Yet this is not all there is to say about it, for even within this narrow range of relatives some kinds of relatives seem to be rather more likely to act as sponsors than others. That this is so is strikingly confirmed in table 17, which summarizes the somewhat incomplete information obtained from the heads of household in the sample.³ One of the things that stand out here is that while there are more couples who have been sponsored by the wife's kin than by the husband's kin, there is a much greater diversity of kin on the husband's side than on the wife's side. While in the one case the sponsor is always, or nearly always, a father or a brother, in the other he may also be a FB, FBS, FZH, MB, and so forth. Also striking is the fact that of all the kinds of kin appearing in the table the wife's father and brother are the ones who are by far the most likely to assume the sponsor's role: while in seventeen cases these relatives acted as sponsors in migration, there are only four cases where the husband's father or brother was the the sponsor and only six where the sponsor was the husband's ZH.

Table 17. Sponsors in Migration

Main Sponsor	<u>Unit of Migration</u>			Totals
	Unmarried Male Migrant	Couple assisted by Husband's kin	Couple assisted by Wife's kin	
F/B	4	4	17	25
FB/FBS	2	2	-	4
FZH	1	1	-	2
MB	3	1	-	4
ZH	-	6	1	7
BWB	1	-	-	1
dMB	1	-	-	1
vB	1	-	-	1
Total	12	15	18	45

Key: In the left-hand column, where the sponsors have been categorized from the migrants' point of view, dMB stands for 'distant mother's brother,' i.e. a real kinsman referred to as *mama*, but genealogically more distant than the *sage mama*, the real mother's brother, and vB stands for a so-called 'village brother,' a *gaon ke bhai*, i.e. a person from the same village related to the migrant by fictive kinship.

Given the structure of the kinship system, however, nothing of this is very remarkable. That there is a greater diversity of kin on the husband's side than on the wife's side is consistent with the fact that women tend to lose contact with most of their natal kin, including their married sisters, when they get married, and that there are more wife's fathers and brothers than husband's fathers and brothers among the sponsors is equally consistent with the fact that while women leave their parental village or neighborhood when they marry, their brothers are more likely to remain there. To be able to act as sponsors for each other in migration close male agnates must first be dispersed through migration, which is most likely to occur through the agency of a wife's father or brother. That the wife's father or brother is a more likely sponsor in migration than the husband's ZH, finally, would seem to accord with the asymmetric principle governing the relationship between bridegivers and bridgetakers, although here we must also take into account the fact, not shown in the table, that where the wife's kin are concerned the effective relationship is usually a parent-child relationship, not just a sibling relationship as in the case of the husband's ZH.

Thus the view that the distinctions between affines and consanguines and lineal and collateral relatives are irrelevant in the context of migration does not apply here. Nor, indeed, do the data support the view that more distant relationships are also important in migration. Among the sponsors listed in the table, only two or three do not belong to what one would normally consider to be a person's closest kindred. One of them is a BWB, second is a 'distant mother's brother' (dMB), a *dur ke mama*, and a third a so-called 'village brother' (vB), a *gaon ke bhai*, i.e. a person who is regarded as an agnate under the fictional notion that people born and bred in the same locality constitute a single brotherhood. The case of the village brother, incidentally, was unusual in more than one respect. Normally, a migrant would not set out on his journey before he has secured the support of the sponsor, but in this particular case the migrant, who was a mere boy, turned up unannounced at the house of his helper, having left home after a quarrel with his father. Thus, while the fact that the village brother took the boy into his care testifies to the effectiveness of the relationship, the circumstances under which it occurred serve rather to underline the marginality of village brothers and other non-kin in the context of migration. That the village brother in question was a caste-fellow I need hardly mention; among the Ahirwars, as among the villagers of Gould's study, migration is overwhelmingly a process internal to the *jati*.

Getting access to housing and work

How does the sponsor go about helping the migrant to find a job and a place to live, and how, for that matter, do the people who have already settled in the city solve these problems for themselves? What are the social relationships involved here?

In the past the situation was relatively simple. From the time when the Ahirwars first came to Kanpur down to the 1930's, or even the 1940's, finding a place to live was not a major problem. As a rule low-caste people were not allowed to settle among high-caste people, but in their own neighborhoods and *ahatas*, the owners of which were usually Muslims and high-caste Hindus, residential quarters were apparently not difficult to find. In one of the *ahatas* where the Ahirwars lived in large numbers until the communal riots of 1931 the owner, a Muslim, was in the beginning so anxious to get new recruits, I was told, that he even offered a small fee to those of his tenants who would bring in new ones, and in Koriyana a similar situation obtained for a while. Here, people say, some of the tenants at first

did not even have to pay rent, as their landlords thought that it was better to have non-paying tenants than to give their vacant apartments over to *bhuuts*, *chaureels*, and other dangerous creatures known to haunt desolate places, such as graveyards, ruins, and uninhabited houses.

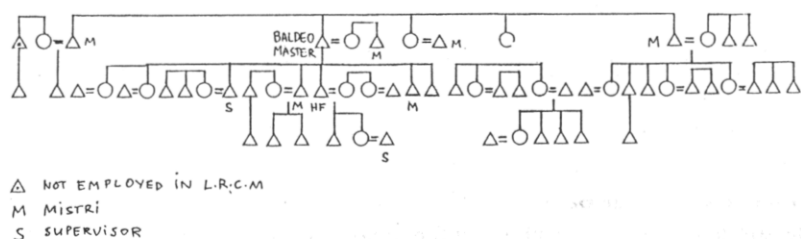
In the labor market, which as far as the Ahirwars were concerned was largely identical with the textile industry, there was more competition. At the beginning of the century the textile industry experienced a prolonged period of labor shortage on account of the plague, and there were also shortages of a temporary kind later on, but the normal situation was one where the supply of labor was in excess of the demand; increasingly so as the years went by. For the Ahirwars, however, it was still relatively easy to find employment in this industry. In the textile mills of Kanpur, as elsewhere in the Indian textile industry (Morris 1965, Koiiman 1977, 1984, Chakrabarty 1983), the task of recruiting workers (as indeed also that of dismissing workers) was delegated to a class of superior foremen on the shopfloor, commonly referred to as head jobbers or masters. These men, who had risen from the ranks of the workers on the strength of their ability to handle men and machines, especially men, and were often Koris and sometimes Ahirwars, were not labor contractors in the usual sense of the term, since they were not responsible for the payment of wages. As the Ahirwars remember them, however, they still had almost unlimited powers of hiring and firing, no worker being employed and no worker being dismissed without their consent. Like the jobbers of Calcutta, Bombay, and other places, moreover, some of them regularly charged money from the workers they employed, although this practice, the Ahirwars say, was not so common in the beginning.

In most of the mills of Kanpur the jobber system had been replaced by a somewhat more bureaucratic system of labor recruitment by the mid-1950's. In the politician Ram Ratan Gupta's Laxmi Ratan Cotton Mills, however, where large numbers of Ahirwars were employed, it was retained more or less intact down to the 1970's, when the factory went out of production and was taken over by the government. One of the jobbers in this factory was the Ahirwar Baldeo Master, whom I mentioned in chapter 3 as the person allegedly responsible for the victory of the Congress *neta* Har Narain in the municipal elections in Koriyana in 1959. Recruited to the factory in the late 1930's and soon put in charge of one of the three shifts of the weaving department, Baldeo Master served Gupta faithfully as head jobber for almost three decades. When he eventually died towards the end of the

1960's and was succeeded by one of his own sons, a man called Ram Gulam, he had recruited hundreds, perhaps even thousands, of workers to the factory, a large majority of whom were apparently low-caste men, mainly Koris. According to people who knew him personally, Baldeo Master was reluctant to hire high-caste men, as such men were thought to be less amenable to disciplinary measures than low-caste men and were likely to find it especially difficult to accept the authority an Untouchable. Yet even if Baldeo Master had not had any such fears, the composition of his shift by caste would presumably have been much the same. Like all jobbers, including his son and successor Ram Gulam, Baldeo Master recruited workers mainly through his personal network of kinsmen, neighbors, and friends. As this network consisted mostly of people of his own kind, primarily Ahirwars and other Koris, it was only natural that there was also a predominance of such people among the workers of his shift.

But this does not mean that Baldeo Master and Ram Gulam used the employment opportunities at their disposal merely to gratify their kith and kin. In many cases moral or sentimental considerations were no doubt involved. Such considerations were surely of primary importance where near kin were concerned. As shown in figure 5, by the early 1970's only one of Baldeo Master's and Ram Gulam's thirty-nine closest male relatives did not work, or had not worked, in the weaving department of L.R.C.M., and among the remaining thirty-eight no less than seven, all of whom belonged to the very core of their joint kindred, had been promoted

Fig 5. Kinsmen in labor recruitment



to the ranks of line jobbers, so-called *mistris*, and supervisors. Furthermore, just as these men were employed in the factory on the moral and affective strength of the relationships involved, so were presumably some of *their*

closest relatives, as indeed also some men who were connected to Baldeo Master and his near associates as neighbors or friends. Yet while personal considerations of this sort may in fact have been involved in the majority of cases, the more distant and indirect the connection, the more transactional was usually the relationship, the job-seeker often being required to pay a commission in cash or kind in order to get employed. Indeed, such payments, normally construed as gifts, were not only demanded from fresh recruits. By the mid-1960's more than sixty percent of the workers of L.R.C.M. were temporaries and substitutes (V.B. Singh 1973). As such they were entirely dependent on the foremen, and to assure themselves of continued employment, as well as to increase their chances of getting a permanent job in the future, many of them did not only humble themselves before their superiors and occasionally present them with bottles of liquor; frequently they also handed over a portion of their monthly earnings. In order to secure the continued goodwill of the foremen or even to express their gratitude for the promotion, some of them continued to make such payments even after they had been made permanent. This was the case with one of the Ahirwars of Devi Street, a man called Roop Chand, who had been employed as a temporary worker in this factory for several years, all the while giving Baldeo Master Rs. 5-10 per month. When he was eventually made permanent on the payment of a lump sum of a few hundred rupees, he could perhaps have discontinued the monthly payments. As his son explained, however, he continued to pay because he felt indebted to Baldeo Master. He did not believe that the practice of extorting money from the workers was right, nor indeed did he particularly like Baldeo Master as a person, but as the latter could just as well have given the job to somebody else, he was still grateful to him. To continue to pay was thus a matter of honor.

Furthermore, while Baldeo Master and Ram Gulam were not insensitive to the obligations of kinship and other personal ties, they were first of all the loyal servants of Ram Ratan Gupta, or Lalaji, as they used to call him. As such they were not only expected to take the skill and efficiency of job-seeking workers into account, even more importantly they had to consider their attitudes on issues of industrial relations. No matter how close a worker happened to be in terms of kinship or friendship, if he took a militant stance against the employer he could not rely on the support of Baldeo Master. Quite the contrary. To keep the workers from joining the unions and going on strike was one of the foremen's chief tasks. In L.R.C.M. there

was a big strike against increased workloads in the late 1940's, which ended with the dismissal of thousands of workers. Starting again with a fresh work-force, Gupta was determined not to let the unions interfere with his business and throughout the 1950's and 1960's he almost succeeded in keeping them out of the factory (S.M. Pandey 1970). Workers who refused to relinquish their ties with the unions were victimized in various ways and ultimately discharged, and trade-union leaders who attempted to hold meetings outside the factory gates were not only attacked by the police, with whom Gupta had excellent relations, but also by his own private army of loyal workers led by the foremen. That Baldeo Master was an important figure in this struggle is indicated by the fact that Gupta presented him with the gift of a revolver at the wedding of one of his daughters, and also gave him large gifts of money on other occasions, as for example in 1949 when he received an extra reward of Rs. 1 000 for having recruited large numbers of workers to replace those who had then been dismissed. According to Ram Gulam, who had taken over his father's disciplinary function as well as his other functions, the two of them had always belonged to the core of Lalaji's repressive troops, and even now when the factory stood silent and it was unlikely that he would ever be able to serve his master again, he regarded himself as one of his men: "We have eaten his salt for many years. How could it be otherwise?"

In writings on the jobber system the point is often made that the jobber's powerful position inside the factory tended to spill over into a similar position outside the factory. Rajnarayan Chandravarkar (1981: 608-11), describing the situation in Bombay between the wars, mentions that the jobbers frequently acted as money-lenders and rent-collectors, that they were occasionally landlords, that they sometimes ran liquor-shops and gymnasiums, so-called *akharas*, that they were among the main organizers of religious ceremonies and festivals, and that they were prominent members of neighborhood committees and caste *pancayats* and were even called upon as advisors in family affairs. While there were also other central figures in the working-class districts of the city, the jobbers were by far the most important.

In large part this description would also seem to apply to the situation in Kanpur in the same period and before. Among the Ahirwars the men who were employed as foremen in the mills, the so-called *master-mistri log*, the 'master-mistri people,' formed something of a privileged class within the caste. Like their colleagues in Bombay they sometimes acted as money-lenders. In the 1920's and thereafter, when land for housing was offered for

sale by the municipality, many of them also became independent houseowners and landlords, often recruiting tenants among their workers and sometimes even using them as construction workers. They did not differ from their caste-fellows by cultural preferences, but they were in a much better position to enjoy what was commonly regarded as the good life. Frequently, they were also leading figures in community affairs, contributing prominently to festivals and rituals and representing their followers in *pancayats*. As my Ahirwar informants would insist, however, the foreman's power within the mill was not automatically translated into community leadership. Not only were some of the foremen not particularly interested in community affairs, others lacked the personal qualities required of headmen and other community leaders, notably the oratorical and diplomatic skills always mentioned as the hallmark of such persons. Baldeo Master, for example, apparently did not have these skills. Although he was still a very influential member of his caste group, his influence is said to have been based on fear rather than respect.

In a similar vein I wish to qualify Dick Kooiman's (1984: 144) view that the jobber system perpetuated social relations of a feudal or pre-capitalist kind within the framework of modern industry. While this may be true in some sense, it should also be noticed that from the Ahirwar point of view it represented something quite new. Never before had individual Ahirwars been able to wield such power over their caste-fellows as did the masters and to a smaller extent the *mistris*. Some of the old headmen were no doubt extremely influential, but as they did not control the means of subsistence of their caste-fellows, they had much less real power over them. As I have said before, the system of headmen and *pancayats*, which was the pre-capitalist or 'feudal' system of authority among the Ahirwars, was essentially a system of plural authority, a system where the limits of the headmen's authority were narrowly set by the limits of consensus within the group. Hence the need for oratorical and diplomatic skills, both of which were much less important to the management of the workers in the factories.

Occupational diversification

While Baldeo Master and the other head jobbers of Laxmi Rattan Cotton Mills stood at the height of their power, their colleagues in the other mills were considerably cut down in size and eventually replaced altogether. Under the new system of management and recruitment their powers were divided between a whole set of functionaries, including labor officers,

medical officers, departmental heads, shifts-in-charge, *mistris*, and the officers at the Employment Exchange, an institution also established in this period. At present a person who wants to become a permanent worker in the mills must first serve as an apprentice for a fairly long period, during which he is paid nothing or very little. Thereafter, he must register at the Employment Exchange, where there is already a long queue of registered job-seekers. The millowners are not legally compelled to recruit their workers through the Employment Exchange, but there is a so-called gentlemen's agreement to that effect. Thus if everything goes by the book the applicant will eventually be informed that he should turn up at such-and-such a factory at such-and-such a time. Arriving at the factory along with several other applicants, the number of workers being sent from the Employment Exchange being always in excess of the number workers required, he will be medically examined and tested on the machine by the supervisor and the *mistri*. If he is found fit he will get employed as a temporary worker for specified period of time, usually a month or two. And this is only the beginning. Before he reaches his goal of becoming a permanent worker, he must advance to the rank of substitute worker, which may take a long time, and thereafter he must again stand in queue. As I have mentioned before, years may pass before he is made permanent.

The idea behind this system of recruitment is that only seniority and skill should count in the selection of workers. Nobody should be employed for personal reasons, nor should anyone have to pay for his job. As the workers of Kanpur know very well, however, principle and practice do not always agree. In actual operation the system can be bent and twisted in many ways. The mills do not always stick to the gentlemen's agreement just mentioned, and the people at the Employment Exchange do not seem to be immune to bribes and personal pressure. Given the right incentive, my informants say, they will not hesitate to let you bypass the queue. Furthermore, a worker who is well connected within the mills, especially one who is closely related to supervisors or *mistris*, will stand a much better chance of getting employed than one who lacks such connections, although money may sometimes serve as a substitute. And this applies not only to the initial stage of the worker's career. For as long as he has not been made permanent personal connections are extremely important, and so they are indeed for getting that final promotion.

While the present system of recruitment is not so different from the old one as it first appears, however, it is a very different system as far as the

Ahirwars are concerned. The reason for this, I am told, is that while the persons who controlled the recruitment of labor in the past were often low-caste people, including Ahirwars, those who are now in charge of it are more frequently high-caste people. Among the higher levels of the supervisory staff, consisting of educated persons, there are almost no low-caste men, and even among the *mistris*, still very important in the process of recruitment, their numbers have decreased considerably in the last few decades. The result of this development, my informants say, is that it has also become more difficult for Koris and other low-caste people to get employed as ordinary workers. There are still quite a few of them in the mills, no doubt, but whether this will also be so in the future is less certain. As one resentful Ahirwar worker described it, when high-caste people first started to work in the weaving departments they were often extremely deferential towards the Kori foremen, presenting them with gifts and respectfully saluting them whenever possible. Now the situation was just the reverse. His own foreman, a Brahman who had taken over after a Kori, systematically favored his own people. He himself had eventually managed to get a permanent job, but only after years of flattery and feet-touching. Under the present conditions of general scarcity it was also very difficult for high-caste men to get employed in the mills; many of them were indeed in the same predicament as the Koris. Still there was a difference, not only in his own factory, but everywhere in the industry.

In their search for alternative employment the Ahirwars have generally ended up in the small-scale sector of the urban economy. In the middle of the 1960's, after the China War, a fairly large number of men were employed as tailors in the defence industry, but these men, half a dozen of whom now reside in Devi Street, were for the most part migrants coming directly from the countryside. The Ahirwars who already resided in the city at the time were usually not familiar with tailoring and therefore not in position to compete for these very attractive jobs. For the rest, the Ahirwars who have managed to find alternative employment in the large-scale sector during the last couple of decades would mainly seem to be persons of higher education able to benefit from the system of reservations for the Scheduled Castes. In Devi Street a handful of young men holding university degrees, like Moolchand, Ram Prasad, and Hira Lal's son Gopi Charan, are in fact the only ones who have found such employment in recent years. All the others who have entered the labor market in the period, including several dropouts from the textile industry, are employed as workers or petty tra-

ders in the small-scale, so-called informal sector.

As I have mentioned before, one industry where many Ahirwars are now employed in the brush and bristle industry. In this industry, which was started by British entrepreneurs towards the end of the last century (Nevill 1909: 82), the Ahirwars, or rather the Caurasis, were in fact employed in fairly large numbers even before World War II, although most of the workers were then women and children; the men usually left as soon as they were old enough to work in the mills. What happened when it became more difficult to enter the mills was that many men simply remained in this industry. Here they earned less and worked more than the permanent workers in the textile industry but in comparison with the temporaries and substitutes of that industry they were not disadvantaged, certainly not in the short run and perhaps not in the long run either. While the best that a temporary millworker could reasonably hope for was a permanent job, a bristleworker could always try to become an independent entrepreneur, earning considerably more than even a *mistri* in the mills. As a few Ahirwars had already managed to set up their own business, producing semi-finished goods for larger factories and workshops, and as there seemed to be room for further ventures of the same sort, some young men would probably have preferred to remain in this industry even if their entrance to the mills had not been blocked.

At present bristlework and brushwork is rapidly replacing millwork as the most common of the occupations among the Ahirwars of Kanpur. Among the working men in Devi Street the two groups of workers are still evenly balanced, but as the millworkers are on the average much older than the bristle- and brushworkers it is only a matter of time before they will be outnumbered by the latter. In Devi Street, as presumably also in some of the other Ahirwar neighborhoods of the city, millwork is in fact a dying occupation. While among all the working men in the Devi Street sample almost twenty percent are millworkers, there is not a single millworker among the men below age twenty-five and only a handful among the men below forty. Among the bristle- and brushworkers, on the other hand, there is no shortage of younger men; in the age group of men below twenty-five they constitute nearly a third of the total and are easily the most numerous of all the occupational groups.

But it is not likely that the bristle- and brushworkers will ever become as numerically predominant among the Ahirwars as the millworkers were in the past. Not only are there many members of the group, including quite a

few Caurasis, who regard brush- and bristlework as an unclean occupation; in recent years the brush and bristle market has apparently become overcrowded with the result that wages and profits have fallen and the scope for new employment diminished. There are still some fairly successful Ahirwar bristle entrepreneurs in the city, including a few residing in Koriyana, but the opportunities for making an entrepreneurial career are not as good as before. Nor, I am told, are the earnings of the ordinary workers, the so-called *karigars*. Many of the latter may still not earn less than the temporaries and substitutes of the textile industry, but since the wages of such workers are also very low, this is not much of a consolation. On the whole, the bristle- and brushworkers are in a very precarious situation, and if they nevertheless remain in the trade, it is mainly because better jobs are hard to come by.

Finding it practically impossible to get employed in the large-scale sector and not finding work in the brush and bristle industry either, the Ahirwars have recently spread into a variety of different occupations, some of which are entirely new to them. Among the 126 working men in the Devi Street sample nearly thirty different occupations are represented. Apart from the millworkers, bristle- and brushworkers, tailors, plastic factory workers, embroidery workers, painters, clothvendors, and other workers separately listed in table 18 below, there are a couple of key makers, a couple of unskilled workers in the biscuit industry, a repairer of the upholstery of seats for lorries, a metal worker manufacturing cooking utensils, a cutter in a printing press, an unskilled helper in a printing press, a packer in a small shoefactory, an unskilled worker in a tobacco factory, a small labor contractor in the construction industry, an itinerant salesman supplying soap, dental powder, and similar articles to shopkeepers, a betel vendor, an itinerant tradesman selling betel condiments, so-called *pan masala*, to betel vendors, a plastic garbage collector, a helper to a homeopathic compounder, and several others mentioned before.

How have these men found their way into their present occupations and present jobs? How were they trained? How did they get in touch with their employers? The answer to the question of training is that apart from the most highly educated, who were formally trained in schools and further instructed on the job, and the unskilled, who have no training at all, nearly all of the men in the sample, including the millworkers and the brush- and bristleworkers, acquired the basic skills of their trades from kinsmen and close Ahirwar neighbors. Painting, for example, was first introduced among

Table 18. Occupational distribution.

Occupation	Number of Workers	% of workers
Manual Wage Workers	90	71.4
Millworkers	23	18.3
Brush- and Bristleworkers	23	18.3
Tailors	11	8.7
Plastic Factory Workers	5	4.0
Embroidery Workers	4	3.2
Painters	3	2.4
Others	18	14.3
Traders and Entrepreneurs	28	22.2
Clothvendors	11	8.7
Bristlework Entrepreneurs	3	2.4
Cotton-Waste Traders	3	2.4
Others	11	8.7
White-Collar Workers	8	6.3
Totals	126	100.0

the Ahirwars of Devi Street when a younger brother of Comrade Mihi Lal, a man called Nand Lal, got fed up with his job as a temporary millworker and started to learn painting from his father-in-law residing in another neighborhood of the city. Once he had mastered his new craft and started to work on his own he took on one of his immediate neighbors, a younger brother of Ram Shankar, as an apprentice and later on he also trained another Ahirwar neighbor, our friend Tula Ram, one of the chief protagonists of the *javara* dispute. Embroidery work was similarly introduced through a kinship relationship, and so were several of the other skilled occupations. The few additional exceptions to this common pattern include a small number of men who were initially employed by *parjats* as apprentices or unskilled laborers, as well as a couple of tradesmen who received some elementary instruction from *parjats* and then picked up the rest by practice. One of the tradesmen, a man selling betel condiments to betel vendors, who previously worked as a betel vendor, was introduced to his present trade by the person who then used to supply him with such goods. The other, a commissioned salesman peddling soap and related articles to shopkeepers from a handcart, learned some of the basics of his trade from his employer, a wholesale merchant with whom he got in touch through a newspa-

per advertisement.

The answer to the question of employment is not very different. Among the wage workers and commissioned workers employed on a more or less regular basis, 62.5% reported that they had been employed in their present job with the assistance of close kinsmen and castemates, usually neighbors - 16.5% were in fact the employees of such persons. Among those remaining 6.5% claimed that they had been employed with the assistance of *parjat* friends, mostly neighbors, 16% that they had been employed through the agency of the Employment Exchange, and 15% that they had managed to find a job without the assistance of intermediaries. Furthermore, among the men who did not owe their jobs to the direct intervention of kith and kin there were quite a few who had acted on information received from such people. This was the case with several of the men who got in touch with the employer through the Employment Exchange. Some of those who work as tailors in the defence industry, for example, lived in the countryside before they got their present jobs, and it was only because their kinsmen in Kanpur informed them of the existing employment opportunities that they came to the city. And among the men who reported that they had directly approached the employer there were also those who had relied on information supplied by their kith and kin. This was indeed the case with most of these men. The only clear exceptions were the soap trader mentioned above, who learned about his employer by reading the newspaper, and a metal worker who had been trained in his occupation by castemates in Allahabad but found his job in Kanpur more or less by his own efforts.

The importance of kith and kin

How do these facts stand in relation to current anthropological views about the importance of caste in the labor market? While they support the view that caste-fellows frequently help each other in the search for employment, they can clearly not be used as evidence for the more far-reaching statement that there is an effective obligation of mutual assistance attached to caste membership as such. Among the Ahirwars of Kanpur the people from whom one may reasonably expect to get some assistance are primarily close kinsmen and neighbors. The range of persons involved is a little wider than in the context of migration, but it certainly does not embrace the entire local subcaste, not to speak of the entire caste. Many Ahirwars do regard the subcaste as a moral community, membership of which naturally entails

a categorical obligation of mutual support and assistance. Yet none of them would claim that they and their caste-fellows act as nature prescribes. The view of the caste as a moral community is indeed mainly used as an ideal standard by which to measure the present state of moral corruption.

Furthermore, while there is such a notion of what ought to be, it does not represent an ultimate value overriding every other value. Nobody would criticize a person for assisting a *parjat* friend or neighbor rather than an Ahirwar with whom he is not personally connected, nor, for that matter, would they normally criticize one another for placing their own interests before those of their caste-fellows. As I have mentioned before, there is no lament more common than that of the lack of unity and solidarity within the group. Nobody cares about the well-being of his caste-fellows but thinks only of himself, and so forth. Consistently with this, moreover, nobody is more highly respected than the true social worker who sacrifices his own comfort and interests for the sake of others. At the same time, however, it is clearly recognized that for the ordinary householder no obligations are more important than those which he owes to the persons who are directly dependent on him, his parents, junior siblings, wife, and children. Assisting more distant kith and kin can be regarded as a moral obligation only where it does not interfere with these obligation. In practice this means that such assistance is morally demanded only where it does not cost a great deal. When it comes to economic matters, at any rate, it is more or less taken for granted that every man is mainly responsible for himself and his immediate family. The relatively prosperous and resourceful are often criticized for their selfishness, but this, it seems, is an expression of envy more than of genuine moral indignation. The wealthy Hira Lal, for example, could perhaps legitimately be blamed for not contributing more generously to caste associations and other communal undertakings, such as the *javara* procession, but hardly for not spending his money on the poor. People would be upset if he did nothing to help his immediate kith and kin in case of emergency, but I do not know that he is seriously criticized for paying his few workers, who are also his tenants and neighbors, very meager wages. Here, it seems, he is not expected to abide by any other morality than that of the market, nor is any other person who employs the labor of his caste-fellows.

And similar considerations apply in the area of housing. As mentioned above, housing was not major problem in the past. At present, however, finding a place to live is just as difficult as finding a job; not only in Koriyana

but everywhere in the city. One of the questions which should be answered, therefore, is how the Ahirwar landlords in the city recruit tenants to vacant apartments. Do they give preference to caste fellows, or are there also other considerations involved in the process of selecting tenants? The answer to this question given by our friend Girja Shankar, who is not only a landlord owning several houses in the city, but also a leading social worker, is probably fairly representative. For me, as for other houseowners, he said on one occasion, caste is of some importance, but so is the rent. In the house where I live we have ten tenants, seven of whom are Koris and six of whom are even our close relatives. Among those remaining one is a Kurmi, one a Lodhi, and one is a Thakur, or so at least he claims. I suspect that he is rather a low-caste man, but it does not really matter what he is. He was recommended by a *parjat* neighbor, and as he was ready to pay a high rent I gladly accepted him. If A is willing to pay Rs. 55 while B is willing to pay only Rs. 40, I prefer A even if he is a *parjat* and B belongs to my own caste. The advantage of having your kith and kin around is that it gives you some security. If a member of my family fell suddenly ill, for example, I would not hesitate to ask one of my caste-fellows to bring a doctor, even if it was in the middle of the night. My *parjat* tenants would probably not come to my assistance so willingly. But there is also another side of the coin, he continued. While the *parjats* always pay the rent punctually and usually behave quite well in other respects too, my Kori tenants are often a great nuisance. Not only are they frequently reluctant to pay the rent, they also fight and quarrel more often than the others. If they resided under a *parjat* landlord they would probably behave better, but as they regard me as one of them, they believe that they can do whatever they like. Given the chance I would much rather live among educated *parjats* in a government housing estate, using this house merely as a supplementary source of income.

Efforts of Caste Mobilization

In this chapter we are concerned with organized expressions of caste solidarity, or rather with efforts to create such solidarity and mobilize caste members for collective action. To begin with I discuss the rise and fall of the Koli-Rajput movement, a movement for caste mobility and reform that originated in the city of Ajmer in Rajasthan in the 1920's, and reached the Ahirwars and some of the other Koris of Kanpur towards the end of the 1930's. As described below, this movement crumbled in the early 1950's, largely as a result of being too successful. One of the major goals of the Koli Rajputs was to get the Koris excluded from the Scheduled Castes, but no sooner had they achieved this goal before large numbers of Koris turned against them. The Koris of Kanpur, or at least a dominant section amongst them, did not want to sacrifice the opportunities given to them as members of the Scheduled Castes for an uncertain future as Koli Rajputs, and for a few years an association called the Sanyukt Kori Mahasabha, the 'United Kori Great Conference,' was running a campaign for their reenlistment among the Scheduled Castes. With the reversal of the decision to exclude the caste from the Scheduled Castes in 1956 the Sanyukt Kori Mahasabha had largely served its purpose, and thereafter very little was done to mobilize the Koris across the boundaries of the subcastes until the early 1970's, when some social workers and politicians came together in an effort to revive the Sanyukt Kori Mahasabha as an organiza-

tion for the unification and uplift of the caste. The idea of caste unification was then an old one; the Koli Rajputs had raised it, and so had the old Sanyukt Kori Mahasabha. While the Koli Rajputs had only suggested that the different subcastes should have commensal relations with one another, the leaders of the revived Sanyukt Kori Mahasabha wanted to abolish subcaste endogamy and erase the boundaries between the subcastes altogether. This they regarded as an essential step forward, not only because subcaste endogamy was itself a sign of backwardness, but more importantly because the amalgamation of the subcastes would increase the strength of the Koris in the general competition for advancement. As it turned out, neither the association itself, nor its program of unification and reform were received with much enthusiasm among the Koris of Kanpur. The attitudes among the Koris made it seem unlikely that it would ever become much of a success. One of the questions addressed in this chapter is simply why this was so.

The Koli-Rajput movement

The Koli-Rajput movement was first established in 1927, when some of the Koris of Ajmer started an association called the Koli-Rajput Welfare Society. It became a movement of regional spread ten years later, as the members of this association formed the All-India Koli-Rajput Sabha and invited Koris from other places to participate in the inaugural conference and join them in the movement. That Ajmer was the site of these events was not a mere coincidence. Ajmer did not only have a sizeable Kori population. It was also one of the headquarters of the Arya Samaj, the members of which were actively engaged in promoting low-caste efforts of social advancement in the first few decades of this century (see e.g. Juergensmeyer 1982, Lynch 1974, Parry 1970, Rowe 1968a, 1968b). That the Koli Rajputs were supported by the Arya Samaj is clear from the elaborate 100-page report published after the conference in 1937 (Akhil Bharatvarshya Koli-Rajput Kanferens n.d.). As it appears in this report, the leaders of the Koli-Rajput movement were personally associated with such prominent figures of the local Arya Samaj as Har Bilas Sarda, the author of the Child Marriage Restraint Act of 1929, the so-called Sarda Act, as well as of numerous books on social reform, and his close relative Kunwar Chandra Karan Sarda, who in the 1920's had participated with Swami Shraddhanand in the reconversion of the Mulkana Rajputs and for a period was the general secretary of the Hindu Mahasabha. These men had assisted the Koli Rajputs with the

formation of the Koli-Rajput Welfare Society in 1927, and had probably also been involved in the setting up of the M.E.V. Middle School, a school for local Kori children that was one of the main projects of the association. Furthermore, their assistance was essential to the success of the 1937 conference, where along with Dr. B. S. Munjee, the president of the All-India Hindu Mahasabha, a figure of national renown, and a few other outside leaders of the Arya Samaj and the Hindu Mahasabha, they acted as speakers and well-wishers. That 'Dr. Munjee-Sahab' did not come to Ajmer merely in order to participate in the Koli-Rajput conference, but was also going to attend a conference of his own organization, was hardly a matter of any importance to the Koli Rajputs, large numbers of whom joined the cheering crowds receiving him at the railway station.

According to the conference report, several thousand persons were present at this first meeting of the All-India Koli-Rajput Sabha. Most of them must have been local people residing in and around the city of Ajmer, but some came from more distant places. The work of inviting participants had been going on for almost a year. One team of volunteers had visited Jaipur, Rewari, Delhi, and Meerut; another Lahore, Hissar, and other places in the Punjab; a third Bhilwara, Ratlam and Indore; a fourth Ahmedabad; a fifth Mathura, Agra, Indore, Bombay and Lahore; a sixth Delhi, Meerut, Jullundur and Ambala; and so forth. Altogether more than fifty urban centers received delegations from Ajmer, and by the time of the conference local Koli-Rajput associations had already been established or were in the process of being established in several places, including Agra, Abu-Road, Beawar, Shahpura, Bhilwara, Mathura, Lucknow, Konch, and Kanpur.

The conference itself, which lasted for three days, was apparently a well-organized affair. The morning sessions were inaugurated in Arya Samajist fashion with prayer and *havan*, a fire sacrifice, and continued with a mixture of speeches from the *dais* and discussions about suggested resolutions. The afternoon sessions followed a similar pattern. Over the three days the audience listened to seven speeches and agreed on fifteen different resolutions. The speakers were all *parjats* representing the Arya Samaj and the Hindu Mahasabha. Even the opening address was delivered by a member of the Arya Samaj, a certain Dr. Mukherjee. The president of the Welcome Committee - there was a special committee for each and every task - a Koli Rajput called Ishwar Singh, had been scheduled to speak, but as he was not feeling well, Mukherjee was asked to replace him. Here I reproduce - in rough translation - the inaugural speech held by Kunwar

Chandra Karan Sarda (which along with the rest of the speeches were later printed in the conference report):

My dear Koli-Rajput Warriors!

By asking me to inaugurate the Koli-Rajput Conference today, you have done me a great honor. For this I am much obliged. As there are several persons more able and learned than myself amongst us, my service need only be a small one. For more than twenty years I have done my best to encourage your progress. When the service society (i.e. the Koli-Rajput Welfare Society) was first formed many brothers took a pledge to help their less fortunate brothers, and I am happy to see that until today this pledge has not been broken. When you were harassed by the police and held your big *pancayat* at Alwar Gate, I prayed that you would remain brave and tried my best to protect you. I am happy that in accordance with the resolution you then made, you have now acquired land and even built a school. Now, having looked at your history and declared yourself Koli Rajputs, you have arranged a conference for the uplift of your caste. It makes me very happy to see thousands of Koli-Rajput brothers with saffron turbans tied in the true Rajput manner sitting under this beautiful *pardal* today. God planted the seed and now you are rising to Kshatriyahood by your own efforts!

Even today you practice child marriage and other evil customs. When you have abandoned these customs and eradicated all feelings of hatred and mistrust between you, you should form a strong movement to defend the interests of the Hindus. In these dark ages organization (*sangathan*) is a power to be worshipped.

Dear Brothers, it is because of the unsparing efforts of your General Secretary, Nawal Singhji Gahalot, and several other devoted Koli Rajputs that you are now able to stand as true Kshatriyas before the world. These gentlemen are the true benefactors of your caste. I wish them success with all my heart.

Dr. Munjee, the leader of the Hindus, who represented the Hindus at the Round Table Conference in London, was a member of the Viceroy's Council ('the council of great lord-sahab'), and has started a military school for Hindu boys in Nasik, will preside over this conference tomorrow and bring you the blessings of the Hindu Mahasabha. He will be accompanied by the General Secretary of the Hindu Mahasabha, Lala Ganpatraiji. And that is not all, Rao Sahab Gopal Singhji,

leader of the Kshatriyas of Rajasthan, and Raja Durga Narain Singhji, leader of the Kshatriyas of U.P., wish your conference success with all their heart. This is very good and fills us with pride. Yet as true Rajput we must never forget our ancient history. We must be continually inspired by the deeds of Maharana Pratap, Virbar Durgadas Rathor, Pritthviraj Chauhan, Shurvir Shivaji, Guru Gobind Singh, and other heroes. You belong to the house of Bhagwan Rama, Krishna Bhim, and Arjuna. You are the lights of the Solar Dynasty. As we struggle for progress, we must defend Aryan civilization (*arya-sanskriti*). Jaymal-Fatta fought against Akbar, defending Chitor to the last drop their blood. True devotees of their motherland the Rajputs refused to surrender. Believing in the immortality and eternal youth of the soul, the Rajput-Gods witnessed their wives burning to death on the funeral pyre. They never abandoned their duty. Koli-Rajput Brothers rise! Having pledged yourself to Kshatriyahood (*kshatriya-dharm*) raise your caste high! Stand up and be self-reliant warriors! God will ensure your victory!

Long live Koli-Rajput Mahasabha!

This speech is representative of the lot. Again, it was part of the teachings of Dayandanda Saraswati and the Arya Samaj that the contemporary caste system was a corruption of the original one. In the Vedic period, the golden age to which they used to refer, the four *varnas* had been open categories defined in functional terms; the principle of hereditary status was a later addition lacking sanction in the Vedas. Consequently, there was no reason why Kori and other low-caste people should not try to climb upwards in the social hierarchy. The important thing was that they adopted a mode of conduct consistent with their pretensions. If they did not act in accordance with the norms defined as appropriate to the *varna* in question, their claims would be void and empty. Not only Sarda made this point; it was stressed by all the speakers. Dr. Munjee (whose speech was apparently delivered in English) reminded the audience that "there are Rajputs and Rajputs" and that only those who have preserved the martial traditions of Rana Pratap and other legendary Rajput heroes were worthy of respect.

Yet it was not merely out of concern for the Koli Rajputs that Munjee, Sarda, and the other speakers hammered this point. These men were not just social reformers unselfishly devoted to the uplift of the poor and the oppressed, but also militant Hindu nationalists. Their main goal was to

mobilize as many Hindus as possible in the struggle against the Muslims. For a reader not familiar with modern Indian history it may not be immediately apparent, but the main thrust of Sarda's speech was that the Koli Rajputs should join this struggle. Dr. Munjee, who was not a member of the Arya Samaj, and was perhaps less concerned with the original order of Hindu society, was even more explicit on this point. As he explained in his speech, it was largely because of the system of *varnas* that the Hindus had been enslaved by foreigners, Muslims as well as Christians. What was wrong with this system was that it made warfare the specialty of a few. During the many invasions that India had experienced through the centuries, Brahmans, Vaishyas, and Shudras had been passive spectators watching a small number of brave Kshatriyas struggle in vain against the hordes of invaders. Now there had to be a change. Militarism should be met by militarism. All Hindus should adopt the virtues of the Kshatriyas. That the assembled Koli Rajputs were already in the process of reclaiming their lost identity as martial Rajputs and Rajputinis, he said, made him very happy.

Thus for Dr. Munjee and his friends the Koli Rajputs were mainly potential soldiers in the big struggle over India's future that was waged at the time. The main protagonists of this struggle were the British, the Hindus, and the Muslims. There was some disturbing evidence, however, that the lower castes might break the unity of the Hindus and emerge as an independent fourth party. That this might happen foresighted Hindu leaders had been talking about for a long time (see e.g. Galanter 1984), but it was apparently not until the late 1920's, when Dr. Ambedkar appeared on the stage, that it was widely regarded a real possibility. Munjee himself had been confronted with the separatist views of Ambedkar at the Round Table Conference in London in 1930, and along with rest of the politically informed population of the country he had witnessed the struggle between Gandhi and Ambedkar on the issue of the political representation of the low castes, a struggle that culminated with Gandhi's so-called epical fast in 1934. The subsequent compromise, the so-called Poona Pact, had satisfied none of the parties (see e.g. Zelliot 1972), especially not Ambedkar who soon announced that he was seriously thinking of leaving Hinduism (Zelliot 1970). As a result of this threat, even those who had not previously taken the demands of the lower castes seriously concluded that these castes had to be more closely incorporated into the Hindu fold. One important step in this direction was the formation of the All-India Depressed Classes League with the loyal Congressman Jagjivan Ram as leader in 1935. Another

was Pandit Malaviya's well-known speech at the annual conference of the Hindu Mahasabha the same year, where he promised that discrimination would come to an end if the lower castes decided to join in the defence of Hinduism.¹ To be sure, it could not be guaranteed that the restrictions of marriage and commensality would also disappear, but as such restrictions also applied where the higher castes were dealing with one another, this should not make much of a difference (Gurtu 1973).

It is against the background of these and related efforts to create or maintain a united Hindu front that we must look at the participation of Dr. Munjee and his friends at the Koli-Rajput conference in Ajmer. What happened there, I take it, was essentially that the prominent guests offered the assembled Koli Rajputs social recognition in exchange for their active support in the communalist struggle. Their very presence could be interpreted both as a first installment and as a promise of further installments in the future. That the Koli Rajputs enthusiastically accepted the offer is easy to understand, for as self-appointed Rajputs they were already on the side of Hinduism, at least in principle and for the time being. Yet they were hardly as deeply committed to the Hindu cause as their honored guests. They had not gathered in Ajmer in order to express their political loyalties, but because they wanted to further their own, caste-specific interests. For the Koli Rajputs the conference represented a major step out of centuries of social degradation, a step towards a higher social status and better material conditions. Among the fifteen resolutions adopted by the meeting only two were political statements: one expressed the wish that all the members of the caste should strengthen Hinduism by joining the Koli-Rajput movement, the other - adopted on the suggestion of one of the Sardas - was a resolution that five Koli Rajput youths should be sent to the Bhonsla Military Academy in Nasik, a Hindu military school founded by Dr. Munjee. The rest concerned more immediate matters. One or two were demands for work and education directed towards the government; one was a declaration that education should be made obligatory among the Koli Rajputs; a third was a declaration that the minimum age for marriage should be fixed at fourteen for girls and fifteen for boys; a fourth was a recommendation that the expenses in connection with marriages and other rituals should be reduced; a fifth was a recommendation that the customary singing of obscene songs at weddings and other ritual occasions should be abolished; and a sixth was a proposal that the Koli Rajputs should try to change the drinking habits of their caste-fellows.

How did the founders of the Koli-Rajput movement originally come up with the idea that they were Koli Rajputs rather than Koris? This question I cannot answer. Perhaps the idea was derived from the Kolis of Gujerat, a fairly low caste of farmers and fishermen, who not only claimed to be Kshatriyas but also had a few petty rajas amongst them. I do not know that there were any organizational links between the Koli Rajputs of Ajmer and similar associations among the Kolis, but as witnessed by the fact that a dozen Koli notables were listed in the conference report as "Koli-Rajput Chiefs," the Koli Rajputs claimed that they and the Kolis were of common stock. Several of these Koli notables had even been invited to preside over the conference. While none of them had accepted the invitation, they all sent their warmest congratulations, and some years later, at a similar conference in Kota in Rajasthan, one of them, Raja Jaishwant Rao of Jawhar, a petty state in Saurashtra, even sent one of his ministers to represent him. In spite of this, neither the Raja of Jawhar nor any of the other Koli 'chiefs' were closely involved with the Koli Rajputs. Their role in the movement was mainly that of symbolic figureheads giving substance and credibility to the origin myth on which the Koli Rajputs based their claim to higher social status.

One version of this myth, published by the Koli Rajputs of Rae Bareilly in Uttar Pradesh (Vir 1968), begins with creation itself as it is presented in the Puranas and other Hindu scriptures and continues with the emergence of the two major branches of the Rajputs, the Solar Dynasty and the Lunar Dynasty. The main part of the story, however, starts "a thousand generations later" with the foundation of the Koli dynasty by a king of the Lunar Dynasty known simply as Kashi Naresh, the King of Kashi. Here again the author draws on a well-known body of mythology, for as it happens the Koli dynasty in question is none other than that of the Koliyas to whom Lord Buddha was related through his mother as well as through his wife. Thus the foundation myth of the Koli-Rajput movement is in its central parts identical with the story of the Koliyas and the Shakyas that one can find in any account of the life of the Buddha (see e.g. Thomas 1927).

Once the connection with the ancient Koliyas and Lord Buddha has been established, the author goes on to explain how the proud Koliyas became the downtrodden Koris. The downfall began after the death of Ashoka, when the ascending Brahmins systematically persecuted the Buddhists. Under the Buddhist rulers the country had experienced a long period of peace and affluence. The ruling principles of those days were non-violence.

ce, truthfulness, and righteousness. Although there was a social hierarchy, there was no caste system in the strict sense of the term. The caste system was created by evil Brahmins, as they replaced the founding principles of Buddhist society with those of purity and impurity. As Lord Buddha's own kith and kin the Koliyas were inevitably among those who were most badly treated by the Brahmins. Little by little, they fell from their elevated position as kings and princes to a state of utter powerlessness, poverty, and ignorance. As the surrounding society forced them to act as Shudras, they too began to see themselves as such. They even started to apply the Brahmin concepts of high and low, the concepts of purity and impurity, in their dealings with one another, which explains why they are still internally fragmented by caste and subcaste. In the end they had entirely forgotten their true identity, believing instead that they were Shudras and Untouchables. As the author puts it, while they had originally been proud lions, they were now lions believing themselves to be small cats.

How, it may be asked, does this identification with Buddha and Buddhism fit with the militant identification with Hinduism expressed at the conference in Ajmer? The contradiction is more apparent than real. Unlike Dr. Ambedkar, who in the 1950's converted to Buddhism along with more than two hundred thousand of his Mahar caste-fellows (cf. Zelliott 1966), the Koli Rajputs did not regard Buddhism as a separate religion in conflict with Hinduism. The Brahmins had fought against Buddhism, no doubt, but then Brahminism and Hinduism were not necessarily the same thing. In the text referred to it is stressed that Buddha was one of the avatars of Vishnu. Like Rama and Krishna before him, he made his appearance in an age of disorder and injustice and his task was to restore harmony and justice in the world. According to the writer, the history of the world is an endless cyclical process, where the original order is repeatedly destroyed by humans and repeatedly restored through divine intervention.

The Koli Rajputs of Kanpur

In the decade following the Ajmer conference the Koli Rajput movement spread to many different places, although it was perhaps more successful in urban areas than in the countryside. In the villages low-caste strivings for upward mobility tended to provoke a great deal of hostility on the part of the higher castes, and this may have discouraged many potential supporters from joining the movement. In the urban centers, where low-caste people and high-caste people were usually less closely involved with one

another, and where the former were also less vulnerable to reprisals, the high-caste reaction to such strivings tended to be more tolerant, at least as long as they did not lead to acts of transgression more serious than the wearing of the sacred thread and the usurpation of high-caste names and titles. With regard to the Koli Rajputs the dominant reaction was perhaps one of ridicule. The idea that the timid, not to say cowardly, Koris - that was the stereotype - were a race of brave warriors descended from Lord Buddha must have appeared as an extremely incongruous one. I would be greatly surprised if it was not turned into still another joke confirming the proverbial stupidity of the Koris.

And it was not only high-caste people who found the Koli Rajput myth implausible; even within the caste there were large numbers of people who rejected it. While they agreed with the Koli Rajputs that the Koris were not Shudras or Untouchables, many of these people preferred to support the culturally more plausible claim that the caste or at least their particular segment of the caste belonged to the peaceful Vaishyas, the *varna* responsible for the provisioning of the society. In support of this belief they referred not only to classical texts, such as *Manusmriti*, but also to books written by modern nationalist historians, some of which painted a rather rosy picture of the situation of the weavers in pre-colonial times. Indeed, for the followers of this rival movement, who were found in many places, including Ajmer and Kanpur, the historians' accounts of the sufferings of the weavers under colonialism seem to have provided an explanation of the present degradation of the the Koris in much the same way as the story of the downfall of Buddhism among the Koli Rajputs. Furthermore, it seems that they sought legitimation and encouragement for their aspirations among the same groups of high-caste politicians and social reformers who provided such support for the Koli Rajputs, including our friend Dr. B. S. Munjee. (If Dr. Munjee's advice to the followers of the Vaishya movement was the same as that which he gave the Koli Rajputs, I cannot say).

The Vaishya movement, which was borne by several different caste associations, was apparently somewhat older than the Koli Rajput movement, and when the latter reached Kanpur it was already well established among some of the subcaste groups residing there. Among the Sonwanis, a group coming from the districts of Shahjahanpur, Lucknow, and Unnao north and north-west of Kanpur, for example, there was an association called the U.P. Sonwani Tantuvaya Vaishya Sabha, and among the Dhimans, or rather a particular community of Dhimans spread through

Lucknow, Rae Bareli, Bara Banki, and a couple of other districts to the east and south-east, there was an association known as the Dhiman Vastrakar Vaishya Sabha. Among these groups the spread of the Koli-Rajput movement was therefore largely blocked in advance. The subcaste groups where the Koli Rajputs recruited most of their supporters were the groups represented in Devi Street: the Ahirwars, the Shakywars, the Banaudhas, and the Kamalvanshis. They also had some followers in other groups - one was a group of Dhimans from the districts of Gonda and Basti across the river Ghaghara to the north-east of Kanpur, a community also known as the Ghagharaparis, 'The people from across the Ghaghara' - but these four, especially the Ahirwars and the Shakywars, provided their main sources of support.

For the Ahirwars the Koli-Rajput movement was a new experience. During the 1940's a small minority of the Ahirwars of Kanpur, most of whom resided in one particular neighborhood, joined the Vaishya movement, but before that there had apparently not been any Ahirwars among the followers of this movement. Yet this is not to say that there had been no organized strivings for social mobility and reform among the Ahirwars. In the years immediately preceding the arrival of the Koli-Rajput movement, some of them had been involved in a local reform movement of their own making, a movement directed against the involvement of Ahirwars in the polluting occupation of bristle and brushwork, and especially against the increasing employment of female workers in *parjat* workshops away from their neighborhoods. The latter was regarded as a particularly serious problem, for lacking male protection working women could easily fall prey to the seductive charms of their male employers and workmates, or so it was said. Among the bristleworkers there were even a few who had eloped with their lovers. As the men in question were not even Koris, many Ahirwars felt that these women were a disgrace to the subcaste as a whole as well to their families.

By the middle of the 1930's the question of the female brushworkers and their sexual conduct had become a major issue dividing the Ahirwars of Kanpur between two hostile camps, those who wanted to save the honor of the group by making the brushworkers quit their jobs and those who believed that the accusations brought against the women were grossly exaggerated and argued that the issue was one of poverty and destitution more than honor and dishonor. As brushwork is known as *bal ka kam*, 'hair work,' the brushworkers and their supporters were popularly referred

to as the Balvalas, 'the Hairy Ones,' and their opponents as the Ganjas, 'the Hairless Ones.' One need not have read Leach (1958) and others on the symbolic meaning of hair and its absence to sense the ambivalent metaphor. In structuralist notation: Ganjas : Balvalas :: purity : impurity :: abstention : indulgence :: impotency : pleasure :: poverty : wealth.

That there was a radical difference of interpretation between the two parties was forcefully expressed when the Ganjas adopted the saffron banner of Hinduism, and the Balvalas countered with the red flag of the labor movement, a symbol which had been used by the Kanpur Mazdoor Sabha since the 1920's (S.M. Pandey 1970), and was not specifically associated with the ideas of communism and socialism. This, I am told, happened in 1936 or 1937, when the dispute was brought to a climax and there was also a great deal of unrest in the textile industry. The Ganjas had by then come to realize that mere persuasion would not work and had therefore brought the issue before the Caurasi Pancayat, the supreme caste council of the Caurasis that used to assemble in the vicinity of Konch. Here, where there was a majority of rural people, most of whom presumably shared the Ganjas' aversion to brushwork, it was decided that the women had to resign from their jobs and that those who did not comply with this request should be placed under *hukka-pani bandh*, 'pipe-water boycott.'

Yet this mobilization of caste authorities turned out to be ineffective. Not only did the brushworkers stubbornly refuse to leave their jobs; encouraged by their supporters some of them decided to take the dispute to the local district court, where they accused a few of the leading Ganjas of harassment. These persons, they said, had not only defamed them among their neighbors and caste-fellows, in their unreasonable efforts to deprive them of their means of subsistence, they had even assaulted them physically. This was denied by the accused. It was true that they had tried to persuade the women to leave their jobs, but they had not used violence. Those who should be blamed were the women. Had they only remained obedient to the traditions and authorities of the caste, there would have been no dispute.² This defence made no impression on the court. The sentence, I am told, stated that the brushworkers had every right to remain in their occupation, and that any attempt to prevent them from doing so by the use of physical or other forms of harassment constituted a criminal offence. Whether this also covered the social boycott I am not so sure, but since the boycott had already proved ineffective this was probably not a matter of much importance at the time.³

As the organized campaign against the brushworkers began to peter out, many of the Ganjas turned to the Koli-Rajput movement, where they found a new and presumably more rewarding outlet for their reforming ambitions. Two of their most prominent leaders, both of whom had been involved in the legal dispute with the brushworkers, became in fact Koli-Rajput leaders of regional reputation. One of them, a millworker called Devi Din, became the president of the U.P. Provincial Koli-Rajput Sabha, the branch association responsible for the coordination of activities on the provincial level. The other, a millworker called Ram Das, became the chief secretary of the same regional organization. Along with a handful of other leaders, they were also responsible for the running of the local movement in Kanpur; like other such movements, the Koli-Rajput movement was vitally dependent on the efforts of a small number of activists.

But not all the Ahirwars who became Koli Rajputs were former Ganjas. Even Balvalas were attracted to the movement. Some of them might have been sceptical of the possibility of making the higher castes accept the flattering notion that the Koris were descended from the ancient Koliyas, but so were presumably some of the Ganjas. In any case, one did not have to be extremely optimistic in this regard in order to join the Koli Rajputs. Some of the supporters of the movement may not have had any definite ideas about the future at all, being attracted to its founding ideas regardless of their reception among the higher castes. Furthermore, those who were more directly concerned with the standing of the Koris in the wider society did not necessarily believe that the desired change would be easily achieved. Even the most enthusiastic of the Koli Rajputs must have understood that it would take a long time before the higher castes would come to recognize them as the Koli Rajputs they truly were. What made them believe that they might succeed at all, I have already suggested, was presumably the fact that there were now some cracks in the wall of untouchability, and that these cracks seemed to be widening. Few of the Koli Rajputs of Kanpur had participated in the Ajmer conference, but they had usually heard about the participation of Dr. Munjee and his friends from the Hindu Mahasabha and the Arya Samaj, and were also aware of the anti-caste statements made by the leaders of the Congress. Moreover, in Kanpur they had their own high-caste patrons, the most important of whom was a certain Rajendra-ramandi Shastri, a leader of the local Hindu Sabha. Between Shastriji and the secretary of the U. P. Provincial Koli Rajput Sabha, the Ahirwar Ram Das, there was apparently something of a *guru-chela* relationship. This

is at least the impression one gets from a small biography of Shastriji that Ram Das wrote in the middle of the 1940's. In this booklet, presented to the master as a small token of gratitude and affection, and to the Koli Rajputs as the story of an exemplary life, Shastriji is praised for his efforts to promote the welfare of his own Brahman family and caste (everyone should support his family and caste), for his support of the Hindi language and Hindu culture, for his unyielding attitude towards the Muslims, for his support of the Koli-Rajput movement and other low-caste movements, and for his devotion to God. Particularly admirable was the fact that he had managed to combine his solidarity with his own Brahman community with a friendly, unprejudiced attitude towards the lower castes. These and further compliments Shastriji returned in a speech at a regional Koli-Rajput conference in Gonda, where he described Ram Das as an unusually brave defender of the Hindus. Apparently Ram Das and some other Koli Rajputs had previously participated in a communal battle with the Muslims, and now Shastriji wanted every Koli Rajput to follow their example.

Yet the main business of the Koli Rajputs was not fighting with the Muslims, but rather to put their own program of ritual and social reconstruction into practice; as the leaders of the movement always reminded their followers, without a change of self-image and life style within the caste the Kori would never be accepted as Koli Rajputs. The reforms which the members of the Kanpur association regarded as the most urgent were roughly the same as those which had been discussed at the big conference in Ajmer: the abolition of child marriage and other ritual practices felt to be immoral, stigmatizing, or otherwise harmful; the introduction of some of the ritual practices of the Rajputs, primarily the donning of the sacred thread; the gradual loosening up of the restrictive boundaries between the subcastes; temperance; and education - physical as well as mental. The favored method of promoting these reforms was the caste conference, but more intensive methods of persuasion were also used. A particularly ambitious project was the Koli Rajput Junior High School, a school that was set up in one of the Kori neighborhoods of Kanpur in the middle of the 1940's. In comparison with some of the schools started by high-caste associations earlier in this century (such as the Kanya-Kubja College founded by some of the local Kanya-Kubja Brahmans in 1915), this school was a modest establishment. For a while, however, it engaged no less than six teachers and had more than 250 students divided between nine different standards. In view of the limited financial and educational resour-

ces of the Koli Rajputs, this was a great achievement.

The Scheduled Caste issue

By their efforts to implement this program of reform the Koli Rajputs did not seriously antagonize their castemates. There were people who remained indifferent to their preachings, and there even people who were actively opposed to some of their ideas - not least that concerning the ritual unification of the subcastes - but there was no organized opposition of the kind presented by the Balvalas in the dispute with the Ganjas. Beyond the program of reform, however, there was an issue over which such an opposition would eventually be mobilized. The seeds of dispute had been planted back in 1936, when the Koli-Rajput movement of Kanpur had not even got started. What had happened then was that the Koris along with the Camars, the Dhobis, the Khatiks, and other so-called Depressed Castes of the region were defined as Scheduled Castes under the Government of India (Scheduled Castes) Order, 1936. Among the Koli Rajputs, as well as among the supporters of the Vaishya movement, this was regarded as a great misfortune. What the government had effectively done, they said, was to lend official authority to the traditional image of the caste as Shudras and Untouchables. Thereby it had also undermined every past and future claim to higher status on the part of the Koris. How would it ever be possible to convince the higher castes that the Koris should be treated as Rajputs or Vaishyas, when even the government of the land defined them as Untouchables?

What had to be done, then, was to make the government correct its mistake. To this end the Koli Rajput sent innumerable petitions to high officials during the 1940's. In the beginning they met with little success, but in 1949, when the British Raj had been dismantled and India had become an independent country, the headquarters of the U. P. Koli-Rajput Sabha in Kanpur received a copy of the following official letter (No. 1303/III-14-1949, dated Lucknow April 9, 1949) signed by a secretary of the U. P. Government in Lucknow and addressed to all heads of departments and principal heads of offices in the state:

Sir,

I am directed to invite a reference to paragraph 1 of G. O. No. 0-1422/II-B-55-1948, dated April 14, 1948 issued from the appointment(b) Department, and of which an extract is herewith en-

closed, and to say that Govt. have of late been receiving representations from members of certain Scheduled castes for changing their caste names, claiming higher descent and requesting on that ground that they should cease to be designated as members of the Scheduled Castes. While the Government of India (Scheduled Castes) Order, 1936, was intended to afford protection to certain castes among the Hindus, it seems unnecessary to insist on any individual being treated as a member of any particular Scheduled caste, if he himself denies being its member and does not desire to be so treated. I am accordingly to ask that if any such person wants his caste or sub-caste to be omitted or not to be entered in Govt. records even in cases in which it is still required to be entered in accordance with the G. O. dated April 14, 1948 referred to above, he can make an application to that effect and his request should be accepted.

Yours faithfully,

Sd/- B. N. Jha
Chief Secretary.

This did not satisfy the Koli Rajputs entirely, for their demand was not merely that individual Koris should be allowed not to identify themselves as such in government records if they so preferred, but that the Kori caste should be dropped from the list of Scheduled Castes altogether. Yet it was still a big step in the right direction and was promptly communicated as such among the supporters of the movement. Moreover, a decision to exclude the Koris from the provincial list of Scheduled Castes was already in the making, although of this the Koli Rajputs were probably ignorant at the time. Thus when the Constitution (Scheduled Castes) Order, 1950, was published a couple of years later it appeared that the Koris along with the Khatiks had been removed from the Scheduled Castes of U. P. The exact grounds for this decision are not clear, but presumably the authorities simply acceded to the demands of the Koli Rajputs, the Vaishya Koris, and their Khatik counterparts. The criteria by which eligibility to Scheduled Caste status was determined had apparently not been changed since 1936.⁴

It was in reaction to these developments that a counter-movement was formed. Scattered protests against the Koli-Rajput campaign to get the Koris removed from the Scheduled Castes had been heard all along, but it was not until the late 1940's, when the Koli Rajputs were already on the brink of reaching their goal, that the opposition became more widespread

and was raised to the level of an organized movement. In the beginning most of the Koris of Kanpur may in fact have sympathized with the Koli Rajputs, for in those days practically none of them had been in a position to benefit from the meager provisions made for the Scheduled Castes; some of them had probably not even been aware of the existence of any such provisions. By the late 1940's, however, there were not only a few students receiving government scholarships amongst them, but also a larger group of people who believed that they or their children might benefit from their Scheduled Caste status in the future, as well as a growing number of people who had no personal stake in the matter, but had nevertheless come to think that it would be foolish to sacrifice the opportunities for education, employment, and political representation now made available to the Scheduled Castes for a most uncertain recognition as Rajputs. Furthermore, just as some of the Balvalas had sided with the brushworkers and their families simply because they felt that it would be cruel to deprive these people of their means of livelihood, there were now those who supported the movement against the Koli Rajputs because they felt that it would be cruel to deprive the students of their scholarships and future jobs.

The leaders of the movement were a diverse lot, united only by their desire to get the caste reenlisted among the Scheduled Castes. Some of them, apparently the majority, were former Koli Rajputs who had defected from the movement and now wanted to make a career as Scheduled Caste politicians within the Congress. Others were persons who had stood outside the Koli-Rajput movement all along, criticizing it either from a communist perspective or from the perspective of Dr. Ambedkar and his local predecessor Swami Achchutananda. Achchutananda was an ascetic and social reformer of low caste who had started as a disciple of the Arya Samaj, but later advanced the idea that the lower castes derived from the original pre-Aryan, pre-Vedic population of India, the original Hindus, whose religion, the autochthonous creed of the land, had been usurped and gravely distorted by the Brahmans.⁵ In Kanpur Achchutananda had large numbers of followers in the 1920's and 1930's, although most of them were apparently Camars, as were also the persons who later became followers of Dr. Ambedkar and joined the Scheduled Caste Federation and the Republican Party of India. Among the Koris, who usually did not like to be identified with Camars and other lowly castes, the supporters of Achchutananda and Ambedkar were a much smaller group, but they were still not without influence. The handbill translated below, which was spread among the

Koris of Kanpur towards the end of the 1940's, shows how they argued on the Scheduled Caste issue:

KORI BROTHERS BEWARE!

Escape from Koli Rajput and Tantuvaya Vaishya traps! Unite and save the existence of the Kori caste!

Dear Brothers!

India is the only country in the world where in the name of religion and caste people have been fighting with one another for thousands of years, and which has remained backward as a result of untouchability and discrimination. It is a country where one cannot rise by mere manipulation. Not only Brahmans, Kshatriyas, and Vaishyas, but even Telis, Tamolis, Ahirs, and Gadariyas look down upon us. The British government was aware of this and gave us therefore some political rights as well as some facilities for education and training. But this was more than the high-class capitalists could accept. Feeling threatened, they immediately tried to make the Untouchables think that they were Kshatriyas and Brahmans. They fooled some credulous persons into believing that they would become Brahmans and Kshatriyas merely by wearing the sacred thread. But that did not work and today the Untouchables are still in a very depressed situation.

Today, however, we must give our thanks to Babasahab Dr. Ambedkar. When he demanded separate rights for the Untouchables at the Round Table Conference in London in 1930 the Brahmans, Kshatriyas, and Vaishyas, were frightened. They claimed that there were no Untouchables in India. To settle the matter a committee under Lord Lothian came to India. The Hindu Mahasabha, the Arya Samaj, and the Congress then started a campaign for the uplift of the Untouchables. The doors to the temples were thrown open and sacred threads were distributed free of charge. For the sake of appearances and the census, Untouchables were registered as Kshatriyas. They were called Jatav Kshatriyas, Koli Kshatriyas, Jaiswar Kshatriyas, Ghutiya Kshatriyas, Rajak Kshatriyas, Parashrami Kshatriyas, Dhanik Kshatriyas, Tantuvaya Vaishyas, Dhiman Vaishyas, Vastrakar Vaishyas, and so forth. As a result the strength of the Untouchables was reduced from 26.5% to 22.5%.

Even now there are some misguided persons amongst us who refuse to change their mind, although they know how desperate our situa-

tion is. Out of narrow self-interest these persons are disregarding the welfare of the caste. By turning the Koris into Koli Kshatriyas they have done a great deal of harm. Because of this the future of our caste looks very dark.

Now we must come to our senses and protect the existence of the Kori caste. Take it as an insult if you are called anything but "Kori" and follow the path laid out by Dr. Ambedkar, your only true leader. Raise your voice for the welfare of your caste under the banner of the Scheduled Castes Federation!

The analysis presented here is obviously similar to that suggested in this chapter. It is also an analysis which many Koris, including some former Koli Rajputs, would now largely accept. While most of the Koli Rajputs would probably still insist on the truth of the Koli-Rajput myth, and therefore object to the statement that they were fooled into believing that they were Kshatriyas, they would agree with the view that the high-caste patrons of the movement were manipulating them for their own ends. Many old Koli Rajputs now speak with a great deal of bitterness about Dr. Munjee and other potentates of the Arya Samaj and the Hindu Mahasabha. Yet this is how things appear retrospectively. In the late 1940's this pamphlet made little impression on the leaders of the Koli-Rajput movement, then as determined as ever to get the caste removed from the Scheduled Castes. In their view this was an essential step towards progress. In the anthropological literature one sometimes gets the impression that the driving force behind movements for caste mobility of the kind represented by the Koli-Rajput movement was a desire for status and social recognition, pure and unadulterated. The Koli Rajputs, however, did not pursue the goal of social recognition regardless of its material consequences. Basically, they seem to have been no less concerned with the material welfare of the caste than their opponents. Where they differed from most of their opponents was largely in their understanding of what progress required. The Koli-Rajput view was that social recognition was a means to economic and political advancement as well as end in itself. The view of their opponents was rather that economic and political advancement was a prerequisite of social recognition as well as an end in itself. This should be kept in mind when we read the following leaflet, distributed by the U.P. Provincial Koli-Rajput Sabha in 1949, shortly after the reception of the official letter from Lucknow:

URGENT!

DON'T LISTEN TO THOSE WHO WANT TO MISLEAD YOU,
LISTEN TO US!
WHERE CASTE MUST BE WRITTEN, WRITE 'KOLI RAJPUT'!
THE U.P. KOLI RAJPUT SABHA, KANPUR, WARNS KOLI RAJ-
PUT BROTHERS IN ALL DISTRICTS NOT TO BE TAKEN IN BY
FALSE PROPAGANDA.

Ahirwars, Shakywars, Mahawars, Kamalvanshis, Kutars, Dhimans, Banaudhas, Ghagarparis, Sariyuparis, and all other subcastes (*gotras*) must know that the caste has produced some leaders with traces of untouchability in them. There are two or three in Kanpur and one or two in Jalaun. These leaders say that we must declare that we are Koris and Untouchables, since otherwise our students will lose their scholarships and the rest of us our rights. To spread this message they hold meetings in Kanpur, Jalaun, Jhansi, Gonda, and other districts. Koli Rajput brothers, do not let these false leaders deceive you. You must understand that they are turn-coats acting only in their own selfish interest. When they approach you with the slogan 'Kolis must remain Untouchables' answer in unison 'We are Koli Rajputs and not Untouchables'. Do not forget that in spite of national freedom we still carry the mark of untouchability on our heads. Remember also that the Koli Rajput community has given birth to Lord Buddha and that even today there are great men like Arvind Kumar amongst us. There are still as many as forty-two princely states with Koli rulers in India.

Those who say that we are trying to become Koli Rajputs are wrong. We are not *becoming* Koli Rajputs, we *were* Koli Rajputs. This is a fact of history. It had been forgotten, but now we are again following our right course. The U.P. Koli Rajput Sabha appealed to the U.P. Government to exclude the Koli caste from the Scheduled Castes. The government accepted our request and issued an order to all the District Magistrates of U.P. that Koli Rajputs should not be registered as Untouchables. The same order, that Kolis must be registered as Rajputs and not as Untouchables, has been issued by the district police superintendents to all the police officers in their districts.

Now, when your demand to be called 'Koli Rajput' has been accepted by the Government, some troublemakers are trying to create disunity amongst us. Koli brothers, we are fully confident that you will beware of them. Educate your children, abolish all evil customs from the community, put an end to child-marriage, eradicate the spirit of un-

touchability from your caste, have full confidence in the Government, support the prohibition, give your full co-operation to your village or district wards and District Congress Committees, and do not let anyone deceive you. Start Koli Rajput associations in every village, strengthen the movement of the caste (*jati sanghtan*), and abide by the rules of the Koli Rajput Sabha. When you have created a strong movement the leaders who now want you to become Untouchables will change their mind. We trust that you will support this pamphlet and proudly raise the flag of our caste.

This remained the official view of the Koli Rajputs of Kanpur until 1955, when they finally changed their mind, and at local conference in Lenin Park, a small park located in one of the working-class districts of the city, declared that they would turn to the government with a request that the Koris should be reinstated among the Scheduled Castes. By that time, the Koli-Rajput movement was already a closed chapter in so far as the Koris of Kanpur were concerned. True, there were still persons who remained faithful to the central ideas of the movements and manifested their conviction by calling themselves Singh and wearing the sacred thread, but their numbers were decreasing and they were no longer as active as before. Among those who had then already deserted the movement were the former Ganjas Devi Din and Ram Das, the president and the secretary of the U.P. Provincial Koli-Rajput Sabha. Devi Din had temporarily retired to a more private form of existence among his kinsmen and neighbors, Ram Das had left Kanpur and set out on a political career in his hometown in Jalaun district; a career which was suddenly interrupted a few years later, when along with another politician he was convicted of corruption and removed from his seat on the local Municipal Board.

The process of disintegration had apparently started with the the publication of the revised lists of Scheduled Castes in 1950, when there was a storm of indignation, directed not only against the Koli Rajputs, some of whom were physically assaulted, but also against the government, which had decided to exclude the Koris without making any previous inquiries of its own. The organization which now took the initiative was the recently formed Sanyukt Kori Mahasabha. Like the Koli-Rajut Sabha this association had branches in many different places, but it was apparently much stronger in the central and south-central districts of the state than in the districts in the west. In Kanpur, its main stronghold, it recruited most of its supporters among the Ahirwars, the Shakywars, the Banaudhas, and the

Kamalvanshis; the groups where the Koli Rajputs also had most of their followers. Among the groups mainly supporting the Vaishya movement, it was less well received, probably largely because these groups were educationally somewhat more backward than the others.

As we shall see later on, one of the goals of the Sanyukt Kori Mahasabha was to serve as a platform for demands for political representation, but in the beginning its main purpose was to get the Koris reinstated among the Scheduled Castes. The Congress government, it turned out, was not unsympathetic towards this demand. At a reception in Lucknow Pandit Govind Ballabh Pant, the Chief Minister of the U. P. Government, admitted that a fault had been committed, and promised that the Kori students would continue to receive their scholarships, even though they were no longer formally entitled to them. As he also explained, however, it was not within the power of the state government or even the central cabinet in New Delhi to cancel a decision taken by the Lok Sabha, the central parliament. This could only be done by the Lok Sabha itself, and then only in connection with a new revision of the Scheduled Caste lists. It was not to be expected that the members of the Lok Sabha would make any changes of the present lists merely to satisfy the wishes of the members of one or a few individual castes. Like others who were dissatisfied with the recently adopted order, the Koris would have to wait.

As it happened, however, it did not take a long time before the Scheduled Caste lists were again revised. In 1953, to satisfy the demands from various higher castes who felt that they too were entitled to support, the government appointed the so-called Backward Classes Commission, also known as the Kalekar Commission. The main tasks of this commission were to define criteria for backwardness on which an extended system of positive discrimination could be based, and to discuss how the situation of the non-Scheduled Castes to be covered by this system could be ameliorated, but in addition to this it was also asked to review the existing lists of Scheduled Castes (Government of India. Report of the Backward Classes Commission, 1955). This gave the leaders of the Sanyukt Kori Mahasabha the opportunity they had been waiting for. In a long and carefully prepared reply to the questionnaire distributed by the Commission, copies of which were sent to the central government in New Delhi and the state government in Lucknow, they mentioned that the Koris had previously been a Scheduled Caste and that the decision to exclude them had been taken without any enquiry into their economic, social, and political circumstan-

ces. Yet, as the government could easily have found out, the Koris were one of the most backward of all the castes of the country. Most of them were villagers living in abject poverty. In some places they owned small plots of land, usually very meager ones, but as a rule they were underpaid and undernourished sharecroppers and day-laborers. Of their traditional craft very little remained, and where it still existed it did not provide its practitioners with more than a bare survival. But then the Koris were hardly even regarded as human beings by their high-caste neighbors. They were forced to reside in segregated hamlets, where the houses were not better than pig sties; they were forced to perform different kinds of unpaid work, so-called *begar*; they were not allowed to visit local temples; they were not allowed to bathe in local ponds; they were not allowed to draw water from local wells; and they were commonly discriminated against in such public establishments as schools and teashops.

In the cities they were usually not subject to *begar*, but for the rest their situation was essentially the same as in the villages. While there was no law preventing them from residing in high-caste neighborhoods, they were still forced to live with other Untouchables in separate neighborhoods. In these neighborhoods their living conditions were miserable. Frequently they were not even provided with drinking water, not to speak about sanitation and other municipal services. Nor were they allowed to participate on an equal basis in economic life. A Kori who tried to make a business career would soon find his way blocked by prejudiced high-caste people. Even in the cities the Koris were only allowed to engage in low-paid, menial kinds of work.

Apart from this description of the situation of the Koris, given in answer to the questionnaire, the memorandum contained a polemical discussion about what had to be done in order to make it possible for Koris and other low-caste people to become equal with the high-caste citizens of the country. What provoked this discussion were a couple of statements preceding question 11 of the questionnaire:

11. The stigma of untouchability being essentially psychological could be removed at any time. The segregation and seclusion of Scheduled Tribes could be overcome by mutual understanding and by mutual effort. When we succeed in this would you not like to put all these categories into one general category of "Backward Classes" and then set before the nation a general target for overcoming general backwardness both as regard education and financial status?

As the leaders of Sanyukt Kori Mahasabha read these lines - and there would seem to be no other way of reading them - it was the view of the Commission that untouchability was a problem that could be handled separately, without improving the economic and educational situation of the Untouchables. This was a grave mistake, the memorandum argued. Untouchability was a psychological problem in the sense that it was the manifestation of a religiously colored hatred on the part of the higher castes, but it was not a psychological problem in the sense that it could be removed by mere persuasion. That this was not possible low-caste people had learned during the previous decades. What, for example, had come out of the efforts of Gandhi and the Congress to change the attitudes towards low-caste people? In order to soften the hearts of high-caste people, and create a more positive image of the Untouchables, Gandhi and his followers had started to call the latter Harijans, 'Children of God.' The outcome had merely been that the word Harijan had become synonymous with the word Untouchable (*achhut*). This was not surprising, for even among Gandhi's followers there were many who did not seriously practise what they preached. The best amongst them visited Harijans at home, eating their food and drinking their water, but afterwards they used to purify themselves in the Ganges. How would it be possible to teach new attitudes if there were no teachers? That the desired change could not be initiated by the Untouchables themselves was clear from the experiences of the Koli-Rajput movement and similar movements among other low castes. The supporters of these movements had scrupulously conformed to high-caste standards of conduct, but this had not made high-caste people more sympathetic towards them. Quite the contrary, these unfortunate people had been brutally attacked by their high-caste neighbors. Their houses had been set on fire, their land had been stolen from them, their wives had been raped, and in some places they had even been murdered.

The lesson to be learned from all this was clearly that the economic reforms must come first. Not until the Untouchables had risen to a position of economic equality with the higher castes would they be met with respect. It was a matter of regret, the memorandum said, that not even the government seemed to understand this. Recently Prime Minister Nehru had asked the workers to cooperate with the government for the good of the nation. This was a most unreasonable request. How could low-caste people give their whole-hearted support to a society that treated them as animals? How could they love a society that did not love them?

With this we may leave the Sanyukt Kori Mahasabha memorandum. What remains to be said about the Scheduled Caste issue is that along with their caste-fellows in the central and eastern districts of Uttar Pradesh, the Koris of Kanpur appeared on the revised lists of Scheduled Castes adopted under The Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes (Amendment) Act, 1956. Their castemates to the west, those residing in Agra and Meerut divisions, were not affected by the decision. For administrative purposes they were to be treated as members of the so-called Other Backward Classes, a decision with which their most articulate spokesmen were apparently satisfied.

The issue of political representation

As mentioned above, one of the goals of the Sanyukt Kori Mahasabha, was to get the caste represented in the new system of parliamentary politics. It was not a question of representation in the formal, constitutional sense, for as the leaders of the association were well aware, the constitution gave no political rights to individual castes. The demand was rather that the ruling Congress, which they held responsible for the exclusion of the caste from the Scheduled Castes, should nominate Koris as party candidates in general, non-reserved constituencies, preferably in proportion to their numbers in the population. There was obviously nothing to guarantee that the Koris would have been so well represented in the political system if they had remained among the Scheduled Castes, nor even that they would have been represented there at all. Even as Scheduled Caste politicians the Kori *netas* would have required the support of the Congress or some other political party, support which might not have been forthcoming. As the representatives of the Sanyukt Kori Mahasabha formulated the demand, however, it was merely a demand for the restoration of their legitimate rights as members of the Scheduled Castes. By deciding that the Kori students should not be deprived of their scholarships the Chief Minister Pandit Pant and the Congress had already admitted that a mistake had been made. There was no good reason why they should not also restore the political rights of the caste.

When the issue of political representation was raised for the first time, in connection with the first general elections of 1952, the outcome was very disappointing. Not only was the unrealistic demand for proportional representation turned down; not a single Kori was found fit to represent the Congress. Furthermore, while the Congress bosses refused to accept the

demand of the Sanyukt Kori Mahasabha, they acceded to a similar demand from the Khatiks, choosing a Khatik for a seat on the Legislative Council in Lucknow. As the Khatik in question had a more impressive political record than any of the Kori *netas*, no harm had been done to the latter as individuals. Yet here it was a question of castes, not of individuals. Since both the Koris and the Khatiks had been excluded from the Scheduled Castes on very flimsy grounds and both were entitled to compensation, they should obviously have been treated in the same manner - or was it not a simple rule of moral arithmetics that equals should be treated equally? By attending to the grievances of the Khatiks, while ignoring those of the Koris, the Congress potentates had committed a second big crime against the Koris.

The biennial elections to the Legislative Council in 1954 provided the Kori *netas* of Kanpur with a second opportunity, and this time the Congress bosses were apparently more sympathetically disposed. According to my Kori informants, a few of whom were personally involved in the negotiations, it had in practice been decided that one of the leaders of the Sanyukt Kori Mahasabha, an Ahirwar and former Koli Rajput from Koriyana called Baij Nath (who was also one of the secretaries of the local Congress Ward Committee) would be given one of the party tickets. Not only had the president of the City Congress, Devi Sahay, and some other important local Congressmen accepted Baij Nath's candidature, even the Chief Minister Pandit Pant had given his approval. What happened in the end, however, was that Baij Nath's name was dropped. As to the reason why this happened there is no agreement among my informants. According to the most common story, the fault lay entirely with the Kori *netas* themselves, who had failed to stick to their previous agreement of unanimously supporting the candidature of Baij Nath. At the last moment, one or two of them had secretly tried to persuade the Congress leaders that the choice of Baij Nath was a bad one and that they themselves were the true leaders of the caste. As a result, Pandit Pant and the others had lost confidence in the Koris, and decided that it was better to nominate somebody else.

This story fits the local stereotype of selfish politicians, but whether it is also in keeping with the facts is less certain. I am more inclined to believe another story, which suggests that Baij Nath was dropped for the simple reason that he was unable to mobilize the requisite support within the party. The selection of party candidates was a highly competitive process, and the persons who eventually got the nominations were those who were best able to put pressure on the party leaders. While it is possible that Pandit

Pant, Devi Sahay, and others promised Baij Nath their support, they may well have given similar promises to others. What mattered in the end were the political resources of the different candidates.

Whatever the reason, the fact that Baij Nath did not get the ticket further aggravated the sense of deprivation and injustice among the Kori *netas*. This is evident from the following resolution adopted at a meeting of the Sanyukt Kori Mahasabha shortly after the elections:

RESOLUTION

Respected President
All-India Congress Committee, Delhi

Sir,

A conference of all the workers, *mahates*, *mukhyas*, *chaudhuris*, masters, and mistris of the Kori caste held on Feb. 6, 1955 at the residence of Shri Param Lal under the presidentship of Master Shiv Prasad passed the following resolutions:

1. That although there are 3 500 000 Koris in U.P., 40 000 in Kanpur district, and about 25 000 in Kanpur city, no Kori has been given a seat in any political assembly. According to their numbers they should have been given several.
2. That amongst all the castes of U.P. the Koris are the most backward. First they were included among the Scheduled Castes, but before the last general elections they were excluded from the list. Even so they are still treated as a Scheduled Caste.
3. That handloom weaving is the traditional occupation of the Kori caste. Weaving, agriculture, and working in factories are still the occupations in which they are engaged.
4. That most of the social workers, students, and active political workers of this caste belong to the Congress and that the Kori caste has always supported the Congress.
5. That representatives of the Kori caste for a long time have petitioned the Governor of U. P. Shri Munshiji, as well as the prominent leaders of the Congress Shri Pantji, Guptaaji, Gautamji, etc. about our lack of political representation, but that so far we have only been kept

in suspense.

6. That due to party politics all our petitions have so far fallen on deaf ears and that therefore the Kori caste has not been able to progress. The Koris are exploited politically, socially, economically, and educationally and their situation is getting worse day by day.

7. That it is because of the negligence of the Congress leaders and the U.P. Government that the situation of 3 500 000 Koris is steadily deteriorating.

8. That this conference strongly protests against the injustices perpetrated against this caste and sadly adopts the resolution that unless we are given the political representation due to us, we will not be able to support the Congress in the future.

This conference requests, therefore, that our Kori caste shall once more be enlisted among the Scheduled Castes and that this shall be done very soon. We also request that all the demands mentioned above should be accepted and implemented. We would be very grateful if that happened.

While the disappointment expressed here must have been genuinely felt, it would be a mistake to believe that the leaders of the Sanyukt Kori Mahasabha were seriously considering the possibility of leaving the Congress. Some of them would later defect from the party, but when they wrote this resolution they still believed that they might succeed in their efforts of persuading the Congress bosses to accept their demands. Furthermore, they had no real alternative. If any political party could help them realize their ambitions, it was surely the powerful Congress party. The communists, who at this time were trying to recruit supporters in Koriyana, were certainly not an alternative. Not only were they a much smaller party than the Congress, they also had little sympathy for caste organizations like the Sanyukt Kori Mahasabha.

That they were still loyal supporters of the Congress government, the leaders of the Sanyukt Kori Mahasabha got an opportunity to demonstrate in action during the big 80-day strike against rationalization in the textile industry, which started only a few months after the adoption of this resolution. As mentioned in chapter 2, this strike, strongly opposed by the Congress leadership in Delhi and Lucknow, was preceded by a merger of most of the major trade unions in the industry, including several

unions which normally supported the Congress. The only major union which did not join the united front was the INTUC-affiliated RTMU, which remained faithful to the government and opposed the strike. That RTMU was also in minority outside the labor movement is indicated by the fact that Kanpur's leading Congressman at the time, a politician called Shiv Narayan Tandon, decided to resign from his seat in Lok Sabha in protest against the government's pro-employer attitude.

Since the leaders of the Sanyukt Kori Mahasabha belonged to a community of millworkers, one might have expected that they would also support the strike. But they did not. Anxious to prove their loyalty, they even lent some support to those who tried to break the strike:

KORI WORKER BROTHERS BEWARE OF MANIPULATORS!

On May 2 some selfish, factionalist leaders called a strike. In this connection the U. P. Sanyukt Kori Mahasabha warns you not to fall prey to party politics.

In order to enhance their own reputation and win seats for themselves these leaders are trying to confuse and befool you. The workers are the ones who will suffer from their cheap tricks, for it is always the poor workers who lose when there is a strike. The strike leaders lose nothing, nor do the factory owners. The factory owners are always in favor of lock-outs, by which they confuse the workers and perpetuate their tyranny. The selfish leaders of the strike have been telling us that by putting pressure on the government and the factory owners we will compel the government to accept our demands. But these leaders are not in a position to help the workers. When they are now building a wall between the workers and the factory owners they are only trying to further their own interests.

The poor workers are going to be crushed unless they reject these conspirators and resume their duties in the factories. Come to the office of the U. P. Sanyukt Kori Mahasabha, Ramnagar Koriyana, with your grievances. The office is constantly at your service.

A couple of the leaders of the Sanyukt Kori Mahasabha were also among the signatories of the following leaflet, spread among workers of all castes and communities in Koriyana and its surrounding neighborhoods:

APPEAL TO WORKER BROTHERS!

Today is the 29th day of the strike. The condition of our houses clearly indicates our suffering. As long as the strike continues there will be no improvement. Worker Brothers, for your own sake and for the sake of your families we therefore ask you to return to your duties. By following a false path laid out by false leaders you will only aggravate your problems. The strike is illegal. We are confident that our government will solve our problems, but first the strike must come to end. Our future prospects are very good.

To listen to false propaganda is not wisdom. Strikes were not of any use in the past and will not be of any use in the future. You should return to your duties at once. If you have any difficulties while calling off the strike and going back to the factories, we will give you our full support.

We see the destruction of homes
I sat before my plundered house
Ask him about his grief
whose house is being destroyed before him

Yet by the spreading of such messages the leaders of the Sanyukt Kori Mahasabha did not get any closer to the fulfillment of their political goals. In 1959 one them - the Ahirwar Har Narain mentioned in chapter 3 (who was, incidentally, also a former Koli Rajput) - was eventually given the honor of representing the Congress in the elections to the new Municipal Corporation, but by that time the Sanyukt Kori Mahasabha had already been dissolved. The Sanyukt Kori Mahasabha had been formed in response to the decision to exclude the Koris from the Scheduled Castes, and with the reversal of this decision in 1956 it had served its main purpose, at least in so far as the rank and file of the caste were concerned. Many Koris were still unhappy about the fact that the caste had no parliamentary representatives, but they could no longer argue with the same force that the Koris were entitled to special treatment. Furthermore, there was the problem of rivalry and factionalism within the Sanyukt Kori Mahasabha itself. While it may not be true that Baij Nath was deprived of his nomination to the Legislative Council in 1954 because his colleagues in the organization plotted against him, there were certainly those who were dissatisfied with the selection of Baij Nath as the representative of the caste. If they nonetheless supported his candidature it was largely because there

seemed to be no better way by which they could further their own political careers. As prominent members of the Sanyukt Kori Mahasabha each one of them gained in reputation among his caste-fellows and hopefully among the leaders of the Congress as well. Yet as some of them were bound to gain more than others, the alliance could not be a stable one. It had worked reasonably well under the special conditions created by the exclusion of the Koris from the Scheduled Castes, but when these conditions no longer obtained it rapidly crumbled.

The revival of the Sanyukt Kori Mahasabha

But this was not the end of the story. To many Koris it probably seemed so at the time, but in 1973, when practically nothing had been done to mobilize the Koris of Kanpur across the boundaries of the subcastes for almost twenty years, an attempt was made to revive the Sanyukt Kori Mahasabha. Among the social workers and politicians involved in this attempt were several of those previously mentioned. There was the old Koli Rajput Devi Din; there was the winner of the 1959 municipal elections in Koriyana, Har Narain; there was the Banaudha communist Duli Chand, one of Har Narain's chief competitors in 1959; there was the Shakywar and RPI *neta* Nathu Ram, who had fought against Hira Lal's son Gopi Charan in the 1968 municipal elections in Koriyana; and there was Comrade Ram Shankar's relative and friend Girja Shankar, who had been involved in the Mohalla Sudhar Committee in the 1960's. The person who came up with the suggestion, I am told, was a Dhiman schoolteacher and former Koli Rajput called Jai Ram Master, who in 1972 had set out to gather support for an organization of his own making called the Nagar Kori Samaj, the 'City Kori Society,' the chief purpose of which was to establish closer relations between the subcastes. Also important was the outside encouragement provided by the All-India Koli Samaj, a caste association dominated by Kolis of Gujerat, for it was as a result of participating in a Delhi conference of this association that Har Narain and a few of the other figures involved in the revival of the Sanyukt Kori Mahasabha decided to make common cause with Jai Ram Master. The revived Sanyukt Kori Mahasabha was not set up as a local branch of the All-India Koli Samaj, however; right from the beginning it was an independent association of the Koris of Kanpur and Uttar Pradesh.

While the founding members of the revived Sanyukt Kori Mahasabha may have had somewhat different ideas about the ends to be served by the association, they fully agreed on one thing; it should be devoted to so-

cial reform and have no political involvements. Its members were free to engage in politics, but not the association itself. As stated in the constitution of the association, which was adopted after a year or so, it had seven major goals. One was to unite the subcastes by promoting commensal, matrimonial, and other forms of fraternization between them. A second was to encourage a spirit of progress among the members of the caste. A third was to support the spread of education, if possible by starting schools and libraries. A fourth was to seek government assistance and give advice for the creation of cooperative societies among the weavers and other artisans of the caste. A fifth was to put an end to backward and expensive customs prevailing within the caste. A sixth was to encourage the Koris to celebrate the anniversaries and memorial days of the holy men, kings, heroes, and heroines of their caste - no names specifically mentioned. A seventh, finally, was to give material support to the old and destitute of the caste.

As also laid down in the constitution, the organization itself was a voluntary association open to every Kori on the payment of an annual fee of half a rupie, provided that he subscribed to its goals and rules. How one should decide whether a particular group of persons were Koris was not explained, but the criteria of caste membership were not in dispute: a Kori was a person of Kori ancestry whose hereditary occupation was weaving and whose customary practices conformed to those of the caste. Like other Koris, the members of the Sanyukt Kori Mahasabha adhered to the view that all Koris derive from a common stock, and that the subcaste divisions have emerged more or less accidentally in the course of history. Consistently with this view, they even avoided to refer to the subcastes by the common word *jati* - a word connoting separateness and distinction. Like the Koli Rajputs before them, they used instead the word *gotra*, which normally refers to an exogamous grouping within a *jati*.⁶

Nor was it usually difficult to decide whether a particular group of people satisfied this common-sense definition of caste membership. The practical criterion was simply that the group in question were Koris if they so claimed and there was no compelling evidence to the contrary. By the time I came to Kanpur twelve named *gotras* - the Ahirwars, the Shakywars, the Shankwars, the Banaudhas, the Kamalvanshis, the Dhimans, the Sonwanis, the Mahawars, the Kaithwars, the Kutars, the Jaiswars, and the Kashyaps - had been approached by members of the association, and among these twelve only two - the Jaiswars and the Kashyaps - had not been accepted as Koris right away. The Jaiswars, most of whom come from the

district of Rae Bareilly to the south-east of Kanpur, are said to engage in leatherwork in some places, and are therefore often regarded as Camars or Korchamras by other Koris. The members of the Sanyukt Kori Mahasabha, however, most of whom were more concerned with numbers than with the ritual status of the caste, decided that they were genuine Koris eligible to membership of the association. As Girja Shankar explained, just as there were Ahirwars and Ahirwars, there were Jaiswars and Jaiswars or rather, Jaiswars and Jaiswaras. While the Jaiswaras were a group of Camars, the Jaiswars were Koris. It was probably true that some of the Kori Jaiswars had practiced leatherwork in the past, but only because the higher castes had forced them to do so. It did not prove that they too were Camars.

The problem with the Kashyaps, on the other hand, was not that they were known to engage in any disreputable practices, but rather that most of the members of the association had not even heard of them before. They knew that there was a sage of ancient times called Kashyap, but they did not know that there was a group of Koris carrying his name and that members of this group had resided in the city for more than half a century, as was apparently the case. When the matter came up for discussion, even the person who had established the contact, a Kutar manufacturer of iron utensils called Dal Chand, began to wonder. Dal Chand himself had become acquainted with a few Kashyaps in the context of work - most of the Kashyaps were ironworkers like himself - and had never had any reason to doubt their credentials. That they were not known to his associates in the Sanyukt Kori Mahasabha could probably be explained by the fact that they were a small and residentially isolated group engaged in an occupation where they had few opportunities of meeting other Koris. Yet there was still room for doubt, and it was not until he and his Ahirwar friend Devi Din recalled that a Kori *sadhu* of knowledgeable reputation had once told them that Kashyap *rishi* had been a Kori - just as the saint Rae Das had been a Camar - that the question was resolved.

It was agreed that the association should be as broadly based as possible. Most caste associations were run by a handful of leading activists, the rest of the members being a mere conference audience expected to give their support to whatever measures the leaders decided upon. In order to avoid such elitism it was resolved that the Sanyukt Kori Mahasabha should not only have a big Working Committee of 25 members, but also a larger, so-called Representative Assembly, consisting of 11 representatives of each of the *gotras*. While the members of the Representative Assembly

would be democratically elected by the members of their respective *gotras*, the members of the Working Committee were to be elected by the Representative Assembly in accordance with a principle of *gotra* equity, a principle which would also be applied to the election of office-bearers within the Working Committee. As stated in the constitution, meetings of the Representative Assembly should be held at least once every third month, and meetings of the Working Committee at least once every month. Moreover, a public conference open to all the members of the caste was to be arranged once a year.

When I came to the city, however, this organizational framework had not been established. What existed was a Working Committee of somewhat floating membership that used to assemble off and on in Koriyana, at a primary school owned and managed by one of its members, a Shakywar clerk in public employment called Ram Din. Apart from Ram Din, who resided in an adjacent building and was nearly always present, the members most regularly attending the meetings of this Working Committee were the Ahirwar Girja Shankar, who was its chief secretary, the Banaudha communist Duli Chand, the Shakywar *neta* Nathu Ram, and three or four persons of lesser importance belonging to the same *gotras*. Also attending the meetings with some regularity were the Ahirwar Har Narain, the Ahirwar Devi Din, the Dhiman Jai Ram Master, and a Kamalvanshi *neta* and factory worker called Prabhu Dayal, who had been the president of the old Sanyukt Kori Mahasabha in the 1950's, and had now also become the president of the new one. Outside this core of participants were a number of persons who were regarded as members or would-be members of the Working Committee but were not often present at the meetings. One of them was the vice-president of the association, a Banaudha communist millworker called Godhan Lal, a second a Banaudha clerk called Kishore Lal, a third a Sonwani millworker and small-scale *neta* from Koriyana called Lalta Prasad, a fourth a retired Mahawar mill *mistri* called Shoba Lal, a fifth the Kutar manufacturer of iron-utensils Dal Chand, a sixth the Kashyap manufacturer of iron-utensils Salig Ram (mentioned in a previous chapter), and a seventh an old Jaiswar millworker called Mahadeo Prasad, whose primary concern was not the Sanyukt Kori Mahasabha, it seemed, but the Koli-Rajput movement, which still has not entirely lost its appeal among the Jaiswars.

Thus the Working Committee was dominated by Ahirwars, Shakywars, Banaudhas, and Kamalvanshis, the groups which had also been dom-

inant in the old Sanyukt Kori Mahasabha as well as among the Koli Rajputs. Among the remaining eight *gotras* approached in the beginning, six - the Sonwanis, the Dhimans, the Kutars, the Kashyaps, and the Mahawars - were only marginally represented on the Committee, and two - the Kaithwars and the Shankwars - were not represented there at all. The Kaithwars, who come from the districts of Etawah, Unnao, and Hardoi west and north-west of Kanpur, and are a fairly small and backward community in the city, had initially been represented by one of their few educated members, a clerk called Jiwan Lal, but this man had soon dropped out and now there was nobody to replace him. Most of the Kaithwars were apparently not even aware of the existence of the Sanyukt Kori Mahasabha, and those who had heard about it seemed not to be interested. Among the Shankwars, who come from Etawah, Mainpuri, Etah, Shahjahanpur, and a few other districts of western U.P. and are also a small group in Kanpur, there was not much interest either. The person approached by the Sanyukt Kori Mahasabha, a CPI trade-union worker and leading member of his group called Shyam Lal, had raised the question at a caste meeting, where it was decided that the Shankwars had nothing to gain by joining the association. Twenty-five years earlier another Shankwar meeting had arrived at a similar decision in regard of the old Sanyukt Kori Mahasabha. At that time most of the Shankwars had been followers of the Vaishya movement. As such they had been satisfied with the exclusion of the Koris from the Scheduled Castes, and - with the exception of Shyam Lal and a few others - not at all inclined to join in the protests organized by the Sanyukt Kori Mahasabha. Since then they had come to value the opportunities made available to them as members of the Scheduled Castes, but this did not make them any more interested in the Sanyukt Kori Mahasabha. Among the older members of the group there were still those who insisted on the superiority of the Shankwars vis-a-vis other Koris as well as those who insisted that the Shankwars were not really Koris at all. Yet the main argument, I am told, was simply that, high-sounding declarations notwithstanding, the Sanyukt Kori Mahasabha was a useless organization, since it would not be able to help the Koris to solve the problems which mattered most to them, the problems of work and education.

And such attitudes were by no means confined to the Kaithwars and the Shankwars. In all the *gotras* - the Ahirwars, the Shakywars, the Banaudhas, and the Kamalvanshis not excluded - the responses among those who were at all aware of the existence of the association ranged mostly

from indifference to outright rejection. Perhaps the most common criticism was that the stated purpose of the Sanyukt Kori Mahasabha was not its true purpose, or at least not its main purpose. What the members of the association were mainly promoting, people said, were their own selfish interests. Persons like Devi Din, Jai Ram Master, or even Girja Shankar were perhaps honest social workers devoted to the welfare of the caste, but the others, especially the politicians, were first of all preoccupied with their own careers. These persons had got involved with the Sanyukt Kori Mahasabha primarily because they wanted to make their political superiors believe that they were important leaders of their caste, leaders who would be able to mobilize large numbers of voters in future elections and would therefore be suitable as party candidates. To create such an impression had been their overriding concern as members of the old Sanyukt Kori Mahasabha in the 1950's, and now when they were members of the new Sanyukt Kori Mahasabha it was still their main concern. In spite of what they said the new association was therefore very much a political organization. The program of caste unification and reform was at best a secondary matter.

Often mentioned in this connection was the involvement of some of the leading figures of the Sanyukt Kori Mahasabha in an attempt to get one of the Koris of Kanpur elected to the State Legislative Assembly in 1974. As Girja Shankar described it, the idea of making this attempt was born in 1973, not long before the elections, when it was discovered that the boundaries of the local constituencies had been redrawn, and that one of the new constituencies, the constituency to which Koriyana belonged, had a very large population of Koris. If all or most of the Koris residing within the boundaries of this constituency could be made to support the same candidate, it was suggested, that candidate would have a very good chance of winning, at least if he were also the candidate of one of the major political parties and as such supported by some other groups of voters as well. The unsuccessful attempt to get Baij Nath nominated to a seat on the Legislative Council in the 1950's had not been forgotten, but now the situation appeared different. If the leading politicians and social workers of the caste could only agree to support the same candidate, it might not be impossible to convince the Congress or some other political party that they should let a Kori represent this particular constituency. It was at least well worth trying.

As it happened, history did not only repeat itself, it eventually turned into farce. To begin with none of the major parties accepted the bargain. The Ahirwar Har Narain, who by this time had left the Congress for the

BLD, failed to get the nomination of his party, and so did several others, including Har Narain's longstanding rival Baij Nath, who was still a member of the Congress, although he had never been allowed to represent the party in an election. The only one who was found acceptable by his party was a young Neo-Buddhist and member of the RPI called Tota Ram, but as the RPI was a very small party, supported mainly by Camars, and as Tota Ram himself was not a leader of wide reputation, his candidature was not greeted with much enthusiasm. In a preliminary fashion the caste leaders agreed to support him, but in the last minute all of them, except Girja Shankar, changed their mind and decided to support a young man from Koriyana called Raja Ram, who wanted to contest the election as an independent. Raja Ram, who was mentioned in chapter 3 as one of the independent candidates in the 1968 elections to the Municipal Corporation, also had very little political experience, but he had something else that was very valuable: money. While Tota Ram would not have been able to raise more than Rs. 500 on the election campaign, Raja Ram boasted that he could spend as much as Rs. 20 000 if needed. The only problem was that Raja Ram's money derived from bootlegging, his family being widely known as the leading distributors of tinctured ginger in Koriyana. In the eyes of Girja Shankar - who was very much concerned with the immoderate drinking habits of his caste-fellows - and many other members of the caste this disqualified Raja Ram in advance. The members of the self-appointed selection committee, however, decided to ignore this problem; after all even more respectable *netas*, such as Baij Nath and Comrade Duli Chand, had engaged in this business, although not in recent years. Furthermore, for a few of the members of this committee, especially the president of the Sanyukt Kori Mahasabha Prabhu Dayal and the RPI *neta* and member of the Sanyukt Kori Mahasabha Nathu Ram, who were both employed as campaign managers, the selection of Raja Ram seem to have provided a welcome opportunity of earning some money under pleasant circumstances. According to the people of Koriyana, this was indeed the only reason why these persons decided to sponsor Raja Ram. Raja Ram himself was merely an ignorant fool, they say. It was the *netas* who had given him the idea, and then made him spend an enormous amount of money - the estimates range from ten to sixty thousand rupies - on a campaign that they knew was doomed to failure.

And a big failure it was. During the campaign Raja Ram and his chief lieutenants toured the constituency in an old car which had been bought for this particular purpose, and in the low-caste neighborhoods where they

held most of their rallies they lavishly entertained the audience with food and other refreshments. Yet when the election results were published it turned out that out of a total of nearly 67 000 valid votes, Raja Ram had got only a meagre 2 241, as against 37 527 for the winning Congress candidate, 15 759 for the Jana Sangh candidate who came in second, and 4 466 for the CPI(M) candidate who came in third. I do not know if Raja Ram had really believed that he would be able to defeat the Congressman, but he must at least have expected to make a better result than this. According to Girja Shankar's estimation, he did not even get a very large share of the Kori vote. In Koriyana his supporters were mainly the customers of the family's medical store-cum-liquor shop.

Girja Shankar described this affair with much regret, although he himself had withdrawn as soon it was decided that Raja Ram would be given the nomination. It had given the caste a bad name, he said. He had heard many sarcastic remarks; a prominent Camar politician had made the comment that it was not surprising that a caste of drunkards had chosen a bootlegger as their common representative. And it had probably also harmed the Sanyukt Kori Mahasabha, which was then still in the process of formation. Since some of the persons who had been involved in this affair had also been involved in the Sanyukt Kori Mahasabha, some people had mistakenly concluded that the latter had a political purpose, which was absolutely not the case. Still, he did not regret his initial involvement. Right from the beginning he had been much criticized by some of his communist friends, including Ram Shankar, but he had rejected their criticisms. Supporting a person attached to the Congress, the BLD, or the RPI, was not necessarily the same as supporting the Congress, the BLD, or the RPI. In India politics did not revolve around parties so much as persons. What mattered to the voters were the personal characteristics of the candidates, and what mattered to the candidates themselves was usually nothing but the opportunities for personal advancement and enrichment offered by the political system. Furthermore, something very important had been at stake in this case, namely the status and reputation of the caste. In material terms nothing much would have been gained if a Kori had been elected to the Legislative Assembly. He himself would have become a rich man, and some of his relatives and close friends might also have benefitted, but otherwise the economic situation of the caste would not have improved. Yet in terms of status there would have been a gain for the caste as a whole. Look at the Camars, he said. The fact that Jagjivan Ram is a Camar and that the great genius Dr.

Ambedkar was also a Camar certainly makes a big difference both to the way that other people think of Camars and the way that Camars think of themselves. Since the Koris are so much more backward than the Camars, even a mere MLA would have been an asset. Suppose you were a poor and illiterate man belonging to a family of equally poor and illiterate persons. Would it then not make a big difference to your self-image if your brother became a highly respected doctor, lawyer, or politician?

Further criticisms

With regard to the stated aims of the Sanyukt Kori Mahasabha there were mainly two types of criticism, one that the idea of unifying the caste was retrogressive, the other that it was premature or for traditional reasons not even acceptable in principle. Some of those who advanced the first type of criticism were Scheduled Caste radicals who believed that the proper unit of mobilization and unification was the entire Scheduled Caste cluster rather than its individual components. These persons argued that the project of unifying the Koris was not only wasteful of time and effort, but perhaps even harmful, as it seemed to suggest that the Koris had more in common with one another than with other Scheduled Caste people. This was basically not the case. If a Kori wanted to marry outside his sub-caste, they proposed, there was no reason why he should not marry a Camar or a Dhobi, for all Scheduled Caste people were essentially one and the same. There were also the critics of communist or socialist persuasion, such as Comrade Param Lal Banaudha and Comrade Mihi Lal of Devi Street, who were suspicious of all forms of caste mobilization, since they believed that such mobilization reinforced caste boundaries, and was therefore detrimental to the mobilization of the working people along the lines of class, as well to other forms of fraternization across the boundaries of caste. One of my communist acquaintances, a Sonwani trade union worker and leading member of his community called Chakki Lal, even suggested that the weakening of working-class solidarity was the *raison d'être* of caste associations; their hidden purpose, as it were. Caste associations, he said, were instruments of capitalist oppression, and it was as such that they had been invented in the first place. He himself had been actively involved in caste work in the early 1950's - for a while he had even published a journal devoted to questions of caste reform - but since the big strike of 1955, when he was converted to communism, he had confined himself to trade union work.

Such criticisms were not taken very seriously by the members of the association. The only one who seemed to agree with the communist view was Comrade Duli Chand, who once explained that the reason why he had joined the association in the first place was that he wanted to keep an eye on Prabhu Dayal and the other *netas*; it was important that he and other communists made sure that the association would not be used against the interests of the common members of the caste. Otherwise he was not much in favor of caste associations. Yet this was a somewhat exceptional statement, even for Duli Chand. A more common view was simply that since the Sanyukt Kori Mahasabha was merely an organization for social reform, there was no reason why it should provoke animosity between Koris and *parjats*. Certainly there was nothing wrong with helping the poor and the depressed, not even if they were one's own kith and kin. If a person wanted to join the communists or some other leftist political group, he could very well do so while remaining a member of the Sanyukt Kori Mahasabha. A person's commitment to the association need not come into conflict with his political commitment. In practice it could perhaps be difficult to reconcile the two, since they both required an investment of time and effort, but in principle there was hardly any conflict. Furthermore, since neither the political parties nor the trade unions were directly concerned with the kinds of problems that concerned the Sanyukt Kori Mahasabha, the question was not whether one should join the one or the other, but whether one should be concerned with these problems at all. Unfortunately, most people seemed not to care.

Nor was the criticism of the Scheduled Caste radicals regarded as very pertinent. Girja Shankar, who did not seem to be atypical in this respect, justified his standpoint on the issue of intermarriage by adhering to the so-called "line of least resistance" principle of social reform enunciated by the Maharasthrian Brahman Justice Kasinatha Telang at the beginning of the century (Conlon 1974: 359-60) - although he did not know it under that name and had probably never heard of Telang. He agreed (at least in his role as a social worker) that it would be good if Koris married Camars and Dhobis, just as it would be very good if the caste system was abolished altogether. Yet here it was not a question of what he or any other member of the association might think or want, but of the opinions and sentiments prevailing among the Koris at large. As the critics certainly knew, most of the Koris were not yet ready for such radical proposals; the question of intersubcaste marriage was itself a very controversial one. By recommending

their caste-fellows to marry Camars and Dhobis, he and his friends in the association would only make themselves very impopular. As for the idea of strengthening the unity of the Scheduled Castes by less radical means, he was all in favor. The problem was only how it should be done. In the government offices the Scheduled Caste employees were usually united in separate organizations across the boundaries of caste, but in the society at large there were no organizations of a similar kind. Efforts had been made to create such organizations, but they had for the most part not been very successful, largely because of the perennial problems of jealousy and factionalism. Even to keep a small organization like the Sanyukt Kori Mahasabha together was very difficult.

It is certainly true that the project of amalgamating the subcastes was itself a very ambitious one. Despite the past efforts of the Koli Rajputs and other social reformers to unify the caste, the Koris of Kanpur were still a mere conglomeration of separate subcastes and segments of subcastes, some of which were even reluctant to admit that they were Koris. Frequently they were not even aware of each other's existence. Before he became a member of the Sanyukt Kori Mahasabha, Girja Shankar knew of only two *gotras* other than his own: the Shakywars, who come from the same region as the Ahirwars, and the Banaudhas, a few of whom he had encountered in Koriyana and elsewhere. Like other Koris, he must have heard that there were seven subcastes in the caste - just as there were seven subcastes in every caste - but nobody had given him the names of these seven, and he himself had apparently never cared to ask; this was simply not one of things that he was curious about. And Girja Shankar was by no means atypical. In Devi Street, a few persons could give the names of seven subcastes or more - Hira Lal, the cotton-waste trader, who has many kinds of Koris among his customers, was one such person - but the average member of the group knew of only three or four. Furthermore, knowledge about other *gotras* did usually not extend far beyond the names. Like Girja Shankar, the Ahirwars of Devi Street were able to give some further information about the Shakywars and the Banaudhas - they knew at least where they came from - but of the other groups they tended to be quite ignorant, even when they had personal acquaintances among their members, which was not always the case. Subcaste affairs were just not relevant to the relationships in question. The members of the single Kamalvanshi household residing in Devi Street, for example, were usually not even known as such to the people in the street; to most of the Ahirwars they were simply Koris

from somewhere west of Kanpur. Similarly, there were Kamalvanshis, Dhimans, Sonwanis, and others who did not know the Ahirwars as Ahirwars, but lumped them together with the Shakywars into an indiscriminate category of Yamunaparis, 'People from the other side of the Yamuna.'

As we have seen in a previous chapter, moreover, the fact that people of different subcaste have known each other at close range for a long time does not imply that they are willing to accept each other as equals for ritual purposes. The restrictive attitude of the Banaudhas, or rather of the dominant majority among the Banaudhas, vis-à-vis the Ahirwars is more typical of the attitudes towards other subcastes among the Koris of Kanpur than the more permissive attitude of the Ahirwars vis-à-vis the Banaudhas. And remember that the difference in attitude between these two groups was one concerning ritual commensality, not intermarriage. In regard of intermarriage even the Ahirwars tend to be more restrictive, although not necessarily for reasons of purity and pollution. An even more important reason why the Ahirwars do not normally marry outside the subcaste, and usually do not even consider the possibility, I believe, is simply that it does not seem to offer them any particular advantages. The only ones who are likely to be at all attracted by the idea are upward-climbing parents of educated and equally upward-climbing children, who cannot easily find suitable brides or bridegrooms for their offspring within the subcaste. For people of this kind an expansion of the matrimonial market to cover the entire caste would clearly be advantageous, and in recent years a small number of families - not even half a dozen - have in fact crossed the boundary of the subcaste in their search for a suitable match, although not in Devi Street. For their less advanced caste-fellows, who usually have no such difficulties, marrying outside the subcaste would not even seem to be consistent with their obligations towards their daughters. As long as one remains within the subcaste network, one knows fairly well what kind of life awaits one's daughter, what she can expect from her new family and what they will expect of her. To be sure, there is no guarantee that the marriage will be a successful one, but even if things go wrong one may be better off within the subcaste than outside the subcaste, as disputes tend to be more easily handled when the protagonists play the same game, as it were, and belong to the same network of relationships. Marrying outside the subcaste, among people of different tastes, habits, and traditions, is a far more risky proposition.

In Devi Street, as presumably in other Ahirwar neighborhoods, the few intersubcaste marriages that have been arranged so far are regarded

with mixed feelings even among the more progressive. According to one critical view, the families involved would have done a much greater service to their Ahirwar caste-fellows by remaining within the subcaste, since they would then have helped to spread their own spirit of self-improvement within the group. By marrying outside the subcaste, each one of them had deprived at least one Ahirwar youth of an opportunity of advancement. The major obstacle to the progress of the Ahirwars and other Koris, these critics said, was not so much that they were enclosed within the narrow boundaries of their subcastes (although this was perhaps also a problem), but that there was no solidarity between the educated and the uneducated of the caste. One of the persons particularly concerned with this problem was Comrade Param Lal Banaudha. You must have noticed, he said, that the educated members of this community do not like to associate with their less educated neighbors. In the beginning they are one and the same, playing together as friends, but gradually they drift apart and by the time the educated have finished their education and found employment, there is hardly anything left of the friendship. If the members of the Sanyukt Kori Mahasabha are really concerned with the welfare of the caste, they should deal with this problem. The problem of intermarriage will take care of itself, for those who really want to marry outside the subcaste will do so regardless of the Sanyukt Kori Mahasabha, and those who do not want to do so will not change their mind merely because some social workers say they should.

Girja Shankar, who believed that the question of intersubcaste marriage was a vitally important one, would surely not have accepted this argument. He would not have denied that there was a gap between the educated and the uneducated; he was indeed no less concerned with this problem than his critics. Yet he would have rejected the suggestion that there was a serious conflict of aims here, but would rather have argued that the unification of the subcastes would ultimately benefit all the members of the case, not only the educated. And he was also more optimistic with regard to the possibilities of promoting the amalgamation of the subcastes by propaganda - perhaps because he himself was the product of a similar process of amalgamation that had already been accomplished. As described in chapter 4, the Ahirwars of Kanpur were in the past divided between two separate communities, the Caurasis and the Nadiyaparis, the members of which regarded each other with a great deal of suspicion and did not marry each other, although they recognized each other as Ahirwars and were connec-

ted in a roundabout fashion. By the 1940's, however, these two communities had apparently started to intermarry in a small way, and by the late 1960's the boundary between them was already disappearing. Girja Shankar, who was the offspring of a Nadiyapari-Caurasi union, and therefore had relatives in both the groups, was well aware of the fact that the gaps now to be bridged were wider than the former gap between the Caurasis and the Nadiyaparis, but the difference was still only one of degree. The most difficult part of the job was to get started; once some members of group A had married into group B, others would follow suit almost automatically. It was true that the educated were now more concerned with the issue than the uneducated, but in the end the latter would also come along.

Yet, as Girja Shankar clearly realized, the starting of the process was not going to be easy. By the time I left Kanpur, the members of the association had been directly involved in arranging one intersubcaste marriage, between a daughter of Jai Ram Master, the Dhiman member of the Working Committee, and a son of the Kashyap manufacturer of iron-utensils Salig Ram, who was also a member of the Working Committee, although not a very active one. This marriage had not been arranged for mere demonstration. Before he got in touch with Salig Ram, Jai Ram Master had been searching in vain for a suitable husband for his daughter, a girl of unusually high education - some persons suggested maliciously that the reason why had started the Kori Nagar Samaj in the first place, and then also joined the Sanyukt Kori Mahasabha, was that he wanted to solve this personal problem of his. Within his own group of Dhimans the right kind of youth was not to be found, and the non-Dhiman Koris whom he had previously approached had all rejected his proposals. Salig Ram, however, was quite satisfied with the match; Jai Ram Master's daughter was indeed the perfect wife for his son, a boy of intermediate education, whom he was coaching towards a career as a medical doctor. As Jai Ram Master was a person of small means, the dowry would not be a big one, but here the important thing was the cultural capital represented by the girl's educational certificates and family background. Among the Kashyaps, who were educationally even more backward than the Dhimans, there were no educated girls; in Kanpur the only Kashyap of higher education was in fact Salig Ram's own son.

How this marriage was received among Jai Ram Master's kith and kin I do not know, but for Salig Ram it created almost as many problems as it solved. The difficulties started at the time of the engagement, when Salig

Ram and few of his closest relatives visited the house of Jai Ram Master, and one of the relatives, his sister's husband Ujagar Lal, was presented with a handbill announcing a meeting of the Ahirwar Kori Sangh - an association of Ahirwars to be discussed later. Ujagar Lal said nothing about this handbill there and then, but afterwards he was upset. Like most of the Kashyaps he knew very little about other Koris. The only subcastes that he had heard of in the past were the Shankwars and the Mahawars, who are both found in the home districts of the Kashyaps, the districts of Etah, Farrukhabad, and Mainpuri in Western U.P. As a result of this engagement he had also come to know about the Dhimans, but that there was also a group of Koris known as the Ahirwars he had never heard before. To the best of his knowledge the Ahirwars were a group of Camars. This he knew for certain, for the Ahirwars and the Kashyaps were frequently neighbors in the countryside. Now Salig Ram wanted him to believe that these Ahirwar friends of his were Koris. Yet where was the proof? How, indeed, did Salig Ram know that his prospective in-laws were not also Camars? If they were Koris they would surely not be so intimate with Ahirwars.

Through Ujagar Lal the news that Salig Ram was about to marry his son to the daughter of a Camar spread rapidly among the Kashyaps of Kanpur - there are no more thirty or forty Kashyap households in the city - and soon it had also reached their caste-fellows in the countryside. Salig Ram tried his best to refute the allegation, insisting that both the Dhimans and the Ahirwars were Koris, but in a local *pancayat* led by the headman of the Kashyaps of Kanpur, a man called Hulasi Ram, it was decided that Salig Ram had to annul the engagement, pay damages to the *pancayat*, and give a feast to the community. Until he had done so he would be treated as an outcaste, and so would everyone who dared to associate with him. In an effort to counter this decision, Salig Ram tried to establish a rival *pancayat* under the leadership of a headman of his own choosing, but as he had very little backing in the countryside this move was doomed to failure. What happened instead was that many of his erstwhile supporters gave in to the pressure brought to bear upon them and joined in the social boycott. In the end only a handful of persons were still on his side.

On the day of the wedding, when the bridegroom and his few remaining supporters were getting ready to set out in procession towards the bride's house, a fight occurred. In a last attempt to prevent the marriage Hulasi Ram and his supporters had come to Salig Ram's house, where they abused the bridegroom and his family. After a short while the verbal animosi-

ties turned into fighting, Salig Ram's son beating Hulasi Ram's son with an iron bar and others joining in the commotion. In the end they were all tied up on a rope and brought to the nearest police-station. According to Salig Ram, who described this part of the event with much delight, the policeman interrogating them had been astonished to hear what it was all about. When Hulasi Ram complained that he had merely been trying to prevent one of his caste-fellows from marrying a Camar, he raised his eyebrows and asked if Hulasi Ram knew what age he was living in. This time he would not take action - perhaps because Salig Ram, who was anxious to get on with the wedding, had previously given him a bribe - but he warned them all that he would not take kindly to further disturbances.

Arranging a caste conference

When I first came into closer contact with the Sanyukt Kori Mahasabha at the beginning of 1975, several of the members of the Working Committee seemed already to be losing faith in their project. Some of them did not often attend the meetings, and even a few of the regulars appeared not to take their participation very seriously, regarding the meetings rather as occasions for leisurely entertainment and gossip of a kind appropriate for Sunday mornings. A few invariably arrived one or two hours late, and usually there were also some who had to leave for some more important engagement before the meeting was finished. Comrade Duli Chand, who was more conscientious in this regard, suggested at one point that the situation might improve if all the members of the Working Committee took an oath of fidelity to the association and its charter. He even suggested that each one of them should invite five influential members of his *gotra* to partake of this ritual event, which at one stroke would considerably broaden the base of the association. These suggestions were unanimously accepted after some discussion, but a fortnight later, on the Sunday fixed for the occasion, all the fifteen participants came alone, and several of them were late as usual. It was then agreed that a second attempt should be made later on, but the idea was in fact never raised again.

By the time this happened the members of the Working Committee had arrived at a turning point. During the preceding year and a half they had been mainly preoccupied with organizational matters, including the task of writing a constitution, but now these matters had been dealt with, and there was nothing to prevent them from getting on with the more difficult task of translating program into practice. How should this be done? The

answer was obvious: by arranging a caste conference and making that conference declare itself in favor of the aims of the association. Yet this project could not be embarked upon right away. First of all the members of the caste should be informed about the association, and the proper way of doing this would be to arrange area or neighborhood meetings in places where Koris were concentrated in large numbers. In the spring of 1975 a few such meetings were held. On one occasion some of the leading members of Working Committee assembled at the neighborhood of the vice-president of the association, the Banaudha communist Godhan Lal. Here less than fifty persons, mostly Banaudhas, listened first to Godhan Lal complaining about the poor attendance, then to Girja Shankar describing the history of the revived Sanyukt Kori Mahasabha, and finally to Prabhu Dayal, the president of the association, reviewing the history of past efforts of caste reform and expounding on the philosophy behind the present one. The twin purposes of the Sanyukt Kori Mahasabha, Prabhu Dayal said, was to unite the Koris and provide them with a new and much needed spirit of progress. The establishment of relations of ritual commensality and intermarriage, *roti-beti byohar*, was long overdue. The members of the audience should attend the coming conference of the Sanyukt Kori Mahasabha and there express their support of its program.

But the preparations for the conference were soon interrupted, first by a dispute among the Banaudha members of the Working Committee, and then by the declaration of the Emergency, as a result of which no meetings were held for nearly half a year. The dispute, the main protagonists of which were the vice-president Godhan Lal and the Banaudha clerk Keshav Lal, was an old affair. According to Godhan Lal, it had in fact started fifty years before, when the Banaudhas of Kanpur, or at least their leading members, were divided on some trifling issue of personal prestige and precedence now almost forgotten. Since then the Banaudha community had remained divided between two hostile factions (*dal*), the present leaders of which were Godhan Lal himself and Keshav Lal. The latest round of this never-ending dispute concerned a marriage between a DHFBD of Godhan Lal with a youth from a small town east of Kanpur, whom Keshav Lal claimed was a Camar, although neither he nor anyone else had made a thorough investigation of the matter. The evidence came in two parts: at the wedding the bridegroom's party had not properly observed the customary practices of the Banaudhas, and then there was also a letter from someone residing in the bridegroom's hometown, saying that the boy was the son of a Camar.

Yet what was now at stake was not so much whether the boy was a Camar or not, but whether Godhan Lal, who had participated in the arrangement of the marriage and then also been present at the wedding, had knowingly led his young kinswoman into the arms of a Camar. Keshav Lal insisted that this was the case. Godhan Lal had not only deceived the girl, he had deceived the entire community. For this he should at least apologize. Godhan Lal, on the other hand, insisted that he had nothing to confess; he was just as innocent as Keshav Lal himself. Furthermore, it was quite obvious that Keshav Lal was merely trying to score a point. By claiming that he was not concerned with the marriage itself, and not making a real investigation, he had practically admitted that this was his purpose. If the marriage was O.K. - and this was in fact not the first time that a Banaudha girl had married into that particular family - what he had known or not known should not make much of a difference.

It was Keshav Lal who had placed this affair before the Working Committee. As it would not have been possible to get Godhan Lal convicted of misconduct before a *pancayat* representative of all the Banaudhas of Kanpur, he had come up with the idea that the Sanyukt Kori Mahasabha might act as a tribunal. Godhan Lal had not been very happy about this proposal, but he had not rejected it. A refusal might not only have been taken as evidence of his guilt, but also as an indication that he did not trust the impartiality and sound judgement of his friends in the Working Committee. As for the members of the Working Committee, they did not have much of a choice either. Not only is dispute settlement an important part of the role of the social worker; in this case the interests of the association were vitally at stake. A refusal to deal with the matter would most probably have meant that Keshav Lal had left the association along with his followers, and this was an outcome that nobody desired. Yet even by accepting Keshav Lal's request they did not solve the problem. It was obvious that neither of the parties would tolerate defeat, and that whatever the settlement, one or the other might decide to leave. Some kind of compromise was obviously required, but would it be possible to find such a compromise? There was also another problem. Keshav Lal wanted to have Godhan Lal condemned of dishonesty. He was not directly concerned with the question of intercaste marriage. Yet would it really be possible to decide on first question without also taking a stand on the second? According to Girja Shankar the situation was impossible. He himself did not care whether the boy was a Camar or not, but most of his caste-fellows did, and if

Godhan Lal was found innocent some of them might conclude that the Sanyukt Kori Mahasabha condoned marriages with Camars. If Godhan Lal was found guilty, on the other hand, Camars and others might start to complain that the Sanyukt Kori Mahasabha was a casteist association supporting untouchability. If worse came to worst, they might all end up in court, accused of discrimination under the Untouchability Offences Act of 1955 or some other law.

In the end the members of the association managed to avoid the problem altogether. In the spring of 1975 a few preliminary meetings were held, but then came the Emergency and even Keshav Lal lost interest for a while. When it was taken up again in early 1976 everyone seemed to be determined to find a lasting settlement. Hearings were held with a variety of persons, a *pancayat* consisting of five of the members of the Working Committee was elected, and a date was fixed for the settlement. Yet no sentence was delivered by the *pancayat*. It assembled as agreed, but only to decide that it needed more time. The case was an extremely difficult one, the *pancayat* declared, and should therefore not be handled in a rush. Furthermore, there were now more urgent matters to attend to. Recently the conference plans had been taken up again. If a conference was not arranged soon there was a real danger that the work for which the association had been established in the first place would never be carried out. The settlement of the dispute between Godhan Lal and Keshav Lal would have to be postponed until after the conference.

While the conference preparations had indeed been resumed at this time, however, another matter was now even more important. This was the question whether the Sanyukt Kori Mahasabha should make a public statement in support of Indira Gandhi and the 20-point program. The person who had come up with this idea was the Shakywar and RPI politician Nathu Ram, who at one of the first meetings after the standstill had argued that such a declaration of loyalty would ensure that they would not be suspected of subversive intentions and get into trouble with the police. Prabhu Dayal, Keshav Lal, and a few other members sympathetic of the Prime Minister and her party had regarded this as an excellent proposal and suggested that it should be executed without delay. Girja Shankar, Duli Chand, and a few other members of communist leanings, however, had been much less enthusiastic. They had argued that since the Sanyukt Kori Mahasabha was not a political organization such a step would be highly inappropriate. Moreover, one of them had suggested, was it not also rather

inappropriate of Nathu Ram to make such a recommendation without even explaining what the 20-point program was all about? Would Nathu Ram not be so kind as to present it to them? If he did not remember all the twenty points - as his embarrassed silence seemed to indicate - he could surely give them one or two?

With the laughter provoked by Nathu Ram's inability to answer this unexpected and basically irrelevant question, his controversial proposal had been removed from the agenda for the time being. The issue was not buried, however, and in the following couple of months the two groups kept accusing each other of trying to destroy the association. Ram Din, the owner of the school where the Working Committee used to assemble, even talked about resigning; he did not wish to be a member of a communist organization directed by Comrade Ram Shankar through his close relative and loyal supporter Girja Shankar. The big confrontation came at a meeting of the Working Committee, where Girja Shankar upbraided the participants for not taking the association seriously enough, and the president Prabhu Dayal, who had not attended the meetings with much regularity lately, countered with a long and angry speech directed at Girja Shankar and his closest supporters, primarily Comrade Duli Chand. First of all he found it extremely offending that a young man like Girja Shankar should be telling him and other experienced social workers how to run a social organization. If he had been absent on a few occasions, it was because he had been prevented from attending by other important engagements. In the old days he had arranged conferences where thousands of people had attended. One problem with this association was that its members did not trust each other. He would gladly resign, if this was what the members wanted, but it should not be said that he was responsible for their lack of progress. If very little had been achieved thus far it was because Girja Shankar and his friends were engaging in party politics. They had even refused to accept Nathu Ram's proposal in regard of Indira Gandhi's 20-point program, a program of utmost importance for the nation as a whole. Why? Just because they were communists and wanted everyone else to be a communist too. Anyone who tried to sabotage the 20-point program was anti-national and should be put behind bars.

After this outburst of rhetoric, which lasted for nearly half an hour, there was pandemonium, the participants shouting at each other at the top of their voices. In the end, when they had returned to their normal selves, it was agreed that fighting was useless, and that the really important thing was

now to arrange the conference about which they had been talking so much. The collection of money should start right away. Even for a very small conference at least Rs. 500 would be needed. Har Narain, who had calmly listened to the previous discussions - intervening only to support Prabhu Dayal on the question of the 20-point program - suggested that they should meet the following Sunday at 8 p.m. sharp and make a joint effort. If they went around the neighborhoods one by one, they were not likely to be very successful. People were always more generous when they were faced with an entire group.

But again there was an interruption. A preliminary date for the conference was fixed a week later, but then almost nothing happened for more than a month. Yet Girja Shankar, who knew that I would now soon be leaving the city, assured me that the conference would be held within a month or two, even if that meant that he would have to make most of the arrangements himself. He had in fact already planned it in some detail. The collection of money would probably be the most difficult part, but he was pretty confident that he would be able to manage it. At the next meeting of the Working Committee he would propose that all the registered members of the association should contribute Rs. 10 each, and that he himself would collect the remaining two or three hundreds among his Ahirwar caste-fellows. He would obviously not say no to those who might offer to assist, but if nobody came forward he would do it himself. Another rather difficult task would be that of inviting the honorary guests, although here the *netas* would be only too happy to help. The person who stood highest on his own list of candidates was the new Chief Minister of Uttar Pradesh, N.D. Tiwari, but any minister would do, and so would indeed a successful Kori government officer. He had already spoken to such an officer, an Ahirwar who was very highly placed in the postal services in Bihar and had previously presided over a conference of Ahirwars. This man might attract a sizeable crowd. The Koris usually had a very low opinion of themselves and their caste, and would therefore be curious to know what kind of a man he might be. Yet if there were a minister on the *dais* even more people would come. Moreover, for the *netas* a minister or some other big-wig politician would clearly be the better choice, as they would then get an opportunity to make a favorable impression, thereby perhaps improving chances of future advancement. The question of political representation was still an important one.

The conference itself would be divided into two parts. The first part

would be restricted to persons of major influence among their *gotra*-fellows, the *khaas-khaas log* of the caste, the 'important-important people.' The second would be a general, public meeting open to all the Koris, as well as to *parjats* who would care to participate. The main purpose of the closed session would be to work out a number of resolutions to be presented and acclaimed at the open session. The resolutions in question would be general statements in support of the aims of the association, not least that concerning intersubcaste marriage. To make the participants adopt a number of such resolutions would probably not be difficult, and the adoption of the same resolutions by the general meeting would be almost a formality, although a very important one, since it would provide public support for those members of the caste who were actually interested in marrying across the boundaries of the *gotras*. Otherwise the main purpose of the larger session would be to show the members of the caste that the Sanyukt Kori Mahasabha was a force to be reckoned with. The association needed an injection of new blood; seeing large numbers of their caste-fellows assembled under its banner, some younger persons interested in social work might decide to join it.

A conference of this kind was in fact held shortly before I left the city, although it did not answer to the description on every point. For one thing, there were no ministers or other major politicians among the people on the *dais*. In order to make it more attractive to such figures the organizers had previously decided that the conference should be held in support of the Prime Minister and her 20-point program, as well as in support of the seven aims of the Sanyukt Kori Mahasabha; even Girja Shankar had eventually agreed to this. Yet this did not help much. Prabhu Dayal and Nathu Ram visited Lucknow several times, and for a while it seemed that one of the ministers, the state minister of small industries, Mrs. Kidwai, would be available, but she eventually informed them that she would not be able to come. As it was then only a week left to the conference and the handbills and letters of invitation had already been printed and delivered, the idea of having a minister preside over the meeting had to be cancelled. Since the handbill had announced that at least one minister would be present, and that several other important figures had also been invited, this was embarrassing, but nothing could be done about it. Instead some local politicians were asked to do the job. Thus amongst the four or five *parjat* politicians who actually attended the conference the most prominent was the president of the City Congress, an aged Brahman of relatively minor reputation, who

dropped in at the closed session to deliver a speech in defence of the Emergency and then left again. Those who spoke at the public session were a Muslim trade-union leader belonging to the Congress and two other local Congress politicians of low rank.

Another disappointment was the relatively poor attendance. As earlier, the Sanyukt Kori Mahasabha had been established as an association of all the Koris of Uttar Pradesh; not merely those of Kanpur. Thus invitations to the closed session had been sent to a large number of caste leaders and other *khaas-khaas log* residing in other places. Yet not one of these persons had replied, and on the day of the conference only a few - one of whom was the veteran Koli-Rajput leader Ram Das now residing in one of the towns of Jalaun district - turned up. And the local Kori notables did not attend in large numbers either. Hira Lal, the cotton-waste trader, for example, was not there, and many of the highly educated were also absent. Altogether something like 150 persons were present in the Arya Samaj conference hall rented for the purpose, but most of these persons were ordinary folks from Koriyana and other nearby Kori neighborhoods, who had not been specifically invited for the occasion. At the open session, which was held in the evening at Lenin Park - the venue of several major caste conferences in the past - there were more people, but still only about four hundred, a rather modest figure, not least in view of the fact that the *javara* procession held a couple months before, had drawn an audience of several thousand persons. Furthermore, most of these four hundred were apparently also people from nearby neighborhoods; even to me a great many of the faces seemed familiar. And then again, while some of the people I knew had come because they regarded the event as an important one, there were also those among them who were merely curious about the spectacle. Comrade Mihi Lal and Comrade Param Lal Banaudha, for example, did not intend to be converted to the philosophy of the Sanyukt Kori Mahasabha. Moolchand, Gopi Charan, and their friends from the old Mohalla Sudhar Committee, who were also present, seemed to be more concerned, but towards the second half of the evening, after listening to many redundant, highly predictable speeches, they became restless and left. Whether Girja Shankar's fresh recruits - the new blood that he was waiting for - were hiding somewhere in the crowd I cannot say, but I doubt it. Some young persons were present, but for the most part the gathering consisted of middle-aged and elderly householders, well beyond the stage of youthful enthusiasm and idealism.

For the rest, however, this first annual conference of the Uttar Pradesh Sanyukt Kori Mahasabha went according to plan. Of the animosities of the last several months almost nothing was seen - even the fact that the president of the association Prabhu Dayal managed to be nearly an hour late to the morning session was passed over as a minor nuisance, and so were a few embarrassing incidents which occurred during the ensuing discussions. Jai Ram Master, a man of short temper, got very upset when one of the self-invited members of the congregation impertinently suggested that the association would become more effective if its leading members adhered more closely to its proclaimed goals in their own personal lives. Obviously the speaker was not familiar with the fact that one of the persons so unfavorably commented upon had recently let his own daughter marry into another *gotra*! What had the speaker himself accomplished in the way of caste reform in his time? Yet Girja Shankar swiftly defused the quarrel, quoting a proverb to the effect that everyone - member or not member of the Sanyukt Kori Mahasabha - should attend to his own actions before he ventured to criticize the actions of others. By the end of the day the following nine resolutions had been doubly acclaimed, first by the *khaas-khaas log* and then also by the rank and file:

UTTAR PRADESH SANYUKT KORI MAHASABHA

ANNUAL CONFERENCE

RESOLUTIONS

1. This conference fully endorses the 20-point economic program of Prime Minister Indira Gandhi and declares that the Sanyukt Kori Mahasabha will support its implementation by every possible means.
2. This conference solicits the attention of the Government of Uttar Pradesh to the economic backwardness of the cottage industry of this community (*samaj*). It asks the Government to give financial support to this cottage industry.
3. This conference notices that while it is clear that handloom weaving is still the main occupation of this community, its members have not been given proper representation on the U.P. Handloom Board and other government organs connected with this industry. It is therefore requested that members of this community be appointed to these organs.

4. This conference declares that the divisions between the *gotras* should be abolished. Commensal relations, matrimonial relations, and other social relations should be established in order to create a friendly unity within the Kori community.

5. This conference declares that in order to make this community progress, harmful and immoral practices, such as the widespread use of intoxicants, the custom of dowry, and rituals that are indecent, should be uprooted and destroyed.

6. This conference notices that this community is lacking in education. Hence it declares that every boy and girl of the community should be educated up to the 10th standard.

7. This conference declares that instead of practicing evil customs, the members of this community should follow in the footsteps of those great persons of their country and community who have contributed to the progress of mankind, and celebrate their anniversaries from time to time.

8. This conference is worried about the growing population of our country, since it is clear that our means of consumption are limited. Hence it declares that for the sake of the progress of the nation this community must also make a contribution to the success of family planning.

9. This conference notices with regret that although the Kori community belongs to the Scheduled Castes it lacks representation in the Lok Sabha, the Legislative Assembly, and other representative assemblies. This conference therefore solicits the support of the Government of India and the Government of Uttar Pradesh and asks that they attend to the progress of the Kori community by giving it suitable representation in the Lok Sabha, the Legislative Assembly, municipal corporations, district boards, and other representative bodies.

Reforming efforts within the subcaste

When Girja Shankar got involved in the Sanyukt Kori Mahasabha he was already a social worker of some experience. Not only had he participated in some of the activities of the Mohalla Sudhar Committee of Devi Street, more recently he had also been engaged in a campaign for reforming some of the marriage customs and other ritual practices of his Ahirwar caste-fel-

lows. When the Sanyukt Kori Mahasabha was established, this campaign, conducted in the name of the Ahirwar Kori Sangh, 'the Ahirwar Kori Association,' an association of a rather informal kind set up by Girja Shankar himself in collaboration with the old Koli-Rajput Devi Din, had in fact not yet been brought to a conclusion. As Girja Shankar explained to me, however, this was not a problem, for the Ahirwar Kori Sangh and the Sanyukt Kori Mahasabha were complementary rather than competing undertakings. The Sanyukt Kori Mahasabha was also concerned with the reform backward marriage customs as well as with the more recent problem of inflated dowries, to be sure, but here its role was mainly that of providing outside support for subcaste associations like the Ahirwar Kori Sangh. In ritual matters such as these every subcaste had its own practices, and it was therefore not possible to formulate a general program of reform equally applicable to all. Furthermore, even if the ritual practices of the subcastes had been more uniform, associations like the Ahirwar Kori Sangh would have been required, since such associations were much closer to the grassroots of the caste. While some questions could only be dealt at the level of the caste, others were easier to handle within the subcaste or some segment thereof.

The goals of the Ahirwar Kori Sangh were quite specific. Inspired by the example of an Ahirwar (more precisely Nadiyapari) social worker, who had set out on a similar campaign among his caste-fellows of Jhansi district in the late 1950's, Girja Shankar and his chief associates, mainly Devi Din, had drawn up a charter of thirty rules to be adopted by their Ahirwar caste-fellows. Among these rules - only twenty-six of which were applicable to the Nadiyaparis - five were directed against the employment of Brahmans as ritual experts. One said that Brahmans should not be hired for the purpose of namesgiving; a second said that Brahmans should not be employed for the fixing of an auspicious date for the wedding; a third forbade the employment of Brahmans for the purpose of writing the *lagan* letter, the customary reminder of the wedding date sent by the bride's family to the bridegroom's family; a fourth forbade the employment of Brahmans at the wedding ceremonies; and a fifth declared that Brahmans should not be hired for any other ritual purposes either. Instead the members of the community should themselves perform the rituals in question. By adhering to these rules the Ahirwars would not only help undermine the Brahmans' ritual monopoly; they would also save money, which was not a matter of small importance. The employment of Brahmans as ritual experts was a

self-inflicted form of exploitation.

A second set of rules, also five in number, could be called rules of respectability, i.e. rules primarily aiming to abolish customs regarded as indecent or backward. One such rule stated flatly that all dirty customs had to be abolished, and mentioned as one of several examples the custom of *gande gane gana*, the singing of 'dirty,' sexually indecent songs at various points during the wedding ceremonies. Another rule of the same kind proclaimed that in the future the use of liquor and other intoxicants at weddings, funerals, and other rituals should be strictly forbidden.

Most of the remaining twenty rules were intended to reduce ritual expenses, especially marriage expenses. One said that when a household was invited to a wedding dinner or some other communal banquet it should not send more than one of its member to represent it. A second said that in order to reduce the expenses of the bride's side the bridegroom's following, the *baraat*, should not include more than forty persons. A third said that elephants, swan cars, horses, and other vehicles of high rent should not be used in the *baraat* - the bridegroom should travel less expensively - and added that the arrangements for music should be less costly. A fourth came with the radical suggestion that the wedding ceremonies should be held - or at least started - while it was still daylight, as this would make expensive arrangements for illumination unnecessary, at least on the bridegroom's side. The rest of the rules in the category placed more or less stringent restrictions on the transfer of money, jewelry, and other valuables in connection with some of the customary engagement, wedding, and funeral rituals. At the remarriage of widowers and widows, one of the rules stated, there should be no gifts at all, except the traditional token of Rs. 5 given by both the parties to one of the elders - formerly the headman - of their respective groups in order to get the union publicly accepted and legitimated.

The method for implementing this program was much the same as that of the Sanyukt Kori Mahasabha, although here there was no question of seeking Government support or other outside patronage. First the rules should be placed before the householders of the community at a series of neighborhood meetings, and then, when they had been approved of by a dominant majority, they should be formally adopted at a larger conference. As Girja Shankar explained, he had known all along that it would be impossible to get unanimous support for the rules right away, but this was not essential. The important thing was that most of the *khaas-khaas log* for-

mally approved of them, and that at least some of these people decided to follow them in practice. The poor and illiterate would not dare to take the initiative; they would be too afraid that their relatives and neighbors might criticise them for stinginess. If some of the more affluent showed the way, however, the poor would gradually follow suit. As always the big problem was getting started.

I was present at one of the preliminary meetings, a meeting where more than fifty householders from several different Ahirwar neighborhoods were assembled. After the initial formalities, including Girja Shankar's introduction of the then recently arrived *gore log*, white man, Mr. Stefan Molund, the meeting soon turned to the 30 rules. One critic said that the rules were fine but incomplete, since no provisions had been made for their enforcement. There had to be sanctions against deviants, and these sanctions had to be applied with strictness and impartiality. A second critic was also in favor of the rules, but argued that the whole campaign was just a waste of time, since it would in fact not be possible to apply sanctions against deviants. Who would have the power to do that? It would be more practical to drop the whole thing, and let people arrange their marriages as they found fit. This was also the view of a couple of other speakers, one of whom also felt that the rules were too detailed. All that was needed was a general recommendation of moderation and simplicity. The members of the caste should learn not to spend more than they could afford.

There were also those who were critical of particular rules or wanted to add one or several rules or recommendations. Not a single objection was made against the anti-Brahman rules and the rules of decency, but some of the other rules drew critical comments. One elderly man who was all in favor of the idea of cutting down marriage expenses suggested that instead of hiring a brass band as was now a fairly common practice, the Ahirwars should return to their old ways, and be satisfied with a small band of three musicians, one playing *jhanji*, cymbals, another *dholak*, a big two-sided drum, and a third *kurmurhia*, a small, cup-shaped drum played with sticks. But this was not a popular suggestion. A far more common view was that the marriage expense rules were too stringent. Objections were made against the idea of letting the *baraat* set out in plain daylight: Do you want us to look like Muslims, one man enquired. Objections were raised against the idea of limiting the *baraat* to forty persons: shall we not be allowed to invite all our relatives and friends, another man said. And there were protests against several of the other rules in this category, including the rule for-

bidding the bridegroom to travel to the bride's house on an expensive vehicle. Do you want him to walk, one of the participants asked. I am not against saving, but my children would never accept such a rule. For them it is very important that these things are done in as grand a manner as possible. They want the bridegroom to ride on a horse, they want to have a big *baraat* of 150 persons, they want to have a fine band of musicians, and they want to have equally fine arrangements for illumination. Saving is all right, but it can go too far.

These and other criticisms did not discourage Girja Shankar and his associates. They modified a few of the rules on the way, but at the final conference, where the rules were formally approved of, the list was essentially the same as in the beginning. The critics, they said, were not representative of the majority, and anyway the rules were not meant to be absolutely binding, at least not in the beginning. They were rather a charter to be implemented little by little. Social workers are necessarily ahead of their time. Their job is not to confirm existing prejudices, but to guide people into the future. Girja Shankar and his associates did not put it in exactly those words, but this was the gist of their argument. They were fully convinced that some of the ritual splendor had to be sacrificed for the sake of a more lasting kind of splendor. If their Ahirwar caste-fellows did not accept this proposition in its full consequences now, they would surely come to do so in the future. They would have no choice.

And what was the more immediate outcome of this campaign? By the conclusion of the marriage season of 1976 - two years after the conference - only two or three marriages had been arranged in accordance with the rules, and at least one of these marriages had been much criticized. Why such a poor result? The explanation most commonly given by the Ahirwars of Devi Street was that one of the members of the association, the *neta* Har Narain, had broken all the rules in connection with the marriage of his eldest son, a marriage that had been held only a couple of months after the conference. During the conference itself Har Narain had put all his weight behind the rules. Not least had he supported the rule that restricted the size of the *baraat* to forty persons, a rule which he had wanted to implement at once. Yet at the subsequent marriage of his own son there had been at least two hundred persons in the *baraat*, some even said three hundred. And the other rules had not been observed either. As the people of Devi Street described it, the *baraat* of Har Narain's son had been just the sort of extravagant *baraat* that the conference had declared wasteful and impro-

per. No wonder, they said, that others did not bother about the rules either.

While all this was probably true enough, it was hardly an explanation that went to the heart of the matter. The fact that one of the chief advocates of the rules had failed to observe them in his own practice may have discouraged some persons who might otherwise have tried to follow them. Yet those who liked to criticize Har Narain were usually themselves not much in favor of the rules. While they often supported them in principle, they were basically no more inclined to follow them in practice than Har Narain. The problem with the campaign was its lack of realism. The most fatal of its weaknesses was that it appealed to a solidarity that did not really exist. However much the more affluent and the more educated might have wanted to help their less advanced caste-fellows, they were hardly prepared to sacrifice their personal and family interests for their sake, at least not where these interests were of major symbolic and material significance, as was here the case. Even a person as concerned with social reform as Comrade Moolchand was not ready to do so. This he made quite clear not only to me but also to the old Koli Rajput and member of the Ahirwar Kori Sangh, Devi Din, who for a while showed some interest in getting his daughter married to Moolchand's younger brother Ramesh. As the go-between informed Devi Din, Moolchand and his family would not be interested if the marriage was going to be arranged in accordance with the rules of the Ahirwar Kori Sangh. They would not demand much in the way of a dowry, but they wanted the wedding ceremonials to be fully appropriate to the occasion. Not only would they invite all their friends and relatives to the *baraat*, they wanted the material arrangements to be of a good, if not necessarily luxurious, standard. They and their relatives would not accept anything less. Furthermore, even among people of smaller means, who were supposed to be the primary beneficiaries of the reforms, the response was not unambiguously positive. While such people must have approved of the idea of reducing marriage expenses, they also regarded the wedding as a big occasion to be made the most of. What other opportunities for celebration and display did they have?

As a matter of fact, even Girja Shankar himself was not an entirely consistent advocate of these reforms, or so at least claimed one of his Ahirwar friends, a clerk in government employment called Harish Babu. What made Harish Babu say so was an incident that occurred in connection with the marriage of his eldest daughter to a youth from the city of Jhansi, a marriage that he had tried his best to arrange in the spirit of Girja Shankar's

campaign. He had not observed all the rules. Not only had the bridegroom's family wanted a Brahman to fix the date of the wedding, which he had accepted. In consultation with his brother and the rest of the family he had also decided that some of the rules regarding the wedding arrangements were a little too stringent. The wedding did not have to be a very grand affair, but it should not be undignified either. Yet for the rest he had tried to conform to the rules. He had even taken the daring step of not inviting more than one person per household, a measure for which he expected to be much criticized by his neighbors and caste fellows. A few of them would understand, he said, but the rest would probably call him a miser.

What he had not expected, however, was that Girja Shankar would also come to criticize him. Yet so he apparently did. According to Girja Shankar's own version of the incident, what had happened was that he had encouraged Harish Babu to increase his gift of departure to the bridegroom and his family from Rs. 500 to Rs. 1 000. He had felt that Rs. 500 was too little, since the bridegroom was a boy of good education and had come all the way from Jhansi accompanied by a big *baraat*: "If you buy an elephant you have to feed it. If you cannot afford to do so you should be satisfied with a horse." Yet Harish Babu had not been pleased by his friendly intervention. He had eventually followed his advice, but only with a great deal of reluctance. The last two or three hundreds he had thrown on the table with an angry comment to the effect that there were people who talked in one way and acted in another.

And afterwards Harish Babu remained angry for a while. As he elaborately explained to me, he had not asked Girja Shankar to meddle. His friend's intention had perhaps been a good one, but he and his family did not need any lessons. He was not an ignorant fool. He had tried his very best to give the bridegroom and the *baraatis* a good reception. They had been comfortably lodged at a nearby *dharmshala*, they had been served good food no less than five times, a barber had been there to shave them and a Mochi to polish their shoes, and they had also been provided with railway tickets for their return to Jhansi. Furthermore, he had spent a great deal of money on the wedding banquet; the spices alone had cost him Rs. 150. Altogether this marriage had cost the family at least Rs. 5 000, which for them was a very large amount of money. Unlike Girja Shankar, who had inherited a considerable property from his grandfather and had only a small family to look after, he was not a wealthy person. When he had decided to follow some of the rules of the Ahirwar Kori Sangh it had not been for the mere fun

of it, nor just because he wanted to provide others with a good example. Girja Shankar seemed not to understand it, but he and his big family needed all the money they could earn and more.

What more is there to say about these efforts of social reform? Only that towards the end of my stay in Kanpur Girja Shankar himself was getting increasingly dissatisfied. As explained after one frustrating meeting of the Sanyukt Kori Mahasabha, he felt that he had achieved very little during the last few years. He had arranged and attended meetings nearly every Sunday, but almost nothing had come out of it. Now he was thinking of doing something else, namely to start a monthly journal of four to six pages devoted to questions of social reform. It should be a very cheap journal; if possible it should be available at the price of 10 paise. If he could find two or three hundred steady readers for such a publication, he would probably become more effective than he had been so far, and at the same time he could spend more time with his family. The important thing was to reach out to the educated members of the caste; as long as they did not get involved there would not be much improvement. Despite considerable efforts, he had not been able to make these persons join him. Perhaps they would be more easy to reach through a journal. In principle at least, they were all in favor of helping the poor and the backward. Yet there was also another and no less disturbing problem: Why was it that the ordinary members of the caste did not attend the meetings, but merely complained of the selfish *netas*? I wonder what they really want us to do, he said. Is this not something that you could help me to find out before you go?

The Past and the Future in the Present

In the introduction to this book I took the rather common-sensical view that the modern history of India is the history of a status society moving some steps in the direction of a class society. I made no prediction of the future, however, and I did certainly not suggest that this society must by some iron law of history eventually become a class society of Max Weber's pure type; an extremely unlikely outcome anyway, since a society of that kind is a mere theoretical construct. An alternative to the gradual erosion and eventual disappearance of caste, it has been pointed out, is the perpetuation and further development of caste in its 'substantialized' form, i.e. caste as a non-hierarchical, non-holistic structure of desegmented castes or caste-blocs, relating to one another in the manner of competing ethnic groups. While such a society is quite different from a classical caste society as usually portrayed, it is obviously also very different from an ethnically homogeneous class society, where social inequalities are ultimately based on the differential control over property and skills.

Here I am not concerned with the merits and demerits of these theories in general terms. Yet I notice that the view of urban India as an aggregate of substantialized or substantializing castes does not fit the case of the Koris of Kanpur very well. At the level of ideology it is perhaps legitimate to speak about substantialization, for as I have argued at some length, the traditional view of the caste system as a hierarchic whole of

cosmological meaning is not one to which many Koris - at least not many Ahirwars - consciously subscribe. A far more common view is that the caste system is the willful creation of Brahmans and Thakurs, intended to serve their evil interests of domination and exploitation. The Koris, by the same token, are a conquered people - or a segment of a conquered people - who had a substantial existence before the Brahmans and the Thakurs came to India, or before they were subjected to the strictures of caste. While cats, dogs, and cows are natural *jatis*, most of them would agree, humanity is essentially a single unitary *jati*. The castes - at least the inequalities between the castes - are not part of nature by any definition of that concept.

This view does not necessarily exclude a certain veneration of Brahmans, I have mentioned, for it is possible to make a distinction between Brahmans as a caste and Brahmans as priests. As many Koris reflectively construe their world, the fact that Brahman priests know how to communicate with the gods does not mean that Brahmans should constitute a privileged caste. The reason why the Brahmans have had a monopoly of ritual knowledge of a certain kind, some of them would say, is not that the gods once gave them that knowledge as their exclusive possession, but rather that they managed to make people believe that they had so received it, and thereafter kept it to themselves. Indeed, it was largely by making this knowledge secret, and in collaboration with the Thakurs keeping the low castes in a state of fearful ignorance, that they established and maintained their domination. Consistently with this view, moreover, there are now also Koris of a more radical outlook who prefer to dispense with the services of Brahmans altogether, even for the purposes of namesgiving and the fixing of the wedding date, purposes for which the Koris have turned to Brahmans for as long as they can remember. These persons do not reject the gods, but merely their self-appointed ombudsmen, whose services they believe they can do without. Furthermore, those who still rely on the Brahman's services do not always do so for the sole reason that they have faith in the superior powers of Brahman priestcraft. For some people respectability or a mere desire to conform to tradition would seem to be equally important motives.

When Dumont (1972) and others speak about substantialization, however, what they refer to is not merely an ideological or structural transformation by which the caste system loses some of its organic, holistic character. They also suggest that the disintegration or - as Dumont would say - weakening of the vertical solidarity of the system as a whole is accompanied

by an increase in horizontal solidarity within castes, such that subcaste boundaries are gradually eroded, and the castes - formerly mere social categories - emerge as corporate bodies competing with each other for scarce political and economic resources. That there has been a tendency towards such a development in modern times is well documented. As we have seen in this book, however, the weakening of vertical solidarity does not automatically result in a corresponding increase in horizontal solidarity. During the 1940's the Koli-Rajput movement emerged as a fairly strong force transcending, if not eroding, subcaste boundaries, and towards the end of the same decade the Sanyukt Kori Mahasabha also mobilized large numbers of Koris across the boundaries of the subcastes. Yet both these movements arose under rather special circumstances, where common interests of a fairly well-defined and tangible kind were felt to be at stake, and collective action on the basis of caste seemed to be the appropriate way of furthering those interests. The present situation is different. Apart from a few politicians trying to climb upwards in the political system as representatives of their caste and a few social workers trying to convert their caste-fellows to their own philosophy of progress, very few Koris believe that caste action is the answer to their problems. To some extent this is because the Koris have not yet forgotten the past failures of caste mobilization and are deeply suspicious of some of the leaders now speaking about the virtues of such mobilization. A more important part of the explanation, however, is simply that caste mobilization does not seem to offer them any tangible rewards. What exactly is it that an organization like the Sanyukt Kori Mahasabha could possibly do for them? The idea of transforming the Koris into Koli Rajputs or Tantuvaya Vaishyas was buried long ago and cannot be resurrected. In Devi Street there are some young men who have not even heard about the Koli-Rajput movement, and those who do know about it tend to regard it as something of mere antiquarian interest, something which has no relevance whatsoever to their current concerns. What is important to them in their present situation are mainly the problems of education and employment, neither of which they believe can be solved by the Sanyukt Kori Mahasabha or any other caste association of that kind. That the Koris would all prosper if they laid aside their mutual prejudices and started to marry across the boundaries of the subcastes, most of them are realistic enough to regard as a doubtful proposition.

Nor is the subcaste itself a strongly corporate body. As explained in this book, the idea of the subcaste as a moral community based on shared

substance is one to which all Ahirwars tend to adhere. Yet as I have also explained, this does not necessarily mean much in terms of effective support. The basic unit of mutual assistance is the household. Whenever the interests of this unit come into conflict with more remote interests, as they are often bound to do, they normally prevail. The fruitless efforts of the Ahirwar Kori Sangh to make the more affluent and educated sacrifice their family interests for the sake of their less affluent and less educated kith and kin clearly illustrate this point, and so do some of the data on economic transactions presented in earlier chapters. The fact that close kith and kin frequently assist one another on the labor market, and that under certain circumstances this may lead to a situation where large numbers of persons of the same subcaste are employed in the same occupation or even in the same niche of employment, may create the impression of a strong corporate solidarity. As I have suggested in one of the previous chapters, however, the effective ties of recruitment tend to be those of close kinship and neighboring rather than those of common subcaste as such. Furthermore - and this is merely a restatement of what I have just said - the transactional element would seem to be of some importance even where closely related persons are dealing with one another. The values of kinship, it appears, are most likely to be celebrated where they do not demand a sacrifice of personal or family interests but reinforce a relationship beneficial to both the parties. While it would be preposterous to argue that kinship is merely an idiom for something else, it is clear that the importance attached to it tends to vary with its usefulness.

And what about class? The analytical starting-point of this study, I should repeat, is that India's urban society is neither a caste society, nor a class society, but a complex hybrid of the two. Various forms of caste closure, including those imposed by the state in order to abolish the inequities of caste, are still very important, directly and indirectly. At the same time, it is obvious that even a very detailed description of these forms of closure would not provide us with anything like an exhaustive account of the patterns of inequality in this society. Even to Koris and other low-caste people, i.e. the people who find their lives most narrowly circumscribed by caste, such a description would seem one-sided. Very important from the Kori point of view is the considerable lack of fit between the hierarchy of castes as traditionally conceived, and the distribution of wealth, power, and their associated forms of status in the society. As we have seen in this book, Koris and other low-caste people are for the most part impoverished manual

workers. Yet the working class, the so-called worker people, is not a category of low-caste people redefined as a class. It embraces large numbers of people of higher caste who are economically no better off than their traditional caste inferiors. There are Ahirwars who claim that they are now being pushed out of the textile industry by the higher castes. But whereas this reminds them of the continuing importance of caste distinctions, it is at the same time a reminder of the fact that the society emerging in the city is very different from the old society still existing relatively intact in the surrounding countryside, a society where high-caste people would normally not compete with low-caste people for subaltern jobs. While in that society high-caste people are not always wealthy and powerful, there is certainly a much closer fit between caste status, on the one hand, and the distribution of wealth and power, on the other. To the Koris this is a brute fact of major significance.

Equally significant to their understanding of the society is the fact that some low-caste people, including some Koris and some Ahirwars, have managed to leave the working class. As I have mentioned, most of those who have been able to do so have benefited from the system of reservations for the Scheduled Castes. The one big exception noticed in this book is the wealthy cotton-waste trader Hira Lal, a person whose good fortune the Ahirwars cannot explain to their satisfaction within the framework of their ordinary, mundane knowledge of the world. While the fact that these persons have usually not risen in society solely by their own efforts testifies to the continuing importance of caste, however, the fact that they have risen at all is again something that points in the opposite direction. First of all, it bears witness to the extremely important fact that the state does not support the old regime, but is committed by its own constitution - drafted by Dr. Ambedkar - to the creation of a society where life-chances will no longer be determined by religion and caste. The Koris are by no means convinced that the functionaries of the state are invariably also so committed, but even so the delegitimation of the caste system by the state is fundamental to their view of the society.

Furthermore, while the beneficiaries of the system of reservations are sometimes discriminated against by their high-caste superiors and colleagues, they are by no means totally ostracized. Not only are they normally allowed to do their job without too much hindrance, they are also able to make friends with high-caste persons of their own occupational status and level of education. There are individual variations here, some

low-caste bureaucrats, clerical workers, and students being more closely involved with their high-caste peers than others, but in general their situation is not one of complete segregation. Discussing high-caste attitudes towards them, these persons habitually make a distinction between two kinds of high-caste people, the progressive and the conservative, the modern and the backward. While they may disagree about the relative strength of the two categories, they tend to agree that the latter constitute a declining race, although not one that is likely to disappear in their own life-time, or even in the life-time of their children or grand-children. The society of the future - as they tend to read it from the present - is clearly a society where the inequalities of the caste system are no longer of much consequence, access to opportunities and rewards (including those of friendship and sociable interaction) being instead mainly determined by property and education. The fact that so many of their less advanced caste-fellows seem unable or even reluctant to adopt the progressive, self-improving outlook appropriate to such a society is one of the things that may occasionally suggest a different reading, but for the most part this is the kind of society that they believe is waiting for them at the distant horizon of the future.

And the views of the less educated and less prosperous would not seem to be radically different. Habitual cynics with regard to man and society, these people often speak as if the caste system will remain for ever. Very common are statements to the effect that the changes which have occurred in modern times are mere surface developments. In action Brahmans and Thakurs are now less prejudiced than before, but this is only because they are afraid of legal prosecution or because it serves their interests in some other way. In their hearts - *dil mem* - they have preserved their old hatred of the Untouchables. Yet the Koris who speak in this fashion are also likely to stress that what is most important at the present time is not caste but wealth and power. In the past the society was strictly divided into *varnas* and *jatis* in accordance with the prescriptions of the Hindu *dharm*, but now there is only one social division of major significance, the division between the rich and the poor. If you are rich, people will not bother about your caste, and if you are poor they will not think much about it either, since a poor man is almost an Untouchable anyway. It is true that the poor are internally divided by caste, and that those among them who belong to the higher castes are often no less prejudiced than other high-caste people. Yet since these high-caste people cannot usually impose their dominance upon them, this is not a matter of very great importance. The problem with these

people, some of the Koris would say, is that they cling to a society to which they do not belong anymore. Whether they like it or not, they will eventually have to come to terms with the fact that all people are equal, the fact that "First we are people..."

By invoking this communist formula I do not mean to suggest that the Koris are usually class-conscious by a strict Marxist definition of the term. They are all acutely aware of the existence of class divisions, and more often than not they speak about the society as a structure based on differences of economic power. As many writers explicate the concept of class-consciousness, however, a person does not become truly class-conscious until he has acquired a certain kind of systematic, macro-social understanding of the structures of exploitation, including the supportive structures of the state, and is ready to participate in the struggle to destroy those structures. As Frank Parkin (1972: 90) puts it, becoming class-conscious in this ideal-typical sense of the term is to some extent like learning a foreign language, a language which permits "a different translation of the meaning of inequality from that encouraged by the conventional vocabulary of the society." As we have seen in this book, some of the Koris of Kanpur have gone through such an educational process, and are now wedded to a more or less articulate Marxist view of their own society and the world at large. But those who have acquired some fluency in this language are not many. Even among those who support the communists there are quite a few who cannot speak it well. If they are nevertheless attracted to the communists it is often because they believe that the communists are less selfish and less corrupt than other political leaders claiming to represent them. As I have pointed out, politics in this society revolves to a large extent around persons. Even the state tends to be regarded in personal terms, with the result that the question about its role in the struggle between the classes easily becomes a question about the personal qualities of the members of the government. Yet even in the absence of radical class consciousness there is a strong awareness of class and class conflict among the Koris. Such an awareness exists across the spectrum of political affiliations and sympathies, and extends also to those who do not bother to get involved in politics at all. If this consciousness is not forcibly asserted, it is largely because the Koris, along with other worker people, lack the means of so asserting it.

To take their often submissive attitudes at face value would be a serious mistake. One of the Ahirwar brushworkers of Devi Street, a man called Yamuna Prasad, once asked me to visit him in the factory where he was

employed. Preferably, I should come on a Tuesday, he said, because on Tuesdays the director was usually absent, which would make things easier. On the Tuesday when I turned up at the factory, however, the director was there, and when I told him who I was and why I had come, he explained that he was very busy at the moment but would be happy to show me around some other day. That Yamuna Prasad might do the job did apparently not occur to him. He sent for him, but only, it seemed, to certify that my story was genuine. Yamuna Prasad himself was very embarrassed by the situation. In Devi Street I had known him as big, rather boisterous man who liked to make fun of everything, including his superiors in the hierarchies of caste and class. Here, however, he seemed strangely transformed. Not only was there nothing left of his usual cheerfulness, he seemed also to have decreased in size. Standing deferentially at the doorsteps of the office, he looked a great deal smaller than the director, although there was in fact not much of a difference between the two men in this respect. To me this event served as a powerful explication of the meaning of the concepts of 'big people' and 'small people,' and afterwards I began to wonder whether I had not also got a very partial understanding of the attitudes towards caste and class among the local representatives of the working-class vanguard, such as Comrade Mihi Lal and Comrade Param Lal Banaudha. Even if these men were not as self-assertive when they were standing face-to-face with their superiors as when they merely talked about them, however, not to take their more reflective attitudes seriously would clearly be a mistake. The fact that Koris and other worker people tend to humble themselves before their employers, as well as before other 'big people' controlling their lives, speaks more directly of the attitudes of those superiors than of the attitudes of the people under their command. To a large extent working-class and lower-caste deference must be analysed in strategic terms, as a way of coping with a society of extreme power differentials. Yet I would not go so far as to say that this adaptation to powerlessness is merely a form of role-playing without deeper psychological implications. The Koris themselves would not accept such a view, nor would it seem to be acceptable on theoretical grounds. As I understand it, the Koris adapt to their lack of power and their poverty inwardly as well as an outwardly. One thing that seems to happen is simply that subjective attitudes and aspirations are adjusted to objective probabilities, or what seem to be objective probabilities. In other words, when there does not seem to be much scope for advancement, improvement, or resistance one resigns to the situation

at hand, at least to the extent that one does not constantly worry about a future beyond reach. The rule of the day becomes that of muddling through. The strong orientation to the pleasures of the here and now, characteristic of subaltern cultures everywhere, can only be understood in this perspective. Yet, and this is the final twist, where the objective situation changes, so does the response. This book contains several illustrations of this point, the most striking being perhaps the difference in mood and outlook between the Koris who have managed to improve their lot, and those who have been left behind.

In *Homo Hierarchicus* Louis Dumont (1972: 241-243) speaks eloquently of time and change in relation to the caste system. In traditional Indian society, he says, the temporal is subordinated to the spiritual, and enclosed within it. What is regarded as significant is not historical time and historical change, but "the immutable model of the society and the truth, the model of the *dharma*," in relation to which change appears as mere degeneration. Historical change has no positive meaning, but is negatively perceived as loss of meaning and loss of order.

If this is traditional India, the Koris of Kanpur are clearly not part of it. Like other citizens of Kanpur, the Koris take the reality of the gods to be more stable and in a sense more real and significant than their own shifting order of existence. But this does not mean that the process of historical change as they know it lacks meaning, nor indeed that it is perceived as a mere process of degeneration from the atemporal model of the *dharma*. Most of them have a strong sense of living in a period of major change, a period where the model of the *dharma* itself is about to lose its meaning. Some of them look towards the new society with optimism, others - and they are perhaps the majority - see no end to their misery. Yet that history has taken a new course is recognized all around.

Notes

Chapter 1.

1. I need probably not remind the reader that there are several concepts of class in Marxism. In the following passage from *The Critique of Hegel's Doctrine of State* (Marx 1975: 146) Marx uses the term in much the same way as I do in this book:

"It was a definite advance in history when the *Estates* were transformed into social classes so that, just as the Christians are equal in heaven though unequal on earth, the individual members of the people became *equal* in the heaven of their political world, though unequal in their earthly existence in *society*. The actual transformation of the *Estates* into *classes* took place under the *absolute monarchy*. Thanks to the bureaucracy the idea of unity was made to prevail over the various state within the state... Not until the French Revolution was the process completed in which the *Estates* were transformed into *social classes*."

2. By describing pre-colonial India as a status society I am not suggesting that this was a society where the position of individuals and groups always remained fixed. As the historians would presumably agree, however, the social mobility that occurred under the old regime was for the most part not of the same kind as that characteristic of a Weberian class society. In a class society social mobility is typically regarded as legitimate. Indeed, the system of social stratification is felt to be acceptable only to the extent that it allows for mobility. In theory at least, the credo of a class society is that of careers open to talent. In traditional Hindu society, on the other hand, upward mobility was typically regarded as illegitimate and had to be justified as a restoration of original rights and prerogatives or denied altogether. In practice the society was open to certain forms of mobility; in principle it was fixed and immutable.

3. Nowadays only the Scheduled Castes are separately enumerated in census publications. In 1891, however, when there were 919 649 Koris in the state, 282 036, or 30.7% lived in the districts of Agra and Meerut divisions (Crooke 1896). If the percentage were the same in 1961, the Koris classified as members of the Other Backward Classes were approximately 325 000.

4. Just as the text is biased towards the viewpoint of the more educated, it is biased towards the male viewpoint. This bias is indeed by far the more pronounced one. I had some opportunities to talk with a few of the more elderly local women, but for the rest my relations with persons of their gender were restricted to friendly greetings, and in a few cases customary jokes of a sexual kind. An inclusion of female perspectives would certainly have improved the story presented in this book.

Chapter 2.

1. The literature dealing with this event is extensive. A brief account as well as a list of fur-

ther references is given in Edwardes 1975.

2. In *Young India* Lala Lajpat Rai (1915: 107) quotes the following passage from an article published in the British newspaper *Outlook* in 1915:

"I care not whether the pilgrim wanders through the beautiful Memorial Gardens (in which, significantly, no native is allowed to enter), feasting his eyes on the blaze Bougainvillea, or resting them in the shade of the peepul or the banyan, or whether he lingers in the strangely Italian-looking Memorial Church and reads the roll of honour that fills a series of mural tablets; everywhere his soul will be filled with gloom and will cry for eternal vengeance on the authors of the massacre and on those who threw the dying with the dead into the awful blackness of the pit."

3. This shift, more complex than suggested here, has been discussed by Bagchi (1972).

4. Royal Commission on Labour in India. Evidence. Vol. III, Part 2, C-3217-25.

5. An inquiry committee appointed by the Congress High Command put most of the blame for these riots on the government. Not only was the communal problem itself largely the result of British divide and rule, in this particular instance the local authorities had done almost nothing to suppress the violence and there was even some evidence that they had been involved in starting it. The government, which made its own inquiry, admitted that the police arrangements had been inadequate, but denied all further accusations (cf. Barrier 1976).

6. This epidemic, which affected large parts of the country, reached Kanpur in late 1899. By 1903, when it had abated, 7 800 persons had died and many more had left the city (Upper India Chamber of Commerce 1903-4). In 1901 the local population was 202 797; in 1911 only 178 557.

7. As shown by the statements presented to the Textile Factory Labour Committee of 1906 (India 1907).

8. This is a quotation from the statement of Mr. S.M. Johnson of the Muir Mills to the Textiles Factory Labour Committee of 1906 (India 1907: 204). An extensive discussion of the working conditions in the early textile industry of India can be found in Morris 1965. Morris is concerned with the textile industry of Bombay, but much of what he has to say applies to Kanpur as well.

9. Interview, April 16, 1976.

10. Needless to say I do not know whether this is what actually happened. What is important, however, is not whether this story is true or not, but that it is believed to be true.

11. Taylor (1978) sketches the historical background of the modern concept of *neta*. The classic analysis of the place of the renouncer in traditional Indian society is that of Dumont (1970).

12. The 'ji' in Netaji is a general honorific suffixed to titles of all kinds as well as to personal names, as in Gandhiji, Panditji (to a Brahman), Masterji (to a schoolteacher), or Babuji (to any educated 'gentleman' or more specifically to a clerk).

13. A more favorable comment on Sanjay Gandhi's rapid ascent to the heights of power appeared in a letter to the editor of *The National Herald*, February 13, 1976. The author had heard "all sorts of uncharitable gossip about Mr. Sanjay Gandhi." It seemed to be widely assumed that the Prime Minister was grooming her son to become her successor in the same way as she herself had been groomed to succeed her father. Yet if this was true, what was so wrong with it? "Which father would not like to groom and build-up his son or daughter for greater service to the nation; or, for that matter, which mother would not wish and yearn and endeavour to prepare her son or daughter to shoulder greater responsibilities in the cause of the country?"

Chapter 3.

1. This random sample was taken from a municipal list of residents, first checked and updated by persons in Devi Street.
2. Most of the informants could not give the dates for the arrival of their family in Kanpur, Ramnagar Koriyana, and present accomodation. To overcome this obstacle I made a calendar of widely known events. Thus I would ask whether the arrival of the informant's grandfather in Kanpur took place before or after the construction of the bridge over the Yamuna, whether it occurred before or after the building of a certain textile mill, and so forth. As soon as the approximate dates had been fixed for some of the families, moreover, I could ask new informants whether their families arrived before or after these ones. Information obtained by such a procedure is of course not the most reliable.

Chapter 5.

1. For discussions of fictive kinship see Freed 1963, Vatuk 1969.
2. The category of brides taken includes a number of local women who were married outside the neighborhood but later returned in the company of their husbands. It is mainly for this reason that there are more women in this category than in the category of brides given. In the latter category, moreover, there are a few women who were married before they and their husbands settled in Devi Street.
3. That there are only 45 cases in this table is partly due to the fact that some of the respondents did not know how their forefathers came to the city, partly to the fact that the sample included several groups of agnates referring back to the same migrant. In the table no migrant has been counted more than once.

Chapter 6.

1. The Hindu Mahasabha had taken some steps in the same direction in the 1920's. At the 1923 conference in Benares Swami Shraddanand's resolution to the effect that untouchability should be gradually abolished was accepted despite conservative resistance (Dixit 1974). For the Congress the 1931 Declaration of Fundamental Rights was a document of decisive importance. Note the following paragraphs:

(iv) All citizens are equal before the law, irrespective of religion, caste, creed, and sex.

(v) No disability attaches to any citizen, by reason of his or her religion, caste, creed, or sex, in regard of public employment, office of power or honour, and in the exercise of any trade or calling.

(vi) All citizens have equal rights and duties in regard to wells, tanks, roads, schools, and places of public resort, maintained out of State or local funds, or dedicated by private persons for use by the general public.

2. One of the accused still remembers the following (or roughly the following) exchange between his lawyer and one of the bristleworkers:

Lawyer: Are the hairs of the pig cut or picked?

Brushworker: They are picked.

Lawyer: There must be some blood left on them then?

Brushworker: Yes, but we don't touch them until they have been washed.

Lawyer: Why not?

Brushworker: If we did our *pancayat* would expell us.

Lawyer: If you were given a pig to rear, would you accept it?

Brushworker: Oh no, Sir! We don't rear pigs. Only Khatiks and Mehtars keep them.

Lawyer: Why is that?

Brushworker: The pig is a dirty animal - it eats dirty things and has other dirty habits.

Lawyer: Would you not even accept a pig which had been kept in clean surroundings?

Brushworker: No Sir, we don't rear pigs.

Lawyer: I don't understand this. If you can handle the hairs when they have been cleaned, why can't you do the same with the pig? I can't see the difference. To me it seem that you should either be prepared to rear pigs, or, like my clients, avoid pigs altogether.

3. For a discussion of the legal status of caste authorities see Galanter 1963, 1972.

4. These criteria, defined by the 1931 Census Commissioner J.H. Hutton, were as follows:

1. Whether the caste or class in question can be served by Brahmans or not.
2. Whether the caste or class in question can be served by the barbers, water-carriers, etc. who serve the caste Hindus.
3. Whether the caste or class in question pollutes a high-caste Hindu by contact or proximity.
4. Whether the caste or class in question is one from whose hands a caste Hindu can take water.
5. Whether the caste or class in question is debarred from using public conveniences, such as roads, ferries, wells, or schools.
6. Whether the caste or class in question is debarred from the use of Hindu temples.
7. Whether in ordinary social intercourse a well-educated member of caste or class in question will be treated as an equal by the high-caste men of the same educational qualifications.
8. Whether the caste or class in question is merely depressed on account of its ignorance, illiteracy or poverty and but for that, would be subject to no disability.
9. Whether it is depressed on account of the occupation followed, and whether but for that occupation it would be subject to no social disability.

For a discussion of the difficulties of applying these criteria in various regions see Galanter 1984.

5. Swami Achchutananda's ideas are interestingly analysed in R.S. Khare's (1984) *The Untouchable as Himself*.

6. According to Elliot (1869, Vol. 2: 331) the word *gotra* can be used broadly to refer to all kinds of subdivisions of a caste: "it has become the custom to call all subdivisions of tribes Gots." In Kori usage, however, the word does normally not refer to subcaste divisions.

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