

The Jats of Northern India

Their Traditional Political System—II

M C Pradhan

Social and political changes do not seem to have had much effect upon the traditional political system of the Jats of Northern India, based on the khap and sarv-khap Panchayat.

A person who comes to occupy a status position outside the traditional system strives to consolidate it by acquiring the status roles within the traditional system. To do this he has to live up to the social norms dictated by it. Thus he upholds adherence to the traditional system and reinforces its authority. The prestige and political ascendancy of such persons is used by the traditional Panchayats to command allegiance and exercise social control within the Jat community and, to some extent, in inter-caste relations.

[The first part of this article appeared last week.]

THE functions of various political units of *khap* and the *sarv-khap* Panchayat fall into three categories, namely, adjudicative, legislative, and executive. The *khap* council and its various political units now, for the most part, do not have legislative functions because they have, no legal sanction or authority as they enjoyed earlier under their legal charter, then the *khap* Panchayat could frame rules and regulations to be obeyed not only by the Jats but also other castes and communities of the *khap* area, and their infringement was punished by the *khap* Panchayat which was supreme in internal matters. Several instances from the historical records of the *khap* Panchayat of Baliyan and from the minutes of the Panchayat meetings can be cited where certain rules of conduct for inter-personal, inter-group, and inter-caste relations, rules guiding land revenue collection, and general policies of social welfare for the people, were framed and executed by the *khap* Panchayat. However, the *khap* Panchayat and its units now function only as adjudicative bodies, and executive bodies in so far as the implementation of their decisions is concerned, by virtue of what may be called the traditional charter. The *sarv-khap* Panchayat still functions as a legislative body when it meets for its formal session every five years since its revival in 1950. (See the resolutions of the *sarv-khap* Panchayats below). An informal meeting of the *sarv-khap* Panchayat of neighbouring *khaps* may also function as adjudicative and executive bodies when they judge cases of infringement of resolutions adopted in the formal meetings of the *sarv-khap* Panchayat or decide to implement these resolutions in the various *khaps* of the area or when they decide cases and disputes between persons, groups or castes, and implement their decision on the parties concerned. Executive power, particularly in implementing the sanctions passed by a Panchayat, is

generally used in extreme cases of default or flouting the social norms by a person or a group, and its success depends upon a strong public opinion behind the decisions of the Panchayat.

A council of higher political units may be summoned if a smaller unit is not successful in settling an issue. Among the territorially based councils, a *khap*, an *inter-khap*, or a *sarv-khap* Panchayat, is considered more effective than lineage, *patti*, village, *ganwand*, and *thamba* Panchayats. To make a council effective and successful important persons like the headmen, of maximal lineages and the leaders of villages!, *ganwands*, *thambas*, *khap* leaders, and sometimes also of the neighbouring *khaps*, are invited to attend the meeting and to act as judges or mediators. With their judgement and experience and also because of their prestige and political influence, they are considered in a better position to put forward such proposals as may lead to the settlement of a dispute or to implement the decisions of a Panchayat.

Primary Functions

The primary functions of the councils of various lineage segments are to maintain unity and solidarity within their respective groups, and to remove or at least to keep in check the forces of schism which are inevitable in the relations between their members. Thus the lineage Panchayats settle disputes between the members of various kinship groups and strive to keep peace and goodwill between them. Sometimes matters of common interest are also discussed in these council meetings and a common line of action adopted. The cases decided by a *khandan* or minimal lineage council generally deal with quarrels over the partition of joint family property, misuse of borrowed agricultural implements, the priority in use of irrigational resources and with cases of personal aggrandisement, in-

timidation by a member against another, breach of promise, theft, refusal to pay back a loan, and other kinds of misbehaviour. These disputes mostly arise between brothers, step-brothers, parallel cousins or members of joint families of a minimal lineage.

These conflicts may also be present at the sub-thok or major segment level, though with lesser frequency than at the minimal lineage level on account of the fact that the partition of property takes place mostly at the minimal lineage level thereby reducing the chances of jealousy or bad blood between the members of a sub-thok. A sub-thok Panchayat thus performs the same functions as the *khandan* Panchayat. But sometimes a sub-thok council may also take decisions on matters of common interest and adopt a particular line of action. One of the major segments of Shoron village, for example, decided to discontinue the service of the *khap* genealogist on the grounds that he gave false evidence against a member of that segment in a court case on account of which the member lost his claim to some property.

The thok or maximal lineage Panchayat is the most powerful and effective of all lineage councils. On account of kinship factors and local contiguity an individual is largely dependant upon his thok for economic, social, and political support. It is not easy for an individual to acquire prestige and political influence without the support of the members of his maximal lineage. The thok Panchayat functions to maintain unity and solidarity among its constituent segments and decides cases and disputes among them. It has power to use certain positive and negative sanctions (to be described later), which are not the prerogatives of other lineage councils. For example, in cases of ostracism or "dropping the huqqah" of an individual by a Panchayat, the assent of his

marriages, in giving dowry, etc, and persuading the people to save the money and spend it on education of children, on improvement of agriculture, and on religious rites. Certain functions of the *khap* Panchayat which it had during the medieval period, eg collecting land revenue, keeping an army and police force for the purpose of defence and internal administration, etc, have now fallen into disuse. But it has at the same time taken on certain new functions as mentioned above.

A serious dispute within a *khap*, between *khaps* or their members, may be decided either by a council of neighbouring *khaps* or by the *sarv-khap* Panchayat. The procedure for calling such a meeting is the same as in the case of a *khap* council. The Wazir of a *khap* is approached and he, judging the seriousness of the dispute or the difficulties involved in its settlement, invites the respected and influential persons from the neighbouring *khaps* or from all the *khaps* of Meerut Division, intimating to them the date and the venue of the proposed meeting. The meeting is generally called at the house of the party which is at fault or has infringed a rule. Persons selected to act as judges or mediators at the council meeting are known for their honesty, neutrality, fair play, tact and sense of justice. The reputation of an individual for these qualities is built up gradually over a period of years, and by his behaviour in council meetings, by his opinions and by his ability to settle a dispute, he gets the opportunity for being invited from one important Panchayat to another of increasing significance.

Cases decided by a council of neighbouring *khaps*, or an informal *sarv-khap* Panchayat may fall into any of the following categories: Marriage disputes arising out of divorcing a girl or maltreatment of her by her husband or parent-in-law; cases of cheating in marriages, e.g. showing one girl to the bridegroom's parents and then marrying another with a defect, asking a heavy dowry and demanding a continuous flow of presents from the girl's parents after marriage under the threat of maltreating her if such a flow stops; and cases of breach of other social norms. Now breach of the *sarv-khap* Panchayat resolutions adopted in 1950, 1956, and 1963, which will be discussed later, are also discussed at such meetings. Most of these cases may also be decided by a *khap* Pan-

chayat. Serious disputes between maximal lineages, clans or castes, villages of two different *khaps*, or between *khaps*, are also decided either by a council of neighbouring *khaps* or by an informal meeting of the *sarv-khap* Panchayat.

The Sarv-Khap Council

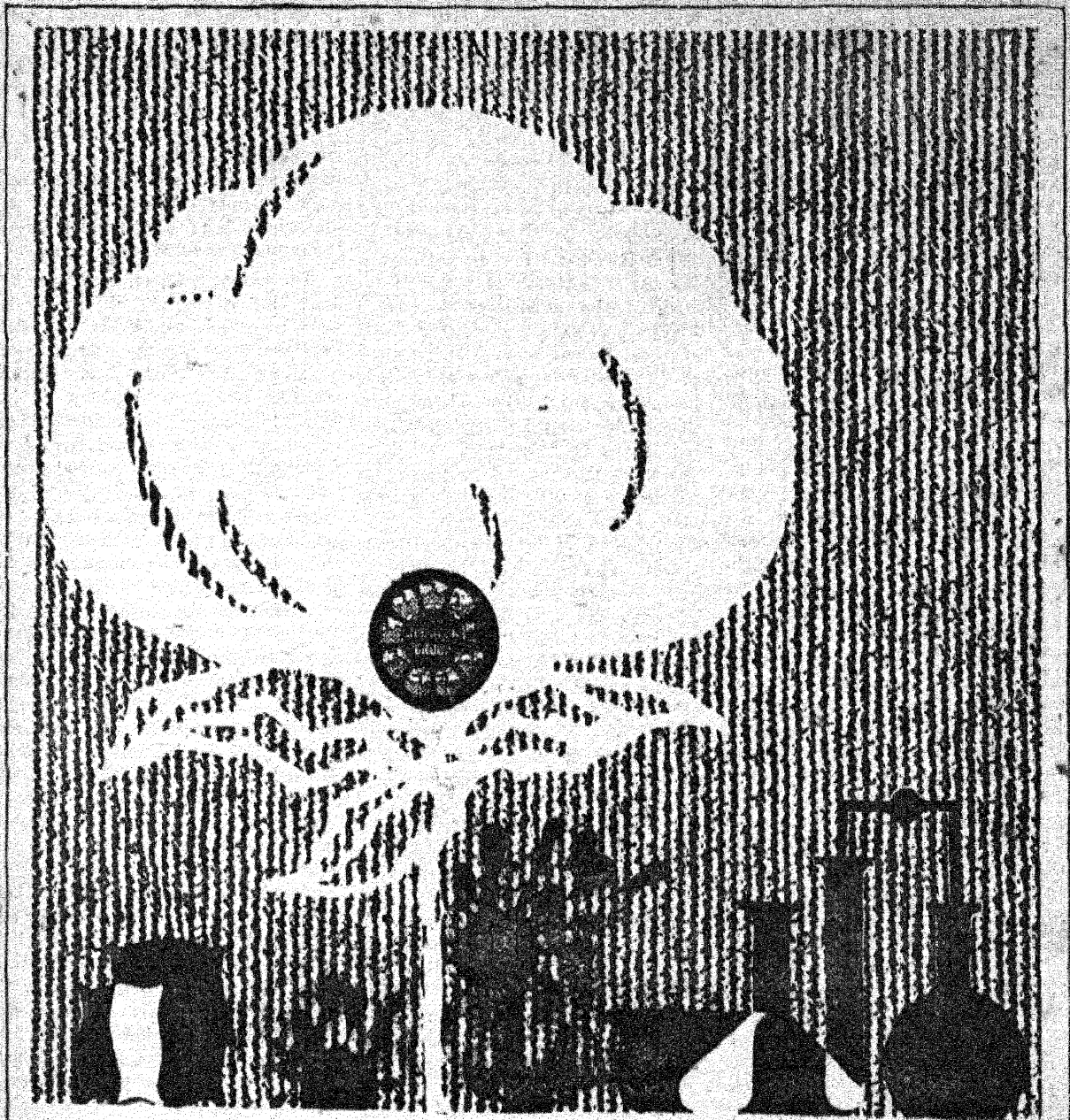
The *sarv-khap* council is a representative body of all the Jat clans and of the *khaps* of other castes of the Meerut Division. It does not have a hereditary headman or Wazir or secretary. The president of the council is elected at each meeting. The Wazir of *khaps* Baliyan acts as the secretary at the Panchayat meetings, and records its minutes and decisions. The membership of this council is now voluntary, but during the medieval period, it seems, all the *khaps* were under the jurisdiction of this council. Now only those *khaps* or castes which attend the meetings of the *sarv-khap* Panchayat and agree with the decisions and resolutions passed by it are bound by them. The *sarv-khap* council does not have any administrative power over the other *khaps*. Its executive powers are also limited in that they can only be exercised with the consent of those *khaps* which have agreed to implement its decisions within their clan areas. In its informal meetings, the *sarv-khap* Panchayat mostly functions as an adjudicative body, and the implementation of the decisions is either left to the *khaps* concerned or to a committee of influential persons constituted with the consent of the *khaps* to see to their implementation. The legislative functions of the *sarv-khap* Panchayat are mostly confined to its formal, quinquennial meetings. But during the medieval period when faced with extraordinary circumstances like a foreign invasion or political or economic turmoil, a formal meeting of the *sarv-khap* Panchayat could also be called which could formulate certain rules or regulations for the people of the area. This is borne out by the minutes of the *sarv-khap* council meetings of that period. The authority under which the *sarv-khap* council has been functioning for centuries is mainly traditional and it has not had any legal charter such as was granted to various *khaps*. This traditional authority is based on its role in defence of the *sarv-khap* area in the past. Now it has become a moral force which is hard to flout even for a *khap*.

The primary functions of the *sarv-khap* council are the same as those of a council of neighbouring *khaps*. The

functions it came to acquire during the medieval period, e.g. keeping an army for defence and maintaining internal autonomy of the area, demanding political recognition for the *khaps* from rulers at Delhi, etc, have now disappeared. But it has now taken on certain other functions such as working for schemes of social and economic welfare of the people. These new functions have strengthened the traditional belief of the people in the *khap* and the *sarv-khap* councils.

To convene a formal meeting of the *sarv-khap*, a council of five or six *khaps* is held to decide the date and the venue for the meeting. A *khap* may offer to play host. Then a working committee consisting of important leaders from various *khaps* is set up to raise subscriptions from the *sarv-khap* area and to send invitations to headmen and leaders of the *khaps* and also of various castes to participate in the meeting and, finally, to make necessary arrangements for food accommodation and other conveniences for the delegates and for holding the council meeting. A steering committee is also instituted to decide the agenda of the meeting and to finalise a list of topics which is put before the general meeting for discussion and passing of resolutions. But the delegates are also free to put forward any resolution they wish to before the council meeting. Speeches are delivered elucidating the aims and purposes of the resolutions and the desirability of adopting them. Then those who do not agree with this or that resolution deliver their speeches. Finally, the resolutions are put to vote one by one. Voting is by show of hands. If a resolution is passed by an overwhelming majority, it is considered as adopted, and the one which cannot muster enough support or which do not have an overwhelming majority, fall through. A resolution may not be binding upon those *khaps* or castes which were not in favour of it. After the resolutions have been adopted, the leaders of those *khaps* and castes who were in favour of them come to the dias one by one and take an oath to implement the resolutions in their respective *khaps* or castes.

A working committee is set up consisting of the leaders of various *khaps* and castes to canvas and enlist support for the resolutions by touring the villages of the *sarv-khap* area, and to persuade the people to accept and implement the resolutions. After the meeting of the *sarv-khaps* council in



GROWING BIGGER EVERY DAY

That's us. Always trying to do a little better than yesterday. Always doing it. Textiles, jute, dyes and chemicals. These are the interests we have today. Tomorrow? The possibilities are endless. The future is wide open.



MAFATLAL
GROUP

over, the leaders of various *khaps* and castes may also hold meetings of their respective political units in which the *sarv-khap* council resolutions are again adopted with a view to emphasise their importance and to persuade the constituent political units such as *thoks*, *ganwands*, and *thambas*, etc, to accept and implement the resolutions.

If the resolutions have been accentuated by a *khap* or a caste council it may punish any infringement of them in its Panchayat. In more serious cases of default, the matter may be referred to the *sarv-khap* secretary who then summons a Panchayat meeting of four or five *khaps*, and the defaulters are lined, warned or admonished for flouting the resolutions. Other sanctions may also be passed against the defaulting persons or groups, but the implementation of these sanctions is again left to the *khap* or the caste concerned, and only on its suggestion a committee of influential persons may be set up to see the sanctions implemented. The secretary of the *sarv-khap* Panchayat keeps himself in touch with the efforts of the committee and after it has successfully carried out its task the secretary makes a note of it in the *sarv-khap* Panchayat register of records. If the sanctions passed by a Panchayat is not successful because of the intransigence of the defaulter, a bigger Panchayat of more influential persons and leaders of a larger number of *khaps* is called at the doors of the culprit. They refuse to eat or drink (by the tradition it is the duty of the person at whose house the Panchayat is assembled to provide food and other hospitality) till he has accepted the decision of the council and has carried out the sanctions to the satisfaction of the council members. It becomes very difficult for a person or a group to ignore such an assembly of persons. Moreover, if the Panchayat goes away from the house of the defaulter without accepting food and water from his hands the prestige of such a person is mortally affected and other persons, groups and even his service castes may discontinue social and other relations with him till he complies to the sanctions passed by a Panchayat and expiates himself by giving a community feast in which the same, council members must be invited. If, however, the Panchayat has failed to bring a person to book it may ostracise him, his whole *thok*, village, and even the whole *ganwand*, (if it is found that these units are siding him or are helping him in other ways) till such time as when the defaulter has

carried out the directions of the Panchayat and the leaders of other units have apologized and asked to be forgiven for their conduct. During ostracism, which is almost always temporary among the Jats, eating, smoking, marriage, and other kinds of interaction are prohibited with the person concerned and also with such units as may have helped him. Over a period of years these restrictions become unbearable and then the defaulter and those who have been helping him try to reach a settlement with the Panchayat. After they have either paid a fine or tendered an apology or given an undertaking (with a straw under the teeth signifying humility) not to go against the wishes of the Panchayat, they are pardoned and are allowed to enjoy the usual privileges of the caste. There are a few cases in which such extreme decisions were taken to ostracise a *ganwand*, and once the whole of the *khap* in recent years. The normal relations of commensality and marriage were established after several years and then only when the defaulters in the *ganwand* case had apologized and paid the fine, and in the *inter-khap* dispute between Baliyan and Desh when a rapprochement had been reached between the two.

First Formal Meeting

The following case will make the procedure and the functions of the *sarv-khap* Panchayat explicit. It relates to the first formal meeting of the Panchayat held in 1950 after a period of one hundred years. It will also show the influence this council has had upon the Jats as well as other castes of Meerut Division since its revival:

The meeting of the *sare-khap* Panchayat was held in Shoron village, *khap* Baliyan, and was attended by hereditary leaders of all the 18 *khaps* of Meerut Division and also by the leaders of other castes and communities. The headman of *khap* Kalaslain (of Gujar caste) was elected as president of the meeting, which lasted three days. Speeches were given by several leaders from various *khaps* eulogizing the past history of the *sare-khap* Panchayat, the aims behind its revival, and its importance for the welfare of the people. Then followed discussions and speeches on the 14 resolutions put up before the general meeting. These resolutions had been framed earlier by the working committee of the Panchayat. They were:

(1) People should not incur heavy expenditure on daughters' mar-

riages, particularly on extending hospitality to the grooms' parties.

- (2) Display of ornaments by groom's father at the time of 'the ceremony of welcome' held at the bride's house should stop.
- (3) Not more than five persons should accompany a marriage party.
- (4) No relations should be invited by a bride's father at the Lime of her marriage, except her maternal uncle (mother's brother), for this custom entails heavy expenditure which the bride's father can ill-afford.
- (5) The feast of mandha (final feast before the departure of the marriage party) should be discontinued.
- (6) The engagement ceremony should be performed only with one rupee and the old custom of incurring heavy expenditure or this ceremony should be discontinued.
- (7) The groom's father should not present more than 3 tolas (weight measurement for precious metals) of gold and 50 tolas of silver ornaments to the bride. The bride's father should not give more than one tola of gold and 25 tolas of silver ornaments.
- (8) Only 5 items of clothes and 5 of kitchen ware should be given in dowry.
- (9) The boy and the girl should be fully satisfied with each other before the marriage takes place. After the marriage, the husband should not leave his wife.
- (10) The marriageable age for a boy should be 25 years, and for a girl 16 years. Child marriages should be stopped.
- (11) In the bhat ceremony (when presents are given by the bride's mother's brother to the parents of the bride) not more than 50 rupees should be given in cash and presents of cloth and kitchen utensils should be discontinued,
- (12) The custom of sending presents to daughter's husband's place on every festival after marriage should be discontinued.
- (13) In the ceremony of gauna (when the bride goes to her husband's place for the second time after marriage) only five items of doth and one set of bedding should be given by the girl's father. All other presents in cash or kind should be discontinued.
- (14) Other malpractices now prevalent in marriage ceremonies



Millions of hearts beating as one.
Small rivulets flowing into a mighty river.

Such is our free society of many
communities living together in
peace and harmony. This society is
worth preserving, worth fighting
for. Remember, your neighbour is
as important to this society as you.

ONE GREAT COUNTRY
ONE GREAT PEOPLE

DA 6574

should also stop; and the money thus saved should be spent on education of boys and girls and for religious causes.

All these resolutions were passed by the general assembly and were adopted. Members of all the *khaps* came to the dais one by one and pledged their support for the resolutions and also promised to implement them in their respective *khap* areas. Leaders of several other castes also pledged their support and promised to implement the resolutions within their castes.

These resolutions have had a profound effect upon the people of Meerut Division. Some of the resolutions such as those about marriageable age of boys and girls, limit on the number of relatives to be invited in marriages by the bride's father, or the limit imposed on presents and expenditure incurred on the *bhat* ceremony are not strictly followed. But the other resolutions are being strictly followed by quite a number of *khaps* and the infringement of these resolutions brings swift punishment from the *khap* or inter-Map Panchayat. The defaulter is generally made to pay a fine and give a firm promise that he would not break the resolutions in future. The fine thus realized is donated by the Panchayat to the school in the locality to which the defaulter belongs or towards building such a school if the village has none. From the register of records of the *sarv-khap* Panchayat kept by the Wazir of *khap* Balivan, it is evident that *khaps* and councils of neighbouring *khaps* have punished a number of persons who have infringed one or the other of these resolutions. During my fieldwork I came to know that these resolutions have been effectively implemented and are being strictly followed by the Jats as well as by certain other castes of such *khaps* as Baliyan, Salaklain or Desh, Chogama, Gathwala, Kalaslain (of Gujjar caste), Badanu and so forth. Information about breaking a rule by a person may be given either to the *khap* leaders or the Wazir of the *sarv-khap* council who, after verifying the complaint from the respected persons of the village or *ganwand* to which the defaulter belongs, calls a Panchayat meeting either of the *khap* or council of neighbouring *khaps*, depending upon the seriousness of the breach or the status of the defaulter.

The 1950 meeting of the *sarv-khap* Panchayat was also attended by several Jat leaders from the Punjab. And it had such a profound effect upon them that after their return they can-

vassed for a meeting of the *khaps* of their state which ultimately led to a meeting of several *khaps* in the town of Beri, on January 31, 1951. The prominent leaders of the *sarv-khap* Panchayat of 1950 were also invited to this meeting. In this Panchayat the 1950 resolutions of the *sarv-khap* Panchayat were adopted.

Resolutions Taken Seriously

The second meeting of the *sarv-khap* council was held in 1956, again in Shoron village of the *khap* Balivan. I attended the meeting. The same resolutions of 1950 were put up before the general meeting for discussion with a view to finding out their impact upon the people. It was established from the speeches of leaders from different *khaps* and castes that these resolutions had done quite a lot of good in removing malpractices of too high dowry, unnecessary expenditure in marriages, leaving the wife after marriage and extortion of money and presents from the wife's father or maltreatment of the wife. One Jat leader in his speech assessed the amount saved by the Jats and such other castes as Rajputs, Gujars, Ahirs, Tiyagi Brahmins, Blacksmiths, Carpenters, Goldsmiths, Muslim Jats, and Weavers of the *sarv-khap* area at Rs 750,000,000 during the five years between 1950 and 1956 through economizing in marriage ceremonies and related expenses. And this, according to him, was due to the resolutions of the first formal *sarv-khap* Panchayat. This showed the effectiveness of the council as an institution of social control and its popularity with the masses. However, it was felt that in some areas of Meerut Division the resolutions were not being followed strictly. Therefore, it was decided that these resolutions should again be passed and adopted by the second Panchayat meeting, and fresh pledges for their implementation should be taken from the leaders of the *khaps* and castes. This was done and the 1950 resolutions were adopted again and fresh pledges taken. The second *sarv-khap* council also passed some other resolutions of minor importance, but its main task was to infuse of fresh sense of dedication to the resolutions of the first formal Panchayat and to propagate for their acceptance by certain *khaps* or castes which had not yet seriously taken up their implementation within the areas of their jurisdiction. In this the second *sarv-khap* Panchayat succeeded to a great extent

The third quinquennial meeting of this body was held on March 2, 1963 in Baraut (a town in *khap* Salaklain of the Jats of Tomar clan, in Meerut district). The president in his speech before the general meeting eulogized the role of the *sarv-khap* council in maintaining and propagating the cultural tradition of the country and its devotion to the cause of social welfare of the masses and to defending the freedom of the country as was borne out by its past history. He said that in the difficult period of national emergency created by the Chinese attack on their country the eyes of the nation were fixed on the farmery who had to produce more food so that the country could be strong enough to defend itself; and in this task the *sarv-khap* council and its leaders could render valuable service by persuading the farmers to make the country self-sufficient in food. He also expressed the hope that in its present meeting the Panchayat would be able to put forward before the public a constructive programme of economic and social development and would be able to implement it with the dedication which had characterized its functioning from ancient times.

The resolutions put up for discussion and adoption before the general meeting are of topical interest because they indicate the present trends in the *sarv-khap* council, the thinking of its leaders, the effect of the Panchayat resolutions upon the masses and their relevance for the political processes of today within the various *khaps* and castes of Meerut Division. The resolutions finally adopted by the Panchayat are:

- (1) The Panchayat should contribute its mite towards the defence of the country in the wake of the Chinese aggression by persuading the people to donate to the national defence fund, helping the government in building a village volunteer force and in army recruitment and persuading the farmers to grow more food
- (2) The Panchayat should continue to work towards the implementation of the resolutions of the two earlier Panchayats of 1950 and 1956. These resolutions have done quite a lot of good in removing malpractices in marriage ceremonies and customs prevalent among the castes and the communities of the *sarv-khap* area.
- (3) The Panchayat should strive to remove caste distinctions and barriers,

- (4) The Panchayat should promote better educational facilities and better management of educational institutions. It should also raise funds towards building a girls' college. But co-education in schools and colleges should not be encouraged.
- (5) Cows should be protected (from slaughter) and production of milk and *ghee* (clarified butter) should be increased in villages.
- (6) People should be made conversant with the history of the *sarv-khap* Panchayat so that they may know the importance and the role of this organization in the life of the people from old times to the present day and follow its resolutions.
- (7) Two military colleges should be opened, one in Baraut and the other in Bulandshahr district. The Panchayat should persuade the government to undertake this task and should also raise contributions from various *khaps* towards the financing of these colleges.
- (8) A working committee should be set up to implement these resolutions.

I have not been able to visit the field recently in order to assess the impact of these resolutions on the people of the various *khaps* of Meerut Division. Nor has it been possible to know how far the working committee has been able to implement the new resolutions adopted at this Panchayat meeting. But it was bigger and more important than the two earlier meetings of the *sarv-khap* council held in 1950 and 1956, both with regard to the number of delegates and the topics on the agenda of the meeting. The resolutions indicate that since its revival the Panchayat has taken upon itself the responsibility of tackling with social and economic problems facing the people of the *sarv-khap* area, and to extend the nation as well and is thus trying to widen its influence among the masses. Moreover, the resolutions on national defence passed by the Panchayat indicate that its leaders still consider it as their duty to defend the country against foreign invasion which was one of the important functions of the *sarv-khap* Panchayat in mediaeval times. The Panchayat's contribution to defending the country could not, of course, take the same form as in earlier times, like raising an army from different *khaps* and lighting the invader directly.

By and large the leadership of the *sarv-khap* council still functions

within the traditional thought pattern as can be seen from the resolutions mentioned above. Rather than accepting a political ideology and programme of social and economic development from the 'rightist' or 'leftist' political parties functioning in the country, the Panchayat is grappling with these problems in the traditional manner with a 'peasant-outlook' as it were. This is born out by resolutions 2,4,5, and 6 mentioned above. On the one hand, the *sarv-khap* Panchayat stands for schemes of social welfare and change (resolutions 2,3,4, mentioned above); on the other, it also acts as a check on certain other social changes like co-education in schools and colleges and urbanization and westernization and the ideas that go with them.

Sanctions, Negative and Positive

This sophisticated and largely intended meeting of the *sarv-khap* Panchayat fits proceedings were broadcast by the All India Radio, and were also covered by the Nav Bharat Times of March 2nd and 5th, 1963, and by other newspapers), passing bold resolutions on problems having an all-India bearing, may seem a far cry from the informal lineage Panchayats in different *khaps* with parochial interests in the Jat villages: it may also seem at first that there is no connection between these two political institutions. But a closer look at these political processes will show that these two units form a chain in the political continuum. For the same structural and organizational principles, viz, kinship proximity and local contiguity at village and *khap* level, the concept of 'brotherhood' (*bhattachara*), and so forth, are at work at the *sarv-khap* level also. And the resolutions are primarily addressed to the people of the various *khaps* and the caste Panchayats of other castes. Here the *khap* leaders, at least in the case of the Jat clans, will only be able to implement these resolutions by the active support of the headmen and leaders of *thoks*, *sub-thoks*, and *khandam* of minimal lineages. It is these lineage councils, together with the *khap* Panchayats, which see to the implementation of the *sarv-khap* Panchayat resolutions.

The sanctions exercised by various units of the Jat political system may be divided into positive and negative sanctions. Positive sanctions promise economic, social, or psychological rewards to an individual. Negative sanctions are those which may inflict punishment, penalty or ostracism for the breach of norms of the society.

They are negative in the sense that they can be applied only to penalize or punish but not to reward. (R T La Piere, "A Theory of Social Control", McGraw Hill, London, 1954).

Positive sanctions are used not by the Panchayats but by the society of social groups and their use is closely related to an individual's actions and behaviour in relation to the lineage groups to which he belongs and to those with whom he comes in contact in face-to-face relationships. But sanctions like total extermination of an individual, economic intimidation, wilful harm to a person's property or, conversely, economic reward are unknown among the Jats and are not used by the Panchayats. Formerly such physical sanctions as beating or whipping of a defaulter were common but now they are rarely used by the councils. Permanent expulsion or ostracism of an individual was rarely practised if at all, and is now totally absent. But temporary expulsion signified by 'dropping the *huqqah*' (withdrawing the right of a person to eat or smoke with other members of his caste) is common, though resorted to by the Panchayats only in extreme cases of default. And then, to be effective it must have the active support of the *thok* or maximal lineage of the offender. Thus the exercise of this sanction is the privilege only of the *thok* or the *khap* Panchayat. Fines and economic restitution of an aggrieved party are common and can be used by any unit of the Jat political system.

A curse is considered one of the most effective sanctions. The faith in a curse, particularly when uttered by Panchayat members, is very strong and a curse is considered infallible. Several cases could be cited where a curse uttered by a Panchayat against the persons who have flouted its decisions has come true. A typical case is that of a person in Shoron village in *khap* Baliyan who, on the advice of his elder brother, got married in *khap* Salaklain. But this was against the resolutions of his own *khap* which had banned marriages between Baliyan and Salaklain on account of some dispute, between the two *khaps*. The *khap* council tried to persuade the two brothers not to break the ban, but it failed to persuade them in spite of two or three meetings of the *khap* Panchayat. The elder brother of the person concerned was the headman of a *thok* of Shoron village. On account of party politics within the *khap*, with the backing of his maximal lineage, the headman succeeded in marrying his brother against

the ban. After the marriage, a meeting of the *khap* Panchayat was held and a curse was uttered by the council members that there will be no male issue from this marriage to carry on the family name. This incident happened more than twenty years back but there has been no male child born till now. The person concerned is now about seventy years old (this was his second marriage); the only son from the first marriage had died at the age of eighteen before the second marriage took place. According to the villagers there is now not much hope of a son. The curse of the Panchayat had had effect.

A curse may be uttered by any political unit from a minimal lineage to a *sarv-khap* Panchayat when all other means of social control have failed. It is the last, but not the least, of the effective sanctions at the disposal of the Panchayats. The belief in the efficacy of the curse and the strong fear of it strengthens the moral element in social relationships and checks unethical or anti-social conduct. The process of education and urbanization, it seems, has not affected this belief and it is fairly common among educated and urbanized Jats serving in the Indian army, government or civil service and also among college students.

A Panchayat may also ask an individual to take an oath of good conduct in future. This practice is supported by the common belief that if an individual breaks his words of honour or a promise given before a Panchayat, he loses his respect in the eyes of others.

For certain religious and moral lapses an individual may be asked by a Panchayat to undergo expiatory religious rites such as going on a pilgrimage, taking a purificatory bath in the river Ganges or giving a communal feast. Others may be forbidden to eat or smoke with him until he has performed these rites. In some cases he may also be asked by a *khap* or *sarv-khan* Panchayat to tour the villages of his *khap* and ask to be forgiven by the leaders of those villages. In such cases the Panchayat appoints a committee of two or three respectable persons who are asked to accompany the defaulter on his tour to the villages and to see that he carries out the decision of the council. Generally, this sanction is accompanied by temporary expulsion of the person from the caste. The caste councils and the *khap* Panchayats of other castes also use these sanctions. *Impact of Economic and Political Changes.*

The Jat community as well as other

castes of Meerut Division have experienced certain economic changes brought about by the introduction of irrigation facilities and of sugar-cane as a cash crop, by the growth of the competitive market economy and the growth of industry and towns. These factors have produced economic inequality among the Jats. Those who have gained wealth now aspire for leadership or office within the traditional political system, as headmen of *Uncage* groups and as judges or council members in Panchayat meetings and also for office in the new government instituted political set-up of Gram and Adalat Panchayats (village committee and justice committee respectively).

Traditional System Not Weakened

Those who are more well-to-do than others may even stand for the state legislature or the parliament. For such status roles as are outside the traditional ones, an individual need not follow the traditional values demanded by the society. Such persons, if they are unable to achieve a position of leadership or office within the traditional political system, may turn against it; and then it becomes difficult for a Panchayat to control their behaviour. Those who come to hold office as president of a Gram Panchayat, a judge on the Adalat Panchayat, a member of the Zila Piri-shad (district committee), or member of the state legislature by virtue of their economic or political influence, may also be elected as the heads of *thoks* and *sub-thoks* or to such other status roles within the traditional system as are not strictly hereditary. This is because the belief in the traditional authority and value system of the Jats, as moulded by their kinship and political structure, has not changed much in spite of education and urbanization. Education among the Jats is increasing fast on account of the keen interest the community is taking in education by raising funds for schools and colleges. But the traditional values, ideology, and thought patterns of the Jat society are not undermined by the dissemination of education, in spite of its western pattern. It only results in the broadening of outlook which is used to rationalise and to reinforce the traditional value system based upon the kinship and the political system of the society. This happens because the Jats are still tied to the land which cannot be alienated outside the *thok*, a factor which maintains the corporate group structure of the society. Moreover, because of the introduction of the cash crop of sugar-cane and the increase in

land prices on account of irrigation, facilities resulting in substantial increase in agricultural output and its market value, an individual has high economic stakes in his ancestral property. And those Jats who are serving outside their villages in army, civil service and other jobs like to return to the villages after retirement to settle down there. I did not come across even one case where a Jat had sold his property in his native village and had settled down in a city. On the other hand, many cases could be cited of senior army officers, government servants, etc., who have come back to their villages after retirement and now lead wealthy agriculturists' lives. These values and interests uphold the kinship and the political system of the Jat society under the conditions of change.

A person who has come to occupy a status position outside the traditional system strives to consolidate it by trying to achieve the status roles within the old system. To do so he has to live up to certain social norms dictated by kinship and the political ideology of the certain social norms dictated by the community; and in doing so he upholds the belief in the traditional system and thus reinforces its authority. The prestige and political ascendancy of such persons is used by the traditional Panchayats to command allegiance and exercise social control within the community and, to some extent, in inter-caste relations as well.

Social and economic changes do not seem to have much effect upon the traditional political system: nor is the system showing any signs of disorganization. The Jats, as well as other castes, still believe that "five punches (council members) sitting in a Panchayat are like five gods". This epitomises the ethos of the Jat community. The council members entrusted with the task of settling a dispute or making a decision are considered sacred. This belief not only protects them against any harm from the litigants for the decisions they may give, decisions which are morally binding upon the parties concerned and could only be broken at the pain of incurring a curse by the Panchayat which is considered infallible, but also compels the punches to conduct the affairs of the Panchayat with justice, equity and good conscience.

Such structural and organizational principles as *khap* bhaichara (brotherhood), *khap* exogamy, kinship organization and sentiment, corporate group structure of the society and the seclusion pattern of the lineages and the

clan remain very much the same. They still seem to uphold and reinforce the traditional Authority and its political system in more ways than one.

The Gram and the Adalat Panchayats introduced by government function at village and inter-village level. The Gram Panchayat has certain economic and political advantage over the traditional village council by virtue of the legal authority invested in it by government statutes. It can act towards village-wide goals with more effectiveness than the traditional village Panchayat. But the success of the Gram Panchayat in any undertaking depends largely upon the co-operation of maximal lineages and major segments of the Jats without which it remains ineffective. Other castes like the Carpenters, Blacksmiths, Sweepers, Chamars, Water-carriers, etc. are still largely dependant upon the Jats by virtue of their having most of the agricultural resources. These castes also support the decisions of the leaders of maximal lineages. Thus the Gram Panchayat can hardly get the majority of its members for an undertaking if it is not supported by the Jat *thoks*. It is also largely controlled by inter-

thok politics and relations between various lineages of a village. The traditional village council still functions independently of the Gram Panchayat.

The Adalat Panchayat is an adjudicative body comprising four or five neighbouring villages and decides cases and disputes between the members of these villages. It has become a rival institution to the *gamwand* and *thamba* Panchayats. But the villagers do not place much faith in the Adalat Panchayat, consider it a hot bed of politics and intrigue and do not take their disputes to it. They still prefer a *thok*, *patti*, village, *gamwand*, or *thamba* council for their disputes; for in these Panchayats they can have a say in the selection of the council members, which they cannot be sure of in an Adalat Panchayat. The new political set-up of Gram and Adalat Panchayats has not yet established itself in the thought patterns of the villagers. Finally, the new set-up has a restricted scope and frame of reference as compared to the traditional political system which has much wider functions in the social, political and cultural fields. The new political set-up has taken over some of the for-

mer's functions, like the administrative and adjudicative powers at village and inter-village level, but it leaves out other fields of activity in which the *khap* and its political units and the *sary-khap* Panchayat remain as effective as possible under the changing conditions.

Above I have discussed briefly the relation between the Jat kinship structure, concept of *bhaichara* (brotherhood) system of land tenure and the customary law of inheritance on the one hand, and the traditional political system of the Jats on the other; the history and the functions of the political system from medieval times to the present day; and the impact of certain processes of change upon the political system. Other aspects like the techniques of propaganda, implementation of Panchayat decisions, the effectiveness of the *khap* and the *sary-khap* councils in regulating conduct within the Jat community as well as other castes, the maintenance of political dominance of the Jats (within their clan areas) over other castes and the present trends of the political system could not be discussed here.

(Concluded)

Peace of mind at home



Piece of jewellery



IN STATE BANK LOCKER!

Place your valuables in State Bank of India Lockers. Locker facilities are available at most of our larger offices.

Special features:

1. The key of your locker has no duplicate!
2. You can have your own lock on the lockers.

Safe custody facilities for documents and valuable articles at a nominal charge are also available.

STATE BANK FOR SERVICE

LPE-Adyar 5/18/2