

# Group Dynamics in a North-Indian Village

## A Study in Factions

### I—Introduction

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This study was carried out by the author when he was in Delhi as the Consulting Anthropologist to The Ford Foundation with the assistance of Haivant Singh Dhillon. Prof Lewis is the author of *Life in a Mexican Village*.

THIS study grew out of a pilot research project in village Rampur\*, sponsored by the Programme Evaluation Organization of the Planning Commission. The field research was carried on by the writer over a four-month period, with the assistance of Indian students†. The broad objectives of the research project were threefold: (1) To develop relatively simple but reliable methods for the study of social organization, leadership, and value systems,—methods which might be applied on a broader scale by the staff of twenty evaluation officers in their respective community project areas; (2) to demonstrate the relevancy of an intimate understanding of village life and organization for the work of the evaluation officers as well as for the multi-purpose village workers; (3) to obtain significant baseline data in a village within a community project area prior to the start of the action programme, so that some measure of control can be had in the study of the impact of the community development programme upon the culture and economy of the village. In this paper we have singled out factions for special study because of their importance for an understanding of village social organization and their practical implications for community development programmes.

The study of factions takes us to the very heart of village life. It involves an understanding of some of the crucial factors which give Indian village social organization its distinctive character, namely, the importance of kinship, caste, and inter-village networks. It also involves an understanding of many of the social, ceremonial, economic and political aspects of life since these are organized primarily on a family basis which is in turn the basis of faction structure. The delineation,

analysis and charting of factions and their inter-relationships provide us with the key to the channels of communication and the power structure of the society, and reflect many of the values of the people. Moreover, since these factions operate across village lines, their study gives us an understanding not only of a single village but of an entire area or sub-area. In short, one cannot understand a north Indian village without understanding the structure and functions of factions.

The research methods used in this study were those of the current anthropological and sociological repertory and included participant-observers, interviews, the use of schedules and questionnaires, autobiographies, and case studies. The study of factions was begun after we had been working for over four months on a broad community study of the village and had accumulated a mass of data on various aspects of village life. Included in this data were the following: a house to house village census; a detailed study of agricultural economics, including a study of agricultural innovations over the past fifty years and the circumstances and individuals responsible for these innovations; a study of the village patwari records; a study of felt needs in housing, and health; a study of native concepts of illnesses and their cures; a study of inter-caste relations and the breakdown of the jajmani system; a comparison of the old caste *panchayat* and the new statutory *panchayat*; a study of the ceremonial cycle and the life cycle; and, finally, a brief study of the religious and ethical concepts of the villagers. In all of the above quantitative data was obtained wherever possible. In this connection each family in the village was rated on a socio-economic point scale which was devised to show the range in wealth, housing, literacy and education.

Our study of factions was aided and enriched by our preliminary study of the community as outlined above. The study of factions grew out of our attempts to identify the

village leaders. In questioning informants about leaders it became apparent that there were no village-wide leaders but only leaders of small groups known as "dhars" which we have called factions. Once we learned of the "dhars" pattern we began systematically to delineate the factions, their size, membership, kinship, *pana*, and tholla composition, history, functions, and cohesiveness. For this purpose much of the community data was reorganized on a faction basis and this gave us a much clearer picture of the nature and importance of factions in everyday village life.

Rampur is a Hindu Jat village\*, about fifteen miles west of Delhi on the Rohtak side. It is two miles off the main Delhi-Fazilka road with which it is connected by a cart track. The village can also be reached by the Delhi-Ferozpur railway line. Cheora and Nangloi, the two nearest railway stations, are at a distance of a few miles from the village.

The village is located in the dry Bhangar area west of Delhi and has a total area of 784 acres. Its population of 1095 is distributed in families representing twelve castes as follows: 78 Jat families; 15 Brahmins, 20 Chamars (leather workers), 10 Bhangis (sweepers), 7 Kumbhars (potters), 5 Jheemecs (water-carriers), 4 Dhobis (washermen), 4 Khatt (carpenters), 3 Nai (barbers), 2 Chcepi (tailors), 1 Lobar (blacksmith), and 1 Bania (merchant).

The Jats own all the lands of the village. The distribution of holdings is shown in Table I (page 425).

\* The Jats are an ancient ethnic group believed to be of Indo-Scythian origin. They came into northern India on one of the later Aryan waves at about the beginning of the Christian era. At present they number approximately six million and are distributed in the Punjab, western UP and northern Rajasthan. They enjoy the reputation of being some of the best agriculturists of India. In the Punjab most of the Sikhs are Jats. Historically the Jats are related to the Rajputs.

\* This name is fictitious.

† I am grateful to my research assistant Mr Harvant Singh Dhillon for his aid in field work and in the preparation of this paper.

We see that all Jats are land-owners. About 33 per cent of the families own less than four acres; 38 per cent own 4-10 acres, and 29 per cent own 11-52 acres. There is some concentration of land ownership since about 29 per cent of the families own 60 per cent of the land.

The data on land cultivation by Jats is given in Table II (page 425).

Twelve of the fat families rent out all of their land and no longer engage in agriculture. Four families cultivate less than one acre. If we consider ten acres as a minimum size of economic holding, we see that only 45 per cent of the fat families have economic holdings.

The Brahmins are occupancy tenants but only four of the five families are cultivators at present. One sells milk, another is a tailor and the rest are employed in jobs outside the village. None of the Brahmins carry on their priestly functions.

Though the Chamars are leather workers by caste, only two are now shoemakers and one of these also holds the job of village chowkidar. Three families are weavers, four rent land from the fats for vegetable gardening (hoe cultivation), four are

employed outside the village and the remainder earn a living in the village by combining part-time agricultural labour with cattle raising. The Bhangis carry on their traditional work as sweepers in the village. Only two are employed outside. Six of the Kumbhars work in the village as potters and one of these also rents two bighas of land from the Jats for vegetable gardening. One Kumbhar is employed in Delhi. All of the Jheeniers carry on vegetable gardening on a hoe basis. Two of the barbers are employed out of the village, one as a teacher the other as a driver, but both act as barbers in the village on Sundays. One of the three Dhobis is an agricultural labourer and his son is employed as a labourer outside the village. The other three families do washing in the village.

Land pressure in the village is great. The population has doubled in the last fifty years while the land resources have remained the same. Over 93 per cent of the land is under cultivation and there is serious shortage of timber resources and grazing lands. Only thirty-six trees are recorded in the patwari records for the village. About twenty per cent of the village lands are irrigated by canal and another five per cent by eleven Persian wells, seven of which have been built since 1940. The major crops are wheat, jowar, bajra, gram, and sugarcane.

Village Rampur is one of four villages which together constitute a chougama or traditional four village unit. This unit is in turn part of a twenty village unit known as a beesogama, which is an exogamous unit. Fifteen of the twenty villages are of Dabas *gotra* but all are now known as Dabas villages and accept Dabas leadership. These units are tied by kinship bonds and act together on some ceremonial occasions and for panchayat meetings.

The village is divided into two *panas*, Dhan Singh and Harditt, each with two thollas as follows:

Pana Dhan Singh  
Tholla Dhan Singh  
Tholla Teka

Pana Harditt  
Tholla Harditt  
Tholla Jaimel

Each pana has one tholla with a pana name and another tholla with a different name. The *panas* and thollas were named after popular men of Rampur by the British revenue officers in about 1860, in their attempt to enhance the leadership position of local leaders. Dhan Singh and Harditt, as well as Teka

and Jaimel, died about sixty years ago and are remembered by most villagers over thirty as popular leaders of their respective kinship groups,

The age of these sub-divisions varies considerably. About 200 years ago there were only two divisions in the village, probably two *panas*, constituted by the ancestors of the present-day Teka and Jaimel tholla residents who claim to be descended from the original settlers and trace their ancestry back for about 750 years to the time of Prithvi Raj\*. On the other hand, the families of Dhan Singh tholla can claim only about 150 years' residence in the village for they were invited in at that time by Teka members as *bhanjas* or cousins' sons. Harditt tholla too, claim old families in its genealogy, but these have died without living descendants. The present-day families of Harditt are also relative newcomers, cousin's sons who were invited into Rampur about 100 years ago by some Jaimel families.

The *panas* are of approximately equal strength, Dhan Singh having 40 families and Harditt 38. Moreover, each pana has an equal amount of land, pays the same revenue, and is represented by a separate Jambardar or headman. The tholla strength varies considerably as follows: Dhan Singh 28 families, Jaimel 22, Harditt 16 and Teka 12. Teka, the smallest tholla and one of the oldest is the most cohesive, while Dhan Singh, the largest and most recent, is the most disunited.

It must be noted that the pana and tholla divisions, used for revenue purposes, apply only to the Jats and to the Brahmins who are their occupancy tenants. This means that the official social organization of the village, as recorded in the village patwari records, is in terms of a single caste, the Jats, which clearly dominates the economic and political life of the village. The other castes are not members of any pana or tholla. They live on village *shamilat* land, ie, land owned collectively by the Jats.

The distribution of village house sites by *panas* and thollas is shown in the map on the next page.

It can be seen that the houses of tholla Harditt and Jaimel, which together constitute pana Harditt,

\* This tradition is also mentioned in the *Report on the Revised Land Revenue Settlement of the Rohtak District of the Hissar Division*. W E Purser and H C Fanshawe, Lahore, 1880, p 25.

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cluster together in a single area, whereas the houses of pana Dhan Singh are more scattered and are divided by Harditt tholla. This particular pattern is quite recent. Fifty years ago each of the two panas constituted two distinct and cohesive geographical units of the village. To this day villagers will speak in terms of "our half" of the village rather than in terms of the pana names. While clear-cut pana division of house sites has suffered, the agricultural lands of each pana still form separate units and it is this which helps to perpetuate pana distinctions among the villagers.

Despite the proximity of village Rampur to Delhi city and the many urban influences to which it has been subject, such as Arya Samaj, the Congress and other political movements, and increased opportunities for education and jobs, we find that local village life and institutions have remained remarkably stable. This is particularly true of the agricultural economy. The Jats still love the land; in the past fifty years there have only been two families who have sold their land and left the village. The caste system still remains strong and dominates

the thinking of the villagers, despite the many reformist movements and the coming of Independence. The weakening of the jajmani system has

upset the old equilibrium of caste relations somewhat and has increased inter-caste tensions, particularly in the case of the Chamars.

**Table I Distribution of Land Ownership among Jat Families, Village Rampur, 1953**

Area owned in acres	Number of families	Per cent of families	Per cent of families	Per cent of land owned
Less than 1 acre	3	3.79	50.63	21.07
1-3	23	29.11		
4-6	14	17.72		
7-10	16	20.25	20.25	19.02
11-16	16	20.25		
20-30	6	7.59	29.11	59.9
52	1	1.26		

**Table II Analysis of Land Cultivation by Jat Families, Village Rampur, 1953**

Area under cultivation in acres	Number of families	Per cent of families	Per cent of families
0	12	15.38	15.38
Less than 1 acre	4	5.12	14.09
1-3	7	8.97	
5-9	20	25.64	25.64
10-12	13	16.66	
13-18	15	19.23	38.45
19-20	2	2.56	
21-22	2	2.56	6.4
25-38	3	3.84	

