The author, a Research Fellow of the Australian National University, Canberra, recently spent a year in the village about which he writes. He has previously done field-work in Kerala, and among the Indians in Fiji. He is the author of Land and Society in Malabar, Oxford University Press, 1952. This article is yet another in the series of Village Studies appearing in this Journal.

NO study of an Indian village can omit a discussion of changes taking place there. Some of these are not the result of any conscious policy for the village, but are the concomitants of population growth, natural calamities or general economic and cultural trends. Others stem from recent Government policies of reorganisation or development. The former can be called informal changes, made sometimes by the decisions of the villagers themselves, and sometimes by circumstances over which they have little control. The latter are sanctioned changes, since they are usually in the form of laws or directives which must be obeyed. In general, more attention is paid by townsfolk to sanctioned changes, since these are more easily known, being discussed and initiated by Government. But the influence of informal changes on these policies is also important, as I shall try to show. Both kinds of change can be seen in a Malwa village some 30 miles from Indore, and in describing them, this article will add material to what has already been published on the subject in this journal.

Informal Change

In our village the main informal change has been a transformation of the caste population. There are now 25 castes in a Hindu population of 806. These are, in order of size: Khati (181), Rajput (118), Balai (85), Charnar (69), Bhilala (64). Gosain (45), Tell (29), Brahmin (28), Ahir (26), Sutar (25), Nath (14), Nai (14), Kumawat (14), Mali (13), Gari (10), Darzi (9), Kumhar (9), Balai Babaji (9), Lohar (8), Doli (8), Bhangi (8), Min (8), Beragi (5), Bargunda (5) and Barbujya (2). In addition there are 102 Pinjarra and 4 Fakir Muslims.

It was not always like this, however. Sixty years ago there were only 5 Khati houses in the village, with hardly more than a dozen people. At that time the two main castes were Rajputs and Balais. The turning point was the famine of 1899-1900, the baseline for most village memories. Both Rajputs and Balais were decimated by this catastrophe and some castes, like the Bhambi and the Nayak, were either completely wiped out, or fled the village in search of food and never returned.

Because the fields were empty and unfilled, the landlord (jagirdar), wishing to maintain his land revenue, started to invite outsiders to settle, giving them bullocks and other inducements. Most prominent among those who came were Khatis, brought by the few already in the village. In the next 40 years 14 Khati men with their families settled in the village. By contrast, only 4 Rajputs came, and more Rajputs than Khatis left the village in the years which followed. The Khatis are now firmly established 44 of the 53 adult males are village born (compared with 30 of the 34 Rajputs). Immigration has more or less stopped, only 1 family coming in the last 15 years, for there is no longer any vacant land. But Khatis have increased naturally at a more rapid rate than the Rajputs, and so the numerical gap between the two castes has been further widened. (Khatis and Rajputs form one third of the village population, and are the most influential of the large castes in the village. Thus we shall, for simplicity’s sake, consider only their positions in the village, though there are also changes in the population of other smaller castes).

The 13 Khati males who are not bachelors and who have had their wives living with them for more than a year or two have each produced an average of 2.28 children alive at the time of enumeration (of whom 1.1 are male) The 27 corresponding Rajputs have had 2.18 such children, including .1 male. From another angle, the 29 Khatis of over 30 years have produced an average of 2.73 such children each, .38 being male; the figures for the corresponding 23 Rajputs are 2.22 and .89 respectively. The data for childhood mortality (up to 6 years or so) again show a castewise difference. Such figures can only be treated tentatively for some people may not mention all the deaths but the difference appears too great to be entirely explained by such discrepancies. Khatis reported 1.28 dead children each, Rajputs 2.70. For men over 30, again, the figures are 2.01 and 2.90 respectively.

It is true that tests show no statistical significance in these figures of castewise differences, possibly because of the small numbers involved. But the fact remains that these differences exist, whether as a historically unique fact, or as a general trend of difference between these castes; and the villagers undoubtedly see them as trends when they seek an explanation by saying that the Rajput blood is now ‘weak’. Some lay it to the consumption of meat and liquor by Rajputs, whereas the Khatis are vegetarians and said to eat more green vegetables. Others say that the Rajputs are expiating some previous sin. The acceptance of this trend reflects the general weakening of the Rajput position in the village, which we note below, and it makes the figures socially, if not statistically, important.

Same Trend

Moreover, say the villagers, in two nearby villages the same trend is seen. In one, some newly-arrived Khatis are said to have been increasing more rapidly than the original majority group of Ahirs—this is now marked by the transfer of one of the two Ahir headmen’s powers to a Khati. In another village, it is said, there has been no history of immigration or emigration. Both dominant castes, the Dhakars and the Rajputs have been in the village for many generations. But now there are 45 houses of Rajputs and only 7 of Dhakars. The latter caste, again, is said to have ‘grown weak’. Dhakars died in the 1900 famine, they died in the 1919 influenza epidemic, they died in an outbreak of cholera some 10 years ago. Differential survival and mortality rates appear to be more than exceptional factors in village change, combining with famines and epidemics to change radically a village’s caste composition and so form a basis for other informal changes, as well as for influencing sanctioned change.

Sanctioned Change

The main sanctioned changes have
taken place in the field of village authority. Historically, Rajputs have been the village's dominant caste since their immigration some 500 years ago owing to their possession of the village headman ship (pateli). The patel had considerable authority in previous times. He was the collector of the land revenue, which he remitted to the jagirdar or the Maharajah. He was responsible for the peace of the village, having under his influence an individual village; unless he had kinsmen in other nearby panchayats. But the village panchayat is still responsible for all public and development work in the village building of roads and public wells, clearing and lighting of streets, for example and has the power to levy labour for 5 days each year to carry out these projects. Administration of this growing development programme, and the considerable sums involved, gives quite a lot of power to the panchayat members.

The patels retain the duties of collecting rent, reporting disturbances, and of entertaining visiting revenue and police officials—the two most frequent categories of outside visitors, after the development officials. This, it is true, still represents considerable power. But it is only the transition stage between the old hereditary order and the new democracy. The rent-free family lands of patels and village servants are to be abolished, payment for service being in cash. And it is said that plans are afoot to abolish all but one patelship, and have this patel elected, first from among the present Rajput patels, and later from amongst all castes in the village. The personal contact of the patel with the Government has stopped. Since the State was merged, along with 24 other Princely States, in the Indian Union State of Madhya Bharat in 1948, the patel's direct fealty to the Maharajah stopped. No longer does he make sacrifice to the flag, and the prestige and influence he gained from direct contact with the ruler has gone. The centre of Government is now hundreds of miles away in Gwalior, or in Indore, wielded by unknown men from whom no favours can be sought on a traditional and personalised basis of service and loyalty.

The general Rajput position in the village has been considerably changed by this Government policy on village administration. For the authority of the patels overlapped to their caste as a whole, especially as the majority were their close relatives. There are two main group of Rajputs in the village—one Chauhan, the other Solanki. In each there are two main lineages stemming, it is said, from brothers who first came to the village and who split into separate households. A present 21 of the 34 Rajputs belong to these lineages, and a further 5 an linked through marriage. Each of the lineages had a patelship; recently, however, one of the Solanki patelships fell vacant, being without a direct heir, and the other agnate were not allowed to take it up—so three patels remain. The lessening of their powers has meant a diminution of the caste's influence as a whole.

Further, the non-official position of the patels and their kin is changing, in part, in part, to the growing Khati population. Patels had important ritual duties in the village. On the ninth day of the Dassera festival, for example, the sacrificed goats at the shrines of the goddess. That evening they went to each of the village shrines and worshipped, sending materials for rituals at shrines of the tutelary deities of all lineages in the village. By doing this they assured divine protection for the coming year. At other major festivals, too, the patels were the initiators and general guardians of the rites. Thus, on the day after Diwali, when a calf-skin is tied to a pole, and cows are teased and fought with it, the patels went early in the morning to the Chamar's quarters, saw that the skin was ready and made fast to a stout stick, and then gave a token payment to the Chamar on behalf of the village.

In addition, the patels and their kinsmen had a secular influence on people. Being among the largest landholders and some of the wealthiest men in the village, they were expected to give more in alms to the begging castes (Nath, Babaji etc.), and to pay more for the services of other castes (Na, Kumhar etc.) at such times as weddings and funerary feasts. Again, on journeying to other villages they had their carts driven by Balais, whereas members of other castes drove themselves. Thus, through their wealth and the authority of their traditional responsibilities, Rajputs held a position of eminence in the village.

This non-official influence continues, of course. Patels still perform the rituals mentioned above, and the Rajputs' status as major landholders still gives them the position which comes from a good
economic standing. Nevertheless, the shift in the village's caste composition has spelt some informal change. As we note below, Khatis do not take much part in public events. The proportion of the village which attends them, therefore, grows less as Khati numbers increase—and it is the Rajputs who are the major maintainers of such events.

This change can be seen in specific cultural factors. Take, for example, that of diet. In former times all major castes in the village ate meat —the Rajputs, Balais, Chamars, Bhilalas and the Pinjarras. Only Brahmans, Sutars, Lohars and a few others abstained. Now Khatis, too, eat meat, and with the other vegetarian groups they form about one-third of the village population. They disapprove of the sacrifice of goats at the Dassera festival, and few attend the proceedings. Again, there is a periodic worship of Sitala Mata, performed by the entire village. On previous occasions goats were sacrificed by the meat-eating castes; but at the most recent worship this was forbidden, over Rajput and other protests. The reasons were that it might be hard for vegetarians to worship at a shrine where blood sacrifices had taken place (though no difficulties had apparently occurred on previous occasions) and also that Government disapproved, and that blood sacrifice was not in the spirit of the times. This was an informal change, not brought about by any specific policy. It was the result of the growth of the vegetarian population in the village, and a corollary of the wider cultural change-over from the ways of the martial Maharajah and his nobles (Mahattas and Rajputs) to the Gandhian precepts of the present era. In both cases the Rajput values have become less widely held in the village and their lead less followed.

Position of Khati
What of the Khati position? Khatis, of course, have held no official powers and responsibilities like the panchayat. They have simply formed a growing group of peasant farmers, a few of whom have become quite wealthy, but in the main have stayed fairly small owners due to inheritance by large families. They have had no traditional responsibility in village affairs, not being either village craftsmen or servants.

And it seems that, in general, too, Khatis are more caste-and family-conscious than village-conscious, fewer than of other castes attending affairs which demand a general village participation. Thus, in the playing of gulll-danda at the Santsantar festival only 5 Khati came, as against 8 Rajputs and 6 Balais; and the Khatis were young boys, whereas there were senior Rajputs present. Again, in the worship of Ram Devji Maharaj at two shrines in the village, 12 Rajputs were seen to make offerings and only 2 Khatis—many Khattas maintaining that they observed the day of fast, but made worship in their own homes, not in public. Mention has already been made of the Rajput responsibilities at Dassera, and the Khati attitude towards the sacrifices. In general, too, more Rajputs are found to come and listen at the visit of any outsider, the Khati saying that they have no time to leave their work, unlike their more easy-going fellow Inhabitants.

The obverse of this is that Khatis tend to emphasise more closely the caste and kin-group in their activities. Different branches of Rajputs worship their lineage goddess on different days of the Dassera festival; but all Khatis worship on the same day. Again, there is a custom of making brothers and sisters of those who together "hear Ram's name" from a guru, and these can be of different castes. Of 148 men and women hearing Ram's name together where Khatis figured, 67 were Khatis and 81 from 17 other castes. Of the 156 in which Rajputs were included, only 50 were Rajputs and 106 were from 21 other castes. Since a negligible number were outsiders, the figures indicate a greater linkage of Rajputs with other castes in the village, and a rather more exclusive pattern for Khatis, promoted perhaps by their greater numbers which allow it.

Finally, Khatis are more exclusive than Rajputs in their eating. They will only eat food cooked in salt or water from a caste-mate or a Brahmin, and sit apart from others to do so. But Rajputs will eat such food from the hands of more than a dozen other castes—Brahmin, Nai, Kumbhar, Gosain, Kumawat and so forth. This means that Khatis do their own cooking at most large feasts, and eat separately, whereas Rajputs usually eat with other castes, and thereby participate more fully in the activities of other castes in the village.

These present characteristics of the Khatis in our village do not mean that they never take part in village affairs as a caste. In many places Khatis are patels and members of the panchayat. Neither can it be solely because of their recent arrival in the village. For the Khatis in a nearby village also came there at the time of the 1900 famine, and have since acquired one of the patelships; and in another village, Khatis have lived for generations but have the same lack of interest in village affairs. It is probably because of present divisions within the caste, and an apparent absence of men with the temperament and desire to lead in public life. The fact that many positions of importance in the village are now to be gained by elections would give Khatis considerable influence if they were to enter public affairs more fully. There are qualifying factors—whether Khatis would vote together as a caste, to what extent a Khati leader could obtain other votes—but numbers, not descent, will determine power in the village, and so opportunities will be thrown open to all castes, particularly the larger ones.

Conclusion
To sum up, then, informal changes in the caste composition of the village population (through immigration and a differential survival rate) and in the general values held (in such matters as participation in public rites and vegetarianism) have here combined with sanctioned changes (as regards the patelship and the general system of hereditary positions) to make for a lessened influence of the hitherto dominant caste of Rajputs; and it is possible that the influence of Khatis will grow. These two types of changes need not have interacted thus. If, for example, the change in the powers of the panchayat and the institution of the village panchayat had taken place in a village where the population of the panchayat's caste was growing, or even steady, the possibility of a change in authority through introduction of an elective system would not have the same weight as here described. The effects of the same specifically induced changes may therefore differ considerably from village to village, and cannot be described or predicted without knowledge of the history of the village, its caste composition and the attitudes of those castes—in brief, some knowledge of what informal changes may be taking place there. And it is the same with the impact of any general trend of change. There can be no easy way to knowledge of 'the Indian village'.