CHAPTER IV

ATTITUDES OF YOUTH TOWARDS RELIGION, SOCIAL STRATIFICATION AND LEADERSHIP STRUCTURE

The present chapter deals with three aspects of social life in the area under study. The first part deals with religious beliefs of youth; the second part relates to social stratification system with a focus on caste and occupational hierarchy, while the last part deals with the attitudes of youth towards leadership structure of the village communities.

Part I

Religion:

Supernatural beliefs are present in every known society. Religion deals with man's belief in the supernatural forces that influence human events. There is no society in which people do not believe in religion. Even in most of the materialistic societies, there is a hold of religion to some degree or the other. This hold was much more in evidence in the past than what it is today.

The functionalists (Durkheim, 1961; Malinowski 1954; Parsons 1965) argue that religion maintains social solidarity,
value consensus, harmony and integration between the parts of the society. However, they emphasize the positive contributions of religion to the society. From a Marxian perspective religion as a part of the superstructure of society, is shaped ultimately by the infrastructure. Thus, changes in the forces of production will be mirrored by changes in religious beliefs and practices. According to Marx, "Religion is the sign of the oppressed creature, the sentiment of a heartless world and the soul of soulless conditions. It is the opium of the people" (see Bottomore and Rubel, 1963). Max Weber (1958) rejects the view that religion is always shaped by economic factors. He maintains that under certain conditions the religious beliefs can be a major influence on economic behaviour and these religious beliefs can direct economic action.

"The institution of religion has been of crucial importance to the Indian society. It was believed that with the advancement in science and technology in India, the institution of religion will be affected adversely. But, due to the peculiar features of the Indian society, religion still retains much of its past significance even in the areas where science and technology have made rapid advancement" (Bhatnagar, 1972:113).

"Every religion has three major components, the philosophy, the rituals and the mythology embodying the peoples' beliefs and customary practices. There is a human
recognition of a superhuman power which controls the
conduct, the mental attitude, the thought and behaviour
patterns of individuals and groups in the society or the
community. There is especially a recognition of a personal
god entitled to obedience by the people. There is an
element of awe, fear and uncertainty which instils in the
minds of the people, a reverence for and faith in the
supernatural powers. Prayer or performance of sacred rites
are different forms of worshipping gods or the supernatural
beings or objects. Apart from the manifestations of reli-
gion in the form of ritualistic rites and mythological demon-
strations, faith in super human beings or objects is the core
element of any religion. Religion shapes the life of an
individual to a large extent. The attitudes, norms and values
acquired by man in his early years have far-reaching conse-
quences and the role-structure of individuals and groups in
the community or society is conditioned largely by the

The area under study draws its population from
Hindu religious group of people and the religion appears to
be the core factor influencing their way of life. It has
been observed that people in the village communities are more
religious. The religious festivals and fairs are celebrated
with great pomp and show, round the year. The old folks have
reverence and respect for the various deities and they perform
the religious rites with devotion, the younger set especially
the educated lot appears to be enjoying the recreational aspect of these more than the religious ones. The religious rites, customary practices and traditional values and norms associated with the religious doctrines have been observed to have acted to the detriment of the progress and development of the developing nations. The rational and scientific outlook which appears to be one of the prerequisites of modernization appears then in antithesis to the religious ethics, dogmas and beliefs. The religious beliefs in certain communities are so strictly followed that despite modernizing efforts, there is dampening effect on the secularization of religious belief. As a consequence of modernizing efforts, secularization of religious values, rational and scientific outlook due to educational inputs, there may appear on the behaviour pattern level, a harmonious existence of various religious groups (Mehta, 1981:96-97).

1. Attitudes of Youth Towards Gods and Goddesses/Isht Devis and Devatas:

For the purpose of probing into their religious beliefs, the respondents of the present study were asked to mention the names of various gods and goddesses/isht devis and devatas which were worshipped in their community and whether they worshipped all, one or some or none of them. Almost all of the respondents mentioned the names of some of
the important gods and goddesses as: Shanker Bhagwan (Shiva), Lord Rama, Lord Krishna, Ganesh, Lord Vishnu, Mahadev, Hanuman, Laxmi, Durga Mata, Sita, Parvatee, Kali Mata, and Saraswati. Some of the important deities locally called as 'Devis' and 'Devatas' mentioned by them are: Bijat Maharaj, Shirgul, Tahari, Gaurali, Dundi Devi, Vinak Devata, Guga Pir, Narsingha, Lakar Bir, and Kulana. These local deities are briefly described as follows:

1. 'Bijat Maharaj' is a famous devata of the people. The origin of this devata remains in obscurity. But there are various stories and legends which give us clues regarding his origin. He is considered as younger brother of Shirgul of Churdhar. The Mohra (mask) of Bijat Maharaj is in the sanctum of seven storeyed temple at Sarain. People from far and wide come to pay their obeisance to this devata. When the people are in some difficulties, they ask the 'Gur' or 'Utarua' of Bijat Maharaj the cause of their sufferings, and the 'Utarua' who speaks on behalf of Bijat Maharaj tells them the cause of their sufferings and also suggests required remedies. This Devata is also invited by the people to their homes. The devata is represented in the form of a 'stick' made of Gold called as 'Chharfi', which is carried by a Brahmin on his shoulder, who is generally a Pujari (Priest) of this Devata. Bajantris (musicians) accompany the devata to the home of the invitee. The 'Palkies' (Palanquins) of this devata are very famous.
3. Gathering of Devotees at the Temple of 'Bijat Maharaj' at Sarain

4. The Famous Temple of 'Shirgul' at Churdhar
2. 'Shirgul' seems to be an Apabhramsha of lord Shiva. The temple of this devata is situated at Churdhar, the highest peak of the region (3,647 mtrs above sea level). He is represented in the form of a 'Shivlinga', which is enshrined in the sanctum of the temple. A large number of people from far off places go to Churdhar especially in the months of Sawan and Bhadon (July-August) and stay at the temple complex for one night. They perform various rituals and remain awake throughout the night. Next morning they make their offerings to the deity and seek the blessings of Shirgul. Shirgul is also a very famous devata and people have firm faith in him. The temple remains closed from December to March due to heavy snowfall.

3. 'Tahari' is regarded a powerful goddess or devi of higher caste people especially of Rajputs. Tahari is a village goddess whose shrines are found in many villages. The lower caste people whose area falls under the jurisdiction of Tahari also worship this Devi and have faith in this goddess.

4. 'Gaurali' is a local devi or goddess and is considered as the younger sister of Bijat Maharaj. She is a common goddess of people of all castes. She is considered as a goddess who decides various disputes concerning land and property and other sufferings.
5. A Pageant of Glittering Palanquins (Palkis) of 'Devis' and 'Devatas'

6. Temple of 'Thari' at village Thundna
5. 'Dundl Devi' is also a common goddess of people of all castes. Its temple is situated at village Dhabas.

6. 'Vinak Devata' is a local devata and is considered the protector of the village and its people. The small shrine of this devata is seen in almost in every village. The Vinak name itself appears the local variation of the name 'Vinaik' (Ganesh) who is considered as the remover of all difficulties.

7. 'Narsingha' is probably the god Narasimha of the Brahmanical faith. What is surprising is that it is worshipped mostly by the people of lower caste but the higher caste people also do not disregard this deity.

8. 'Guga Pir' is chiefly the devata of lower caste people but high caste people also worship this deity. People of lower castes can enter the temple of Guga Pir. Even Puja (worship) rituals in its temple are performed by the lower caste people.

9. 'Lakara Bir' is also a local deity. This devata is also considered as the guardian of the village and its people. People sometimes offer sacrifices of goats and rams to appease this deity.

10. 'Kulana' is a Kul Devata. People offer milk, butter and ghee to this devata.
It has also been found that the cent-per-cent respondents in the whole sample, worship some or all these deities and are of the views that they have a firm faith in them. Every village has been observed to have a village deity and a temple of which exists in the centre of the village. It was interesting to note during the course of data collection that some families seem to be worshipping 'PAP'. The pattern of religious worship shows that people are religious in content and thought. They have deep faith in some god or goddess/Isht Devi or Devata. There is hardly any person who does not seem to worship any deity. This shows that religion plays an important role in the socio-cultural life of the people in the village communities.

iii. Attitudes of Youth Towards Worshipping of any God or Goddess/Isht Devi or Devata in the Event of Illness in the Family:

In the transitional societies moving from traditional to modern social order, there has been great emphasis laid on rationalization and on scientific outlook. In the context of the area under study, one important measure to study the religious attitude has been whether people worship any god or goddess or any Isht Devi or Devata in the event of illness in

*PAP*: A person who is killed treacherously or who dies an unnatural death by way of deceit etc. is later on converted into a family or village spirit, and this spirit (PAP) is worshipped by the people of that family or village. Mohra (mask) of the 'PAP' is placed at the space provided in the house.
the family or not. The respondents of the present study were asked to mention whether they believed in worshipping any God or Goddess or any Isht Devi or Devata in the event of illness in the family (Table 4.1).

Table 4.1: Worshipping of God or Goddess/Isht Devi or Devata in the Event of the Illness According to Educational Level of Respondents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SNo.</th>
<th>Educational Level of the Respondents</th>
<th>Worshipping of any Deity in the Event of Illness</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Believe</td>
<td>Do not believe</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>in wor-</td>
<td>in wor-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>shipping</td>
<td>shipping</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>deity</td>
<td>deity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>Educated</td>
<td>102 (61.08)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>Uneducated</td>
<td>88 (72.73)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>190 (65.97)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: 1. Figures within brackets represent percentages

2. $X^2 = 4.24, df = 1, P < .05$

A glance at the above table shows that on the whole, the majority of the respondents irrespective of their educational level (65.97 per cent) have stated that they do believe in worshipping some God or Goddess/Isht Devi or Devata in the event of illness in the family.
It is revealed from the table 4.1 that 61.08 per cent educated youth as compared to 72.73 per cent uneducated youth do believe in worshipping some god or goddess/Isht devi or devata in the event of illness in the family, whereas on the other hand 38.92 per cent educated youth as compared to 27.27 per cent uneducated youth do not believe in it. The chi-square test shows that there is an association between the educational level of the respondents and their attitudes towards worshipping of any god or goddess/Isht devi or devata in the event of illness in the family.

Although health and medical facilities are adequately provided in the area, still belief in one's deity or god or goddess/Isht devi or devata has been observed to be strong especially among the older people and womenfolk in the village communities. The reasons mentioned by those respondents who believe in worshipping god or goddess/Isht devi or devata in the event of illness in the family is that these deities have the divine power (or 'kala' as it is called in local dialect) in them by which they save us from illness and other mishappenings and give us relief. Some of them also state that it is an old practice and is custom of the area. Those respondents who do not favour worshipping these deities, mention that it is useless to worship all these deities. These have now become the things of the past and now such beliefs are out of vogue. These are just practised due to old and superstitious beliefs of our ancestors. They further
state that modern drugs and medicines can give better and early relief from such illnesses.

Further, an attempt has been made to analyse the attitudes of youth towards worshipping of God or Goddess/Isht Devi or Devata in the event of illness with their modernity score level (Table 4.2). It is assumed that youth with a high modernity score level as compared to those with a low modernity score level, may tend to give less importance in worshipping these deities in the event of illness in the family.

Table 4.2: Worshipping of God or Goddess/Isht Devi or Devata in the Event of Illness According to Modernity Score Level of Respondents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SNo.</th>
<th>Modernity Score Level of the Respondents</th>
<th>Worshipping of any Deity in the Event of Illness</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Believe in worshipping Deity</td>
<td>Do not Believe in Worshiping Deity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. High</td>
<td>68 (54.84)</td>
<td>56 (45.16)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Low</td>
<td>122 (74.39)</td>
<td>42 (25.61)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>190 (65.97)</td>
<td>98 (34.03)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: 1. Figures within brackets represent percentages
2. $X^2 = 12.03; df = 1; P < .05$
It is revealed from table 4.2 that the majority of respondents with a low modernity score level (74.39 per cent) as compared to those with a high modernity score level (54.84 per cent) do believe in worshipping gods or goddesses/Isht devis or devatas in the event of illness in the family. The chi-square test shows a significant association between the modernity score level of the respondents and their beliefs in worshipping gods or goddesses/Isht devis or devatas in the event of illness in the family. This finding apparently supports our hypothesis that youth with a high modernity score level as compared to those with a low modernity score level tend to give less importance to worshipping these deities in the event of illness in the family.

Thus, on the whole, it is found that the educated youth as compared to the uneducated youth and youth with a high modernity score level as compared to those with a low modernity score level have given less importance to worshipping these deities in the event of illness in the family.

People in the hills are highly religious, God fearing, superstitious and conservative in their outlook. They seek consent and advice of the local deities in taking any important decision. If the deity refuses permission, the task intended is abandoned. If somebody falls ill in the family, first preference is given to a priest and not to a doctor for the required treatment.
iii. **Attending the Religious Institutions**

Another important aspect revealed in the present study has been whether the youth attend their religious institutions regularly, sometimes or never. It is observed that on the whole the majority of the respondents (95.83 per cent) attend their religious institutions sometimes, while only a few respondents (4.17 per cent) state that they attend the religious institutions regularly. But there is hardly any respondent in the sample who does not seem to attend the religious institutions. This shows that the respondents in the area under study are not regular visitors to the religious institutions. This is also the case with regard to other people. But on certain auspicious days, they do go to the temples and make their offerings and prayers to their respective deity.

The materialistic outlook of the youth based on their heavy consumption behaviour pattern is in dialectical situation to the religious values and beliefs held by them. This explains the paradoxical situation wherein the transitional stage of modernization, both traditional and modern values are observed to be co-existing.

iv. **Attitudes of Youth Towards Evil-Spirits/Magical Practices/Sorcery/Faith Healing**

It is generally believed that education helps in
the formulation of secular* attitudes. The educated people are usually regarded as more rational and as such they are thought to be less prejudiced and superstitious. For the purpose of probing into their beliefs in evil spirits/magical practices/sorcery/faith healing, the respondents were asked to mention whether they believed in them or not. It is assumed that the educated youth as compared to the uneducated youth may tend to give less importance to these aspects of social life. Table 4.3 shows the distribution of respondents by their beliefs in evil-spirits/magical practices/sorcery/faith healing.

Table 4.3: Beliefs in Evil-Spirits/Magical Practices/Sorcery/FAith Healing According to Educational Level of Respondents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SNo.</th>
<th>Educational Level of the Respondents</th>
<th>Beliefs in Evil Spirits/Magical Practices/Sorcery/FAith Healing</th>
<th>Believe</th>
<th>Do not Believe</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>Educated</td>
<td></td>
<td>52</td>
<td>115</td>
<td>167</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(31.14)</td>
<td>(68.86)</td>
<td>(100.00)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>Uneducated</td>
<td></td>
<td>53</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>121</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(43.80)</td>
<td>(56.20)</td>
<td>(100.00)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Total</td>
<td></td>
<td>105</td>
<td>183</td>
<td>288</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(36.46)</td>
<td>(63.54)</td>
<td>(100.00)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: 1. Figures within brackets represent percentages
2. $X^2 = 4.86; \ df = 1; \ P < .05$

*There are three distinguishable usages of secularity in the existing literatures: (1) segregation between Church and State; (2) tolerance and equal regard for all religions; and (3) withdrawal of the authority of religion from other institutional spheres of social life. Hence, the term 'secular' is used in the third sense.
Table 4.3 indicates that a greater number of the educated youth (68.86 per cent) as compared to the uneducated youth (56.20 per cent) do not believe in evil-spirits/magical practices/sorcery/faith healing. It is also revealed from the table that on the whole, the majority of the respondents (63.54 per cent) do not believe in these aspects of social life. The youth in the area under study report that they do not believe and do not submit themselves to these practices. They report that these practices are prevalent in the area but one should keep away from them.

The chi-square test shows that the educated and the uneducated youth differ significantly with respect to their attitudes towards evil spirits/magical practices/sorcery/faith healing. This shows that the educated youth as compared to the uneducated youth give less importance to these aspects of social life, a finding that apparently supports our hypothesis.

Further, an attempt has been made to relate the attitudes of the youth towards evil-spirits/magical practices/sorcery/faith healing with their modernity score level. It is assumed that youth with a high modernity score level as compared to those with a low modernity score level may tend to give less importance to these aspects of social life.
Table 4.4: Beliefs in Evil-Spirits/Magical Practices/Sorcery/Faith Healing According to Modernity Score Level of Respondents

| SNo. | Modernity Score Level of the Respondents | Beliefs in Evil-Spirits/Magical Practices/Sorcery/Faith Healing | | |
|------|----------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------|---|
|      |                                       | Believe | Do Not Believe | Total | |
| 1.   | High                                   | 41      | 83             | 124   | (33.06) | (66.94) | (100.00) |
| 2.   | Low                                    | 64      | 100            | 164   | (39.02) | (60.98) | (100.00) |
|      | Total                                  | 105     | 183            | 288   | (36.46) | (63.54) | (100.00) |

Notes: 1. Figures within brackets represent percentages
2. $X^2 = 1.08; df = 1; P > .05$

A cursory look at the above table shows that 66.94 per cent respondents with a high modernity score level as compared to 60.98 per cent respondents with a low modernity score level do not believe in evil-spirits/magical practices/sorcery/faith healing. The chi-square test does not show any association between the modernity score level of the respondents and their beliefs in these aspects of social life. This shows that youth irrespective of their modernity score level tend to give the same importance to these aspects of social life, a result apparently contrary to our hypothesis. This shows that modernity score level does not have an adequate influence on the attitudes of the youth so far as
evil spirits/magical practices/sorcery/faith healing are concerned. The paradox of traditional faith healing co-existing with modern medicines and drugs is observed even in the modern developed societies (Dubos, 1969).

v. Participation of Youth in Religious Festivals and Fairs:

Fairs and festivals associated with various religious beliefs and deities are manifestations of demonstrating the sacredness of rituals, mythological tales and the underlying philosophy of each religious faith. These represent a strange combination of faith and recreation. The youth may consider certain aspects of religion more so from recreational point of view. Apart from religious sanctity of festivals and fairs, in the areas under study, the recreational ethos is very well pronounced. In order to get an idea regarding the ritualistic aspect of religion, the respondents were asked to mention the names of various religious festivals and fairs which were observed in their community. The important religious festivals and fairs which are mentioned by the respondents are 'Baisakhi', 'Bishu', 'Janam Ashtami', 'Diali or Charyoli', 'Gugaleau', 'Jagra', 'Bakreid', 'Shivratri', and 'Shant or Shand'. The brief description of these festivals and fairs is as follows:

1. Baisakhi:

On this auspicious day, people from far and wide assemble at the temple of Bijat Maharaj at Sarain to pay
their offerings to the deity. The day is considered as the beginning of the Bishu fairs season. It is also the end of winter and beginning of the summer season. It is generally held on first day of Baisakh (13th April).

2. **Bishu**

It is a fair in which local people participate and pay their obeisance to a local deity. The Bishu fair is celebrated under the flag of some village deity. The most important attraction of Bishu fair is a archery play which is locally called as 'Thothe-Ka-Khel' and is played between the two parties. Parties of archers come from various places. Bishu fair is held at village Sarain for two days in the second week of April every year under the flag of Bijat Maharaj in the courtyard of the temple. People dance and sing with beating of drums and tune of musical instruments. They also feast their relatives and friends. Another Bishu fair is held at village Dhabhas every third year in the courtyard of the temple of Dundi Devi in the month of mid April.

3. **Janam Ashtami**

It is a celebration of lord Krishna's birth. On this day, people keep fast. The main dish prepared on this day is 'Kheer and Patanda'. People worship lord Krishna in the midnight.
7. People Dancing and Singing at the Temple of Dundi Devi at Dhabas on the Occasion of 'Bishu' Fair

8. Display of Archery (Thote Ka Khel) : Main Attraction at the Bishu Fair
4. Charvili:

It is also called by another name as Diali. The fair is held in village Sarain in the month of August in honour of the village Deity. On the fair day people gather in the courtyard of the temple at night, some of them especially youth with burning 'Mashals' in their hands and sing folk songs and dance. As a matter of fact, it is a fair of fire known in the local terminology as 'Chiras'. The aim of celebrating the fair with burning 'mashals' is to pray for the protection of the standing crops from the pests. 'Natti' dances and folk songs are the main attraction of the fair.

5. Gugaleu:

It is an festival which is celebrated under the flag of Guga Pir. It is held in the month of August. The main attraction of this festival is the trembling of 'Gur' who speaks on behalf of the Guga Pir and Narsingha. He holds the hot iron chains in his hands and hit in his body. Other attractions are like putting burning coal pieces in his mouth or sometimes hot iron rod on his tongue. What is surprising is that no injury is inflicted on his body. People dance and sing folk songs.

6. Jagra:

This is a rite offered to any village deity. Either Devata is invited to one's house or it is performed at his
temple on a day already fixed when all the people of the neighbourhood also attend.

7. Bakreid:

This is celebrated during the first week of January when the temperature in the area remains very low due to snowfall. In this festival, he-goats and rams in case of higher caste people, and sheep and pigs in case of lower caste people are slaughtered. All kith and kin are invited by the hosts and eat meat, drink wine and dance for about 3 days.

8. Shivratri:

This festival is an important religious festival celebrated in the month of Phagun (February). The festival is celebrated individually. On that day, some persons in the family keep fast and do not take anything. The whole day is spent in preparing food in oil or vegetable ghee. During the night people in their homes worship lord Shiva.

9. Shant or Shand:

Literally means peace and prosperity. This festival is generally held every twelfth year in certain villages. Many sacrifices are made in the name of the village deity especially in case of Devi Tahari as a mark of respect. The images of the deities especially that of Bijat Maharaj and
Gaurali is brought out of the temples and made to dance up and down seated in the Palanquins. The deity in whose name the festival is being celebrated invites the neighbouring households, Devis and Devatas. The festival is cultural and recreational and ‘Natti’ dances and folk songs are performed. The people of all castes and creed participate in it.

It is observed that the festivals which have an all India appeal such as Diwali, Dussehra, Holi, Lohri, Rakhi, Basant Panchami etc. are not celebrated with great pomp and show in the village communities. People are more inclined towards giving importance to local fairs and festivals which are very important in their social life.

With a view to finding out the extent of participation in these festivals and fairs, the respondents were asked to mention whether they took part in these festivals and fairs of the village/area or not. It is observed that cent-per-cent respondents in the entire sample do take active part in these festivals and local fairs of the area. All these religious festivals and fairs celebrated in the village communities are traditional. These festivals and fairs are an important part of the cultural life of the people of the area. These festivals have an educational, social as well as a religious character. These serve the need of social cooperation, not only for economic sustenance but also for cultural survival itself.
The above description shows that education and modernity score level have not significantly affected the religious behaviour of youth in the village communities. The effect on the ritualistic aspect of religion is almost negligible. However, regarding religious faith, it is revealed that the educated youth and the youth with a high modernity score level show a tendency towards secularization of thoughts. It has been observed that a substantial number of educated youth and the youth with a high modernity score level do not believe in worshipping of any deity in the event of illness in the family; do not believe in evil spirits/magical practices/sorcery/faith healing, and do not attend the religious institutions regularly. However, they do have deep faith in these deities and they participate in all religious festivals and fairs. This shows that the effect of education is more pronounced at the attitudinal level rather than at the normative structure. It can, however, be maintained that significant changes in social behaviour or at the normative level can be expected in the due course of time because the changes in attitudes are normally followed by changes in the social structure.