Chapter III
THE PRESENT STUDY

The present study incorporates an input of multidisciplinary understanding as it focuses on caste-class nexus and political power at the district level. Multi-layered political institutions and processes need to be studied historically and contextually to understand the present political situation. Rajasthan has a distinctive socio-cultural and political background in the Indian union vis-a-vis other states. The state of Rajputana (as it was earlier known) comprised of 19 Rajput, 2 Jat, and 1 Muslim princely states, and each state was constituted of several thikanas and jagirs. About 60% of the total land was under the jagirdar system, and the remaining 40% was kept as Khalsa lands.\(^1\) The Mughal rulers treated Rajput states of Rajasthan as Subah (province), and the British renamed it as Rajputana Agency.\(^2\) Both the British and the Mughals looked at Rajasthan as a socio-political formation keeping in view their respective interests as alien rulers of India. The British in particular by entering into treaties with Rajputana rulers, kept them out of the mainstream of the Raj. Though the British did so in their own narrow interests, it resulted into a distinct political space for the Rajput rulers in the states of Rajputana. Further such a political
strategy openly nurtured an archetypical polity, society and culture. The situation that developed in Rajputana could be compared with feudalism in medieval Europe. The nineteen princely states out of the twentytwo were identified with the Rajputs and the Rajput elites. Clan loyalties overshadowed caste and sub-caste considerations.

**Distinct Socio-Political Formation of Rajasthan**

The formation of a separate political and administrative identity in the princely states of Rajputana resulted into distinct local politics, methods of administering justice, land-tenure systems and caste relations. While four-fifth of India was under the direct rule of the Raj, the remaining one-fifth including the states of Rajputana was somewhat unconcerned directly with the Raj. The social formation, polity, and administration of this region need to be carefully studied particularly in terms of shaping of the political situation in the post-independence period. Tod characterized this situation in Rajputana as the rule of a feudal aristocracy.³

Besides the feudal formation, polity and administration, Rajputana was characterised by religious, linguistic, caste, and ethnic divergencies. Several reports prepared by the British provide information on Rajputana, but the most systematic account is available through James Tod's Annals
and Antiquities of Rajputana. The census of 1901 also provides a systematic storehouse of information about Rajasthan. Rajasthan is characterised as a cultural region and it is further divided into several sub-regions such as Marwar, Mewar, Hadoti, Torawati, Dhundhar, Shekhawati, etc. The present study is concerned with Shekhawati in general, and with power-politics particularly in Sikar district which forms the Shekhawati region along with Jhunjhunu district. Shekhawati was ruled by the Shekhawat Rajputs, a clan bifurcated from the Khacchawa rulers of Jaipur. More than 400 years ago, the Shekhawats declared themselves as autonomous rulers of the Shekhawati region.

Based on the 1901 census report the five major castes in the states of Rajputana were Jats, Brahmins, Chamars, Bhils, and Rajputs, numerically in descending order. The other castes are Bhats, Lohars, Jains, Banias, etc. Muslims also constituted a significant segment of Rajasthan's population.

Rajasthan has often witnessed political and cultural rivalry between Rajputs and Jats. Jats consisting of nearly 10 per cent of the state's total population, are numerically the most proponderant caste, but so far no Jat has become chief minister of the state. Unsuccessful attempts were made in the past by three prominent Jat leaders to become the chief minister of the state. These included Kumbha.
Arya, Nathu Ram Mirdha and Ram Niwas Mirdha, and the latter also contested for the leadership of the Congress legislature party and lost. The present chief minister B.S. Shekhawat who has occupied the high office for the third time, comes from Sikar district. Kumbha Ram Arya ones successfully contested the Sikar Lok Sabha election. The Mirdhas come from the neighbouring district of Nagaur. The Shekhawati region and its adjoining districts such as Nagaur, Churu and Jaipur in particular are known as a stronghold of Jat leadership. The rivalry between Rajputs and Jats is a traditional one as the former were the ruling clan and the latter were their tenants and cultivators. After Independence due to effective abolition of the jagirdari system obverse structural processes surfaced resulting into downward social mobility among the Rajputs and upward social mobility among the Jats. Such a changed situation gave a new shape and character to status rivalries and power-politics in the Shekhawati region.

As it has been stated earlier that the pre-independence feudal social formation, polity and administration were essentially extremely exploitative de-humanizing and clan-ish, excessive and oppressive power exercised by the princes, thikanedars and bhomias characterised the system. Though Rajputs as rulers were at the top of the power hierarchy and the administrative organisation, but in prin-
ciple they were inferior to Brahmins in terms of caste hierarchy and religious and cultural order. Such a situation created a conflicting system of relations indicating gaps between the ideal and the actual, and a conflict between the priestly order and the kingly model was quite frequent. A Brahmin who was at the top of the priestly order as a **prescriber** for all other communities including the Rajput ruler, was subordinated ruthlessly politically by the ruler in actual life situations. Brahminic prescriptions were not asked for to rule a jagir, though required in principle. In fact, there was no relationship in political matters in terms of the **prescriber** and the **prescribed**.

Further, such a situation also resulted into the weakening of the caste system, the actual caste system had several loose ends. At times a lower/untouchable caste functionary of a jagirdar could dictate terms to a Brahmin. How such an antithesis and a polarity were accommodated in the feudal polity and administration, and how they have been transformed after Independence still remain crucial points of investigation for a student of political science.

In some of the studies emphasis is more on the community as a basis of political power rather than the system of polity and rule. Such a hypothesis poses some very basic problems. Firstly, it implies two or more parallel
hierarchies, one in terms of birth-based caste hierarchy, and the other based on actual political and administrative power of the ruler(s). Secondly, if the first hierarchy has all the cultural legitimation as it had in the past, then the second hierarchy becomes secondary in significance. Thirdly, social ordering of the people would depend upon the power enjoyed by them under a prince or a jagirdar and as such a Bania could occupy the second place and a Brahmin could be below him. And finally, accepting community as a basis of power implied harmony between caste hierarchy and power hierarchy, and this was not the case in the princely states of Rajputana. Rajput rulers were more of a phenomenon rather than a community exercising power over the people. Non-Rajput landed interests and groups were also perceived by the people like the Rajputs and these included the grantees and the sub-grantees belonging to different castes and communities.

**Social Transformation in Rajasthan since Independence**

Social transformation in Rajasthan after independence has been so tremendous that even one could doubt whether feudalism at all existed there or not. There is a remarkable discontinuity and departure in the post-independent Rajasthan from its feudal past. Nothing like a remarkable continuity persists for a nearly thousand years of the society and polity, ecology and socio-cultural values of
Rajasthan as perceived by Iqbal Narain and P.C. Mathur. Princes have won and lost elections. The jagirdars and thikanedars have not only lost their status and power, but they have also degenerated into a pauperized lot. On the contrary, the peasant castes have not only moved up socially and economically, they have become electorally a force to reckon with in India's Parliament, State Legislature and Panchayati Raj institutions. Certainly there is a vibrant new complexion of society and polity in the post-independence period.

In the game of power-politics, barring some exceptions, no group or individual has consistently and unilinearly moved up. Ups and downs have been witnessed in a given segment depending upon emergence and combination of social forces at the local, regional, and national levels. Continuity of the tradition in the political arena after Independence could be witnessed in terms of the formation of the Swatantra Party in the early years which mainly comprised of the ex-princes and ex-jagirdars. Secondly, it could be seen in the emergence of the Jan Sangh (now known as the BJP in its new reincarnated form) in which the upper caste segments aligned as a force against the Congress Party. The Swatantra Party withered away long ago from India's political scene, and the Jan Sangh after several political convulsions and repulsions widened its social base as it is evident from the
political alignments and formation of the present government by B.S. Shekhawat. These two developments signalled a break on the continuity of the socio-political forces in the present situation.

The Universe of Study

Sikar district, which was earlier a part of the princely state of Jaipur, and has witnessed before and after Independence significant political situations, has been selected to study power-politics for our doctoral research. In the 1930's and the 1940's Sikar was considered a hot-bed of politics and a leading constituent of the Shekhawati federation. Several important leaders and activists belonged to this part of the Shekhawati region. Jamunalal Bajaj, Harlal Singh, Ladu Ram Joshi, Heeralal Shastri, Badri Narain Sodani in particular may be mentioned. After Independence several important political figures from outside the region have made Sikar an arena of their politics, Swami Karpatri, Rameshwar Tantia, R.R. Morarka, Kumbha Ram Arya, Balram Jakhar and Devi Lal who belonged to different political parties made inroads into the local electoral politics. The leaders of the pre-independence period participated in the Praja Mandal movement against the jagirdars and the thinkanedars. However, the post-independence leaders particularly from outside the district entered into the dis-
trict politics for their individual political gains.

Sikar is a multi-complexioned social formation comprising of various castes and communities. The main social groups are: Brahmmins, Rajputs, Mahajans, Jats, Gujars, Meenas, Ahirs, etc., and the functionary castes such as Khati, Lohar, Sunar, Nai, Dhobi, Darjee, Tamboli, Rangrej, etc. are also found. The main Muslim groups are that of the Kyamkhani, Pathan, Sheikh, etc. There are also a large number of Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes in the district. Most of the castes are divided into sub-castes. The Jats are a major group engaged in agriculture, and they are also numerically the most preponderant group. Brahmmins, Rajputs, and Mahajans form the upper stratum of the society, whereas the principal agricultural and artisan castes such as Jat, Mali, Ahir, Khati and Sunar form the second layer of the caste order. Some functionary castes were placed below these middle castes, and the untouchable castes were at the bottom.

Brahmins, Rajputs, Mahajans and Jats were the main castes in terms of power and social status before the abolition of the Jagirdari system. The Rajputs were Jagirdars, grantees, bhomias, and Chhutbhaiyas. Brahmmins, though pursuing priestly occupation besides agriculture, were also associated with the jagirdars in various capacities. Mahajans were mainly engaged in trade and commerce, and at the
same time some of them were official suppliers of goods and services to the rulers. They also helped the jagirdars in maintaining accounts and records. Jats were at the top of the peasant castes and were the principal cultivators in the district. Barring some individuals who were patronised by the Jagirdars as Patels (designated to help in collection of land revenue), all the rest of the Jats and other agricultural communities worked under the oppressive rule and command of the jagirdars and bhomias. Jats being the principal agricultural caste and occupying the fourth rank in the local caste system reacted and resisted strongly their de-humanization and exploitation by mobilizing themselves against the Rajput rulers. The Jat Sabha was formed to fight the oppressive rule of the Rajput rulers. Such a mobilization made the Jats more conscious and ethnocentric than other communities in the district. This invited criticism from other communities, and some other agricultural castes dissociated from their efforts against the rulers. Consequently, the Jat Sabha was transformed and renamed as Kisan Sabha. The Kisan Sabha too remained a Jat-dominated organisation.

The question of caste and class and the nexus between the two and this nexus as the basis of political power become significant in such a situation. It is not the continuity or transformation of ideology of pure and impure
that matters today in the district politics, but the continuity and transformation of caste-sentiments and caste-based mobilization that matter most in the present-day politics. Caste and class are no doubt not reducible to each other, but the two simply cannot be juxtaposed as anti-thesis, and this is how one has to see the significance of the two as having the nexus approach for understanding power-politics at the district level.

**The Main Thrust of the Study**

To understand the dynamics of power-politics in terms of the role of caste and class, it is necessary to know the nature of contradictions and discontinuities, obverse structural processes of transformation, and patterns of social change. Congruities and incongruities and structurally and culturally induced and self-generating processes of social change in modern Rajasthan can be understood in terms of answers to the following questions:

1. In what form is caste continuing in the power-politics of Sikar district?

2. What is the nature of class relations in the countryside of the district?

3. What sort of nexus exists between caste and class in the context of power-politics?
4. What is the nature of the rural upper and upper middle classes in the district? And what role these classes are playing in the political processes?

5. How elections in particular have changed rural society in terms of fragmentations, factionalism, networks and alignments?

Land reforms in Sikar district were so effective that the changes following from this revolutionary step brought about a social upheaval. The Rajput rulers lost not only their jagirs and land-grants, they were reduced to a state of proletarianization and pauperization. The Jat tenantry being the major beneficiary of this republican revolution not only moved up socially, economically, and politically, they also showed hatredness for their ex-rulers. Since the Congress party was at the helm of affairs before and after independence in the district, the Jat peasantry became a natural supporter of the Congress. The Jat leadership even tried to stop the entry of Rajputs in the Congress party by declaring them as feudal and reactionary forces and collaborators of the Raj. Rajputs as a community have never mobilized themselves as a strong group. They are also more diversified compared to Jats in terms of education, occupation, and dispersal of population.
Emergence of Jats as a strong socio-economic and political force after the abolition of the jagirdari system sent a message to other castes and communities that their ethnocentrism and casteism would be ruthless, and it might go against the interests not only of the Rajputs but also affect other communities such as Brahmins and Mahajans. A sort of counter-consciousness is being expressed at times to oppose the Jat domination by the Brahmins, Rajputs and Mahajans. However, this consciousness has not found a crystallized and visible form. The Jats have taken full advantage of their numerical strength by mobilizing themselves in favour of their caste nominees in elections for panchayat raj, cooperatives, state assembly and Lok Sabha. However, Jats are also ridden with factions. Factionalism within the Jat community is known to almost all political leaders in the villages of the district. The most known factions are led by two Jat leaders of the same village belonging to two different clans. These are known as Sunda and Meharia factions.

The factional fight has also witnessed ups and downs due to the factors stated above. The following tentative inferences could be imagined:

1. A basic change has occurred in the district as a result of the abolition of the jagirdari system, particularly in favour of the principal peasant castes and communities.
2. A process of socio-economic equalization has been set in, and this has resulted in an attack on traditional caste-based inequalities and discriminations.

3. The beneficiary castes, families and individuals consolidated the economic gains by the mid-1960s and thereafter plunged into the arena of political power taking advantage of their economic gains and enhanced social status.

4. The urge for political power resulted into the use of a caste as an interest group by mobilizing its members for electoral support.

5. Numerically small castes and communities and the upper castes have not been quite successful in having caste-based mobilization for electoral gains.

**Method of Study**

To understand links between the past and the present political formation in Sikar district of the Shekhawati region of Rajasthan, it became necessary for us to collect relevant data and information from various secondary sources such as reports, documents and published materials. Archival sources and local libraries were tapped for this purpose. Biographies and autobiographies of some well known freedom fighters and activists were also consulted. Details
from various sources about the leaders and power elite who contested elections or otherwise were gathered from secondary sources as well as from knowledgeable persons.

Party functionaries, leaders and supporters were approached for providing necessary information regarding their respective organisations and activities. An Interview Guide was prepared for interviewing the power elite drawn from different parts of the district. Besides interviewing about 100 individual political leaders, some case studies were also conducted. Last elections held for panchayat raj institutions in 1995, besides the last assembly elections, were observed by way of extensive visits to various towns and villages in the district.

Concluding Remarks

Power is neither absolute nor a zero-sum phenomenon. It is basically a relative and societal entity. As such power is a multi-layered and multi-faceted possession of individuals and groups of people. Determinants of power vary both historically and contextually. No uniform pattern of power dynamics can be ensured because of societal and cultural ramifications. Hence, society and culture-specific framework alone, despite some commonality of attributes, can uncover the nature of inherent factors and forces of power and power-politics. Keeping this in view we have studied
power elite in Sikar district of Rajasthan which had a sort of classical feudal system until 1954, and which since then has undergone a sea-change, apparently without a trace of its horrible past.
Notes and References


(3) Tod, James, 1990, Annals and Antiquities of Rajasthan, 4 Vols, Delhi: Low Price Publications.


(6) 1901 Census, op. cit.


(8) Ibid.

(9) Narain and Mathur's emphasis is on community as a focal point of study.

(10) Ibid.
