CHAPTER VIII

SIMILAR ORGANIZATION:
CHOKHLA VERSUS KUDARIYA
Nearly every caste in rural India has its authority structure, whether formal or informal. To quote Dumont on this point:

"Most of the castes have organs of government; and even those which have not, exercise authority over their members in a diffused and unformalized way, and can, for example, excommunicate or banish one of their members" (Dumont, op. cit., 167).

Details in the foregoing chapters also go to indicate how the higher castes, in the absence of any intra-caste intravillage or intra-caste inter-village traditional councils, have their informal and uninstitutionalized, perhaps also an amorphous, authority structure, and how most of the lower castes have their highly complex, formal and institutionalized authority structure on both intra-caste intra-village and intra-caste inter-village levels. These conventional "organs of government", often known as the Panchayats, have been variously described as the "village assembly" here, or the "village council" there, or the "village panchayat" still elsewhere. Dumont has rightly observed:

"The expression 'village panchayat' is scarcely ever defined, but, especially in twentieth-century Indian literature, a link has been established between it and the notion of 'village community'. . . In the terms of a very widespread belief, the 'village community' had more or less universally the 'village panchayat' as its organ" (Dumont, op. cit., 170).
The Panchayat, whether that of a village or of a caste, has attracted the attention of the social scientists, including the historians and the economists. But in the earlier writings, scant attention seems to have been paid either to a definition of what a Panchayat means or to a distinction between a village panchayat and a caste panchayat (Dumont, op. cit., 171-2).

Drawing the reader's attention to how "there is a relative paucity of recent literature on the caste assembly and the intra-caste panchayat in general" (Dumont, op. cit., 173), Dumont summarizes Blunt's classification of three types of "internal caste government":

a. where the caste has no assembly, as in the case of "the superior castes or the castes of the 'twice-born' among whom authority is diffuse and it is 'public opinion' which excommunicates, or boycotts, and moreover does so effectively" (Dumont, op. cit., 173);

b. where the caste has a permanent assembly, as an assembly which "possesses one or more permanent dignitaries, who are responsible for bringing infringements to its notice and convening it when the need arises" (Dumont, op. cit., 174); and

c. when the caste has a non-permanent assembly, as the one "in which the assembly only meets at the request of a guilty party, after he has been excluded by his community without any formal decision; he then appeals against this collective attitude before the assembly, so as to obtain his reinstatement conditional to a punishment to be decided" (Dumont, op. cit., 173-74).
A modest attempt has already been made in the foregoing chapters to sketch and delineate the structure and functioning of the various "organs of government". In the following pages, a brief survey is made of the studies pertaining to what Dumont calls the "internal caste government" on the inter-village plane and, then, a comparison is worked out between the two versions of the same institution as it is found in two divergent culture areas — viz., Rajasthan and the Madhya Pradesh.

The intra-caste inter-village organization has been called by different names by several anthropologists and sociologists of different countries. Professor Dube has called it "Inter-Village Caste Panchayat", in his famous book, Indian Village (1955); but Majumdar (1958) called it "Javar", in his well-known book, Caste and Communication in an Indian Village. Such a caste council has been named "Pankhers" as circle council by Mayer (1960), in his book — Caste and Kinship in Central India. Ghurye (1957) has referred to the caste organization as "Caste Panchayat", and Chouhan has called it "Chokhla" in his book, Rajasthan Village (1967). These caste organizations in the Bundelkhand region of Northern Madhya Pradesh have been called "Kudariya Organization" by Atal (1968) in his book, Changing Frontiers of Caste. So we see that these caste organizations
have been named variously in various regions according to the regional usage. The main purpose of the author here is to bring out the similarities and differences between the Chokhla of Rajasthan and the Kudariya of the Bundelkhand region. The author has tried to define the functions and powers of both of them, giving descriptive details of the Chokhla and the Kudariya separately.

**Chokhla of Rajasthan:**

The intra-caste inter-village organization is known as the Chokhla in Rajasthan and it has been very clearly defined by Chouhan:

"Chokhla is a unit of a caste (sub-caste in actual practice, the endogamous division of a caste, viz., the sub-caste is the unit for a Chokhla. The word caste is being used instead of a sub-caste, because the caste includes the sub-caste) spread over a number of contiguous villages binding the members of the caste (sub-caste) to certain codes and regulations considered to be falling within the traditional jurisdiction of the caste (sub-caste) organization in that area, and subjecting the members to some effective controls through collective action" (Chouhan, 1967, 120).

Thus, the caste council, in a wider sense, is called Chokhla in the Mewar region of Rajasthan.
"Chokhla is a network of a caste spread over a number of villages. A village is a territorial unit providing accommodation to members of many castes. A caste is spread outside the village and consists of a number of exogamous units. In order that village exogamy and caste endogamy might go together, it becomes necessary for members of a caste in a village to establish several ties with members of their own caste outside the village" (Chouhan, op. cit., 121).

The study of the Chokhla was made first by Chouhan (1967) and, then, by Atal (1968). The studies are concerned with Kheri and Ranawatank Sadri villages of Rajasthan respectively. Atal has explained in his study that in the Kheri village there are 18 castes (sub-caste taken as a caste) and except one Rao-Bhat, claiming themselves to be the Brahmans, all the castes have the Chokhla organization. Even among the Bada-Paliwal, who are Brahmanas, there is a Chokhla organization called Hoda Kanji ke Chokhla by them. In the same way, Chouhan has said that in Ranawatank ke Sadri of the Mewar region, there are 23 castes (sub-caste as a caste), all of which have been divided into three groups from the point of view of population as major, medium and minor. Among the major group, there are three castes out of which one is of Rajputs who do not have this organization, but the other two have. In the medium group, there are two castes having the Chokhla organization, and the description of the Chokhla organization of Jat caste has
been given. In the minor group, there are 18 castes, all
of which have the Chokhla organization, but the analysis has
been made only of the Kumhar, the Luwar and the Sadhu castes.

Kudariya Organization in Bundelkhand:

In the Bundelkhand region the intra-caste inter-village
organization is called Kudariya, and in most of the castes,
except the higher castes (such as the Brahmans, the Rajputs,
the Lodhi, the Dangi and the Jain), there are caste
organizations to regulate the behaviour of their members.
There is a territorial boundary of the Kudariya of each
caste, comprising of several villages, in which the persons
of an endogamous unit dwell, bound mutually by agnatic or
cognatic ties or by kith and kin ties. All these are
members of a common council or Kudariya. In some castes
the area of their organization is quite wide. It can be
said that in the castes that permit widow marriage and
arrange for the re-entry of such persons into their caste,
there are the Kudariya organizations.

Atal (1968) has mentioned that in all the sub-castes,
except Rao-Bhat, there are the Chokhla organizations in
village Kheri (Rajasthan). On the other hand, in village
Khiria (in Sagar District of the Bundelkhand region), the
study has been made of the Kudariya organization only of
seven castes (the Nai, the Kachhi, the Gadariya, the Gond, the Chamar, the Chadar and the Parjapat) out of the 19 castes living in the village. Atal has made no mention of the existence or non-existence of the Kudariya organization in the five castes (the Dhimer, the Luher, the Bareth or Dhobi, the Basor and the Kothia or Tel) that are included in the 19 castes, living in Khiria.

The entire study of the author is based upon the Kudariya organization, and for this he has chosen ten villages of Sagar District of the Bundelkhand region of Northern Madhya Pradesh. The castes (a sub-caste taken as a caste) living in these ten villages are thirty-four in number, out of which only the higher castes (the Brahmanas, i.e., Saryupari, Kanyakubja, Jujhotiya, Sanadhya and Bhargava; the Rajput, the Lodhi, the Dangi, the Jain and the Raj Gond) do not have such a Kudariya organization and the rest of the castes (clean or unclean) have the Kudariya organization. Concerning the Sunar, the Bharbhunja the Jat and the Kachwaha Kachhi castes, the author did not get any reliable information and so no description of these castes has been given. During the empirical study the author found that this formal organization is purely on sub-caste level as in these ten villages.
Similarity Between the Chokhla and the Kudariya

A comparative study of the Kudariya (Bundelkhand region) and the Chokhla (Rajasthan) has shown the following similarities and dissimilarities:

(1) **Territorial jurisdiction:**

The territorial boundary of the Chokhla and the Kudariya differs from caste to caste, and this organization is found in both the regions on sub-caste level. So in a local territory the persons of the same endogamous group or sub-caste, inhabiting several villages, are the members of the same organization. When there is excessive number of villages within the boundary of a Chokhla, to facilitate, they create smaller Chokhla, too, but on the other hand, when such number of villages exceeds the normalcy in the Bundelkhand region, they form sub-chiefs popularly called the Badkurs, under the Kudariya. The Badkurs are chosen either in the hereditary order or nominated through providing the Bhandara feast to the caste Kudariya. It is through these Badkurs that the cases of the Kudariya are sent to the Mukhia for decision.
(2) **Nata Versus Kari:**

In the Mewar region, except in the higher castes such as the Rajput (Chouhan, 1967), the Rao-Bhat and the Bada-Paliwal Brahmanas (Atal, 1968), there are traditions of widow marriage and divorcee marriage in all the castes, and this is called Nata. On the other hand, in the Bundelkhand region, widow marriage and divorcee marriage are practised in all the castes except the higher ones, and they are called Kari. In addition to this, in both the regions "the married woman may develop extra-marital intimacy and may elope with her lover" (Atal, *op. cit.*, 103). In this position, the woman's former husband has a right to claim compensation money from her lover or second husband. In both the regions, this compensation money is decided by the Chokhla or by the Kudariya, and it is called Jhagda-Lena in the Mewar region (Atal, *op. cit.*, 103) and Byahgat Lena in the Bundelkhand region respectively (Atal, *op. cit.*, 114). This money is to be paid by the father or the lover (or the second husband) of the woman and she is to return even the ornaments, if she has any, from her former husband. If this money is not acceptable to the former husband, then the case can be put up before the court of law. In both the regions, such secondary marriages (not with full rituals) are permitted and approved by the regional caste councils.
(3) **Kriyawar Versus Terahin:**

In Rajasthan "the Kriyawar (death-feast) is an essential feature of the ceremonial life of all the castes. It is compulsory to invite the entire Chokhla for the feast" (Atal, *op. cit.*, 108). Among the castes inhabiting the Mewar region, death feast is arranged on the twelfth day after the death; the caste elders are approached for their consent" (Atal, *op. cit.*, 108).

In the same way, in the Bundelkhand region, the death feast (which, in common usage, is called Terahin) is given on the thirteenth day after death. When some member of the Kudariya dies, this information is sent to all the villages coming under the Kudariya jurisdiction and especially kith and kin come to pay a visit to the family of the deceased. The Mukhia and the Panchas visit the family of the deceased, one day before the death feast and offer condolences to them and start planning for the Terahin on the next day. On that day, the cooking arrangements are made under the direction of the Mukhia and the Panchas. With the consent of the Mukhia, it is decided as to how many persons are to be invited — whether everybody from all families or only one person from each family. In the Terahin, persons of all the villages under the Kudariya and of all the castes in the village are invited. In this
way, we find that the *Terahin* and the *Bhandara-Bhoj* are based upon inter-caste character in the Bundelkhand region.

The person who has not been able to perform the *Terahin*, after some time, arranges for the *Gangajali Poojan* (delayed *Terahin*). For this ceremony, the person has to take the consent of the Mukhia. If he finds himself unable to perform the *Terahin* due to some difficulty, he goes to the Mukhia with the request that the date should be extended. He is permitted to perform the *Gangajali Poojan* rite, but it is necessary for him to invite at least one person from each family of his own caste, living in the villages under that Kudariya. Apart from these, the persons of other castes also are invited to this feast. Specially the *Kameena* are definitely invited in such feasts. It is on the occasion of the *Terahin* or the *Gangajali Poojan* that the eldest male member surviving the deceased is presented with a new *Pagdi* (turban) to mark him as the head of the family. After performing this rite, a man gets his socio-ritual prestige in the caste and the local community.

In the Bundelkhand region, the new Mukhia is confirmed only when he gives the *Bhandara* feast to his own caste fellows. The office of the Mukhia is inherited by a new Mukhia. For being confirmed as a Mukhia, he has to give
the Bhandara to his caste fellows. Generally on the day of the Terahin of the dead Mukhia, this function of the Bhandara, too, is also arranged, and on this day the Pagri (turban) is put on by the successor Mukhia, and then he becomes the confirmed Mukhia of the caste.

In the same way, if somebody is unable to perform the Kriyawar on the twelfth day after death, he invites the caste elders of the neighbouring villages and this Panchayat is called the thesp institution, in which reconsideration is done about the delayed Kriyawar, and the date of the delayed Kriyawar is fixed, and reasonable expenditure is assessed. The menu, too, is also decided at that time. Sometimes the delayed Kriyawar is combined with the Gangoji ceremony which means that the water of the Ganges or any sacred river is brought after the immersion of the ashes of the dead in that river. In the Bundelkhand, it is called Gangajali rites. The holy ashes of the dead person are carried to the Ganges and the holy water of the Ganges is taken while returning. Thus, the death feast of the deceased is called Gangoji in Rajasthan and Gangajali rite in the Bundelkhand region. Delayed Kriyawar is combined with Gangoji ceremony in Rajasthan and is more expensive from the economic point of view. Various rituals are to be performed with it, and they require an assembly
of the persons belonging to the host's caste. "The Gangoj ceremony starts from the worship of Pathwaris — the deities of the path. These deities are invited to take part in the feast. The host and the guests go in a procession to the Pathwaris for the purpose. Custom requires that every head of the family present on the occasion should offer some money to the host. These payments are recorded in a register so that the family may reciprocate the gesture when similar occasions arise in other families. On their way back from the Pathwaris, some of the women carry water pitchers on their head and become possessed by the deity. The procession then ends in a feast" (Atal, op. cit., 109). "The next day the important ceremony of Pagdi-Pehrai is held in any case where the dead person is a married male. In this ceremony, in the presence of the caste elders, the heir to the deceased is asked to wear a turban signifying his succession to the rights and obligations of the deceased" (Atal, op. cit., 109).
Differences Between the Chokhla and the Kudariya

The Chontra and the Mukhia:

In the Bundelkhand region, the centre of the Kudariya of each caste is called Chontra — the place where the Mukhia lives. Generally every Kudariya has a centre. But in Rajasthan, there are no centres of the Chokhla and there is no information regarding some castes (Gairya caste) which have no hereditary chief or any centre.

Rigid Boundary Versus Flexible Boundary:

In the Chokhla, the number of the villages can be increased or decreased according to necessity. There can be several heads within a Chokhla but in the Kudariya there is rigidity in the matter. The number of the villages coming under it can neither be increased nor decreased. The villages which are under a Kudariya remain unchanged. If the number of the villages varies much, then there is a provision of sub-chiefes (the Badkura), who come to the office through inheritance or are made through the Bhandara function, but the Mukhia will be only one. In the Bundelkhand region, there is no provision for a smaller Kudariya as there is in Rajasthan for smaller Chokhlas under a wider Chokhla.
The Kudariya is more Powerful than the Chokhla:

In comparison with the Chokhla of the Mewar region, the Kudariya of the Bundelkhand region is more powerful. Through the Chokhla, remarriages (widow marriage and divorcee marriage) are permitted and confirmed socially; but the field of authority of a Kudariya is not limited to the subjects mentioned above. There are a number of other matters in which the Kudariya acts very effectively. These are the cases of Parag (killing or murder) — whether it is a sacred animal or a human being, or the cases of pre-marital and extra-marital sex relations with persons of lower or higher castes or of one’s own caste, and so on. If somebody violates the social norms and goes to prison, the Kudariya has to be convened after his return before he is to be admitted again into the caste. Thus, it is clear that the Kudariya, in addition to remarriage cases, has its special significance in cases of other kinds, too, and regulates social behaviour. Regarding Kari, the cases falling under the jurisdiction of the Kudariya are of intra-caste character and inter-caste character because the culprit or accused calls the meeting of his caste Kudariya, spread over several villages, to get back the membership of his caste. On the other hand, he is also to deal with the inter-caste Panchayat of the village,
consisting of several castes, serving each other in a
dynamic social pattern, to regain the service of those
castes who had stopped serving him due to his
excommunication from the caste.

So both these organizations — the Kudariya and the
traditional village council — have their separate
importance. The culprit gives the Bhandara feast and pays
a fine to his own caste Kudariya, on the one hand, while,
on the other, he gives the Bhandara to the Saktom, if he
belongs to a clean caste. If the person belongs to an
unclean caste, in the Bhandara feast to the Saktom only
those castes join in the feast which have mutual eating
and drinking relations.

After the meetings of the elders (Sayana) or the
Panchas of the village, every case is forwarded to the
Mukhia of the Kudariya. On the request of the accused,
the Mukhia fixes the date of the meeting and through the
members of the family of the accused, information is sent
to the caste Panchas of all the villages coming under the
Kudariya. Thus, the judgment is made by the Mukhia and
the Panchas, but the elders of higher castes, too, remain
there as the Panchas. Through this, the judgment is made
very effective and the accused is to obey the decision of
the Mukhia and the Panchas.
By the elders of the higher castes, the accused may be compelled to be excommunicated from the caste and the services of the other castes (service-rendering castes) may be stopped to him. For fear of this, the culprit generally accepts the verdict of the Kudariya chief.