CHAPTER XI

THE SUMMING UP
The universe of study of the present empirical investigation comprises ten small-to-medium size villages in Northern Madhya Pradesh, a region which can be characterized as the heart of the Bundelkhand. These villages are multi-caste and/or multi-community villages insofar as the socio-cultural contours of their population composition are concerned.

Each village under the present study has been viewed not only as a well-defined territorial unit distinct from other similar units but it has also been borne in mind that no village in rural India is a self-sufficient and holistic isolate or a complete and independent whole in itself. That the myth of 'the little village republic' has been long exploded, and that the rural sociologists and anthropologists have long abandoned such holistic conception, has also been borne in mind throughout the present investigation. For the methodological issue raised by Redfield and Singer only forced the author to address the two questions to himself:
a. Can an Indian village be satisfactorily comprehended and conceived as a whole in itself?

b. Can understanding of one such village contribute to understanding of the greater culture and society in which the village is embedded? (Marriot 1961, 175).

These fundamental questions have been asked by the author time and again only with a view to arriving at a satisfactory answer in the light of the empirical data gathered by him in the course of his systematic investigation.

After attempting a general survey of Indian village communities and similar 'little communities' in the west as well as in the primitive world, Marriot has clearly pointed out how each village, in the Indian context, can be viewed both as "a stable, self-subsistent whole", on the one hand, and as an integral part of "the greater culture and society in which the village is embedded", on the other. And referring to this paradoxical position, Marriot writes:

"But now we seem to have contradicted ourselves. We cannot say both that an Indian village is comparable with a primitive isolate and also that it is dependent upon and part of a system that is outside itself. We cannot claim simultaneously that the great tradition of Indian civilization is relevant to understanding of peasant life. To attempt to resolve these plausible but contradictory claims, I turn here to reconsider the social structure and the religion of one village, keeping the initial pair of questions in mind" (Marriot, op. cit., 177-8).
In his study of Kishan Garhi (as an old Hindu village on the western plains of Uttar Pradesh in Aligarh District), Marriot presents a vivid picture of social, economic, ritual and political structure of the village, and proceeds to conclude:

"These structural facts make Kishan Garhi seem very much less than an isolated whole in the primitive sense. Viewed as a society, as an economy, as a church, or as a polity, this little community has no close coherence or well-bounded physical locus. The very things which I must identify as parts of the little community reach beyond the physical village, while many parts of other communities and of the great community reach inside the village. This little community of Kishan Garhi cannot be satisfactorily conceived as an isolated structure or system" (Marriot, op. cit., 180).

In treating an Indian village not as 'an isolated whole', the author has toed the line with Marriot's arguments. He has further followed Marriot while treating each village as an 'isolateable unit', and has drawn on Marriot's propositions:

"But still I am compelled to go on to say that the village of Kishan Garhi is like a living thing, has a defineable structure, is conceptually a vivid entity, is a system -- even if it is one of many subsystems within the larger socio-politico-religio-economic system in which it exists. . .

Economically, for instance, the village constitutes a vital nucleus of activity through its lands. . .
Socially, the village of Kishan Garhi is a nexus of much informal activity among non-kinsmen and non-caste men. . .

Politically, too, there is in some senses an isolable whole community in Kishan Garhi..." (Marriot, op. cit., 180 & 182).

It is against this duality or polarity of conceptualization that the author has taken up his study of the traditional regulatory mechanisms with a view to focusing sharply on the structure and functioning of the intervillage caste councils. The major focus of interest of the present study has, thus, been on attempting sharp delineations of the traditional regulatory mechanisms as the agencies of pattern maintenance insofar as the customary codes of behaviour and the traditional norms and values are concerned.

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Since the topic of study relates to the traditional caste councils on intra- and inter-caste as well as intra- and inter-village planes, the author has started his study with a sweeping survey of the conceptual repertoire wherein he has closely examined three conceptual formulations and their import. Endorsing Mayer's position he has employed the word 'caste' in the sense of 'subcaste'
as inclusive of 'kindred of cooperation' and 'kindred of recognition' rather than taking any taxonomic plunge like Karve.

In order to tread on safer grounds, the author has neither attempted (nor could he perhaps attempt) any definition of caste himself nor has he subscribed to any one definition as his starting point. In stead, he has taken up the conceptual framework from Atal, and has made an humble effort to highlight the structural and functional relevance of the threefold attributes of caste — viz. the basic or pivotal, the sufficiently relevant, and the peripheral against the backdrop of the traditional caste councils. The author has examined these caste councils as maintaining the basic or pivotal attribute of caste, that is, endogamy. It is of interest to note here that the caste councils have been conceptualized as the sufficiently relevant attribute of caste, and that such sufficiently relevant attribute of caste contributes significantly towards the maintenance of the basic or pivotal attribute of caste, that is, endogamy.

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In the chapter on "Regulatory Mechanism and Pattern Maintenance", it has been pointed out how, in the ten villages under study, four kinds of traditional regulatory mechanisms are found. It is through these fourfold mechanisms of regulation of human behaviour that an individual is governed. Conformity to social codes, norms and values is ensured, at the lowest level, by one's family and descent group to which one belongs. On the next plane, that is, on the level of the extended kin group in the village, the Biradari Baithak, comprising of elders (sayane) as representatives of individual households, functions as a formal or an informal agency of social control. Such Biradari Baithaks are common to nearly all castes which are either numerically preponderant or economically strong besides having sizeable numerical strength. A caste represented by one or two households in a village does not have its Biradari Baithak.

The Biradari Baithak is the smallest judicial body — something like a mini-caste council within a larger caste council, that is, the Kudariya. It takes cognizance of anti-social behaviour and ethico-religious lapses on the part of its members. It adjudicates upon certain matters or forwards the case to the Kudariya or the Gaon ki Panchyat. But when the members of a caste are few in a village and, as such, do not have their Biradari Baithak, their cases
are taken up generally by the Gaon ki Panchyat that serves as the surrogate for the Biradari Baithak. In such cases, the village council may either give its verdict or refer the case to the Kudariya of the offender. The entire regulatory mechanism can be illustrated by the following diagram:
It has been mentioned earlier that the fourfold regulatory mechanisms and the family including the descent group exercise their social control on the individual. These are the different levels of membership which can be illustrated by the following diagram:

E means Ego.
The family and the descent group function as the first and lowest agency of social control and regulate social behaviour. It may be recalled here that when anybody commits a wrong and gets declared as an outcast, such as in case of parag, it is the family and/or the descent group that get affected, and they too are declared an outcast. Next comes the Biradari Baithak as an agency of social control. As a caste forms a part of the local village community, the Gaon ki Panchyat functions as the next agency of social control, and so forth. These different kinds of traditional councils operate as regulatory mechanism in the different contexts.

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While sharply focusing on the intracaste intervillage councils, the author has pointed out in Chapter IV how the higher castes and even some clean castes do not have their formal traditional caste councils on the intervillage plane whereas the lower or unclean castes as well as some clean castes have them. In the case of those castes which do not have formal caste councils, the dominants and influentials of one's own caste as well as those of other castes both within and outside the village (often from the
adjacent villages) gather together to constitute an intercaste intervillage council ad hoc, and arrive at a decision, especially in cases of parag. In the event of breaches of social norms other than the cases of parag, only the local influentials and dominants are enough to constitute a council, again ad hoc, to arrive at a decision.

The cases cited in Chapter IV help us arrive at the conclusion that there appears to be a positive correlation between the institutions of Kari and the Kudariya: the two are interdependent variables, as it were. The higher castes do not have the institution of Kari. However, sporadic cases of extra-marital relations of the nature of Kari are reported among them. And yet they do not have the Kudariya. It may, however, be noted here that in the absence of a regular institution of Kari, such sporadic occurrences are rationalized and tolerated. For instance, the case of Nanna Prasad Tiwari can be recalled. His kept wife was accorded a low ritual status, for there are clear notions of relative degrees of ritual statuses of a wife in regular wedlock with full marriage ritual and a kept (Kari) as wife. The concept of neche chowka more than amply illustrates this relative status differentiation. Furthermore, such other disqualifications associated with a Kari wife as denial of privilege of ritual washing of feet of a girl at the time of her marriage also go to
indicate the relative ritual status position of the woman.

A whole chapter has been devoted to a detailed study of the institution of Kari, its various types, the mode of its confirmation, and so forth. The practice of Kari is highly ritualized and institutionalized among those castes which practise it. It is worth recalling here how, in the Kari cases, feasts of readmission into the close kin group as well as the caste, the payment or refund of byahgat (compensation money), the ritual offering of new set of bangles, and so forth only characterize its ritual and institutional character.

It is in this chapter that the decisive role of the Kudariya in regard to the cases of Kari has been spelled out with the help of several case studies relating to the different types of Kari unions. To deal with the cases of Kari is an exclusive prerogative of the Kudariya. In other words, they relate to matters of private morality within the caste, as it were. But in case where a Kari woman is known or reported to be a moral wreck, it becomes a case of public morality, and of common concern even to those outside the Kudariya. The Kudariya's exclusive prerogative is, thus, encroached upon in the interest and for the maintenance of public morality by the traditional village council. The case of Halka Kachhi amply illustrates the point how, in the interest of public morality, the
traditional village council can, as it did, take cognizance and pronounce verdict long before the Kudariya took up the issue to decide it.

The conventional jurisdiction of the Kudariya can be studied on two planes: the territorial and the contextual. Even a cursory glance through the pages of Chapter V would soon reveal that the territorial jurisdictions of the various Kudariyas vary both numerically as well as territory-wise, as the various maps indicate. When we study the Kudariya's jurisdiction on the contextual plane, we discover that generally matters relating to socio-ethico-religious realms come under the Kudariya's effective jurisdiction. These matters relate to customary usages, conventions and traditions. For instance, the cases of Kari and immoral sexual relations, performance of various feasts, breach of norms regulating connubial and commensal relations, and the like are such issues which are of socio-ethico-religious nature. The modes of punishments, too, are of customary nature, and their number is limited. The mode and extent of punishment are generally coextensive with the nature and gravity of the offence. Some punishments are punitive in monetary terms whereas others
are purificatory in ritual terms. Thus, a fine is punitive in monetary terms whereas a ritual bath in the Ganges or the Narmada is purificatory. The punishments are obligatory in nature. The nature of evidence again takes a customary form in that oaths and ordeals are resorted to in order to prove innocence. To swear on Gangajali, on one's youth, on one's eyes, on one's son, and so forth are the conventional oaths.

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The concept of sin, commonly known as the parag in the Bundelkhand region, is treated as a serious offence. Killing a human being or a sacred animal is treated as tantamount to sin, irrespective of whether such killing is voluntary or involuntary, calculated or accidental. The notion of sin as a spiritual stigma and the beliefs relating to its dire consequences relate to the Hindu great tradition as it is embodied in the ancient scriptures. The notions of papa (sin) and punya (spiritual merit), of heaven (sarga) and hell (narakas), of reincarnation according to one's good or bad deeds (the theory of karma and punarjanma) are such great traditional elements which are present in the rural setting in their parochialized form. The entire series of purificatory rituals that a
sinner has to undergo in order to attain his normal ritual status is again a great traditional element. The role of the Kattaya Brahmana who ritually takes the first morsel of killing (hatya ke kour) and the customary fee that he is paid for his services, the Tulsi Vivah and the ritual bath, the caste feast and the Satkam feast — are these rituals are a part of the great tradition. The entire complex of rituals finds its place in the Hindu sacred literature, relates itself to a sacred geography, and is enacted by a sacred class of literati. There is no denying the fact that there are intercommunication channels between the local little traditions of the little community and the non-local great traditions of the indigenous civilization, and that such intercommunication is through ritual recitations of holy texts and performance of complex rituals by the priestly Brahmanas, on the one hand, and through pilgrimages by the villagers, on the other. There is again no denying the fact that the Kudariya has preserved the great traditional elements, in their less sophisticated form of course, in the form of ideas, beliefs and rituals that are interwoven with the rural concept of parag.

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As a traditional regulatory mechanism for pattern maintenance, the Kudariya plays its vital role in defining the nature and extent of social intercourse. It has been pointed out in the Appendix that, in the area under study, people have their notions about ritual purity and pollution relating to physical touch, food, water and smoking. Such notions provide and determine the range of social participation.

Again, it is these notions of ritual purity and pollution which underlie the indigenous caste hierarchy as the rural folk see it. They tend to divide the castes into three broad divisions or clusters of castes as the higher castes, the clean castes and the unclean castes. Rules of commensality determine the intercaste relations. Distinctions between kachcha and pakka food further define the range of acceptability of food and determine the relative socio-ritual positions of the donors and the recipients. It is worth recalling here how the Kudariya sanctions about commensality preserve the customary usages and how the erring persons are forced to undergo purificatory rituals.

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