The Pandas of Hardwar all claim to be Gaur Brahmans and they sometimes describe themselves as Adi Gaur Brahmans. They are all Yajurvedis and “belong” to the Yajurved. The Yajurved consists essentially of technical texts and formulae used in ritual, and these are based in large part on the Rigveda. The Pandas have ancient links with the tirtha which they serve and are, as a community, dependent on what is known as jajman vrity, the pilgrimage or jajmani trade. It is also known humorously as akas vrity, the sky trade, because it is entirely unpredictable and depends on the will of the Gods. The present study relates to this community of Pandas and attempts to analyze their role in the whole pilgrimage complex in changing socio-economic and political scenario.

The present study aims firstly, to find out the traditional status and role of the Pandas of Hardwar; secondly, to analyze the changes in the status and role because of altered socio-economic and political changes; thirdly, to know the public life of the Pandas of Hardwar at ghats, i.e. the daily life of the Pandas at ghats in context of the relations between jajmans and Pandas and the whole ritual complex of the ghats; and lastly, to investigate the life of the Pandas at home, particularly with reference to ambivalence of their position both religiously and socially.

The findings show that the traditional status of Pandas is fast changing. Though their role has not changed much, the change in status seems to be the resultant of materialistic conception among them as well as the changing conceptions of purity and pollution connected with the traditional caste occupations. The changes in private life lead to the changes in public life and same holds true vice versa. Respect among the Pandas is given to those of a senior generation and then to those of greater relative age, and this is reflected
within the terminology of reference and address. In all cases, even today, the Pandas address each other with great politeness and formality, always adding ji to the relationship term and using that form of address, which shows most respect and gives greatest pleasure. It should be noted that pilgrims call their Panda by the word babhaji even if he is a mere boy. Out of respect, that will also address him as purohitji, guruji, panditji, etc. and their children often call him chacha (uncle). This shows that their traditional role is helping them to command respect from their jajmans.

The thesis has been divided into seven chapters. First chapter deals with the problem and its context. Second chapter gives a brief introduction of Pandas of Hardwar. Traditional status and role of Pandas of Hardwar is the subject-matter of third chapter. Contemporary status and role of Pandas in changing scenario are discussed in fourth chapter. Fifth chapter deals with the public life of Pandas, whereas, their private life is discussed in sixth chapter. The last and the seventh chapter provides the summary and conclusion.

Vandana Singh