Chapter 1

The Problem and its Context

Every religion has its sacred foci to which men of faith periodically converge. The pilgrimage is a pan-human phenomenon, albeit one of declining importance in the industrial and commercial nations of the West. In India, the custom of pilgrimage to holy places (Tirtha-yatra) is an ancient one and one, which, due to modern methods of mass transportation, is becoming increasingly popular.

Tirtha, in its extended meaning, referring to all things held to be pure and holy, existing in various forms such as speech, water, land, body, limbs, time, trees, places, resorted to by God, places where there are images of God, and so on. The term tirtha means 'ford' or 'crossing place', and it refers to those places, which are believed to be charged with power, where one crosses over from the material world to the world of the spirit. Tirtha-yatra literally means "undertaking journey to river fords" but it commonly indicates the visitation of sacred places. Agehananda Bharati (1970) points out that this must often be understood metaphorically. Tirtha-yatra means not only the physical act of visiting the holy places but it implies a mental and moral discipline (Bhardwaj, 1973).

Bhardwaj (1973) considers that perhaps the earliest allusion to the practice of pilgrimage in Indian literature is to be found in the Altrey Brahman of the Rigveda, and he notes that the Aryan peoples of Vedic times revered rivers. He suggests that at least two strands of the concept of pilgrimage, that
is, the merit of travel and reverence for rivers, can be considered continuous from Vedic times.

After the Vedic period, the practice of pilgrimage appears to have grown in popularity (as evidenced by the relevant sections of the Mahabharat) and, as Hinduism became more formalized, the significance of the ritualistic elements increased. Once the ritualistic details were written down and the Purans became accepted as the authority of common religious observance, then the practice of pilgrimage (glorified by the Purans) achieved a higher status in Hindu beliefs than ever before.

The existence of a class of priests dependent on the offerings of pilgrims was also a factor in the increased popularity, as they had an economic motive for spreading the fame of the tirtha to which they were attached. This class is known as Tirtha Purohits. Tirtha Purohit means pilgrimage priest, and the term is frequently used in opposition to Kul Purohit or family priest. Both are Brahmans and have a hereditary and institutionalised relationship with their jajmans, but whereas the kul purohit serves local jajmans, the tirtha purohit serves those who come from outside. Another word frequently used by Rajasthani and other pilgrims is Gangaguru, a term that indicates the importance of the Ganges (Ganga Mata or Ganga Mai) in the completely sacred complex of Hardwar and Varanasi. The most usual term, however, is ‘Panda’, which, according to the priests of Hardwar and Varanasi, means literally the ability to distinguish good and evil. The community is described as the Tirtha Purohit Samaj or, less formally, as the Panda Samaj.

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 (Embree, 1996).

The Pandas have ancient links with the tirtha which they serve and are, as a community, dependent on what is know as jajman vrli, the pilgrimage or jajmani trade. It is also known humorously as akas vrli, the sky trade, because it is entirely unpredictable and depends on the will of the Gods.

Traditionally, the Pandas number about 3,000 of whom three-quarters lived in Jwalapur (a town about six kilometers from Hardwar) and one-quarter in Kankhal (a town three and a half kilometers from Hardwar). Even today, this ratio is approximately correct and communal donations are worked out of this basis. The work of the Pandas is the practical and spiritual service of their jajmans; they see to their comfort and lodging and perform whatever rites they require. Thus, they are becoming priests-cum-travel agents; they also meet the pilgrims at railway station and make arrangements for their stay, either in their own houses or in rest-houses. Sometimes the Panda-pilgrim relation continues over generations, with the descendant of a particular Panda family ministering to the descendants of a particular pilgrim family for hundreds of years.

### 1.1 STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

The public image of the Pandas throughout India is extremely colourful and contradictory. The reputation of the priests of the different pilgrimage centres varies, but usually all sorts of stories circulates about their greed, harassment of pilgrims and illiteracy. They are often attacked as rogues, beggars, indolent users of narcotics, low-class Brahmans and even as secret drinkers of alcohol and meat-eaters. Almost all Hindus have strong opinions about Pandas, whether they have any real contact with them or not. The Pandas of Varanasi have earned
a particularly bad name for themselves for cheating and robbing pilgrims. It is generally said these days that if one is new to Varanasi and its ways, it is safer to observe these gentlemen from a distance and understand what they represent, rather than have any dealings with them.

The Pandas of Hardwar are also often the targets of gossip and rumour, but their reputation generally is good. Locally, they are the most numerous high caste community and the most ancient, and they play a prominent role in local politics and administration, are members of the town’s secular and religious elites, and have close contacts with local shopkeepers, hotel owners and businessmen. Their relationships with their pilgrims are usually equable and they are respected as priestly Brahmans and gurus.

The ambivalence attached to the community, and indeed to all pilgrimage priests, is not new. For example, Crooke (1896) comments that the priests along the bank of the Ganges or Gangaputras (sons of Ganges) “belong to no special tribe of Brahman. They may be Gaur, Sarwariya, or Kanaujiya, and though their profession is very lucrative, they have an evil reputation for roguery and rapacity, and not finding it easy to intermarry with respectable Brahmans, there is a tendency among them towards endogamy.”

In Hardwar, the Pandas are regarded with particular ambivalence by those whose secular status or work does not bring them into close contact with the community. For example, immigrants into Hardwar do not always know much about the domestic life of the Pandas and tend to exaggerate the rigidity of their orthodoxy as well as the frequency of deviations. Those Punjabis who have been influenced by the Arya Samaj, or who are practicing Arya Samajis, are usually extremely hostile to the Pandas, regarding them as worshippers of idols and practitioners of superstition. Other sectarians also condemn the “popular
religion” prevalent on the ghats. It should be pointed out, however, that in actual encounters the Pandas are always treated with respect as Brahmans and that most local inhabitants, whether Arya Samajis or not, have a residual faith in the Ganges and in the merits of bathing and ritual works.

A fundamental reason for the ambivalence of attitude towards the Pandas is the association many Indians make between them and the impurity of death. They regard the Pandas as “funeral priests”. Technically, they are wrong, since at Hardwar the Mahabrahman community performs those functions, which are polluting. The Mahabrahmans, who are also known as Mahapatras and Acharyas, are regarded by the Pandas as “low class” Brahmans. Some critics also maintain that only inferior Brahmans would accept donation at all and mingle publicly on the ghats. They suspect the Pandas of taking donation or food from low castes since they meet thousands of pilgrims every week. Other critics rank those whose hereditary profession is that of priest below those who traditionally devote themselves to learning and who can “study the original works that regulate these rituals, can find fault with the priest at every step, and reserve for themselves the higher functions of the critic and the superintendent” (Bhattacharya, 1896).

This ambivalence about the Pandas points out the need for a sociological study of the public and private life of the community of Tirtha Purohits of Hardwar. The present study is a humble attempt in this direction. It deals with their public life as priests, guides and genealogists and with their private life as inhabitants of a particular town and members of a particular community, lineage and family. In other words, the present study relates to the community of Brahman priests of Hardwar who serve pilgrimage centre and attempts to analyze their role in the whole pilgrimage complex in changing socio-economic and political scenario.
1.2 OBJECTIVES OF STUDY

The major objectives of the present study are as follows—

1) To find out the traditional status and role of the Pandas of Hardwar;

2) To analyze the changes Panda community is undergoing in their status and role because of an altered socio-economic and political changes;

3) 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. In other words, to analyze the changing ritual status and role of the Pandas; and

4) To investigate the life of the Pandas at home, particularly with reference to ambivalence of their position both religiously and socially.

1.3 OVERVIEW OF LITERATURE

The proposed study falls under two sub-fields of Sociology, namely, ‘Sociology of Social Stratification’ and ‘Sociology of Religion’. An attempt is made in this section to present briefly the major studies conducted in both these sub-fields.

1.3.1 STUDIES ON SOCIOLOGY OF SOCIAL STRATIFICATION

The early British/Western encounter with the Varna-Jati system of the people of India stimulated two kinds of research. One group, the Indologists, scanned through the sacred literature of the Hindus and brought into relief the various elements of the Varna model. Scholars like Wilson, Monier-Williams, Colebrooke, Max Muller, and Zimmer belong to this group. The other group, consisting mainly of administrators with an academic bent of mind, was interested in mapping the phenomenon of caste on the ground in terms of
distribution in space and as descriptions of social and cultural diversity. These accounts were usually in the form of general ethnography and the spatial frame usually adopted was the administrative provinces. The typical products of these studies are the various Tribes and Caste Volumes like those of Dalton (1872), Nesfield (1885), Risley (1891), Crooke (1896), Thurston (1909), Russel and Lal (1916), Ibbetson (1916) and Enthoven (1920-22).

During the first three decades of this century, along with census type surveys and glossaries, a few ethnographic monographs were also published. Although most of these were on tribes, some also dealt with individual castes and sects. G. W. Briggs on the Chamars, (1920), N. A. Toothi on the Vaishnavas of Gujarat (1935) are worth mentioning.

M. N. Srinivas's study on Religion and Society among the Coorgs of South India (1952) is one of the first attempts to study the caste organization of a region as a functioning system. Although the ascribed ritual status of a caste is based on notions of pollution and purity, caste status is mutable and upward mobility in the caste system is accompanied by sanskritization of rituals. Later on, Srinivas spelt out the distinction between the Varna system as a theoretical model and the concrete reality of the caste (jati) system (1955).

Lower castes have been the deprived and depressed sections of Indian society for a long period. British administrators, during the British period, conducted studies of various Scheduled Castes in different parts of the country. Mention may be made of such accounts as available from Dalton (1872), Sherring (1881), Nesfield (1885), Crooke (1896), Baden and Powell (1896), Hopkins (1901), Thurston (1909), Baines (1912), Lillingstone (1930), Risley (1915), Ibbetson (1916), David (1923), Henninger (1930), Stevenson (1930), Blunt (1931), O'Malley (1932), Robertson (1938) and Fisherman (1941), who
have provided useful data about life, customs, manners and religious beliefs of Scheduled Castes. These scholars were inspired either by their intellectual curiosity or were guided by their administrative expediency.

Abbe Dubois's Hindu Customs, Manners and Ceremonies (1906), Mrs Sinclair Stevenson's The Rites of the Twice Born (1930), Briggs The Chamars (1920), W. H. Wiser's The Hindu Jajmani System (1936) and Stephen Fuch's The Children of Hari (1950), may be considered good pieces of intellectual work, providing important information about the practices and beliefs of depressed classes. Sachchidananda (1974) has presented an extensive review of researches on Scheduled Castes with reference to change.

A good number of studies conducted by social scientists in the post-independence period, apart from other concerns, have tried to investigate whether Government measures has served to reduce the social disabilities of Scheduled Castes in India and uplift their social, economic and political status. Mention be made of such studies as those of Kuppuswamy (1956), Gupta (1958), Sinha and Sinha (1960), Sirsikar (1963), Patwardhan (1963, 1968), Beteille (1969), Lynch (1969), Bhatt (1975), Abbasayulu (1978), Malik (1979) etc., among others. But the scholars have arrived at contradictory conclusions. Some have contended that there has been a definite change, while others have depicted that there is no significant change. Many scholars have also investigated the role of caste, caste associations and organizations in economic development and political behaviour.

1.3.2 STUDIES ON SOCIOLOGY OF RELIGION

While generations of Brahman Pundits have been interested in preparing commentaries on the basic religious-cum-philosophical texts of Hinduism, including those concerned with social norms, there was no indigenous tradition
for systematic analysis of social behaviour in relation to ideal norms. The European travellers, missionaries, natural historians and humanistic scholars began the systematic recording and study of religious texts and behaviour of the people of India. The initial spadework of recording religious behaviour was done during the 18th and the 19th centuries. European scholars were immediately impressed by the culture-shock of contrasts with monotheistic Christianity—polytheism, idolatry, animal sacrifice and plethora of rituals. They became interested in three broad areas—a complete description of the diversity of religious beliefs and practices; a search for the primitive base of Hinduism in archaic folk rituals and tribal customs; and bringing into relief the higher philosophical thoughts and rich symbolism in pantheistic/monistic Hinduism.

Among the scholars of this pioneering phase may be mentioned Buchanan (1925), Dubois (1928) and Wilson (1958). The list could be multiplied. The Census Reports from 1872 onward and the various 'Tribes and Castes' volumes pursued this original impulse for recording the diversity of ethnic (tribe/caste) and sectarian customs throughout the length and breadth of the country and an image of Indian society emerged as an agglomeration of numerous social groups whose behaviour was moulded by distinct magico-religious customs. Apart from the mapping of diversity, the nature of continuity between 'tribal primitivism' and 'folk' or popular Hinduism as well as the contrast between tribal religions and the philosophical traditions of Hinduism were the main theoretical interests of these scholars (Crooke, 1906; O'Malley, 1935; and Hutton, 1961). Risley's famous characterization of Hinduism as "animism more or less transformed by philosophy" or as, "magic transformed by metaphysics" (Risley, 1915), provides the keynote to the intellectual concern of this period. Fraser's famous *Golden Bough*, with its evolutionary bias, absorbed a good
deal of the information on archaic customs of the peoples of India. Indian scholars like Bhattacharya (1896), and Roy (1934) shared similar perspectives in their study of religious customs.

Among the other, important publications correlating religion with social structure may be mentioned the works of Gough (1959), Mathur (1964), Harper (1957a, 1957b, 1959, 1963, 1964a), Beteille (1964-1965) and Nicholas (1967). In his book, *Caste and Ritual in a Malwa Village*, Mathur (1964) has demonstrated in detail how religious rites and ideas regarding purity and pollution determine caste hierarchy and caste behaviour.

In an interesting paper on Hindu village pantheon in a Mysore village, Harper (1959) demonstrated how there is a broad reflex of three-class-caste system in three grades of deities. In another paper relating to the Havik Brahmanes of the same village, Harper (1957) demonstrates relationship of male dominance in social structure and utilization of spirit possession as a stress-reducing mechanism.

Andre Beteille (1964) observes how participation in Pongal religious festival symbolizes differential positions of various castes in the social structure and does not generate larger cohesion or integration. In another paper “Social Organization of a Temple in a Tanjore Village”, Beteille (1965) shows that the different cults in the village tend to be autonomous and unconnected and do not directly contribute to village or caste solidarity.

The Anthropological Survey of India initiated a series of studies during 1967-70 on the social organization of Hinduism in order to study the changing structure of Indian civilization (Sinha 1970). Originally it was planned that the focus of the study would be on studying religion in the sacred city of Kashi. The unpublished report of Saraswati and Sinha (1970) on the Sadhus of Kashi brings into relief the sectarian basis of ascetic organization, their spatially far-flung organization and secular props, their composition in terms of caste and linguistic affiliation and trends of change from orthodox sectarian rural linked forms to new universalistic urban centred forms. Saraswati (1970) has done an extensive survey of the Pundits of Kashi and was engaged in organizing a research programme on the sacred complex of Kashi including the sacred shrines, Visvanath temple, the burning ghat and the bathing ghats. One of the significant features of these studies is the use of textual and contemporary native categories in guiding observations and interpreting data. The broad picture that is emerging is that while larger volumes of people are getting involved in sacred rituals, the rituals themselves are becoming simplified and standardized in order to cater to modern urban needs. Saraswati (1970a) has also posited a universal scheme for classification of cultures based on combination of three modes of transmission of knowledge—oral (Lauck), textual (Sastriya) and transcendental (Nairvritik).

Recently the researchers of the Anthropological Survey of India have published a number of ethnographic monographs relating tribal religious beliefs and practices with social structure (Bannerjee, 1968; Hajra, 1970; Nandi, et al., 1971; Rajalakshmi Misra, 1971; Guha, et al., 1972).

In view of the global expansion of human sciences and rapid social change in India, it is not surprising that the period under consideration is a time
of flowering of sociology of Hinduism, the main contours of all religious in India. Several scholars have shown special interest in conceptual, comparative and critical studies of Hinduism in its manifold dimensions.

Eliade's Encyclopedia has given a considerable space to Hinduism. The contributor Hiltebeitel (1987) makes a general survey of Hindu tradition, showing how it has taken shape historically in the "greater India" of the Indian subcontinent. The roots of Hinduism have been traced from the religion of the people of the Indus Valley. This view, generally known as "substratum" theory, is opposed to the response in favour of treating the development of Hinduism as derivable from within its own sacred literature. However, the author has identified the various phases of its development: Vedism originating from the early sacred literature of Hinduism known as Veda; classical Hinduism, identified as "Hindu synthesis", "Brahminic synthesis", or "orthodox synthesis"; classical bhakti Hinduism developed from syncretistic worship of Hindu deities; Tantric Hinduism asserting its Vedic legitimacy, in practice rejecting Hindu orthopraxy; Sankara's Advaita Vedanta and Smarta orthodoxy sustaining the unity of Hinduism; elaboration of bhakti into sectarian Hinduism, the main current of living Hinduism; and Hindu response to Islam and Westernization having many dimensions. Eliade's Encyclopedia also discusses Hinduism outside the Indian subcontinent.

of modern Hinduism. Parpola et al.'s (1986) South Asian religion and society; and Burghart's (1987) collection of throwing light on how Hinduism is perpetuated in an alien cultural milieu of Great Britain. All these are important contributors to sociology of Hinduism.

Saraswati (1986a) identifies fivefold characteristics features of Hinduism, or, what he prefers to call, Sanatan Hinduism:

(a) **Nirbandha**, without ties, not a formally and firmly constituted body. Even its sampradayas, or flowerets, are unbounded and interconnected. Taking a holistic view, it is both founded and unfounded, formed and unformed, with and without ties.

(b) **Nilakantha**, a symbolic expression of the phenomenon, which contains the multiple forms of sampradayas, with, varied beliefs and practices of opposite characters, without any constraint.

(c) **Nitya Shuddha**, eternally pure, a self-purifying system helping the realization of the highest state of purity of body and mind.

(d) **Nityamangala**, eternally auspicious, situated in harmony with transcendent values.

(d) **Nityananda**, bliss eternal, preparing man for the ultimate experience of pure aesthetics through ritual mode.

Reflecting upon the traditions of tirthas, Saraswati (1983) makes four operant ideas: (a) although tirthas are of unequal merits, they cannot be drawn into a commonly acceptable hierarchical order; (b) the Hindu sacred texts have taken account of holy places scattered all over India; (c) some important tirthas are represented by their counterparts in different regions of India; and (d) despite the cultural diversities of tirthas, in terms of conceptual categories,
performances, performers, and linguistic regionalities, there is an overall unity of beliefs and practices in India’s sacred traditions.

Of the several tirthas, some seem to have too readily fascinated the scholars from various disciplines. Kashi (Varanasi, Benaras), for instance, is one such place. Besides, the luminous work of Eck (1982), based on comprehensive textual and contextual sources, several anthropological and sociological studies of Kashi have appeared, since Sinha and Saraswati began in 1967. The exposition ranges widely from the “holiest ascetics” (Sinha and Saraswati, 1978), and “sacred complex” in all its dimensions (Vidyarthi, Saraswati and Jha, 1979; M. N. Jha, 1986; R. Sahu, 1983; B. N. Sahay, 1978) to the “unotouchable Doms” (Kaushik, 1979), and “death and cosmogony” (Parry, 1981).

Pilgrimage research has in recent years gained academic popularity. The first international symposium on pilgrimage was organized by Barbara, Nimri Aziz at the Xth International Congress of Anthropological and Ethnological Sciences, held in New Delhi in 1978, and jointly chaired by Chi Nakane and Baidyanath Saraswati. The Pittsburg World Congress 1981 and the 2 subsequent ICAES 1983 and 1988 symposia were chaired by Makhan Jha followed this. As far as the Indian scholars’ participation in the international conferences and the number of published literature on Indian pilgrimage are concerned, there has been a significant growth. However, as Bowman (1985) feels, ‘certain aspects of pilgrimage studies are flawed in ways that lend themselves to the proclivities of scholars to disregard pilgrims and their practices in analysis of societies and their cultural activities’. His main contentions are that most anthropological studies on pilgrimage lack adequate theoretical orientation and tend to be positivist.
There is no denying the fact that the sociology of Indian pilgrimage, largely, is confined to the collection of descriptive data on local pilgrimage. The works of Vidyarthi et al., 1979; Pal et al., 1980; Chakrabarti et al., 1980; Morab, 1980; M. Jha, 1981; Narain, 1983; Saraswati, 1983; Aziz, 1983; Shasmal, 1983; A. K. Sinha, 1984; Viswanath, 1985; Behura, 1985; Samanta, 1987; and also M. Jha (ed), 1985 are based on the observation of the activities of the pilgrims and the organization of the sacred specialists.

Among the other aspects of pilgrimage studies, we find examination in terms of "communication process" (A. K. Sinha, 1979), "human circulation" (Bhardwaj, 1985), "communities" (Morinis, 1985) and "personal dimension" (Aziz, 1987), which indicate a wider social process of transcending the local pilgrimage.

At another level of abstraction, Saraswati (1985) provides a "cosmological explanation" of the traditional vision of pilgrimage as an exercise in perceiving the macrocosm, knowing the Absolute, a quest for falling together of all opposites, for a return of the primordial. Drawing upon the Tantric concept of pilgrimage as a phenomenon to be realized within one’s own body and mind, he points out that ‘pilgrimage cannot be fully understood in terms of a historical process, a temporal event, and a series of action to fulfill human desires; it is essentially a high drama enacted at a place where every pilgrim plays an archetypal role, knowingly or unknowingly’.

This brief review of studies amply demonstrates that not much has been done to understand the changing status and role as well as public and private life of tirtha purohits of tirtha nagaris.

1·4 THE CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

The present study revolves around the following major concepts which have been operationalized as under—
a) **Pandas**—Pandas are those Brahmans who serve as pilgrimage priests, generally called tirtha purohits, at ghats to those who are their jajmans or who come from outside to have a holy dip in Ganga.

b) **Status**—Status is a position of a person or group in the general institutional system, recognized and supported by the entire community (or even entire society), rooted in folkways and norms. Status is created by the opinion of the others. In other words, status refers to location of a person or a group in a system of social relationships.

c) **Role**—Role denotes pattern of behaviour expected of the occupant of a status, i.e., a set of expectations applied to an individual or a group who occupies a particular position in the structure of a social system. Being a dynamic aspect of status, it refers to the working of a person or a group according to his status.

d) **Public Life**—Public life of the Pandas means their daily life at the ghats where they serve as priests, guides and genealogists to their jajmans or other visitors who come to take holy dip in sacred ganga or to perform last rites of their deceased relative.

e) **Private Life**—Private life of the Pandas means their life as orthodox Brahman priests inside the home, their marriage practices, dietary habits, husband-wife relationships, relationship with other elder and younger family members, their attitudes towards various restrictions concerning menstruation, pregnancy, parturition etc.

### 1.5 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The present study would address itself to the following major research questions—

1) What is the traditional status and role of the Pandas of Hardwar?
2) What changes Panda community is undergoing in their status and role because of altered socio-economic and political changes? In other words, how the Panda community, which had inherited an occupational commitment to values traditionally, considered an essential part of orthodox Hindu life, could reconcile its public role with the changing socio-economic and political scenario?

3) How is the public life of the Pandas of Hardwar at ghats, i.e. the daily life of the Pandas at ghats in context of their relations with jajmans or others who visit this tirtha nagari?

4) How is the private life of the Pandas at home as orthodox Brahman priests and what changes are taking place in it with reference to ambivalence of their position both religiously and socially?

1.6 COVERAGE

The locale of the present study is Hardwar in the Hardwar district of Uttarakhand. Uttarakhand is bounded by Tibet (China) in the North and Uttar Pradesh in the South, Nepal in the east and Himachal Pradesh in the west. Uttarakhand is the sacred land where so many ancient shrines and places of pilgrimage are scattered. The demand for a separate hill state of Uttarakhand arose in 1930 for rapid development of Kumaon and Garhwal regions of Uttar Pradesh. Many committees of the government of Uttar Pradesh considered it from time to time but did not find it economically feasible until the agitation by the Uttarakhand Kranti Dal became violent. That brought out ultimately the new State on November 9, 2000. Almost entire State is a hilly carved out except two districts of Hardwar and Udham Singh Nagar. 63% area is covered by forests and hardly 12.5% land is fit for cultivation. The State also does not have many big industries. It comes to that the economy of the new State is likely to remain
in a non-self-sustainable condition. The State mainly depends on remittances from people employed in North India. It has been granted special status by Planning Commission to come over its teething financial constraints. Fortunately, the State has the high potentiality for development of tourism, forestry and hydro-electric power which if fully harnessed could help to make Uttaranchal a prosperous State.

Besides being an important pilgrimage centre, Hardwar is fast growing as a tourist centre. From Hardwar Ganges descends to the plains. It is one of the seven cities which give salvation mentioned in the Skand Puran, the other six being Ayodhya, in the north, where Lord Rama ruled; Mathura, the birth place of Lord Krishna; Kashi, the city of Lord Shiva; Kanchi, in the south, sacred to both Lord Vishnu and Lord Shiva; Avantika (Ujjain), in central India, also sacred to Lord Shiva; and Dwaraka, the capital of Lord Krishna in the west. The population of Hardwar District was 14,44,213, whereas the population of Hardwar was 3,48,142 (2001 Census) residing over an area of 123 kilometers and is situated at the height of 2,947 meters above sea level. The universe of the study is the Pandas of Hardwar.

Three-quarters of the Pandas live in Jwalapur (a town about six kilometers from Hardwar) and one-quarter in Kankhal (a town three and a half kilometers from Hardwar). The work of the Pandas is the practical and spiritual service of their jajmans; they see to their comfort and lodging and perform whatever rites they require. The character of Jwalapur is entirely different from that of Kankhal. It is secular, larger and has a much busier market. It is also a trading centre for grains, timber, cattle and tobacco. It is some four miles from Hardwar and situated on the banks of the Ganges canal.
The Panda community lives towards the centre of the town encircled by low caste community. In general, the oldest lineages live right in the centre, the more recently arrived further out. Interspersed with them, is a scattering of high caste tenants and businesspersons living separately. Encircling the high castes are the Hindu Harijans, Muslim Kasai (butchers), Muslim Sekhs, Muslim Nai, Hindu Harijans, Muslim Darzi, Garhas and Julahas (spinners), Hindu Cauhans (zamindars and farmers), Sainis (farmers and gardeners), Ghosis and Pathans, and Mocis (shoemakers). The Muslim sekhs perform for Muslim a role similar to that of the Hindu Mahabrahmans and sweepers in that they beat the drums and take the cloth laid on the dead body.

The most obvious distinction between Jwalapur and Kankhal and Hardwar is, of course, that Jwalapur has a large Muslim population. Up to 1947, the Muslims seem to have lived in relative harmony with the Hindus although there were a few incidents arising out of contentious issues such as cow sacrifice and the selling and eating of beef. The two communities lived separately but there was some ritual interchange. Some Muslim communities retained certain Hindu traditions (for example, Rajput, families celebrated festivals such as Dussehra) and all retained a caste-like structure in terms of marriage, occupation and commensality. Thus, there were Hindu barbers and Muslim barbers, Hindu tailor and Muslim tailors.

The Pandas and other high caste persons were accustomed to go to Muslim sayanas (wise men) for advice and to worship at the tombs of Muslim saints who were regarded as very powerful. They also attended certain festivals shared by Hindus and Muslims. One is the festival of Gaughal, which takes place in September on land owned by the Bara Dhara. It is the celebration of a Hindu saint Gugga who was born in a Rajput family in Rajastha and who is
depicted riding upon a horse and armed with sword, bow and arrow. It is known that the greatest temple of Gugga is in Rajasthan and contains many snakes. One of the Panda said that Gugga is called guggapir (i.e., the Muslim term for a saint) because he read parts of the Kuran. Previously, a Muslim fakir officiated at the shrine together with a Jhimvar and a Jogi but, after 1947, this custom was discontinued. Still today, however, some Muslims go to the fair.

It is said that when the Muslim ruler Taimurlang came to Hardwar, he converted some Hindus through force and others through fear. In time Muslims also came from outside. Before conversion, the local Muslims were Rajputs, Vaisya and Sudra and formerly the power of the Rajput zamindars was considerable. Even today, the Rajputs live on the inside of the town and the lower castes on the outside.

At the time of Partition, there was an exodus of Muslims from Jwalapur and the Pumbha families, who at that time lived in Kankhal, also fled. Many were murdered in retaliation for the massacre of Punjabi Hindus whose relatives and neighbours had abandoned their homes and come to Hardwar. After a year, the Uttar Pradesh Government guaranteed their safety and many returned and took back their property. Today, they are, in general, poor and ill educated. There is, of course, no inter-marriage with Hindu castes and no open eating or smoking together. However, through political contact and increasingly through higher education and neutral job situations, there are some points of meeting between Hindus and Muslims. During the period of fieldwork, suspicion hung over them with regard to their loyalty in the Pakistan crisis and they were accused of singing patriotic Pakistani songs. Pandas, generally, are hostile to Muslims, regarding them as murderers of cows and eaters of beef as well as potential iconoclasts; the more orthodox would not like to touch a Muslim and many
differentiate between foreigners who live in a cold climate and therefore need to eat meat and those who do so voluntarily. Within Jwalapur, there are not only several mosques but also a Jain temple and Sikh gurdwaras.

The Pandas, through their profession, necessarily have dealings with a great many local castes and communities both in Hardwar, and Jwalapur and Kankhal. In Hardwar, they come into contact with shopkeepers, cafe owners, managers of dharmashalas, rickshawpullers, etc. and it is part of their job to know Hardwar thoroughly and to be able to advise their pilgrims well. They are also familiar with all the specialists they call to play their part in the ritual scenario and who include Mahabrahmans, barbers, sweepers and Bhattas as well as learned karmakandi pandits. And, since they own or rent rooms or houses in Hardwar in which they live during the day (and their jaimans at night), they are served by low caste servants—sweepers barbers, shoe-menders, restaurant employees, etc. These relationships are, in general, more impersonal than those jaimani links inherited in Kankhal and Jwalapur.

Within their own, home towns, as in Hardwar, the Pandas are shown respect as priestly Brahmins and deferred to as ritually superior. They have institutionalized jaimani relationships with several castes and employ the services of many more as potters, gardeners, labourers, decorators, carpenters, domestic servants and watchmen.

Some Pandas also directly serve a section of the local population. For example, some of the Misra and Sukla families serve local jaimans outside the community as kul purohit while individual Panda astrologists, healers, palmists or vaidyas sometimes gain a reputation among the town or neighbourhood. They are sought out by local inhabitants and rewarded in cash and attracts a local following. For example, today a young Panda girl claims to be the
incarnation of Saim Baba. She has devotees among several local communities and they regularly present offerings to her. A few Pandas augment their income by reciting katha or kirtan and they too are called by local inhabitants and afterwards presented with dakshina, fruit, flowers, etc.

Apart from these relationships, the Pandas contact with other castes depends upon many factors. Neighbours of high castes will usually be invited to marriage parties but social relations within the home are usually limited to kin and affine. Religious functions such as Ramlilas, inter-caste festivals such as Holi and Diwali, cultural societies and wrestling provide occasions when inhabitants of the town see and great each other. On these occasions, there is usually much joking and bantering and they provide a welcome break from the routing prescribed by tradition. Increasingly today too, there are friendships between men of different castes which result from similarity of profession or interest.

The town of Kankhal is about two miles to the south of Hardwar on the banks of the Ganges. It is extremely ancient being mentioned, for example, in the Mahabharat and many Purans. It is most famous for its connection with Siv and his wife Sati who burnt herself in the fire of the Yajna of Deksa. It contains several temples of repute and several akharas adorned with friezes (said to the Moghul) of great artistry. There is one central bazaar and the inhabitants, rather more than those of Jwalapur or Hardwar, from a face-to-face community composed largely of Pandas, servant castes and sadhus. Today, there are also some residents of high caste families who own shops or businesses in either Kankhal itself or Hardwar.

Adjoining the river Ganges at Kankhal are the great akharas of sadhus (Udasis, Nirmalas, Nirbanis, Niranjanis, etc.) and, ghat. In one direction lies
the road to Hardwar along the Ganges bank. This is called Sanyasi road and is lined with asrams, temples and shrines. In the other direction is the road out to neighbouring villages, fields and gardens. On the road out of Kankhal towards Jwalapur are Gurkul Kangri and Premnagar Asram, the home of the Divine Light Movement.

Close to the bank of the Ganges and to the akharas and asrams are individual families of higher castes, some of whom have immigrated to the town comparatively recently. There are Jains, Vaisya, Khatris, Sikhs and Aroras with a few outsider Brahmans and some servant families. However, the main high caste community is overwhelmingly that of the Pandas who occupy whole mohallas. Some lineage groups occupy an entire land with family units living in adjacent houses. The Panda houses are built round a courtyard behind small galls or lanes and they have, in general, an atmosphere of neat-ness and peace. They usually have a few sacred plants or trees growing (tulsi, pipal, amvala, etc.) and sometimes, standing in the yard, a buffalo or cow. Further to the right is the community of Mahabrahmans who are adjudged almost as ancient as the Pandas but whose status is much more ambivalent.

Still further away from the Ganges bank are the Purbiya, a community of low caste people from Eastern Uttar Pradesh who immigrated several years ago and who still live in temporary dwellings. Then, in separate bastis, are the carpenters, the gardeners and the potters and behind them on the outskirts of Kankhal are the sweepers and tanners. The Pandas seldom go into a low caste basti except to summon someone for work of for some ritual function or (nowadays) to canvass during municipal or state elections. However, the pigs and compounds and have to be driven off with great noise and disgust. Along the main road to Hardwar are the washer men (Dhobis) whose families play
and live in the street. Chickens scratch around and donkeys and horses are tied outside the huts. In both Kankhal and Hardwar, rub the clothes with a stick and the open space behind to spread them out. At various intersections in the bazaar are the wood sellers, the vendors of hay from the jungle and the rickshawpullers.

There are a number of important institutions close to Kankhal. One of these is Ramakrishna Mission which is situated right behind the Harijan bastis. The swamis, who are often Bengalis, are admired and revered for the work they do and they have a very high status locally. Another is Gurkul Kangri, an Arya Samaj institution that is controlled by the Arya Pratinidhi Sabha of Punjab. There are still many Arya Samajis on the staff and in the student body but, today, sanatani Hindus also go there to learn and even to teach (among them some Panda boys and professors). In general, however, the teachers are drawn from many states—Punjab, Bengal, Gujarat, Uttar Pradesh, and from many castes with a preponderance of Rajputs, Khatris and Vaisyas.

These institutions are relatively recent. The link of the sadhu orders with Kankhal is an ancient as that of the Pandas and these two communities together for centuries formed the local elite. The Mahants and Mandalwswars of the akharas and asram own vast landed and social importance. The death of a Mahant can cause, as much difficulty over the succession as that of the Divine Light Movement which is the best known. The boy god (Balyogesvar) was the son of a local Kankhal inhabitant who was in origin a Pahari Rajput. His father was well known locally but thought to be a fraud. His two marriages and general way of life caused gossip and scandal and today his movement (so well known internationally) is not well known locally except for the eccentricity of its devotees. In general, the asram remains something of an island and there is little contact with local people.
Within Kankhal there is a Jain temple, a Sikh gurudvara, and towards Jwalapur a small fundamentalist Christian church of no local importance which has a very small congregation drawn mainly from Kerala Christians at B. H. E. L.

A sample of 50 Pandas, 35 from Jwalapur and 15 from Kankhal, was selected on the basis of random sampling from among 3,000 Pandas. The attempt was made to include the Pandas of all age groups so that their traditional and contemporary status may be analyzed objectively and more meaningfully. The individual Pandas thus selected constitute the sample and the units of study.

There are several reasons why Hardwar is an appropriate choice for the study of a pilgrimage centre and its priests. It is one of the most ancient tirthas in India and its importance has been recognized throughout the centuries. It is situated on the banks of the Ganges and is the gateway to the high Himalayas, the home of the Gods. Its appeal to pilgrims is non-sectarian and supra-regional, and its sanctity is confirmed by numerous references in the Mahabharat, the Purans and other religious texts. The sacred complex is linked to mythical cycles of all-India importance and is the site of fairs of national renown (Kumbh Mela, Ardha Kumbh, Baisakhi, etc.).

Today, Hardwar presents an extraordinarily interesting and rich field of study. It is the home of many orders of monks and sanyasis, sectarians and institutes of traditional learning. In terms of secular development, it is a rapidly growing town, which is expanding as an industrial and tourist centre.

The Pandas of Hardwar are numerous, disciplined and possess bahis (record books) which go back to many centuries. Their links with their jajmans are even more ancient and they have been performing ritual and receiving donation for hundreds of years. Moreover, the jajmani system and the ritual network within which the Pandas function is very complex and has by and large been neglected by the students of Indian sociology.
Hardwar, as a city of pilgrimage, is extremely ancient. It is one of the seven cities which give salvation (moksapuris) mentioned in the Skand Puran, the other six being Ayodhya, Mathura, Kashi, Kanchi, Avantika (Ujjain) and Dwaraka. Hardwar is referred to by many names—Maya, Kapila, Gangadvara and Hardwar was part of a large area known as Maya Ksetra which was bounded by Neel Parvat in the East, Varseni River in the West, Naga Tirth in the South and Ratna Sthambh in the North. It was spread over twelve yojanas in length and three in width.

There are whole cycles of myths which are associated with Hardwar but which are known throughout India. To the Pandas they are of particular significance, since they testify to the holiness of Hardwar and therefore indirectly to their own priestly status. Hardwar is linked in myth with many gods (who often appeared in response to the call of a devote) and with many sages, saints, risis and maharsis. Thus, all three gods—Brahma, Visnu and Shiva—are associated with Hari-Ki-Puari and other ghats and shrines, and the Goddess has sanctified the ground in several of her forms. The asurs Sumb-Nisumbh fought a battle with Sakti-ma at Devi Parvat and Camunda at a mountain west of Mansa Devi. There are temples of Ganga Mai, Candi Devi, Anjani Devi, Gauri-Sankar and many other goddesses. Hardwar is also famed as the birthplace of Bhisma and Dronacarya and as the place where Raja Dhrtrastra (father of the Kauravas) worshipped and found salvation. Ram, Bharat and Laksaman visited Hardwar in Dvaparyug and the Pandavs also travelled through it during their ascension to Svarga, leaving Bhimgoda as the mark of their passage.

Of all the myths associated with Hardwar, those, which concern the Gangas, are the best known. In a sense, Hardwar is the Ganges—there is a
temple incarnate, a deity personified, the perennially flowing, the ever-new Ganges. The purification and peace come from the act of bathing that is the aim of all pilgrims. The holy bath or ‘dip’ is the only essential rite of pilgrimage. Many legends stress the sanctity of the Ganges at Hardwar. It is said that Ganga jal collected from Hardwar, and used by countless pilgrims for ritual and even medicative purposes, will last uncontaminated for ever, whereas that taken from, for example, Banaras or Allahabad, will quickly spoil.

There are many stories told of the manner of Ganges’ descent to earth. One concerns the origin of the seven streams near Saptarsi Asram—

"When Ganges came to the asrams of the seven rsis, she divided into seven streams to avoid their jealousy and thus this place is called Saptarsi Asram".

Another story tells how the descent of the Ganges disturbed the sage Jahnu as he was performing a sacrifice and, in his anger, he drank up the waters—

"Once Ganges disappeared through the abuse of an rsi. Ganges was flowing in the form of water while Rsi Jahnu was praying on the bank. Ganges came past and took up his puja pots. The Rsi became angry and drank all her water in three acmans. Then he found his puja pots. The other rsis, mahatmas and devtas prayed to Rsi Jahnu for Ganges. Then the Rsi was conciliated and let Ganges out from his loin. Ganges is therefore called Jahmavi".

There are also legends, which relate to the myth of the churning of the ocean. Some say that Brahma placed in Hari-Ki-Puari the jar of nectar (amrta-ghat), which he snatched away during the battle between the surs and asurs (who were fighting to divide the fourteen ratnas churned out of the ocean). Others do not always mention Brahma—
“During the time of Kumbh Mela, the water in Hari-Ki-Puari becomes nectar. After the churning of the ocean of milk by gods and raksas, there was a struggle for the pitcher of nectar and, during this struggle, it was broken and drops fell in four places—Hardwar, Allahabad, Nasik and Ujjain. Every twelve years in each place, nectar again appears”.

There is a legend concerning Shiva which is connected with the same myths—

“Neel Dhara is the main stream of the Ganges. After the ocean was churned and nectar was found, poison (Kalkutvis) was also discovered. That poison was so effective that even the wind, which blew upon the jug, became poisonous and persons whom it touched became unconscious. Then all the devtas and asurs came to Lord Shiva and respectfully begged him to drink that poison and save the world. At this time, Lord Shiva was sitting on the Neel Parvat (a mountain of Kailash and Himalaya). He drank the poison at a place, which is twenty miles from Hardwar and held it in his throat. His throat, by the effect of the poison, became dark blue (Neel kanth). Because Ganges was coming down from the hair of Lord Shiva, that part of the Ganges on which the shadow of the throat fell became quite blue. Thus, the flow there is called Neel Dhara and the mountain Neel Parvat. Nowadays, poisonous diseases can be removed by bathing there.”

Of the other legends associated with the Ganges at Hardwar, one of the most interesting is that of Ganga’s marriage with King Santanu, father of Bhisma, the great warrior of the Mahabharat.

The major characteristics of the selected sample of Pandas are as follows—
1. All the Pandas are Hindus;

2. Age-wise they are 43.5 per cent in the age group of 18-35 years, 29.6 per cent in the age group of 35-45 years and 26.8 per cent are above the age of 45 years;

3. As regards their marital status, we find that 80.0 per cent are married and 20.0 per cent unmarried;

4. Their educational background reflects the following position : up to Matric 60.0 per cent, up to B.A. 30.0 per cent and up to M.A. 10.0 per cent;

5. As regards their fathers' occupation, all were professing the traditional occupation of the Pandas indicating the continuance of traditional occupation among them in successive generations;

6. 75.0 per cent Pandas live in joint families, whereas the remaining 25.0 per cent in nuclear families;

7. Likewise, 70.0 per cent Pandas have large sized (more than 8 members) families, 20.0 per cent medium sized (5 to 7 members) families, whereas the remaining 10.0 per cent have small sized (less than 5 members) families; and

8. All are native residents residing in Hardwar city, Jwalapur and Kankhal.

1.7 TOOLS, DATA COLLECTION & DATA PROCESSING

The data were collected in 2001-2002 by informal interviews which are characterized by a flexibility of approach to questioning. They do not follow a system of pre-determined questions and standardized techniques of recording information. This technique allows the interviewer much greater freedom to ask, in case of need, supplementary questions or at times he may omit certain
questions if the situation so requires. The data collected through the informal interviews were supplemented by non-participant observation. Observation of Pandas was confined only at ghats. Informal interviews with the family members of the selected Pandas were also conducted. Data from jajmans about their views about the Pandas were also collected through informal interviews. The collection of data was done in 2001-2002. The primary data collected through informal interviews and observation were qualitative in nature. These data along with the secondary data required about the locale, traditional status and role of Pandas and collected from secondary sources available were manually handled.

1.8 IMPORTANCE OF STUDY

Our primary aim in the field and afterwards was simple. It was to provide an ethnographic study of a community of Brahman priests who served a pilgrimage centre and to analyze their role in the whole pilgrimage complex. It seemed that the number of detailed monographs on such normative communities was few and, indeed, that very little had been written on the theme of pilgrimage itself.

The title of the thesis refers to the public and private life of the Panda community because both have been stressed. We were interested not only in the elaborate mechanism of pilgrimage but in the Panda community itself, and we considered that an understanding of the Panda/jajman relationship, and of the ritual network surrounding the pilgrimage centre of Hardwar, would be depend and enriched by a clear comprehension of what was happening within the community. In particular, we were concerned with how the Pandas, as orthodox Brahman priests, were adapting to the political and economic changes which have occurred since Independence and which might have appeared to threaten their own priestly authority and prestige. We wanted to discover how a
community, which had inherited an occupational commitment to values traditionally considered an essential part of orthodox Hindu life, could reconcile its public role with the social changes that were taking place not only in the world outside but internally.

The study shows that the traditional status of Pandas has been very high not because of higher caste, but also due to sacred profession. They were regarded in high esteem and were not always after money. Their relations with their patrons were very cordial. Their traditional role has been to perform last rites of the deceased and to keep records of the deceased. They also performed pooja on behalf of their jajmans who visited the holy city of Hardwar. The Pandas perform all their ritual duties near the bank of the Ganges. They conduct the death ceremonies in general at Kusghat, and Ganga pooja and the immersion of the ashes at Har Ki Pauri. Other rites (mundan, yajnopavit, suhagnitari, godan, etc.) take place at both ghats.

The contemporary status of Pandas has changed considerably. The materialistic approach being adopted by them has lowered their status. Daily visitors can be seen avoiding the Pandas, if possible, or quarrelling with their jajmans over the amount to be paid in return of the services rendered by them. Many pilgrims are seen to avoid Har Ki Pauri to take holy bath and do so on the other side of the Ganges. Many ghats have come on Rishikesh Road side of the Ganges, where Pandas are not present and have adequate parking space. These ghats are now being preferred by large number of pilgrims to avoid Pandas whom they regard 'gurus', not in the sense of learned Pandits but clever guys in getting money in the name of deities. There has not been much change in the role of Pandas. Their traditional role of performing last rites of the deceased, to keep records of the deceased and to do pooja on behalf of their jajmans remains the same.
The public life of Pandas, as the hereditary priests of Hardwar, remains as mediators between their jajmans and the deities—mediators of merit (punya) and the means whereby sin (pap) is destroyed. It is through their knowledge of the correct procedures of worship that pilgrims attain maximum reward and gain specific ends. They claim and have a monopoly of priestly service as far as pilgrims are concerned. They maintain that their authority to perform rites for pilgrims and to receive their donations comes from Sastras and that those who neglect these obligations gain no benefit from pilgrimage.

The study also shows that the relationship of the Panda with his pilgrim is not only religious but also social and historical. A pilgrim may be skeptical of the value of certain rites and perform them only because he is pressured by his female relatives, but he may still have some interest in common with his Panda—music, politics, etc. The Pandas have a contractual relationship with many groups whose function is ritually neutral—shopkeepers, local farmers and gardeners, nearby villagers selling their produce, rickshawalas, tongawalas, etc. Although some bargaining or bartering may take place, the relationship is primarily a cash one, depending on the market rate. Within the Panda community, true jajmani relationships occur only with those whose services are required for ritual purposes and in particular, those concerned with pollution. These specialists include the revered family priest as well as barber or sweeper.

On the whole, the study shows 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 truevice 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 from 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 purohitiji, 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.