Chapter 2

Introducing Pandas of Hardwar

Hardwar acts as a magnet for immigrants and semi-permanent visitors, attracting students from all parts of India, eremite and cenobite sadhus, devotees of particular sects and retired people who want a peaceful and worshipful end to life. Many elderly people move to Hardwar either to live in some kind or religious institution or to follow a modified monastic life in their own houses. Wealthy merchants, businesspersons and pious widows often build a house or dharmasala in Hardwar and use it periodically. At other times, their relatives, caste fellows or even those from the same town or region are permitted to live there. Hardwar is also, like most pilgrimage centres, a home for the displaced, the mad, the ill the leprous, the deformed and mutilated. Pilgrims and charitable organizations give them food and aims and they, in turn, performs a religious function.

Rowe remarks (1973), that “from the earliest times the Indian city has provided a symbolic representation of the social order, both in its spatial arrangements and in its social structures. In the city we note arrangements reflecting the necessities of caste, kinship and association and these mirror concerns of the totality of Indian society.” In all three towns, residential position and ritual and occupational status are strongly correlated and the position of the Pandas as the traditionally dominant high caste made clear. In village are Jwalapur particularly, the spatial arrangements of the village are retained and
they are now constrained in this form because of the lack of building space. In both, there is a separation between high and low castes. The lowest castes are segregated in bastis.

Hardwar itself is much more heterogeneous than its neighbouring towns and although ancient has expanded rapidly in the last one hundred thirty years. It has a fluctuating and mixed population. As a pilgrim centre, but Pandas economically dependent on pilgrims and tourists. The Pandas own or rent rooms by the ghats. There are the sources of Pandas livelihood in the comparison of whole year Pandas mint money in festival month (Basakhi, Sawan, Kumbh etc.) when the tourists and pilgrims come to visit it a stay at there lodges as Dharmashalas.

2.1 PANDAS AND THEIR HOUSEHOLDS

The wife is bound to live with her husband and to submit herself to his authority even now after the passing of the 1955 Act. If either of them deserts the other, the aggrieved spouse may file a petition for the restitution of conjugal rights. Although some of the Panda wives have been deserted, they do not go to court because they are independent and because to go to court is in itself disgraceful. In fact, pressure from relatives is employed rather than legal measures and quarrels usually centre on the return of the dowry. To be deserted is a terrible fate for a Panda wife and it is made worse for her by the knowledge that the burden on her parents will increase, since they will have to provide for her maintenance. It will be usually quite impossible to remarry her. There are very rare cases where wives (bahu) of Pandas have left their husband's house without the consent of their fathers and have afterwards been remarried outside the Panda samaj, and where parents of guardians have remarried a girl
deserted by her husband. In such cases, dahej is given twice and the expense for the parents is great. Such remarriages are highly scandalous at the time.

There are strong social pressures, which discourage individuality as opposed to tradition. However, since the formal organizations of the Panda community are often powerless, gossip is the main social weapon, together with avoidance and the breaking of family links. Where a Panda is economically independent of his father and of the community, censure may not be so crushing. Thus, many Pandas say that the disregard for the community and for elders is increasing.

The remarriage of widowers (unlike that of widows) poses few problems. If the man or boy is suitable in all other respects—he is relatively young, has a good income, owns property and baheis and has few or no children—a father will consent to marry his girl to a widower. As girls depend on their parents, they will not take any difficulties. Only if they have some further education or the contemplated bridegroom is much older will they put forward objections. Many Pandas have been married twice, or even three or four times. There are a few cases where a husband has married his dead wife’s sister.

Many Pandas who are now heads of households lived as children with two ‘mothers’, their father’s co-wives, and it is accepted that Hindus traditionally have the right to marry any number of wives, even though they have a wife or wives living. The Pandas who took a second wife generally did so because their first wife was barren. A few Pandas continued to marry a second them even after the passing of the Act of 1955 but the first case, the first wife would not go to the court because they are not independent and because to go to court is in itself disgraceful and the main reason is that the offence is non-cognizable (Suomoto) no action was taken. Largely the offenders were linked
by close kin ties to Panda leaders and because the factionalism produced by party politics resulted in stalemate. Bitterness was particularly noticeable if the deserted wife's rightful claim to maintenance from her husband was not respected.

Women in the Panda community are not coparceners but inherit under the Hindu Succession Act of 1956 which, in several respects, leaves the coparcenaries system untouched. Section 8 defines the heirs of those who die intestate. Previously, ancestral property devolved only on coparceners and, before 1937, women had only the right to maintenance.

The new legislation means that property can now go out of the lineage group or family. Until very recently, women seldom claimed property legally theirs. No, there are one or two examples. One case we shall look at concerns the daughter of a Panda who filed a suit for a half share against her "cousin-brother". She was able to do so because of the laws whereby a daughter or widow can inherit. In general, however, the Pandas still believe strongly that the dowry given with a bride (which includes bhat for example) takes the place of inheritance. Kanyadan is considered the greatest of gifts and donations. Thus, Panda women generally do not claim although they have the legal right. If they do so, they may antagonize their brothers who will otherwise help them in the marriage of their daughters and granddaughters.

We now look at certain examples of litigation within the community and see how disputes come about. From them we can see the problems that arise where there is no male issue and where there are male heirs not in the direct line of descent. The new legislation confuses the principles of male coparcener ship so that, for example, it is disputed whether a daughter or brother or brother's son should inherit. As we have seen, traditionally women within the community
do not inherit property from their paternal lineage and, after marriage, are regarded as belonging to a different lineage. This practice is reinforced by the nature of jajman vrti. Jajmans prefer to deal with a male family member rather than a gumasta and women cannot themselves carry on the family business. Thus, with the help of relatives and supporters and by paying out money, a father is younger brother or "cousin-brother" will keep the record books and fight the case. Even where there is no alternative claimant, the daughter will have difficulty for outsiders to learn the trade. If her husband is in business or service, he will have to give it up to become a working Panda, employ a gumasta, or contract the bahis to another Panda. In all cases, a paternal uncle of "cousin-brother" is in a good position to take all the record books from the safe and keep them underground. The daughter or widow cannot go to Hardwar and cannot meet pilgrims and, therefore, cannot easily check.

Hardwar itself is much more heterogeneous than its neighbouring towns and although ancient has expanded rapidly in the last one hundred thirty years. It has a fluctuating and mixed population. As a pilgrim centre, but Pandas economically dependent on pilgrims and tourists. The Pandas own or rent rooms by the ghats (the Kankhal Pandas own huts actually on Subas Ghat next to Hari-ki-pauri). A few own large lodging houses fronting the main ghat or close to the central bazaar. All along the High Street and along the lanes parallel to the Ganges are the rooms and buildings of the Pandas. In these (or in the courtyards), they receive and house their pilgrims. The entire centre is a honeycomb or warren of Pandas.

Many of the dharmashalas and lodging houses recently built are owned by individuals or communities outside Hardwar and are run by managers. A large number of the functionaries are therefore also from outside: for example, the Rajasthani temple and dharmashala has a Rajasthani manager and pujari
the Karnatak dharmashala is run by a Brahman from the South, Bola Giri Asram is run by Bengalis.

The local residents consist mostly of shopkeepers, managers and servants of hotels, lodging houses and dharmashalas, cafe owners, rickshawpullers, caprasis, flower sellers, betel sellers and employees of schools, hospitals, irrigation department, local offices, the dak bungalow, etc. Frequently, the day population lives elsewhere at night. Many of those who work in shops or as craftsmen come from Jwalapur and Kankhal. It is unusual to find communities living together in the sizeable bastis that they from in Jwalapur and Kankhal, and even the weepers live on top of the dharmashalas and houses that they serve.

Many of the wealthiest residential families occupying good positions are immigrants from Punjab who have built up businesses within Hardwar but who look to cities and villages in Punjab and elsewhere as their real homes. (There are also colonies of Punjabi refugees in the area but they are outside Hardwar and closer to Jwalapur and Kankhal). Several of these families have been generous benefactors to Hardwar, donating colleges, parks, statues, etc. but, by the original inhabitants, they are still regarded as outsiders. The newcomers—Bhalla, Khatri, Sikh, Arora, Vaisya, etc.—are generally regarded as wealthier than the older established families and having a more luxurious life style.

In Hardwar (to a much greater extent than in Kankhal or Jwalapur), it is possible to see the growth of a small service class recruited from several states and often allotted houses by the employer (e.g. an engineering firm, post office, municipal department).
It would be appropriate to introduce social change among the Panda community. Previously, the Panda community was the dominant one within Hardwar. Records from the British period show that the Panda leaders, with the respected shopkeepers and Mahants, made up the effective society of the area. Panda representatives were invited to attend Government darbars and receptions and Panda leaders had an influence, which transcended the limits of the community. It is said locally that the sardars of Phirahedi lineage, for example, were consulted by the whole of Pancpuri as man who were wealthy and influential and who had many kinsmen and supporters. It was principally Pandas who convened panchayats to discuss important issues affecting the area and who held meetings to consider what sanatani attitudes to new movements should be (for example, to Gandhi's espousal of Harijan uplift). When the municipality was constituted under a British chairman, Pandas were well represented and they supplied the first elected chairman. (Today also the chairman is a Panda). However, with the growth in population, their dominance became less obvious.

2.2 PRIESTLY OCCUPATION VIS-A-VIS OTHERS

The community, two or three generations ago, was almost entirely priestly in orientation although a few families possessed farms and property and lived as zamindars. During the British period, one or two began to learn English and to work as clerks in law courts. With the growth in schools and colleges, this trend has continued and an increasing number have taken to the professions as well as to shop keeping. Whereas their previous position as head of the ritual hierarchy coincided with a social and economic dominance, today they exist as a traditional community within a complex urban setting in which many types of hierarchy and value systems co-exist. This change is visible in their
jajmans also. Previously, the most valued jajmans were the rajas and maharajas of landed estates and states. Today, it is the wealthy Vaisya families (e.g., Birla, Dalmiya, Bajoria, Somani, Khetan and Simhariya) of whom their purohits boast.

Increasingly, the influence of the Pandas as a community is diluted by the immigration into Hardwar of outsiders who have no part in the traditional social hierarchy and for whom local social structures have no direct relevance. The population of Hardwar has increased with the formation of new state of Uttaranchal and proliferation of Bharat Heavy Electrical Units. It may be noted that after partition, many refugees came to this city. Between 1941 and 1951, there was a massive increase of 40.46% due mainly to the influx of Punjabi refugees after 1947. At one time, the number of refugees exceeded the permanent population. Hardwar could not support so many and some went elsewhere but even to this day there are colonies of refugees in Panchpuri. The Punjabis came to Hardwar in part because they have always had a very close connection with the city, regarding it as their own pilgrimages centre and contributing much to its ashrams and dharmaashalas. Today, many refugees are shopkeepers and businessmen. In the decade 1951-61, the percentage increases was only 45.7%, which probably reflects the stabilizing of the situation. Between 1961 and 1971, however, the population rose 33.2%.

The new and sizeable Punjabi element in Hardwar has an influence that cannot be discounted. Punjabis have their own language, style of clothes and manner of food preparation. Their women have much greater freedom than the local high caste women and they pay, in general, much less attention to the minutiae of hierarchy and ritual. Among them, the Ksatriy and Vaisya models are thought to be much more diffused. Many identify with the military extrovert tradition rather than the Brahmancial tradition of self-control and sacrifice. Meat
eating and the drinking of wine are customs that connect many both with the local low castes and with the professional elite in B.H.E.L., the army at Dehra Dun and the academic elites in Roorkee and Delhi. It is understandable then that many Pandas regard the Punjabi influence as the main cause of the decadence and degeneracy affecting their own society. What perhaps is of consequence that is more fundamental is the fact that these immigrants are not part of local ritual of jajmani patterns? They remain outsiders related outside. Those who are successful in business and commerce frequently regard their own life style as more sophisticated and progressive than that of the local inhabitants. Moreover, it should not be forgotten that the Punjabis come generally from what Pocock (1962) describes as castes of “ascribed specialisation” (land-owing, labouring and commercial castes). He suggests that they are ‘frings areas’ in the sense that caste values are most vulnerable in them, their internal organization as castes is most complex and they are most open to change. In contrast, the Pandas as religious specialists par excellence are most near the centre of the transmission of caste ideology. An additional factor is that some of the immigrants have been influenced by the Arya Samaj which has challenged Brahman—oriented teachings.

It is not only Punjabis who have immigrated to Hardwar. The building of modern banks, hospitals, schools, colleges, post offices, factories, and hotels has attracted into the city outsiders from different states. They, too, often remain outside the traditional local hierarchy, forming a small service class. A glance at the membership of one of Hardwar’s most “middle-class” societies, the Rotary Club (Hardwar Rotarian Souvenir, 1969) shows that it includes Aroras, Sikhs, Vaisya, Jains, Khatris and Agravals, whose field of work reflects the increased complexity of Hardwar. For example, ophthalmology, allopathic
The very existence of doctors, professors, lawyers in Hardwar, whether local or outsiders, is an aspect of the diminution of Panda dominance. Two generations previously, the Brahman pandit could answer will questions through his knowledge of the Sastras and his virtual monopoly of the duties of teaching and learning? Today, Pandas talk of traditional learning and modern learning as entirely different in character and aims. For many others, however, traditional Sanskritic learning has become a part of knowledge rather than the totality of knowledge.

Within the traditional framework, the Pandas retain respect and hegemony and many Pandas do not acknowledge any change in their dominance. However, thirty years before the implications of the high status of the Pandas were more concretely in evidence. Today, many of the outward manifestations of caste segmentation at an urban level different water fountains, different wells, and different utensils in cafes—are by law forbidden. Untouchables have entry to cinemas, hospitals, post offices and all public institutions. Even if the Pandas do observe rules of purity and seek out rickshawpullers of a middle caste or avoid tea shops which do not employ Brahman cooks, they cannot loudly proclaim what they are doing. There is,
among most Pandas an awareness of the sensitivity of low castes about their profession and status and, in general, they act with extreme delicacy. For example, when I visited the Bhatt’s or the Mahabrahmans, I was always warned against mentioning what to them might be humiliating details of their work and, similarly, I was advised to be very careful in speaking to ocha Panda families. The protection of their own purity is now done in a way which gives no offence and which is not likely to cause comment. Particularly difficult is the position of the “secular” Panda who is forced to mix socially with other castes. He has to weigh the scruples of his community and himself with the need to please others.

Thus, one of the most interesting aspects of the society is its internal disparities. Some older Pandas strictly keep all community rules on pollution, touching, commensality, etc., others do not. It would therefore be extremely difficult to draw up a matrix of caste ranking of the kind proposed by Marriott (1957) or by Mahar (1959). Moreover, such formulation as exists would not lead to a precise ranking of local caste hierarchies. The Pandas say, for example, that they eat pakki roti only from the hands of the twice-born but, in practice; they eat generally only in their own homes. The castes who surround them in Jwalapur and Kankhal and with whom they have traditional ties are obviously much lower in status. They have little reason to visit socially the homes of the Vaisya shopkeepers although they may know them intimately as friends. Finally, we may note that the number of castes within Hardwar is now so vast that any simple tabulation would be impossible. The ranking of immigrant families in itself poses problems. In general, the Pandas fit the different castes and sub-castes into the varna scheme and then into an order which they consider determined from antiquity by criteria of purity. In international terms, they distinguish Brahmans from Ksatriy and Vaisya, the twice born from Sudra and
Sudra from Untouchables. It was noteworthy that Pandas could disagree about the varna classification of Kayasths and about the relative status of Dhobi and Nai and, even (on one occasion), of Camar and Bhangi. Because the Pandas has superior status caste rankings were assumed, and greetings, relative positions, etc., had a taken-for-granted aspect. The Dhobi, Nai, Camar and Bhangi had themselves a much more intricate view of their own position as relative to other castes near them in rank.

Now-a-days, it is those Pandas who gain local offices or who are elected to positions within a political party who have to mix with people from all communities, including the Muslim. Paradoxically, therefore, it is those of highest status who meet the widest range of local castes and who are most likely to be contaminated from the orthodox point of view. Again, it is the wealthy and highly educated who are most likely to marry out of the sub-caste. They alone can afford it and can withstand any criticism made within the community. Previously, it was the bhangoinevalas (bhang drinkers) and the lowest of the Pandas that tended to be in the company of the impure.

To sum up, we may say that there has been a shift in the position of the community in relation to the town as the rate of immigration and urbanization has speeded up. Moreover, the perspective of the Pandas as a traditional community is seen as increasingly 'specialized' is being “betrayed” from within by many of the younger Pandas who are leaving the profession and who are thereby affirming change in the context of a community in which change is traditionally not a value. Yet these are the sons who today bring most prestige upon their lineages and families and through whom the community hopes to exert its influence.
2.3 FORMAL ORGANIZATIONS AMONG PANDAS

The Panda community has formal organizations which correspond to various levels of segmentation and which are lineage based. The most important organizations are Sri Ganga Sabha, which represents the entire community, and the five dharas of Jwalapur and Kankhal, which are institutionalized groupings of several lineages.

In theory, all the members of the various organizations are equal but, in fact, traditional hierarchical tendencies and the desire for power and prestige favour the continued influence of previously powerful lineages and the creation of factions around charismatic leaders. This is despite the fact that all except one of the dharas now elect their officials and have written constitutions on the Western model. (The registration of organizations is though desirable mainly because it ensures that any property held jointly has legal safeguards). It is usual for Pandas to praise their system as a form of grass-roots democracy in which power goes upwards from the smallest segment, the family. It is also usual for many Pandas to see the officials or leaders of the community as forming elite in which different pressure groups jostle for position. Many contrast their own community organizations with those of the Mahabrahmans, which are regarded as being, in fact, effective and communalistic.

It is commonly believed that many of these organizations are losing their vitality and social importance—in particular, that the dharas are decaying and that Ganga Sabha, while preserving its role of representing the Pandas to the outside world, is declining to the extent that it lacks internal corrective powers. Pandas say, for example, that "the community is going out of discipline". To some extent, this is part of the general feeling of changeover and disintegration, but there are more specific causes. The dharas are now losing the social importance that they had when the mohalia and the lineage were the main units
of interaction. The multiplication of links outside the community has reduced the importance of the locality and its presiding sardar, and importance has shifted to the political arena and to wider community projects. On the other hand, Ganga Sabha is too general and too formal a body to deal with specific offenders. Moreover, leaders are often reluctant to excommunicate or fine offenders against community norms, since close kin ties may relate them to them. Indeed, it is probable that the Pandas have always found it difficult to punish offenders, since open rifts between families or lineages in such a tight community are unpleasant.

There is another reason why the disciplinary powers of the various Sabhas are today not utilized and important issues not raised. There is uncertainty about 'religious' offences which, far more than criminal offences, threaten the purity and status of the community. The Pandas, several of whom are lawyers, are very aware both of government laws against caste discrimination and of the sensitivities of other local communities. It is, therefore, becoming increasingly problematic to publicly punish this kind of offence. Moreover, punishment is most likely to fail of its purpose if the offender is earning independently. In addition, although the feeling of the community remains strongly against aberrations, such as the eating of meat or eggs, the remarriage of widows, marrying out of the sub-caste, eating with lower castes, etc., there is the feeling that they cannot be punished directly. A few Pandas would today even maintain that these were matters for the individual, rather than the community, to decide. Moreover, it tends to be the wealthier, more sophisticated Pandas who follow these new customs and who mingle with westernized elite. Confronted by modern egalitarian ideologies which, however imperfectly practiced, have the sanction of the law and government, the Pandas cannot resist united since some kind of conflict of values is developing among themselves also.