Chapter 7: Tragedy of Power and Territoriality

7.1 Introduction

This chapter deals with the political and territorial claims made by the dominant -- and in some cases non-dominant castes and communities -- of the khap region under study. This chapter attempts to explore the subtle and not-so-visible efforts for visibility in the region as well as within the institution of khap. What ‘spaces’ are available with the communities for locating themselves on the canvas of the region as well as within the juridical set-up of khaps? The alternate realities of the juridical and political structure of khap and the geographical region under it are explored in the chapter. The chapter also traces the changes and the possibility of future changes in the structure ad region of khaps, arising out of contrasting claims. This chapter brings out the sense of power among the castes and communities of the region, through claims on political and juridical structure of khap; the chapter then goes on to discuss the claims on the territorial aspect of khap through the claims on divinity i.e. the claims on devatas, or the holy men, of the region.

The existing sociological and anthropological literature on Indian society tends to see caste as the defining metaphor. Its socio-political and cultural aspects seem to have been overplayed at the cost of other modes of social configuration, but some studies like the classical work on caste conducted by Louis Dumont (Dumont, 1970), M. N. Srinivas (Srinivas, 1955) and Andre Beteille (Beteille, 1965) did bring out the emergent tensions in the caste-based jajmani system in the wake of the new forces of modernisation. There are also studies by scholars like Rudolph and Rudolph (Rudolph & Rudolph, 1967), Rajni Kothari (Kothari, 2005) and Christophe Jafferlot (Jaffrelot, 2003) that have grappled with the questions of the political economy of caste if not its cultural anthropology. The contemporary subaltern perspectives have emerged in the writings of Gloria Goodwin Raheja (Raheja, 1994), P. Hershman (Hershman, 1974) and Badri Narayan (2009; 2001),
who focus on the ethnicity and identity formation. While these studies contribute to the analysis of the power dimensions that exist within the public sphere, they fail to give insights to understand an institution like khap, which in recent years has been seen as the cultural regulators in the ‘territorial spaces’ of Haryana and western Uttar Pradesh. More so, the above-mentioned studies are found wanting in their insights for understanding the conditions principally created by cultural and juridical systems like khap.

7.2 Khap in the Narrative of Tragedy

In this chapter, the elementary concepts of power, caste, dominance, and chance are looked into through the framework of narrative of “tragedy” instead of narrative of “romance”. Narrative of “romance” as the mode of historical emplotment is seen as celebrating valour and resistance by agencies in overcoming the unfavourable conditions, whereas narrative of tragedy as the mode of historical emplotment “questions the view of human history as moving teleologically and transparently toward a determinate end, or as governed by a sovereign and omnisciently rational agent” (Scott, 2004, p. 13). Tragedy as the mode of historical emplotment and narrative analysis offers the possible chances and alternatives in the present-centeredness of the past and the future (James, 1989; Koselleck, 1985; White, 1973).

By using the term ‘territorial spaces’, I specifically intend to pitch in the indices of clan and land that has been invoked in the wake of the prosperity of erstwhile land-owning communities (i.e., the Jats in this case) in the neo-liberal India. This chapter looks into two vital processes: one, it tries to give out the new positionings and the supposedly more contemporary ways of reclaiming dominance; secondly, it looks into the possibility of the development of the alternate form of the khap institution, or the possibility of alternate institutions altogether contingent upon the ‘present’. The existing studies on khaps done by scholars like Prem Chowdhry (2011), and MC Pradhan (1996) have pointed to the resurgence of claims of dominance in the wake of modernisation. Hence, given the fact that these accounts bring to limelight the fuzziness of power structures among the Jats in north India in the present times, it is worth studying khap from the angle
of “the problem of the historical moments of tragedy” i.e. those moments in which new forms of thought and action struggle with the old (Scott, 2004, p. 12). This is the reason I have looked into the institution of khap from the perspective of “tragedy”, found in works of scholars like C. L. R. James (James, 1989), Hannah Arendt (Arendt, 1990), Reinhart Koselleck (Koselleck, 1985), Charles Segal (Segal, 1999), J. Peter Euben (Euben, 1986; 2007), etc. Articulation of tragedy offers a literary-philosophical genre in which a number of “consequential theoretical shibboleths” of today’s time are challenged (Scott, 2004).

‘Tragedy narrative’ as the tool for analysis offers reflection on human action, and chance, with significant implications for how we think the connection among past, present and future (Scott, 2004).

While the Marxian conceptualisation in this regard does put a lot of onus on the unanimous model of ‘class-for-itself’ orientation, Foucault’s views do riddle themselves in the universal indoctrination of ‘a discourse’. These accounts tend to presume at least a certain degree of consensus in a collectivity, whereas the phenomenon of khap throws numerous challenges to the study of power relations within the ambit of fixed and predictable variables. It is herein that Eric Wolf’s notion of power is of relevance to some extent. For him, power is manifested in relationships (Wolf, 1999, p. 5), operationalised in settings and domains and even orchestrated through the direction of energy flows. In this chapter what is being looked at, though, is not the analysis of the elementary concept of power, rather an analysis of the problem of such power claims in the face of that period of history in which the social system under study is in a state of flux.

This chapter more specifically deals with the possibility of multiple futures of the “present-centered”, (Koselleck, 1985) tragedy of the phenomenon of khap. The power of khaps in the wake of its encounter with the power of modern forces of justice and rationality (the products of enlightenment), do not merely entail the moment of transition; rather it amounts to the moment when the historical forces i.e. the historical forces of rationality and the historical forces of khap-like institutions, happen to be at reconcilable odds with each other.
It is said that in the moments when the great historical forces are at “irreconcilable odds” (James, 1989) the tension between the competing historical directions are at a high pitch and from this new kinds of “subjects” (Scott, 2004) or “personalities” (James, 1989) are thrown upon the stage, the who “embody within their single selves the mighty conundrums and divisions of their age” (James, 1989).

In order to enquire into the central research question of the chapter i.e. the question of alternate choices and possibilities, it becomes indispensible to look into the following questions as well: What changes have the forces of modernisation effectuated to the structures of stratification? What are the spaces through which the khaps succeed in ‘hegemonising’ themselves? Given the ubiquitous nature of the khap, what are the modes of resistance and accommodation?

In the light of the above argument, the intention is not to visualise khap either as a problem or as a very conducive institution; the intention is also not to totally acquiesce with the rationality of enlightenment debate and concept rights and claims. It is said that the way one defines the issues depends on the way one has conceived the problem. Thus, it can be well remarked that the present study would contribute to the understanding of the new spaces of ‘communitarian’ civil society that might be thrown up for the future by the tragedy or irony of the institution of khap in the wake of its tussle with the modern spaces of individualisation in the present Indian society. I do, however, admit that the study, in its quest to probe into the socio-political leanings of the phenomena, might risk neglecting a detailed analysis of the socio-cultural symbols, myth-making exercises etc.

In khap’s case we get to see a phenomenon in which there is an “attempt to hold the opposites together,” to borrow the idea from Perone (Perone, 2011, p. x). A system that appears to be at loggerheads with the so-called modernity, to the contrary actually claims to be the real campaigner of the modern-day concept of inclusive approach or the process of secularisation. The concepts like shunning of caste discriminations, widow remarriage, abolition of ‘terahavin’ (rite de passage on the thirteenth day of death), raising voice against female foeticide are claimed
to be dealt with by the Jat community in its spirited campaigns. Amidst all the claims and disclaims the most relevant and subtle feature could be the creeping modernisation of the khap system, which looks troublesome and suppressive for other non-Jat communities. By creeping modernisation here, it is meant how the khap system spread itself over to the non-Jat communities as well in the wake of modern day needs -- be it political needs or need to reclaim identity and influence (Chowdhry, 2011). When Jats claim that the culture is being spoilt by widespread modernity and free will, whereas their system was already modern in its own way, they miss the point that they themselves are indulging in that very idea of modernity or rather modern-day politics of numbers and influence. When the khaps of Jat communities are made to spillover to other non-Jat communities with an intention to strengthen their cause or to deepen the mobilisation by bringing other communities also under their system and influence, they very much follow the route of modern-day politics and strategies. This seems like a process of homogenisation of the khap culture throughout the area and making all sorts of political claims of traditional authority and territorial claims of dominance. We can say that the ‘modernity’ seems to have brought about some sort of a break from the traditional structure of authority and legitimacy, as Ugo Perone would say, inflicted by a process of secularisation (Perone, 2011). The Jat community claims to have made the system more inclusive in the sense that other non-Jats are also brought under this “fair and more accessible justice delivery mechanism”.

As chaudhary Rajpal Singh of Shoron village once told me, “Isme sabko bina bhed-bhav ke nyaya milta hai. Waisa nyaya police ya court kachehri se kabhi nahi mil sakta. Un logon ko yahan ka kuch pata hi nahi hota...wahan duur baithkar wo log yahan ka nyaya kaise kar sakte hain (We deliver justice without any discrimination, something the police and courts are incapable of. They don’t even understand us well: how can they deliver justice when they live so far away from us.)

The above-mentioned situation of the so-called modernity and khap institutions calls for the altering of the focus of attention away from the concepts of oppression and resistance, toward the conditions principally created by the khap system and its structure. These conditions that are created by the khap system have
to be seen as temporal, and are not to be treated as atemporal.

It is believed that Mahendra Singh Tikait tried to carry on the Bhartiya Kisan Movement through the khap route (Gupta, 1997). He tried to create an overall canopy of khap, extending its covers to the non-Jat communities as well. For this he created a khap-like structure for non-Jat communities such as ex-untouchables of the region. Tikait believed that the traditional authority system, with its sacred and divine impressions, would be an apt platform to bind communities together. These communities started having their chaudhary as well. The only difference is that the chaudhary of these communities would be the head of two to three gotras put together, unlike the Jat gotra chaudhary, who is the head of one gotra only.

In Jats’ attempt to bring other marginal communities under the khap umbrella, they also opened up new avenues of contestations and claims. This possibility of actions and their repercussions is quite evident in the analysis of historical moments by David Scott:

“So long as there is no complete consummation, human affairs remain enigmas that are the more obscure the more the actors believe themselves sure of what they are doing and what they are... It is only when the drama is over that actions take on their true significance and agents, through what they have in reality accomplished without realising it, discover their true identity.”

(Scott, 2004, p. 13).

In the light of above-mentioned account of the power dynamics, it is seen that the dyadic power relationships are giving way to triadic logic of relationships, as now the audience in the form of media watchers, civil society, etc. also get involved to an extent. In this process there is scope for the marginal communities to embarrass the Jat chaudharies sometimes or say something as a mild protest without actually doing something revolutionary. In doing so, they are registering their presence and voice. Even if nothing really changes, the thing that can be observed in the region is that the members of these communities have started taking pride in their leaders or village heads. This ushers in a fresh wind of confidence and an all improved idea of self-perception. It is said that what is at
stake is “being” - “against being, which is strong, we are allowed to be strong” (Perone, 2011, p. x). This possibility is worth exploring.

7.3 Process of Extending Khaps’s Jurisdiction to Other Communities

Some of the gotras of Dalit communities in the Muzaffarnagar region are Tussamar, Parchcha, Dheengan, Lohat, Janjotha, Chindalya, Tank, Sorha, Kalsaniya, Karaundhia, Mithaliya. These gotras are different from the Jat community’s gotras. The Dalit communities of the region trace their gotras from their Satis, who are believed to be the unmarried virtuous women of their community. Among Dalit communities, one or two gotras have one head or chaudhary. Each chaudhary bears the responsibility of five to six villages, unlike the Jat gotra chaudharies, who have a much wider jurisdiction (up to 84 villages).

The structure could be understood with the help of the structure and line of authority of Baliyan khap, which is predominantly a khap of Jat gotra, as already mentioned in the previous chapters. Baliyan khap claims to have its jurisdiction over 84 villages of which 72 villages fall within the boundaries of Uttar Pradesh, rest are in Haryana and Rajasthan. Among the villages that come under Baliyan khap’s authority are the villages in which some of the non-jat communities are also in large numbers. For example, in villages like Mazara, Kinauni, Barwala, Taoli, and Sanjhak, Dalit communities and Muslims as well as Muslim Jats (or Mule Jats, as they are called) are in large numbers. Mazara and Kinauni villages of Baliyan khap have almost equal number of Dalit community’s population as compared to Jats. Taoli, Sanjhak are Muslim-dominated villages of Baliyan khap. According to Charan Singh Karaundhia of Mazara village, aged about 60 years, within Baliyan khap, Dalit community was also allowed to have its headman, who would also be called the Baliyan khap’s chaudhary. He was not very sure of who started this system or who brought them within the khap fold, but he vaguely mentioned that it was Mahendra Singh Tikait’s initiative. In conversation with the vocal people of Mazara village, the sense of pride is easily discernible when they talk about their chaudharies. Mahipal Singh says, “Kalu Chamar humara chaudhary tha. Uska kya kehna, wo to bahut diler tha!” (Kalu Chamar was our headman. What could one say about him, except, perhaps, that he was a very courageous man). The names of
some of the Dalit community’s chaudharies that could be traced were Mirchi, Shibba, Kalu, Harikishan. The problem is that, unlike Jat community, which is very well aware of its roots and origins that it claims, Dalit communities do not have a very clear picture of their power structure and cultural patterns in the region. Whenever probed for details and precise descriptions of their cultural claims and patterns, they end up providing a very sketchy account of their backgrounds.

7.4 Sense of Power through Political Claims

The Dalit communities were brought within the fold of khap structure; in due course, not all but certainly some of them do feel a sense of power. Though it is said, “full participation, does not automatically follow from increased access to institutions” (Min, Callaghan, & Murphy, 1995, p. 31), one could see that even if it does not guarantee full participation, it does end up giving some sort of perception of power. Within the power complex in bargaining situations, perceived power is considered more important (Bacharach & Lawler, 1981).

The aforesaid perception of power could be sensed through the claims made by Charan Singh Karaundhia about Kalu chaudhary. He narrates an anecdote about Kalu chaudhary. He told me, “Ek bar Baliyan ke Jaton mein aur Chamaron mein than gai. Tikait sahib jaton ki taraf se khare the. Chah rahe the ki chup-chap unki sun li jaye lekin humare Kalu chaudhary ne sabko chup kara diya. Tikait Sahab se kaha ki, ‘Dekhiye hum bhi barabar ke hain: aap bhi baliyan ke chaudhary hain to hum bhi baliyan ke chaudhary hain. Barabar se baat suni jayegi.’ (Once there was an issue between the Jats and Chamars of Baliyan khap. Mahendra Singh Tikait was putting forward Jats’ case. He wished that everyone would silently agree to what he decided, but our Kalu chaudhary shut everyone’s mouth by making his point. He told Tikait that they were both equal in status: Kalu told Ticket, “You are the headman of Baliyan khap, I am also the headman of Baliyan khap. So both the parties will be given equal and fair chance of being heard”).

The analysis of the above mentioned claims and anecdotal accounts make the concept of ‘power’ appear as drifting away from ‘foundationalism’ and leaning towards ‘pragmatism’. It is argued, “Pragmatism shifts the basis of power from
foundational claims to shared experiences, which make power \textit{radically contingent} (Allen, 2008) – that is contextually dependent on human relationships and experiences” (Ansell, 2011, p. 126). The criticism of ‘interactionist’ theory has been that it is incapable of dealing with conflict and reifies the conservative bias of traditional ideas (Huber, 1973). According to Gary Alan Fine, though there are traditional criticisms to ‘interactionist’ approach yet the “connection between interaction and organisation has increasingly been recognised as essential for understanding the problems of social order” (1984, p. 240). From the above-mentioned approach ‘power’ is believed to be exerted as the “power to define the situation” (Fine, 1984). In the above example quoting headman Kalu, this particular kind of power seems to be embodied and exerted.

Another anecdote -- one that almost everyone from the region narrates -- also reflects some sort of dialogue of power and power to define the situation. It shows how institutions like khap, which have been the hegemony of one community, have the scope of being manoeuvred. A journalist called Sanuj Sharma, who knows the region well, told me about a panchayat that was called by Jats a few years ago. The issue was that Dalit community boys were apparently creating a lot of trouble for Jat boys -- putting up a fight with them, and generally creating ruckus. Jat chaudharies convened the panchayat along with the Dalit community’s chaudhary. Sanuj says the Dalit chaudhary was continuously looking down towards the ground through the entire meeting. When Jat chaudharies asked him to take the responsibility of the deeds of the boys of his community, he said something quite unexpected that changed the tone of the panchayat completely. This chaudhary kept looking at the feet of Jat chaudharies and said that dalit boys have never been this gutsy. He further added that those bold boys who are born in Dalit community must be having Jat blood. On hearing this Jat chaudharies immediately called off the panchayat. It is believed they called off the panchayat to avoid any further discussion, which hinted at Jat men raping Dalit women, Sanuj Sharma said.

These above-mentioned incident is example that such platforms, whose aim might not have been given to empower the marginal communities, actually end up providing them the opportunity to, at times, question the dominant communities or
embarrass them in whatever limited capacity possible. This also happens because such platforms or institutions like panchayat system in khap areas include a third element apart from the two groups -- the ‘audience’. This is how the dyadic logic gets a third element of audience, and gives way to a triadic relationship. In a triadic situation, the actors initially involved solely in dyadic interaction behave differently; also, the degree of power and assertion changes, because now the two groups involved are no more the sole interpreters of power relation. In such situations, with the addition of audience as the third element -- be it in the form of media or outside world -- the power dynamics are played out differently i.e. either more cautiously by the dominant group or more tactfully by the marginal group, as we witnessed in the above example of combined panchayat of Jat and Dalit community. This case manifests the “transactional logic” of power, which suggests that it is useful to think about power in triadic terms that takes into account a key third-party role (Ansell, 2011, p. 141).

Khap as an institution, which started bringing within its fold the non-Jat and marginal communities for the purpose of keeping them under the dominant rule’s jurisdiction, in turn gave them the chance of being heard willy-nilly. Therefore, from this perspective it would be only appropriate to understand the idea of institution, keeping in mind the triadic logic of power. An institution is not merely a “bilateral relationship between person and concept or even simply an interaction between two persons mediated by a concept. Pragmatism’s triadic logic suggests the importance of third parties – audiences. An audience is a collective third party that looks on as a person uses or evoked the meaning of a concept” (Ansell, 2011, p. 42). Even if he audience is a silent partner in the transaction or not even present in physical sense but registers a sense of being watched by the outside world, “it can become an arbiter in the ongoing attempt of parties to create intersubjective alignment” around the idea of power (Ansell, 2011, p. 42).

Even forced participation makes the participants part of -- or more theoretically, the agents of -- that institution. They start carrying the institution in them and get the opportunity to play along. Once they are conscripted into the power structure, they do not merely remain subject to the institutional control. The territorial institutions or, in the particular case of khaps, the institutional
negotiations are of “substitution and transformation” (Bridgeman, 2005, p. 205). Through such institutions two kinds of ‘self’ are created. “The discursive self, a participating self constructed of desires, beliefs, experiences and knowledge and a participating self, which is constructed through action (including non-physical action)” (Bridgeman, 2005, p. 205). Activities do not exist in a simple dyadic relationship, rather a more fully contextualised, polyphonic, contentious model of transactionality that encompasses multiple participants and voices along with situation, setting, institution itself becomes a model, which finds it difficult to maintain boundaries between self and other as argued by Phelps (Bridgeman, 2005). The vulnerability of boundaries is inevitable once the scope has been provided even if it seems minuscule in the beginning. The porous boundaries begin the transaction of power and dialogue.

These aforesaid points get illustrated in the following example from the field. In Barhaut village of Muzaffarnagar, the panchayat scene has changed slightly. It might not be a very critical change in terms of decision-making or in reaching an all-inclusive consensus, but it is a visible change nonetheless. Now the panchayat members of Jat community take a lot of pride in introducing the Dalit chaudhary to media and other outsiders. The visible emphasis remains on the fact that now the Dalit chaudharies don’t have to sit on the floor, rather they are also offered morha and made to sit right next to the Jat chaudharies. This kind of a thing happens when a triad gets created i.e. the triad of the chaudharies of two communities of unequal power defending capacity and a third element of media or outsiders as audience. This triad imbues the agent with a sense of power and occasions a realisation of power in that given situation and more so in the contested territory.

In another incident, headman Harikishan -- a Dalit chaudhary of Kalsaniya gotra, Kairana village -- protested against the might of the Jats of the village, in an incident which looks insignificant but has a huge symbolic dissent and power assertion. Chaudhary Harikishan is too old to be able to narrate his stories of “valour” (the word “valour” was used by the members of his community who were surrounding him while I was trying to have a conversation).
Shaingar Pal volunteered to narrate the incident. With a lot of pride he said, “Jat abhi tak apne apko bahut dabbang samajhte rahe hain lekin ab unki itni nahi chal pati. Ye jo humare chaudhary baithe hain ye ab thapp ho liye hain lekin pehle to bade bade kaam kiye. Humari zameene to Jaton ne hadap li hain. Hum to zameendar the pehle lekin ab to dabaye hae Dalit hain. Ab jab khet hain nahi to admi pakhana ke liye kahan jayega. Humare chaudhary gay eek Jat ke khet mein to wapasi mein Jaton ne ek bar pakad liye inhe aur kaha uthane ke liye apna pakhana. Humare chaudhary ne bade aram se kaha ab hum uthayenge to nahi, kaho to mitti daal de (Jats consider themselves fearless, but we are not scared of them anymore. This headman of ours has become old now, but in his youth he has done courageous things. Our community used to be landowners earlier, but now we are just suppressed Dalits. Now, since we don’t own lands, we have no place to defecate. Once this headman of ours went to clear his bowel on a land that was owned by a Jat. While returning, the Jats caught hold of him and asked him to carry the feces. Our headman said he would maybe cover the excreta with soil, but he refused to carry the feces).” After narrating the incident, everyone had a good laugh and mocked the dominant Jat community of the region.

The young men of Dalit communities have different views about their community and khap as compared to the elderly. When asked about their status in the society and especially in the region, chaudhary Harikrishan says, “Hum to dabaye hue dalit hain. Hum to Kshatriya the. Hum Gujar the lekin in Jaton ne humari sabhi zameenein Chheen li aur humein daba diya. Humare kuch gotra gujaron mein bhi hain. Tila Jalwali ke Gujar un gotra walon ko hookah dete hain jo dalit gotra gujaron mein paye jate hain. Humare kuch log Musalman ban gaye aur kuch dalit.” (We were made Dalits forcefully. We actually belonged to the warrior community of Kshatriyas. We were Gujars but Jat people took away all our land and deprived us of our status. Some of our gotras are found among Gujars also. Gujars of Tila Jalwali share hookah with those dalits who share common gotras with Gujars. Some of our people became Muslim and some became dalit). Gujars are also one of the dominant communities in the region apart from Jats. Such claims to upper-caste status by the communities considered to be low in the order of caste hierarchy are also mentioned in the work of George W. Briggs (Briggs, 1920).
Chaudhary Harikrishan narrates a story about how the Jats captured the lands in the region. He says, “Jaton ne apna jhota daura diya tha. Jahan tak unka jhota ghoom gaya wahan tak unhone kabza kar liya is zameeno par humko bhaga bhaga kar (Jat people had left their calf to wander in the region. Wherever the calf went, and whatever length and breadth it covered, these Jat people captured the lands and forcefully evicted us from us lands).”

The calf story is popular in the region, but the narratives vary a bit: the Jats I talked to said that calf had somehow come to a pond in this region and drowned in it, and that the story that elders of Dalit community tell -- that the calf was left to wander by the Jats, and wherever it went they captured the entire space -- is false. Jats said that Dalits use this story to make false claims and false identities.

The young men of Dalit communities who are getting educated have started to drop such claims of higher status. They believe in living out their identity and making it redundant by embracing their identity and showing their strength through their identity. They do not like to live in denial of their identity -- whether forced or otherwise. An English-speaking young man of Kairana village, who was doing his graduation from a college nearby, said: “Hum koi baad mein dalit nahi banaye gaye. Hum dalit hi the. Koi gujar wujar nahi the hum. Hum jo hain wo hain, bas (We were not converted into Dalits. We were always Dalits. We were never Gujars. We are what we are.)”

From the statements of young men belonging to Dalit communities, it becomes evident how the younger generation embodies within itself more divisions of its age and these divisions within the single selves bear the potentiality of the alternate methods and systems. Here the concept of *dunamis* (potentiality) and *energeia* (actuality) as borrowed from Aristotle explain how the very structure or conditions created by the khap system bear the *dunamis* or potentiality of the claims to become the actuality in the future of relations and spaces. For Aristotle, the potentiality is not the power to produce change rather it is the capacity to be in a different and more completed state. Aristotle says, “Actuality is to potentiality as someone seeing is to a sighted person with his eyes closed, as that which has been shaped out of some matter is to the matter from which it has been shaped.”
If we go by Aristotle’s explanation then we see that every situation or thing has more than one potentiality: for example, a piece of wood has at least two different potentialities: it is potentially a table and also potentially a bowl. Here the matter is the wood linked with potentiality and substance (table and bowl), linked with actuality. Khap’s case could also be understood in these terms: khap as an institution or structure is matter with its varied components including different communities which are believed to be at the margins. This khap as matter has the potentiality of further actualization into other different forms with the help of what might be carved out by various voices that have remained unheard till very recent.

The men in Kairana village take pride in telling that now every community has its own chaudhary. They give out the names of the chaudharies of different communities: for example, Muslim Dhobi’s chaudhary is Samaydeen Dhobi; Sheikh’s chaudhary is Johari Sheikh; then there is chaudhary Bashir Lohar; Valmiki community's chaudhary is Sairam; Leelgarh or Dangar’s chaudhary is Husne Alam.

In village Taoli, majority of Jats are Muslims. They have difficulties in embodying two identities. They wish to be recognised not as Jats, but solely as belonging to the Muslim community. In Taoli, people claim to be having no influence of Jat’s panchayats and diktats. They say that in this part of the region they are dominant, as the 70 percent of the population belongs to Muslim Jat community.

In the above-mentioned narratives we get to see what C. L. R. James has to say about the tragedy of times or the historical crisis. James says that there are ways in which tragedy both constitutes and enables a distinctive reflection upon subjectivity in moments of historical crisis (1989). The situation of power struggle or claims to dominance could seem to be as meaningless chaos but one needs to see what is called as the projections of the sub-soil from which they came (James, 1989, p. x). Seeing the struggle merely as resistance and overcoming gives a very narrow understanding of the situation and it’s positioning in time and space. Going beyond mere struggles and overcoming, gives a chance for wider sociological generalisations and philosophical universals (White, 1973).
It is seen in the region that the Dalit communities, which are at the margins in the region, are able to exercise their political choice mostly in situation when the two candidates standing for elections happen to be Jats with equally powerful backgrounds. This is narrated both by people of Dalit community of the region as well as of Jat community. Citing an example of gram panchayat elections, people from both the communities told me that the Dalits are able to choose a candidate of their choice without force in gram panchayat elections only when both the Jat candidates are equally powerful. In case when one candidate is more powerful than the other, the more powerful one garners all the Dalit votes in his favour, but when both are equally powerful and have struggles among themselves, the Dalit community enjoys freedom of choice. This kind of ‘choice’ that becomes available to Dalit communities as truly free and liberating gives a delusive perception of equality in choice and opportunity.

Though the kind of choice available to Dalit communities in certain situations as mentioned above looks delusive, it cannot be denied that the situations like these -- where two powers collide for common claims -- do generate internal stresses. The internal stresses move toward explosions and conflicts which shatter the basis of dominance of both the powers and create the possibility of emancipation of the people near the boundaries of these fractures, as seen in the case of Jacobins over whom the two powers -- British and French -- were struggling for dominance and ultimately due to the generation of internal stress, the possibility of emancipation was created (James, 1989, p. 26). Julia Kristeva says that the modern version of liberty lies between the two extremes (McAfee, 2004).

It is said that the old structures or paths go nowhere later, not because they have been falsified, but rather because they become irrelevant. (Scott, 2004). This tragedy of structures prepares another ground of projection of the potentialities and brings out such ‘chances’ and ‘agents’ who have a chance to alter the future for themselves. This alteration happens within the limits of its environment and that is why it becomes imperative to study the limits, which hinder the alteration (James, 1989).

These agencies and personalities emerging out of the structural and political
tragedies could be the individuals, embodying within themselves the multiple identities of their temporality and the temporality of space, who need to be located and brought together. These could be individuals like Istekhar Tyagi of Bhanera village, Saloni Pradhan of village Pur Balyan, and people like Sohan Biri -- also her granddaughter Vaishali -- who head the women’s wing of Bharatiya Kisan Union and happen to be carving out an alternate place. There could be a meeting point of organisations like AIDWA (All India Democratic Women’s Association) and local social activists and such individuals from the margins along with media that inherit the complexities of time and space within themselves.

Neeraj Balyan of Balyan khap, Mazara village, said that even though in the present time communities other than Jats do not have khap chaudhary and their chaudharies only participate in khap panchayats, it is quite possible that later they either develop their own system of becoming more assertive in voicing their concerns. There could also be alternate mechanisms and systems that might be adopted in terms of the local civil society which might cut across the cultural barriers.

The possibility of alternate mechanism or system does not simply mean that those systems will be having altogether neutral spaces bringing the peripheral groups to the centre. As is already mentioned, alternate possibilities might lead to any of the multiple ends, which means that the alternate mechanism might still be assisting the dominant. This could be understood through the following case. This is the case of a Dalit boy named Tinku of Kairana village who had eloped with a Jat girl from the same village. Usually in such cases the matter is taken to the panchayat and the chaudharies of both the communities are called to decide upon the case. In this case it was not followed. The girl’s family did not approach the panchayat. They preferred filing a complaint against Tinku and his family, charging Tinku with abduction.

From the above example, what comes across is that a more neutral mechanism for complaining was used by the dominant party. The space of state and its organs, is supposed to be more neutral i.e. supposedly free from the cultural or communitarian biases. Yunus Mohammad of the same village told me, “Unhe
ladki ko wapas lane se zyada us ladke ko barbad karna tha. Case charhana tha uspar jisse sarkari nuakari na mil sake. Ye sab kuch to panchayat mein nahi ho pata.” (The girls’s family preferred to go to the police station instead of calling a panchayat because their intention was to ruin the boy’s future by making a police case against him, which would spoil his prospects of getting a government job). The open access to government jobs for the Dalit communities has been a constant concern of the dominant communities of the region (Chowdhry, 2011).

The point to be understood through the above case is that the possibility of neutral spaces through alternate mechanisms might not lead to the desired ends for the communities at the margin. There is always a possibility of the spaces to get co-opted. The way this space got used by the dominant community, some day it might be used by the lesser privileged group for their benefit. The argument was not to point out how the dominant communities co-opt the system, but rather to bring out the tragedy of space -- be it neutral or biased. The power of the supposedly neutral space of state organ or the power of the cultural space meets its tragic at some point or the other, when it gets problematised in the manner stated above. This ultimately leads to the tragedy of power.

7.5 Sense of Power through Territorial Claims

Territorial claims that give a sense of power through the idea of belongingness come across in this section of the chapter. This section tries to look at the assertions and subversions of the dominant and peripheral castes in the society, particularly through discourses and narratives peddled over generations, surrounding ascetics, saints, revered men/women, god-men etc. in western Uttar Pradesh. Behind the fact that myths surrounding local saints and deities in this area have persisted over generations, lies the indefatigable nature of stories, folklores, fables in these societies. There are also various claims on the local region-specific folk art forms regarding its original proponents. The subtle power-play, involving social assertions of dominance by powerful clans and communities of this region like the Jat community, and a simultaneous negotiation of space (and hence seeking a legitimization for accommodation) in the same society by marginal groups, is something that this section intends to highlight. The section also
interprets the latent politicisation of the mythico-religious symbols and beliefs in the societies of the concerned region. How this politicisation is challenged through subversive narratives also comes out in the analysis.

There are a number of shrines and mausoleums of saints belonging to the Jat and Gujar communities in and around the district Muzaffarnagar of western Uttar Pradesh. Jats and gujars are the dominant peasant castes of this region. The shrines here are known as “devata ka thaan” (abode of God). There are a number of narratives about the lives of men who were considered divine and valorous. The dominant threads in this narrative are the ability of these saints and holy men to create miracles and help people. These men are considered divine for the strength and energy they accumulate through deep meditation in the harshest of conditions. People of the Jat community are the followers of Shiva, one of the Hindu gods. The ascetics from the Jat community are also considered to be staunch worshippers of lord Shiva. The similarities are drawn between the local ascetics and lord Shiva on the basis that these ascetics also went through tough meditative practices and lived in the toughest of conditions. Shiva is considered to be the divine Yogi, steeped in pure and perfect meditation (Zimmer, 1946, p. 115). It is said that through this myth the omnipotence of ascetic will power is glorified and the accumulation of psychic and physical energy is used for magical purposes, which has been the aim of the most ancient forms of yoga practice (Zimmer, 1946, pp. 115-116). It is also believed that such yogic practices elevate the humans above the limitations of human nature and “equate them with the superior energy of the cosmic powers” (Zimmer, 1946, p. 116).

These notions surrounding the purpose and power of yogic practices are part of the local belief system. An important thing to be noted here is that the very people who are against the so-called Brahmanical rituals and practices seem to be clinging on to such belief systems to have a sense of belongingness, and get appropriated in that very fold. This sense of belongingness later gives these ascetics the power to assert their presence in the region through symbols, motifs and also through the stories weaved around them. Through all these, there is an attempt at the creation of a certain kind of space, effected through a mythical
incorporation and subsequent reshaping of the extant socio-cultural beliefs of that society.

If one studies the myths and stories of a particular region, there are many possibilities that one might get a better understanding of the social mind and fabric of that region and society. Such arguments that religion and mythology arose from landscape find mention in the works of modernist poets like Wallace Stevens as is put across by one of his later works titled “A Mythology Reflects its Region” (Bloom, 2003, p. 22). The myths that are created -- or rather get created in the process -- reflect the ordering of the region in the minds of its inhabitants who live by such myths. It is said, “the image’s truth bespeaks the nature of the creator” (Polka, 2002, p. 44).

The Jat community of the region claims that earlier the people who went to temples or did elaborate worshipping were jeered at, but lately many people from the Jat community itself started going for the elaborate worship and rituals. Deification of individuals belonging to particular communities also began. These individuals had either adopted an ascetic life style or were believed to be of valorous character. The Jat community worships Shiva. They have a philosophy behind choosing Shiva as their god. The people of this community proudly narrate the characteristics of their Shiva: they say he is the most innocent of all gods, who also possesses the supreme power of meditation and miracles. In the explanation of the choice of their god, they actually try to spell out the ideas of their own characteristics. Here one gets to see how the gods are localised in a higher realm of ideas as well as territorially. This is seen in the analysis of the scriptures and ancient texts as explained through one of the two forms of Brahman with attributes as “qualified, defined, clothed upon with attributes, through the inevitable tendency of the mind to superimpose, limiting conditions on all the objects of its thought. As such it constitutes the anthropomorphic deity of popular worship, and so as the object of devotion is localised in heaven, in the heart and so on” (Griswold, 1990, p. 76).

The gods are seen to be localised further in the form of local saints and warriors, who are conferred with the adulations of gods. In the process, the gods
become more accessible to the local people in the form of their local saints and deities. This not only helps in strengthening the territorial claims of a particular community, but also in underpinning their claims to have given such benevolent and courageous individuals to the region, which further strengthens the grounds for assertion of their morality and dominance. Through this kind of storytelling their assertions and claims on a particular territory stand justified. Here is an example of such territorial claims through a local folk deity Piyara ji in Saharanpur district of western Uttar Pradesh. Piyara ji is believed to be from Muzaffarnagar of western Uttar Pradesh. The stories surrounding Piyara ji are documented in the statistical and historical accounts of the northwestern provinces (Provinces, North-Western, 1876). One of the stories reads like this: once a quarrel broke out between the Brahmans and Gujars of Sadrpur, and someone from the latter community murdered the priest. In revenge, the ghosts of the murdered men tormented the Gujars, who then prayed to Piyara Ji for assistance. Piyara Ji acquiesced to their request and went further to even declare that Sadrpur belonged to him in his former birth. The discovery of a certain well, purportedly dug by him, proved the correctness of the assertion to every one's satisfaction. It is also mentioned that Piyara Ji then took possession of the village and changed its name to Andeva, the modern rendering of which is Ramdewa. Piyara Ji died there and was buried in the village.

The territorial claims with the help of myths and stories are seen in other places as well. We also get to see a parallel of this -- of how such myths are woven in the rural and folk cosmology -- in Egypt, through the work of el-Sayed el-Aswad. He explains how the invisible forces play a role in the assertions of people’s identities. He says, “People assert their relationship with the unseen and spiritual world through participation with the invisible entities and forces such as souls, angels, and intermediary holy persons or saints.” (El-Aswad, 2002, p. 89). There is a story mentioned in the village accounts of Egypt, which explains how the soul of a dead man reclaimed the land that was earlier seized by force from his father. People believed that the power of the ‘soul’ was such that after a fight with landowners, the matter could only be
settled when a tomb of the dead man was built on that spot (El-Aswad, 2002, p. 90).

Another feature from western Uttar Pradesh finds similarity in the works of D. D. Kosambi. Kosambi says, “Sometimes the primitive local god or goddess is identified with one of the deities found in brahmin literature. The older gods are not smashed but adopted or adjusted.” (Kosambi, 1994, p. 22). The inhabitants of the region in point confer divinity on the individuals of their castes. Later on, these supposedly divine individuals tend to be worshipped as their local deities in the form of avatars (incarnations). The Jats claim their saints to be the incarnations of Shiva. They believe that those deities take the form of snake and keep the entire region under their surveillance. A local deity like Dallu devata is believed to be guarding the agricultural fields of the region in the form of a snake. The people claim their revered saints take the form of a snake because the snake is believed to be representing Shiva in the Hindu religion. Such notions are also seen in other regions as brought out in the works of D. D. Kosambi in which he explains that the peasants also worship higher gods which look primitive and are a step above the local gods. He also explains how there may be a guardian of the fields, generally a cobra with a relief image, which has a divine status (Kosambi, 1994, pp. 21-22).

Kosambi, in another work, explains how there is a possibility that certain primitive cults were absorbed into the mainstream religious beliefs and hence their transformation into gods as shown by the example of the Nag (cobra) cult. This is believed to be absorbed into a Brahmanised discourse by putting the cobra around lord Shiva’s neck (Kosambi, 2005, p. 28). This brings us to the point where it becomes difficult to decipher whether the recent claims of the communities mentioned above are made for the conscious mainstreaming of the belief system or is there an ignorance of their original form of belief system which got absorbed into the later-day Brahmanised form of religious practices? There could also be a third possibility: maybe what these communities are claiming is actually the original forms of their belief system.

Along with the assertions through the local saints and deities by the dominant groups in these areas, we also get to see the subversions within by the lower-caste groups and other religious groups like Muslims. These lower castes or
minority religious groups also assert and lay their claim of descent from these saints by putting these saints in the category of shared gods or goddess, common to all communities. By doing so, these communities on the periphery of the social structure also negotiate their space with the dominant communities. There are examples of revered individuals who are worshipped by almost everyone and have many mythical claims surrounding their lives. These myths involve various angles of different communities. Folk deities like Goga ji have many stories attached to them. Goga ji is revered as a saint as well as a “snake-god”. He is known as Goga ji among the Jat community and as Goga pir or Zahir pir among the Muslim community of this area. Kaimkhani Muslims of claim their descent from him. His place of origin is believed to be the state of Rajasthan, but he has his presence primarily through his statues and sacred places made for him in various villages up to the regions of western Uttar Pradesh. There are other such examples of shared local deities such as Baba Kalu who is venerated by various lower and middle castes as well as the dominant castes like Jats (Provinces, North-Western, 1876).

These kinds of subverting narratives of myths by the marginal groups give them some legitimisation of their local territorial claims as well as sense of belongingness in that society.

There are some other local deities and saints, which are claimed by the Jat community of this region -- such as Khichadi wale, who is believed to be from the jungles of Sukartal in the district of Muzaffarnagar; Kali Singh maharaj; and Bhure Singh maharaj (they are even called devata in Sisauli village). Kali Singh maharaj is also believed to be present in the region in the form of snake. The latest addition in the list of saints and god-like figures seems be the venerated farmers’ leader Mahendra Singh Tikait who is also known as Baba Tikait and Mahatma Tikait, though he himself discouraged all kinds of rituals and superstitions. Stories involving myths and miracles surrounding Baba Tikait are already being narrated in the region. The stories -- of how he got possessed by some devi (goddess), the story of the oil lamp which burnt continuously until it went off suddenly on his death, etc. -- are already catching up fast with people’s imagination in the region. Such myth-making could be seen in the light of the desire to portray continuity with a strong and dominant past of popular and cult figures of the society. The
stories surrounding a dominant or popular personality could be described as having an intention to maintain the “continuity with a suitable historic past” (Hobsbawm, 1983, p. 1) to be able to assert themselves for legitimacy or domination or to be able to negotiate power in a better way in the region.

The other non-Jat communities, on the other hand try, to break the grand narrative created around the personality of Mahendra Singh Tikait. They say that it is true that he was a good orator and had an influential personality but he was not above humans. They go on to say that Tikait was a little sensible and influential, but his sons who are controlling the khaps are considerably lesser human beings. Istekhar Tyagi of Bhanera says, “Koi aisa nahi hota itna mahan. Wo bhi the to insan hi (Nobody is that great to be called a god. He was also just a human being).” Through this statement of Istekhar Tyagi, it’s easy to see how these subtle aspects of the discourse of hegemony and co-option of the sense of belongingness of regions and the spaces are played out and subverted.

If we see the above-mentioned narratives from a constructivist standpoint, we might merely end up talking about the theories related to myth-making and cultural construction. When we move beyond the critical constructionist approach, we get a clear vision of dialogue of power through narratives and claims from a pragmatist lens, which problematises power and causes a ‘tragedy of power’ itself, brewing some alternatives for the present or so to say for the future of the present.

The history of culture thus appears to be the process in which the weak vie with the strong for the authority to determine how this ‘second world’ will be characterised (White, 1973, p. 285). The second world is another illusory world alongside the so-called original world of pure power relations (White, 1973). How this second world is envisioned depends upon the present-centeredness of the problem of tragedy of power.

It can be claimed that there always exists heterogeneity of ends and this heterogeneity of ends gives the ‘mutable classification’ of experience and expectation. These mutable classifications, when detected, provide guidance to agencies in the course of foreseeable and unforeseeable change.
7.6 Conclusion

It is seen that there cannot be simply one end towards which a phenomenon moves or appears to be moving, rather there is always a possibility of heterogeneous ends. This understanding comes from the narratives claiming presence and dominance, which create a sense of power at both ends even when one group is dominant and the other at the margins. The subversive claims and the sense of power explored in the chapter changes the dynamics of the positioning of the communities. The platform of power, marked by the positions of centre and periphery, gets stretched into a straight line on both sides of which power is sensed. This sense of power challenges the positions of power on both sides, putting ‘power’ itself in a tragic situation.

The tragedy of power creates an “in-between” space, open to be used by any force on both sided i.e. it could either be co-opted by the dominant or by the marginal. In the end it could be claimed that power in itself has the seeds of power-neutrality and causes its own tragedy.

References


