

**CASTE, RITUAL AND POLITICS AMONG YADAV COMMUNITY OF EASTERN
UTTAR PRADESH: A SOCIOLOGICAL ANALYSIS**

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BY

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DECLARATION

I, **Devi Prasad**, hereby declare that this thesis, entitled “**Caste, Ritual and Politics among Yadav Community of Eastern Uttar Pradesh: A Sociological Analysis**” submitted by me under the supervision of Prof. Pushpesh Kumar (Dept. of Sociology, UoH) and co-guidance of Dr. R. Thirunavukkarasu (Dept. of Sociology, UoH) and Dr. Anand Akundy (IPE, Hyderabad), is a bonafide research work and is free from plagiarism. I also declare that it has not been submitted previously in the part or in full to this University or any other University or Institution for the award of any degree or diploma. I hereby agree that my thesis can be deposited in SHODHGANGA/INFLIBNET.

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CERTIFICATE

There is to certify that the thesis entitled “**Caste, Ritual and Politics among Yadav Community of Eastern Uttar Pradesh: A Sociological Analysis**” submitted by Devi Prasad bearing Regd. No. 14SSPH07 in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the award of Doctor of Philosophy in the Department of Sociology is a bonafide work carried out by him under my supervision and guidance.

This thesis is free from plagiarism and has not been submitted previously in part or in full to this or any other university or institution for the award of any degree or diploma. Further, the student has the following publications (in Scopus Indexed Journals) before submission of the thesis for adjudication and has produced evidence (see, appendix-6) for the same in the form of reprint in the relevant area of research (at least one publication in referred/UGC Care/Scopus Indexed Journal is required):

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He has made presentation at the following Conference:

- Presented a paper titled “Mapping Reciprocity among Yadavs through the Articulation of the *Bhoj* and AIYM” in a three-day national conference on ‘Examining Intersections: Caste / Gender Narratives in India’ organized by the Institute of Development Studies, Kolkata and sponsored by the ICSSR, held on February 8-10, 2016.
- Presented a paper titled “Village Exogamy and Biradarism in a Multiple Caste Village: An Illustration” in a three-day national conference held on November 29, 30 & December 01, 2014. It was sponsored by UGC and ICSSR.

As per University of Hyderabad rules, the M.Phil course work done in Department of Sociology in any university is considered as the Ph.D. course work. Therefore, he was exempted for doing Ph.D. course work again in Ph.D. programme. The student has passed the following course towards fulfilment of course work requirement for Ph.D.

Sl. No.	Course Code	Name of the Course	Credits	Pass/Fail
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Devi Prasad

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Chapter-1

From Heterogeneous Sub-Castes to a Congruent Socio-Cultural Identity

Introduction

This thesis attempts to explore the process of political mobilization and polarizations among the Yadavs. It also tries to understand how these processes of change are validated through *biradari bhoj* (community feast) and other cultural celebrations. Additionally, the study explores the process of articulating a pan identity, which benefits the community in developing a new political rhetoric¹ and helps them to enter mainstream politics. Towards this goal, this chapter delineates the socio-political background of this mobilization among the Yadavs, and why it has become necessary for a rather heterogeneous Yadav community to assert a broader collective and a congruent socio-cultural identity across Uttar Pradesh. I explore in detail, the concepts of community formation, socio-cultural mobility, genealogy, political participation and sub-caste divisions.

Genealogy of Yadav Community

Yadav is a broad term that includes several sub-castes (Ahir, Golla, Krishnaut, Gop, etc.) known by different names in different regions, whose common traditional work was that of shepherd, cowherd and milk seller. V.S. Yadav writes in his thesis that Ahir, Gwal, Kamhuriya, Dhadhor, Ghoshi, Gopal Baghel, Ghangar, Yaduvanshi Dhengar and Dhanga, were major ethnic groups in Uttar Pradesh (Yadav, 2008). Moreover, Ahirs² were numerically one of the sub-castes of Yadav community in Uttar Pradesh. Years ago, a few sub-sub-castes could also be seen among Ahirs. In this regard, Ram Asare Yadav from Tandawa village said, “There was a few separate sub-castes

¹ Lucia Michelutti (2004) writes, “The Yadavs were traditionally a low- to middle-ranking cluster of pastoral-peasant castes that have become a significant political force in Uttar Pradesh (and other northern states like Bihar) in the last thirty years.” She explores, “[h]ow the successful formation of a Yadav community, and the political activism of its members, are partly linked to their descent view of caste, folk theories of religious descent, factionalism, and finally to their cultural understanding of 'the past' and 'the political'. It is concluded that Yadav socio-religious organisation directly and indirectly helped the Yadav community to adapt to the modern political world.”

²Moreover, the name Ahir or Abhir is derived from ‘Abhira,’ an ethnic group mentioned several times in inscriptions and Sanskrit scriptures.

division of Ahir caste, such as the Sunars-Ahir, Sutars-Ahir, Lohar-Ahir, Shimpi-Ahir, Salic-Ahir, Gurao-Ahir, and Koli-Ahir, etc.”

Now, this ethnic group are one of the dominant castes in Uttar Pradesh. The most of the members of this community claim that they belong to the ‘Yaduvans’³. Therefore, the term ‘Yadav’ is traditionally used for farmer-herder groups and sub-castes (for instance, Ahir, Gwal, Gop, etc.) across India. Following a social and political revival movement in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, they claimed themselves to be descendants of the legendary mythical king Yadu⁴.

Yadavs were divided into many *gotra*⁵. Rao (1979) writes that there were three royal or chiefly clans among them, the Aphariya, Kousaliya and Khosa. The Aphariya dominance was more widespread than that of the other two clans. Besides royal and chiefly clans, there were about two dozen clans which gained socio-political dominance on the basis of military service and land grants. It appears that the leaders of these clans, served the kings and had *chaudhari* (head of caste) rights in the villages in which they were dominant, while other clans remained locally dominant.

³The word Yaduvansh or Yaduvanshi is used for the people of India who claim to be the descendants of the ancient king Yadu. The Yaduvanshi were originally Ahirs. Anthropologist K.S. Singh (1998: 44) writes that ‘many famous Ahir kings named Madhuriputra, Ishwarsen and Shivdutt later joined the Rajputs and were called Yaduvanshi Rajputs.’

⁴King Yadu is mentioned in Hindu texts like Mahabharata, Harivamsa, Puranas like Vishnu Purana, Bhagavata Purana and Garuda Purana etc. In these texts, King Yadu is described as the eldest son of King Yayati and Queen Devayani. It is believed that King Yadu had ordered that his future generations would be known in the room of the Yadavas and their lineage would be known as the Yaduvansh. That is why the descendants of King Yadu are known as Yadava or Ahir.

⁵Gotra broadly refers to a group of people whose lineage is inextricably linked to a single male ancestor. Hindus trace their gotras to the names of ancestors born thousands of years ago. The word Gotra means the descendants of (a monk) beginning with the son's son. In brief, the list of gotras of the Yadav caste include: Atri, Afriya, Babriya, Banafar, Banafar, Dangar, Dusadh, Ghoshi, Jhawat, Mahalwat, Noniwal, Vashishtra, Vallabala, etc.

Political Classification and Social Division

Today, the Yadav community falls under the political classification of Other Backward Classes (OBCs) under the Uttar Pradesh Constitutional Act, 1994⁶. The National Commission for Backward Classes (NCBC) broadly defines them under the cattle-herder castes or sub-sub-castes which are traditionally associated with occupations like animal husbandry, 'milk-production,' and 'milk selling'⁷ etc. under the one broader umbrella term, Yadav. It is important to point here that these cow-herder castes (Ahir, Golla, Gop, Dhandor, etc.) are traditionally perceived as '*shudra*', 'illiterate', outspoken, rude, etc. (Rao, 1979).

Over the years, the internal hierarchies and sub-castes divisions among Yadavs have been undermined by its community members. Resultantly, the allied sub-castes like Gwala, Ghurpita, etc. of the similar allied sub-castes have become synonyms. Now, the new generations bear 'Yadav' title in Uttar Pradesh.

Eminent scholars like M.S.A. Rao (1979), Lucia Michelutti (2004; 2010), K.C. Yadav (1967; 1994), J.N.S. Yadav (1992; 1996) and Shiva Sudhannad Yogi (1997) have investigated the ambition of getting this socio-cultural and political identity of the Yadav community. Now, the new generations of Yadavs are trying to build a pan-Indian collective identity, which denotes the 'fusion' of different 'cognate castes' (Ahir, Golla, Gop, Dhandor, etc.) under the umbrella term, 'Yadavs'. Now, as per government records (Report of NCBC), both the castes (Ahirs and Yadavs) are understood as synonyms.

At a general level, there were two ways of establishing a Yadav ethnic identity- one, the caste names Ahirs, Gavli, Golla, Gopa, Goala had an affinity to the Abhiras⁸ and Gopas⁹, which were

⁶ Resolution No. and Date, Ahir 12011/68/93-BBC (C) dt.10/09/1993 & Yadav, 12011/88/98-BBC dt. 06/12/1999.

⁷The expressions of affiliation with the traditional occupation of animal husbandry can be seen in rural areas largely while celebrating Krishna Janamashtami (birthday of Krishna; a popular mythic figure of Hinduism) and the 'Sadar festival' (in Hyderabad) by the Yadav community.

⁸ According to local belief, the Abhira was a Yadav dynasty that ruled over Western Deccan, India. They succeeded the kingdom of Satavahanas. From 203 to nearly 260, the Yadavs formed a kingdom. There is a belief that the Yadavs were from the Abhiras (Ahir), a kshatriya clan.

held to be synonymous and associated with Lord Krishna, who belonged to the Yadu dynasty.¹⁰ All these sub-castes could be incorporated under the umbrella term ‘Yadav’ because they followed similar traditional occupations (cattle-herding). These castes claimed that their ancestors were emperors, kings, chiefs, commanders-in-chief, soldiers, zamindars, owners-cultivators, labourers, milk sellers, cowherds, and cattle breeders (Prasad, 2014). The second principle of incorporation was on the basis of a set of occupations associated with cattle, which acquired legitimacy because Krishna was a cowherd. Shepherds and goatherds in the mountains and forests were in the *machan* (penumbra)¹¹ of cowherds who occasionally went to the forests to graze their cattle. However, cattle-herding as a general occupation was considered enough to incorporate the former into the regional category of Gollas or Ahirs and then into the all-India category of Yadavs (Rao, 1979).

The term ‘Yadav’, in fact, is not a homogeneous category because the sub-castes of Yadavs were not equal in their socio-cultural status¹². Thus, the foundation of a new identity also indicates multiple socio-cultural and political divisions. While a few were able to claim a superior status from their separate mythological origin, others were treated as inferior. For instance, the Goals enjoyed the highest status among them, while the Ghurpitas occupied the other end of the social hierarchy. Despite the Ahirs constituting the numerically stronger group, they were placed in the middle of the ritual hierarchy. This strict ritual hierarchy was translated into internal divisions and reaffirmed through a prohibition on intermarriage among the various sub-groups (Rao, 1979). The structure of multiple caste hierarchies was an integral part of not only this cow-rearing community, but it was also an inevitable part of other communities.

⁹ The word Gope, Gop or Gopa is used as a synonym of the Yadavs (Ahir) in Bihar, Western Uttar Pradesh, Jharkhand and West Bengal. The Yadav community is also divided into sub-divisions like Dhadhor, Krishnaut, Gop, Majhraut, Sadgop, etc.

¹⁰ Yadav community believes that King Yadu was the forefather of Lord Krishna. See for more details at http://yadavhistory.com/origin_of_yadavs.

¹¹ The partially shaded thatches (especially outer region).

¹² Moreover, these cognate castes engaged in husbandry and peasant activities for their livelihood as well as for creating a surplus (See for more details: Singh, 1998. People of India: Rajasthan, Mumbai: Popular Publication).

Mythology and Local Belief

The Yadavs can be referred to as a customarily non-elite *charwaha* (herdsman). They trace their lineage from Lord Krishna and King *Yadu*, as a part of their socio-political resurgence movement (Rao, 2002). Jayant Gadkari (1986) incorporates a few other lineages here. He writes, “However, it appears to be almost certain that various communities such as; Andhaka, Vrushni, Satvatas, Abhiras, Nagas come together perhaps after a period of long conflicts, and became known as ‘Yadava’... worshipped lord Krishna”. Now, the Yadavs trace their origins from Yadu. According to local beliefs, Yadu was a king, considered to be the first member of the Yadukul (family). Yadu’s descendants are now known as Yadavas or Ahirs in Uttar Pradesh. Similarly, Krishna is one of the famous mythological characters of the Yadukul. It is found that the sub-castes of the Yadavs identify their caste from Yaduvansh.

In this regard, Lucia Michelutti (2002) found that the Ahirs/Yadavs of Uttar Pradesh were divided into three major segments. First, the Yaduvanshi Ahir, also called Yadubansis, Yadubans, Yadavamshi or Yadavanshi, who claim descent from Yadu and Lord Krishna. Second, a mythic story of the origin of the Nandvanshi Ahirs of Mathura narrates that, on his way to kill the *rakshasas* (demons), Krishna crossed the holy river Yamuna attended by the Gawlis (a sub-castes of Yadav); those who crossed the Yamuna river with him became the Ahir Nandavanshi. Now, the Yaduvanshi and Nandavanshi are fundamentally treated as synonymous. Third, the Ahirs (Gwalvanshi) are historically connected through the occupation of cow-herding. In addition, Ram Asare Yadav of Tandawa village narrated that ‘the Gwalvanshi Ahirs (also called, Aheer) had settled in Jaunpur, Gorkakhpur, Azamgarh, Varanasi, Mirzapur etc. while the Nandvanshi Ahirs live in a few districts like Mathura, Saharanpur and Rampur of Western Uttar Pradesh. The Yadav families living in the *terai* or *kachhar* area (wetlands or on the banks of the Ganga or Gomti river) are considered inferior to the families living in the upper region. This is why, people do not give their girls to the grooms who live in the *terai* region. However, the families living in the *terai* region proudly give their girls to the families living in the upper part’.

The Ahirs/Yadavs manifest a special relation to the mythical characters of Lord Krishna and Nandbaba¹³, owing to their connection with the ‘sacred’ cow, which is itself revered as a ‘mother’ or ‘goddess’. There are a few other deities worshipped among the Yadavs at the local level (Prasad, 2015). In this regard, Ram Asare Yadav says, “First, among the spatial deities of the Ahirs/Yadavs is Kharsk Deo, who is always located at the place of assembly of the cattle. Second, Mater Deo is the god of the pen. Third, the people of Yadav community believe that a favourite deity among Yadavs/Ahirs is ‘Deeh Baba’ (Laharerwa Beer Baba) or ‘Haridas Baba’. Deeh Baba is considered as a chieftain of the village.” These local deities are remembered and worshiped on the day of Deepawali among Yadavs.

Roots of Mobilization and Identity Politics

A few works of literature suggest that the 1980s and 1990s witnessed a shift in Indian politics, which also influenced ordinary people. The upsurge of Hindu nationalism became a part of Indian politics (Jaffrelot, 2003; Hansen, 1999). Resultantly, socio-political mobilizations among Yadavs took place in the Hindi-heartland and a new political rhetoric moves around building a new image of its leaders as literate and politically aware (Michelutti, 2008). However, the routes of political mobilization go back to the late 19th century.

Indian social thinkers like Gandhi, Kabir, Ravidas, Tukaram, Phule, Periyar, and so on have helped in the creation of a self-consciousness among the depressed sections of the Indian societies for many decades. Shahu Maharaj, a Kolhapuri king, was known to be one of the first to disqualify the caste system, and gave fifty percent reservation to the backward sections of the society. He also provided financial support to publish the work, ‘Mooknayak’ (Leader of the Dumb)¹⁴, which was a revolutionary event in the early 20th century. Ambedkar wrote in the first issue of the ‘Mooknayak’, describing the Hindu society as a fortification of many storeys because it has neither a ladder nor a proper door to go out, and therefore, no way to interchange

¹³According to the mythological story, Vasudeva (Father of Krishna) took his new-born son, Lord Krishna, to his brother, King Nanda on the night of the child's birth so that King Nanda could raise him. King Nanda, who was married to Mata Yashoda, brought up both Lord Krishna and his brother, Balarama. It is said that King Nanda had around nine lakh cows.

¹⁴ Retrieved on 17/05/2022 from <https://www.bbc.com/hindi/india-44618504>

the storey. Those who were born on a particular storey (rung) die in the same storey (without escape). Even if a lowest-storey person had the qualifications to go up to the upper storeys, the person cannot climb to that level. Even if the person or community in the upper storey were unfit and undeserving to occupy the position, he/she cannot be strapped down, as the society which believes that God subsists even in the inanimate objects also says that the people who are a part of that very society should not be touched.¹⁵

The first decade (of the 20th century) saw the quest for a socio-political space across colonial India. The reason for this socio-political upsurge among the underprivileged castes/communities was also aided by a few social reforms of the British-Indian government. For instance, the Minto-Morley Reforms of 1909 gave a new glance into the process of caste mobilization and the formation of caste associations in that decade. Similarly, the *Montagu–Chelmsford* Reforms and the activities of Christian missionaries and a few anti-Brahmin movements gave a new boost to women's rights. The right to vote was given to women by the *Montagu–Chelmsford* Reforms. The Minto-Morley Reforms built a parliamentary system by which Indians (only a few sections of the people like landlords, educated members, etc.) got a chance to participate in the electoral system. Thus, the middle and lower castes remained deprived because the Reforms did not incorporate these sections into this right. At the same time, the activities of the Christian missionaries created a high consciousness about socio-political rights among the deprived castes. Similarly, movements like the Satya Shodhak Movement (1874), Arya Samaj (1875), etc., also influenced these castes to come forward and build a more extensive social network to fight against the hegemony of the upper castes. However, the nationalist leaders of the Indian National Congress (INC) did not pay much attention to the backward sections (Das, 2001).

It would be worth pointing out here that, in modern India, the social categories of caste were first strengthened during the British colonial rule because the first documentation of the different castes took place during this time. Christian missionaries also showed interest in this propaganda and contributed to the surveys conducted by the administration. In the 19th century, a caste census was also conducted, because of which, along with the development of a caste consciousness, the politicization of caste identity also came into vogue. With the help of

¹⁵Retrieved on 17/05/2022 from <https://drambedkarbooks.com/tag/mooknayak-newspaper/>

scriptures like the Manusmriti and Rigveda, many isolated castes were identified, and were differentiated culturally and socially. As a result, countless castes were helped in re-establishing their rare identity. This was done by the British government during the 19th and 20th centuries. During colonial rule, many anthropological surveys were also conducted from time to time. This helped in the categorization of the thousands of castes by the end of the 20th century.

The above-mentioned instances led to the backward castes, including the cognate castes of the Yadavs, to establish their caste associations. Similarly, a few other organizations like the Kurmi Caste Association (1890), Ahir Kshatriya Mahasabha (1910)¹⁶, and Gop Jatiya Maha Sabha (1912), etc., were established to ensure socio-political rights. A few backward caste movements like the Janeu Movement in north India, Satya Shodhak Samaj in Maharashtra, Self-Respect Movement (Tamil Nadu) and SNDP Movement (Kerala), etc. also emerged in the early 20th century.¹⁷ The feeling of deprivation led these underprivileged castes to consolidate their socio-political mobilization and engage in effective negotiation. This period can be exemplified as the ‘renaissance era’ of the backward castes movement because it was the time when many anti-Brahmin movements were also initiated with some philanthropic ideas as their basis to fight for social justice (Rao, 1979: 136–143). These movements also gave a new direction to the educational system and socio-cultural lives of the people. As a result, many fragmented and marginalized castes, including the Yadavs, began organizing for socio-political mobility (Yadav, 1994).

Political Mobilizations of the Cattle Herder Castes

Ahir, Golla, Gauli, etc. were separated till the late 19th century. Later on, the socio-political mobilizations among these different cognate castes took place. This ended with the formal establishment of the Ahir-Yadav Kshatriya Mahasabha in 1910 which had two objectives (1) to create consciousness about the Yadav Gaurav Gatha (Yadav’s Pride Tale)¹⁸ and (2) to demand a separate Yadav/Ahir regiment in the British-Indian army. A few other associations like the

¹⁶ This organization also claimed that the Ahirs/Yadavs descended from King Yadu’s dynasty to which Lord Krishna belongs.

¹⁷ These movements reinterpreted the myths of the origin of their own caste and traditional beliefs.

¹⁸ The local *birhasingers* sing the big achievements of the Yadav community.

Yadav Srikrishna Pracharak Mandali (in Mumbai, 1903), Gopal Mandali (1909) of Goala, 'Gop Jatiya Mahasabha' (1912) of Gops and Bangiya Gopa Samiti (in Mumbai, 1922) were also formed and associated with this community. Meanwhile, these organizations wanted to form a single larger organization for a pan-caste identity to combat socio-economic and political disabilities. As Rao points out, "...these cognate castes were designated as *Shudras*, and they did not have the right to study *Vedas* and were not entitled to the initiation rights of wearing the sacred thread...As cowherds, milk-sellers, agrarian labourers, tenants and palanquin-bearers, Yadavs were economically dependent on and politically subservient to the locally dominant landowning caste" (1979: 132). After many attempts by a few educated Yadav leaders like Dr. R.B. Khedkar, Badan Singh, Shyam Singh, Kamta Singh, Pahup Singh, Balbeer Singh, Ras Bihari Lal Mandal, and Swayambar Das, these regional organisations of allied castes of the Yadavs decided to work jointly within a federal structure namely, the 'All India Yadav Mahasabha' (AIYM) with a broad vision of 'unity' as well as 'a new pan-caste identity' in 1923.

AIYM and Social Mobility

An inaugural function was held in Nazargunj¹⁹ in Purnea (Bihar) in collaboration with the Bihar Prantiye Gop-Jatiya Mahasabha (a regional organization of the Gop caste) in 1924. In the inaugural function, the leading role was taken by Prithi Chand Lal Chaudhuri (the king of Nazargunj who belonged to the Ahir-Yaduvanshi clan), Vallabh Das, Navdeep Chand Ghosh, Sharad Chand Ghosh, and others (Yadav, 2014: 6-7). Describing this moment, Rao (1979: 140) writes, "The establishment of the AIYM was a great event in the career of Yadav movement. The movement gave expression to the national identity of several regional Yadavs associations." AIYM was the outcome of non-Brahmin movements. It appears that its members are inspired by the thoughts of social reformers like Kabir Das, Jyotiba Phule, Ambedkar, etc.

The first objective of AIYM was to publish or popularize the surname 'Yadav' (a caste-title) as a symbol of a pan-caste identity, which was also supported by their regional associations (Rao, 1979: 140). This vision was successfully carried out by the same. In the beginning, this organization mainly focused on the 'rights of wearing Janeo' (the sacred thread) as the ritually

¹⁹ Nazargunj was the dominant princely state in the Purnea region (Bihar), and as a result of geographical proximity, it included land in what is now West Bengal (Roy, 1957).

higher castes (Brahmins, Thakurs, Kayastha, Baniyas, etc.) used to wear (Yadav, 2014). This internalization and adapting of the rituals by the community can be attributed to ‘*Sanskritisation*’ (Srinivas, 1952). The main motive of this move was to overcome their Shudra status and gain self-respect in the public domain through the social formation and propagation of a new identity of the cognate castes as ‘*Yadu-vanshi*’²⁰, tracing their origins to the mythological ancestor, King Yadu, celebrating their caste pride. As these cattle herder castes were considered ‘Shudra’ by the local people in the Hindi-speaking belt, the leaders substituted their regional identity with a pan-Indian identity.

Strategically, the AIYM also collected historical records and writings on the cognate castes of Yadav to prove their shared history. Ram Lal Yadav (2014) writes that, “Yadav community was divided into 1486 branches with hierarchal order across the country, but today people from the Yadav community feel that they are descended child of great king Yadu.”

To overpower the regional differences, the AIYM also decided to use common symbols, a flag and a popular deity, Krishna (see, appendix: 4.1). These cultural symbols and their new identity have been popularized with the help of the *birha* folklore and faruahi folkdance. Many new stories were created with the help of the local *birha* folklore. Local *birha* singers narrate these stories and create political consciousness at grassroot level (see, chapter 5).

The organizational effort of the AIYM and regional organizations created a collective consciousness by transcending (sub-caste) cultural differences. The AIYM incorporated their spatial identity into the pan-Indian identity. They tried to initiate endogamous relation across the states. There were also drives to reject cattle sacrifice, female infanticide, spirit possession, child marriage’ etc. for all the cognate castes (Michelutti, 2002: 104). To build a new image, the AIYM and allied organizations also initiated a movement among the Yadavs to give up their traditional social habits like the consumption of non-vegetarian food and drinking liquor, and believing in ghosts, etc. Gradually, the local organizations of the Yadav community endorsed the substitution of lineage, clan, and God-cults with the cult of Krishna. The main (behind the

²⁰ Madhav Das of Bhatmai village narrated that ‘Yaduvanshi is a popular word used for describing various cattle herder kshatriya groups claiming descent from ancient Yadus.’ Also see, <http://bhartiyyadavmahasabha.co.in/history1.html>

adaptation of the umbrella term ‘Yadav’) objectives of the local organizations as well as the AIYM were: (1) to eradicate the internal socio-cultural differences and hierarchical divisions; (2) to create relatedness within a highly heterogeneous community; (3) to promote their ‘cow herder’ ethos; and (4) to build a self-respecting identity as a warrior community for which they demanded for an ‘Ahir/Yadav regiment’ in the British army²¹.

Demand for Ahir/Yadav Regiment: A Long Pending Political Goal

The PAN identity (as a single community) was popularized by demanding for a Yadav/Ahir regiment during the colonial British-Indian government. This demand was based on their (AIYM and its regional organizations) self-classification as a warrior and brave ethnic group. Even now, the AIYM and other allied organizations have been demanding for an ‘Ahir regiment’ for many years. Raj Lakshmi Yadav²² says, “It is not casteism to demand Ahir or Yadav regiment ...there are many regiments in the Army which are named after castes like Dogra, Jat, Rajput, Jat, etc.” The members of AIYM make such demand not only for the sake of cultural or political identity, but they also symbolize it (Ahir/Yadav regiment) as a significant source of ‘financial support’ and a ‘source of power’ (Rao, 1964: 1441-1443).

Moreover, the inclusion of the ‘Ahir regiment’ in the British-Indian Army gave them a tool to manifest their self-respecting identity through the lens of Abhira’s²³ heroic past (Rao, 1979: 136-40). The weaving of a collective caste identity for the Yadavs was based on masculine values, as is evident above. The symbolism of being a martial race was limited to the males. Resultantly, the space for women was limited in the larger organizations like the AIYM and ‘Ahir/Yadav

²¹ The demand was accepted by the British-Indian government. The Ahir/Yadav regiment gave the Yadavs their space to claim their legacy as a martial race. Even today, the AIYM demands for a ‘Yadav regiment’ in the Indian army (See for more details, ‘Yadav, Ram Lal. 2014, Op. cit.). This journal is published by the Yadav activists who are closely associated with ‘AIYM’.

²² Retrieved on 17/05/2022 from <https://www.deccanherald.com/national/national-politics/ahead-of-bihar-polls-yadavs-again-raise-demand-for-ahir-regiment-in-indian-army-847163.html>

²³ ‘The Abhira dynasty was a dynasty that ruled over the western Deccan, where they succeeded the Satavahanas. From 203 to roughly 260, they formed a vast kingdom. They were from the Abhira kshatriya clan’ (Retrieved on 17/05/2022 from <https://nashik.gov.in/about-district/history/>).

Regiment.’ The entire idea of community formation among the Yadavs gives a glimpse into the masculinization of community symbols. This also illustrates how a caste identity is embedded and performed through gendered discourses.

In this regard, Rajwant Yadav (a member of the AIYM) proudly seeks a pan caste identity with the help of caste army. He said, “The brave Jawans from my community have sacrificed their lives bravely in the India-China (1962) and Kargil wars (1999)...in Akshardham temple and Indian Parliament attacks (2001). When we (Yadavs) are prepared to lay down our lives in the name of nation, there should be an exclusive regiment for my community.” The members of AIYM have send around 20 lakh postcards to Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi with the same demand²⁴. The Samajwadi Party also included the demand for an Ahir/Yadav regiment in the party’s manifesto in the 2019 Lok Sabha polls, and the SP chief Akhilesh Yadav assured the formation of a Yadav Infantry/Ahir Regiment, if elected to power during the same Lok Sabha election²⁵. It would be worth to point out here that Jat Regiment, Rajput Regiment, Rajputana Rifles, Madras Regiment, Maratha Light Infantry, Mahar Regiment, and Gurkha Regiments, etc. are a few caste- and ethnicity-based regiments and corps of the Indian Army.

In sum, the Ahir/Yadav Regiment is a much-awaited demand of the Yadav community and this demand acted as a catalyst for the community to become politically organized. Many efforts are also made by Yadav leaders at the local level to unite the socially and educationally backward Yadavs. The celebration of Krishna Janmashtami by connecting it with the PAN identity of the Yadav caste and organizing large caste-based *biradari bhojs* are also a part of the greater narratives to facilitate community formation.

²⁴ Retrieved on 17/05/2022 from <https://www.news18.com/news/india/colonial-hangover-indian-army-and-the-british-legacy-of-caste-based-recruitment-1992713.html>

²⁵ Retrieved on 17/05/2022 from <https://theprint.in/opinion/brave-ahirs-honourable-chamars-army-regiments-with-more-than-just-caste-on-their-side/221528/>

Community Pride: Yadav Solider in Rezangala War

When discussing about the demand for an Ahir/Yadav regiment, it is pertinent to mention the Rezangala war. The Rezangala battle²⁶ took place in the north Indian Union Territory Ladakh during the India-China war of 1962. The Ahir/Yadav company of Kumaon regiment was instructed to defend a creek overlooking the Chosul airfield. This company of 120 jawans (Yadavs), recruited from the Rewari region (Haryana), and an officer, Major Shaitan Singh, were attacked by a huge contingent of Chinese army consisting of around five thousand infantry and heavy artillery on November 18th, 1962. In the battle, 114 Ahir/Yadav jawans laid their life, and five were captured by the Chinese army, and one solider was sent back to tell the story to the senior officers.

The battle of Rezangla has inspired local folk singers, the Bollywood film *Haqikat* (1964) and has also motivated the youth. The Indian government constructed a memorial place 'Ahir/Yadav Dham' where the war took place. Now, the members of the AIYM and local Chaudharis proudly narrate this story publicly²⁷.

After talking to a few Yadav Chaudharis and singers, I could understand that this incident has had a profound influence on them. They often speak proudly about this incident as a mark of community pride. In this regard, Parashuram Yadav of Tandawa village says, "I feel proud about this incident because our jawans fought bravely for the nation." He further said, "Yadavs belong to a martial race. Therefore, there should be a 'Yadav Regiment' in the Indian Army." It is observed that Parashuram Yadav was a passionate listener of the *birha* folklore and a local folk singer informed him about the Rezangala incident. Neeraj Rajput writes, "On the new 'war memorial', the names of the brave soldiers of the Rezangala war will be written, as well as the names of the soldiers who made the supreme sacrifice in the violence of Galwan Valley with the China Army in the last year i.e., 2020. The Rezangala War Memorial has also been given the name of 'Ahir Dham', because the company of '13 Kumaon' regiment, which fought the war in

²⁶See for more details (Retrieved on 18/05/2022 from), <https://www.tv9hindi.com/knowledge/know-about-historical-war-rezang-la-war-of-1962-rajnath-singh-to-inaugurate-revamped-rezang-la-war-memorial-today-919822.html>

²⁷ The story of Rezangala War can be found at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sHmeQMMOMBI>

1962, is a company of the Ahir/Yadav community.”²⁸ Therefore, all the organizations of Yadavs have been collectively demanding for an Ahir/Yadav Regiment for many years.

Yadav: As a Pan-Identity

The data of NCBC states that there are several sub-castes among the Yadav community as the word ‘Yadav’ represents a cognate category consisting of several allied pastoral castes, which together constitute about 12 percent of the total population of India.²⁹ Meanwhile, many studies claim that the majority of the cattle herder communities belong to the Ahir caste (Rao, 1979; Michelutti, 2002). Brajwasi, Gavli, Koli, Lingayat, Gafoli, Gobari (Gyari), Gobra, Gadhari, Gwara, Yadav, Raut, Thethavar, Gop, Gopal, Yadav, Gwala, Ghasi, Gope, Sadgope, etc. are a few other sub-castes among the Yadavs. According to the All India Yadav Mahasabha (AIYM), the allied sub-castes of Yadavs in India are about 20 per cent of total population of India at present. The differences among these sub-castes were based on dissimilar cultural practices.

Therefore, to demean such dissimilar socio-cultural practices, Chaudhari Padma Singh, Chaudhari Kamta Singh and Chaudhari Shyam Singh formed the 'Ahir-Yadav Kshatriya Mahasabha' in Mainpuri (U.P.) in the year 1910. In 1912, the 'Ahir Kshatriya Vidyalaya' was established in Shikohabad. The Ahir Yadav Kshatriya Mahasabha was the first to bring together the various sub-castes of the Yadavs and organize them into a political force. Another prominent leader, Rao Balbir Singh, inspired the Yadavs to wear Janeu, which angered the Rajputs and Bhumihars in Munger, Bihar and also led to their violent clashes with the Yadavs. A special report on Yadav states, “Even before independence, Yadav leaders Chaudhari Nehal Singh, Chaudhari Gangaram, Baburam Yadav and Laxmi Narayan had started uniting the divided Yadavs into sub-castes in UP, Delhi and parts of central India. In 1908 itself, these leaders formed the Yadav Sabha. In the same year, Rao Man Singh, associated with the Rewari royal

²⁸Retrieved on 14/02/2022 from <https://www.abplive.com/news/india/rezangla-day-when-indian-soldier-fought-the-chinese-till-the-last-bullet-and-the-last-man-ann-2000398>

²⁹ According to the British-Indian Census 1931, these cow-rearing ethnic communities constituted around 12 per cent. Since then, the caste census could not be conducted. Therefore, the given data can be different at present.

family, appealed in the book 'Abhir Yadav Kuldeepak' that Yadav, Ahir, Gopa are all descendants of Kshatriya Yadukul and they should now become one.”³⁰

The major concern of the AIYM was to find out the relatedness among these many cognate Yadav castes using traditional occupations and mythical characters. So, the members of AIYM began to publish magazines, newspapers, online content, etc. dedicated to the Yadav community as a part of their strategy. The histories of the Yaduvans (Yadu dynasty), local Yadav kings, famous personalities, sub-castes of Yadavs, activities of the AIYM, etc. were the major themes and concerns of these publications.

Underscoring this point; the AIYM claims on its website that the Yadav/Ahir is a caste that lives in India, Sri Lanka, Nepal, Pakistan, Russia, Bangladesh and the Middle East. As mentioned in the beginning, they claim to be descendants (based on mythology) from the ancient mythic figure, King Yadu. The name Yadu belongs to one of the five Aryan tribes (clans) mentioned in the Sanskrit scripture, Rig Veda. They were known as the Panchjanya (five people). It was the common name which was given to the five Vedic clans (Kshatriya). The Abhir/Yadav caste generally follows the Vaishnav traditions of Hinduism. Yadavs also share Vaishnav religious beliefs. They are ardent devotees of Krishna (an avatar of Lord Vishnu). The Yadav community can be classified in the caste hierarchy of Hinduism under the Kshatriya varna because the Yadavs remained in power in India and neighboring countries until 1200-1300 AD (till the arrival of Muslim invaders or rulers). There are two things, which are especially common among the Yadavs. Firstly, they claim to be the *vanshaj* (descendants) of King Yadu (Yadav); Lord Krishna is also believed to belong to the same dynasty. Secondly, many cattle-herder castes in this social category also engage in similar occupations like milk-production and milk selling. The stories of Lord Krishna's pastimes (where his childhood was centred around cattle) lend a kind of social legitimacy to the occupations related to milk-production.

Umesh Yadav, the author of the 'Ahir Yadav Gatha', a blog that writes about the history and politics of the Yadavs, says that the Yadavs of Uttar Pradesh had taken an active part in the

³⁰Retrieved on 14/02/2022 from <https://hindi.news18.com/news/uttar-pradesh/mau-investigation-school-of-anand-yadav-mafia-mukhtar-ansari-hearing-in-high-court-mla-fund-case-nodelsp-4260391.html>

Indian Independence movement.³¹ He claims that most of the people who took part in the Chauri Chaura movement in Gorakhpur in 1922 belonged to Dalit and backward castes and were led by Yadavs, and Bhagwan Yadav was sentenced to death for this. He says that Chaudhari Raghubir Singh was also a prominent freedom fighter. Even before independence, Yadav leaders like Chaudhari Nehal Singh, Chaudhari Gangaram, Baburam Yadav and Laxmi Narayan started uniting the Yadavs who were divided into sub-castes in U.P., Delhi and other parts of India. In 1908, Dilip Singh brought out the magazine, 'Ahir Gazette' from Rewari (Haryana) and reported that Mainpuri district used to be the centre of 'Ahir' organizations when U.P. was the United Provinces.

Thus, the strategies of constructing a new identity 'Yadav' consist of two inter-related elements. First, the members of various organizations of the Yadav community started collecting historical evidence of the political dominance of this community. Second, they claimed their relation to a few popular mythological characters of religious texts and local deities.

In this regard, Rao (1979: 134) points out that the Arya Samaj helped the Yadavs to achieve their aim of social mobility, especially following the spread of the Arya Samaj's beliefs and rituals among the Yadavs in U.P. and Bihar with the adoption of the *janeo* (sacred thread). Later on, it led to the 'Janeo Movement' as groups of adult males adopted the sacred thread in public. As it meant organized activity, it attracted the attention of the Thakurs and other dominant castes and violent riots ensued. The adaptation of the Arya Samaj beliefs and rituals meant several changes in the life-style of the Yadav community in the Hindi belts. Now, people from the above-mentioned sub-castes bear 'Yadav' as their caste title and follow similar traditions and commensal patterns.

³¹Retrieved on 14/02/2022 from <https://hindi.news18.com/news/uttar-pradesh/kushinagar-policemen-came-in-the-last-leg-of-liquor-bolero-seized-owner-arrested-nodelsp-4006507.html>

Research Questions

1. What was the necessity for a rather heterogeneous Yadav community to assert a broader collective and a congruent socio-cultural identity across Uttar Pradesh?
2. Is there any role of community feast (biradari bhoj) in rendering the internal ideological division within Yadavs to diminish and consolidate as a firm congruent PAN Yadav identity?
3. How do the Yadav leaders or caste heads (*chaudharis*) communicate the collective decision to the masses (i.e. caste members) and how do they convey their ideas of a consolidated caste network in rural areas? How do the local *chaudharis* mediate kinship and marital ties to further strengthen caste network?
4. To what extent do the ideological divisions or disputes still surface, and how the collective efforts of caste heads fall short in resolving the internal divisions and contradictions?

Methodology

The methodology of the present study is based on a bottom-up approach, and was executed using the ethnographic method of ‘triangulation’, which enabled me to collect narratives, oral histories and life experiences of the respondents. The bottom-up approach often resembles a ‘seed’ or core model, by which the initial data can be small but eventually grow in size and complexity. Therefore, I have used this approach to understand how the idea of a community feast and a few other cultural activities help the Yadav community to strengthen their caste network. A strong caste network ultimately helps the caste leaders in a democratic country like India. To aid the approach, the triangulation method was used to collect primary data. Micheal Quinn Patton (1999) writes that the triangulation method can be referred to such process in which more than one method is used to collect data on the same context. This is a technique of assuring the reliability and validity of a research study by using a range of methods to collect data on the same topic, and involves different kinds of samples. However, the core purpose of triangulation is not necessarily to cross-validate the primary data, but rather, to capture the diverse dimensions of the same incident (matter of study). It helps in increasing the researcher’s in-depth understanding about something and strengthens their standpoint in many aspects. “Triangulation

method is also an effort to explain the complex human or social behaviour using a range of methods to offer a more balanced clarification to readers' (Noble and Heale, 2019).

Selections of the Village(s)

Tandawa village was my primary focus for data collection. I directly interacted with the villagers and received first-hand information about the process of socio-political mobilization among the Yadavs here. The study area is located fifteen kilometres away from the District Headquarters and comes under the Sultanpur constituency³² of the Lok Sabha, and the Sadar constituency³³ for the State Legislative Assembly. The village panchayat of Tandawa is 'Kithawa.' This village panchayat consists of five villages, namely Kithawa, Tandawa, Rayapatti, Manapatti, and Rupnathpur. Social factors like remote geographical location, caste compositions, developmental activities, caste conflict, new socio-cultural patterns, and *biradari bhoj* make Tandawa village an ideal representative for a sociological study. If we look at the village panchayat's caste composition (Kithawa), it is primarily dominated by the backward castes, namely Yadav, Kurmi, Kumhar, Kahar, Musahar, Kewat, Pasi, and Badhayi. The so-called upper castes- Brahmins and Thakurs- exercise significant influence on the elections, whether it is the village panchayat, district, or state assembly levels. Forty-two per cent of the population of this village is 'illiterate' (according to the Indian Census-Village Directory, 2011).³⁴ I also collected primary data from the neighbouring villages (Natauli, Rajanpur, Lautan ka Purva, etc.) of Tandawa to get an in-depth understanding of a few other socio-political dimensions.

In terms of representation, the primary data was collected from men and women of illiterate (ages above fifty years old), semi-literate (middle-age group from thirty to fifty years old), and the newly literate (young) categories. I also conducted in-depth interview with regular participants of *biradari bhoj* to get different versions of their narratives. I dedicated myself to remaining neutral, which helped me to interpret the understanding of human experience in qualitative research.

³² Menaka Gandhi is the Lok Sabha (the lower house of Parliament of India) representative from this constituency.

³³ Raj prasad Upadhyay (Raj Babu) is an MLA from this constituency.

³⁴ Directory, I. C.-V. (2015-16). *National Family Health Survey-4, District Fact Sheet Sultanpur*. Retrieved on October 13, 2017. From www.rchiips.org:

http://rchiips.org/NFHS/FCTS/UP/UP_Factsheet_179_Sultanpur.pdf

Period of Fieldwork and Method of Data Collection

Interview, group discussion and observation methods were opted to gather information about community formation, local politics, gender and inter- and intra-caste relations. The aim was to interview a cross-section of the residents in the area. The field work was conducted in two phases³⁵. The first phase was conducted from August to December 2019, while the second phase was from April to November 2020. I also visited Tandawa many times as per the requirements of the study.

Those field visits gave me a chance to explore the recent socio-political formation and social changes here. Primary data was also collected using field notes, telephonic interviews, and the go-along technique. The techniques of 'observation' and 'dialogic partnership' guided me to examine the social world through lived experiences and the 'emic view'³⁶ of the subjects of the study. In this regard, Clifford Geertz (1986) writes, “The well-known observation method is equated with a qualitative research enterprise. A researcher provides a detailed, in-depth description of the 'everyday life' of the people and their socio-cultural practices through his/her acquired skills to gain an understanding of the emic world view.”

Observation method is a great asset and a highly productive methodological aid, particularly in the study of culture and social life. In this regard, Jodhka writes that ‘M.N. Srinivs shows the relevance of the observation method even for those interested in regional, state, or national studies because it can serve as a system of apprenticeship, help interpret other data on social institutions, and be a crucial aid to intellectual development’ (Jodhka, 2012a; 2012b).

Other significant issues like the role of the Yadavs in socio-political development, power politics and developmental initiatives in the rural area are also a primary focus here. Therefore, I took the help of local Hindi newspapers (Dainik Jagran, Amar Ujala, Hindustan, etc.), magazines (Yadav Kuldipika, Yadav Shakti, etc.), websites, Facebook, Youtube and booklets (Aatrey Chandroday, Ahir Gaurav Gatha, etc.) for the present study.

³⁵ Detailed descriptions about the method of data collection and the idea of the field are given in Chapter-3.

³⁶ The emic approach investigates how local people think. How they perceive and categorize the world, their rules for behavior, what has meaning for them, and how they imagine and explain things.

Conceptual Frameworks

Keeping in mind the first objective, I conceptualized the first and second chapters with the help of the theory of ‘identity politics’. The laden phrase ‘identity politics’ has come to denote a wide range of socio-cultural and political activity and theorizing founded in the shared experiences of injustice of the members of certain socio-political groups. In India, identity politics is rooted in the violent socio-political and cultural history of Partition and the demand for separate electorates for religious and caste identities. Since then, whenever a marginalized community has demanded for a space in politics, it has largely been seen as divisive, and as a threat to the equality, social harmony and unity of the nation.

In terms of caste, this conceptual framework has been used by a few well-known scholars like Christophe Jaffrelot, Badri Narayan, M.S.A. Rao, etc. Jaffrelot (2003) examined the emergence of the backward castes in the Hindi belts and found that a drastic socio-political change took place in the politics of Uttar Pradesh and Bihar after the 1990s. He says that leaders like Lalu Prasad Yadav, Mulayam Singh Yadav, Sharad Yadav, etc. played a key role in this political development. To the entire process of political shift, he called ‘India’s Silent Revolution’. Similarly, Badri Narayan (2021) tried to map out how the idea of the polarization of castes happened among the lower-backward castes. He brought out the multiple layers of political discriminations, exclusions and caste division in Indian society. M.S.A. Rao (1979) compared the social mobility between the Yadav and Ezhava communities and emphasized how the idea of making a ‘cultural identity’ led these castes to mobilize for their political representation in the power structure. He coined the phrase ‘Yadav Movement’ to explain the socio-political mobility among the cattle-herder castes (Yadavs).

The works of Arjun Appadurai (1981), Suzanne Hanchett and Stanley Regelson (1988) guided me to conceptualize the second objective (see, chapter 4). On the one hand, Hanchett and Regelson’s (1988) work offer a rare opportunity to delve beneath the surface and explore the inner meanings of some popular customs of rural India. It is often seen that the symbolic use of *akshata* (coloured rice), flowers, and food in various Indian festivals bears a deep, mystical meaning within the ethnic culture of each particular area. Hanchett and Regelson (1988) emphasizes that rice being the major food of people living in India, it is used abundantly in the

rituals of numerous Hindu deities. Authors points out that how the ‘coloured rice’ is conspicuously used in various rituals all over India. For instance, yellow being the symbolic colour of fertility or of a fertilized egg, or even of menstrual fluid, it has a functional meaning in Hindu rituals. In sense of community feast, the ritual of throwing the *akshat* is performed at each step.

On the other hand, the food has taken on meanings beyond simple survival. Because food is such a basic and powerful element of human existence, its use as a symbol of social, religious, and political ideology is widespread. The use of food as ritual is often not so obvious, but when we think of our linking of food with occasions and festivals, and often limiting it to these, it becomes clearer. Anthropologists tend to stress the usefulness of food as a marker of social boundaries and creating social network. Appadurai (1981) talks about food in the South Asian context, and he notes how consumption practices signify the structures within the social order and act as ‘the instrument of Hindu ideas of rank and distance.’ Appadurai states that food and drink represent ‘a peculiarly powerful device,’ something that can “[bear] the load of everyday cultural discourse.”

Similarly, Rao and Ravikumar (2017) look at the interface between religion and politics in the present Telangana state through the ritual of honouring a female deity. Authors found that this ritual is organized at different places in Hyderabad city around the same time as the *bonalu* festival,³⁷ the temple and the ritual in the old city became particularly prominent due to the location of the temple surrounded by a Muslim-majority population. Here, emotions often run high when processions are organized; in the past, Hindu–Muslim communal conflicts, riots, and assaults have flared up when the *bonalu* was organized, disturbing the peace and tranquillity of the entire city. This work provides a framework to examine how a religious ritual needs to be understood in its political context, thus compelling us to rethink the religious–secular binary.

To meet the third objective, I used the idea, ‘*Vernacularization of Democracy*’. Lucia Michelutti (2008) offers a new perspective to examine popular democracy in Northern India. As it is often claimed that the ideologies of equality and social justice are transformed and internalized through the modality of modern democracy, her works explores how the notions of social justice

³⁷ Bonalu is a Telangana traditional Hindu festival centered on the Goddess Mahakali. This festival is celebrated annually in the twin cities of Hyderabad and Secunderabad, as well as in other parts of the state.

and social equality enter into the popular consciousness of a particular group, namely the Yadavs of Mathura town, through the idioms of caste, vernacular language, religion, masculinity, and ideas of personhood. Michelutti emphasizes that the notions of democracy were rephrased in local settings. She also highlights how the idea of caste identity was also modified in a vernacular language. She demonstrates and explores this process through the political transformation of the Yadav caste into a quasi-ethnic community, which emphasizes its inheritance of democracy along *deen* (religious lines). She builds her arguments based on social facts and logic, based on primary data. The aim of her work is not only to challenge the normative understandings of democracy as the prerogative of elites and institutions but also to explore the rhetoric, language and slang often used and perceived by people in general and the Yadavs in particular. She called this process, the '*Vernacularization of Democracy*'.

She argues that the articulation of the 'Yadav' identity lays claim to a specific folk theory (cultural identity), according to which all Indian pastoral castes (Ahir, Gop, Gwala, etc.) are descendants from the Yadu dynasty to which a popular god, Krishna, belonged. Despite some limitations like personal context and focusing a particular town, the theory of the *Vernacularization of Democracy* adopted an innovative approach that was neither from an 'upper'/elite nor lower strata of the caste hierarchy, but from the idea of democracy from the 'middle-strata-caste'.

To examine the last objective of the research, I went through the works of Kancha Ilaiah who (2005) opened up a fresh academic debate that countered systemic Brahmanism by using a new method to explore the social dominance of the upper castes. His method is novel as it goes back to the roots of Dalit-Bahujans (lower-backward castes), whom Ilaiah refers to as the 'production communities'. His work majorly revolved around the productive masses (mainly the cattle-herder castes of shepherds and Yadavs) and their contributions to the nation-building process.

Plan of the thesis

Thousands of people of Yadav community gather to listen to *birha* during the time of *biradari bhoj*. Sitting under a tent in such a huge amount, discussing various socio-political issues and discussing the caste atrocities on Yadav community in the past years can be called a unique phenomenon. Similarly, the initiative to prepare a script (in the form of folksong) by *birha*

singers overnight on any events or incidents also has sociological significance because such scripts are used to mobilize the people. Such socio-cultural activities also have political implications. The credit of which can be given to the socio-cultural initiatives like the *biradari bhoj*, *dadhikando*, *krishna janmstami*, *nandmahar*, etc. because these cultural activities have created political consciousness among Yadavs.

However, the routes of socio-political consciousness among Yadav is linked to the ‘Emergency,’ ‘Mandal affair,’ Ram Rath Yatra, ‘Babari demolition,’ and the rise of regional parties in Uttar Pradesh. The above phenomena have provided a framework to the leaders of middle-lower castes including Yadav community to come forward as a safeguard for the welfare of marginal sections. Similarly, these socio-political affairs have also given a chance to build a self-respective image for the own community.

The ideas of ‘*hissedari*’ (equal share) and ‘*bhagidari*’ (power distribution) were main concern of the caste politics. In this regard, Kanshiram, a leader of Bahujan Samajwadi Party, once gave a political slogan, "*Jiski jitni bhagidari, uski utni hissedari*" (share in election tickets and in power on the basis of support). Now, it has become around three decades since the foundation of the dalit-backward castes based political parties like Samajwadi Party, Bahujan Samaj Parti, Apna Dal, etc. emerged as an alternative political force. Due to influence of these political parties, many new changes have taken place in the power structure of rural India.

Now, backward castes like Yadavs, Kurmi, Maurya, Rajbhar, Nishad, etc. have been seeking equal share in power structure. Therefore, these backward castes have been strengthening its caste network with the help of a few local socio-cultural practices. In this regard, the present study focuses on the Yadav community to get an in-depth understanding on the socio-political process at grassroots level.

Having introduced the heterogeneity and cultural diversity among Yadav community in the introductory chapter, the second chapter delineates the socio-political background of Uttar Pradesh in general and eastern U.P. (especially Sultanpur, Ayodhya, Prayagraj, Amethi, etc. district) in particular. Primarily, I have mapped out the political representation of backward class specially the main factors behind the emergence of Yadav community during 1990s. How it became possible for Yadav leaders to make a socio-political space after the 1990s in the political

of Uttar Pradesh. The present chapter also maps out how local Yadav leaders take the help of a few socio-political organizations and cultural celebrations to show their presence in the public. Similarly, it has also been a main aim of this chapter to study how strengthening the caste network has become essential in order to challenge the caste supremacy of the dominant castes.

The third chapter gives detailed description about the field, method of data collection, various challenges, social atmosphere, etc. I have also written about my personal observation and interaction with research participants. The fourth chapter delineates how the Yadav community takes the help of a significant cultural practice (community feast) to consolidate its caste network at the local level. Similarly, the present study focuses on how the idea of strengthening the caste network has been helping the Yadav community to reshape the socio-political identity. In addition, the chapter explores how the people from Yadav community want to make a socio-political space with the help of a community feast, fair of *nandmahar*,³⁸ etc.

The fifth chapter examines the expressive culture among Yadav with the help of birha folklore and faruahi folk generess. Folklore is an effective means of communication in the study area since it connects people with their way of life and gives a way to the Yadav community to build a PAN identity. Folk media forms the language of local people's expression and provides an opportunity to voice their opinions on various socio-political issues. Therefore, the organizers of biradari bhoj hire local professional folk singers on the day of the feast. The participants of the community feast get much information about 'Ahir Gaurav Gatha'.³⁹ They also get inspiration from such a provocative speech, which makes participants to organize a grand feast once in lifespan.

Therefore, the fifth chapter is based on a descriptive analysis of folklore and how the local leaders take help of this folklore to build caste network and social engineering. Mainly, I have analyzed how the native Yadavs communicate the collective decision with more prominent community members and express their thoughts for a consolidated caste network in rural areas.

³⁸ Nandmahar is religious shrine, which is dedicated to the Lord Krishna, Balrama, Nand Baba and Shree Vasudev. This place is very popular among Yadavs.

³⁹ Ahir Gaurav Gatha (Yadav Pride tale) is a form of poetic telling about heroic deed. In other words, folk singers speak the recent socio-political development in Yadav community. Major achievements of Yadav community are pointed out by the folk singers. The idea of narrating is collectively known as 'Ahir/Yadav Gaurav Gatha'.

In addition, the present chapter also attempts to address gender and ‘expressive culture’⁴⁰ with the help of birha folklores, especially how the Yadav community has been closely associated with rural folklores like *birha*⁴¹ or *faruahi*⁴² for a long time. I have also delineated the interrelationship between folklore and the caste question with a particular focus on intra-caste relations. It is found that the local leaders and *chaudharis* (heads of a caste) promote *birha* folklore to reach out the larger community members. Similarly, I have also described how the *birha* folklore as a medium of communication has been helping local leaders to spread their political messages and thought in rural areas. In this regard, the present chapter also examines how the women from the Yadav community are closely associated with the folklores. Keeping in mind the popularity of birha folklore among Yadavs, the organizers of the biradari bhoj hire local folk singers to attract and turn up the larger number of the community members to the feast.

The sixth chapter detailed about a few *goul* (factions) and ideological groups among Yadavs. I have addressed the internal ideological divisions among Yadavs and how the local leaders and *chaudharis* come up with an opinion. What are the priorities of such dissimilar groups and how do they stand for a pan Indian identity. For example, ‘Akhil Bhartiya Prabuddha Yadav Sangam’ and the members of Yadav Shakti magazine put more emphasis on democratic and rational values. They follow the footprint of Kabir, Periyar, Phule, Ambedkar, Lalayi Yadav, etc. The pictures of these social reformers can be seen on the banners and posters of Akhil Bhartiya Prabuddha Yadav Sangam. They also promote rituals free marriages. In such marriages, brides and grooms just read preamble of Indian constitution and even they do not hire priest. The members of the Prabuddha Sangam also negate the sub-caste boundaries among Yadavs openly.

In contrast, All India Yadav Mahasabha and the members of Yadav Kuldipika magazine have been celebrating passionately Shree Krishna Janamstami, dadhikandon, nandmahar, sadar festival, etc. passionately. They also organize the mass wedding ceremonies for the poor families

⁴⁰ Expressive culture is processes, emotions, and ideas bound within the social production of and performances in everyday life. It is a way to embody culture and express culture through sensory experiences such as dance, music, literature, visual media, and theater. So, I have examined that how these folklores are closely connected with emotion and thought of Yadav community.

⁴¹ Biraha is an ethnic Bhojpuri and Awadhi folk genre of Yadav community in Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, and Jharkhand in India. It is a sad or devotional story of any famous character and it is often sung in poetic form.

⁴² Faruahi is a folk dance which is prevalent in the rural parts of Eastern Uttar Pradesh and Bihar among Yadavs. Faruahi dance is a folk form in which the dancer's body part is danced and it is very labor intensive.

of Yadav community with the help of local leaders and priests. Its members try to project to a mythic figure Shree Krishna as an ancestor of Yadavs.

It is very clear from both examples that these Yadav organizations keep dissimilar ideological position but they promote a pan Yadav identity and negate sub-caste boundaries among Yadav community. However, it was found that the members of Akhil Bhartiya Prabuddha Yadav Sangam and All India Yadav Mahasabha are well-educated and their socio-economic background is much higher than the organizers of *biradari bhoj*. It was noticed that the members of both organizations often criticize to the idea of *bidari bhoj*. These members feel that the entire process of celebrating such expensive community feast leads its organizers into the shadow of poverty and backwardness.

We can see that most of the Yadav leaders are closely associated with Samajwadi Party. They actively participate in the *biradari bhoj* and they try to keep frequent relation with the local chaudharis. Moreover, the Yadav leaders of different political parties and ideological groups are also invited to the *biradari bhoj* in order to make a consolidated caste network.

The concluding chapter revisits the various dimensions of the thesis in an effort to locate the idea of identity politics among Yadavs and its connection to community feast, folklore and a few other cultural activities.

Chapter-2

Mapping the Political History and Necessities to Polarize

After a long political struggle, India attained freedom in 1947, but a few sections worldwide were cynical about its long-time survival. The widespread socio-political and cultural diversity of the subcontinent were the main reasons behind their skepticism. As Winston Churchill said, “They [Indians] will fight amongst themselves for power and India will be lost in political squabbles”⁴³. Therefore, the Constituent Assembly of India chose to lead India in the path of a secular, mixed economy. Another point of concern was the weak opposition, as a solid and diversified opposition was necessary for a healthy democratic country to function. Otherwise, there would be many possibilities for the ‘tyranny of the majority’ to take over (Tocqueville, 2003).

In the initial years after Independence, the absence of an opposition in the Parliament was a great challenge. However, the conscientious efforts of Ram Manohar Lohia and Jay Prakash Narayan created a space for non-Congress leaders. In this regard, Lohia also met with Dr. B.R. Ambedkar to merge the ‘All India Backward Class Association’ (AIBCA) with the ‘Socialist Party.’ However, with the untimely death of Ambedkar, the idea of merging the AIBCA did not become possible.

After the demise of Lohia, Jay Prakash Narayan took over the responsibility, and his idea of ‘total revolution’ gave a new breath of fresh air in the political scene. Janata Dal could win and form government after almost three decades of the Indian National Congress (INC). This new government was a ‘real representative government’ because it was the first government in which many new leaders from ‘underprivileged sections’ got a chance to rule the country. The continuous efforts of Jay Prakash Narayan resulted in the first time in 1977 for a non-Congress party to win the election.

Today, India is the world’s largest democracy, where two significant parties, namely the INC and Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), hold much influence over nine hundred million voters. It is important, now more than ever, to trace how social representation matters in a socio-political

⁴³ This famous quote is taken from <https://indianexpress.com/article/opinion/columns/what-india75-needs-education-and-skills-rather-than-freebies-7433668/>

democracy, as equal opportunities for all sections has been a concern since Independence, made worse by the structural inequalities inherited from the colonial government in general and caste-based discrimination in particular.

Numerically, the Other Backward Classes (OBCs) constitute around 60 per cent of the Indian population and have started playing a decisive role after the 1990s in the Indian political scenario, as seen in the election results in Madhya Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Tamil Nadu, Assam, West Bengal, Haryana and many other bigger states.

Social Ustice in the ‘National Parties’

The INC is the country’s oldest national political party. It has also been in power at the Centre as well as state levels for the longest time; the INC has been ruling India for about fifty of the seventy-two years of its existence as an independent country. As of 2019, the INC is still considered the second largest party in India with a secular outlook. In terms of the party’s representation in the Indian Parliament and state assemblies, BJP is India’s biggest political party and with membership, BJP has emerged as the world’s largest political party.

If we look at the institutional framework of both the parties, INC and BJP, we can see that both the parties are federal. The apex body of the INC is called “The All India Congress Committee,” which is constituted by the President, Treasurer, General Secretaries, In-Charges, Secretaries, and Joint Secretaries, while the apex body of the BJP is constituted by “the post of president, vice-presidents, general secretaries, joint general secretaries, secretaries, spokespersons, morcha presidents and office secretary” (Prasad, 2019).

The representation of OBCs is negligible in the judiciary, and educational institutions. This deprived section occupies only around three per cent of the top teaching posts and only 9.8 per cent⁴⁴ of the faculty positions in all central educational institutions (Central Universities, IITS, IIMs, etc.).

The Indian parliament, led by the National Democratic Alliance, passed the Constitutional (123rd Amendment) Bill giving constitutional status to the OBC Commission. It was a long-pending

⁴⁴Retrieved on 19 August 2019, from <https://www.thehindu.com/opinion/op-ed/violation-of-reservation-in-top-posts-at-universities/article28252966.ece>

demand, but the Congress never fulfilled this demand. A senior leader from the Dalit community, Thawar Chand Gehlot said, “This bill would provide social justice to the Other Backward Classes; it is the need of the hour.”⁴⁵

However, many socio-political transformations took place after the 1990s in North Indian politics which Christophe Jaffrelot called ‘India’s Silent Revolution.’ Many other academicians have acknowledged it and gave credit to egalitarian Dalit-bahujan leaders and emancipators like Kansiram, Karpuri Thakur, B.P. Mandal, Mulayam Singh Yadav, Lalu Prasad Yadav, Mayawati, and many others.

While the INC claims to be a democratic, secular party, and has succeeded partly in providing social representation to the diverse communities which make up this nation, it has mostly remained oblivious to the caste divisions and social injustices that affect the population and across religions, even when castes have, over epochs, served as the source of pride and socio-political deprivation. The OBCs never figured in the INC’s electoral plans until its rival BJP wooed this large section of the population and won the 2014 Lok Sabha elections. The BJP repeated the feat in 2019, securing a second term with a clear two-thirds majority. It is interesting to note that in the 2014 and 2019 general elections, BJP benefitted a lot by playing the ‘OBC card’ and projecting its Prime Ministerial candidate, Narendra Modi, as a person belonging to the OBC.

The INC ruled Uttar Pradesh for more than four decades and it is hardly a secret that the OBCs have had little representation in the top echelons of the Congress party, be it the All India Congress Committee (AICC), its student wing (NSUI), or the Congress Working Committee (CWC). OBCs have been missing from even the leadership of the youth and women’s wings of the party, as shown in a few tables below:

⁴⁵Retrieved on 19 August 2019, from https://www.business-standard.com/article/current-affairs/parliament-passes-bill-giving-constitutional-status-to-obc-commission-118080601176_1.html

Table No. (2.1): Category-wise INC Presidents from 1947 to 2019⁴⁶ and Representation of OBCs

Name	State	Caste (Category)
J.Bhagwandas Kripalani	Telangana	Kshatriya (General)
Bhogaraju P. Sitaraimayya	Andhra Pradesh	Brahmin (General)
Purushottam D. Tandon	Uttar Pradesh	Brahmin (General)
J.L. Nehru	Uttar Pradesh	Brahmin (General)
U. Navalshankar Dhebar	Gujrat	Bania (General)
Indira Priyadarshini Gandhi	Uttar Pradesh	Brahmin (General)
N.S. Reddy	Andhra Pradesh	Reddy (General)
Kumaraswami Kamaraj	Tamil Nadu	Nadar (OBCs)
S. Nijalingappa	Karnatka	Lingayat (General)
Jagjivan Ram (Babuji)	Bihar	Scheduled Caste
S.D. Sharma	Madhya Pradesh	Brahmin (General)
Dev k. Barooah	Assam	Brahmin (General)
K.B. Reddy	Andhra Pradesh	Reddy (General)
Rajiv Ratna Gandhi	Uttar Pradesh	Brahmin (General)
P.V.N. Rao	Telangana	Brahmin (General)
Sitaram Kesri	Bihar	Bania (OBC)
Sonia Gandhi	Uttar Pradesh	Brahmin (General)
Rahul Gandhi	Uttar Pradesh	Brahmin (General)

⁴⁶ List of names taken from https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_presidents_of_the_Indian_National_Congress
See also: <https://www.inc.in/en/leadership/past-party-presidents>.

Table No. (2.2): Congress Working Committee Members (2019-20)⁴⁷ and Representation of OBCs

Name	State	Caste (Category)
Manmohan Singh	Punjab	Sikh (Minority)
Rahul Gandhi	Uttar Pradesh	Brahmin (General)
A. Kurien Antony	Kerala	Christian (Minority)
Ahmed Mohammed Bhai Patel	Gujarat	Muslim (Minority)
Smt. Ambika Soni	Punjab	Khatri (General)
Anand Sharma	Himachal Pradesh	Brahmin (General)
Avinash Pande	Maharashtra	Brahmin (General)
Gaikhangam Gangmei	Manipur	Scheduled Tribe
Ghulam Nabi Azad	Jammu & Kashmir	Muslim (Minority)
Harish Rawat	Uttarakhand	Rajput (General)
Jyotiraditya Madhavrao Scindia	Madhya Pradesh	Rajput (General)
Selja Kumari	Haryana	Scheduled Caste
KC Venugopal	Kerala	Nayar (Brahmin)
K Siddaramaiah	Karnataka	Kurwa (OBC)
Luizinho Faleiro	Goa	Christian (Minority)
Motilal Vora	Rajasthan	Brahmin (General)
Mallikarjun Kharge	Karnataka	Scheduled Caste
Mukul Wasnik	Maharashtra	Scheduled Caste
Oommen Chandy	Kerala	Christian (Minority)
Priyanka Gandhi	Uttar Pradesh	Brahmin (General)
Raghuveer Singh Meena	Rajasthan	Scheduled Tribe
Tamradhwaj Sahu	Chhattisgarh	Sahu (OBC)
Tarun Gogoi	Assam	Scheduled Tribe

⁴⁷ List of names obtained from <https://www.inc.in/en/congress-working-committee/members?page=2>

Table No. (2.3): Mahila Congress Presidents⁴⁸ and Representation of OBCs

Name	State	Caste (Category)
Begum Abida Ahmed	Uttar Pradesh	Muslim (Minority)
Jayanti Patnaik	Odisha	Kayashta (General)
Susri Kumudben Joshi	Gujarat	Brahmin (General)
Girija Vyas	Rajasthan	Brahmin (General)
Ambika Soni	Punjab	Khatri (General)
Chandresh Kumari	Rajasthan	Rajput (General)
Rita Bahuguna Joshi	Uttar Pradesh	Brahmin (General)
Prabha Thakur	Rajasthan	Rajput (General)
Anita Verm	Himachal Pradesh	Kayastha (General)
Shobha Oza	Madhya Pradesh	Brahmin (General)
Sushmita Dev	Assam	Scheduled Tribe

Table No. (2.4): National Presidents⁴⁹ in NSUI and Representation of OBCs

Name	State	Caste (Category)
P.Kumaramangalam	Tamil Nadu	Brahmin (General)
G. Mohan Gopal	Kerala	Ezhava (OBCs)
Geetanjali Maken	Delhi	Brahmin (General)
K.K. Sharma	U.P.	Brahmin (General)
Subhash Chowdhary	Delhi	Jat (General)
Ramesh Chennithala	Kerala	Nayar (General)
Mukul Wasnik	Maharashtra	Dalit-Buddhist (Scheduled Caste)
Manish Tewari	Punjab	Brahmin (General)
Saleem Ahmad	Karnataka	Muslim (Minority)
Alka Lamba	Delhi	Jat (General)
M. Natarajan	M.P.	Scheduled Caste
Ashok Tanwar	Haryana	Scheduled Caste
Nadeem Javed	U.P.	Muslim (Minority)
Hibi Eden	Kerala	Christian (Minority)
Rohit Choudhary	New Delhi	Jat (General)
Roji M John	Kerala	Christian (Minority)
Fairoz Khan	J&K	Muslim (Minority)
Neeraj Kundan	J&K	Scheduled Caste

⁴⁸ List of names obtained from <https://www.aimc.in/past-presidents/>

⁴⁹ List of names retrieved on 11 August 2019 from <http://nsui.in/leadership>

Table No. (2.5): Indian Youth Congress's presidents⁵⁰ and Representation of OBCs

Name	State	Caste (Category)
N.D. Tiwari	Uttar Pradesh	Brahmin (General)
P.R.D. Munsii	West Bengal	Brahmin (General)
Ambika Soni	Punjab	Khatri (General)
Ram Chander Rath	Odisha	Brahmin (General)
Ghulam Nabi Azad	Jammu & Kashmir	Muslim (Minority)
Tariq Anwar	Bihar	Muslim (Minority)
Anand Sharma	Himachal Pradesh	Brahmin (General)
Gurudas Kamat	Maharashtra	Brahmin (General)
Mukul Wasnik	Maharashtra	Dalit-Buddhist (SC)
R. Chennithala	Kerala	Brahmin (General)
M. Singh Bitra	Punjab	Sikh (Minority)
SD Gaekwad	Gujarat	Gaekwad (General)
Manish Tewari	Punjab	Brahmin (General)
Randeep Surjewala	Chandigarh, Punjab	Brahmin (General)
Ashok Tanvar	Haryana	Scheduled Caste
Rajeev Satav	Maharashtra	Mali (OBCs)
A. Singh Raja	Punjab	Sikh (Minority)
K.C. Yadav	Uttar Pradesh	Yadav (OBCs)
B.V. Srinivas	Karnataka	Brahmin (General)

Table No. (2.6): Presidents of Uttar Pradesh Congress Committee from 1947 to Present and Representation of OBCs

Presidents	Category (Caste)	District	Tenure
Seth Damodar Swaroop	General (Baniya)	Bareilly	1947-1948
R.P. Das Tandon	General (Brahmin)	Prayagraj	1948-1950
Jugal Kishore	Nil	Mathura	1951-1952
Algoo Rai Shastri	General (Brahmin)	Azamgarh	1953-1954
M.D. Upadhyay	General (Brahmin)	Pratapgarh	1955-1957
C. Sharma	General (Brahmin)	Jalaun	1958-1960
Chandra B. Gupta	General (Baniya)	Lucknow	May 1960
Ajit P. Jain	Minority (Jain)	Saharanpur	1960-1964
Kamalapati Tripathi	General (Brahmin)	Varanasi	1965-1971
R.K. Bajpai	General (Brahmin)	Prayagraj	1971-1972
Baij Nath Kureel	Schedule Caste	Raebareli	1972-1974
L. Shankar Yadav	Backward (Yadav)	Jaunpur	1975-1976
Mohsina Kidwai	Minority (Muslim)	Barabanki	1977-1979
Dharmveer	Schedule Caste	Prayagraj	1979-1980

⁵⁰ List of names retrieved on 11 August 2019 from <https://iyc.in/our-story/>

V.N. Panday	General (Brahmin)	Prayagraj	1980-1982
Sukhdev Prasad	Schedule Caste	Gorakhpur	1982-1984
V.P. Singh	General (Rajput)	Prayagraj	1984-1985
Mahaveer Prasad	Schedule Caste	Gorakhpur	1985-1988
Balram S. Yadav	Backward (Yadav)	Etawah	1988-1994
Mahaveer Prasad	Schedule Caste	Gorakhpur	NILL
N.D. Tiwari	General (Brahmin)	Nainital	1994-1995
K.J. Prasad	General (Brahmin)	Shahjahanpur	1995-1997
N.D. Tiwari	General (Brahmin)	Nainital	1997-1998
Salman Khurshid	Minority (Muslim)	Farrukhabad	1998-2000
Shreeprakash Jaiswal	General (Baniya)	Kanpur	2000-2002
A.K.S. Munna	General (Rajput)	Jaunpur	2002-2003
Jagdambika Pal	General (Rajput)	Basti	2003-2004
Salman Khurshid	Minority (Muslim)	Farrukhabad	2004-2007
Rita B. Joshi	General (Brahmin)	Prayagraj	2007-2012
Nirmal Khatri	General (Khatri)	Faizabad	2012-2016
Raj Babbar	Minority (Sikh)	Agra	2016-2019
Ajay Kumar 'Lallu'	OBC (Kanau)	Kushinagar	2019-Present

Sources: The official website of INC and other internet sources.

We can see in the above tables that the representation of the OBCs is very less in the topmost positions in the decision-making bodies of the INC since Independence. Despite constituting more than half the population of the country, the OBCs received very minimal chances in the top levels of the party, including the Mahila Congress. At the same time, people from the General category, especially Brahmins, got more opportunities than the others. Thus, these tables indicate that the longest-ruling party of India was very selective and gave less preference to the marginal sections and other backward classes.

A Wind of Socio-Political Change

The political arena in North India has been dominated by the *dvija*⁵¹ castes in every sphere since Independence-from policy-making to implementation- and so, the representation of the scheduled and backward castes was very minimal. This vacuum in the representation of the marginalized communities was partially filled after the 1990s by the leaders of unprivileged castes. Karpooori Thakur, Lalu Prasad, Mulayam S. Yadav, Ram Vilash Paswan, Shiv Pal Yadav

⁵¹Retrieved on 23/05/2022 from <https://www.britannica.com/topic/dvija>

Yadav, Nitish Kumar, Jitinram Manjhi, and so on played a significant role for many years in the politics of Uttar Pradesh and Bihar. These leaders created a social environment for the Dalit-Bahujan communities and led them toward political empowerment, bringing many local leaders from unprivileged castes into mainstream politics.

Lohia believed that the Indian society had never been an industrial society, and hence, the Marxist ideas of the ‘bourgeoisie’ and proletariat’ were Western, and would not be applicable here. They would have to be adapted to the Indian context, where the upper castes can be perceived as the ‘bourgeoisie,’ and the lower castes, including the tribal groups, Dalit, and OBCs, can be called proletariat (Sharma, 2019).

In the beginning, the primary strategy of the national Dalit-Bahujan leaders was to include all marginal sections in the agenda of social justice, whether they were from a backward community, scheduled caste, minority, or were poor peasants and labours (Prasad and Daniel, 2019). They propagated their agenda to bring these classes together, and mobilized a significant movement for their upliftment or empowerment; for instance, Lalu Prasad Yadav as a railway minister, promoted coolies (porters) to fourth-grade employees (gang-men).⁵² This instance shows that the leaders were obvious in their vision for the empowerment of these marginal sections, whether they were from the Dalit-Bahujan community or dvija caste. Before these leaders, in mainstream politics, the Dalit-Bahujans were not visible in any public or political sphere of the Indian society.

Socio-Political Connections between U.P. and Bihar

The idea of social representation when the INC was in power at the Centre and many of the states can be gauged by an anecdote that former Chief Minister of Bihar Lalu Prasad Yadav shared during a public speech in the remote village of Aloli in Khagaria district, Bihar in the 1990s: “When Karpoori Ji used to talk about the reservation, people used to abuse his mother-sister-daughter. And, when I talk of reservation for Dalit-bahujan, before using abusive language, people look around to see if any backward-Dalit-Adivasi is listening (Prasad, 2019).” The story indicates towards the outlook of the higher castes against the Dalit-bahujan, but also highlights

⁵²Retrieved on 19 August 2019, from <https://www.telegraphindia.com/states/jharkhand/porters-hail-railway-minister-monthly-income-no-longer-a-dream/cid/617202>

the success of the efforts of Karpoori Thakur, the second Chief Minister of Bihar, who belonged to the Naayi (backward) caste, one of the most depressed among the Other Backward Classes in bolstering the strength of the movement. This was the reason why ‘Jannayak’ was often added in front of the name of Thakur, the first non-Congress Chief Minister of Bihar.’⁵³

Mulayam Singh (‘Netaji’) and Lalu Prasad Yadav were very close to Jay Prakash Narayan. They have been playing very significant roles in the national politics since the 1990s. They continued in the efforts of Jay Prakash Narayan and tried to mobilize the backward classes into a movement. Often, Lalu Prasad Yadav used to give “wake-up calls” to backward castes. His ambition to empower the lower sections can be seen in his speech: “*O gai charane walon / O bakri charane walon / O tadi peene walon / Vote dena seekho* (O! Cattle-grazers, O! Toddy-drinkers, learn to vote) (Prasad, 2019).”⁵⁴ Similar instances are often shared on social media by the new dalit-bahujan (SCs, STs, and OBCs) of the modern Indian society. Now, social media has become an important tool (Prasad et al., 2022).

The above instances also speak about the importance of proportional representation in the apex decision-making body for all the parties, and for backward classes. The efforts of these leaders, especially Karpoori Thakur, Mulayam Singh Yadav, and Lalu Prasad Yadav, changed the course of representation for the OBCs in Uttar Pradesh and Bihar. The idea of social justice inculcated by these leaders are influential in the politics of the bordering districts of Eastern Uttar Pradesh. Therefore, the opposition parties take the help of Bhojpuri singers and actors to target and reduce this influence as a part of their strategy.

Mulayam Singh Yadav and the Politics of U.P.

It would be worth remembering that B.R. Ambedkar used the term ‘mook’ (silent) to refer to the backward castes in his magazine ‘Mook Nayak’ (1920) because there was no representation of this class in the political hierarchy of the Indian society. The voices raised by this exploited section for their rights from time to time were ignored by the ruling class. It is necessary here to

⁵³ Retrieved on 19 August 2019, from <https://www.forwardpress.in/2019/09/how-obcs-have-had-little-say-in-the-congress-party/>

⁵⁴ Retrieved on 19 August 2019, from <https://www.indiatoday.in/magazine/cover-story/story/19960515-elections-1996-lalu-prasad-yadav-social-justice-campaign-given-a-careful-spin-833165-1996-05-15>

discuss the socio-political developments in the deprived castes (Yadavs) that were particularly brought about by the former Chief Minister, Mulayam Singh Yadav during his tenure.

Uttar Pradesh was ruled mainly by the upper-caste dominated INC for several decades after the Independence. After the INC-imposed Emergency Rule (from June 1975 to January 1977), many new changes took place in Indian politics, especially in Uttar Pradesh. Verniers (2016) writes, “Indira Gandhi provided them (new leadership) the cause and the opportunity to form a new alliance by declaring a state of Emergency, on the 25th of June 1975. The three opposition formations joined hands to defeat Indira Gandhi in the 1977 elections, under the common banner of the Janata Party.” After the Emergency, leaders from the backward classes like Ram Naresh Yadav and Banarasi Das could get a chance to become Chief Ministers in the state, crucial in representing the voices of the backward classes. However, by imposing the President’s rule on 17 February 1980, those voices of the marginal sections were suppressed again. INC leaders like V.P. Singh, Shripati Mishra, and N.D. Tiwari took over as Chief Ministers. Therefore, the Dalit-Bahujan sections of Uttar Pradesh were looking for a strong leader who could understand their suffering.

In these political conditions, the marginalized castes polarized under the leadership of Mulayam Singh Yadav who was known to work with a secular and democratic spirit. He raised questions about the political rights and equal representation of the backward classes, against the upper-caste domination in the political domain. The Emergency period also pushed many Dalit-bahujan leaders to come forward in mainstream politics. At the same time, the implementation of the recommendations of the Mandal Commission (during the 1990s) and the introduction of Reservation for the Other Backward Classes in public employment also led to the rise of political consciousness among the classes. After the 1990s, the Indian political landscape underwent extensive changes. Apart from the Samajwadi Party (SP), a few other political parties like BSP (Bahujan Samaj Party), Apna Dal and LJP (Lok Janshakti Party) also emerged during the 1990s. Most of the leaders in these parties were from the weaker sections of the society. To truly champion the socio-political needs of these sections, the Bahujan Samaj Party and Samajwadi Party decided to contest together in 1993 and won the election. Mulayam Singh Yadav became the Chief Minister of Uttar Pradesh.

Mulayam Singh Yadav (Netaji) was very close to Jay Prakash Narayan and the value of socialism also influenced him. Ram Manohar Lohia, JP Narayan, and Raj Narain were his political mentors in the early stages of his political career. Many of the party workers believed that Mulayam Singh was the torchbearer of socialist ideology. He joined many agitations for the interests of Other Backward Classes and poor farmers, and so, has also been jailed many times. Given Yadav's political acumen and devotion to backward and disadvantaged castes, Chaudhary C. Singh (former Prime Minister), called him the 'Little Napoleon.' That is why the backward communities of Uttar Pradesh still see Mr. Yadav as their political messiah.

Lucia Michelutti (2008) writes that Mulayam Singh Yadav's coming to power created a fantastic political understanding among the Yadavs. The community felt that 'a big leader' who had sympathy for them was sitting on the highest chair in the state. As time progressed, this image of Yadav only deepened among the disadvantaged classes, and so, he became the Chief Minister of the state for the third time in September 2003. As he tirelessly tried to uplift the deprived castes, and his political strategies, he gained much popularity among the backward castes, especially the Yadavs and Muslims. He was recognized as a leader of the 'Yadav caste' and a few opponent leaders referred him as 'Mulla-Mulayam'. Mahaprashasta (2017) says that "His vision of the socialist ideology and the philosophy of social justice have been reduced by connecting it with the minority and Yadav community. At the same time, the other leaders do not miss calling this pioneer of social justice as anti-Dalit and anti-upper caste."

The academic world analysed the patterns of social changes in Uttar Pradesh during the 1990s through the Dalit-Bahujan leaders, namely Dr. Ram Manohar Lohia, Mulayam Singh Yadav, Kanshi Ram, and Mayawati. These political process and the massive socio-political changes of the 1990s were studied by many scholars. For instance, Christophe Jaffrelot (2003) called these social changes the 'Silent Revolution', while M.S.A. Rao (1979) gave the name 'Yadav Movement.' Yogendra Yadav (2010) and K.C. Yadav (1994) examined the social and political changes of the 1990s with special reference to Lohia, the Mandal Commission, and Reservation.

Mandal Commission and Social Justice

Former Chief Minister of Bihar, Lalu Prasad Yadav, used to say that 'political empowerment is the salvation for economic backwardness.' Earlier, the backward castes did not have

representation in the political and educational spheres, or government offices. The implementation of the recommendations of the Mandal Commission in the early 1980-90s, beginning with the reservations for OBCs in public employment (government institutions), marked the rise of political consciousness for social justice among the OBCs in India.

Mulayam Singh Yadav, along with a few other popular leaders, formed the Samajwadi Party in U.P. with the principles of 'equality and social justice' aiming towards a 'socialist society.' The Samajwadi Party functions with a 'secular' and a 'democratic outlook.' At the same time, based on the doctrines (for uplifting the backward sections) from great social reformers like B.R. Ambedkar, Jyotiba Phule, Sri Narayana Guru, Periyar E.V. Ramasamy, and C. Shahuji Maharaj, the Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP) was formed by the visionary leader Kanshi Ram in 1984, which was later led by Mayawati Prabhu Das (popularly known as Bahen-ji [sister]).

Gilles Verniers (2016) states that the Indian political scene underwent a social transformation, especially with the emergence of the backward castes and marginalized communities in the political space and regional political parties like Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP), Samajwadi Party, RJD (Rashtriya Janata Dal), Janata Dal (United), Apna Dal and Lok Janshakti Party (LJP), most of which were led by OBC leaders. The efforts of people from the castes which were not visible in any sphere of public life, and were reduced to the roles of agricultural workers or labourers, working in the agricultural field of higher caste created a new socio-political atmosphere during the 1990s. Owing to their efforts, a new leadership took wings in the state politics of Bihar. The gap in the political domain was being filled by leaders who hailed from peasant or labour classes. Yet, the rise of the backward classes in the political scene did not alter the INC's national politics.

Even after the implementation of Reservation for the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes, they still faced the problem of getting a caste certificate for the government job. The higher castes generally occupied every *thana* (police station) in Uttar Pradesh and other states, and the representation of the backward castes, SCs and STs were negligible. Discrimination between Dalit and non-Dalit cops was noticed recently (Ramashankar, 2016). The dominance of higher castes in the public sphere and government machinery lowered the confidence among the OBCs, SCs, and STs. Decades back, they were not allowed to publicly express their views and could not oppose the discrimination they faced at the hands of the privileged castes. The landlords paid

minimal '*majdori*' (wages) to the labourers (SCs, OBCs and minorities), and not the wage price set by the government. If they demanded for their wage rights, the local landlords used to threaten them, or burn their houses. There have also been many cases filed for attaining proper wages (Prasad and Bibhar, 2020).

Years back, the rural areas of Uttar Pradesh, particularly the eastern parts of the states, followed the feudal order of *bekari* (forced labour). Durga Prasad Yadav of Tandawa village said, "There was a deliberate attempt by the village landlords (higher castes) to exploit the unprivileged castes. The local upper castes used to refer to the marginalized sections with derogatory remarks like *chamra* (for Kori caste) or *gwaroo* (for *Gwala*/Yadavs). The landlords were habituated to take the produce and services of the backward castes forcefully without pay. The agricultural workers of marginal sections received '*sawa-sheer*' (1.25kg) paddy as *mehantana* (cost of labour) for the whole day." In a discussion with the villagers in the study area, the respondents narrated that 'the dominant castes address the students from the backward castes and scheduled castes with derogatory remarks or by their caste name.'

These issues created great unrest and it brought about an uprising from the marginalized community. Over time, literacy rate and socio-political awareness increased among the backward and scheduled castes. These new changes created a confidence in these oppressed communities. The exploitation of the Chamar, Mushar, Kurmi, and Yadav castes decreased drastically after the emergence of Lalu Prasad Yadav, Mayawati and Mulayam S. Yadav. The agenda of ensuring equal participation of these castes in the administration and local politics began simultaneously. The Panchayati Raj election gave more strength to the backward and scheduled castes in rural politics. These local leaders strengthened their influence in policy-making and brought the confidence to face such adverse situations.

These leaders' combined efforts would have realized the progressive vision of Ambedkar, Karpuri Thakur, B.P. Mandal, and so on, but they seem to have lost ground in the 21st century. During the 1980-90s, many socio-political changes took place, but the socio-economic conditions, health, and educational sector of Uttar Pradesh are still impoverished compared to other states (Mehrotra, 2006). 'The NCRB (National Crime Records Bureau) data for 2015-16 showed that the numbers of crime reported against schedule castes had raised from 38,670 to 40,801, with U.P., Bihar, and Rajasthan, etc.—states ruled by the BJP—with most instances of

crimes against people belonging to Scheduled Castes. In the decade (2016), the crime rate against Scheduled Caste rose by 25 per cent—from 16.3 crimes per 100,000 Scheduled Castes reported in 2006, to 20.3 crimes in 2016'.⁵⁵ The atrocities against the Dalit and marginal sections are still very high today because a new leadership pattern has been emerging among the lower castes, who challenge the socio-political hegemony of upper castes (Prasad and Srihari, 2017). Moreover, many respondents believe that the Dalit-Bahujan leaders used to be kingmakers in the politics of Delhi (center) after the 1990s, but now they have almost become foot-soldiers for the current government and promote radical 'Hindutva-politics'.

BJP and Hindutva⁵⁶ Politics

The BJP was established on 6 April, 1980. This was the same time when the Mandal Commission suggested giving 27 percent reservation to the backward classes i.e. about half the population of the country. However, the Congress Party, following the path of soft Hindutva, did not take the political risk of implementing the Mandal Commission Report for a decade for fear of the rise of 'Kamandal politics'⁵⁷ and losing upper-caste votes, because of which the backward classes stopped expecting social justice from the Congress Party. A decade later, in 1990, there was a change of power and the Janata Dal government was formed. Sensing the mood of the public, Prime Minister V.P. Singh decided to give reservation to the backward classes. BJP, an ally of the V.P. Singh government, felt the electoral threat and following the policy of Hindu appeasement, tried to reduce the effect of the Mandal Commission through the religious and political 'Ram Rath Yatra'. A teacher, Ram Narayan said, "Ram Rath Yatra was a well-planned political stunt of BJP, which lasted from September to October 1990. In order to grab power, the BJP exaggerated the *Babri Masjid* dispute and presented it in a planned and aggressive manner. As a result, they became successful in mobilizing anti-Muslim sentiment." Many respondents narrated that the higher castes started frequently visiting the houses of the lower and backward

⁵⁵ Retrieved on 19 August 2019, from <https://www.theweek.in/news/india/2018/04/25/bjp-and-its-hindutva-politics-the-slow-saffronisation-of-india.html>

⁵⁶ As a political ideology, the term Hindutva was articulated by Vinayak Damodar Savarkar in 1923. It is used by the organisation Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), the Vishva Hindu Parishad (VHP), the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) and other organisations, collectively called the Sangh Parivar.

⁵⁷ Kamandal refers to Hindutva politics that emerged during the same time span of Mandal politics by virtue of aggressive posturing of BJP on national political discourse. Literally Kamandal means water-pot used by Hindu sages and ascetics. See for more details- <https://thewire.in/politics/uttar-pradesh-elections-caste-bjp>

castes to convince them, “Your contribution for Ram Mandir is going to create a new history for India.” These leaders had a clear political vision to motivate the marginal people.

Verniers (2016) argues that the BJP released a booklet called “BJP’s Comment on 15th Anniversary”, which was distributed and politicized along the yatra’s route in the many states. This booklet contained two declarations which at first glance appear inconsistent. The leader of BJP, Advani, proclaimed that ‘Bharat (India) is one country, one people and one culture.’ However, the booklet of Rath Yatra replicated a statement put forth by the ex-Prime Minister, Atal Bihari Vajpayee: “My party and I not only recognize but celebrate the plural, multi-religious, multi-regional, multi-lingual and multi-ethnic character of India.” This unity was defined purposefully vague to appear relevant throughout India.

Similar visions were also replicated in the visual imagery of the rathyatra. The sides of the truck (Ram Rath) carrying Advani around India were bedecked with paintings of great freedom fighters like B.R. Ambedkar, Bal Gangadhar Tilak, Sardar Vallabhai Patel, Rani Laxmibai (*Jhansi ki Rani*), Ashfaqulla Khan, Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose, Veerpandyan Kattaboman, Veer Savarkar, Bhagat Singh, Chandrasekhar Azad, and Keshav Baliram Hedgewar. The Rath (chariot) represented a very diverse list of political figures belonging to different religions and communities. It also encompassed the great people of different socio-political inducements, as well as a few important regional legends. Using such a list of famous figures, Advani invoked a glorified picture of the national past, where people from all backgrounds joined a unified movement. Advani and his political clout often argue that the Hindu god Ram is connected with the tradition, history, culture, geography, and society of this ‘Hindu’ nation, but the ideology and activities of the BJP say a different story.

However, the lower and backward castes were becoming aware of the communal politics of BJP, and kept themselves away from right-wing politics in the beginning. In this regard, Lalu Prasad Yadav played a significant role, as he passed an order to arrest L.K. Advani to maintain the law and order situation in Bihar. The primary purpose of putting him behind bars was to bring confidence and trust among the Minorities.

SP and BSP: Identity and Dignity Politics

The Post-Ambedkarite movements after 1990 gave a new legacy to Dalit-Bahujan politics, and Uttar Pradesh witnessed a political shift during the 1990s. The thoughts of B.R. Ambedkar, R.M. Lohiya, J.P. Narayana (popularly known as ‘Loknayak’) inspired millions of ‘Backward Classes’ including Mulayam Singh Yadav, Kanshiram and Lalu Prasad Yadav who have become the significant politicians standing up for the socio-political rights of the backward classes in North India. Ram Manohar Lohiya’s vision for a ‘Samajwad’ (a socialist society) along with Ambedkar’s mantra to ‘educate, agitate and organize’ inspired Mulayam Singh Yadav to come forward for the welfare of underprivileged sections like OBCs, SCs, STs, and Minorities after the 1990s. A few political events such as the Emergency, Mandal Commission, the Babri Masjid demolition and the emergence of Samajwadi Party in U.P. gave way for this political shift. These events gave a new way for the lower-middle castes including the Yadav community to come forward for the welfare of marginal sections and build a self-respecting image for their own community. The Yadav community especially began to be called the ‘caste of politicians’ by associating themselves with the Hindu god, ‘Krishna’ (Michelutti, 2008). Thus, ‘identity politics’ was a prime concern for the Yadav community, and if we compare them with the Dalit community, it can be said that ‘dignity politics’ and ‘symbolic perseverance’ were main concerns for the leaders of this community in the late 20th century till date.

Kanshiram tried to transform the “given identity” into a “self-respective” dignified identity in the legacy of Ambedkar, but it was not a very smooth journey for him. It is essential to note here that when Kanshiram began giving more importance to Mayawati and projected her as the Chief Ministerial candidate for Uttar Pradesh, his colleagues Sone Lal Patel and a few other leaders started their own faction in November 1995 citing the reason as Mayawati’s arrogant nature.

The BSP was primarily supported by the scheduled castes as well as most backward classes emotionally, but “BSP could not fulfill the socio-economic gap, and UP’s lower castes had before the mobilization began, and still have, the lowest social indicators in the Uttar Pradesh and country” (Mehrotra, 2006). Consequently, SP has become the alternative political party of choice for these voters, as this party also followed the same political ideologies at its abstract level. On the other hand, it appears that, after the formation of SP, the Yadav community has

emerged as an influential caste politically while UP's Dalit mobilizers focused exclusively on capturing power, and the gains to the lowest castes have been entirely symbolic (Ibid.).

Regional parties like SP, BSP, Apana Dal, etc. who stood for the rights of marginal sections raised questions about the proper implementation of Reservation to the backward classes. The issue of reservation for backward classes, thus, became a political tool that changed the direction of UP's politics during the 1990s. With the political consequences and accepting the suggestions of the Mandal Commission, especially Reservation for backward classes, the V.P. Singh government also created a nuanced approach to attract the OBC voters. This step helped the backward castes to enter the more extensive bureaucratic system through constitutional means, and the backward classes got a new enthusiasm and support from and through the constitutional mechanism.

In sum, SP and BSP have been influencing the state politics of U.P. since 1990. Both the parties have become major political forces with a certain caste consciousness. SP is more popular among the Yadav community that represents about twelve per cent of the state population while BSP is much popular among the Dalits, who constitute about twenty per cent of the state population. It appears that for the supporters of SP, caste identity is a significant concern, while dignity politics and resistance against Brahmanical ideology are an essential concern for the followers of BSP, as they depend on the particular political context.

One can see here that politics and ethnic identity are closely related with each other and very relevant to the present context because the identity of caste members is formed when the caste has certain features, for instance, a common name that symbolizes the community's uniqueness and distinguishes one from the others. To some extent, a caste also shares a common political ethos because myths on common origins relate them with common ancestors, birthplaces, foundations, a shared history (i.e., the shared memories of successive generations of the collective community), etc. Some cultural characteristics, such as institutions, customs, or language, build a sense of solidarity. The thought of capturing political power and socio-cultural practices are interlinked with an identity, which is also reconstructed, reproduced, reshaped and reconfigured in a new avatar continuously over time.

Caste and Dignity Politics

Formulating a dignified social and political identity for marginal sections is perceived as one of the essential tasks by progressive thinkers, who have worked for the same through various social movements as well as constitutional provisions. Keeping in view the various socio-cultural and religious disabilities, the chairman of the Drafting Committee of the Indian Constitution, Dr. B.R. Ambedkar, penned the rights and principles of liberty, equality, justice, and human dignity of Indian citizens in the various articles of the Constitution.

In spite of these rights, for a long time, especially during the colonial period, the citizens who belonged to ritually lower strata of the caste system, including the Yadav community, could not get legal rights to perform many ritual activities (Prasad, 2015). A few scholars note that religious beliefs and ritual practices are more prominent among the rural families. Historically, the ethnography of caste in the pre-Independence period was also replete with discussions on the rules of purity and pollution and their use in maintaining social distance between the castes/sub-castes. Most notable among these rules were commensality and endogamy (Dumont, 1970; Beteille, 1996), and both factors have played a very efficient role in consolidating the caste network for many years. Similarly, Khare (1976) points out that land ownership, education and government jobs help to enhance the ritual status of the Kanyakubj Brahmins to forge 'Hypergamous' relations with Brahmins of higher ritual status in Lucknow, Uttar Pradesh.

This is why the second decade of Indian Independence indicates towards the process of imitating ritual activities: the religious offerings and ritual sacrifices that were typically followed by the upper castes like wearing the *janeu* (sacred thread), *pindadan* (ancestral worship), *brahm bhoj* (feasting to Brahmin), etc. were taken up by the ritually lower castes, including the adoption of religious symbols. This process of emulation simultaneously shows the inter-connectedness and gap in reciprocity among the different strata. The prominent social thinker Srinivas (1952) coined the term "*Sanskritisation*" to describe this socio-cultural process, which denotes the process by which marginal castes placed lower in the ritual hierarchy seek social mobility by emulating the rituals and cultural practices of the upper or 'dominant castes'; it also addresses the social changes during the initial years of Indian Independence in the institutions of caste and religion.

This imitation of social mobility was brought about by the relative deprivation among the lower castes. Moreover, the politics of '*janeu movement*' was inspired by the thoughts of Dayanand Saraswati, and was a radical goal of the Arya Samajis⁵⁸. It became popular among backward castes like Kurmi, Ahir and Goala castes in U.P. and Bihar at the beginning of the twentieth century. It is also responsible for their conflicts with upper castes like Brahmin, Bhumihar, and Baniya. These castes wanted to maintain their ritual hegemony over the Hindu ritual as a part of their tradition (Rao, 1979: 134). Wearing the *janeu* was a symbolic protest among the allied castes of the Yadav community, similar to the "Mahad Satyagraha" and "Kalaram Temple Satyagraha" of Dalits for attaining a self-respecting identity. Now, people have the fundamental right to perform ritual sacrifices, religious offerings, etc.⁵⁹, by which one can worship, demonstrate and follow any religion of their choice.

It is important to interrogate the process of building a self-respecting identity because a particular socio-political ethos is created through the ritual sacrifices and religious offerings, which, in turn, helps in building an extensive caste network. Such a consolidated caste network provides backup for the political parties as well. For instance, traditional supporters of SP are backed by Yadavs, while Apana Dal and BSP are supported by Kurmis and Dalits, respectively. After the Mandal commission, these caste-based backups led to an alternative regional politics in Uttar Pradesh. Politics and ethnic identity are mutually complementary in India because *dharma* (a set of beliefs in Hinduism), which is idealized by the Indian democracy, gives moral authority to both. Each caste defines their deity according to convenience. There are also some popular beliefs in the rural society which blur the relation between human beings and gods. Michelutti (2002) writes, "Yadavs trace a direct line of descent from the god Krishna, and there is no conceptual problem in defining him as 'an ancestor.'" It is found that many people from the Yadav community visit Gaya (a district in Bihar) to perform '*pindadan*' (ritual sacrifice) according to their belief that their ancestors (forefathers including Krishna) and '*kuldevta*' (demi-gods) are waiting for '*pindadan*.'

⁵⁸Dayanand Saraswati was the founding member of Arya Samaj. He was inspired by the religious texts, 'Vedas.'

⁵⁹The right to freedom of religion is covered in articles 25, 26, 27 and 28 of the Indian Constitution which provides religious freedom to all the citizens of India.

Often, the higher gods are also linked to the lower gods by what Wadley calls the ‘genealogical gap,’ which are detailed in the myths of origins and the songs of praise of the deities and ancestors (Moffatt, 1979). The social status of a few Yadav families who used to worship Raja Bali (a powerful protector/demi-god) was considered lower than the families who worshipped Krishna. Raja Bali is considered regional and lower than Krishna who is seen as universal, ‘democratic,’ and ritually higher in the ritual hierarchy among the North Indian Yadav community. Therefore, at the core of the formation of the Yadav community lays a tendency to ‘emulate’ Krishna, at the regional and national levels, where descent legitimizes local lineages (Fox, 1969). Over a period, such castes who seek social mobility create new mythologies to trace their genealogy to well-known kings/deities. The creation and changes in their beliefs help them to continue to survive in this socio-political world in a dominant position.

After Independence, India chose the path of democracy, which runs on numbers. Therefore, a caste/community seeking political power always work towards enhancing its numerical strength. Bringing together cognate castes under an umbrella term ‘Yadav’ might improve the numerical strength of this caste. This polarization is only possible when a caste redefines itself in a new socio-cultural atmosphere for its continued survival as a dominant caste/community.

Caste Formulas in Indian Politics

Ambedkar gave the mantra, ‘educate, agitate and ‘organize’ to the backward sections (Ambedkar, 2014). The idea of ‘organize’ is very significant in popular democracy, especially when caste-based forces become a part of the broader democracy. It is said that in U.P. political elections, ‘you cast your vote and vote your caste.’

The Yadav community is considered as the ‘vote bank’ of the Samajwadi Party at present. Events such as the ‘Emergency’ (from 25 June 1975 to 21 March 1977), ‘Mandal Commission’ (1979), ‘Babari demolition,’⁶⁰ (On December 6, 1992), etc. are also responsible for this. Meanwhile, the legacy of socialist leaders like Karpuri Thakur, Ram Manohar Lohiya and Raj Narayan also gives a ray of hope to many young leaders. These leaders detached from INC, leading Mulayam Singh Yadav, Lalu Prasad Yadav, and Kanshi Ram to initiate a Dalit-bahujan

⁶⁰A large crowd of Hindu *karsevek* (volunteers) demolished the 16th-century Babri Mosque in the city of Faizabad (Ayodhya), U.P.

(SCs, OBCs, and Minority) politics, especially in states like Uttar Pradesh and Bihar. The decade of 1989-99 was crucial for *dalit-bahujan* politics. Many events took place during that time. For instance, Mulayam Singh became the Chief Minister of U.P. in 1989. Two years later, his government collapsed when Congress withdrew its support. The year 1992-1993 became a turning point for Mulayam Singh Yadav and the backward castes when the Samajwadi Party came into being (See samajwadiparty.in).

Moreover, the unrest among the backward castes was one of the primary reasons for launching a new political party. There was no proper representation of the OBCs in both the INC and BJP. In 1993, SP and BSP allied for the elections to the UP State Assembly, which was scheduled on November 1993. The primary motives behind this alliance were to give a voice to the Dalit-bahujans (marginal sections) and prevent the return of BJP to power in the state.

When one goes back to the caste orientation in U.P. politics in 1970, we find that the AJGAR (Ahir, Jat, Gujar, and Rajpur) formula was used by Charan Singh (former Prime Minister of India) to bring these four castes together. The idea of caste politics was already in place when he tried to break the monopoly of the INC. The Samajwadi Party has been attracting the Yadav community and other backward castes with iconic figures like Ram Manohar Lohiya since its foundation, while the BSP has been attracting Dalit voters with the legacy of Ambedkar and Kanshi Ram. The first was initiated by Mulayam and Janeswar Mishra supporting a socialist ideology, while Kanshi Ram and Mayawati Prabhu Das led the second. Meanwhile, the decade of the 1990s also witnessed a new change that most of the political parties adapted Ambedkarism as an ideology to attract Dalit voters. The idea of ‘vote bank’ also became prominent among political parties and as a result of this, many caste-based socio-political activities took place.

Apart from this discourse, the post-Mandal era witnessed some new socio-political developments when major political parties began to assume their future on *dalit-bahujan* votes. Politicians kept recalling great legends like Ambedkar, Savitri Bai Phule, Mahatma Jyotiba Phule, Ayyankali, Narayana Guru, Raidas, Periyar E.V. Ramasamy, C.S. Maharaj, Kabir Das, Karpuri, Dashrath Manjhi, etc. to convert the legacy of these leaders into votes. Although the ambitions of the popular leaders from backward classes vary, as Shaibal Gupta (2001) put it, “Leaders like Karpuri Thakur represented a more Sanskritized section of the backward those with a certain level of education and economic power. A section had achieved certain economic empowerment

and wanted to convert it into political empowerment through the socialist movement of the 1960s and 1970s. But with Lalu Yadav, we saw the emergence of the ‘cockney backward’⁶¹ to the forefront, a non-Sanskritized, earthy, rustic section that spoke the local dialect and existed on the fringe of the market...He, in a sense, reversed the process that leaders like Karpuri Thakur had begun. Under Lalu Yadav, electoral and political empowerment happened first, economic empowerment later (Witsoe, 2013).” Thus, leaders like Lalu Prasad Yadav in Bihar and Mulayam Singh in U.P. cleverly converted the legacy of the above leaders by putting the timely agendas of ‘social justice’ and later ‘socio-economic development’ on top.

Ambedkarism and Political Landscape of U.P.

The frequently quoted words of B. R. Ambedkar (1891-1956), which have become a source of inspiration for millions among the marginal sections, “educate, agitate, and organize” seems to be very significant here⁶². Today, the thought of Ambedkar has become an ‘ideology,’ and major political parties have adapted it. Samajwadi Party tries to justify the legacy of Ambedkar by concentrating on the central issue of social justice for Muslims, Dalits (to some level), and OBCs in the politics of Uttar Pradesh.

Dalit-bahujan leaders often advocate for ‘education’ because it has become a tool for the marginalized section to become empowered and move forward. Decades back, the Janata Dal state government (1989-91), including Mulayam S. Yadav, adapted empowerment through ‘education’ by extending Reservations for Other Backward Classes in UP’s educational institutions and administrative services (Michelutti, 2002: 35). The provision of reservation in education gave these communities a chance to enter government institutions. The Yadav community also adapted Ambedkar’s first mantra, ‘educate’ for their social mobility after Independence.

The Yadavs also tried to follow the second idea, ‘agitate’ when they began the ‘*janeo* movement’ under the influence of the Arya Samaj and protested in many places in North India. However, the

⁶¹The term ‘cockney backwards’ is used by the author in order to compare the backward sections of Bihar with the white poor of Europe.

⁶² In his sincere advice to lower castes, Ambedkar said that educate, agitate and organize; have faith in yourself. With justice on our side, I do not see how we can lose our battle. For ours is a battle; neither for wealth nor for power. It is a battle for freedom; for reclamation of human personality.

'*janeo* movement' failed because it led to caste conflicts between the Shudra and non-Shudra castes (Rao, 1979: 134; Jassal, 2001: 53). Yet, the Yadav community still carries its 'past' (political rhetoric), which has found its best display and use in modern politics. Ciotti (2006) writes, "Within the Yadav community, the idiom of descent is linked to the creation of sacred genealogies and the proliferation of a vast caste historiography supporting such versions of the past, which have found their display and use in modern politics. The Yadavs have carried out their identity project through kinship and corporate local and national power" (Ciotti, 2006: 908-909).

The third message of Ambedkar, 'organize,' is also captured by the Yadav community, as Jaffrelot (2003) notes, "Yadav leader succeeded in their social fusion project since they persuaded their fellow caste members to downplay the endogamous units into which they were divided: there were even some inter-regional marriages... (pp. 189)." Events from the Mandal commission to Babri demolition led to the active participation of the Yadav community, and helped them to wield political power, especially in the North Indian states of U.P. and Bihar.

However, the idea of 'organize' has not been taken much seriously by the leaders of the *Dalit-bahujan*. For instance, on the birth anniversary of B.R. Ambedkar, Shivpal Yadav alleged that Mayawati has nothing to do with B.R. Ambedkar. She has ruined his mission and is only concerned about Dalit votes. Therefore, the Shudra and *ati-shudra* are facing many new challenges in the Hindi belt.⁶³ Meanwhile, it remains to be seen whether the Samajwadi Party will sustain the confidence of the Yadavs in the coming years. Looking at the recent results of the Vidhan Sabha elections (2022), it can be said that the Yadav youths still trust the current president of the Samajwadi Party, Akhilesh Yadav. In this context, Farooqui (2019) writes, "Akhilesh Yadav's popularity is very high even among the youth of Yadav community." Akhilesh Yadav has matured as a leader after becoming the National President of the Samajwadi Party, but his current politics lean more towards the party's fight for survival than carrying on Netaji's legacy.

Despite constituting half of India's population, the OBCs are absent from the top echelons of the two big parties, namely the BJP and the INC while BSP and Samajwadi Party (SP) need to

⁶³ Retrieved on 03/02/2017, from NDTV: <http://www.ndtv.com/india-news/mayawati-has-ruined-ambedkars-mission-alleges-samajwadi-party-1395572>. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SaGXLfwz3tg>

deviate from this trend and realize their agendas sooner. Otherwise, BSP and SP cannot claim to be inclusive without including the real stakeholders, the SCs, OBCs, and minorities.

Yadav Ascendancy in Uttar Pradesh Politics

In UP, Lohia was successful in uniting the Other Backward Classes against the Indian National Congress. The leadership of OBCs in the state remained in the hands of the leaders of the Yadav community. After Lohia, Chaudhary Charan Singh also tried this formula and leaders like Ram Naresh Yadav and Mulayam Singh Yadav emerged. In 1967, when a non-Congress government was formed in UP, Mulayam Singh became a cabinet minister. In 1977, Ram Naresh Yadav became the first Yadav Chief Minister of the state. Mulayam Singh emerged during the Mandal movement and became the Chief Minister from the Janata Dal (a political party) in 1989. After this Mulayam Singh Yadav created his own party (Samajwadi Party) and made his identity as the biggest Yadav leader of the state. Since then the Yadav community is strongly associated with the Samajwadi. Mulayam Singh Yadav became the Chief Minister thrice on the basis of Yadav votes and Akhilesh Yadav once. With the Samajwadi Party being in power, the Yadav community in the state was strengthened not only politically but also economically, socially and educationally.

After awakening the light of education in Yadav community, this community, often called 'gawanr' or 'dehati' (uncivilized), tried to strengthen the caste network in search of a golden tomorrow. As a result, a new debate arose on issues such as internal socio-cultural or sub-castes divisions and food restrictions. In order to reduce the socio-cultural distance, the local 'progressive' chaudharis started bypassing the inter-caste marriage restrictions. To reduce the estrangement between different groups, the *chittha panchayat*⁶⁴ was started. The process of organizing the *biradari bhoj* on a large scale started. However, there was a flood of many new cultural events such as the *biradari bhoj*, sadar festival, etc., whose purpose was to establish its presence in public places as well as spread their foot in the politics of Uttar Pradesh.

⁶⁴ It is a grand meeting of local leaders and caste heads of Yadav community.

Chapter-3

The Field Site: Tandawa Village (Sultanpur District)

Tandawa village is located in the Eastern Uttar Pradesh, which is also known as 'Purvanchal' and 'Awadh Region'. The Eastern U.P. had been looking for development since independence. After the demolition of Babri Masjid (1992), the process of communal polarization in this region had intensified, due to which Eastern U.P. became a victim of communal and caste politics. It is a very backward region in north-central India. In terms of linguistic diversity, Eastern U.P. can be divided mainly into three parts –Awadhi speaking belt in the west, Bhojpuri speaking belt in the east and Nepal region in the north. Religiously important districts like Gorakhpur, Prayagraj, Mirzapur, Ayodhya and Varanasi also fall in this region. The political parties had understood very well the importance of this region because their political goal cannot be achieved without conquering Eastern U.P. Therefore, many popular leaders, such as, Jawaharlal Nehru, Lal Bahadur Shastri, Indira Gandhi, Chandra Shekhar, Rajiv Gandhi, Sanjay Gandhi, Narendra Modi, Rahul Gandhi, Mulayam Singh Yadav, Menka Gandhi, Akhilesh Yadav, Varun Gandhi, etc. contested election from this region.

The present chapter describes inquiry methods, social background of the respondents, and an ethnographic account of the field. I have used the qualitative approach, which is also known as participatory research. When a researcher visits, participates and interacts with the participants, he/she must carefully receive others' responses and give back similar answers meticulously. Therefore, it becomes mandatory to conduct a pilot study, known as a "pre-study of the fuller study" (Denzin and Lincoln, 1994). "*Pre-testing*" and "*piloting*" can help a researcher identify research questions" (Pidd and Woolley, 1980). In this regard, Kezar (2000) writes that a pilot study can also be used to test the research questions, an idea or hypothesis and obtain 'first-hand,' 'real world' experience (Heidegar, 1962). As a researcher, I went to the field with fewer objectives and very limited questions with the hope to build rapport with informants.

Pilot Study of the Field

I did my pilot study from July 3 to September 14, 2015. I visited more than fifteen villages, namely Tandawa, Natauli, Rajanpur, Kithava, Mahmoodpur, Bariyauna, Dube Ka Patna, Deeh Dhaggapur, Bhatmai, Bharthipur, Lautan Ka Purwa, Pamoli, Bhatpura, Matau Ka Purva, Bhatva

Ka Purva, Naipura, Sudnapur, Lahdadpur, etc. These villages are located between Ayodhya and Sultanpur district of Eastern U.P. In Awadhi (local) dialect, a long conversation and 'dialogic partnerships' have been initiated to establish a close interaction with the research participants like *chaudharis*, village pradhans, local pandas, etc.

As a researcher, I also faced a few challenges and dilemmas during the pilot study. Therefore, I tried to build rapport with the respondents. Finally, I decided to do small-scale in-depth preliminary research to assess feasibility, adverse events, cost, time, and several other issues. Therefore, I decided to do an in-depth study of the Tandawa village. The first visit helped me to choose the final sample. During the pilot study, my primary encounter eventually made me aware of future challenges in many ways. Those challenges and advantages are described as follows-

1. **Rapport Building:** The pilot study helped me to establish a trustful rapport, empathetic and friendly relationship with local villagers especially research participants. After building trust, the research saw a gradual positive move. After a series of discussions with the respondents, I could make a 'social space' and build a strong rapport with community members or research participants. The idea of rapport building gave a way to collect trusted information. It also opens the door for a comprehensive understanding of various social issues. I found that the process of gaining the trust of people from the local villages requires a great deal of patience. The mutual relationship between natives and me played a vital role in exploring the multiple or hidden constructed realities. The idea of building a rapport could be possible through building trust, friendship, economic contract, teaching-learning, etc.

A fieldworker is considered a 'symbol user' and 'meaning maker' because he/she has to examine life experiences with the help of folk song, sketch, slang, etc. Therefore, it was very significant to me to build a 'trusted relationship,' which gave me the 'power of disclosing the multiple realities.' After going through some experiences in the field, I can say that building mutual relationships with participants could be possible through showing empathy and gesture. Such expressions seem to be crucial for the validity of the information. So, it became inevitable for me to build a good rapport with my research participants.

2. **Structuring or Restructuring the Questions:** The second important issue to me was the idea of structuring or re-structuring the research questions, which I could know after the pilot study. The "pre-study" of the study area gave me some new ideas about how to ask a question and what the limitations were. It seems that these issues entangle every fieldworker in the trap of dilemma, for example, inquiries about one's daily routine, personal income, possessions, political inclination, religious or cultural belief and relationship status, etc., are very delicate issues to be asked directly in the form of a question by an unknown person. Asking questions on sensitive personal or social issues is a challenge because it gives the impression of 'attack on respondent's privacy'. Such matters restrict the informants from responding. In the beginning, a few respondents said, "You are also from my community. You already know everything." So, the pilot study helped me deal with such challenges or dilemmas. The pilot study also showed me a path by which I could be alert of such a challenge or dilemma.
3. **Being Prejudice and Stereotype:** I must say that a researcher is also a social being, not a value-free social element. The internalization of various socio-cultural values during primary and secondary socialization process makes our behaviour and thought stereotypical and prejudiced, somewhat, about something and about somebody. Any stereotypical biased behaviour and thought of the researchers restraint them from participating in the subjects' lives in the desired manner. Consequently, their findings are left incomplete, biased, and assumption-based. Therefore, I can say that a pilot study helps to explore many hidden social realities, which one could not get in literature. The pilot study also enabled me to keep 'objectivity' alive in my mind.
4. **Ethical Values:** The fourth issue, 'ethical values,' attracted me a lot because I planned to go for an in-depth interview to gather the relevant primary data from the respondents of diverse social groups. I wanted to explore their preferences in terms of selecting a groom or bride. What were their personal criteria for inviting the community members. Such information often is related to the respondent's personal and social life experiences. After establishing a good and trustworthy relationship through a pilot study with the respondent, I got many personal and sensitive accounts of the respondent's life. Therefore, I have changed the name of respondents and I did not discuss such information with others or publically.

To make the research's findings rich, substantial, and valid, I examined their personal experience and narratives with other community members without disclosing the names of the informants. I felt that protecting the respondent's confidentiality while using personal life accounts in research is one of the most significant challenges and dilemmas.

5. **Taking Consent:** It appears that the above-pointed concern can be solved partly through the idea of 'taking consent.' In the case of women respondents, taking permission from the head of the household was another challenge. The pilot study helped me to make a strong rapport with such respondents. Finally, I was able to meet and discuss such issues.
6. **Go Along:** The mobile method (meaning, they walk, run, ride, drive, and so on) was another form of informal (walking) inquiry. I used this technique of data collection during the study. I wanted to participate in *biradari bhoj* and participate in the meetings of local *chaudharis*. So, I took the help of young local leaders and visited many events with them on a motorcycle. The new leaders (rider) expressed their feelings, thoughts, and personal experiences wholeheartedly without any hesitation during such travels. These informal interactions brought me a little closer to the research participants.

Few Other Involvements in Pilot Study

On the first day of my field visit, I reached Lautan Tiwari Ka Purwa village as a stranger. First, I saw a few people sitting at a shop in the village. They were gossiping among themselves. To attract their attention, I said, "*Namaskar! Lautan Ka Purwa goan yihay aay?*" (Greetings! is it Lautan Ka Purwa village?). They replied, "*Han! Aapko kiske yahan jana hai*" (Yes! To whom do you want to visit?). I informed my purpose of visiting Lautan Ka Purwa village. After that, they asked me another question. "*Aap kaha ke rahne wale ho?*" (From where do you belong?). Then, I briefly introduced my native place and academic details. I discussed local socio-political issues with those four inhabitants of Lautan Tiwari Ka Purwa village. The conversation with them lasted for about 30 minutes. Sometimes, I noticed a 'complete silence,' and I also felt that they were feeling 'uneasy' during the conversation because those four young boys were vacillating to express their emotions and social perception. That was the notion of caste because I hid my caste surname when I introduced myself. I intentionally introduced only the primary name. Indirectly, those four villagers often wanted to know my caste during the conversation. Even, they offered me tea to show their hospitality and humbleness. I visited across the village

with them, and I could get to know the village's geographical location and social structure first time.

I was informed that there are three homes of Tiwari (a sub-caste of the Brahmin community). After these came the Yadav *basti* (skirt of Yadav), and to the south corner of the village, there are more than 18 houses of Yadav community. A long conversation took place among a few other villagers and me. While visiting the home of a Yadav caste, the family's head offered me water and jaggery. I ate and offered jaggery to these four people who met me at the village's entrance point, but they did not show any interest.

During the introduction with a few other villagers, I was inquired, "*Aage kya lagaten hain*" (What caste title do you use?)? The astonishing thing for me was to understand the why was there such eagerness with the people to know the caste I belonged to? Do caste surname of a stranger matter for them? What to do next? These are some of dilemmas that come in the mind of a research, and a firm decision is essential to be taken. I decided to reveal my caste identity in such circumstances because getting closer to research participants was my main aim. The idea of 'revealing caste identity' became inevitable for making further communication. The informants' curiosity also showed that they wished to talk about the dominance of caste and it is linked to socio-political issues, etc. Therefore, the first obligation was for me to reveal my caste identity.

The desire to know the caste surname of a field investigator through the expression "*naam ke aage*" (after the name) gave a clue about the existence and importance of caste in rural society. After revealing my caste identity, villagers expressed many things about the village's socio-political issues, intra-castes relations and daily routine of the villagers.

After one day, I went to Natauli village, where I met a few people considered lower in the socio-cultural hierarchy. They expressed their social reciprocities and relation with Yadav community (a majority caste in the village) and suggested me to meet Hansraj Yadav (an elected member of village panchayat). I met Hansraj Yadav and had a series of conversation with him. He gave some insightful information about power-structure in the study area. After making a good rapport with a few respondents, the local village *pradhan* (Hansraj Yadav) of Natauli village suggested me to visit a neighbouring village, namely Tandawa. This is the village where I could get some ideas about the dominance of Thakur caste. Similarly, I could learn about the role of *goul* in the

village. Especially, how such *goul* play a significant role during the village panchayat election and community feast.

Apart from these villages, I also visited a few temple towns like Seeta Kund (Sultanpur), Bharat Kund (Ayodhya), Pishach-Mochan (Varanasi), Prayagraj, Gaya, Puri, Brahma temple (Pushkar), etc. These are a few important places where pilgrims (the organizers of *biradari bhoj*) visit during *pitra paksha*.⁶⁵ I made long conversations with a few priests, pandas, and pindadanis (devotees). I also attended ritual ceremonies like *tarpan*, *brahm bhoj*, *yajna*, etc.

I spent more than two months in the field during pilot study to make a trustworthy relationship. During my field visit, I wanted to get an in-depth understanding of how *biradari bhoj* and other cultural activities help Yadavs to build a consolidated caste network. During the visit to Tandawa, Natauli, and other neighboring villages, I found multiple factions among Yadavs.

Locating the Study Area

Keeping in mind the present research objectives, I chose a set of respondents for the interviews and discussion. As a researcher, I always thought of the 'field' as something out there and consciously constituted or determined my field. The idea of field is constituted with two components in the present research: a geographical location that I want to study and a rational mental component, which includes the investigator's mind who defines the field for the collection of primary data.

Uttar Pradesh: An Overview

Uttar Pradesh is one of the most populated⁶⁶ and politically vibrant states in India. It was formed on April 1, 1937. It was known as the “United Provinces”. It was renamed Uttar Pradesh after independence (in 1950). Lucknow is the political capital of the U.P. It is the largest province (in terms of population), which sends 82 numbers of Members of Parliament (MPs). There are 403 electoral seats in the legislative assembly. Indian census reveals that with 207.6 million people, now U.P. is about the size of Germany, France, and the Benelux nations shared. There are more than 113 million voters in total with an average of a quarter of a million voters in each constituency. By the constitutional Act, 1935, the Legislative Assembly (of U.P.) for the United

⁶⁵ It is 16-lunar day period in Hindu calendar when devotees pay homage to their ancestors, especially through food offerings.

⁶⁶The population of U.P. is around 228.96 Million.

Provinces was organized for the first time on April 1, 1937. The Assembly's strength (as specified under the Act of 1935) was 228, and its term was five years. The first meeting of the (provisional) Uttar Pradesh Legislature under the new Constitution began on February 2, 1950, with the Governor's address to both the Houses assembled in the Assembly Hall. After the first election after independence, the elected Assembly of Uttar Pradesh met on May 19, 1952. The state has been marred by repeated episodes of communal violence and atrocity against marginal sections. In December 1992, the Babri Mosque in Faizabad (now, Ayodhya) was demolished by '*karsevak*' (radical Hindu activists), leading to widespread communal violence in Faizabad (Ayodhya) and its neighboring district Sultanpur which later escalated to other parts of India. The main objective behind choosing Uttar Pradesh is to analyse the new political rhetoric created after the 1900s by backward castes, especially how the Yadav community became front-runner on the socio-political domain at their native villages. Many social scientists called 'India's Silent Revolution' to these socio-political changes.

Sultanpur: A Brief Description

Sultanpur district is situated in the eastern part (Awad region) of Uttar Pradesh. The official website of Sultanpur district describes its historical features in the following way-

“The city of Sultanpur lies in latitude 26 degrees 15 minutes north and longitude 82 degrees 05 minutes east on the bank of Gomti river about 60 km south of Faizabad (now, Ayodhya), 41 km north of Pratapgarh district and 138 km south-east of Lucknow (capital city of U.P.).” It is on the branch line of Varanasi-Lucknow section of the Northern Indian Railway (broad gauge), passing through Jafrabad, Jaunpur, Sultanpur, and Jaunpur. Another branch line of the Indian railway connects Sultanpur with Ayodhya and Prayagraj. Purvanchal Expressway (a six-lane metalled road) connects to Sultanpur with Faizabad, Shahganj (district Jaunpur), Jaunpur, Raebareli, Lucknow, Amethi.

The Sultanpur town is located on the left bank of the Gomti (River). This city has been identified with the Kusapur mentioned by Huen Tsang, the Chinese traveler. There was a dilapidated stupa of Ashoka in his time and that Buddha taught here for six months. There are remains Buddhist stupas still visible at Mahmoodpur, a village, at a distance of 8 km north-west of Sultanpur headquarter. The town later fell into the hands of Bhaars, who retained it until it was taken from

them by the Muslims in the 12th century. About seven hundred and fifty years ago, people said, two brothers, Sayid Muhammad and Sayid Ala-ud-Din, a horse trader by profession, visited east Avadh and offered a few horses for sale to Bhar Chieftains of Kusabhavanpur, who seized the horses and put the two brothers to death. This news fell on the ears of Ala-ud-Din Khilji, who would not allow such an outrage to pass unpunished. Therefore, gathering a mighty force, he set out for Kusabhavanpur and took revenge by killing most of the Bhars by stratagem adopted after a long drawn siege.

If we examine the Sultanpur district through the lens of religious belief, we find that there is a religious place on the bank of Gomti. This sacred site is known as Sitakund. The aspirants of the community feast believe that goddess Sita (wife of lord Ram) bathed at Sitakund as she accompanied her husband (Ram, the main hero of the epic, Ramayana) on his fourteen years exiles.⁶⁷ *Nahavan* (a bathing fair) is held in Chaitra and Kartika month of the Hindu calendar.

Another source⁶⁸ reveals that Sultanpur has existed since ancient time. It was destroyed repeatedly before passing under the rule of Muslim ruler. The Muslim town was destroyed during the Indian Mutiny (1857–58). The existing settlement arose as a British armed outpost. It is now primarily an agricultural trade center. Sultanpur's surrounding areas comprises a elasticity of alluvial plain on both sides of the Gomati River.⁶⁹ Paddy, sugarcane, barley, wheat, pulse, potato are mainly grown. The total population of the Sultanpur district was 3,797,118 (Senses 2011) of which 1,914,586 were males and 1,882,531 were females until the 2011 census. At

⁶⁷ According to a local priest (Radheshyam), "Once there was a magnificent city called *Ayodhya* on the banks of River Sarayu. Its people were leading a happy life. They were ruled by a generous king Dasaratha. But the king was unhappy as he had no children. The sages advised him to perform a ritual. As a result, he was blessed with four sons, Rama, Bharata, Lakshmana and Shatrughna. The princes grew up into individuals with great qualities excelling themselves in archery, hunting and many other fields. One day a great sage known as *Vishwamitra* asked Dasaratha to send his son Rama to protect them from the evil demons. Rama along with Lakshmana succeeded to destroy them. They then proceeded to the city of Mithila, where Rama got married to Janaka's daughter Sita, as he managed to lift the divine rudra's bow and string it. Soon a time came when Dasaratha wished to hand over his reign to his eldest son Rama, son of Kausalya. But Kaikeyi, another wife of King Dasaratha reminded his two boons he had promised, that her son Bharata should succeed as King and Rama should be sent into exile into the forest for fourteen years. To respect his father's promises, Rama gave up the throne and went into the forest with Sita and Lakshmana. This decision of Rama brought enormous sadness and grief to Dasaratha and he soon died."

⁶⁸ See for more details: Retrieved on 03/06/2021 <https://sultanpur.nic.in/history/>

⁶⁹ Retrieved on 03/06/2021 from <https://www.britannica.com/place/Sultanpur>

present, the population of this district in 2019-2020 is 4,284,330 (estimated as per aadhar uidai.gov.in February 2020 date)⁷⁰. Between 0-6 age group, the numbers of people were 11,648. The total number of literates (84,080) constituted 78.10% of the people with male literacy of 81.50% and female literacy of 74.40%. Literacy percentage is 63.13 percent, out of these 36.41 percent is male literates and 26.72 percent is female literates. Total workers percentage is 31.38 per cent, out of these 23.22 per cent is male workers and 8.16 percent is female workers.

Administrative Division

Sultanpur district comes under the Ayodhya division. It is also known as 'Awadh Region' popularly. There are three Nagar Palika Panchayats, five Tehsils (Sultanpur Sadar, Kadipur, Lambhua and Jaisinghpur, Baldirai), and seventeen police stations to maintain law and order. There are five constituencies for the assembly election: Isauli, Sultanpur, Sultanpur Sadar, Lambhua, and Kadipur.

Awadhi (Hindi) is a local dialect of the people of Sultanpur. Moreover, Sultanpur is one of the popular districts of Uttar Pradesh for well-known M.P. like Rahul Gandhi, Rajiv Gandhi, Sanjay Gandhi, Sonia Gandhi, Smriti Irani, Varun Gandhi, Menka Gandhi, etc. Amethi constituency (for Lok Sabha) was part of Sultanpur district till 2010, but Mulayam Singh Yadav, the then chief minister, made a separate (72nd) district (Amethi) of Uttar Pradesh by merging three tehsils (Musafirkhana, Gauriganj and Amethi) of Sultanpur district and two tehsils (Salon and Tiloi) of Raebareli district. Now, there are fourteen blocks and 1727 villages in Sultanpur. The study area (Tandawa village) is located in the Kurebhar block of Sultanpur.

Socio-Political and Cultural Geography of Tandawa Village

It is also important to glimpse the cultural symbols and the medium of expressions (folklore) associated with rural inhabitants' way of life. Similarly, it would also be mapped out how those symbols have some meanings by which a privileged caste-like Thakur gets socio-economic benefit in a local setting. In addition to the above concern, it would be interesting to examine how the backward castes, especially Yadavs confront and resist such problems. Therefore, I have undertaken a series of discussions to get an in-depth understanding of the realities.

⁷⁰ Retrieved on 03/06/2021 from http://www.indiagrowing.com/Uttar_Pradesh/Sultanpur_District

It is noticed that each demi-god or goddess of the Tandawa village belongs to a particular caste; for instance, the place of *Musayi Baba*⁷¹ (a *dalit*, male deity) is located in the south-east direction of the village. In contrast, the *deothan* (a sacred place) of *Mari Thakurayin* (a female deity from Thakur caste) is situated in the west direction. On the one hand, we can see that the populations of *dalit* community are occupied at the *dakshin-purab-tola* (south-east skirt of the village) while the west part of the Tandawa is known as *Thakurauti* (residential place of Thakur caste). The people of Tandawa village often visit the sacred place of *Mari Thakurayin*, but no one visits *Musayi Baba*. We can see that the inhabitants of Tandawa offer *dhaar* (water with flowers, rice and tamarind) and worship *Mari Thakurayin*. Interestingly, no one offers and prays to *Musayi Baba*. It means that the people have given lesser importance to *Musayi Baba*, and he has been degraded as a deity over a period.

Another sacred place exists in the north direction of the village, where a large gathering takes place twice every year. This place is known as *Kariya-Bajhana*. According to the local mythology, '*Kariya* (a dominant caste) had fallen in love with *Bajhana* (a *Dalit* girl)'. If we see their social status, *Kariya* belongs to a dominant caste (Thakur) while *Bajhana* belongs to Chamar / *Harijan* (ex-untouchable) caste. There is an oral tale behind this sacred place. A respondent, namely Ram Narayan, narrated, "People believe that *Kariya* and *Bajhana* were a couple (lovers) and no one allowed them to get married because of their caste differences. One day, the couple saw a dream, i.e., "A local God is suggesting them to sacrifice their bodies." Therefore, both committed suicide near a pond." Now, the pond has become a holy place.

So, a sociological question arises here: Why did the lower caste demigods like ***Chilbila Baba***, *Musayi Baba* not receive such popularity as *Kariya-Bajhana*. Why could *Musayi Baba* not get the recognition or acceptance while *Bajhana* (even a *Dalit* girl) has become a symbol of resistance? Now, she is being worshiped by *Dalit* and non-*Dalit* communities, too. She has also been recognized widely. How are the above instances associated with the idea of the community feast?

To get the answer for the above question, we need to look at the socio-economic and political geography of Sultanpur. We can see that the Thakur and Brahmin castes are major 'dominant castes' in Sultanpur and its neighboring districts like Amethi, Pratapgarh and Ayodhya. A youth

⁷¹Musayi Baba belongs to *Dalit* community. The new generations have no idea about this sacred place. He has been demeaned by local inhabitants over a period.

leader Rajendra told me, "The name of Bajhana (a Dalit) is associated with Kariya (Thakur), who belongs to a dominant caste of Sultanpur. Therefore, she could get social acceptance, and people worship her." In the case of *Musayi Baba*, as mentioned previously, *Musayi Baba* belongs to a marginalized caste. He has no direct connection with any dominant caste. Therefore, he has not received the recognition and symbolic value. The idea of getting socio-cultural recognition and acceptance, the above reason (from which caste anyone belongs) can be a valid point. The dominance of Thakur caste can be sensed even at every domain of the village, including from the panchayat election to the Vidhan Sabha or Lok Sabha election. The dominance and presence of Thakur and Brahman castes create 'fear' among backward castes. The sense of getting fear is associated with 'survival,' 'self-respect,' 'identity,' 'social experience,' 'independence,' etc. These points give a valid reason to Yadav community to make a consolidated caste network.

The present study has explored the above instances of getting socio-political recognition or rejection in specific socio-political geography. I could get to know from a few key respondents that the commensal pattern of *brahm bhoj* (feeding the Brahmin) was translated into *Badrinath ji ka bhoj* (feeding the god Badrinath) to demean the hegemony of upper castes in commensal relation. Later on, this feast was manifested as *biradari bhoj*, especially after the 1990s. The decade of the 1990s was an important period for the backward classes because many socio-political changes occurred in the rural society in Eastern Uttar Pradesh (see, chapter-2). Identity politics was at its peak for getting socio-political recognition during the period.

Moreover, this is important to point out that there is a close relationship between socio-political mobility and land ownership. Renowned anthropologist M.N. Srinivas (1987) points out that a dominant caste must have a relatively high ritual position, numerical strength, and land ownership. In addition, we can see that a drastic change took place in the socio-political domain after 1990 among Yadavs. After capturing the political power in Uttar Pradesh, the backward section emerged as a political block. They improvise their caste network and defined various cultural symbols for strengthening their pan Indian identity because the numerical strength and social status of any caste influence the 'everyday life' of the rural inhabitants.

Norms and manners have been carried out from one generation to another in rural areas. Those norms and behaviors have become integral parts of rural tradition, but these traditions are not static. It means that there are a few possibilities for alterations that have been a major concern for the present study. Keeping in mind the current socio-political affair in a north Indian villages,

namely Tandawa in particular and a few other villages in general, the present chapter attempts to understand the process of building social cohesion and inter-caste and intra-community relation scholarly. Similarly, this section also examines multiple social realities, i.e., social reciprocity and symbiosis, to a more significant extent. Several socio-political consequences have been addressed to understand the current socio-political affairs among rural inhabitants with a sociological approach.

Socio-Economic Profile of Tandawa Village

Tandawa village is located in Sultanpur district. It is well-connected by a link road of Sudnapur-Fulauna. There are sixty households, and the total population of this village is 445. They occupy a cultivated area of fifty-four hectares (Directory, 2015-16)⁷². If we look at the caste of landholders, it is found that Thakur, Yadav, and Kumhar are bigger landholders. Thus, Pasi, Chamar, Musahar, and Kahar castes are small landholders. They are engaged in *adhiya* as a sharecropper and Rehan system (taking land on lease by paying money for a short time). Groundwater, minor canals, tubewell⁷³, pond, etc., are major sources of irrigation in the Tandawa village. Apart from the agricultural activities, goat farming, piggery, milk production, dairy are other sources of livelihood for the villagers. There are nine families, who are engaged in mini shops like restaurants, cosmetics items, and furniture. Transportation facilities and electricity are accessible to about ninety-five per cent of households in Tandawa village. These facilities allow them to connect with the district headquarters. The above descriptions of Tandawa village show us a commonality with most of the other villages. To get an in-depth understanding, we must dig into the social geography and the leadership pattern of this village.

⁷²Directory, I. C.-V. (2015-16). "*National Family Health Survey-4, District Fact Sheet Sultanpur*". Retrieved October 13, 2017, from [www.rchiips.org: http://rchiips.org/NFHS/FCTS/UP/UP_Factsheet_179_Sultanpur.pdf](http://rchiips.org/NFHS/FCTS/UP/UP_Factsheet_179_Sultanpur.pdf)

⁷³A tube-well is a type of water well in which a long, 100–200 millimetres (3.9–7.9 in)-wide, stainless steel tube or pipe is bored underground. The lower end is fitted with a strainer, and a pump lifts water for irrigation. The required depth of the well depends on the depth of the water table.

Caste and Social Stratum

Like other villages, Tandawa village also has very similar features. It represents ten castes. There are two families from Musahar caste, three from Kori caste, and eleven from Pasi caste (Pasi falls under the category of Dalits). If we examine the social hierarchies among Dalits, Pasi caste is considered superior to Kori and Musahar. There are a few artisan castes, namely Ahir, Badhayee, Kumhar, Kahar, etc.; these castes are considered to occupy the middle ranks of the caste hierarchy. Thakur caste contributes to eight families, and they are at the top of the caste hierarchy in Tandawa village. People used to call them *babu* or *bhaiya* with a sense of respect. However, the new generations from artisan castes reject the traditional or ritual-based multiple caste hierarchies, and such a notion is visible among '*neye-neta*' (youth leaders) of the study area.

The idea of caste-based 'naming' of a '*purwa*' (living place of a caste) or '*tola*' (locality) is a social fact, which would be sociologically interesting to put forth. For instance, the Kori caste's living place is well-known as '*chamar-tola*' or '*chamarauty*' (a derogatory remark for a Kori caste's living place). When we detail, we can see that the caste members work as 'daily wage labourers due to lack of sufficient livelihood.' Thus, because of the encouragement of new leadership, the most miserable family of the Kori caste is seeking empowerment through educational achievement. Let me give an example of Shiv Baran Kori, who resides in Tandawa village. The head of the family, Shiv Baran Kori, lives with his wife Begna Devi and their children. Shiv Baran makes baskets and works as a mason. In the case of educational achievement, both husband and wife are illiterate, but the elder son, namely Ram Narayan, has done M.Ed. (Master of Education), double post-graduations in geography and sociology. The younger son, Ram Nath, is enrolled in BBA (Bachelor of Business Administration). Shiv Baran Kori's younger daughter has recently completed B.A. (Bachelor of Art) and is looking to pursue her post-graduation. Moreover, other families of this locality are engaged in agricultural activities, apart from a few who are working as unskilled labour.

Rigidity to Openness: A Few Social Consequences

The old tradition of singing '*devi-geet*' or '*pachra*' (devotional folklore)⁷⁴ has been transformed with Bollywood music, attracting new generations. Now, *pravachan-karta* (a priest or storyteller of 'Bhagwat Geeta') keeps an orchestra team who try to connect the *bhajan* (devotional songs) with the latest popular Bhojpuri or Hindi songs. Moreover, it appears that the invention of new machinery has also transformed the old conception of 'joint family' that was considered the best source of labour in rural areas. Similarly, the new generations of a joint family have been attracted by 'dazzling prosperity' of urban India. They have also adopted the modern urban lifestyle in due course of time. Furthermore, after coming back from urban areas to their native place, they also bring the cultural values of those cities in rural areas. These cultural values have become an inevitable part of the rural culture.

In the last few decades, the bigger landholding has been shrinking. The inventions of new machinery are not fit for small landholding. Therefore, small landholders have developed an alternative reciprocal system, '*hoond*'. A group of small landholders builds an 'interest group' for performing agricultural activities timely. The primary purpose of this group is 'to save labour charges.' The members of '*hoond*' collectively work for each other. As it is pointed above, agriculture requires teamwork. Therefore, it becomes mandatory for a peasant living in a nuclear family to form a '*hoond*' with the help of other families and do their work in a timely manner. It means the members of a '*hoond*' can be from diverse caste groups. They work collectively for each other (Prasad, 2015, p. 535). There are four '*hoonds*' in Tandawa village. The idea of '*hoond*' has also allowed them to develop a reciprocal relation between two castes. Another side of the story of a '*hoond*' is entirely dissimilar. It is noticed that the Thakur caste has its own '*hoond*'. They never work with lower castes because they want to demonstrate themselves as being 'superior' to other caste groups. It appears that mutual participation (in *hoond*) is more prevalent among such groups of people who belong to traditionally lower strata of castes like Ahir, Kumhar, Kanhar, Baniya, Pasi, Chamar, etc. in the study area. The idea of *hoond* saves both their money and time.

⁷⁴Women from the Yadav community are singing *pachara* folksong collectively (see, appendix: 4.9).

A New Leadership Pattern

There is emergence of a new social pattern of leadership in Tandawa village during the last two decades. I have measured these changes by caste and age groups. On the one hand, decades ago, there was a complete dominance of the Thakur caste in Tandawa village. But now, the backward castes have organized themselves with the help of Durga Prasad Yadav and Raj Bahadur Yadav. It is found that the socio-political mobilization began when these leaders decided to stop *begari* customs (unwanted free labour), *harwahi*, and *charwahi* practices (other forms of bonded labour) in Tandawa village. The decision became a concerning issue for the youth leaders. Now, most of the villagers accept Durga Prasad Yadav and Raj Bahadur Yadav's leadership for significant contributions they have made to the village (Prasad, 2018). It is noticed that years ago there was a lack of necessary infrastructure like electricity, hand-pump, road, school, etc. Due to Durga Yadav's efforts, many new changes have taken place and those basic facilities are now available in Tandawa village (Prasad, 2016, pp. 192-193).

On the other hand, the agenda of the youth leaders are very dissimilar to senior leaders. The youth leaders, namely Durga Yadav, Haridatt Yadav, Chhoto, Ram Narayan, Rakesh Vishwakarma, Rajendra Saroj, and Ravindra Saroj have been taking an interest in the social justice and welfare for needy sections of the society. Social upliftment through education is the main motto for them. These are the people who can do *jugad* (liaise effectively) with police, Tahsildar (revenue officers), and bank officers. Most of the new leaders are around thirty years old (age) known as '*naye neta*' (new leader) of Tandawa village. Meanwhile, after a fruitful discussion with Ram Narayan,⁷⁵ I noticed that education is not a prime concern among voters for electing a village *pradhan* (head of the village *panchayat*). He gave an example from a recent election of the village *panchayat*. The seat of the Kithawa village *panchayat* (Tandawa also comes in this village *pachayat*) was reserved for scheduled caste rotationally. Ram Narayan responded, "Four people from scheduled caste contested for the post of *pradhan* (village representative). If we look at their educational background, one delegate, namely Ravindra Saroj from Tandawa village, has done graduation, but he got very minimal votes than other contestants. Another contestant, Santram, has done senior secondary (12th), but he could not win the seat. Interestingly, an illiterate candidate won the election, and he is now *gram pradhan*

⁷⁵He is a 25 years old respondent from dalit community. He has done post-graduation in geography and now he is pursuing B.Ed. He is the first literate person in his entire community in Tandawa village.

(elected leader) of Tandawa village." Similarly, Krishna (2003, p. 1175) points out in his book 'the patient's family remembers a person who takes a sick villager to the hospital long afterwards, and there is more chance to identify as a 'new leader' and win the local election.'

Rejection and Acceptance: The Two Sides of Social Cohesion

A village is not a single unified entity. Therefore, we need to examine various modalities of the village. The idea of 'modernity' is understood in different ways. The strong caste consciousness is justified in the name of 'social justice.' The new leaders from the Yadav community always claim strong unity among the backward section, but it is found that factions exist among Yadavs. For adequate facts, let me illustrate a few more social consequences from there. We can see the geographical location of Tandawa village linearly. The eastern part of the village is known as '*purab-tola*' (east skirt) where only so-called *Shudra* (a backward caste) and *ati-Shudra* caste (scheduled castes) live. The western part of the Tandawa village is known as '*paschimi-tola*' (west skirt), where the so-called higher caste (Thakur) lives in the majority. The vocal practices between Thakur and other castes give a smell of a social gap. Thakur caste often considers itself superior to backward castes. In the view of Thakurs, 'backward castes' of the Tandawa village are 'Shudra.' Thakur caste expects from non-Thakur caste to salute them at first. These types of traditional behavior push them into isolation and venerable economic conditions. Moreover, a few Thakur caste families have started working as agrarian labourers for economic survival without any hesitation.

Let me illustrate an example of *holi-milan*⁷⁶ for more clarification on caste consciousness. On the day of *holi*, the villagers collectively celebrate this festival. They roam across the village together because it is a customary practice. Interestingly, when I visited there on the day of *holi* (festival of color) to examine the reciprocal relationship, a social gap was clearly visible in their celebration. Therefore, as a researcher, I tried to examine further their daily reciprocal relationship. Backward and Dalit castes live in '*purab tola*' and feel relative deprivation. Because the folks of (high ranking castes) the '*paschimi-tola*' did not visit the '*purab-tola*.' It appears that lower castes feel 'uncomfortable' to celebrate *holi* with the people of Thakur caste.

⁷⁶Holi is a popular festival of Hindu in north India. Villagers get together collectively on this occasion. This gathering is known as holi-milan in eastern Uttar Pradesh.

Thakurs are considered 'higher caste' traditionally. Their locality is known as '*thakurauti*', which is located at '*paschimi-tola*.' The male members of Thakur caste freely celebrate *holi* with their own caste, but selectively they also visit the houses of other castes. Throughout a long conversation, I found that the large congregation of castes on *holi-milan* has weakened over the last few years. It appears that masculinity and gender insensitivity, such as teasing, assaulting, abusing, bad-touch, etc., have been the main factors behind the degradation of *holi-milan* in Tandawa village. There is a strong disconnection between the backward castes of '*purab-tola*' and the upper caste of '*paschimi-tola*.' One group socialized themselves in Sanskritized forms. In contrast, other groups show themselves as the followers of the equalitarian principle of social justice and secular values.

Akhara: A Place of Wrestling

An *akhara* is a spot of wrestling where the village's male members, especially young generations go there daily and do wrestling as a daily routine in north India. It appears that the *akhara* is a significant site for social interaction in rural areas. People build an *akhara* in July and do physical exercise in each village of North India. On the day of *nag panchami*⁷⁷, people get-together at the *akhara* site where younger boys perform wrestling. However, the idea of wrestling is getting less important nowadays. The new generations leave their native place very early in their childhood and migrate into big cities like Delhi, Mumbai, etc. to seek better economic and educational opportunities. There are still some symbolic meanings of this traditional profession of the Yadav community because it is closely related to 'physical strength' and 'military virtue.' Amar Bahadur (a respondent) said, "The wrestlers often worship Hindu god Hanuman (a monkey-god, who was mentioned in Hindu epic Ramayana) and god Balda (elder brother of Krishna: a hero of Hindu epic Mahabharata). Both gods have been presented as the symbols of 'muscle power' and 'sincere dedication.'"

Local Yadavs of study area often give an example. A local leader Hansraj Said, "Hanuman was very faithful to the Empire of King Rama. Similarly, Yadav soldiers faithfully exhibited in Rejangla war for our nation." Further Hans Raj said, "Yadav soldiers bravely fought not only for the honour of the country but also for the prestige of their caste. ...the real nationalism and

⁷⁷Nag Panchami is a traditional festival. The followers of Hinduism worship snakes or serpents on the day of Nag Panchamithroughout India.

patriotism Yadavs learn from the akhara." Many *akharas* are named in the name of Hanuman and Baldau like 'Hanuman Akhara,' 'Baldau Akhara'⁷⁸. On the auspicious day of *nag panchami* (a popular festival of Hindus in the rural area), local *chaudharis* get together at *akharas* to see *dangal* (performance of wrestling) and give rewards to the participants and winners. The wrestling practices are still prevalent among the Yadav community. Yadavs consider wrestling as their traditional hobby and heroic deed because the idea of muscle power and local politics are an integrated part of it. Local leaders and other members like teachers, officers, *pradhan*, M.L.A., M.P., etc., also join to felicitate the participants. In a few places, we can see pamphlets, posters, and banners related to the *dangal* of Yadavs. The Ahir/Yadav Gaurav Gathas (Yadav pride tales) are written in those pamphlets in which they also demand 'Yadav Regiments' in the Indian army, same as 'Rajput Regiment' or 'Maratha Regiments.'

The people of '*purab-tola*' and '*pashchi-tola*' of Tandawa village build their *akhara* separately. One *akhara* in each village can be seen often. Even people from other villages join wrestling. It appears that the idea of *akhara* creates reciprocity and mutual relations among them.

‘Panchayat Bhavan’and ‘Durga Kirana Store’

Alternatively, 'Village Panchayat Bhavan'⁷⁹ and 'Durga Kirana Store' (a grocery shop) are two other prominent sites of the village where the political aspirants (local villagers) congregate and discuss various contemporary issues. However, many peer groups can be seen in Tandawa village. Each group has consisted of four to six people who can be called a 'gossip group.' They play 'playing cards' for entertainment whenever they get time from their daily routine. They may also go to the local markets together for marketing, especially in the evening. It is noticed that villagers are habituated to go to open defecation in the evening. Still, in the case of the morning, they use their private toilet room. 'Gossiping' is the first excuse behind the open defecation. In this context, an old peasant Bansgopal Singh says, "The people are engaged in agricultural activities and spend their time in the field. The evening is the best time to feel free and get together. Later on, we go to the field for open defecation."

⁷⁸ Yadav community builds a linkup with the names of Baldau and Krishna as their ancestor. Therefore, this community often claim themselves as 'martial race'.

⁷⁹ A building of the village panchayat. It is located in Tandawa village.

There are six 'goul' (peer groups) in Tandawa village. The primary aims of these peer groups is 'to help each other' during election, conflict and crisis. The people who keep a similar thought on some issues and have a good relationship with each other can be called *goul*. Moreover, there is no persistence about its functional structure, size, membership, reciprocity and cohesiveness, etc. of the *goul* in Tandawa village.

Local Social Beliefs

Certain beliefs about village deities bring the people of Tandawa a little closer as they feel 'protected from evil eyes.' Ram Karan (a respondent) said, "There are a few village deities at each corner of this village. *Mari-Thakurayin* (a female deity) at the west corner, *Yazwan Baba* (a male deity) and *Kali-Mayi* (a female deity) at the east corner, *Mohana Bir Baba* (a male deity) at the south corner, *Musai*, *Kariya* (male deity) and *Bajhana* (female deity) at the north corner." There is a common notion of 'we-hood'. The local villagers believe that they are protected under the *Deeh Baba* (a local male chieftain). The mythological beliefs of belonging to the same *Deeh Baba* create symbiosis and a feeling of oneness. Resultantly, they express their social solidarity in everyday life by following kinship terminologies such as *kaki/chachi* (aunty), *chacha/kaka* (uncle), *bhaiya* (brother), *nana* (maternal uncle), *bua* (maternal sister), *dada* (grandfather), and *nani* (maternal grandfather), etc. (Prasad, 2016).

Examining other aspect of social relations, we find that untouchability practices are still in practice in Tandawa village. Higher and middle-ranking castes still keep more social distance with Kori, Pasi and Musahar. These lower castes also keep social distance among themselves, such as lower middle-ranking caste-like Pasi often keeps social distance from Kori and Musahar caste. Any person from Kori or Musahar caste never gets an offer for tea or food in utensils that a person from Pasi caste uses for himself/herself. This kind of caste hierarchy and the idea of social distancing are followed by other castes too. We can see such social segregation in other places too. A few similar instances are also quoted from Dalit autobiographies in India (Limbale, 2009; Valmiki, 2008). Thus, 'some egalitarian socio-cultural practices have been initiated in Tandawa village, for example, the lower castes can have food with middle backward and higher castes in the same row' or table, claimed by Shiv Kumar Yadav (a young inhabitant of Tandawa village). He further said, "Even a few people from higher castes have been transgressing the

caste rules and maintaining commensal relation with Dalits." Years back, artisan castes decided to make commensal relation with Dalit community in the study area.

On the contrary, Gaya Jaysawal used to strongly condemn such new initiative by excusing, "Who would send his/her daughter to our village, if we participate in the feast of ex-untouchable castes?" After his strong disagreement, villagers could not maintain the idea of mutual participation in the feast of lower strata castes for a long time. It appears that the Thakur caste of this village never participates in the feast of Kori, Musahar, and Pasi caste. It appears that the *neye neta* or *karya-karta* of the villages does not keep a rigid approach in commensality.

To sum up, a distinction is observed about meta-commentary about the social practices; meta-commentary by the villages themselves. In the immediate *holi* celebrations, this is more than obvious. "This distinction can be observed in many contexts across. The distinction is ideological and not practiced in many places; that is, the meta-commentary is offered when the researcher asks the tradition bearer to explain" (Prasad and Akundy, 2021). However, it is now necessary that it exists in practice; hence, it is not only ideological. This dichotomy characterizes the dynamics of certain cultural contexts vis-à-vis their exegesis. Moreover, the example below illustrates how Yadav and Thakur caste in Tandawa village maintain inter-personal relations.

On the one hand, Rama Narayan often uses a phrase, "*Ahir ab to Yadav ban gaye*" (Now *ahir* has become Yadav) to show some positive changes among Yadavs. Similarly, Krishn Kumar also uses the phrase '*Yadav-Rajput-bhai-bhai*' (Yadav and Rajput are consanguine and equal like two brothers) with the same intention in front of Yadav." Meanwhile, a few other people from Thakur or Brahman caste use pejorative remarks for Yadavs, for example, "*Kitano ahir pingal padhe do gunan se heen, 'uthana-baithna, aur bolna' liye bidhata chheen*" (God creates two less intellect in Ahir) at the backside. Thus, as a counter-argument, a few people from Ahir caste also use the phrase "*Ab thakur, Thakur nahi rahe*" (Now, traditional social statuses of Thakurs has fallen). The main objective of pointing out the above illustrations is to reveal how subjective experiences helped the field investigators get in-depth hidden reality and catch the social facts.

The present chapter has covered socio-cultural life and political mobility scholarly. It is an output of constant deliberative interaction with the inhabitants of Tandawa and a few other villages. It appears that a new enthusiasm or motivation has been developed for higher education and self-dependence among young girls, for example, Suman Yadav, Renu Yadav, Priti Yadav, Pinki and Mithilesh are a few female names who have done post-graduation as well as B.Ed. They are preparing for the competitive exams with a ray of hope of getting a job in government colleges. They have become iconic figures for girls who want to pursue higher education for better future endeavors.

The *naye netas* have become the agents of change. These new leadership patterns have emerged after a long struggle with higher castes. Therefore, the idea of social justice among the *naye netas* is the main concern. Resultantly, more than ninety per cent of BPL cardholders have benefitted from Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana in Tandawa village.

Modern Technology and Recent Development

The big machines' availability has given a new dimension to the old pattern of social solidarity and caste hierarchies. For example, now farmers are able to harvest many *bigha* with the help of modern machinery and need not rely on the teamwork or labourers of poor lower castes. The new machinery has degraded the traditional values of caste hierarchies. For example, Dalits as well as the middle-ranking of castes like Kumhar, Badhayi, etc., were landless in Tandawa village. Decades back, these landless castes had been compelled to do *begar* (forced or unwanted labour). At present, Thakurs of this village use the new machinery for harvesting, threshing, and cultivating. Now, they do not depend on '*harwaha*' (bonded labours). That is the living reality of the study area. This can be generalized for other villages too.

The above instances show many drastic changes in agricultural patterns, social relations, village politics, educational achievement, women empowerment, etc., in Tandawa village. Now, Tandawa and others neighboring villages are not what it used to be. Now, these villages are even further from what the rural areas has been for long imagined to be. Similarly, in the sense of caste, it is found that such families of lower and backward castes who keep a close relation with Thakur and Brahmin castes in Tandawa village could not get wholehearted support from same caste members during the election.

Gender and Social Media

Social media and television have created a new ethos among the new generations (especially women). Now, women are getting an update about upcoming events and ritual fests like jamjutiya, akadashi, navami, etc. Aastha and other news channels are engaged in such activities. Those interested in doing such activities get updated about recent *bhajan* (devotional song) and popular preacher and *kathakar* of Bhagvat Gita. Women watch a few other channels and they get to know if the *bali /jumka* (a type of earrings) is in fashion or the *matarmala /mangalsootra*⁸⁰. The motive behind doing this is to get updated about the new trend in the fashion market. It appears that men keep much interest in political affairs, Bollywood or Bhojpuri movies, Hindi news debate, etc. The national politics or local issues also take a prominent place among youth. The political affairs become a matter of discussion and debate when young leaders get together in the evening for gossiping. The idea of gossiping and debate minimizes the social distance because the *naye-neta* and the *chaudharis* (old generation) are interdependent. They express their thought with mutual understanding and respect. There was a time when emptiness of infrastructural development like facility of drinking water, *pakka* roads, bridge, school, etc., were significant challenge for the villagers. The joint consensus between '*naye neta*' and '*varishth neta*' (old generation, *chaudhari*) has given a new wing to the concept of social and economic development.

New generations have devalued the complete dominance of the Thakur caste. Such new changes are initiated with the help of rural folklores. To understand the perception and inter-caste relation, I participated as a listener in *birha dangal* (a competition between two folk singers). It is found that folklores are closely associated with the emotions of rural inhabitants. Each caste has its traditional folklore, carried out from one generation to another as an oral tradition. On some special occasions, Yadavs hire a professional *birahiya* (singers of *biraha* folklore) for six hours and pay four to five thousand rupees. If there is any *biradari bhoj* (community feast), the organizers often call two professional groups of *birahiya* and spend more than ten thousand

⁸⁰It is a necklace that the groom ties around the bride's neck in the Indian subcontinent, in a ceremony.

rupees for them. The logic behind calling two groups of *birahiya* is to make it competitive and exciting.⁸¹

Social Background of the Respondents

There are 65 families living in the Tandawa village. The total population of this village is 445. After being aware of the socio-cultural diversities of this village, it would be appropriate to give a brief description about the social, educational, age, occupation, economic status, marital status, etc. of some respondents. After which it will be easy for us to make an accurate estimate about the scientificity of the answer given by the respondents. In-depth interviews have been conducted with 50 respondents from Tandawa village and 30 from a few other villages and their various socio-political and economic activities have been thoroughly studied and analyzed.

Table No. (3.1): Gender of the Respondents

Village of the respondent	Gender of the respondent		
	Male	Female	Total
Natauli and others	24 (30.0%)	06 (7.5%)	30 (37.50%)
Tandawa	40 (50.0%)	10 (12.50%)	50 (62.50%)
Total	64 (80.0%)	16 (20.0%)	80 (100.0%)

Table no. 3.1 represents the gender of the respondents. The table under observation indicates that, the total sample size (80 respondents) have been taken for the study. It can be analyzed from the above table that on an overall basis, 80 per cent of the total respondents constitutes the male population. The percentage of female respondents as compared to their male counterparts is only 20 per cent. Out of the total respondents, the whole numbers of male respondents from a few villages (Natauli, Kithawa, Sudnapur, Nautan ka Purwa, etc.) are 30 per cent and females are 7.5 per cent respectively. Majority of the respondents belong to Tandawa village in which 12.5 are female while 50.0 per cent are male.

⁸¹ A few facts about folklores are discussed in the 5th chapter.

The objective of selecting more male respondents is to explore the multiple social realities because *biradari bhoj*, *chittha panchayat*, wrestling, etc. are traditional cultural practices in which only males are invited to participate. So, this data shows more male respondents, because my interview schedule was based on the inkling of active participation. This table also shows the dominance of males in public gatherings, market place, political meetings, and *biradari bhoj* indirectly. After talking to a few aspirants of the community feast, I got to know that the male members are more involved in the entire process of community formation. I have done an in-depth study on these lines of Natauli and a few other neighboring villages. These villages show similar pattern in terms of participation in cultural activities and organizing the community feast.

It is found that most of the participants of *biradari bhoj* (more than 80 per cent) are from the neighboring villages of the organizers. The distance between the villages of the participants could be around 3-5km. If someone wants to feed more than five thousand people, the organizer may face a great challenge because the average residents of the Yadav in each village are around 20 per cent. An organizer often invites more than 500 *chaudharis*, if he wants to feed more than 5000 people. The gathering of local *chaudhari* is known as *chittha panchayat*. The organizer gives a target to each *chaudhris* to bring more numbers of people for the *biradari bhoj*. In such a case, the geographical distances between the villages of the organizers and the participants can be around 10-15 km. We can find that about 5 per cent of the participants are from other districts too. Therefore, the male members get invitation and participate actively.

Table No. (3.2): Age of the Respondents

Age	Frequency	Percent
20-30	10	12.50%
31-40	10	12.50%
41-50	16	20.00%
51-60	18	22.50%
Above 60	26	32.50%
Overall	80	100

The above table (3.2) reflects the age distribution of the research participants. Age, as it is seen in the table, ranges from 20 years to above 60 years. Around 12.50 per cent of the total research participants were selected between the age group of 20 to 30 years. Same as, around 12.50 per cent informants belong to the age group between 31–40 years. A great deal of respondents (20 per cent) was carefully chosen to be in the age between 41–50 years. We see a slight increase in the next age group, 22.50 per cent of the respondent can be seen to be in the age group of 51 – 60 years. A substantial number of participants, 32.50 per cent belong to the age group of above 60 years. It appears that *biradari bhoj* and other cultural activities are organized by the head of the family who belongs to the old age group (above 60 years). Here, it can be conferred that a majority of the respondents are middle-aged or under the age of 50 years in nature, and a good representation of the respondents belonged to the old and young category.

Table No. (3.3): Education of the Respondents

Education of the respondent	Village of the respondent		Total
	Natauli and others	Tandawa	
Illiterate	0 (.0%)	24 (30.0%)	24 (30.0%)
Upto primary	8 (10.0%)	10 (12.50%)	18 (22.50%)
Upto secondary	8 (10.0%)	4 (5.0%)	12 (15.0%)
Upto sr. secondary	10 (12.50%)	6 (07.50%)	16 (20.0%)
Upto graduation and others	4 (5.0%)	6 (07.50%)	10 (12.50%)
Overall	30 (37.50)	50 (62.50)	80 (100%)

The above table indicates the educational achievement of the respondents by different educational status. All respondents are literate in Natauli and other neighboring villages while 30 per cent of respondents who are illiterate are from Tandawa village. It is found that more than 95 per cent of the aspirants of community feast and other cultural activities are illiterate. Therefore, I decided to take one-third of the interview with such respondents. The percentage of the respondents who have studied up to the fifth standard is 22.5 per cent. A majority of the participants of *biradari bhoj* and other ritual activities are either illiterate or have studied only upto the secondary level. The percentage of the respondents at the secondary level is around 15

per cent. Twenty per cent of the respondents have studied till Sr. Secondary, and only the minimal percentage of the respondents, i.e., 12.50 per cent of the total respondents have attained higher education. The above-given table clearly shows that most of the respondents have studied only till the school level, and hardly very few respondents take admission in higher education. Instead of 67.68 per cent of literacy rate in the state of Uttar Pradesh (Census 2011), why do the people dropout of their schooling? It appears that primary school or higher secondary school can be seen at each village *panchayat*, but the availability of degree colleges is very minimal. If a student wants to pursue higher education in the study area, he/she needs to go to the district headquarter of the Sultanpur district to take admission and attend classes daily. The government degree college or Post Graduate colleges are very far (17km) from the study area. Another reason for the low level of aspiration for education in the study area is deep-rooted poverty. The education level remains at a low position because the poor have to use their children to earn daily bread for their families. Thus, children are engaged in menial works right from their childhood.

Table No. (3.4): Occupation of the Respondents

Occupation of the respondent	Village of the respondent		Total
	Natauli and others	Tandawa	
Farmer	18 (22.50%)	20 (25%)	38 (47.5%)
Govt. services	2 (2.50%)	10 (12.50%)	12 (15.0%)
Petty business	6 (7.50%)	8 (10%)	14 (17.5%)
Others	4 (5.0%)	12 (15.0%)	16 (20.0%)
Overall	30 (37.50%)	50 (62.50%)	80 (100.0%)

Table 3.4 exhibits the occupational patterns of the respondents. It depicts that the respondents of the study area practice different types of occupations. The majority of the respondents were dependent upon agricultural activities and farming. From Natauli and other villages, a large number of respondents, i.e., 22.50 per cent depends on agriculture for their livelihood. The other 25 per cent respondents (farmers) from other villages were selected for interviews. Only a mere

figure of 15 per cent of the total respondents is working in Government services. The percentages of petty businessmen are 17.5 per cent, and the remaining 20 per cent of the total respondents are engaged in other activities like small govt. contract, private services, daily wage labourers, sheep–rearing and fishing, etc. It is found that the study area is primarily dominated by agriculture and its allied activities like fishery, milk-production, poultry farming, etc. Therefore, the majority of the respondents have been selected for interview from farmers.

Table No. (3.5): Monthly Income of the Respondents

Monthly income	Village of the respondent		Total
	Natauli and others	Tandawa	
No income group	2 (2.50%)	4 (5.0%)	6 (7.50%)
Below 1000	4 (5.0%)	8 (10.0%)	12 (15%)
1001 – 5000	8 (10.0%)	6 (7.50%)	14 (17.50%)
5001 – 10000	10(12.50%)	10 (12.50%)	20 (25.0%)
Above 10000	6 (7.50%)	22 (27.5%)	28 (35.0%)
Overall	30(37.50%)	50 (62.50%)	80 (100.0%)

Table 3.5 indicates the current annual income of the respondents. Among the 80 respondents, about one fifth, i.e., 17.50 per cent belong to the monthly income group of Rs. 1001 – 5000. There are 7.50 per cent of the research participants, who fall in the No Income Group. No Income Group includes low-income families, housewives, students, etc. The fourth majority of them, i.e., 15 per cent are in the monthly income of below 1000. Similarly, a second majority of the respondents, i.e., 25 per cent fall in the income group of 5001 – 10000. There are more significant respondents, i.e., 35 per cent who have a monthly income of above 10000 rupees, which shows that the majority of the respondent belong to higher income groups because income is one of the important variables for getting a name, fame, and more social mobility. It appears that the majority of respondents belong to the higher income group. Their socio-economic condition can be measured easily by examining the life-style and land position. In the case of Natauli and other neighboring

villages, out of 30 respondents, more than half of the total respondents are earning more than five thousand rupees per month. A very similar pattern can be seen among the respondents of Tandawa village.

Table No. (3.6): Distributions of the Respondents by Marital Status

Marital status of the respondent	Village of the respondent		Total
	Natauli and others	Tandawa	
Married	18 (22.50%)	38 (47.5%)	56 (70.0%)
Unmarried	4 (5.0%)	6 (7.5%)	10 (12.5%)
Widow	6 (7.50%)	3 (3.75%)	9 (11.25%)
Widower	2 (2.50%)	3 (3.75%)	5 (6.25%)
Overall	30 (37.5%)	50 (62.50%)	80 (100.0%)

More than two-thirds of the respondents (70%) are married, while 12.5 per cent of the respondents are unmarried. I have also taken interviews with nine widows and five widowers. There is a very strong sense of kinship and bonding in Yadav families. So, there is no single respondent in each of the divorced, separated, and unknown categories. Thus, it may be stated that most of the respondents are married because only the married person can organize *biradari bhoj*. Through personal observation, I can interpret that a married person is more concerned about the welfare of the family. If the person fulfills his/her aim of worldly life until the old age, there is more possibility of them organizing *abiradari bhoj* and other cultural events by which one wants to express gratitude to the society to its community members and the nearest forefathers.

Table No. (3.7): Respondents, Based on Types of Family

Types of family	Village of the respondent		Total
	Natauli and others	Tandawa	
Joint family	4 (5.5%)	26 (32.5%)	30 (37.5%)
Nuclear family	26 (32.5%)	24 (30.0%)	50 (62.5%)
Overall	30 (37.5%)	50 (62.5%)	80 (100.0%)

Family is considered as the first primary group in which a human being gets a platform to learn about the worldly life. There are mainly two kinds of living patterns (family-types) in the study area: the joint family and the nuclear family. Among the respondents, 37.5 per cent of the respondents stated that they live in a joint family, whereas around 62.5 per cent of respondents live in a nuclear family. The majority of respondents (32.5 per cent) from Natauli and other villages live in the nuclear family, while only 5.5 per cent families reported that they are living with their unmarried children only. The pattern of living in Tandawa village also reflects the same pattern.

There is a popular perception that the older adults stand for the joint family because they assume that in a joint family life, one passes on the values of cooperation, sharing, love and self-respect. They teach the young to recognize who to trust in times of trouble. After going through the opinions of many old respondents, I found that many people in their old-age are hapless and constrained to living their lives with their married sons and grandsons and daughters because these old-men or old-women are not able to fend for themselves. Resultantly, old-age has become a burden for them. The new generation (mostly male) is inclined towards a nuclear family as they migrate to the industrial area for better economic opportunity and leave their parents either alone or with their wives. It is found that most of the organizers of community feast live in joint families and they spend their savings on community feast and other ritual activities. Therefore, the entire family members suffer after this feast. Even, their children are unable to get quality education.

Table No. (3.8): Types of House

House of the respondents	Types of house			Total
	Kuchha	Pucca	Semi - Pucca	
Natauli and others	7 (8.75%)	13 (16.25%)	10 (12.5%)	30 (37.5%)
Tandawa	14 (17.5%)	16 (20.0%)	20 (25.0%)	50 (62.5 %)
Overall	21 (26.25%)	29 (36.25%)	30 (37.5%)	80 (100.0%)

To have proper insight and information on the

socio-economic profile of the area under study, I observed and asked the respondents regarding the types of houses in which the respondents live. Most of the respondents of Natauli and other neighboring villages are staying in *pucca* and semi-*pucca* houses. Here Semi – *pucca* houses can be referred to such homes, which are semi-solid with half of the construction with mud or hut and the other half built either with brick or concrete cement. The respondents who were staying in semi-*pucca* houses account about 37.5 per cent. It is found that most of the people who are living in the semi-*pucca* houses are beneficiaries of the “Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana – Gramin/Rural (PMAY-G). The second majority numbers, i.e., 26.25 per cent of respondents are having *kuchha* houses, including *khaprail* and *tali* (local terminology for *kuchha* houses), but they are very enthusiastic about getting a house under the PMAY-G scheme. Remaining 36.25 per cent are having a *pucca* houses made up of brick or concrete cement.

A few respondents have sold one or two-room in the market area for business purpose. The data reveals that people are having different sets of socio and economic backgrounds in these villages. The data of the present study also shows that the participation of the female respondents is lower than their male counterparts. The total percentage of female participation for in-depth interviews is 20 per cent, whereas the percentage of male respondents is 80 per cent. The age distribution shows that the middle age group actively participates in the *biradari bhoj*, *chittha*, etc. than other groups, but the organizers of the *biradari bhoj* mostly belong to the old age group.

The educational status of the respondents is found to be average, but 30 per cent of the respondents are illiterate and the rest of them have some knowledge of reading and writing. The respondent of Natauli and other villages shows that there is no illiterate respondent because of the availability of primary and higher secondary school. Most of the respondents in the study

area primarily depend on agriculture. Therefore, the percentage of self-employment is also high in the study areas.

The primary data reveals that most of the respondents in the study belong to the high-income group of 5000 to above 10000. The percentage of no income group (7.5%) is meager. The nature of the house ownership is different in both the Panchayats. Above 90 per cent of the respondents have constructed their houses in their land, and the housing condition of the study area is up to the average standard. The data regarding the household condition reveals that most of the people are staying under semi-*pucca* and *kachcha* houses. The data regarding the numbers of dwelling rooms of the respondents shows that most of the households constitute 5 – 6 rooms in the study area.

Lived Experiences of the Respondents

The purpose of giving the qualitative description is to show how the idea of inter caste and intra-caste relation (caste network, patterns of marriage, etc.) work in the study area and how the cultural celebrations, wrestling practices and community feast become inevitable for an newly emerging caste like Yadav. It is also interesting to know how two dominant castes like Thakurs and Brahmins create such social milieu, which forces lower castes to behave subserviently. Such social environment also leads to the upper castes to keep their political dominance over the marginalized sections. After talking to a few respondents, I noticed that *birha* folklores and community feast have been helping the Yadav community for a long time. Due to such social practices, the local *chaudhari* and '*nayeneta*' (new leaders) have been getting a chance to meet the wider scattered Yadavs. This gathering also opens an opportunity to make a consolidated caste network.

Similarly, the present analysis would give a glimpse about recent changes in power structure and caste dynamics in rural areas. The role of Yadavs is also mapped out especially on how they confronted the dominance of upper caste as well as how Yadav leaders have tried to build a new image in the local socio-political development. The core respondents are from a different socio-economic, political, and family background. Youth, old, apolitical, local leaders, *chaudhari*, teacher, village *pradhan*, women, and organizer of *biradari bhoj* have been included in the list of core respondents to understand multi-layered social realities of villages in Eastern Uttar Pradesh. These respondents narrated a range of issues, which they have been facing in the village.

I have given detailed about some of my personal observations, interaction as well as lived experiences of a few ‘organic intellectual’ of the study area. The selection of these respondents is based on the social knowledge, struggle, resistance, and personal gain in their respective areas. Foremost, I have given a brief introduction about their personal observation and experiences of life, which would enhance our understanding of the present discourse. I have also cross-examined their personal thoughts and comments with the help of their neighbors and a few other stakeholders.

Keeping in mind the above issues, I met an ex-teacher Mathura Prasad Yadav. Currently, Mathura Prasad Yadav is living with his wife Brahma Devi and son Rajendra Yadav⁸². Earlier, he had been teaching ‘Geography’ in RRIC, Katka Khanpur. This school is located in Sultanpur district. He was also an ex-pradhan and he was keenly interested in building caste network. Now, due to his old age, he does not keep a keen interest in *biradari bhoj*. Mathura Prasad Yadav is now 70 years old and politically affiliated with the Samajwadi Party (a regional party). At the age of 15 years, he married a girl chosen by his family (arranged marriage). His family was asked to inform the *gotra* and sub-caste by the bride’s family. After matching *ganna-banna* (trait or character) with his to-be wife, Mathura Prasad Yadav got married. I find that he is the first person who did Bachelor of Education (B.Ed.) and Master of Art (M.A.) in his village Nimasaray. He did post-graduation in Geography from Chatrapati Sahuji Maharaj University, Kanpur. The distance between his hometown (Sultanpur) and Kanpur University is around 200km. Therefore, he was compelled to stay with his cousin brother Ram Raj Yadav, who was residing in Kanpur, during his master’s program.

Moreover, Mathura Yadav also got wholehearted support from his cousin brother. His brother Ram Raj used to teach him English at his residence. After completion of his post-graduation, he started teaching in Ram Rati Inter Collage, Katka Khanpur of Sultanpur district. The journey of Mathura Prasad Yadav was not smooth at all because Thakur caste has been a dominant caste in Sultanpur district. He observed that Thakurs were against the socio-economic interest of backward castes. Therefore, he opposed the oppression of Thakur caste. At first, he got many threat calls from them, but still he continued his socio-political journey. Resultantly, he was

⁸²Rajendra Yadav has three daughters, namely Shraddha (14-year-old), Shikha (12 years old), and Garima (2 years old).

elected (1980-85) as gram *pradhan* (elected member of village *panchayat*) of Bariyauna village *panchayat*. It was a historic moment for backward castes, because he was the first person from this village from where a person from a backward caste was elected as village *pradhan*.

Due to his humble behaviour, he got support from villagers wholeheartedly. He also contested for the post of 'Jila Panchayat Member' but lost with minimal votes. However, his presence in the local election can be seen too at present. He often says that 'education' is the best weapon for backward classes because it brings socio-political mobility. When I asked him about his social experience during the service period in Ram Rati Inter Collage, he responded, "I used to reach there every day 30 minutes before (the assigned scheduled), and I was doing my duty with sincerity and dedication because most of the teachers in the school were from upper castes. Therefore, I did not give them any single chance for creating nuisance." For examining his statements, I visited many villages and I found that there is very positive impression among villagers for his dedication for teaching and perseverance. It was found that many of his students impressed by his teaching passion and moved to Prayagraj district for building their career. A few of them have also been in good positions at present and are working as teachers, engineers, technicians, officers, etc.

His native village represents about eight-hundred people with different castes, namely Mahapatra (seven families), Tiwari (two families), Pandey (three families), Mishra (two families), Kori (sixty families) and Yadav (nine families). His village *panchayat*, Bariyauna, is constituted with more than nineteen-hundred voters. Yadav, Kori, Thakur, and Brahman are numerically majority groups respectively, around 1000, 700, 300, and 200 people.

However, Muslim-Nayi (twenty-five households), Kumhar (two families), Gaderiya (seven homes), Lala (ten houses), Loniya (ten households), Baniya (four households), Lohar (five households), Badhayi (five families), and Kumhar (two-households) show their presence at the village *panchayat*. He advocates the philosophy of Ravidas (a north-Indian saint) and B.R. Ambedkar, a great social reformer and pioneer leader of India. His advocacy is not only associated theoretically, but his thought can be seen in practice. He visits the local market regularly and motivates local poor or marginalized people to send their children to get higher education in a good institution. Sometimes, he also helps them financially without any political motives. The political pitch, he dogged, has become fertile political land for his extended family members. Resultantly, his nephew (elder brother's son), namely Surendra Yadav, has won the

local village *panchayat* election three times.

He attends *biradari bhoj* rarely. He Said, “I attend *biradari bhoj* for the sake of maintaining social relation, but not with religious motives.” He has been suffering from diabetes, anemia, and high blood pressure for many years. Therefore, now he is not able to give much time to his egalitarian practices for community welfare. Mathura Prasad Yadav criticizes the organizational practices of All India Yadav Mahasabha (AIYM) of the Sultanpur district. He believes that ‘the members of AIYM seemed to be politically motivated and biased, because they never do any work related to community welfare at ground level, but they want to build good relations with political parties.’ He said, “Take an instance of the last election, the candidate of alliance (Bahujan Samaj Party and Samajwadi Party), namely Sonbhadra Singh lost by a very small margin of votes, if AIYM could have given their support, the result would be different.”

He also answered many questions related to the traditional folklore of the Yadav community. He points that the origins of this traditional song can be referred back to the early 19th century because, during British rule in India, people from rural India began migrating into urban areas for their livelihood and economic upliftment. They used to stay for many months. These Yadav labours usually gathered during the free hours, especially after post-dinner and sang their traditional folklores: *biraha* or *lorikayan*. He believed that the tradition of singing ‘*biraha*’ has been getting less importance in day-to-day life because new generations among Yadav are getting more attracted towards Hindi and Bhojpuri songs. The reason he suggested can be counted in the following way: ‘Years back; there was much social cohesion among villagers, because the majority of people usually used to do their work with mutual consensus. Agriculture and dairy-related practices were in a dominant position, but now those things have changed. Now, new generations are migrating into urban areas where they come into contact with western and urban culture, which is treated as ‘modern.’ He says, “The thought of individualism and living in a nuclear family have come from the urban culture among Yadavs. Therefore, they never ask sub-castes or *gotra* for making marriage and kinship ties”

However, Mathura Prasad Yadav is creating a fresh dialogue between privileged and unprivileged castes. It can be seen that if educated people from the Dalit community visit his home, Mathura Prasad Yadav offers them tea and snack on the same plates⁸³ without any caste discrimination. This tradition is also followed by his cousin brothers and extended family

⁸³ Such custom is also known as ‘*vattai*’.

members too. He also claims that the *parhe-likhe log* (educated members) of his caste in that village *panchayat* are divided ideologically into two groups. One group stands for pro-Hindu ideology. They are also taking an interest in the activities of AIYM. Those socio-political activities appear in a popular magazine (Yadav Kuldipika) of AIYM. The other ideological group is associated with new educated class, who agree with the egalitarian ideology of B.R. Ambedkar, Periyar, Phule, Shahuji Maharaj, Kanshiram, etc. The ‘Yadav Shakti’ magazine is closely related with this group. Mathura Prasad Yadav is associated with this ideological group.

I made long conversation with Jagarnath Yadav. He is nearly sixty-five years old and considered as *chaudhari* of Rajanpur by his caste fellow. The distance between Tandawa and Rajanpur village is around 3km. Economically, he is well off, but his children could not attain formal education. His polite nature makes him easiest to connect with others. He keeps good relations with other members of the Yadav community of the village. The total population of the Yadav community in Rajanpur village is nearly four hundred. He has about 10 acres of land, a tractor, and water-pump. The primary source of income of his family is agriculture, but he also has five buffaloes as a supplementary source of family income. If we look at his political interest, we can see that Jagarnath Yadav is affiliated with the Samajwadi Party for a long time. The local leaders of the Samajwadi party keep connected with him. He goes to the market every day in the evening and meets other Yadav *chaudharis* in the Sudnapur market. Yadav and Kurmi caste are major dominant castes in the Sudnapur *bajar*. A few years back, he went to Gaya to perform the *pindadan* rite and after coming back from Gaya, he organized *biradari bhoj*. In the *biradari bhoj* of Jagarnath Yadav, around three thousand people turned up. He spent more than eighty thousand rupees for the feast.

Jagarnath Yadav believes that ‘after father’s death, the concerned family becomes impure for a short time. Therefore, he visited and performed some rites at Gaya and Varanasi while considering it as a social responsibility to remove the impurity.’ Meanwhile, the elder son of the family is also obliged socially to complete the last rituals (like *bekar*, *sudh*, *terahwi*, etc.). Jagarnath Yadav says, “It seems that these rituals are not abstract enough to get *moksha* for the forefather. Therefore, one goes to Kashi (Varanasi, Uttar Pradesh) and Gaya (Bihar) to complete

remaining rites (like, *pindadan* and *bhoj*) with the beliefs of attaining *moksha* (salvation⁸⁴) as well as absolve the impurity.” As per his economic condition, one year later, he organized a *biradari bhoj* for two days⁸⁵ to which he calls, ‘a *bhoj* of lord Gaya-Jagarnath’ (community feast).

From this narrative, a few themes have emerged that can be followed in the right way. On the one hand, the *biradari bhoj* is closely connected with *pindadan*, *moksha* as well as social obligation. He says, “After performing above rite, the nearest forefather gets *moksha*. On the other hand, the belief in purity or impurity still exists in rural society. In addition, I would like to add that a *biradari bhoj* can be called as *bhoj* of lord Gaya-Jagarnath’ if the organizer (before organizing the *bhoj*) has visited a few places like Ayodhya, Gaya⁸⁶ and *Jagannath-Puri*⁸⁷ for some ritual obligation. Jagarnath Yadav has still a clear memory of Babri demolition and the story of ‘Ram Rath Yatra’ of Lal Krishna Advani. He said, “I could not take part in the incident of ‘Babari Demolition’, but I am a fortunate person that I got an opportunity to visit such holy places where my (mythological) ancestors (Bharat, Ram, Krishna, etc.) belong.” He believes that one’s nearest ancestors wait to perform *shraddha/pindadan*.⁸⁸

After completion of *biradari bhoj*, he often states that ‘his worldly responsibility has been completed.’ However, it can be seen that his two sons could not attain higher education and are forced to do agricultural works. His younger brother also claims that ‘Jagarnath Yadav has misused the family money, which has been collectively earned by the members of his family.’ It was found that he has built a temple in front of his house, for which he spent around one lakh rupee. The value of this money can be around three lakh rupees at present. His younger brother claims that if Jagarnath Yadav could have spent this amount of money on education, the socio-economic condition of my family would have been better. At present, his younger brother has parted himself from a joint family because the ideology of both brothers is very dissimilar.

⁸⁴ In Hindu religion, the idea of *moksha* can be referred as condemnation to everlasting punishment in the future state, or the punishment itself.

⁸⁵ The first Day of this feast is considered as *kachchi* while second day of this feast is known as *pakki*. In *kachchi* feast, local villagers and friends participate while the *pakki* feat is dedicated to own caste.

⁸⁶ It is a city of ancient historical and mythological significance in Indian state of Bihar.

⁸⁷ It is famous for sacred Hindu temple god Jagannath that is located on the eastern coast of India, in the Indian state of Odisha.

⁸⁸ Hindu mythology manifests that *pindadan* helps the soul of the departed in attaining salvation.

Moreover, it is usual phenomena of the living-pattern in the study area, where more than ninety-five per cent of the rural inhabitants are living in a nuclear family.

In addition, let me give an example of Chhedi Lal Yadav. He belongs to Natuli village, which is around two km away from Tandawa village. Chhedi Lal Yadav is a Chaudhari of Natauli village. He is around sixty years old. He has five acres cultivated land in which he grows paddy, wheat, sugarcane, green vegetables. His village is located on the way to Rajanpur. The distance between Rajanpur village and Natauli village is around 1.5km. If we see the social group, Yadav, Kurmi, Nat, Mishra, Pandey, Musahar (leaf maker or rat eater), etc. castes are inhabitants of the village. There are ten families of the Yadav community in Natauli village, and these Yadav families have political influence over the other castes. This could become possible after getting a consolidated caste network.

If look at his family background, we find that his younger brother was a government teacher, who is living separately. Recently, his brother passed away. At present, Chhedi Lal Yadav is living with his three daughters and a son. His elder daughter is pursuing post-graduation, and the other two daughters are enrolled for graduate courses. He is an active member of the Yadav community in the study area. His social position is better than many other Yadav families in the Natauli village, but economically his condition is deplorable. His *kachcha* house fell in the rainy season, and due to his poor economic condition, he could not rebuild it. During the assembly election, he often converses with the candidate of the Samajwadi Party. Local leaders of Samajwadi Party use his social bonding, but they have never supported him financially. Therefore, now he is keeping less interest in party politics but still believes in the ideology of 'Samajwad'. In the free time, he tries to connect with the *chaudharis* of other villages. He works as '*agua*'⁸⁹ (mediator) without any economic interest.

Chhedi Lal Yadav has been continuously participating in the *biradari bhoj* for many years. He also points to a few changes in the *biradari bhoj*. He said, "The decade of 1990s was a beginning time of engaging more into such activities and such activities had become as a way of life of Yadav community. Because local leaders assumed that if they were not able to turn up the Yadav community into the plank of *biradari bhoj*, the vote bank of Yadav community would be molded

⁸⁹Agua is a person who works as a mediator between two families while finding a bride or groom.

into BJP fold.” He emphasizes that the fear of *Ram Rath Yatra* was a significant reason behind the changes in the commensal practices. He further added that the meaning of *biradari bhoj* was perceived differently until 1990s. He said that ‘the idea of *biradari bhoj* was closely associated with the idea of moksha for a long time. Therefore, *biradari bhoj* was known as *braham bhoj* (a feast of Brahmin). In sum, throughout the narratives of Chhedi Lal Yadav, the primary attention can be given on few points like ‘holy place,’ ‘feeling of the ancestral linkup,’ ‘homage with ritual action and *pind*’⁹⁰ and the inter connection between politics and religion.

After going through the narrative of Chhedi Lal Yadav, the first question arises here as to why the people (those are from rural area) visit a few sacred places like *pishach-kund* (in Varanasi), Gaya and Ganga Sagar (in Kolkata) with the specific objectives of either for ritualistic purposes or for socio-political reasons. What are the social forces behind it? How do they deal with it in day-to-day life? Whether the ritual feast and the ritual obligation affect the living standard, or they are lead to an enhancement in the socio-economic capacities of individuals and their families through their caste network? Such questions are directly linked with social legitimacy because cultural practices give a social legitimacy to the caste hierarchies. If someone wants to bring upward mobility, he/she needs to get acceptance from its community members. So, the idea of celebrating community feast becomes an essential element.

The above queries have also been tried to be understood by making a series of dialogue with Madhav Das. Madhav Das is a singer and writer. He belongs to Bhatmayi village. The distance between Bhatmayi and Tandawa village is around 3km. He has also written a book, “Ram Charith Manas,” which is very popular among Yadavs. The book is based on the life history of the Hindu God Krishna. Madhav emphasizes that Krishna was from the Yadu dynasty and did many heroic deeds. He proudly said that the Yadav community belongs to the same dynasty in which Lord Krishna took birth. He often argues that the Hindu God Rama is worshiped only in the Hindi belt while Lord Krishna is worshiped across the country. He feels that Krishna is more significant than Rama. He spoke some of his experiences, which he got in his life. Madhav says that first, he wanted to publish his book by Geeta Press, but due to the casteist approach (as he belongs to the backward caste) of the publisher, his inspiration went into vain and he lost his hope. He stopped working on the book for more than one year, but a Delhi based publisher

⁹⁰ It has a symbolic meaning because *pindis* referred to the ancestor’s soul.

approached him. Later on, he started working again on the remaining chapters of the book. Finally, he published the book in 2012 and sold more than ten thousand copies. He was working as a peon in a government high school namely Paliya Inter Collage, Sultanpur. Whenever, he was getting time; he used to sit in the library of the school. His rigorous reading habits helped him to write the book. He has also written many stories (folksongs) for *biraha* singers. He has many disciples who often recite his name while singing in public places. Uttar Pradesh's government also honored him with the 'Bharat Bharti Award' for his contribution on writings and public awareness.

Madhav Das gives a glimpse about the local socio-cultural structure in which one grows. He said, "Each corner of a village is protected by village *deeh* (head). This concrete phenomenon has become a tradition in due course of time." Further he added, "There were extreme poverty, illiteracy and lack of awareness. Therefore, the villagers had fallen into the enchantment trap of such *andhvishvas* (misbelief)." A long conversation with him gave me some new ideas. He said that there was a class that always exploited the innocent villagers in many ways. This class was the owner of wealth, land, property as well as natural resources. With limited knowledge, this class also imposed the traditional and irrational practices for their personal interest exploiting the backward castes. *Brahm bhoj* (feeding the Brahmins) and *pindadan* can be a simple example of it. He said, "Take an example of the leadership of BJP. Their whole propaganda of Hinduism is all about political achievement. Therefore, new generations of the educated class of Yadavs are trying to create a new atmosphere for the benefit of the whole community." He emphasizes that the educated Yadavs transformed the idea of *brahm bhoj* into *biradari bhoj*. However, after following him a few days, I found that he has been making an effort to build a consolidated unity among the Yadav community for many years.

Jagdambika Prasad Yadav is another respondent, who is 60 years in age. He could not attain any formal education, but his children have studied till higher-secondary level. He works as a peasant and is living with his wife and children. He also has four buffalos, a tractor, one two-wheeler motor-bike, and excellent irrigation facility. As a peasant, he works in the field throughout the day, but every evening he goes to the market in 'Sudnapur' where he usually meets with his '*biradari bandhu*' (community members) and *chaudhris*. He wears *kurta* (Indian ethnic shirt), *dhoti* and always keeps '*gamchha*' (traditional towel) on his shoulder in public place. If I

mentioned that he is illiterate; it means there is minimal space for social mobility. His elder son works in the city for fulfilling economic needs of the family. Due to the economic crisis, the new generation cannot get a quality education. As I mentioned above, his father organized *biradari bhoj* in which he spent around two lakh rupees to fulfill the ritual process. Following in the footsteps of the father, he also became an active participant of *biradari bhoj*, and received respectful identity within the community framework. He shared with me some of his experiences about the recent changes in *biradari bhoj*.

He points to a few important socio-cultural changes, which have taken place in the last two decades in the process of *biradari bhoj* in following way-

1. *Bhoj* is also known as *biradari bhoj* (community feast), *mela* (fair) or *Gaya-Jagannath-ji ka bhoj* (feast of lord Gaya-Jagannath-ji).
2. Organizers rarely wash (mostly not) or touch the feet of a Brahmin priest.
3. Now, Brahmins are accepting the food that is served by Yadavs.
4. The strength of participation of Brahmin has declined. After analysing the number of participants in such *biradari bhoj*, it is found that less than a hundred Brahmins are being invited in *biradari bhoj*. In a few cases, symbolically twenty or fifty-one Brahmins are being invited.
5. Symbolically, the food is made by the Brahmins for the Brahmins in *biradari bhoj*.
6. In the case of purity and impurity, now peasant castes are participating in the *kachchi* ceremony of Thakur (a higher caste), but years back, their entry used to be denied.
7. The role of gender was quite liberal, which can be seen in *biraha*-folklore.

Let me point to an educated medical practitioner Gaya Prasad Yadav. He graduated in biology. He worked as a compounder in a district government hospital of Ayodhya. He is living with his son and daughter-in-law in Patna village. His son, Gulab Yadav told me that his father was very rational during his professional life. He was an atheist and a secular person, but after the retirement from the post, he shifted in Patna village. In Patna village, he met many people who were heartfelt believers of Hinduism. They influenced him and Gaya Prasad Yadav started preaching '*bhagvat-geeta*.' He met a '*gayawar*' (a professional religious mediator) who preached him about '*pindadan/shradh* rite. After sometime, Gaya Prasad Yadav went to Gaya to perform a few rituals for twenty days during *pitra-paksha* in 2009. One year later, he organized *biradari*

bhoj in which about two thousand people from the Yadav community and about three hundred people from other castes participated.

It was noticed that he spent a sum of two lakh rupees in the *biradari bhoj*, which led his family into a financial crisis. For instance, his daughter-in-law wanted to pursue B.Ed. (Bachelor of Education), but due to financial problems and insensitivity toward a girl child, she could not fulfill her aim. Due to his self-styled nature, his son, namely Gulab Yadav, could not pursue higher education, and the result of which he is running a mini shop of ‘cloths’ in the nearby market. After celebrating the feast, a few changes took place in his personal as well as social affairs; for instance, he has become a pure vegetarian, and highly motivated by the thought of ‘*bhagvat geeta*.’ He spends most of his time in devotional activities. As an ardent *bhagat*, he frequently attends *biradari bhoj* and ‘*bhagvat-katha*’⁹¹. He believes that everyone must organize *biradari bhoj* if one has sufficient money.

His son, Gulab Yadav, is forty years old. He has done graduation from Gandhi Smarak Maha Vidyalay, Patna. He has around three-acres of land and a readymade cloth shop. He wanted to prepare for civil services but could not do so. He blames his father for not achieving his dream. Gulab Yadav says that the involvement in the religious activities of his father has ruined his dream. He is neither free to go to urban areas to earn money, nor does he have enough money to open a big shop. He shows disinterest in religious activities but for the sake of social obligation, he participates in *biradari bhoj*. On the one hand, his father passionately often says about *biradari bhoj*, “*Log (gaya me) pindo ko tarne jate hain aur wapas aane ke kuch mahine ke bad biradari bhoj karvate hai*” (People go there [in Gaya] to relives ancestor’s sin, and after coming back to home, a few months later a *biradari bhoj* is organized). On the other hand, Gulab Yadav says, “*Ye sab bakvas hai*” (These are non-sense). It appears that Gulab does not believe in the philosophy of *pindadan*.

The idea of *dan-punya* and ‘*tarne jate hain*’ (getting salvation) inspired his father to organize *biradari bhoj*. After the dialogic partnership with Gulab Yadav and his father, I could get to know that people go to Gaya with an objective of getting *moksha*. After coming back from Gaya, they organize *biradari bhoj* to show ‘*sufal*’ (the complete successful) in the worldly life. In sum,

⁹¹ It is an occasion of storytelling. Such stories are taken from Hindu text called ‘*BhagvatGeeta*’. It is organized for nine days. Organizer of *biradaribhoj* holds it before ten days of *biradaribhoj*.

after the long discussion with Gulab Yadav, I got to know that the organizers believe in the Hindu philosophy of ‘death rite’ and performing some sacrifices to receive ‘grace’ from the ancestors. He says, “The idea of *biradari bhoj* is a sign of obligation by which one wants to ‘thank’ his ancestors and *biradari bandhu*.” It is found that the idea of celebrating community feast is very expensive. It is noticed that each ‘organizer’ spends more than one lakh rupees to complete ritual process. The case of Gulab Yadav and his father gives us a glimpse of recent socio-economic prosperity. When his father retired from the service, his father received around five lakh rupees. His younger sister got government job, and another sister was elected in local election as a ‘*pradhan*.’ These sudden socio-economic developments inspired his father to organize *abiradari bhoj*. It was found that he never get any support from his caste members. Therefore, he often says that ‘*sare chaudhari apni-apni roti sekne me lage rahte hain*’ (all chaudharis have their personal interest).

Let me give an example of a village leader Hansraj Yadav, who is 52-years old, an elected president of Natauli village panchayat. He is popularly known as *pradhan* in Natauli village. He was a running champion at the district level. He participated in wrestling and won a few awards at the village level. Before winning the village *panchayat* election, he was also elected as a BDC member and showed his leadership during his tenure. He got some funds from block *pramukh* Nanhe Yadav. He builds a semi-*pukka* link road from Gambhira Beer Baba-Bridge to Natauli Kala village. He has very good contact with local leaders. He is closely associated with the Samajwadi Party. His humble behaviour attracts people. However, he actively participates in the *biradari bhoj* and keeps mutual relations with local *chaudharis*. A few years back, he organized a *biradari bhoj* in which more than four thousand people participated. He tries to make a consolidated community network. He often argues that *biradari bhoj* is the only medium by which the Yadav community can maintain a vibrant caste network. When the researcher asked him about his ambition to organize *biradari bhoj*, he replied, “Once someone feels satisfied and feels free from social responsibilities in his / her life, then he/she goes to Gaya to be free from religious obligation.”

If we examine the socio-economic background of Hansraj Yadav and his family members, we find that his mother was selling tea in front of Natauli Inter Collage. Hansraj Yadav was also helping her for a few years. The family of Hansraj was impoverished. Therefore, his younger

brother joined a job and worked as a sweeper, and Hansraj Yadav started working as a bus conductor. His elder son has opened a franchisee that is associated with Broda Gramin Bank, Sudnapur. Now, some economic stability has come into his life. Resultantly, he can give more time for socio-political activities. After organizing the *biradari bhoj*, people could get his current socio-political and economic strength. This is another valid reason to hold *biradari bhoj*.

Haridatt Yadav (Raju) is a youth farmer who is facing a lot of hardship in his life but still focusing on his socio-economic responsibilities for his family and community members. Haridatt Yadav is 38 years of age and educated up to the eighth standard. He is a farmer and keeps interested in local politics. He is popularly known as ‘*baba*’ in Tandawa village. He is living with his wife and two children. Agriculture and tractor are the significant sources of income for him. Due to differences in opinions with his father, he keeps distance and is not on speaking terms with his parents and elder brother. He said, “I never felt being loved in my life. My father behaves with me like an unwanted child and servant.” Such expression can be seen from his mouth often. His father, namely Ram Raj Yadav, always criticizes him and often said, “*Bina piye hi Rajuaa ko do botal ka nasha rahta hai* (Without drinking, Raju behaves like a drunkard).” Raju was very close to his mother Janaki Devi. Therefore, her mother gave ten *biswa* lands to him. Recently, his mother passed away, and a new dispute began after her death. His father is very close to the eldest son Santosh Yadav. Therefore, Haridatt Yadav never likes his father and always fights with him for property. He is a member of the Bhartiya Janta Party and keeps interested in Hindutwa politics. His family members contested for president post of village panchayat three times but could not win. Even they could not score five per cent votes. Due to weak social network they could not win the election. His father spent his whole life in Kanpur district. He was working in a gun factory. Haridatt Yadav also spent his childhood in Kanpur, where he was working in a shop for electronics. Therefore, he did not have close relations with other members of the local Yadav community, but he is making an effort to build a consolidated connection with them.

Haridatt Yadav is influenced by the thoughts of Kabir Das (a great saint of the fifteenth century). Therefore, he does not believe in the philosophy of Hinduism, but for the sake of community feeling, he participates in the *biradari bhoj*. A respondent, Ram Narayan says, “Due to his cunning nature, most of the people do not like his attitude but keep speaking terms with him.

Moreover, a good number of his actions are based on economic oriented. If there is profit, he will make an effort to maintain a social relationship with someone, but in case of loss, he will react differently and keep distance sooner.” Haridatt Yadav represents to a small fraction of Tandawa village. He was elected as a village *panchayat* member in the last village *panchayat* election in Tandawa village.

In addition, it would be worth to point an important person of Yadav community namely Surendra Yadav. He is 49 years of age and educated until twelfth standard. He lives in the Nimasaray village with his wife, father, and his children. He is elected president of Bariyauna village *panchayat*. Bariyauna is constituted with more than nineteen-hundred voters, and Yadav, Kori, Takur, and Brahman are numerically majority castes, respectively, around 1000, 700, 300, and 200 households. He maintains his influence in many villages, and he has won the elections in another village *panchayat* too. His humble behaviour attracts villagers. He maintains good relations with local *chaudharis* of the Yadav community. He often participates if any meeting related to any dispute held in the village.

His elder son got married. On the day of *bahu bhoj* (feasting ceremony), many local leaders turned up, and local people praised his development related works. He has been winning the village *panchayat* election for three consecutive terms. He is very familiar with local officers and leaders. They also help him whenever he asks them for help.

Two decades back, there was no electricity and connected road in his village *panchayat*, but his continuous effort has changed the infrastructure of the village *panchayat*. He also gets full-hearted support from his extended family members during election time. He is facing some allegation and police charges, but he is still working for the marginal section continuously. Local organization of Yadav community invites and shows respect to him from time-to-time. Most of the people call him ‘*pradhan bhayiya*’ with great respect. He does not believe much in the idea of feasting Brahmin, but he feels that people should call their caste members and friends in the *biradari bhoj*. On the occasion of *terahavin* (the last rite) of his grandfather, he only invited his relatives, caste fellow, local members of the village, and friends circle. When I asked him a question about the special invitation of Brahmin as per tradition, he said, “*Unko tel lagane ki ab jarurat nahi hai*” (No need to call them now.). He feels that the time has come, and there is an urgent need to bring equality among different sections of society. He participates in the marriage party of Dalit and not-Dalit families without any prejudice. Therefore, the people of Kori caste of

Bariyauna village panchayat like him. The new generations are getting inspiration from him and they are trying to develop a self-respective image at present.

Renu Yadav is one of the important woman key respondents. She is 34 years old and got married when she was 23 years old. After getting married, she did not lose her hope for learning and gaining knowledge. On the one hand, her husband is educated until the 8th standard and does not keep much interest in educational achievement. On the other hand, Renu Yadav has done double post-graduation (in Hindi literature and Education) and B.Ed. to fulfill her passion for teaching. She also wants to do M.Ed. in the future, if she would get a chance. Other roles involve her as a house wife as well as a farmer for many years. She has two children, namely Dheeraj Yadav and Manshi Yadav. She taught in her village (Tandawa) to the children of low-income families for two years because the condition of education of backward castes in her village was very pathetic. She feels that education can give them a ray of hope to move forward and eradicate poverty and unawareness. She takes the help of online coaching or tutorials for the TET exam, and she wants to pass the ‘TET’ exam as soon as possible. After doing post-graduation, she has been giving exam for National Eligibility Test (NET) but could not get success so far. Finally, she decided to move her dream into teaching at primary school. She is a role model for school going girls in Tandawa village. As a housewife, she keeps breakfast and lunch ready for her children early in the morning (around 8 am). Her children are studying in an English medium school. Both her children are bright in terms of learning and performance in a school exam. After finishing kitchen and household work, she begins her study for TGT and PGT exam. She often says that there is no atmosphere for preparation for a competitive exam in the village. Local people criticize and demotivate her. They often say, “*Ladkiyon ko jyada padha-likha kar kya karaoge, ve bhi Raju ki bibi ki tarah kuch din exam degi aur fir use bhulkar chauka-bartan karenge*” (Why there is need to make girl to be educated, they will give exam same as the wife of Raju is giving and after sometime they will do household work), narrated by Renu Yadav.

The concept of self-economic dependence is in her dream, but due to some family issues (dispute between husband and wife, giving more time to her children), she is not able to fulfill her dream. She said, “If I could have taken ‘*talak*’ (divorce), but I am thinking of the future of these two children.” It appears that she was expecting a qualified groom, but the poverty of her father forced her into an unsuitable match. Openly, she said, “I do not love my husband. There are some social obligations, just I am following it.” The idea of ‘social obligation’ attracts our

attention on social pressure, which has been coming from the local caste network. Renu Yadav did not get the chance to participate in the *biradari bhoj* so far, but she has great respect for the *chaudharis* and active political members of the Yadav community.

Another women participant Pinki Yadav would be worth mentioning here. She is 25 years of old married girl. She is living with her mother in Tandawa village. Her father, Indrapal Yadav, passed away three years back. Therefore, the responsibility of her father is carried out by Pinki Yadav. Apart from agriculture, she does not have any other source of income, but still, she is hopeful for attaining higher education. She has done graduation in Hindi, Sanskrit, and Geography and post-graduation in Hindi literature passing out with first division. She has done B.Ed. and is currently preparing for the TET exam. She also wrote UGC-NET a few times but could not clear the exam yet. The economic hardship is the main barrier for her, but she is continuing her studies bravely. She is taking the help from a local coaching institute for preparing for the TET exam. However, her maternal uncle helps her family from time-to-time. Local Yadav *chaudharis* often praise her for her courage and educational achievement. These *chaudharis* also ask the *chaudhari* of Tandawa village; to approach them if in case she needs any help or assistance. Local *chaudharis* are ready to help her family if Pinki Yadav or her mother faces any hardship. Local leader Durga Prasad Yadav keeps sympathy for her family because of the humble behaviour of her mother.

The father of Pinky Yadav was a good wrestler in Tandawa village. He used to beat the people who went against his wish. If any drunkard passed by his home, the drunkard must keep themselves silent while crossing. Otherwise, there was much possibility of being beaten up. The local *chaudhari* of Yadav community praised Indrapal Yadav and his family. Even people from Thakur caste never dared to speak loudly in front of Indrapal Yadav.

An old participant Ram Raj Yadav is another important key research participant. He is 85 years of age. He spent most of his life in Kanpur, where he was working as a technician in a government factory. He has five daughters and two sons. Currently, he is living in Tandawa village with the family of his elder son, Santosh Kumar Yadav. He is educated until the 10th standard. He narrates the old story of the caste dominance. He said that Thakur caste was one of the main dominant castes during 1950s... After spending ten years in Kanpur, he planned to see his parents, who were living in Tandawa village. He came to his house directly without meeting

Jainarayan Singh, who was a *mukhiya* (head of the village) of Tandawa village. Jainarayan Singh sent his messenger to inform traditional rule and the code of conduct of Tandawa village. There was a rule for those who were living in other places to first meet the *mukhiya* of the village. As per traditional rule, his conduct was not up to the expectation. He was informed by the messenger about *mukhiya's* wish, but he denied going there. He asked the messenger to tell the *mukhiya* that he is not interested to meet with him. After a few days, the *mukhiya* came to his house and tried to threaten him, but bravely he answered the *mukhiya* and also informed his position in the gun factory (with some manipulations). The *mukhiya* was impressed by Ram Raj Yadav and his position in the factory. After that, a fresh and friendly dialogue took place between both of them.

Meanwhile, after spending five days out of ten days in Tandawa village, Ram Raj Yadav returned to Kanpur without any dispute. Two months later, *mukhiya's* elder son (who was doing job at shoes factory) Rajmani Singh visited his home and got to know the whole episode about Ram Raj Yadav. After drinking in the evening, he visited the house of Ram Raj Yadav. Raj Mani Singh found his elder brother there and he beat up the elder brother of Ram Raj Yadav by saying, “*tum mere manayi-tinayi ho aur mai jute ki factory me kam karta hun, isliye tumhe juton ki saugat de raha hun, jiske tum log layak ho*” (You are my slave and I work in the shoe factory; therefore I am giving you gift of shoes to which you people deserve).

Ram Raj Yadav also narrated about deep poverty and illiteracy among the Yadav community. He said, “Most of the families of the Yadav community were dependent economically on agriculture-based labour works. Due to a lack of awareness, they never visit industrial areas. Therefore, local landlords mainly Thakur caste used to exploit them.” The similar responses were counted while talking to other respondents of Tandawa village. Most of the respondents narrated that after working whole days, backward castes were getting 2kg grams, which were not enough to survive a joint family. The economic exploitation of backward castes was at its peak. Due to starvation, people died.

This is another story of a female research participant, who has seen the oppression of Thakur caste, deep poverty and starvation as well as prosperity in her life. Sonapati Yadav was a single child to her parents. Her parents have three acres of land, and her family life was very smooth. She got married at the age of ten years to a person who was 12 years of age. After seven-year,

her *gouna* (farewell)⁹² proceeded. Moreover, both husband and wife were illiterate, and agriculture was the only source of income for them. Their life was moving smoothly in Nimasaray village. A few years later, some family disputes began, and they migrated to Deeh Dhaggupur village, where with the help of their father, they purchased ten-acre land and made *kachcha* house. Atrocity against marginal section was in its peak there, Sonapati Yadav also became a victim of such oppression led by Thakur caste. The men of the local Thakur caste looted her money and molested her daughters many times. After getting such unbearable oppression, she asked her husband to migrate nearby village where backward castes were in the majority. Finally, they decided to settle in Tandawa village. She was working as agriculture labour to survive and feed her children. Due to extreme poverty, she was not able to provide essential medicine, and two of her children died in their early years. Therefore, her husband became a patient of hysteria. Her husband had no control over his mind for more than nine years, and started moving here and there. Resultantly, the financial condition of her family became more deplorable because her husband was the primary earner of the family. She has four daughters and three sons. Her three daughters and one son are illiterate because her economic conditions were not allowing sending them in school. Her children used to work in the field of Thakur as *harwah* (bonded labour) just for the sake of food. Her elder son was working as labour at the home of Rudal Singh (a local Thakur) and getting thirty rupees per month. The thirty rupees were too little to feed a family. With such an amount of money, she was not even able to feed her children for five days.

Also, Sonapati Yadav said, “*Mere pas yek sari thi, usko mai sarkari dukan se kharidi thi aur sal bhar pahanti thi. Mai aadhi sari dhol deti thi aur aadhi pahne rahti thi aur jab aadhi dhuli huyi sari sookh jati thi to aadhi pahni huyi sari ko bhi dhul deti thi. Bhagwan karen aisa samay kisi ke jivan me na aaye!*” (I had a sari which I bought from a government shop and wore the whole year. Half of the sari I used to wash while remaining half sari I wore until the half sari was getting dried. I pray to almighty God! No one should face such extreme poverty.).

⁹² It was a northern Indian custom and the ceremony associated with the consummation of marriage. Gauna is associated with the custom of child marriage. The ceremony takes place several years after marriage. Before the ceremony, the bride stays at her natal home. Marriage is considered only as a ritual union and conjugal life begins only after gauna; that is marriage is consummated only after the gauna ceremony.

Local members of the Yadav community, as well as few other people, gave a helping hand and helped her whenever she asked their help. Local *chaudhari* of Yadav community helped her sons to get a job in a big shop of Raju (merchant) in headquarter of Sultanpur district. Both sons worked there for more than ten years. Later on, her elder son Durga Prasad Yadav became a carpenter while her second son M.P. (Nanhe) Yadav worked as a contractor of the bamboo tree for few years. Six years back, her husband passed away at the age of eighty years. Now, she has more than ten acres of land, a big house, own restaurant, and a bolero car. No one dares to exploit her family at present because local Yadav *chaudharis* give assurance, and whenever there is a need for help, the *chaudharis* are ready to help her family members.

Similarly, I found Parasuram Yadav as an interesting case. He is a poor peasant and active participant of *biradari bhoj*. He is 48 years of age and educated until 10th standard. He is living in his maternal grandfather's house with his wife and two children in Tandawa village. He was a running champion at the block level. He was also interested in wrestling. He worked several years in the local police *chaowki* (station) as home guard, but due to some family issue, he left the job and started working as an agriculture labour. He listens to the *biraha* folklore in his free time. His wife worships local Gods like Raja Bali, Kariya-Goriya and Foolmati. A flag⁹³ in the courtyard of Parashuram can be seen. He has good relations with the singers of *biraha* folklore. He has been an active member of *biradari bhoj* for many years. He has great respect for the members of the Yadav community. He actively participates in the *chitha panchayat* (a meeting of local caste heads) of the Yadav community. He informed me about the pattern of selecting the groom/bride during his childhood as well as at present. During the 1980s, people used to set '*ganna-banna*' (feature matching process). It means that if the *ganna-banna* of bride and groom matched more than 50 per cent, there was more possibility of solemnizing the marriage. The priest was the authorized person to this matching process, but no one cares about such traditional practices at present. Similarly, there was a trend about asking '*gotra*' (lineage). If the *gotra* of two families matched, it means both belong to the same nearest *kul* (ancestry), and the possibility of getting married was not possible. Parasuram Yadav says, "*Kuchh rodhiwadi log upjati bhi pochte the, lekin unki sankhya bahut hi kam thi*" (The percentage of orthodox people, who used to ask about sub-caste of bride/groom, was very less.). In his marriage, he was asked about his

⁹³ The followers of God Rajabali Baba maintain a red and yellow colour flag with bamboo tree in their courtyard.

sub-caste and *gotra*, but he has no idea about his *gotra*. So, he told a popular *gotra (atreiy)* of his village. Recently, his elder son had an arranged marriage, but he did not ask about *gotra*, sub-caste, or *ganna-banna* because there is a popular trend in his community that no one should ask about the above-pointed issue.

Chapter-4

Community Feast and Socio-Political Mobilization

This chapter delineates how the Yadav community has developed a few socio-cultural practices to consolidate its caste network at the local level. In turn, the chapter focuses on how the idea of strengthening the caste network has been helping the Yadav community to reshape the socio-political identity. In addition, it also explores how the people from Yadav community want to make a socio-political space with the help of a community feast, fair of *nandmahar*,⁹⁴ etc. It appears that the culture of community feast paves the way to challenge the caste supremacy of upper castes (Thakurs, Brahmins, etc.) in the study area.

The first section attempts to contextualize the interrelationship between the beliefs of ‘moksha’ (salvation)⁹⁵ and commensality, which keep a dominant influence on the followers of Indic religious practices. Since Yadavs believe that they are part of the larger Hindu community, they also follow commensal rules and certain other rituals. In this context, it will also be worth examining how the idea of unequal power relationships exists in those socio-cultural practices. The larger sections of the Yadav community have to face many socio-economic difficulties and adverse consequences.

Contextualizing the Community Feast

Philosophically, it is believed that a life in Hindu Dharma (religion) stands for the performance of social obligations as per the natural or cosmic laws related to *aashram* system (four stages of life⁹⁶) and *purushartha* (to the fourfold purpose of life) (Prabhu, 1954). In other words, the moral values of *dharma* (righteousness), *artha* (economic activities), *kama* (pleasure, love, psychological values), and *moksha* (spiritual values) are considered *purushartha* (object of human pursuit) in Hinduism⁹⁷ (Rawat, 2006). It appears that a more extensive section of the Yadav community aspires to follow certain rituals of Hinduism. According to the principles of

⁹⁴ Nandmahar is religious shrine, which is dedicated to the Lord Krishna, Balrama, Nand Baba and Shree Vasudev. This place is very popular among Yadavs.

⁹⁵ It refers to salvation from *sansarik dukha* (hurdle in life) and the cycle of rebirth.

⁹⁶ The four stages of life have been divided in following ways: Brahmacharya (Student life), Grihastha (Householder life), Vanaprastha (Retired life), and Sanyas (Renounced life).

⁹⁷ Hinduism is an Indian religion and dharma, or way of life. It is the world's third-largest religion, with over 1.25 billion followers, or 15–16% of the global population, known as Hindus.

Hinduism, every follower has to bear both sin and virtue in this world. If they do their religious deed well, they can attain ‘salvation’ (Prasad, 1995). Yadav (2018) writes that ‘the concepts of rebirth, polytheism⁹⁸ and *avatarvad* (reincarnation) are a testament of the *puranas* (sacred texts of Hinduism) by which ‘*varna dharma*’⁹⁹ and ‘*purushartha*’ were defended. Resultantly, Brahmanism strengthened its roots over a period. It appears that the doctrine of ‘*purushartha*’ is not only ingrained in the human psyche (of the believers) at an abstract level but also as a social practice wherein it passes through a few commensal rites as described below (Prasad, 2019).

The Concept of *Bhoj* and its Association with Hindu Religion

The cultural meaning of the word ‘*bhoj*’ was ‘feeding the dead’. The word *bhoj* outlines the early history of ancestral worship in India, from the earliest sources existing in the Vedas up to the descriptions found in the Dharmashastra tradition (Sayers, 2013). The idea of *bhoj* had not only been an abstract doctrine of Hinduism but it had also been practiced among the followers wholeheartedly. First, it is significant to state that the religious thought of *bhoj* could become possible by developing a doctrine, namely *shraddha* or *pinddan*¹⁰⁰ (a Hindu ceremony) tradition. In this regard, Shukla (2014) writes, ‘as per Hindu sacred texts, Rishi Atri – among the ten sons of Lord Brahma¹⁰¹ was the first to decipher the rituals of *shraddha* or *pinddan* as devised by God Brahma to his son sage Nimi. Grieved by his son’s untimely death, sage Nimi being guided by Narad (God-cum-sage) started invoking his ancestors and forefather, who soon appeared before him and told that ‘Nimi, your son has already secured place in *pitraloka*.’¹⁰² Since you have

⁹⁸ Polytheism is the worship of or belief in multiple deities, which are usually assembled into a pantheon of gods and goddesses, along with their own religions and rituals.

⁹⁹ The *Varna* system in *Dharma*-shastras divides society into four *varnas* (Brahmins, Kshatriyas, Vaishya and Shudras). Those who fall out of this system because of their grievous sins are ostracised as outcastes (untouchables) and considered outside the *varna* system.

¹⁰⁰ In the Hindu religion, *shraddha* or *pinddan* is the ritual that one performs to pay homage to one’s ‘ancestors’ (in Sanskrit: Pitrs), especially to one’s dead parents. Conceptually, *Shraddha* is a way for people to express heartfelt gratitude and thanks towards their parents and ancestors, for having helped them to be what they are and praying for their peace. During the ritual offerings, a performer has to make a few ‘*pindis*’ (made by wheat-flour and some other raw ingredients like mustard, *Sesamum indicum*, etc.), which represent soul or causal body for departed forefathers. After worshiping the nearest ancestors, those *pind is* are thrown in the *kund* (pit).

¹⁰¹ According to britannica.com, it is believed that “Brahma, one of the major gods of Hinduism from about 500 bce to 500 ce, who was gradually eclipsed by Vishnu, Shiva, and the great Goddess (in her multiple aspects). Associated with the Vedic creator god Prajapati, whose identity he assumed, Brahma was born from a golden egg and created the earth and all things on it. Later myths describe him as having come forth from a lotus that issued from Vishnu’s navel.” Retrieved on 27/03/2021 from <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Brahma-Hindu-god>

¹⁰² In Hinduism, *pitraloka* is the world of the departed ancestors. The term comes from Sanskrit, with *pitra* meaning “ancestors” or “parents,” and *loka* meaning “world,” “region” or “realm.”

performed the *bhoj* (the act of feeding) and *shraddha* (worshipping the soul) of your deceased son, it is the same as if you had accomplished ‘*pitriyajna*’¹⁰³ (Shukla, 2014).’

Sayers (2013) writes that ‘*shraddha* is central to understanding the shift from Vedic to Classical Hindu modes of religious behaviour. Central to this alteration is the discursive construction of the role of the *panda* in mediating between the divine and the human actor. Similarly, it is found that the performer of the community feast believes in the mythology of the *shraddha* rite of the Hindu religion. A popular perception is that ‘after the death, the soul of human beings remains in this materialistic world.’ Hansraj Yadav, a respondent who recently has performed *shraddha* rite, said, “Just because of the loss of body (due to some mishap), someone cannot disconnect himself/herself from this worldly-life. The jerk of love, feelings, kindness, affection for their family member, close friends, blood relatives, etc., and the affinity for ‘*duniya*’ (worldly life) prevent the departed soul from going to the extreme ultimate departure (haven). Resultantly, being in a bodiless state, that person (without body) gets pain. The departed soul wants to do many things but could not.”

Similarly, Radheshyam, a local priest said, “The departed soul of the human body cannot be or even do not want to be free from this materialistic world. Therefore, the *shraddha* rite is still in practice with some beliefs.” In addition, Shanu Bhatt (an inhabitant of Prayagraj and believer of Hinduism) said, “We feel that the idea of *shraddha* gives an ultimate mental relief and paves the way for us to depart to the ultimate world of peace...It seems that due to the deep imprint of *shraddha* or *pindadaan* in the public minds, the rituals related to it, including *bhoj* is followed with great fidelity.” These cultural beliefs are not only in the doctrine, but are practiced in day-to-day life.

From Thought to Action

In addition, this research also explores how social beliefs come into practice. The journey of the feeding the dead, also known as community feast, first begins with a belief of listening to Lord Satyanarayana’s (a mythological character) tale. If someone wishes to listen to the story of Satyanarayana, one needs to arrange a few materialistic items under the guidance of any local

¹⁰³Pitri Yajna is considered one of the five sacrifices (*pañcamahayajna*) to be performed by a householder. Pitriyajna refers to the offerings of water and food (*tarpana*) to the manes.

priest. Those items could be the banana stem, *kalash* (urn), incense or incense sticks, camphor, lamp, *bel* (quince, fruits), *mala* (garland), rose flowers, *panchratna* (gold, topaz, pearl, amethyst, etc.), *pancha-pallava*,¹⁰⁴ rice, basil leaves, jaggery, season fruits, *panchamrit*,¹⁰⁵ *naivedya* (offerings),¹⁰⁶ *kalava*,¹⁰⁷ *janeu*,¹⁰⁸ *angavastra* (yellow and white cloth), etc. The devotees believe that fasting, worshiping, and listening to the story of Lord Satyanarayana benefit the min many ways. One of the respondents, Amar Bahadur of Tandawa village said, “If anyone wants to listen to the tale of Lord Satyanarayana, the person can do it at any time except *kharmas*,¹⁰⁹ but if one chooses Purnima (full moon) or Thursday, then it is the best.” On the day of listening to the tale of Satyanarayan, one keeps fasting and, after bathing, sits on the seat in the *poojagriha* (any assigned ‘sacred place’) and worships a few Hindu deities like Shree Ganesh, Gauri, Varuna, Vishnu, etc. (Prasad, 2019). To understand the importance of the oral tale of Satyanarayana, I have pointed below a few narratives of respondents:

Radheshyam Tiwari, a local priest of Tandawa village, told me in detail about the story, which would is worth pointing here-

Eighty-eight thousand sages of Aryavarta (mythic name of India) gathered at the holy pilgrimage site Naimisharanya¹¹⁰ told Sutaji¹¹¹ that, “O Sutaji! In Kali Yuga, man is being burdened with a bundle of *paap*¹¹²(sins) while conducting Vedas and religion. Therefore, please tell me any such measures for the welfare of the good human beings so that a man

¹⁰⁴Panchapallava (group of five leaves) is the combination of leaves of mango (*Mangifera indica* L.), Jambu (*Syzygium cumini* [L.] Skeels), Kapittha (*Feronia limonia* [L.]Swingle), Bijapura (*Citrus medica* L.), and Bel (*Aegle marmelos* [L.] Correa) is used in the rituals.

¹⁰⁵The combined form of milk, ghee, honey, sugar and curd is called *panchamrit*.

¹⁰⁶ Naivedya (cooked food) is one of the five preliminary oblations (*offerings*) to be offered during the worship of Lord Satya Narayana.

¹⁰⁷The thread or thread of yarn, which is dyed with red, yellow, etc., is tied on the wrist of hand and on some items like pitcher on manic occasions.

¹⁰⁸It is a sacred white thread which is worn by the devotee. It has also some symbolic meaning. After 'Upanayan Sanskar', a upper caste boy bears this thread. It signifies the rite of passage from boy to man, and more importantly, the dvija or 'twice born' (Rawat, 2006).

¹⁰⁹According to the Hindu calendar, when Suryadev transits in the sign of Jupiter in Sagittarius or Pisces, this period is called Kharmas or Malamas. No auspicious works are done in during *Kharmas* as per belie.

¹¹⁰Naimisaranyam is located at the junction of the roads from Sitapur and Khairabad, 32 km from Sitapur and 42 km from the Sandila railway station, 45 miles north of Lucknow in Uttar Pradesh. Naimisaranya is also known as Nimsar or Nimkhar and is located on the left bank of the river Gomati. The sacred well, namely *Chakra Kundais* believed to have started from the weapon of Vishnu, *Chakra*. There are shrines dedicated to Chakranarayana, Ganesh, Rama, Lakshman.

¹¹¹A *mythic figure*, *Sutaji* is considered as a story teller. He is the closest and favourite of Ved Vyas (writer of the sacred epic, Mahabharata). He gained all the knowledge of universe from Ved Vyas himself.

¹¹² The opposite word of *paap* is *punya*.

can have a virtuous benefit and may the wishes of his life be fulfilled.” Then Sutaji said, “O sages, you have asked a very good question for the welfare of the world. Now, I will describe the *mangalakari vrat* (unique idea), in connection with which Narada (a mythic figure, sage cum god) once asked Lord Lakshminarayana (supreme god) and listen to the story he told to Narada without worrying.” The story goes like this: Narada travelled to the world with the desire for human welfare and reached India. Seeing people suffering from miseries according to their deeds in Prithviloka, Narada got upset and started thinking in his mind about how will the suffering of these beings be eradicated. When he could not think of any solution, Lord Srivishnu, the lord of the three worlds, appeared before him. There, Narada, praising Lord Vishnu, the god of the Gods, white in complexion with four arms holding conch, chakra, mace, and Padma, said that ‘O Narayana! You are omnipotent and a follower of the universe. Even the human mind and speech cannot describe your qualities. You are the best and paramount. You have no beginning, middle, or end. You are going to fulfill the wishes of your devotees present in every particle of the universe. I greet you.’

Hearing this type of praise from Narada, Lord Vishnu smiled and said, “O Munivar, please give a reason for your arrival without any hesitation.” Then Narada said that human beings born on *prithviloka* (Earth), according to their deeds, are suffering in many ways living in different zones. O Trilokinath (go of the three worlds), please show me some kind of remedy which can rid them of their sorrows, and they can attain salvation by enjoying the wealth of happiness. Lord Vishnu (known as the creator of the universe), said that ‘Narada! Now, I will describe such a vow that by doing this, all the men and women of the world will be freed from *bikarama* or *pap karma*; by overcoming the of poverty, man will float in the sea of happiness and wealth, and live happily. By observing this fast of Lord Satyanarayana, all his wishes will be fulfilled. This is the only method to attain salvation in Kali Yuga (a current mythic period). When Narada wanted information about the law for fasting, Narayana said that by purifying *manasa* (mind) and *karmana* (‘the idea of calling’), a person could perform this fast and offer jaggery, season fruits, *naivedya* etc. with devotion and reverence. They should provide food to ‘poor Brahmins’¹¹³ and give Dakshina to needy people. In this way, by worshipping Satyanarayana, one gets freedom from all the sufferings and lives happily after getting rich and happy.’

It appears that there is a significant impact of such a tale on the common masses. Be it home entry or marriage occasion, people do not forget to listen to the story of Satyanarayan. A local dominant man Banshgopal Singh narrates the tale of Satyanarayana in the continuation of the

¹¹³ A Brahmin character had been portrayed in sympathetic hues, tactfully concealing the sociological facts of Brahmin lives.

above story. Banshgopal Singh is a landlord of Tandawa village recited a tale of Satyanarayana, which would be relevant to mention here:

After a long time, Sutaji met Narada,¹¹⁴ he said that, O sages Narada, I am now telling you the story of that poor Brahmin, Pratru, who fasted first and listened to the tale of Satyanarayana. By observing the fast of Satyanarayana, the poverty of that Brahmin was eradicated, as well as all his sufferings were also eliminated. The story goes in the following way, in ancient times, Pratru lived in Kashi (now, Varansari), the favorite city of the poor Brahmin god. He was living his life somehow by asking for alms. Seeing the plight of the Brahmin, God Satyanarayana, who loved the Brahmins, came to him as an elderly man one day and asked him respectfully, O Brahmin deity, how are you living by enduring many sufferings by asking for house-to-house begging? The impoverished Brahmin said to his friend that I am living by begging because of no means of income. If you know of any solution to remove my poverty, please let me know. Hearing the talk of a poor Brahmin, the older man said that, O friend, God Satyanarayana will fulfill all your desires, and there will be a wealth of wealth in your house. Satyanarayana walked forward from there by telling the method of fasting and listening to the tale of Satyanarayan. The elderly man went some distance and disappeared. The poor Brahmin decided to observe the fast and so on, told by the older man. He did not sleep that night. He kept thinking throughout the night about fasting and listening to the tale of Satyanarayana. Pratru got up and decided to fast for the Lord Satyanarayana, and the poor Brahmin set out to beg. On that day, the Brahmin got a lot of money in begging. After returning home, he worshiped Lord Sathyanarayana and offered *prasad* to the people around him. Resultantly, the poverty of the Brahmin went away. Therefore, the Brahmin decided to observe Shri Satyanarayana fast every month.

People often say that such mythological stories are an integral part of the oral history of the villagers in 'dehat'. There is a huge influence of these legends in rural folklore like Birha, Ropani Geet, Devi Geet, etc. In the continuation of the above story, Ram Karan, a peasant who lives in Tandawa village, narrated how the Brahmin (Pratru) conveyed the older man's message and how people from his contacts got some benefits. The mythic tale goes in following ways-

Sutaji called, O! Narad! Let me tell you a story of Pratru (a person) who has heard this story and kept fast and how his sufferings have gone away after hearing the story of Lord Sri Satyanarayana. Pratru is now rich in wealth, fasting regularly every month. He fasts every month and organizes the Satyanarayan-katha in which many people participate. One day, the Satyanarayan-katha was going on and an elderly woodcutter who cut wood from the forest passed

¹¹⁴ He is a god-sage, famous in Hindu traditions as a travelling musician and storyteller

by. He was feeling very thirsty. Therefore, with the desire to drink water, the woodcutter placed the bundles of wood on the ground and reached the courtyard of the house and asked that Brahmin (Pratru), O Brahmin, to whom are you worshipping? What is the benefit of doing this fast? Please tell me everything. Hearing the words of the old woodcutter, the Brahmin told him the importance of the Satyanarayan-katha and its procedure. The woodcutter was pleased and decided to fast in the name of the Lord Satyanarayana wholeheartedly. While walking, the woodcutter thought that with the money he would get from selling the wood today, “I would worship and organize the Lord Satyanarayana-katha”.

By considering this, the woodcutter got a good price and earned more money on that day. The woodcutter bought bananas, ghee, milk, curd, wheat flour, and sugar, etc., for the offering. After a few days, the woodcutter worshiped and organized the Lord Satyanarayana-katha. People from his family and his neighbors also participated in that puja. After hearing the story of Lord Satyanarayana and fasting, the woodcutter distributed the *prasad* (gift). Due to the grace of God Satyanarayan, his poverty went away. The woodcutter began to worship Lord Satyanarayana and lived happily. Finally, he got salvation and went to *Baikuntha Dham* (haven)¹¹⁵.

The above narrative gives a glimpse of how such tales are also closely associated with economic stability and the idea of *moksha* (salvation). In the continuation of the above story, a labour (namely Brijnath) who works at the brick kiln narrated this tale. The tale gives a glimpse of the popularity of this tale without any socio-economic discrepancies. The mythological story goes like this:

The tale begins with the conversation between Sutaji and sage Narada. Both were sitting under a banyan tree and Sutaji said, O Narada! Now, let me tell a story of a king. In ancient times, a wise and truthful king named Ulkamukh ruled in Kanakpur. He used to go to a temple every day to donate money to Brahmins and worship Lord Satyanarayana. He donated a lot of food, clothes, and money to the poor. His wife Subhadra was very gentle. Both used to observe Lord Satyanarayana every month. Due to the compassion of Satyanarayana, his palace was full of wealth and prosperity. The people in his kingdom were living with great pleasure. Once, when the king and queen were worshipping Lord Satyanarayana on the banks of the Bhadrashila river, a big boat came on the river

¹¹⁵ According to local belief, Vaikuntha literally means - where there is no frustration. Frustration means inaction, despair, frustration, laziness and impoverishment. This means that Vaikunth Dham is a place where there is no lawlessness, no inaction. It is believed that people who perform pious deeds go to heaven or Vaikuntha after death. A local priest, Radheshyam narrated about the local beliefs. He said that people believe, “God Mahadev resides on Kailash (Himalaya), God Brahmadev in Brahmaloka. Similarly, the abode of Lord Vishnu is in Vaikuntha. The position of Vaikuntha Loka is stated in three places: on earth, at sea and above heaven. Vaikuntha is also called Vishnuloka and Vaikuntha Sagar. After Lord Krishna, it was also called Goloka. Since Shri Krishna and Vishnu are the same, the abode of Shri Krishna is also called Vaikuntha.”

bank. A rich businessman was travelling in that boat. He was returning to his city after earning a lot of money. All his money was kept in the boat. The merchant got down from the boat and reached the king. Seeing the king worshipping, he asked, O Rajan! Whom are you worshipping with all these people? And what is the benefit of performing this *puja* (ritual)? So, the king told him the glory of Lord Satyanarayana-katha and the benefit of his fast. When the merchant asked the method of observing this fast, he also told him the method of fasting and worship. The king also gave *prasad* to the businessman after hearing the entire story.

Remembering Lord Sri Satyanarayana, the merchant received the *prasad* and returned. He told his wife Lilavati that we do not have any children. King Ulkamukh of Kanakpur has told me that by fasting and listening to the story of Satyanarayana, all wishes would be fulfilled. If we have any child due to God Satyanarayana's grace, I will observe the fast of Satyanarayana. Lilavati became pregnant shortly after the businessman made the determination. In the tenth month, she gave birth to a beautiful girl. The merchant celebrated the birth of a daughter but did not observe the Lord Satyanarayana's fast. When his wife Lilavati asked her husband to observe Lord Sri Satyanarayana's fast, he said there was no hurry and that he was busy in business-related affairs. When my daughter will grow up and get married, I will observe the fast in the name of Lord Satyanarayana. Lilavati became silent on hearing her husband's words. Sixteen years passed and the merchant's daughter Kalavati became young like the moon of Shukla-paksha.

One day, the businessman returned home after earning a lot of money in business and he looked at his daughter who was walking with her friends. The businessman started worrying about her marriage. The merchant sent his servants to distant cities to find a suitable groom for Kalavati. The merchant's servants arrived in the city of Kanchanpur. In that city, the servants saw another rich merchant (Vanik) sitting with his family members. Vanik's son was beautiful and talented. The servants went back and informed his master about the son of that merchant. The businessman was very happy to see that beautiful boy. After sometime, a grand wedding ceremony of Kalavati was held with pomp. The merchant gave a lot of money to the son of Vanik. After Kalavati's marriage, the businessman did not fast for Lord Satyanarayana. Lilavati told her husband, "O Nath! You had decided to observe Lord Satyanarayana on the marriage of Kalavati. Now you should observe fast." Listening to his wife, the businessman said, "I am going for business with my son-in-law right now. On returning from business, I will surely worship Satyanarayana and I would listen to the tale of Satyanarayana." Saying this, the merchant loaded several boats and set out for business with his son-in-law and servants. After sometime, Satyanarayana became enraged by the merchant repeatedly deciding to fast and not fasting again. One day, the merchant arrived in Ratnasarpur with his son-in-law and started doing business. One day some thieves were stealing from the palace. The soldiers were chasing them. The fleeing thieves hid all the stolen money in the merchant's boats to avoid the soldiers. The empty-handed thieves fled comfortably. Chasing the thieves, the soldiers reached the merchant. When they

searched the merchant's boat, they found the stolen money of the king. The soldiers then took the merchant and his son-in-law captive to the king. The king put them both in prison and took all their money.

On the other hand, due to the wrath of Satyanarayana, a mountain of troubles broke on Lilavati. All ingredients and money in his house were stolen, and there was no food left to eat in the house. Disturbed by hunger and thirst, the merchant's daughter Kalavati went to a Brahmin's house. Satyanarayana Lord was being worshiped in that Brahmin's house. He sat there and listened to the tale and took *prasad*. After returning home, Kalavati told the whole thing to her mother Lilavati. Lilavati decided to observe Satyanarayana. The next day Lilavati worshiped Lord Satyanarayana with her family and people around. After the puja, they distributed the *prasad* to everyone. They also received the *prasad* themselves. Lilavati had fasted Lord Sathyanarayana with the desire of her husband and son-in-law to return home. King Chandraketu saw in a dream in which an old man appealed to him, "O Rajan! The businessman and his son-in-law are absolutely innocent. Release both of them as soon as possible." The merchant woke up in the morning and returned all the money because Sathyanarayana appeared in his dream and also warned him that if you don't keep fast, I would destroy all your glory. Saying so, Satyanarayana disappeared.

Moreover, early in the morning, King Chandraketu told his ministers and the regent about the night dream and asked everyone to leave the businessman and his son-in-law. King Chandraketu immediately left him to the businessman and his son-in-law and returned all his money. In that way, the businessman and his son-in-law both happily walked towards their city due to the grace of Satyanarayana.

After sometime, Satyanarayana approached him as a monk with the intention of taking the test of the merchant and asked, O, merchant! What goods are kept in your boats? The businessman thought in his mind that the monk must be asking about the goods with the desire to ask for something. The businessman lied and he said, "My boats are full of leaves." Hearing the false words of the merchant, Satyanarayana got angry and said, "O Vaishya!, whatever you have said will be true. Saying so, the monk Satyanarayana went away and disappeared. On the other hand, the merchant was happy to return to the monk empty-handed, but when the merchant saw the vines and leaves filled in his boats, he started mourning loudly and in his heart, he repented for lying. The weeping businessman fainted. After sometime, when the man regained consciousness, he started mourning again, so his son-in-law said that all this had suddenly happened due to the curse of the monk, so only those *sadhus* could get rid of this misfortune. Listening to the son-in-law, the businessman went in search of the monk. After searching for some time, he saw Satyanarayana. When the businessman apologized for lying at the feet of the monk, God Satyanarayana said, "Oh dear son! You repeatedly asked me to worship Satyanarayana, that is, god, but never worshiped. The merchant then folded his hands and said, "O God, you are going to remove the sufferings of the oppressed." Everyone's wishes are fulfilled.

Forgive this mistake of mine. I will always fast and worship you, please be kind to me. On hearing the merchant's apology, Satyanarayana forgave him. At the same time, the bells and leaves filled in the merchant's boats were converted into money-grains. The merchant, along with his servants, fasted and worshiped Lord Satyanarayana the next day. Distributed the *prasad* to everyone and also received the *prasad* itself. The merchant then proceeded towards his city. Upon reaching his town, the merchant sent a servant to his house. The servant arrives at his house and informs his wife Lilavati. At that time, both Lilavati and Kalavati were worshipping Lord Satyanarayana. On hearing the news of the return of her husband and son-in-law, Lilavati worshiped and received the *prasad* and told Kalavati that daughter, I am going to the river bank. You come and finish the housework. Having said this, Lilavati walked towards the river. But in the joy of meeting Kalavati's husband, she left the house and reached the river bank without accepting the offerings. Satyanarayan God got angry due to not accepting his offerings. He dipped the merchant's boats into the river. Not seeing her husband there, Kalavati started crying loudly. Then the businessman said that the daughter must have made a mistake in you. Because of that mistake, Satyanarayana has given you this punishment. Then the businessman prayed to the God of Satyanarayana that if god has made a mistake in any of his family's men and women, he must forgive him. God heard the prayer of the businessman and a voice from the heavens came: "O son! Your daughter left without receiving my *prasad*. Now, if your daughter returns home after receiving the *prasad*, she will have visions of her husband and submerged boats will also come up. Kalavati did the same. On his return after receiving his offerings, the boats came up the water. The son-in-law also escaped from the river safely. On returning home, the merchant, his family and brothers-in-law worshiped Lord Satyanarayana according to the tradition. All his wishes (health, wealth, beautiful wife, etc.) were fulfilled. He lived happily and finally went to Vishnulok (haven).

To sum up, the Satyanarayan-puja is a religious ritual which is dedicated to the Hindu God Vishnu. The puja is described in the Skand Purana, a religious (Sanskrit) text. The local priests narrate the Satyanarayana Katha (tale), which dictates the many worldly and spiritual profits. The Satyanarayana Katha states how the deity Satyanarayana vows to assistance his devotees during 'Kali Yuga,'¹¹⁶ the last of the four ages in Hindu cosmology, in particular the performers and attendees of the Satyanarayana Puja. The tale narrates that the performance of the Narayana puja is in itself an assurance to God, and verifications the plights of characters who either fail to complete the puja or forget their promises. There is also a very clear connection between the community feast and the above tales because each organizer listens to the story of

¹¹⁶In Hinduism, it is believed that there are four world ages. The present age is called 'kali yuga', which is considered the worst of the four yugas in a Yuga Cycle, preceded by Dvapara Yuga and followed by the next cycle's Satya Yuga. It is believed to be the present age, which is full of conflict and sin.

Satyanarayana before departing to various shrine places as well as on the day of the feast. The storytelling is popularly known as the ‘*satyanarayan-katha*’ or the *Satyanarayanpuja* in the Hindi belt.

Coloured Rice and its Connection with Community Feast

A day before departing to various shrine places, the aspirants of the community feast listen to the Lord Narayan-*katha*. Often, any local priest narrates the story of Satyanarayana for them, and the main purpose of listening to the story is to invoke the forefathers and get rid of the obstacles coming in the way. The local priest pours turmeric in uncooked rice, which is called *akshat*¹¹⁷ in local slang. While highlighting the importance of colored rice, Ghildiyal (2015) writes, “Not only is rice important as food, it is also undeniable integral to Indian religious ceremonies and our social framework. Present in most prayer rituals, served to god and devotees alike, more or less every regional food culture in India counts rice as important.” *Akshata* is a Hindi word, which means no damage, i.e., ‘complete’. It is believed that only clean and pure things are offered to god. Because rice remains closed inside the paddy, there is no possibility of being raised by animals and birds. *Akshat* is also used in many rituals and people through it everywhere, including inside the rooms and on the roof, because it is believed that demons flee from *akshata*, and the local priest asks the devotees to keep some *akshat* in the fists and blesses the devotees to gain a lot of prosperity in life.

In other words, *akshata* means that no damage has taken place, that is, complete. The whole rice used in worship is called *akshat* (Hanchett and Regelson, 1988). Geeta Devi (a devotee) says, “*Akshat* is a symbol of wholeness, that is why it is used prominently in all rituals for worship. The intention of offering *akshat* in worship is that our worship should be completed like *akshat*.” She further says, “Due to the superior in food, while offering it to god, there is a feeling that whatever we get is obtained only by the grace of god. Therefore, this feeling should also remain in us.” Rajendra Kumar (a peasant) says, “The white colour or *akshat* is considered as a cultural symbol of peace. That is why *akshat* is an essential material in worship.” It is found that devotees make *sankalp* (promise) with some *akshat* in the fists by saying: ‘O Lord! Whatever we have received, we offer it to you and may your grace be with me.’

¹¹⁷ It keeps important place in all ritual activities. It is used as a symbol of prosperity.

The aspirants of the community feast visit door-to-door in their native village with intact yellow rice before departing from their native place to a few shrine places. The yellow rice is thrown on the roof, ways, and in every room of the local inhabitants. The devotees also go to the local burial ground to throw *akshat*. The local people of the village also donate their money according to their financial condition. The villagers go along with the devotees to see them off till the outside of the village. While visiting the village, there are also people with the drum, harmonium¹¹⁸, and flute. They play their instruments to the tune of devotional songs.

Shrines and Aspirants of Community Feast

The aspirants of the community feast have been called '*pindadani*' during their religious journey for fourteen days. After departing from their native village, first, these *pindadani* perform a few rites at Bharatkund (Ayodhya) and a *tripindi-shraddha* at *pishach-mochal* (Varanasi) with the help of any local *panda*. Every *panda* takes, on an average, five hundred rupees to five thousand rupees as a convenience fee from these *pindadani*. If someone cannot pay (five hundred rupees), the *mathadhish* (main priest) does not bless such devotees¹¹⁹. If any devotee pays more than five thousand rupees, such devotee would be treated as VIP (Prasad, 2019). A separate arrangement with an air condition room is provided to such a VIP devotee. For ordinary people (poor or average income group), the *pinddan* is performed in an open place near any big tree. It is found that the majority of devotees perform *pindadan* in a group at various locations. The members in such a group can be from eleven to twenty-one or more.

The Concept of 'Shubh Muhurta': Time and Space

The full moon of *bhadrapada*¹²⁰ in the Hindu calendar and the time from *pratipada*¹²¹ to *amavasya*¹²² of the *krishna-paksha*¹²³ of *ashwin* (the seventh month of the 'lunisolar Hindu

¹¹⁸ A keyboard instrument in which the notes are produced by air driven through metal reeds by foot-operated bellows.

¹¹⁹ When I asked this question to a local *panda*, his responded, "The *pandas* are maligned. We accept what people give to us with faith but we ask more money only from rich people."

¹²⁰ It is a month of the Hindu calendar that corresponds to August/September in the Gregorian calendar.

¹²¹ The first date of the Hindu calendar is called *Pratipada*. This date comes twice in a month: after the full moon and new moon. *Pratipada* coming after full moon is called *Pratipada* of *Krishna Paksha* and *Pratipada* after *Amavasya* is called *Pratipada* of *Shukla Paksha*.

¹²² A lunar month in the Hindu calendar has two fortnights (so-called *Krishna-paksha* [15days] and *shukl-paksha* [15days]), and begins with the New moon, (*Amavasya*).

calendar') month is called *pitru-paksha*,¹²⁴ and *pitru-paksha* is considered the best time to perform various rites related to *pitra-visharjan* (farewell of the forefather). It is considered to be very special for the aspirant of community feast because there is particular importance of *shraddha* or *pinddan* in the *krishna-paksha* of *ashwin* month, which is also considered 'shubh-muhurta' (good time) by *pindadani*. It is believed that if someone offers *pindadan* during the *krishna-paksha* of *ashwin* month, the *atma* (soul) of their forefather and ancestors get *moksha* (salvation). There is a widespread belief in the villagers that the ancestors also get *devaloka* (heaven) after performing the *shraddha* or *pindadan* at the altars of Vishnupad temple and doing *panchkos parikarma* and the *tarpan* at the bank of Phalgu River. Apart from this, it is also believed if one does not go to Gaya (Bihar) to perform *shraddha*, neither his ancestors get salvation, nor the *pindadani* get salvation from *pitru-rina*¹²⁵ (parental debts). Therefore, each aspirant of the community feast visits various shrines before organizing the community feast.

After performing a few rites at Bharatkund, *pindadani* go to Varanasi to perform *tripindi-shraddha* (a special rite related to unnatural death). It is performed on the altar of *pishach-mochan-kunda* in the Varanasi district of Uttar Pradesh. The *pishach-mochan-kunda* is the only place in India where 'tripindi shradh' is performed. The main goal of this rite is to protect oneself from the *pret-badha* (phantom barrier) and liberate the souls of the ancestors who died due to an accident.

After a long conversation with a devotee, namely Ram Kali, who performed *pindadan* at *pishach-mochan-kund* (Varanasi), some facts emerged. She said, "I visited a few shrines with my husband and other fifteen members of the group. During the *pitrapaksha* (stay period), the local *panda*¹²⁶ and other priests used to call us (my group) with different names like 'pinddan-karta', 'pinddani', 'shraddhalu', 'karmkandi', 'pinddata', etc. We visited together a few sacred places like Prayagraj, Ayodhya, Varanasi, Puri, Pushkar, etc." When I asked about other details about

¹²³The part between *Poornima* and *Amavasya* is called *Krishna Paksha* (a sum of 15 days). The day of *Purnima Tithi* starts from the next day, *Krishna Paksha*, which lasts for 15 days till the arrival of *Amavasya Tithi*.

¹²⁴*Pitru-Paksha* is a 16-lunar day period in Hindu calendar when Hindus pay homage to their ancestor, especially through food offerings. The period is also known as *Pitr-Paksha*, *Pitri Pokkho*, *Sorah Shraddha*, *Kanagat*, *Jitiya*, *Mahalaya Paksha* and *Apara Paksha* (Vidyarathi, 1978; Underhill, 2001).

¹²⁵It is believed that *pitru-rina* or ancestors *rina* are one of the unknown forces that cause troubles and obstacles in life. Aniruddha Joshi (2021) writes that an elaborate theory of *panch rina* (debts) was developed in classical Hindu literature. These *rinās* were classified into three categories: (a) *Deva rina*, (b) *Pitru rina*, and (c) *Rishi rina*.

¹²⁶These *pandas* hail from different but similar caste background, for instance, *Maha Bhabhan* in Uttar Pradesh, *Mahapatra* or *Das* in Odisha, *Kantha Brahman* in Bihar, etc.

daily routine (during *pitra-paksha*), his husband Ram Adhar told, “We offer water and other eatable ingredients collectively with *shraddha* (wholeheartedly) to the forefather or departed soul. Especially, we also perform twelve kinds of *shraddha* under the guidance of Gayapal¹²⁷ during *pitra-paksha*.”

Another respondent, Gaya Prasad Yadav, who also performed those rituals, told, “Everyday, we used to perform *shraddha* or *pindadan* at different places. These rituals performances can be named as *shurdhyarth*, *nitya*, *neimitik*, *vridhhi*, *kaamyas*, *sapindan*, *goshtth*, *paarvann*, *deivik*, *karmaang*, *saanvatsarik* and *oupcharik-shraddha* or *pindadan*.”

Chandar Jaisawal (a farmer) said, “It is believed that before pleasing the gods, a man should worship his ancestors because gods are pleased with the worship of ancestors. That is why *shraddha* rite is performed before holding any community feast.” In this regard, Surendra Yadav (elected member of village panchayat) narrated, “The remembrance or honor is bestowed through *shraddha* or *pinddan* especially to forefather or ancestors including father-*kul* (clan), mother-*kul*, *gurukul* (teacher), family servants, etc.”

It is clear from the above-detailed descriptions that the idea of *shraddha* is linked to the notion of ‘honoring’ and ‘feeding’ the ancestors. It appears that the idea of performing such rituals also has a close association with the ambition of an obstacle-free, better future. It means that to create a better future, healthy and wealthy life, one remembers his/her past (forefathers or ancestors).

Intents of Doing *Shraddha*

Three types of *shraddhas* are predominantly prevalent and performed in rural areas for different purposes. The first is called ‘*nitya-shraddha*,’ is performed on the date of the death of the deceased. Almost everyone performs this *shraddha* rite. The second type of *shraddha*, popularly known as ‘*naimittik shraddha*,’ is performed on a particularly auspicious day. The third type is called ‘*kamyas*-*shraddha*.’ There is a belief that a person who asks for something from their ancestors and later on gets the desired objects or wishes like ‘good job’, ‘wealth’, ‘good health’, the person happily goes out to buy clothes and other ingredients to perform *kamyas-shraddha*.

¹²⁷ Gayapal means here those who were actively devoted to ritual activities, for instance, Pujari, Karmkandi, Ghatias (Gangaputra), Panda etc.

With the help of the *panda* (in a few cases, the *panda* keeps genealogical records¹²⁸), those devotees perform various rituals according to the *panda*'s assertion at different religious places like Gaya, Bharat-Kund, Prayagraj, Varanasi, etc.

In addition, a local Gayavar (a professional person who motivates others to perform *shraddha*), namely Radhe Mohan Chaube said, "I visit a village daily and motivate the head of the families to do their religious duties. The religious duties mean to pay the *pitru rina*." I conducted a focus group discussion and found a few similar narratives. On the one hand, most of the respondents pointed out the desire to attain salvation and get rid of *pitradosha* are major motives behind such beliefs. On the other hand, a few think that one goes Gaya to show gratitude to the ancestors after receiving worldly life's desired motives. It appears that the idea of cultural values also motivates them to visit religious places. Most of the respondents feel that feeling satisfaction and realizing freedom from worldly liability can be the primary intent to perform *shraddha*. At the same time, a few of them disapprove of the above thoughts and say that socio-political ambitions are an essential factor to perform such a rite. However, there is one set of respondents who reject whole idea of *pindadan* and *biradari bhoj* and they believe that these all are '*dhakosla*' (deception).

Role of Gayawar in *Shraddha*

Gayawar is a professional person and he has a close relationship with the elites (economically sound) of society in rural areas. He travels from village to village throughout the year. The main objective is to prepare or motivate such people who are economically competent. Such professional *gayawar* has had access from five to ten-gram-sabhas and spends his time throughout the year looking for customers. Every year a *gayawar* gets at least fifty to hundred people going to Gaya and receives a hefty income. First, he hires a bus in *pitru-paksha* and asks his folks (who are interested in going to Gaya) to meet at Bharatkund (Ayodhya). It is found that *gayawar*'s commission or share is fixed in the temples where the fellow travellers perform various rituals. In this regard, Hansraj said, "A Gayawar takes his commissions from bus-owner, *pandas*, priests of the temple and local shop owner per head." Let's analyze the social strata among the people who are engaged in such ritual activities. We can find that a *gayawar* can be

¹²⁸See for more details-Outlook new scroll, 200-year-old records in Gaya help families trace their ancestors. Retrieved on 19/03/2021 from <https://www.outlookindia.com/newscroll/200yearold-records-in-gaya-help-families-trace-their-ancestors/1619355>

placed at the bottom of the social hierarchy while *amathadhisof* any monastery is considered at the highest level.

Moreover, the *pindadanis* (in groups) visit several small religious places under the leadership of *gayawar*, and finally depart to Gaya. They get support from many other people (Brahmins), who actively devote themselves to *shraddha-karma* for rituals. These devoted *karmkandi* Brahmin (who perform rituals) are known by many names: such as *pujari* (priests), *karmkandi*, *ghatias* (Gangaputra), *pandas* (for other valleys), *bhadasara* (pilgrim-hunters), *yatravals* (they pick up pilgrims near *vishwanath-gali*), *gumashtas* (to the care of pilgrims), *kathavachak* (speaker of the religious tale), *tirtha-purohit*, *kirtania* (sing devotional songs), *kirithanani* (special to perform rituals in the Devi temple), *mahapatra* (they perform during death-rites or *shraadh-sanskara*) etc. The above classified professional ritualistic-*pandit* perform many rituals at various famous altars (places of worship) such as *vishnupad* temple, *brahmayoni* festival, *shaktipeeth mahamaya mangala gauri*, *maheshwar* temple, *madhukulya* etc. for devotees. Due to the division of work among these Brahmins, the possibility of conflict is negligible.

Vishnupada Temple and its Connection with the Community Feast

The *vishnupada* Temple of Gaya is one of the oldest temples in India. It is dedicated to Vishnu, a Hindu deity. The Vishnupada temple is very popular among aspirants of community feast because each aspirant visits the Vishnupada temple before celebrating the community feast. This religious site is situated on the banks of the river Phalgu. It is believed that the footprints of Vishnu are present here, which is known as *dharamshila*. It has a footprint of forty centimeters and is bounded by a silver bowl. This mark is prepared on a piece of basalt. According to local religious beliefs, 'this designation belongs to the time when Lord Vishnu stepped on the chest of *gaiasura* (a demon) and pushed it into the earth.' The Indore Maharani Ahilyabai Holkar built its present structure in 1787 AD (Srivastava, 2016).

If we look at the *vishnupad* temple in the mirror of architecture, we can see that a symbol of footprints is built around it. The footprints symbol is located at the centre of the temple. The height of the temple is about thirty meters, while inside, there are eight rows of beautifully carved pillars, which provide support to the pavilion. The temple is built of massive granite stone with an iron breadth. The main gate of this temple faces east and has an existing pyramid-shaped

tower whose height is approximately one hundred feet. There are a gold flag and *kalasha* (a silver or gold pot with a large base and small-mouth), which is situated on the top of the temple.

Genealogical Records of Clients

The large numbers of Hindu believers across India and other countries gather to perform *shraddh karma* at *vishnupad* temple of Gaya. The *shraddh karma* is performed at the hands of the traditional *panda*. Pandas are also known as Gayawal. As a result of talking to many respondents, it is known that the *panda* or *tirtha*-priests in Gaya serve their people from different districts in different states, and this religious trade has been going on traditionally from one generation to another generation. People write the names of their family members, ancestors etc. on the register of the Gayawal (*tirtha-purohit*) and perform their *shraddha* Karma, for which the devotees (according to their socio-economic status) have to pay a hefty amount. Aniruddha Kumar Jha (53-year old), ‘a *panda* (genealogist) in Haridwar who has maintained hand-written record of thousands of Hindu families from across India for 35 years in Devangiri, has decided to preserve them digitally. Even today, he meticulously jots down data in 300-year-old ledgers without any help of computer’ (Kapoor, 2016).

***Brahma Bhoj* and ‘*Sufal*’**

After finishing the entire rituals during the *pitru paksha*, the group (who went together with Gayawal) organizes a *brahma bhoj*¹²⁹ (feast for Brahmin) in Gaya. With the hope of receiving bless from the *pitra* (forefather), they serve food 21 or 51 *kantha* or *mahapatra Brahmin*. There is a famous tale in the study area about feeding the Brahmin, which is worth describing here:

‘The famous *danavir*-warrior and kind wholehearted character of Mahabharata text named Karna donated a lot of material wealth as a donation to the poor and the poor-Brahmin, but he had never given them food. When Karna departed to heaven after his death, he was offered many riches and immense material comforts, but he did not get any food in heaven. He understood the reason for this and prayed to Yamraj to return to earth for a fortnight to donate food to the Brahmins and the needy. These fourteen days have been known as *pitrupaksha* and are considered an auspicious time for giving donations to Brahmins. When

¹²⁹ See also about Brahm Bhoj. Retrieved on 19/03/2021 from https://onlineprasad.com/products/brahmanbhoj-bodh_gaya

Karna returned to heaven again, he was welcomed with plenty of food.’ The moral of the story attracts our attention to the importance of feeding the Brahmins.

According to local beliefs, the devotees meet their *pandas* and request them to give ‘*prasad*’ and renounce ‘*sufal*’ (successful) to get the *pandas* and the main priest’s blessing. It means the intents of devotees or the deed (*shraddha*) has been done successfully. If the *pandas* have received their ‘*dakshina*’ (fees), he speaks in loud voice ‘*sufal*’ in front of the pilgrims and gives blessing to the devotees¹³⁰. However, some economic motives are hidden behind the idea of ‘*sufal*’. For example, if a devotee is unable or does not want to give the requisite money to the *panda*, the *panda* does not call the ‘*sufal*’. The *pandas* refuse sometimes to bless the devotees too. That is why the *panda* in Gaya first wants to know ‘what is the socio-economic status of a common man.’ Some *pandas* already keep their fees on the notice board. The fee for ritual performance per person ranges from five hundred rupees to twenty-five thousand rupees. In return, these *pandas* provide some basic facilities like ordinary food for fourteen days and they also provide shelter as per requirement.

‘*Sufal*’ and Brahminical Supremacy

Interestingly, after performing various rituals at a few religious places and getting the blessing and *sufal* (acknowledgment) of a priest¹³¹, the devotees go back to their homes. The day they reach their homes, they listen once again ‘*satyanaran-katha*’ and ‘*bhagwatpuran katha*’¹³². As per their economic condition, a grand feast is given after a short interval. The devotees (who returned from Gaya) organize *bhoj*, which is also a sign of ‘*sufal*’ (successful completion) in worldly life. It means the ritual performance (by someone) can get social legitimacy after getting blessed by Brahmin¹³³ and celebrating the *bhoj*. This feast is celebrated by believers (who

¹³⁰It means that the purpose has been accomplished. However, it is essential to make clear here the above-pointed rites are also linked with oral history, which makes someone liable to perform community feast.

¹³¹E.A.H Blunt in his book *The Caste System of Northern India*(1931) spends an entire chapter on how castes governed themselves in everyday lives. Based on the U.P. Census Report of 1911, he describes the functions and forms of punishments and rewards. Blunt points out that feeding the brahmin or paying him a fine or gifting him a calf were common forms of punishments among non-brahmins. Gifting the cow and other materials were also common forms of acknowledgement to appease Brahmins.

¹³²The text of Bhagavata Purana, like other puranas, discusses a wide range of topics including cosmology, astronomy, genealogy, geography, legend, music, dance, yoga and culture.

¹³³The idea of getting blessed shows Brahminical supremacy, which have a long legacy. In this regard, Donald (2019) writes that the presence of Brahmin had been everywhere, for instance, if your wife has a bad reputation - feed a brahmin; if you are a cow-killer - gift a calf to a brahmin; if you have disgraced your caste by begging - pay the brahmin a fine; if you have killed a dog or a cat - take a bath in the Ganges and feed a few brahmins; if you

believe in the philosophy of Hinduism) from all sections of Hindu society as an obligatory (assumed) rite in the Hindi speaking belt, but the recent trends show that Yadavs are more involved (in such socio-cultural practices) than other castes.

To sum up, ancestor worship, *shraddha*, community feast, etc., are the symbol of Brahminism and have been popularly followed among the upper and middle castes. A large part of the rural masses, however, have been following rituals for decades. On the one hand, rural families spend a more significant amount of their earnings on these rituals. Resultantly, their children are deprived of higher education and continue to live in the vicious circle of poverty. On the other hand, many low-income families take loans to perform these rituals as part of their daily lives, and the socio-economic status of such families becomes very bad in the long term. Upon visiting a few places in the surrounding rural areas, it was found that these rituals hold a deep influence on Dalit-backward castes and women.

Symbolic Participation: Supremacy of Brahmins in Commensality

I have pointed above that the cultural meaning of the word '*bhoj*' was perceived as 'feeding the dead,' and it was not only an abstract doctrine of Hinduism, but it is also practiced among the followers wholeheartedly. It is equally significant to comprehend that there was socio-political dominance of Brahmins in the public domain. They were protected by many princely states and enjoyed their caste status as "native spokesmen" (Kolenda, 2006; Khare, 2006). In this regard, Donald Shobhana (2019) writes that 'the Brahmin emerges not only as of the most 'unpunished entity' but also as the 'protected entity' in the caste structure. On 17th January 1809, for instance, one is recapped of the British Governor's letter to his army to provide war-time immunity to poor Brahmin settlements and their religious establishments in Travancore.'

In the present context, we can see that Brahmins had been an important legitimate figure whose participation in such commensality was obligatory. A few organizers of *bhoj* informed me that without the participation of Brahmins, these commensal practices could not be considered '*sufal*'. If we examine the numbers of the involvement of Brahmin in each *bhoj*, most of the respondents confirmed that approximately five hundred people from Brahmin community (like

have breached commensal laws - feed your brethren and the brahmins. He (2019) points out, "The seeming disjuncture between the 'crime' and the 'punishment' can be resolved once we recognize how central the brahmin, the priestly governing class, has been to the everyday practice of castes and Hinduism."

Dubey, Tiwari, Bhatt, Gosai, Pathak) had been participating until the 1990s. Therefore, such commensal practices were also known as *Brahman bhoj*. Before going into the patterns of the commensal relation among Yadavs, it is important to understand how there had been a monopoly of Brahmin on commensality in rural areas because the Indian caste system represents a clear division of labour based on birth rights justified by moral and religious texts (Nigosian, 2000: 136). The Brahmins held the most powerful position in Hindu society. They were priests; otherwise, a few of them were also known as society's spiritual leaders. As per the tradition, they devoted their time to studying, teaching, performing sacrifices, and officiating religious services" (Ibid: 136-37).

According to local belief, the word Brahmin translates to 'Brahmin Devta' (supreme self) or the first of the gods. A respondent, Shiv Baran narrated, "The devotees (who perform *shraddha*) also felt that 'good Brahmins'¹³⁴ had the power to facilitate between human beings and ancestors as well as between mortal world and *pitru-loka*¹³⁵." It appears that the above-pointed beliefs are still very common in the study area. Therefore, the notion of *bhoj* was also known as *brahmin bhoj*. Ram Baran further said, "The word Brahmin is used as synonym with Brahman (one who knows God), which is understood as magical force (divine soul)." I noticed that if a low or middle-ranking caste person sees any Brahmin; the person would greet the Brahmin by saying "*paa-laagi 'maharaj'*" (touching your feet), and the Brahmin would reply '*khush raho*' or '*aashirvad*' (be happy or god bless you). Such belief shows that people give a special symbolic status to a person from Brahmin in their daily life. It appears that the people of this community get acceptance of a divine social status (assumed) by birth in rural areas. Most priests who perform marriage rituals are from the Pathak or Tiwari caste (a sub-caste of the Brahmin community), while death rituals are performed by Mahapatra or Kantka Brahmins.

Similarly, it would be worth pointing a popular Sanskrit word, "*aham brahmasmi*", which gives a concrete reflection about the above pointed traditional beliefs. Arushi Lohia (2018) writes that the term '*aham brahmasmi*' drives from the Sanskrit, *aaham*, meaning "I" and *brahma*, meaning 'sacred' or 'divine'. Brahma is considered a Hindu creator god, and the word *asmi* translates to

¹³⁴The popular notion is that a good characters person from Brahmin community and who follow '*satvik*' ideology can be called 'good Brahmin'.

¹³⁵ According to local belief, the *Pitru-loka* is the place of forefather and it is situated between heaven and earth. It is the place where a person goes after the death.

“I am.” In other words, *aham brahmasmi* is a concept that is used in yoga philosophy to describe the unity and consciousness of the *atman* (individual self or soul) with *brahman* (the Absolute). The local cultural meaning of ‘*Aham Brahmasmi*’ is that ‘I am divine soul because I know *Vedas*¹³⁶ or Brahman’. Now, the words ‘*Aham Brahmasmi*’ are typically translated as “I am Brahman”, which has become synonyms of Brahmin caste to some extent. It is found that many sub-castes of the Brahmin community follow surnames like Dwivedi (one who has read two Vedas), Trivedi (one who has read three Vedas), Chaturvedi (one who has read four Vedas), etc. Let's examine the meaning of their surnames which are closely associated with Hindu scriptures. We can find that such caste titles also give a glimpse of multiple caste hierarchies among themselves. At present, these caste titles have received the expected social acceptance.

Moreover, in the study area, Dwivedi, Trivedi, Chaturvedi, etc., sub-castes are considered higher in socio-cultural status than non-Brahmin castes. For example, it is assumed that the caste title, Dwivedi, can be referred as an ethnic group who have studied and have profound knowledge of two Vedas. Similarly, Trivedi and Chaturvedi mean such sub-caste groups, which have knowledge of three and four Vedas. These sub-castes also get an invitation for *brahm bhoj*. It appears that ‘*Satya Narayan Katha*’¹³⁷ (oral tales) give social legitimacy and emotional touch to their caste identity.

Litterateurs often say that literature is a mirror of society because literature is closely associated with the feeling, thought, perception and experiences of the societies. The supremacy of Brahmins in Indian literature has been received much attention. A stanza of a famous Hindi poet Tulsi Das would be significant to point here. Tulsi Das writes, “*pujahin vipra sakal gun heena, shudra na gun-gan gyan praveena*” (One should worship an unskilled or poor Brahmin, but not

¹³⁶The *Vedas* are the religious texts which inform the religion of Hinduism. The *Vedas*, meaning “knowledge”, are the oldest texts of Hinduism. They are derived from the ancient Indo-Aryan culture of the Indian Subcontinent and began as an oral tradition that was passed down through generations before finally being written in *Vedic* Sanskrit between 1500 and 1200 BCE (Before Common Era). In other words, *Veda*, (Sanskrit: “Knowledge”) a collection of poems or hymns composed in archaic Sanskrit by Indo-European-speaking peoples who lived in northwest India during the 2nd millennium BCE. No definite date can be ascribed to the composition of the *Vedas*, but the period of about 1500–1200 BCE is acceptable to most scholars (Doniger, 2004).

¹³⁷*Satyanarayan ki katha* are a collection of tales which are narrated by local priest after religious worship of the Hindu god Vishnu. Satya means “truth” and narayana means, “The highest being” so Satyanarayan means “The highest being who is an embodiment of Truth”. It is found that people listen these tales to get success in business or career growth; during social functions like marriages, house-warming ceremonies, naming of the children, after returning from Gaya and so on.

skilled Shudra)¹³⁸. Many other poets like Kabir Das, Malkhan Singh, Jay Prakash Kardam, Om Prakash Balmiki, Sushila Takbhaure, Dayanant Batohi, etc., have written many poems on the dominance of Brahmin in the socio-political and cultural domain. The stanza of Tulsi Das reflects the importance of Brahmin in the public domain. Ram Asare Yadav of Tandawa village told me, “Years back, the organizers of the *bhoj* used to wash the feet of Brahmins before serving them food. The organizers also gave them money (fifty-one rupees or more) and utensils to each one as per their economic status.”

Social Mobility and the Idea of Commensality

A few scholars, namely K.C. Yadav, Christophe Jaffrelot, M.S.A. Rao, Lucia Michelutti, etc., pointed out that the upper castes’ dominance has been challenged after the emergence of local parties like Samajwadi Party, Apna Dal and Bahujan Samajwadi Party in Uttar Pradesh. It is found that the idea of obligatory participation and inviting more people from Brahmin community in *bhoj* were demeaned too at the village level, and an alternative option of commensality could be developed successfully after the 1990s.

The present section is significant to understand the grassroots social realities. I have described below how local politics and commensality are inter-connected with each other. This would give an opportunity to understand how the idea of building inter-caste and intra-community relations are significant in democracy. It appears that the commensal practices still keep a significant impact on intra/inter-caste relations because the new generations of the Yadav community actively participate in such feast. On the one hand, a few respondents also narrated that old-age people take it as an obligatory rite and actively participate with a desire to get *moksha* and ‘*punya*’ (virtue). On the other hand, the new generations participate with the intention to meet the larger community members and build a social network. The young generation used it as a social platform by which they want to get political recognition. If we examine this rite as a social platform or ‘public share’, it can be seen that this is one of the public arrangements where local Yadavs get-together in large numbers in organized way despite their different political affiliation and class backgrounds. However, there are also a few other social platforms (like Nandmahar

¹³⁸ See for more detail- Social consciousness of Tulsi Das. Retrieved on 20/03/2021 from <http://bhaktikal.blogspot.com/>

fair, Krishna *janamstami*, *dadhikando* celebration, etc.) where Yadav community actively participates widely.

Biradari Bhoj: Mapping its Meanings

The tradition of *bhoj* (feeding the dead) or *brahman bhoj* (feeding the Brahmin) is still followed as *biradari bhoj* (community feast) in Eastern Uttar Pradesh. The word *biradari* is a patriarchal expression for the cognate or clan-based system. The word *biradari* originated from the Persian word *baradar*, meaning ‘brother’ (Parvez, 2015). The word is also used for a group of castes or a community who can keep commensal and marital relations in Eastern Uttar Pradesh. Chowdhry (2004) writes, “The term *biradari* is variously defined according to usage.” It appears that the word *biradari* gives an emotional and emphatic touch to an ethnic group or cognate sub-castes. A well-known anthropologist, McKim Marriott (1962: 265) writes that ‘the word *biradari* may refer to not just one concrete structural unit at any local area but rather to real, patrilineal connection, putative or fictional, at any level of sub-division’.

The word *biradari* is being used in Hindi with the meaning of ‘*bi*’ (special) and ‘*aadar*’ (respect) to ‘such an ethnic group who show a sense of blood relation mutually. ‘The word also denotes the agnatic kin who form the *biradari* (Das, 1976: 265). According to Prem Chowdhry, “In the context of a caste group, a *biradari* is a social group made up of males who believe they are descended from a common male ancestor, which makes them equal and ‘brother’. In the context of the village, *biradari* refers to the entire village, overriding differences of caste, class and creed. Territorially, this may extend from a single village to a group of villages.” That means such an ethnic group or ‘cognate sub-castes’ who are knotted by kinship relationship can be called ‘*biradari*.’ The words *biradari* and *samaj* (society) are used synonymously among Yadavs in Eastern Uttar Pradesh.

The word *bhoj* is very close to the English words commensality and community feast. As I have pointed above, the cultural meaning of word ‘*bhoj*’ was ‘feeding the dead/ancestor’ or feeding the Brahmins. But now, people perceive the meaning of *bhoj* as a community feast or commensality. Broadly, the term ‘*bhoj*’ can be used for such organized commensal pattern which has a significant impact in rural areas. It creates and reinforces social relations widely.

Caste and Commensality

It appears that commensality is a universal phenomenon. Eating is, in all cultures, social activity, and commensality undeniably is one of the most significant articulations of human society (Fischler 2011: 529). It creates a space to make interaction and build social reciprocity. It also gives a social space to the people who are from different socio-political backgrounds. Meanwhile, it also restricts to make frequent connect with others.

In the context of caste and commensality, the work of Ketkar would be significant to address here. Ketkar (1971) pointed out that ‘the restriction of inter-caste feast’ was a responsible factor for the continued existence of caste hierarchies and gap between two castes. He analyzed the social order of multiple caste hierarchies, which ran by the idea of ‘*hukka-pani band*’ (social taboos, prohibitions). These prohibitions were mended to maintain the intensity of intra-caste relations. The intensity of social relation and closeness could be mapped out by observing which castes can touch your children and who is allowed for smoking from your pipe (but not the same mouth piece). Similarly, who is allowed to touch your brass utensils? In case of community feast, Brahmins often participate in the *pakki* (fried)¹³⁹ and remaining other castes participate in the *kachchi* (boiled)¹⁴⁰ as well as in the *pakki* feast.

The ideas of *kachchi* and *pakki* commensality have also some symbolic values. For instance, if someone is from same social strata, he/she would be invited for *kachchi* while the idea of *pakki* commensality gives a bigger opportunity to invite without examining the social background.

The symbolic values are major indicators in rural areas about the intensity of relation and social acceptance. It is found that local villagers, kin and relatives notice carefully who are participating and who are not willing to participate in the *biradari bhoj*. Those attending the feast can be said that they do not have any grievances with the social conduct of the organizers of the community feast whereas, for the families not receiving the invitation card from the organizer, we can say that there are serious grievances or social distance between organizers and those families. In such

¹³⁹There are two types of commensal patterns: *kachchi* and *pakki*. *Pakki* may refer to such ceremony in which fried food is served. It is considered pure. Anyone can participate including Brahmin community.

¹⁴⁰*Kachchi* may refer to such ceremony in which same strata people can participate.

a case, if both families are from the Yadav community, a meeting of the local *chaudharis* (heads of caste) is called to sort out the issue.

Constituent of *Biradari Bhoj*

‘*Biradari bhoj*’ is a feast that can be dedicated to a community and ancestors. It also gives a chance to those community members who do not usually get chance to meet as they belong to different villages. This grand community feast offers them an opportunity to meet up. Haridatt Yadav, an inhabitant of Tandawa village, said, “*Biradari bhoj* gives a social space where one gets an opportunity to meet and discuss a range of issues with the community members from the different socio-political background.” A few respondents feel that if someone gets a good job and earns enough money, the local community members expect from the person to organize the *biradari bhoj*. Similarly, it appears that the well-off families show their socio-economic status with this expensive feast. For instance, if anyone does not have financial problems, the person would distribute more invitation (more than five thousands) and try to hire popular *birha*-folksingers¹⁴¹ like Om Prakash Singh Yadav, Vijay Yadav, Madhav Ram Yadav and Priti Pal for entertainment. The *birha*-folksinger narrates some story in poetic form and entertains the participants of the community feast.

Scheduling the Community Feast

The rural area is dominated primarily by agriculture as well as other related occupations like fishery, dairy-activities, etc. Almost two-thirds of the populations (Yadav community) are involved in agriculture and husbandry activities like milk production and selling. It appears that after threshing the wheat crop, most of the people in the rural area feel free (from May to June every year). Therefore, the aspirants of *biradari bhoj* also fix the date for this community feast between May and June because each organizer expects more numbers of participation in the community feast. Due to the more significant number of participants, this community feast is also known as ‘*mela*’ (a big fair). It was found in those community feasts, which were organized in the month of November-December, the community member turned lesser than expected. The idea of *biradari bhoj* is used as a social platform by which the people from neighbouring villages build social relations and a consolidated caste network with their ‘*biradari*’ (community

¹⁴¹ A few popular singers - Hirala Yadav, Bijay Lal Yadav, Om Prakash S. Yadav, Ram Kailash, Lalji Lahri, Ram Kailash Yadav, Bal Chandra Yadav, Gyan Kishan Lal Yadav, etc. can be named.

members). The *biradari bhoj* also unearths a few different social realities. For example, one can see that many people have very limited resources, but they still want to organize this community feast. A few of them organize this feast because they prioritize traditional norms and cultural practices in daily life. A resident of Tandawa, namely D.P. Yadav opines, “*Biradari bhoj* is an extra burden for an aspirant of low-income family background and it leads them into extreme poverty...Their children remain illiterate and work as unskilled labour.” He further said, “Illiteracy seems to be a significant factor behind celebrating this feast because, without proper education, one cannot move from his/her traditional beliefs”.

In many cases, the organizers of these villages can still not provide quality education to their children. Due to a lack of quality education, their children still face many adversities in life. It is found that the newly rich people tend more to celebrate the *biradari bhoj*.

Embedded Traditional Values

The community feast is celebrated for two days with the help of a few heads of Yadav community¹⁴². The first day is called ‘*kachchi*’ (boiled food) and the second day is called ‘*pakki*’¹⁴³ (fried food). Thus, the concepts of *kachchi* and *pakki* have been losing its traditional and cultural meanings because both days, the same food items are cooked and served at present. If we examine the social situation of the 1990s, we can still find many restrictions in commensality. Those social restrictions differed from caste to caste. In this regard, Ram Kirat (ex-elected member of Kithava village panchayat) said, “The caste members decided two things. First, it was fixed who can take food from whom, and second what sort of food one can take.” A few other respondents also narrated similarly that the food items were mainly divided into *kachcha* (boiled food) and *pakka* (fried food). In terms of identification, a local *chaudhari*, Chhedilal Yadav said, “In *kaccha* food, water could be added while in *pakka* food, ghee could be added only; for example, sugar, *puri* and pumpkin vegetables were considered to be *pukka* food while bread, pulses, *kheer* (made by rice and milk) and rice, etc. were considered *kachcha* food.” A local teacher, Ram Chandra said, “A Brahmin had been participation in *kachchi* in his own caste members, but not from other caste groups.” The above thought gives a glimpse of graded

¹⁴² At present, the head of a caste in each village is known as *chaudhari* in the study areas but the word *chaudhari* has long legacy. Like a responsible leader, the local *chaudhary* continues to work with (organizers) full responsibility, from distributing invitations to serving at community feasts.

¹⁴³ At the village level, caste membership was defined by the commensal hierarchy, according to which castes give or accept specific categories of food or water from each other or smoke together (Bodley, 2011: 312).

inequality and how the notions of purity and impurity were an inevitable part of rural life for a long time.

Restrictions and Commensality

On the day of *kachchi*, the members of the same village, neighboring villages, village *panchayat*, and friend circle get an invitation. Still, in a few cases, the Brahmin community members are also invited. Hansraj Yadav (an organizer of *biradari bhoj*) told me, “I served rice, pulses, *kheer*, *puri*, pointed gourd’s vegetable to the participants including Brahmins because serving *kachcha* food to the Brahmins has become neo-normal at present.” I asked him why did you invite Brahmins to *kachchi*? He replied, “I reserved the day of *pakki* for my own caste’s members because they come from far-away places and in large numbers (approximately four thousand). There could have been problems in their service, if I invited the Brahmins.” It appears that due to the notion of purity and impurity, some separate arrangements are required to provide to the members of the Brahmin community. Hansraj Yadav further said, “We have to wait till the Brahmins eat their food. Food is served to other people only after Brahmins have eaten. Therefore, I thought to avoid the extra burden.” Therefore, most of the organizers of community feast states that ‘the primary purpose of *biradari bhoj* is to meet up and create social relations. From the above-detailed discussion, we can say that the second day of *biradari bhoj* is dedicated to the members of the same community.

Similarly, it is also important to point here that the village’s same community members and the local inhabitants (but not ex-untouchable castes) prepare food on the days of *kachchi* and *pakki*. The food for Brahmins is prepared by the members of the Brahmin caste only. Any close friend from the Brahmin community or a professional cook is called to make food for the Brahmin community (participants) on the first day of the feast. Hansraj informed me, “If the person of Brahmin community does not cook the food, Brahmin participants will not turn up for the feast.” However, the conversations with R.A. Yadav revealed that *biradari bhoj* also has some symbolic value in the local setting; for instance, *biradari bhoj* given in the winter season has more symbolic value than those given in the summer season. In the winter, an organizer needs to spend extra money to arrange quilts, tents, hot tea, etc., but these items are not required during the summers. A feast in which more people participate is considered significant than a feast in which fewer people participate. The numerical strength of participation depends on the socio-economic

position of an organizer. If someone is well-known or popular among *chaudharis*, the involvement of the people would be higher. A feast in which people who belong to higher socio-economic status participate is considered more significant than one in which only local *biradari* participate.

To get an in-depth understanding, it would be worth examining research participants' ground realities and experiences. For instance, J.P. Yadav from Rajanpur village is a 60-year-old farmer. Both (husband and wife) are illiterate and work as a peasant. He also owns four buffalos, a tractor, a motorbike, and five-acre lands. He works in the field the entire day, and every evening, he goes to Sudnapur *chauraha*, where he usually meets up with his *biradari bandhu* (community members) and various *chaudharis*. J. P. Yadav's everyday social practice clearly brings out the gendering of the spaces accessed by him. The women had limited access to such marketplaces to sit for gossip, limiting their access to such friendships. Thus, the *biradari* bonding becomes an inherently masculine one. Long discussions with him revealed that the idea of consolidated caste solidarity has been strengthened among Yadavs. Therefore, the notion of impurity has been declined among Yadavs. This expressed itself through a challenge to existing caste hierarchies. J.P. Yadav further says that 'he has been observing that Brahmins priests have been accepting the food that Yadavs serve.' He also claimed that there is a strong feeling of caste consciousness among Yadavs, and people have also given up the old practices of 'washing the feet of a Brahmin priest.' He further said that 'less than a hundred Brahmins are being invited in *biradari bhoj*, but in a few cases, symbolically twenty-one or fifty-one Brahmins are being invited.'

Due to vegetarianism, a few castes like Kurami, Yadavs, Pal, etc., did not participate in the feast of local Thakur (a higher caste) until years back because the Thakur caste ate non-vegetarian food. Traditionally, Badhayi, Yadav, Kurmi, Gaderia, etc., castes are considered as pastoral, peasant and vegetarian, but they are considered lower than Thakur in the caste-based social hierarchy. Gulab Yadav from Dube Ka Patna village narrated, "Thakur caste has been following non-vegetarian food habits because local Thakurs feel that they are from the Rajput dynasty." Therefore, Yadavs have never had commensal relations with Thakur caste in the past." After cross verification, it was found that *the naam-dani* persons strictly avoid the commensal relation with Thakur caste. Whenever the *naam-dani* Yadavs participated in the *biradari bhoj*, even a few of them had been using their pots (plate and *lota* [small round metal pot]) for having food. The above instance of the commensal relationship between middle-ranking castes like Yadavs and

higher caste-like Thakurs shows there was a notion of purity and impurity. Still, it was minimal with certain people. It cannot be generalized to the entire community.

Commensal Relation and Ex-untouchable Castes

In the case of commensal relation between Dalits (ex-untouchable castes) and Yadavs, it appears that both castes have begun participating mutually with a few prohibitions. For instance, if a person from the Dalit community wants to invite local Yadavs who live in the same village, it would be mandatory for the organizer to hire a professional cook from non-dalit. The cook makes food for the participants (Yadav). In this regard, Harpal Kori (a labour) informed me, “If the food is not cooked by the person of middle-ranking castes (Yadav, Kurmi, Kumhar, Pal), the members from Yadav community will not turn up for the feast.” It is found that even the food is cooked by any middle-ranking caste or any professional person at the home of a Dalit, the members from Thakur and Brahmin castes never participate in Tandawa village. Begana Devi from Tandawa village told me, “Yadav and other middle-ranking castes did also not have commensal relation with Dalits till a few years back. Now, they have begun participating, but a few families send their children for the namesake. Many people participate for the sake of getting votes in the election of the village panchayat.” Meanwhile, due to the continuous efforts of local leaders and *chaudharis* (head of the caste) many new socio-cultural changes have occurred in the rural area. Those changes have also given a new dimension to the commensal relation.

***Biradari Bhoj*: Approval and Disapproval**

The members of the Yadav Mahasabha do not consider the *biradari bhoj* very decent, but they seem to give their silent approval. There is another group who also publishes ‘Yadav Shakti magazine’ openly oppose community feast. M.D. Yadav is a singer of local *biraha*-folklore often says, “AIYM used to oppose expensive feast (especially *biradari bhoj*) that is now very popular in rural areas especially among Yadavs. Thus, AIYM’s leaders (founder members) believed that such expensive feast would lead middle strata’s family into socio-economic backwardness. They also noticed that due to such practices, the Yadav community was struggling with illiteracy, poverty, and fanaticism.” It appears that the AIYM shows their religious attachment with Hindu god Krishna, Balram, Raja Bali and a few other traditional beliefs¹ but committed towards progressive ideas and improvement of the community’s social and economic condition, the

leaders of the AIYM naturally considered this extravagant feast to be wastage and counter-productive to their aims (Rao, 1979). Meanwhile, the heads of Yadav community often promote this feast. These heads are known as *chaudhari* in the study area. Their roles can be understood in following way.

Role of *Chaudharis* in *Biradari Bhoj*

If we trace the history of the title '*chaudhari*' or '*chowdhury*' (community leader), we find that the word was adapted from the Sanskrit word *caturdhara*¹⁴⁴, which literally means "holder of four." The four denotes here a measure of land, from *chatur* ("four") and *dhara* ('holder' or 'possessor')¹⁴⁵. The name *chaudhari* is an ancient Sanskrit term that denotes the head of a community and landlord. In the case of Haryana, Prem Chowdhry points out 'the heads of caste perceived as *panch-parmeshwar* (five gods), and they are generally known to work on the principle of balancing antagonistic factions and effecting a compromise' (Chowdhry, 2004; 2005). In the case of Eastern U.P., it is found that *chaudharis* are popular male members of a caste who are dedicated to their caste in many ways. For example, *chaudhari* takes the initiative and motivates his community members to unite and come forward for the welfare¹⁴⁶ of their *biradari* (Yadav community). The *chaudharis* have been playing a significant role in coordinating and consolidating caste networks¹⁴⁷ traditionally for many years. *Chaudharis* are also associated with patrilineal land-ownership in various parts of India, through which they claim their association with local leadership.

After a series of discussions with a few *chaudharis*, I learned that there are no uniform criteria to select or identify a new *chaudhari* of any village in the study area. Thus, age, close social contact with community members, active participation in *biradari bhoj*, social status, good economic position, engagement in political activities, social accessibility, heredity play an essential role in identifying a new *chaudhari* for a village. Male members dominate the entire idea of selecting a *chaudhari*.

¹⁴⁴ Retrieved on 23/03/2021 from <https://surnames.behindthename.com/name/chaudhary>

¹⁴⁵ Retrieved on 23/03/2021 from https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chowdhury#cite_note-6

¹⁴⁶ For instance, these *chaudharis* take help from local organizations and they organize a collective marriage ceremony for the poor families of Yadav community.

¹⁴⁷ The local *chaudharis* take help of other *chaudharis* who are living far away. To find out a suitable bride or groom, they spend their valuable time without any charges. Local people believe that the main work of a *chaudhari* is to search a bride or groom for needy people.

To make a systematic arrangement for a community feast, the organizer calls a meeting in which local *chaudharis* and a few local inhabitants participate. This meeting takes place in the residential area of an organizer in which, with the help of *chaudharis*, the organizer decides to distribute a hand-written *neota* (invitation). The meeting is often held before one week of *biradari bhoj*. Each *chaudhari* also takes some responsibilities regarding the feast's systematic arrangement and distribute the invitations among *biradaris* (caste or community members). Each *chaudhari* delivers the invitation of *biradari bhoj* in their respective village (Prasad, 2015). In this regard, C.L. Yadav (a *chaudhari*) of Natauli village said, “The meeting of *chaudharis* are called to discuss some challenging issues¹⁴⁸ that are related to the *biradari bhoj*. We (*chaudharis*) also take some extra responsibilities¹⁴⁹ to organize it systematically.” I noticed that the local *chaudharis* also discussed building a solid caste network at the local level. The idea of bringing social cohesion among Yadavs is discussed seriously in the meeting. They make an effort to sort out the grievances between two *gouls* (local factions) of Yadav community.

The discussion with research participants gave me a hint that *chaudharis* is a central figure among the Yadav community. They represent Yadav community at the village level. If we compare them with the same caste members, we can see that *chaudharis* are more popular and dedicated male members. The *chaudharis* seem to be well-informed about current politics. It is found that they keep records related to marital, numerical strength and achievement of the local Yadav community. Therefore, each *chaudhari* provides household-related information of their village to the organizers during the meeting of *chaudharis*. In addition, a few respondents confirmed that *chaudharis* as mediators play a vital role in developing effective communication at the village level, and they try to build ‘self-respect’ and ‘collectiveness’ by providing a channel of communication in a local setting. For example, G.P. Yadav was very popular among Yadavs of Rajanpur village. In a meeting of *chaudharis*, he was nominated as a *chaudhari* of Rajanpur village. He spent his entire life with a dedication to the welfare of the Yadav community. He was devoted to a ‘dowry-less wedding’. Due to his efforts, more than hundreds of weddings were completed in which people did not take any dowry.

¹⁴⁸It is found that there are two or three *goul* among Yadavs in each village. Therefore, it becomes important to an organizer to sort out the grievances between two *gool*sof his/her village with the help of local *chaudharis* of nearby villages. During the meeting, those local *chaudharis*carefully listen the grievances carefully and tried to build consensus between the two *gools* of the village.

¹⁴⁹For instance, they arrange the utensils (from other village)and invite the folk singers.They distribute the invitation in other villages and take responsibilities to buy vegetables and take care of guests.

Similarly, D.P. Yadav is considered to be a progressive leader and a *chaudhari* of the Yadav community in the Tandawa village. He has about ten acres of land and a restaurant at Sudnapur market¹⁵⁰. This restaurant is popularly known as ‘Yadav Restaurant’ which is four kilometers away from his village. The ‘Yadav Restaurant’ is also a popular spot for local Yadav *chaudharis*. Every evening local *chaudharis* of the nearby villages gather here and discuss current political scenarios and family issues. ‘Yadav Restaurant’ is handled by his younger brother, M.P. Yadav (Nanhe), a well-known member of the Yadav community. Most of the Yadav *chaudharis* keep a close relation with D.P. Yadav because of his gentle nature. If someone from the Yadav community needs to find a suitable match for their daughter/son, D.P. Yadav is always ready to help them. He also keeps himself updated about the local and national socio-political issues. He has good social contact with the *chaudharis* of other villages. Both examples demonstrate the centrality of the truth and the inevitable role of *chaudharis* in the villagers’ daily lives.

It appears that *chaudharis* and local folk singers (folklorists)¹⁵¹ are important pillars of Yadav community. They also play an important role in maintaining and reaching community consensus on various social issues like child marriage, dowry, inter-caste conflicts, etc. at the local level. If we examine the influences of local *chaudharis* on the members of Yadav community, we can see that the sense of *chaudharipan* (dominance) has been disappearing for the last two decades.

It would be relevant to point out a recent case of Manoj Yadav, who won the village panchayat election. He also has a shop in Sudnapur market. Due to some personal issue, he divorced his wife, but his wife wanted to live with him. A meeting of local *chaudharis* was held to sort out the problem. It is found that most of the local *chaudharis* were in favour of his wife.

At last, the meeting of the local *chaudharis* ended with a collective decision that Manoj Yadav should live either with his wife or give compensation¹⁵² to her. It has become more than ten years of the dispute, but his ex-wife has not received any payment from Manoj Yadav. It appears that the local *chaudharis* do not affect much for those Yadavs who are economically rich and politically powerful. Such a dispute also attracts our attention to the ineffectiveness of a

¹⁵⁰This market is four km away from his home. Two backward castes namely Yadav and Kurmi are numerically dominant castes in this market.

¹⁵¹I have given details description about folk-singers of Yadav community in the next chapter (chapter-5).

¹⁵²Due to personal request of informant, the compensation amount cannot be revealed here.

chaudhari. The idea of caste *panchayat* has been losing its virtue for the last three decades (Chowdhry, 2004: 6; Bailey, 1965). Now, local *chaudharis* work as a guide for the organizers of *biradari bhoj*.

Questions of Gender

A few female respondents from Tandawa village, namely Renu Yadav, Pinki Yadav, Begana Devi, Rekha Yadav, Tara Yadav, Janki Yadav, and Sanwari Yadav, etc. confirmed that they neither get invitation nor they participate in the meetings of local *chaudharis* or community feast. However, it appears that they have often participated in the program of *birha* folksongs¹⁵³ as listeners. If a *biradari bhoj* is organized in their respective villages, they eat food at the end of the feast with other women. The local women see the whole episode if any meeting of local *chaudharis* is called up in their respective village. Rekha Yadav said, “*Hamare ganv me mardon ke beech me bolna achchha nahi mana jaha hai. Log hamse yahi apeksha rakhte hain ki ham chup-chap sunti rahen. Hamara bolna izzat ke khilaf mana jata hai* (It is not considered appropriate for us to speak among the *chaudharis*. Local people expect us to keep quiet and listen to the local *chaudharis*. It is considered a dishonour or disrespect to speak up before men.)” During the field visit, I saw a squabble¹⁵⁴ that took place between two factions¹⁵⁵ of Yadavs in Tandawa village. It was found that around twenty women were involved in the conflict. Interestingly, no male member was involved in the fight. Women were shouting and abusing each other. There were around ten to fifteen young men watching the whole episode of fighting. After one hour, the faction’s head (Raj Bahadur) came and requested the fighting women to go to their homes. When I went into the details about the members of both factions, I learned that two years back, the members of both factions were united under one umbrella. Due to a small land dispute, they got separated into two factions. Today, they do not even have a speaking term. When I raised this issue in front of the local *chaudharis*, they claimed that “Due to Covid-19, no *biradari bhoj* could be organized in Tandawa village for long otherwise, the dispute could have been resolved.”

¹⁵³It is an inevitable part of *biradari bhoj*. I have detailed about this in the chapter-5 (see, appendix: 4.11, 4.12 and 4.13).

¹⁵⁴The reason of conflict was that a woman from one faction had cut grass from the other faction's field without asking. There were ten women in each group while fighting.

¹⁵⁵Raj Bahadur leads a faction while Ram Asare Yadav leads other faction.

After completion of the whole discussion in the meeting, the local *chaudharis* are offered food. The entire social interaction processes among Yadavs allow them to build consolidated relations and bring consensus on different disputed matters. It appears that these social interaction processes result in ‘caste consciousness’ in the long term.

The question of the participation of women in the meeting of *chaudhari* (so-called *chittha panchayat*) seems to be negligible. It appears that distinguished male leaders and *chaudharis* are the main participants in *chittha panchayat* (Prasad, 2016: 185-94). Numerically, around one hundred to five hundred *chaudharis* participate in each meeting of *chaudharis*. Still, it depends on the socio-economic capability of an organizer. For instance, if someone wants to invite around five thousand people in a *biradari bhoj*, approximately five hundred *chaudharis* and a few male members like teachers, village *pradhan* (elected members of the village council), people in businesses etc. are invited for participating in the *chittha panchayat*. When I asked a question related to the participation of women in *chittha panchayat*, R.A. Yadav said, “*Ye auraton ka kam nahi hai; ve ghar me hi achchhi lagati hai*” (This [to build a consolidated caste network] is a not work of women; they are better suited for domestic-work only). It seems the dominance of men in public spaces is still prevalent, and such an example can also be depicted from *biradari bhoj*. On the other hand, the women are excluded from these social spaces through a clearly gendered binary that prescribes their curtailment in the household. A respondent, G. Yadav said, “The masculine ideals are embedded within this ritual, which is about the debt to the father, a debt which falls upon the son, usually the eldest, to bear.” It appears that the traditional idea of giving more preference to the male is closely linked with the concept of patriarchy¹⁵⁶ (Chowdhry, 2004; Sultana, 2011). It is found that women are being segregated in the name of *parampara* (tradition) and *izzat* (honor), which can also be understood through rural folklores (see, chapter-5). The issue of hierarchies, segregation and subordination, has also been addressed in the next chapter with the help of cultural symbols, myth, and rural folklore. It would be worth to point here that folklore is playing a role of traditional media. It represents a form of communication that employs verbal, vocal, and visual folk art forms transmitted by societies or group of people.

¹⁵⁶ Patriarchy is a social system in which men hold primary power and predominate in roles of political leadership, moral authority, social privilege and control of property. Some patriarchal societies are also patrilineal, meaning that property and title are inherited by the male lineage.

Mutual Coordination

It is found that the *biradari bhoj* creates a space where Yadav leaders, *chaudharis* and members of All India Yadav Mahasabha (AIYM) get together and try to build consensus to any important social cause. Moreover, the local members of AIYM¹⁵⁷ and local *chaudharis* also come forward to solve the internal dispute among Yadavs. They actively participate in community feast and try to build a consolidated caste network among themselves. It is noteworthy to point here an incident that took place in the study area (between Mayung and Majhwara village) on 25th October, 2010. Both villages are about 28 km from the district headquarters and inhabit nearly five thousand populations. Mayung has a big market, while Majhwara has a large amount of barren land. In such situation, if anyone jumps into politics, he/she needs to make a lot of effort to become the people's representative here.

Through an incident that happened in (year 2010) Majhwara Gram Panchayat, an attempt will be made here to explain how caste alliances and caste dominance work at the time of elections. The dominance of the Thakur caste has been a living reality of Majhwara Gram Panchayat as well as its neighboring villages. In this regard, Narsingh Yadav (a teacher) said, "There is a hidden rule that if anyone wants to contest election for village *panchayat*, one must take unofficial permission from Ex-MLA Chandra Bhadra Singh."¹⁵⁸ Thus, without taking permission from him, a Lekhpal (revenue officer), namely Ramkumar Yadav, a resident of Majhwara, had dared to fill the nomination form. Resultantly, Ramkumar was kidnapped on 25th October, 2010, from Bikapur market in Ayodhya. The next day, his dead body was found near Majhwara village. His body was cut into many pieces. Many people, including the local ex-MLA and his brother, namely Yashbhadra Singh, were named in this murder case. The trial of the strength of the two sides of both the villages started from here.

After the assassination of Ramkumar Yadav, the local leaders of the Samajwadi Party and a few prominent leaders of Congress also visited the spot. Meanwhile, Kamla Yadav (wife of late Ram Kumar Yadav) again filled the nomination form for village panchayat. She got the sympathy of local villagers and won the election. Now two axes of politics started appearing here. One side is

¹⁵⁷ The All India Yadav Mahasabha (AIYM) is a caste-based community organisation established on 17 April 1880 to serve a broad body of Indian social groups collectively known as the Yadav caste.

¹⁵⁸ Chandra Bhadra Singh of Mayung village belongs to Thakur caste. He is an ex-MLA.

former MLA Chandrabhadra Singh and the other side is Kamla Devi Yadav. Both villages were no less of a challenge for the administration as well. Whether, it is a small election or a big or event, the administration is forced to stand here head-on. Prior to Ramkumar's assassination, village *panchayat* elections also went unopposed in several other villages too in the Mayung constituency, but after the incident, it gradually came to an end.

Last year in District Panchayat's election, Kamla Yadav from ward 22 of Dhanpatganj block won the elections. When the district Panchayat president's turn came, the political thrust was once again visible. Kamla supported Shiv Kumar (a candidate of the Samajwadi Party) and he won the election for the district Panchayat, while as a BJP candidate, Yashbhadra Singh had to face defeat.

Ajit Yadav, the son of Kamla's brother-in-law, was the main witness in the Ramkumar murder case, but during the trial, he became a defender. The court acquitted the accused in the Lekhpal murder case. For Kamala, it was nothing, but short of bitterness. Mayung and Majhwara have become talked-about in six years, perhaps never before. With the help of local members of AIYM, local *chaudhari*, Yadav leaders and Shiv Pal Singh Yadav (brother of ex-chief minister, Mulayam Singh Yadav), Kamla Yadav also contested the 2019 Indian general election against Chandra Bhadra Singh. Due to her continuous effort, Chandra Bhadra Singh could not win the election. It appears that after the murder of Ram Kumar Yadav, the local members of AIYM helped a lot to Kamla Devi to fight against such injustice. This incident had become a matter of caste pride for Yadavs. The members of AIYM have been making continuous efforts to build a consolidated caste network since the year 2010. The local *chaudharis* of the Yadav community has also been supportive in all possible ways. The incident of Ram Kumar Yadav has become major concerning points for local leaders, *chaudharis* and *birha* folk-singers.

A few respondents also claimed that 'AIYM was not much involved before the incident, when the case came into limelight and got media attention, the members of AIYM became very actives.' It appears that with a particular focus on the cities, the AIYM is not able to deliver its objectives to those people who lived in rural areas. The above incident has created a new narrative of caste politics. Due to community feast, a consolidated caste network has been built among Yadav community. Resultantly, many new Yadav leaders can be counted in the study

area. The new Yadav leaders are able to cope with the caste supremacy of Thakur caste because they get direct support from Samajwadi Party and AIYM. To get in-depth understanding about caste supremacy, some more details have been given below.

Ground Realities

The field experiences can be illustrated to know the grounded realities counted during the long talks with Narsingh Yadav and Durga Prasad. Durga Prasad hails from a remote village, Tandawa, while Narsingh Yadav is from Bariyauna (Neema Sarai) in the Sultanpur district, which falls in Eastern Uttar Pradesh, and today the ‘political wind’ of Delhi also passes through Eastern Uttar Pradesh.

The distance from Tandawa to Bariyauna village is about eight kilometers. Thakur was a ‘dominant caste’ of the Sultanpur district and exercised their influence in both these villages as well. Years ago, caste based atrocities were common in the both villages and its neighbouring settlements. Talking with Narasingh Yadav and some old-age people, I was informed that until years back, Yadav community was not frequently using their franchise because of the intervention of a dominant caste Thakur. Although after the 1990s, there was a qualitative change in the socio-economic status of the people living in these villages. The credit to these changes can be attributed to Mayawati and Mulayam Singh Yadav. Narasingh Yadav says, “Now no one dares to deprive the franchise of backward castes, and even if someone makes such an effort, he or she cannot be successful.” The main reason is that today ‘*naya netritva*’ (new leadership) has emerged in each village. The *yuva netas* (young leaders) from backward castes can be seen in each village. To know this new socio-political change, it becomes necessary to understand the public's social conditions and psychology through the experiences of Durga Prasad hails from Tandawa village.

Durga Prasad is a man of vision. His childhood has been traversed through the narrow socio-economic lanes, and the weak economic condition forced him to do bonded labour in the home of a family of Thakur caste to feed his family. Like him, most backward caste people of the village had to do *harwahi* (bonded labour) in the fields of Thakur castes (in the Tandawa village or neighbourhood). In return, Thakurs used to give these workers food or 3kg grain to satisfy their hunger and minimum family needs. Durga Prasad states that ‘economic and psychological exploitation of backward castes was at its peak till the early nineties.’ Talking to some other

persons of the village (Tandawa) revealed that when Mulayam Singh Yadav became chief minister for the second time in 1993 and respectively when Mayawati got the opportunity to become the Chief Minister in 1995 (for the first time), the ‘uneasiness’ was seen among the Thakur castes of the village. A few families from the Thakur caste named their pet dogs and buffalos as ‘Mulayma’ and ‘Mayawatia’ to degrade the Dalit and backward castes. The Thakur castes could get a clear indication that the days of their feudal excesses were going to be over sooner. The above instances of caste-based practices were common in Eastern Uttar Pradesh. A well-known writer Munshi Premchand has also pointed a few such cases and social conditions of a marginalized community in his work “*Thakur ka kuan*” (A well of Thakur). However, at present, the caste-based social distances have come down on a large scale, and the dalit-bahujan does not have to do much social struggle to protect self-esteem. The credits for such new socio-political changes go to new leadership, *chaudharis* and AIYM.

Reactions, Resistance and Wind of Socio-Political Change

Local prominent Yadav leaders, *choudharis* and Yadav Mahasabha officials began to unite after the Emergency (1977) to break the socio-political dominance of upper castes like Rajputs and Brahmins. As I have pointed in the first chapter, the prominent members of Congress in Uttar Pradesh were from upper castes. So, backward castes felt deprived, but after the Emergency a new leadership was developed among Yadavs. Ram Naresh Yadav and Mulayam Singh Yadav were two major popular faces from backward caste. On the one hand, the popularity of Mulayam Singh Yadav was confined in western and central U.P. On the other hand, Ram Naresh Yadav was very popular in Eastern U.P. Ram Naresh Yadav belonged to the Yadav belts, Azamgarh (a neighboring district of the study area). He was one of the first non-dwij caste leaders who could get a chance to become chief minister of Uttar Pradesh on 23 June 1977. Therefore, many local leaders from Yadavs got an inspiration and began to seek power-politics from local level election to state assembly.

A few local leaders like Mitra Sen Yadav, Ram Ratan Yadav, Ram Sumer Yadav moved into politics. After a few attempts, they became MLA and MLC. Resultantly, several local leaders at village level also started raising their voices to bring unity in the scattered Yadav community. As a strategy, these local leaders tried to build a consolidated caste network. It would be worth to give an example of Late Mitra Sen Yadav. He hails from the study area. Mitrasen Yadav (11 July

1934 – 7 September 2015) was a well-known popular figure, a resident of Bhitari village of Inayatnagar police station area, started the journey of politics with a Communist Party of India. He emerged as a star of politics. He became a member of the Lok Sabha and Vidhansabha several times and not only got his son Anand Sen to win the assembly elections, but also got the red beacon in the BSP government of the state. Mitrasen Yadav, who became famous in a case by killing Jatashankar and Surendra Tiwari, two sons of Mathura Prasad Tiwari, who had the status of a landlord in the local politics, did not look back again. Not only climbed the stairs of politics, he also maintained his dominance at local level. In order to dominate, the list of cases increased, then, gradually this number reached 34. However, he could not escape the court's punishment in the double murder case, popularly known as the Mavai murder case. In Mavai murder case, 23 people including Mitra Sen were sentenced to life imprisonment. Due to the political grip, Mitrasen got remission from the governor and pardon from the president. Not only this, in some cases the police put up a final report and after investigation in one case, the state government withdrew the case of murderous assault, robbery lodged by CBCID. In the case of embezzlement of funds of Kisan High School, Bankata¹⁵⁹ of Tarun police station area, he was convicted by the court and sentenced him to seven years imprisonment and a fine of 15 thousand rupees. The political influence of the local MP's father made Anandsen angry and domineering at a young age. Although he kept avoiding the sections of the law due to family clout, but this trend did not last long. At the age of 22, a case of robbery including murder was registered at Inayatnagar police station, then, the process of registering cases started. However, the government withdrew the first case registered against him. In the ups and downs of politics, the number of cases registered against Anandsen increased to 15. Anandsen along with father Mitrasen became accused of criminal conspiracy in the case of Bhawanifer murder case in Inayatnagar police station. The local inhabitants believe that these cases against Mitrasen Yadav are linked to the dominance of upper castes. It appears that if someone from backward caste wants to break the socio-political dominance of upper castes, he/she may face such similar hurdle. Moreover, I have described a few more such similar cases in many places. The main aim to point out these individual cases is to figure out the social atmosphere in which Yadav leaders take challenge and create a new path for socio-political mobility.

¹⁵⁹This school was built by Mitra Sen Yadav.

Biradari bhoj alone is not responsible for such socio-political awareness, but there is also a few other socio-cultural practices, which make Yadavs as ethnic blog. Such socio-cultural practices will be described in brief. In this regard, let me point here a cultural practice, which is directly related to the socio-cultural changes in the Yadav community.

An Example of Nandmahar (A Sacred Place)

Same as *biradari bhoj*, the idea of visiting *nandmahar* gives an opportunity to get together. Nandmahar is a place, which is considered a *janambhumi* (birthplace) of Raja Bali (a king) and Pawariha (local deity of Yadavs). This place is located around 30km away from Tandawa village. It is found that lakhs of the devotee (mostly from Yadav community) go there to offer ritual sacrifices. Now, the myth related to Raja Bali and Pawariha has been transformed into a national narrative of Balrama and Krishna for some socio-political advantages. Many banners and posters of political parties can be seen in Nandmahar. The local members of AIYM seem to very active during the *nandmahar mela* (three days fair). According to new belief, Lord Krishna had come here with his brother Balarama to kill the demon Paundrak in Dwapar Yuga. After the slaying of the demon, Lord Krishna along with his descendants had also worshiped at Nandmahar. The local devotees still offer milk to the idols of Raja Bali and Nandbaba (the foster father of Krishna) inside the temple. Special worship is done here on the day of Kartik Purnima¹⁶⁰. Many leaders of Yadav community also visit to show gesture and respect to Krishna.

Now, many new fairs like *dadhikando mela*, Shree Krishna *Janamstami*, *sadar* festival, Bir Lorika Mela, etc. have been introduced at different places. These celebrations have become a political tool, which brings socio-political consciousness among Yadavs. They recall the heroic past and try to build caste consciousness with the help of such larger gatherings.

¹⁶⁰ Kartika Purnima is a Hindu, Sikh and Jain cultural festival, celebrated on the Purnima (full moon) day or the fifteenth lunar day of Kartik (November–December). It is also known as Tripuri Purnima and Tripurari Purnima. It is sometimes called Deva-Diwali or Deva-Deepawali, the festival of lights of the gods.

Chapter-5

Folklore, 'Expressive Culture': Rising Community Sentiment

Folklore is made of two words: folk and lore. Folk applied only to frequently poor, rural, illiterate peasants, etc. A more contemporary definition of folk can be defined in the following way: a social group that includes two or more persons with common traits who express their shared identity through distinctive traditions. In addition, Bronner (2012) writes, "Since the 1960s, folkloristic approaches in North America and Europe have been thematised with the keywords of performance and practice, respectively. Although the orientations built around the keywords share a concern for conceptualizing folklore as a type of expressive action, significant theoretical differences are apparent. Arising at a similar juncture in the twentieth century in response to social upheaval, they differ in the use of explanation or generalization with performance often representing singularity (and emergence) of an event and practice signifying the aggregate (and precedence) of folk behaviour."

William John Thoms first used the word 'focalor' in 1846, while E.V. Taylor elaborated on it in his book 'Primitive Culture' (Sims and Stephens, 2005). Similarly, B.A. Botkin (2016) produced a unique collection of long stories, yarns, myths, legends, ballads, and hundreds of other oddities from America's rich past. In the Indian context, when we hear the word 'folklore,' a figure takes shape in our mind. The picture shows a class's character of listeners and singers, who do not have much to do with education and often belong to backward castes (Prasad and Yadav, 2017). These castes embellish their family and society with hard work (especially agricultural work). The meaning of the word 'folk' is also used for these ordinary people. When a person establishes communication (in prose or verse form), it is known in Hindi as '*lok-varta*' (folklore). In Indian literature, litterateur Vasudeva Sharan Aggarwal (1954) has accepted the word '*lokvarta*' to be synonym for 'folklore,' in line with "84, Vaishnava ki Varta" ('84 Vaishnavites talk').

We can say that the feelings, which emerged consciously and unconsciously among the rural masses, which were then rendered in a rhythmic/poetic way, were universally called folksongs. These folksongs originated due to caste oppression, spouse separation, and the feudal system in the *zamindari* system (Jha 1989). Shyam Parmar (1969) writes while highlighting the nature of folk songs, 'the new generations have new expressions and this is the (oral) tradition of folk

songs by which the more significant feelings emerge.’ On the one hand, simplicity, rasa, melody, and rhythm are the essential qualities of these folksongs. With the crux of *karuna* (mercy, sadness), humor, *shringaar* (love), heroic deed, etc., these folk songs have been flowing for decades, giving a sense of contemporaneity in the temperament of the rural masses (Ibid: 56). Moreover, the functions of rural folklores can be broadly grouped into such categories as (1) recreation or amusement, (2) education, (3) socialization, (4) protest or propaganda, and (5) communication of knowledge (Bhattacharya, 2015).

Folklore and Yadav Community

Folklore is an effective means of communication in the study area since it connects people with their way of life and gives a way to expand their cultural bonding. It appears that folk media forms the language of local people's expression and provides an opportunity to voice their opinions on various socio-political issues. Folklore also gives a way to internalize the ideas and practices of democracy at the grassroots level. Therefore, the organizers of biradari bhoj hire local professional folk singers on the day of the feast. The participants of the community feast get informed about current politics from the folksingers. They also get inspiration from such a provocative speech, which makes the participants organize a grand feast once in their lifespan. In order to build community pride, the local folk singers also provide detailed information about ‘*Ahir Gaurav Gatha*’¹⁶¹.

The present chapter is based on a descriptive analysis of folklore and its relationship to social engineering. Mainly, I have analyzed how the native Yadavs communicate the collective decision with more prominent community members and express their thoughts for a consolidated caste network in rural areas. In addition, the present chapter also attempts to address gender and ‘expressive culture’¹⁶² with the help of birha folklores, especially on how the Yadav community

¹⁶¹ Ahir Gaurav Gatha (Yadav Pride tale) is a form of poetic telling about heroic deed. In other words, folk singers speak the recent socio-political development in Yadav community. Major achievements of Yadav community are pointed out by the folk singers. The idea (of narrating) is collectively known as ‘Ahir/Yadav Gaurav Gatha.’

¹⁶² Expressive culture is processes, emotions, and ideas bound within the social production of and performances in everyday life. It is a way to embody culture and express culture through sensory experiences such as dance, music, literature, visual media, and theater. So, I have examined that how these folklores are closely connected with emotion and thought of Yadav community.

has been closely associated with rural folklores like *birha*¹⁶³ or *faruahi*¹⁶⁴ for a long time. I have also delineated the interrelationship between folklore and the caste question. It is found that the local leaders and *chaudharis* (heads of a caste) promote *birha* folklore to reach out to all the community members. Similarly, I have also described how the *birha* folklore as a medium of communication has been helping local leaders to spread their political messages and thought in rural areas. In this regard, the present chapter also examines how the women from the Yadav community are closely associated with the folklores. Keeping in mind the popularity of *birha* folklore among Yadavs, the organizers of the *biradari bhoj* hire local folk singers to attract and make the community members turn up in large numbers to the feast.

Birha Folklore and Community Feast

On the day of *biradari bhoj*, a stage is built where these professional singers present the *birha* folklore and express their socio-political thoughts from the stage (see. plate-4.2). The main objectives of hiring these folksingers are to entertain the gathering (local community members) and create socio-political awareness among participants of *biradari bhoj*. We can see that the folksingers keep a clear impression of their socio-political agenda on the listeners. Therefore, it is essential to explore the role of these singers in the consolidation of a caste network and how they make aware the young generation politically. The folklores and commensality are also interlinked because both cement relationships somehow. It is important to point here that the local *chaudharis* (heads of caste) have close socio-political relations with the professional folk singers. At the time of elections, they help the candidature of the Samajwadi Party. If any incident or caste atrocity happens, the singers or writers of *birha* folklore also play an important role in mobilizing the people with the help of *birha* folklore. Singers and writers of *birha* folklore embody those events with their speeches and writings, which bring social consciousness among its listeners. It is exciting to listen to and also outline show quickly the local response to the grave injustice comes out through a *birha* song, which plays an important role in mobilizing the people.

¹⁶³ Birha is an ethnic Bhojpuri and Awadhi folk genre of Yadav community in Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, and Jharkhand in India. It is a sad or devotional story of any famous character and it is often sung in poetic form.

¹⁶⁴ Faruahi is a folk dance which is prevalent in the rural parts of east Uttar Pradesh and Bihar among Yadavs. Faruahi dance is a folk form in which the dancer's body part is danced and it is very labor intensive.

A few recent incidents which have become popular themes of *birha* folklores, for instance, ‘*machhli shahar kand*’ (incident in Jaunpur), ‘*badaun kand*’ (incident in Badaun), ‘*darbhanga kand*’ (incident in Darbhanga), ‘*baliya goli kand*’ (incident in Baliya), ‘*mau haldharpur kandh*’ (incident in Mau), ‘*jalalpur hatyakand*’ (Jalalpur massacre), ‘Vikash Dube shoot out incident’ (Kanpur), ‘Ganesh Yadav (*fauji*) *ki shahadat*’ (Martyrdom of Ganesh Yadav, Mau), ‘*betiya kand*’ (Betiya incident), etc. are based on some well-known adventures. The above-pointed incidents received media and public attention. These incidents also appeared in many local newspapers too. The local writers of folklore cited these incidents in their writings and mixed it with fictitious characters. The local singers sing it on any public occasion like *biradari bhoj*.

Apart from the professional singing of *birha* folklore, we can see that the ordinary women and men also sing various folklores on any auspicious occasions. They express their suffering, happiness, and daily practices through folklores. I have examined both patterns of singing the folksongs to understand the socio-political process among Yadav community. If we look at the themes of *birha* folklore, we also find that the tales of famous *baagi* (dacoits) like Phoolan Devi, Chandan Singh Yadav, Barsati Daku, Sultana Daku, Renu Yadav, Putali Bai, etc. are portrayed in the *birha* folklores. The themes (of *birha* folklore) on these dacoits are very popular because of the feeling amongst the people of lower castes who feel that these dacoits fought for social justice and sacrificed their lives for the marginal sections. Therefore, it becomes important to analyse and explore how the traditions of *birha* folklore are closely associated with community formation and caste consciousness.

Folklore and Caste Consciousness

Folklores are the unheard voices of backward castes like Yadav, Gaderiya, Pasi, Musahar, Kumhar, etc. Each lower caste is associated with its folklore. Traditionally, these castes work as peasants, agrarian labour, milkmen, sheep-herders, carpenters, leaf-makers, washermen, etc.¹⁶⁵ It is also observed that these castes express their sorrow, grief, happiness, feelings, and thought with the help of folklore. Therefore, a pithy analysis of folklore has been done in the present chapter. During the field work, it was noticed that every organizer of *biradari bhoj* hires the folksingers and their chorus to entertain the community members (participants of *biradari bhoj*)

¹⁶⁵ A famous Hindi poet Ram Naresh Tripathi who hailed from Sultanpur (study area) also collected rural folklores.

and paid around ten thousand rupees. On any joyous occasion, the people fond of *birha* do not forget to call local folksingers. They also invite the folksingers to entertain on particular days, such as, festivals, marriage ceremony, death ceremony, *barahi* (first birthday of new born baby).

It was found that each lower caste is associated with folklore traditionally, for instance, the genres of rural folklores are known as *dhobia* (sung by washermen caste), *pasiota* (sung by Pasi caste), *deena bhadri* (sung by Musahar caste), etc. Apart from the above folklores, many other genres of folksongs are also very popular among lower castes.

Similarly, after a series of discussions I could get to know that *lorik* (a folktale), *faruahi* (a combination of music and dance), *ahir-bhairvi* (a Hindustani classical raga), *pachra*, etc. are traditional genres that are a noteworthy articulation of the Yadav community. Therefore, I have gone through many themes on the folklores, which have been very popular among Yadavs. At first, it would be significant to put forth a unique folklore genre, which is called '*faruaahi*' in local dialect. Mostly, the organizers (low economic profile) hire *faruaahi* singer-cum-dancer. A detailed description is given below to get an in-depth understanding.

Faruahi: A Genre of Folklore

The *faruahi* folklore is also known in local dialect as '*ghoghru naach*' and '*ahirua naach*'¹⁶⁶ (folk dance of Yadavs). If we look at the singing style, we find that less emphasis is placed on the first line while more emphasis is placed on the last line. The first line is sung by the singer alone, while the second line is sung by all his companions (choirs). The art of presenting in a different way adds value to the *faruahi* folklore. After participating as a listener in a few *faruahi* programs, it can be concluded that only male singers are engaged in *faruahi*. The singers have toned muscular bodies like a wrestler. They sing and dance simultaneously for two or three hours. The singers tie *ghungroo* (big anklet bells) to the feet and thigh with the help of a rope (see, appendix: 4.4). It is noticed that their style of singing and dancing with full vigor for three to four hours keeps the spectator engaged. The *faruahi* singers cum dancers are also called '*nachaniya*' (a professional dancer) by the local people. At the time of the performing of the *faruahi* folklore, the singers take off their *kurtas* (shirt) and do not forget to wear a two-meter

¹⁶⁶ The genre of folksong is closely connected with the heart of Yadav community. The members of Yadav community are known as 'Ahir' in the study area. Therefore, this classic performance of dace and folktale is called '*ahirua naach* (Folk dance of Yadav).'

dupatta (scarf) over the *ganji* (innerwear) and white dhoti¹⁶⁷ as well as a set of *ghungroo* in their legs (see, appendix: 4.3 and 4.4). Often two singers perform simultaneously, whose main objectives are to generate competition and keep their audience curious and active. We can see that four or five other co-stars play *harmonium*,¹⁶⁸ *tabla*,¹⁶⁹ or *nagada*,¹⁷⁰ and *dholak*,¹⁷¹ etc. (see, appendix: 4.2 and 4.5). The primary function of these collaborators is to repeat the utterances uttered by the lead singers. As per requirement, they also produce music. The choirs of *faruahi* consist of only male members.

Masculinity and Developing Self-Respect among Yadavs

While dancing, *faruaahi* singers show their masculinity, such as they lift any weight-wood or bicycle with their teeth, etc. The local Yadav community believes that the demonstration of muscle power is part of their culture¹⁷² (Michelutti, 2002). The heroic act of such a performance creates enthusiasm among the audience. These folksingers and dancers communicate the socio-political messages effectively. A popular singer and writer, Madhav Yadav of Sultanpur district of Uttar Pradesh, states that ‘a singer has three objectives to perform these adventurous acts: (1) to entertain the audience, (2) to remind the glorious past, and (2) to instill 'self-respect' among Yadav community.’

Madhav Yadav further narrates that ‘the dominant castes (Thakur and Brahmin) have always persecuted the lower castes of rural society. As a result, fear and inferiority complex are sitting in

¹⁶⁷ A garment worn by male, consisting of a piece of material tied around the waist and extending to cover most of the legs.

¹⁶⁸ Harmonium is a musical instrument which is a free-reed organ that generates sound as air flows past a vibrating piece of thin metal in a frame. It is an important instrument in many genres of Indian music especially classical. It is widely used in India in Indian music concerts.

¹⁶⁹ A tabla is a pair of twin hand drums from the Indian subcontinent. Since the 18th century, tabla has been the principal percussion instrument in Hindustani classical music, where it may be played solo, as accompaniment with other instrument and vocals, and as a part of larger ensembles.

¹⁷⁰ The *nagara* or *naghara* is a drum used in the *faruaahi* genre. There are several types of *naghara*, which is considered to be the lead instrument in folk ceremonies and weddings. The *naghara* differs in size and goes by various names such as "*boyuk nagara*" (big *naghara*), "*cara nagara*" (small *naghara*), "*chiling nagara*" (played with drum sticks), "*Qoltuq nagara*" (drum held under the arm), *gosha naghara* (*Naqareh*) and "*el naghara*" (hand *naghara*).

¹⁷¹ The *dholak* is a two-headed hand-drum. It may have traditional cotton rope lacing, screw-turnbuckle tensioning or both combined: in the first case steel rings are used for tuning or pegs are twisted inside the laces.

¹⁷² Yadav community are a low-caste (Shudra) group. The members of Yadav community believe that once upon a time they were Kshatriya and wrestling practices were a part of their culture. Every *akhara* I visited had a majority of Ahir/Yadavs as regular members.

it. This section of the rural community (usually the elderly population) still do not forget to say '*palagi*' (step touch) when they meet the Brahmins (for the first time). The fallout from '*mansik-gulami*' (mental slavery) is visible in the folklore prevalent in rural society.' The folk singers of the working castes also appear to be slowly succeeding in their mission (to rebuild 'self-respect' with the help of *faruahi* folklore).

In the *faruahi* folklore, the singer does not forget to dance with a beautiful rendition of various songs and couplets. They sing many songs in different rhythms according to the audience's mood. During the field visit, I noticed that the socio-economic background of *ahirva* singers is often lower than other community members. Economic disadvantage, socio-political consciousness, and personal interest attract them to indulge in this profession. These singers' identities can be identified easily by looking at their dress because a singer often wears *kurta*, *dhoti* and they do not forget to put a velvet scarf on their shoulders. It came to my notice that most of the singers belong to cattle herder castes like Yadav or Gaderia caste. The socio-cultural status of both pastoral castes seems to be equal. These singers consider Mulayam Singh Yadav, Kanshiram, Shivpal Yadav, and Mayawati as their leaders. Creating political consciousness in the middle backward castes (like, Yadav and Gaderiya) and liberating them from mental slavery are the main objectives of these singers.

A singer needs to be physically strong because the singer has to dance at least three hours continuously while performing folk songs. The singer's body structure or facial appearance is like a wrestler's physique. In sum, often two singers sing and perform simultaneously while their four or five other co-stars play *harmoniyam*, *tabla*, *nagada*, and *dholak*, etc. Their main objective is to generate competition and keep their audience curious and cheerful. The main function of these collaborators is to repeat the utterances uttered by the lead singers. The choir consists of only male members. Faruahi folklorists perform masculinity along with dancing and raise local issues, such as atrocities against lower caste peasants, labour, common masses, especially the dominance and oppression of Thakurs. It appears that the *faruahi* folklore is less popular than *birha* folklore. It is also often said that after arduous labour throughout the day, the Yadav community used to sing *birha* folklore in high voices in small groups at night for recreation.

The *faruahi* folk singers narrate the current socio-political scenarios as well as the *bhagidari* (participation or position) and *hissedari* (political share) of Yadavs in political parties. These singers try to build political consciousness among listeners (Yadavs) in rural areas. Raju Yadav of Tandawa village says, “*Faruahi* folk artists openly speak about social injustice or torcher done by Thakur or Brahmin castes on backward castes in poetic form.”

Apart from *faruahi*, a few other folklores like *barahamasa*, *devi geet*, *sohar*, *malhar*, *pachra*, etc., are also very popular in rural areas among Yadavs. These folklores are closely linked to particular occasions and seasons. The art of presenting in a unique style makes it understandable and comprehensive. The professional singers and lower castes sing it wholeheartedly. Their (singers of *faruahi* and *birha*) style of dancing with full vigor keeps the audience engaged. Here, it is relevant to give details of the most popular folklore, the so-called *birha*, which is very close to the ethos of the Yadav community. If we examine the style of singing *birha* folksong, we can find that usually, the last word in any stanza of this song is stretched too much when sung. It is the uniqueness of this genre of music. A few detailed descriptions are as follows-

***Birha* Folklore: An Overview**

Birha folklore is a genre of expression, enormously popular among the Yadav community in Awadhi and Bhojpuri belts (Eastern Uttar Pradesh). Therefore, it is understood that *birha* is the traditional song of Yadavs. The word ‘*birha*’ is derived from the Hindi word ‘*birah*’ (separation). So, it is a song of separation that is sung in pain or grief when somebody's close one is away. It is also a popular medium of expression of unpleasant incidents (caste atrocities, molestation, forced labour, etc.), which occurred in the past.

The origin of *birha* is believed to be in the early 19th century, during the British period when the working class started migrating from their native villages to industrial towns in search of employment opportunities (Varma, 1985). Migrant workers had to live a long duration away from their near and dear ones. To forget their prolonged separation from close relatives, these workers sang this song loudly late at night in small groups after a long and tiring day. It is more prevalent in Sultanpur, Faizabad, Jaunpur and Azamgarh districts of Eastern Uttar Pradesh. Over a period, *birha* has become a powerful instrument of socio-political expressions among Yadav

community. Now, it is no more just a song of separation or for expressing sadness, but it inherits the dissimilar ethos of rural society (Parmar, 1969).

I have also tried to understand the ground realities of caste consciousness by making a series of dialogues with a prominent singer, Madhav Ram Yadav. I wanted to know how a Yadav singer tries to build a caste network and manipulate his thought. Madhav is a popular singer cum writer and belongs to Bhatmayi (a neighboring village of Tandawa). The distance between Bhatmayi and Tandawa is around 3km. He has also written a book, 'Shyam Charit Manas,' which is very popular among Yadavs in the study area. The book is based on the life history of lord Krishna. Madhav emphasizes with a proud sense that Krishna was from the Yadu dynasty and did many heroic deeds to save the 'pride of Yadavs'. He proudly said that the Yadav community belongs to the same dynasty in which Lord Krishna took birth. He often argues that the Hindu God Rama is worshiped only in the Hindi belt while Lord Krishna is worshiped across the country. He feels that Krishna is more popular than Rama. He spoke about some of his experiences of caste-based prejudice, which he experienced in his life. Madhav said, "I wanted to publish my book in Meeta Press¹⁷³, but due to the casteist approach of the publisher, my inspiration went into vain and finally I lost my hope." Therefore, Madhav stopped working on his book project for more than one year. After two years, a Delhi-based publisher (this publication house is managed by a Yadav family) approached him, and once again, he started working on the remaining chapters of the manuscript. Finally, he published it in 2012 and sold more than ten thousand copies. If we look at his social background, we can see that Madhav was working as a peon in a government high school, namely Paliya Inter College, Sultanpur. The school is dominated by the Thakur caste. Whenever he was getting time, he used to sit in the library of the school. His rigorous reading habits helped him to improve his writing skill. He has also written sad stories in the form of folksongs for his disciples (local *birha* singers). His experiences of caste dominance and humiliation can be seen in his writings and speeches. He often tells his personal experiences in the meetings of *chittha panchayat* (an assembly of caste heads).

I participated in many programs of *birha* folklore and I noticed that his disciples often recite his name while singing in any public place. Uttar Pradesh's government also honored Madhav with the 'Bharat Bharti Award' for his contribution to writings and social awareness. Madhav actively

¹⁷³ Due to ethical issue, I have change the name of publication house.

worked for Samajwadi Party for many years. He passed away on 22 August, 2021 in Bhatmayi village, Sultanpur. On the last rite, more than one thousand people paid tribute.

More than twenty *birha* singers recognize him as a ‘guru’ (teacher). His disciples are engaged in singing and writing of the *birha* folklore. They participate in the community feasts regularly and try to bring mutual consensus in two factions of the Yadav community. The thought and action of Madhav are reflected in such folklores, which he wrote. One of his disciples, Chhavi Lal Pal is a lead singer and he is currently working with ‘Passion Studio’ for making available his video on various online platforms. We can see that people passionately watch his videos on YouTube, Facebook and a few other social media platforms. He gets millions of views on his YouTube channel. It is found that new generations are more passionate about the social media. They easily get connected with the thoughts of leaders and folksingers like Madhav and Chavi Lal Pal through these new means of communication.

Nature of *Birha* Folklore

We can observe that *birha* is composed of two episodes. Suppose one party sings their point, the other party answers in the same verse. The volume varies to the tune of the song’ (Tripathi, 1928). Shanti Jain (1999) writes that ‘*birha*’ has four stages. Hence, it is called ‘*charakadiya*’ (four lines). Sixteen letters are found in the first and third phases and ten letters in the second and fourth stages. Additionally, the last two letters of the first and the third stages are short and *guru* (long), respectively.’

Birha is a meaningful folk verse primarily for the appropriate euphemism of love and sadness, which gives a glimpse of early adornment. However, Vipralambha Shringar (a sad love story) holds a respected place in most *birha* songs. It is believed that the tradition of *birha* singing was first initiated in ‘Bhojpur’¹⁷⁴ and later on, it spreads in the Hindi belt. The shepherd, Pasi, Dhobi, Yadav, and other lower-backward castes often sing the *birha* throughout the night (Varma, 1985). In this regard, Madhav Ram Yadav narrated that ‘now *birha* folklore is not only limited to rural areas but the culture of *birha* singing can be seen in urban areas too because the Yadavs migrated to various places over a period. Nevertheless, they still kept their singing tradition

¹⁷⁴ A Bhojpuri-speaking region of the state of Bihar.

alive'. Resultantly, the regional caste boundaries were gradually transformed into broader pan cultural identity.

Meanwhile, *birha* folklore has been a major focal point of communication in rural society. This folklore has been popular among all marginalized castes. Thus, it gained particular importance among Yadavs. It has become a belief that this is the only folk song of Yadavs. As a result, this folklore was devalued. Its widespread utility was also seen from a narrow perspective. Now, the 'organic intellectuals' are realizing the usefulness of this and are making a lot of meaningful efforts in creating an awareness among the people of the importance of this folk song. The Central government and the Uttar Pradesh government have awarded many folk singers like Baleshwar Yadav, Kamla Srivastav, Hiralal Yadav,¹⁷⁵ Bansgopal Yadav, Vishnu Yadav, Kashinath Yadav, etc. for their contributions. Madhav Ram Yadav said that 'now it is essential to rethink about its beneficial and far-reaching consequences by looking at such endangered folk songs.' The above pointed Yadavs (folk singers) hold respectable place and they have become an iconic figure. They try to bridge a consolidated caste network among Yadavs with the help of their writings and songs.

Portraying the Emotion and Feeling

The *birha* folklore consists mostly of *vedana* (derived from ethnic oppression), *parakram* (bravery), *harsha-vishad* (happiness), *shringar* (erotic), *krishna-bhakti* (attachment with god Krishna), *narivedana* (women's suffering), *udveg* (excitement), zeal, nature-love, coincidence-disconnection, and emerging social values, etc. Apart from the above points, the notion of *birah* (sadness) also emerges from the dowry-related issues. Such distress has always been a challenge in front of women and sometimes leads to misery and separation from their husbands. Those *birah* related touching descriptions are found in abundance in the *birha* folklore. We can see that the local folk singers often beg from the stage to boost dowry free marriages. The local *chaudharis* and Yadav leaders also give advice to participants of *biradari bhoj* for same.

¹⁷⁵A popular folksinger (Hiralal Yadav) of Varanasi district, Uttar Pradesh was awarded the Padma Shri, India's fourth highest civilian award(see, appendix: 4.7 and 4.8).

***Birha* Folklore: Depicting Power Relation**

Due to the excess of expression of sadness, this unique communication genre was named *birha*. Ram Asare Yadav (a peasant) said, “We can easily find that often, it (to beat up the lower castes) had been usual practice for the Thakur castes and they exploited lower castes physically and financially. Therefore, the working castes express the story of exploitation with the help of such popular folklore.” Moreover, if we examine the principle of ‘exploitation’ and ‘oppression’ in rural society, we find that Indian rural social structures have been hierarchical (in nature) for a long time. There were clear caste-based multiple hierarchical divisions. In this regard, Thorner (1956) would be relevant to be mentioned here. He described the rural society broadly into three categories: (1) *malik* (landlord), (2) *kisan* (tenant) and (3) *majdoor* (landless). He analysed agrarian relations using the above pointed three specific terms to show the existing classes in the agrarian social structure. He used the word *malik* for land-owning castes (landlords), *kisan* for working peasants (including tenants), and *mazdoor* for agricultural labourers. It is found that local landlords, who were from higher castes, exploited the marginal sections. The story of the exploitations by the dominant castes can be sensed through *birha*-folklore.

If one comes across the themes of *birha* folklore, it can be quickly learned that the folklores have their method of responding to social injustice in society. We can see a concrete example from the Sonbhadra district of Uttar Pradesh, where nearly two dozen people of a marginal section were massacred for a small land dispute.¹⁷⁶ It is exciting to listen, how quickly a local response to this grave injustice came out in the form of a *birha*, which played an important role in mobilizing the people. Today, we can see that at any big socio-cultural ceremony of the Yadav community, they invite folksingers and listen to the *birha* folklore, especially in rural areas because the native folksingers have a very rich socio-political understanding of the local settings. They keep a clear impression on the new generation and try to convince how their community has been struggling and fighting for their self-respect and socio-political rights for many decades.

Here, it would be worthy to point the experience of Vegana Devi (a Dalit woman of Tandawa village). She is a peasant of Tandawa village and she also works as labour in the field of a

¹⁷⁶ Retrieved on 21/07/2022 from <https://www.deccanherald.com/national/9-tribals-killed-in-clash-over-land-dispute-747779.html>

Thakur. She told me that the *harwahi* system (forced labour) was very much prevalent in the Tandawa village. The Thakurs used to beat the lower and backward castes to satisfy their ego. She said, “The Thakur caste of my village used to exploit working agrarian women physically and economically. We were also paid fewer wages than male workers.” Kanchi (2010) also points out similar narratives in her research. The instances of exploitation can be noticed in the themes of rural folklores too. The folklore practices among Yadavs are the best-suited examples of ‘resistance’ and effective communication. Therefore, the idea of rising community sentiment is carried forward with the help of such touching folk songs. It is noticed that the Yadav folksingers not only perform in the Eastern Uttar Pradesh, but they also are called to perform in the other states too. In this regard, All India Yadav Mahasabha and other organizations of Yadav community plays proactive role.

Gender, Folksongs and Work Culture among Yadavs

We can see that most of the agrarian women belong to lower-middle castes in the rural area. They face many challenges in their everyday lives, and their suffering and helplessness can be seen in folklore. If we look at the demographic figure, we can see that about half of (17.91 crores) the families residing in India's rural areas are women, mostly (about 84 per cent) working in small-scale industries, agriculture, and allied occupations. Of these working women, 22 per cent are from scheduled castes, 16 per cent are tribes, and 43 per cent are from other backward classes (Ibid). Apart from that, domestic tasks like cooking, taking care of the children, and guests' hospitality are also on their shoulders. Still, despite all this, women cannot get equal social status in the society, and the local landlords exploit the working women (agrarian labour class) too. Therefore, to understand their social grief, we have a few genres of *birha* folklores such as *vasant geet*, *chaita*, *sohar*, *devi geet*, *faag geet*, *kajri*, *henna geet*, *vivah geet*, *natka*, *bidai geet*, *ropani geet*, *malhar*, etc. The working women often raise their voices against any caste discrimination by singing the above folk songs. Some other dimensions of folklores also play an essential role in making aware and politically empowered rural women. The women (from the Yadav community) used to go to the field of the local landlord to plant paddy, onion, potato, etc. They used to express their agony, bitterness of family life, sadness, etc., through the *ropani geet* (folk song). While commenting on *ropani* folksong, a native of Tandawa village, Renu Yadav (35 years old, a housewife) told me that ‘Ropani folksong prevalent in Purvanchal (Eastern U.P.)

region has its pains. But the agrarian women not only maintain their morale by singing songs even in that sorrow and grief but also save the folk culture'¹⁷⁷.

These folk songs gave a way to create social consciousness, which also helped them to raise their voices against exploitation and make a consolidated caste network. Apart from the social life, these folksongs also portray and reflect a glimpse of individual desire and expectations too. For example, *sohni* folksong portrays their aspirations to get jewellery and visit *tirath darshan* (pilgrimage to a religious place). Similarly, on getting free time from agricultural work, women are engaged in fulfilling social obligations. The Yadav women make an effective presence by singing a folksong called '*nakta*', whenever they get a chance to get together on auspicious occasions. On the day of marriage (at the home of the groom), they sing such folksongs the whole night. Often, such voices resonate on the roofs or in the courtyard at night, and some women or girls of the house also start dancing on it. I was informed that *nakta* is a kind of a promising song and a farce which the women of the bride's side perform (at night) after the procession of the *baratis* (the participants of the marriage ceremony of the groom). Such women, who mostly remain in the family walls, share their suppressed sexual frustrations and anxiety on occasion with masculine traits¹⁷⁸. On this day, we cannot see men's presence in the house.

Folk songs are their simple and easy entertainment. It is a unique medium of expression and resistance. If we explore the psychological aspect of life, we can see that two significant issues come out: *bhoot/churai laana* (ghosting) and the tendency of epilepsy or dizziness. Many studies explore that ghosting is an attitude called 'hysteria,' which mainly happens due to mental stress or weak economic condition. We can easily find out that people in the village jokingly and sarcastically say that the 'emoji' or satire is incapable of relieving the mental stresses of women in rural areas. Therefore, folklore is the only significant medium of expression, which helps rural women to express their socio-political ambitions, personal interests, joys, thought, etc., from the bottom of the heart.

It appears that due to the lack of structural development, the study area was battered by widespread disappointment because of epidemics, famines, floods, and other problems. Due to

¹⁷⁷ A link to *ropani* folk song is as follows: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=18ywrmsHTm0>

¹⁷⁸ A few of them dress up and decorate themselves like wearing shirt-pant, portraying moustache, etc. They also speak like men.

the lack of irrigation facilities, people were trapped in the vicious cycle of poverty, and they were dependent on rains. Due to dependency on nature, their economic condition always remained miserable. Therefore, the local landlord got chance to exploit them.

To get rid of anxiety and suffering, women often worshiped and attached to the sun, *peepal* (*Ficus religiosa* or sacred fig), *neem* (*Azadirachta indica*), *tulsi* (holy basil), river, *sagar* (big pond), etc. It appears that *karwa chauth*, *chhat puja*, *prakriti puja* (nature's worship) and '*mata ki puja*' (Goddess worship) and *asharhi puja* became psychologically natural among helpless cattle herder castes. The diseases like cholera, smallpox, chickenpox, black fever, etc., were caused due to the lack of clean water, and in the absence of adequate primary health centres, the people were engulfed in the epidemic.¹⁷⁹ The women who believed in such deep religious beliefs resorted to '*raja bali puja*' (a demigod) to get rid of these diseases. Therefore, the practice of '*devi puja*' (goddess worship) has a unique place in the folksongs of the Yadav community. Goddess is usually worshiped by the women of this community. Even today, the feelings of deprivations are expressed in *devi geet* (devotional folk song). For instance, Janaki Yadav was a housewife and her husband was working in a gun factory in Kanpur. She also contested the village *panchayat* election once but could not win. She was a fearless and open-minded lady. She narrated a stanza of *devi geet*, which portrays the helplessness: "*Brindavan basbo tajo, ar hon lagi anreet. Tanak dahi ke karne bainya gahat ahir*" (Now, I must leave the Brindavan. Many injustices happen here. Even for little curd, Ahir holds my hand.). These folklores give a glimpse about women insecurity. In addition, Ram Karan of Tandawa village said, "The agrarian women were not only exploited by Thakurs, but they were also facing challenges from their own community members."

Apart from the above discussion, other similar aspects of folklore are seemingly essential to discuss here. The patterns of worship like *deeh puja* (worship of village deity), *prakriti puja* (nature worship), local *devasthan puja* (demigod worship), etc., keep a significant influence in the rural society. At the time of family distress, people like to sing and listen to devotional folksongs like '*devi geet*' or *pachra* folk songs. If there is much stress or chronic disease, the believers invoke a demi-god 'Rajabali' (a local deity of Yadavs) by singing '*pachra*' folksongs. On the day of Deepawali (the festival of light), a few Yadav families offer wine to Rajabali in

¹⁷⁹Smallpox and chickenpox are also considered as a *mahamayi*, *bhagawati mata* (local goddess).

the study area. It is seen that while worshiping, the body of the devotees starts shivering and they start talking to themselves in a loud voice. After listening to the loud voice, the neighbors gather and share their family problems with the devotees; for example, if someone has lost something, the devotee asks Rajbali and explains how it can be found. The local people also visit the devotees to get a job and find a suitable bride/groom for their children.

The active participation of women can be seen in a few cultural activities in the study area; for instance, women sing *sohar* folksongs on *shri krishna janmashtami*¹⁸⁰. Another famous festival is ‘*nag-panchami*,’ in which there is recognition of feeding snakes symbolically. Women sing *kajari* or *devigeet* collectively when they go together outside of the village to feed the snakes symbolically. Similarly, another important festival is *ekadashi* (the eleventh day after Deepawali). This festival is also known as *budhi-deepawali*¹⁸¹. The young generations make the symbol of the demonic spirit soul called *bhuyan*¹⁸² for this occasion and burn it on the day of *ekadashi* in the evening. After this performance, women offer sacrifices in graphical bamboo-soop¹⁸³ in *brahma-mohurta* (early morning) by putting flowers on sugarcane, *mandar* tree,¹⁸⁴ walnuts, etc. On the day of *ekadashi*, women also go towards the east direction of the village, beating the *soop* (bamboo baskets) at dawn and saying “*eshwar aaven, dariddra jaye*” (hey god! come and remove the poverty of this village). Renu Yadav¹⁸⁵ told me, “Due to the hitting on the *soop*, a loud sound comes out, which makes them understand that the evil spirits will run away from the village because loud noises make fear among evil spirits.” The *soop* breaks due to a big hit and the broken *soops* are thrown into the village's east side. When they go back to their home, these women sing *pachara* (devotional folklore) collectively. In the study

¹⁸⁰ Krishna Janmashtami, also known simply as Janmashtami or Gokulashtami, is an annual Hindu festival that celebrates the birth of Krishna, the eighth avatar of Vishnu.

¹⁸¹ Retrieved on 21/07/2022 from <https://www.amarujala.com/shimla/budhi-diwali-in-sirmour-paonta-sahib-hindi-news>

¹⁸² It is also considered a symbol of poverty.

¹⁸³ This indigenous machine made out of thin earrings of sarpat (grass) was at one time the important tool of the kitchen which is used to clean various kinds of grains, which is called ‘Pachhorna’ in Awadhi. After filling the grain in the ‘soop’. It was slowly tossed in the air in a special way and when the ‘soop’ came down, it was gently patted by hand. Using ‘soop’ was also an art. Not everyone can use ‘soop’, because only skilled one can use this object. The grains used to remain in the ‘soop’ and the dirt would come out. Now, it is needed on marriage or any auspicious occasion because it has been a part of Indian traditions, but it is difficult to find it in the kitchen of the city.

¹⁸⁴ The Mandar (*Calotropis gigantea*) is a species of *Calotropis* native to Cambodia, Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Thailand, Sri Lanka, India, China, Pakistan, Nepal, BoocBooc in Somalia and tropical Africa.

¹⁸⁵ She lives in Tandawa village. She is a first post-graduate woman of the village. She has done B.Ed. and two post graduations (Hindi literature and Education).

area, there is a belief that if someone beats *soop* during the early hours of the day of *ekadashi*, ‘evil spirits and poverty do not come in upcoming days.’

In sum, the above details give a glimpse of expressive cultures among Yadavs. Such cultural practices attract our attention from time to time. Their cultural belief and social imaginations have been portrayed through folklore for many years. These folklores give a way to make frequent contact and social reciprocities among Yadav community. It was noticed that women prefer to sing the folksongs with own community members.

Folk Songs and Socio-Political Consciousness

Yadavs (especially women) engaged in agricultural work are also associated with animal husbandry and household activities. They express their happiness and sorrow through many folksongs. Whenever they feel helpless from poverty, social, and family problems, they ask for a vow to a goddess named ‘*durduriya*’. In fulfilling their wishes, they gather in the number of seven or fourteen to express their socio-political thought and family issues. They share their joy and happiness by sharing sweets and ‘fast-foods’. Now, fast foods are becoming a part of rural culture. In this regard, Seeta Yadav¹⁸⁶ told me, “As is known in my village, women often like to eat sweets and sour things. So, they observe this eating-habit with culture.” It is found that seven to fourteen (mostly same caste) women usually gather at a predetermined place and worship ‘*chatpata devi*.’ This celebration is called ‘*durduria of chatpata mayi*’ (by rural women), an outstanding example of this. Among the women of the study area, there is a belief that ‘*pipary mayi*’ loves sour and sweet things. With the hope of her blessing, a group of women sit at a place and sing ‘*pachra*’ song to make the ‘local goddesses happy.’ Finally, they share *kheer* (sweet porridge) and other items among themselves. The practices of mutual sharing and singing bring unity and oneness among them. Resultantly, they are able to make collective decision during election, crisis and natural calamities.

The idea of celebrating *durduria* gives them space to get together and discuss their thoughts, from family or political issues to socio-economic problems in the village. The idea of sitting together (in the name of cultural beliefs) is allowing them to socialize. Renu Yadav of Tandawa

¹⁸⁶ She is agricultural labour, and she also produces paddy, wheat, sugarcane, pulse, etc., in her field with the help of her four children. She also actively participates in *durduriya*.

village said, “These gatherings create a consolidated relationship. Such gatherings also create a trust among them and finally help them during election and economic crisis or epidemic to make a collective decision.”

Gender and Issue of Masculinity in Folk Songs

There has long been a custom of singing during different occasions and activities. On the one hand, women prefer to sing *ropni geet* (during planting paddy), *natka geet* (at the time of grinding grains), *kajri* (while swinging, women sing in the month of *Sawan*),¹⁸⁷ *vivah*,¹⁸⁸ *sohar* (at the time of childbirth), etc. On the other hand, men prefer to sing *fagua* (sung in the month of Falgun [March] especially on the day of *holi* festival), *chaita*,¹⁸⁹ *barah-masa* (description of feeling concerning seasons), *aalha* (praise of valor), *birha* (sad songs), etc. If we compare their singing preferences, we can find that women’s songs have a more nuanced representation of issues related to daily routine, sexuality, sadness, laughter, and jokes. On the other hand, the themes of folksongs of men are associated with politics, masculinities, sexuality, heroic dead, etc. According to Shanti Devi Jain, “All the life of the folk is depicted in these folk songs especially from the first scream of the baby to the last episode of life’s expressions. The pictures including the songs of the distraught sister to meet the brother, the love of women’s jewellery, the mother-in-law, the sister-in-law, the misfortune of a woman suffering from the atrocities of the *sautan* (co-wife), the heroic stories of the heroes and the colourful and romantic meet are portrayed (1999).” There are diverse types of songs that are sung by women and men in rural areas with dissimilar purposes. It is found that women usually sing folksongs on special occasions (*mundana*¹⁹⁰ and ear-piercing rites) or social events within the social boundary of the village while men folk singers often sing in local market and any grand occasion.

It appears that the girl has to face much socio-cultural discrimination from her birth to death. Such impression is reflected in *birha* folklore. So, there is a lively description of women’s

¹⁸⁷ While swinging on the swing of the tree, the girls sing a folk song called *Kajri* (see, appendix: 4.10).

¹⁸⁸ It has also many forms like *banna / bannigeet*, *kalevageet* (at the time of breakfast of Baratis), *gari / banara* (at the time of marriage) *geet*.

¹⁸⁹ It is a beautiful song performed in the month of *chait* (April) in Hindu calendar.

¹⁹⁰ The *Mundana* or the *Chudakarana*, is the eighth of the sixteen Hindu *samskāras*, in which a child receives their first haircut.

afflictions in folklore, such as the patriarchal oppression, the moment spent with friends in *naihar* (father's home), the tyranny of a drunken husband, financial crisis, etc.

Like other lower castes, most of the families of the Yadav community had been dependent on Thakur's mercy¹⁹¹ in Tandawa village. Even today, most of the people of the Yadav community are engaged in agricultural activities. However, the experience of the Yadav community in the study area has never been a rosy scenario. They have to face many challenges, which can be seen from the agricultural field to the local market. For instance, if someone wants water from the public canal, they get threatening calls from the Thakur caste. In a few cases, sometimes, the people from the Yadav community have been beaten up by Thakurs, but due to socio-economic empowerment and political consciousness, now Yadav families have been strengthening its caste network. Even, the emerging caste like Yadav challenges the Thakur's dominance over the public canal and local market. Therefore, one can give credit to these folklores because it creates socio-political consciousness among new generation. Due to impact of these folklores, a 'new leadership' has been emerged among Yadavs.

The local folk singers also campaign to bring unity among scattered Yadav community and these singers make them realize the superiority of the Yadav caste. It appears that with the spread of education, the process of solidarity intensified. In sum, these new changes and the past experiences of sorrows and happiness are well described in the *birha* folklore of the Yadavs.

Interpretation of the Mythic Figure in Folklore: As a New Strategy

The local Yadav folk singers and writers try to portray many mythological characters (like, Radha, Gwalin, Gopika, Krishna, etc.) and bring to life these mythological characters alive through their writings. In long term, these mythic characters directly or indirectly influence the thoughts of the listeners of the Yadav community. Moreover, these mythic characters are taken from religious texts of Hindi or Sanskrit literature. For instance, in Hindi literature, many

¹⁹¹ Many people narrated that most of the land of the Tandawa village was under the control of Thakur. Therefore, the unskilled labours had been working in the field of this dominant caste. The idea of forced labour was also in practice. The origin of bonded labour can be traced back to ancient times whereby, the Hindu society was divided into caste structures. The lower caste strata did not have sufficient means for their own sustenance due to which they often depended on higher castes for their own survival. Due to extreme scarcity of resources on the part of debtor, he had nothing to offer as security. Thus, the creditor and debtor entered into an agreement where the debtor pledged his person and work in lieu of unsatisfied debt.

Krishna-shrayi Bhakti branch poets¹⁹² enriched devotional literature through *gwal-bal* (childhood friends of Krishna) and *gopikas* (female friends of Krishna).¹⁹³ Lord Krishna's characterization as the *dhirodatta* (main hero) of these *gwal-bal* and *gopikas*, whether it is of Krishna's childhood of cow rearing, or moving from Mathura to Brindavan, attract listeners (Yadavs) because they relate themselves with the mythic figure of Krishna (as an ancestor). A popular symbol of yogurt-laden *gwalin* can be seen during Krishna-*janamstami* (birthday celebration of Krishna) at each market in the study area. The mythological tales of yogurt-laden *gwalin* indicate economic self-sufficiency and had been attracting Yadav women until years ago.

Traditional Gwala vs. Political Yadav

Agrarian society has been accused of being 'orthodox,' and women were forced to live in the house's boundary in the name of the family's reputation and prestige (Yadav, 1957). Similarly, the Yadav community has been closely associated with milk production and agricultural activities for livelihood. Therefore, female Yadavs were called '*gwalin*' and male Yadavs were called '*gwal*' (cow herder) in the study area. Most of the Yadav respondents narrated similar stories about their affiliation with cattle rearing and milk production. It is found that a few women from Rajanpur and Sonara village were engaged in curd selling years back. They used to go to neighboring villages to sell homemade curd. Even today, we can see such traditional culture of milk production in Yadav community, and the female Yadavs also go shoulder to shoulder with their husbands in the field.

In this regard, Chhedilal Yadav¹⁹⁴ told me, "Selling yogurt was a proud feeling for them, but the new generation has given up the old tradition of milking and selling yogurt." Even though, to know how the women were devoted to their unshakable faith can be understood through a *birha* folk song: "*Kanha rok mat dagariya, dahiya benchan jai ji...*(Hey, Krishna! Do not stop my way; let me go to sell curd)".

¹⁹² The popular notion of remembering to the beloved god is known as Saguna or Nirgun Bhakti stream. Saguna Bhakti is further divided into two streams: Ramashrayi and Krishnashrayi bhakti branch. The Ramashrayi branch focuses on life history of Hindu God Rama while writers of Krishnashrayi bhakti shakha put emphasis on life history of Hindu God Krishna.

¹⁹³ A sub-caste of Yadav in Western Uttar Pradesh is known as Gop and Gwal. The female members of this caste are known as Gopika and Gwalin.

¹⁹⁴ Chhedilal Yadav is a *chaudhari* of Natuli village and working as a peasant. Despite his weak economic condition, he gives his precious time for the advancement of caste members. He is a supporter of the Samajwadi Party.

The above-presented example clarifies how the folklorist is trying to point out the ambition of self-sufficiency and economic empowerment among Women in Yadav community. In a few cases, the Yadav folklorists seem to be dedicated for community formation. Kancha Ilaiah (2009) points out that ‘the writings of historians on these milk producers (Yadav women) have always been neglectful. Along with selling curd, these women kept proficient knowledge on the medicinal values of local medicinal trees. They used to take care of the people's health. Therefore, the word ‘*gwalin*’ was once a sign of self-respect for rural women. Therefore, their struggle was also portrayed in rural folklore.’

In this regard, it would be worth to mention that there has been an unprecedented upsurge in political consciousness among Yadavs in the last three decades. A few leaders (MLAs) like Mitra Sen Yadv, Ram Ratan Yadav, Ram Chandra Yadav, etc., from the Yadav community, have also emerged as prominent figures in the study area and have become strong socio-political figures. These local leaders never forget to mention the prominent politicians like Ram Manohar Lohia, Jay Prakash, Karpuri Thakur, Kanshi Ram, Lalu Prasad Yadav, Mulayam Singh Yadav, Mayawati, B.P. Mandal and Akhilesh Yadav. Today, due to the efforts of these leaders, a new political understanding has been developed and a trend towards educational achievement has increased among Yadavs in the study area.

Resultantly, the new generations do not like to be called *ahir/gwal* because it shows their old occupational identity. Now, they prefer to call themselves ‘Yadav’ because the word ‘Yadav’ gives a sense of ‘achievement’ and ‘educated’ (Prasad, 2016). The new generation perceives the traditional occupation of ‘selling curd’ in an inferior way. The old tradition of selling curd has also been disappearing slowly for the last two decades, but the occupation of producing milk and selling it can still be seen among Yadavs widely. Those who are engaged in milk selling are called ‘*dudhiya*’ (milkman), in professional sense. Now, no one dares to call them ‘*gwara*’ or ‘*gwala*’. It would be worth to point here that the *dhandha* (occupation) of selling curd has been handled by women while the occupation of milk selling has been carried by men. Meanwhile, women seem to be helping their husbands in taking care of cows/buffaloes and milking. Yadav folklorists also gladly accept and express such recent changes in a satirical style through folklores.

Professional Women Folk Singers

There is strong coordination of political aspiration in folksongs. Therefore, our attention also goes to such compositions, in which a repressed or exploited class raises its voice through ‘*birha* folklore’ as a form of resistance. This expressive culture motivates them to make a strong caste network. Spreading the unheard voices of the marginalized sections of the society has been an essential part of ‘*birha* folklore.’ The oral tradition of singing folklore has been verbally transmitted from one generation to another through *guru-shishya* (teacher-disciple) tradition.

Many women singers have also got an honored place in this guru-disciple tradition. Popular women singers like Rana Rao, Kavita, Preeti Pal, Rajnigandha, Ujala Yadav, Nilima Singh, Malini Awasthi, Sharda Sinha, Kalpana Patwari, Kaushiki Chakraborty, Ila Arun, etc. are making great efforts to revive the folklore tradition. The followers of these singers are in millions on YouTube. Today in the era of the internet and social media, these singers are very popular and are very successful in leaving a clear impression of their personalities on the public. However, it is noteworthy that the importance of the individual in folksongs is always secondary while society and collectively still stands first, due to which the local folklorists from Yadav community have given priority to bring collective socio-political consciousness. The efforts of these singers have been praiseworthy because they bring a little closer to the scattered Yadavs for the last three decades.

Folk culture has always had a close connection with folklore. Modern telecommunication mediums (e.g., TV, computer, smartphones, etc.) have been influencing the new generations for the last two decades. Now, the new generation can enjoy the folksongs on the mobile phone itself. A singer, Ram Anjor Yadav said, “The music of Western civilization and Indian cinematography has degraded traditional socio-cultural values in rural areas. Resultantly, the folklores have been becoming endangered.” It is important to note that even today, the older women do not prioritize modern ‘plastic smiles’ like ‘emoji,’ cartoons, etc., but they enchant the heart through the folksongs. A few famous singers like Rana Rao, Kavita, Preeti Pal, Rajnigandha, and Malini Awasthi have been making meaningful efforts to popularize the folksongs for many years. These singers have been raising their voices through big media channels too.

The main reason for the penetration of folksongs in public is the familiarity of writers or singers with the local community. These singers also are attached emotionally to the local socio-political issues. Therefore, women folk singers speak openly about the circumstances of the 'sex-life' of rural women and their personality, suppressed sexuality, and communicative skills. The above point indicates the dominance of patriarchal society over folksongs, and without discussing these, it would not be significant to talk about portraying women's social participation in folksongs. Let me point out an essential work of Asha Singh, who attracts our attention from current circumstances. She writes that the news of rape continues to come up in newspapers every day. Such women who are raped are those who came out of the house for defecation. Who are these women who leave the house for excretion and are raped and killed? These women are poor, Dalit-Bahujan girls/daughters-in-law from rural areas. Those who have to wait for twilight to defecate because women cannot defecate in the open due to the movement of men during the day, nor do they have toilet facilities in their homes (Singh, 2017). Due to lack of toilet facilities at home, women suffer from many health-related issues. The above-pointed health issue did not get any important place in rural folklore. It means that the writers of folklores are not away from patriarchal mind-set up. These health issues are required to be discussed systematically with reference to folklore.

It is often said that health is wealth. So, the local folk singers not only portrait the political issues, but they also put emphasis on the health issues because due to lack of health awareness, the consumption of polluted drinking water, indigenous poisonous liquor, non-toxic food, cannabis, and other poisonous leaves as intoxicants, etc. the prevalence of diseases is higher in rural areas. Similarly, the weak financial condition of the family directly affects the health of the girls. The above-pointed issues also get space in the writings of the local folklorist. The native woman like Bandana Yadav also sings and expresses her views on the above issues in the forms of a folksong in the following ways: "*Dardon se vyakul jiya mor ho, ...amama more hoti to, darad har leti, ...koi darde na jane*" (No one understands my pain. If my mother could alive, she would share my sorrow and distress.). Similarly, another woman, namely Rama Devi sings on Covid-19 in the following way: "*Jadu chale nayi tona, ...alag-alag karde vichona, jo vairi aayigo Corona.*" (Covid-19 divided us). Such lively descriptions of suffering are portrayed in rural folklore. The above instances show that rural folklores are closely attached with the heart and emotion of listeners.

I had a long discussion with Durga Prasad to explore the condition of youth too. He is a peasant, and he has a small shop in Tandawa village. He said, “Today, rural youths migrate from the village's healthy social environment to cities in search of employment. Due to low earning in the town, they have to reside in the polluted atmosphere of the slum area. Due to a lack of conducive social environment, the young people fall into the trap of spreading gambling, drinking, and prostitution. If they return to their native place, the above social evils also come with these youths and affect villages' healthy social environment.” The problems of the youths are often a significant concern for local leaders, folksingers, *chaudharis* and members of AIYM. These leaders make an effort collectively to resolve the concerning issues like drinking, smoking, etc., in order to make a healthy social environment. It was often said that if a person is trapped in deep poverty, he/she cannot think for a consolidated caste network.

Caste and Folklores

Rural society is divided among many castes and sub-castes, which also has a definite effect on women's folk songs. On the one hand, for example, the *gwalin* (female Yadav) likes to sing and listen to folksongs like *birha*, *lorik*, *pachra*, *hanka*, etc., while the Kumharin (the female from Kahar community) prefer to listen and sing folk songs called ‘*kaharwa*.’ On the one hand, women from the Pasi and Dhobi (Dalit) community like to sing ‘*paciota*’ and ‘*dina-bhadri geet*’ folksong while folk music called ‘*gopi-thakur*’ is more prevalent among carpenter (Badhayi) caste (Parmar, 1969; Panday, 2012). In this context, we can state that modern communications (traditional media and social media) has made an attempt to demolish the caste walls. Many folklore singers (e.g., Malini Awasthi, Kalpana Patwari, Rana Rao) are very famous today. They also go to perform folksongs in many places in India and other countries too.

The sense of a patriarchal mind-set can be seen clearly in the study area. The men have monopoly over the ownership of property such as the house and land while women work in the field for the fulfilment of economic needs as well as for the discharge of family responsibility. The poignant glimpse of masculinity can be heard and understood in the folklore called ‘*aalha*.’¹⁹⁵ In this regard, I made a long conversation with a listener, Parasuram Yadav (45 years

¹⁹⁵ Aalha means to speak loudly. Sheelu who belongs to Raebareli had started taking training in Alha by late Lallu Vajpayee at the age of 15. She has performed in various festivals in the country. Sohanlal accompanied her on clarinet, Sarvesh Kumar on dholak, Pawan Kumar on Jheeka and Rajbahadur on Dandtaal.

old, resides in Tandawa village). He regularly participates in *aalha* folklore. He narrated that ‘Alha and Udal were two legendary generals of the Chandel king Paramardideva (He is also known as King Pagrmal), who fought King Prithviraj Chauhan in 1182 CE, immortalized in the *Alha-Udal Khand* ballad.’ *Alha-Udal* is a popular tale, and the tale is also found in a number of medieval writings of the Prithviraj Rauso and the Bhavishya Purana. A singer Madhav Ram Yadav (see, appendix: 4.6) says that ‘the story of *Alha-Udal* was originally written by a famous writer Jagnik, the *charan* (bard) of Mahoba, but no evidence has yet been found. Besides, the *malhar folksongs* also have the smell of masculinity. The significant renditions of these songs are closely associated with hyper-sexuality, occupation, worship, prayer, social change, dress, politics, wrestling, and inter-caste relationships, etc. (Awasthi, 1985). Folklores like *Alaha* and *malhar* are closely associated with ‘*beer rasa*’ (heroic deed), which have a sense of masculinity. These songs are sung in high pitch and after listening to these songs, one may get moral values and encouragement to fight for self-respect and social justice.

Preferences of the Audience

Different forms of *birha* folklore, a few folksongs for example *nakta*, *vivah geet*, *devi geet*, *bhajan*, *pachra*, etc., are also prevalent among female Yadavs. These folksongs are used as means of expression. The adult men and women like *birha* and *alha* folklore. However, if we talk about rural youth, it is necessary to point out that educated youths listen to more politics-driven *birha*. In contrast, illiterate youth listen to folk songs with hyper-sexual roles. Considering the limitations of society, singers sing such songs that are popular among youths with a desire to get more money as rewards. Working-class agrarian women like (prefer to sing more) *chaita*, *nirvahi*, etc. while non-agrarian women (who are living in semi-urban area) like to sing folk songs of *mehdi* or *jhumar geet*. Indian cinema has made folksongs like *fagua*, *vivah geet*, *sohar* very popular. A few female singers - Malini Awasthi, Kalpana Patwari, Ila Arun, Sharda Sinha, Rana Rao, Lalika Jha, Urvashi, Renuka Sahai, etc. are very popular among young girls of the Yadav community.

The folk songs are not only means of communication to understand mood of the rural masses' or interpersonal relations, but there is a need to understand other means of communication in villages apart from rural folklore; for instance, satirical sentences, anecdotes, stories, couplets, talkative, etc., which seem to be other significant mode of expression and making close social

relation. It was seen that if someone abuses other and the person also replies in the same order, which means both have close relation and frequent contact. Moreover, we can exemplify the above instances in detail. For example, villagers get together near the *holika* (an effigy) and abuse each other in the form of (combined with a) stanza called '*kabira*.' There is a need to understand such abusive responses from a sociological point of view. It appears that the tradition of abusing is well-connected with the concept of 'village exogamy' in Eastern U.P. (Prasad, 2016).

The idea of caste and kinship network is also connected with the concept of 'village exogamy' because it incorporates a social arrangement (social system) in which marriage is allowed only outside of the village because the social units (man or woman) of a village are considered as the children of a clan or extended family symbolically. The people of each village mutually understood that they are a child of a clan called *deeh* (male chieftain or a deity). Therefore, they are bound with a mutual relationship of brother, sister, uncle, maternal uncle, grandfather, etc. Resultantly, the sex and marriage between the boy and girl of a village are never allowed in north Indian villages (Prasad, 2016). However, the caste-based hierarchies and stratifications cannot be ignored among different strata of castes in a village. It appears, overriding these social differences, inter-dependency (see, Jajmani System), and symbiosis or coexistence (in a prognostic way) are basic features or the result of 'village exogamy.'

In this regard, Hershman (1981) reveals that 'the principle of village exogamy means that all villagers are of the same clan, the same localized clan, and the same village area is bounded by the morality of brother-sister. Therefore, sex and marriage are prohibited between members of the village.' Perhaps such social tradition can be helpful to understand the inter-caste harmony. A few examples can be taken from Rajanpur (a neighbouring village of Tandawa) for better understanding. Rajanpur is a Yadav-dominated village where more than ninety-five per cent of the populations are from the Yadav community. There is a set of patterns to call each other in the classificatory (kinship symbolic) words like *chacha* (to a young uncle), *chachi* (to a young aunty), *dada* (old men or grandfather), *dadi* (old women, grandmother), *bua* (to sister-in-law), *nana* (maternal uncle),¹⁹⁶ *nani* (maternal aunty), *didi* or *bachchi* (sister), *bhabhi* (brother-in-law),

¹⁹⁶ The word 'nana' or 'nani' is used in a village when the girl of a village resides in the same village even after her marriage.

kaka (to an old uncle), *kaki* (to an old aunty), etc.

I met a young leader, Ram Surat Yadav, of Tandawa village to understand the pattern of abusing others. He pointed out how the rural youths still follow the idea of village exogamy. They make joke as per traditional relations. He said, “There are around 70 families in Tandawa village, and we know each other. If a person considers another person a brother, he will not abuse him as per tradition, but if he considers him uncle, he would be allowed to abuse or make a joke. However, he cannot abuse his immediate uncle. Although in the month of *agahan* (March), one can abuse without any hesitation with mutual consent, especially on the day of *holika-dahan* (effigy burning of *holika*).” It means there is some seasonal freedom of abuse; for instance, the pattern of abuse can be seen in the month of Falgun (March). So, it is often said in a satirical form that ‘*Falgun me baba dewar lagen*’ (The grandfather can be considered brother-in-law in March). The traditional practice of abusing is also seen in rural folk songs. Women are often heard singing such ‘*gari*’ (abuse) songs in marriage. Due to the rural folklore, the tradition of village exogamy still keeps an important place even today. It appears that the local *chaudharis* try to build a consolidated caste network with the concept of village exogamy. They try to extend the brotherhood and caste solidarity from one village to another village. In order to maintain close contact with community members of other villages, a Yadav *chaudhari* is nominated in each village. Each *chaudhari* tries to make frequent contact with other *chaudharis*.

We can say that folk songs have rich importance because these songs easily reach the heart of the masses. Therefore, the political parties and caste association use local folklore for campaigning and making a consolidated caste network. The local leaders understand the importance of these songs. They keep in touch with local folklorists during the elections. Folklorists create new songs for different political parties, for example, “*Chala sakhi vote daya aayi, mohar sayikil par lagayi*” (Let’s go for casting a vote and give our vote to the cycle [Samajwadi Party] symbol).

However, apart from the political aspect, folklore's social, cultural, and psychological factors matter too. Depending on the linguistic and socio-cultural structure of society, folklore may vary in form, but there is a commonality among them i.e., ‘close connection with the heart of the public.’ *Sohar, kajari, mehadi geet, devi geet, vivah geet, nakta, vidayi geet, ropni geet, malhar, faag geet*, etc. are kinds of folk songs that are closely associated with the spirit of the lifestyle of rural masses of Eastern Uttar Pradesh. Folklore also interprets the sentiment, conduct, and

culture of a community. Therefore, local writers of *birha* folklore put emphasis to bridge the socio-cultural gap with the help of their scripts.

The study area is divided into many castes. There are different traditions, beliefs, food habits by which a clear differentiation or hierarchy is maintained by one rank to another. Therefore, the lifestyle of every caste gives rise to an autonomous view and folklore is also not left untouched by it. This is why each caste has its own ‘folksong’ or ‘caste song’.

Table (5:1): Castes and its Folklore in the Study Area

Castes	Folklores
Ahir / Yadav	<i>Birha</i> , Ahiraua or Faruahi
Kumhar and Mahar	Kaharwa, Huruk
Pasi	Pasiota
Musahar	Dina-Bhadri
Badhyi (carpenter)	Gopi-Thakur

Source: Primary Sources

The above investigation shows that folk songs have an important place in rural society. It plays a unique role in strengthening ideals in public as well as in bringing alive the given social system. Folklores also have an unprecedented contribution to safeguarding oral traditions, moral building, and changing the social behaviour. It also provides valuable information on socio-economic and political scenarios. The folklores of Yadav and other peasant castes hold an essential place in their daily lives. Apart from this, the discussions of an ideal society, caste consolidation, political movements, etc., are often initiated by the singers of folklore. However, the expression of ‘sorrow’ has been the main feature of *birha* folklore. If the family of *dusadhas* (Yadav)¹⁹⁷ suffers from *pret-badha* (phantom disturbance), a *pachra* folksong (devotional song) is sung to get rid of it.

It is pertinent to remark here that many such styles are prevalent in Indian folklore, in which the *nayika* (heroine) expresses herself through distress in the event of separation from the protagonist or have to live far away from the hero. In every province of the country, we can see

¹⁹⁷Dusadhas are also known as milky, *dudhias*, or *gwala* due to being associated with the business of milk production/selling.

that there are a number of songs revealing the heroism of the winners, but such folklore that gives expression to the hero-victim is very rare; for example, '*devi geet*' (a devotional song) is invoked by singers to bring social equality and prosperity in the worldly life. The above pointed rare genres of folk music are prevalent among backward and lower castes in rural areas of Eastern Uttar Pradesh.

Far-Reaching Consequences of the Folklore

Birha folklore has been a major focal point of communication in rural society. Therefore, the organizers of *biradari bhoj* hire local folksingers for one day and pay from five to ten thousand rupees. The *birha* folklore is very popular among lower castes with dissimilar names, but it gained particular importance among Yadavs. Therefore, there has been a belief that *birha* is one of the folk songs of Yadavs. As a result, this folklore was devalued, and its widespread utility was also seen from a narrow perspective. Today this folksong has become endangered. However, many local people have realized the usefulness of this rural folksong for the last two decades. Many singers from Yadav and Gaderiya castes have been making many meaningful efforts to influence the people about the importance of this folksong. Keeping in mind the far-reaching consequences of folklore, Uttar Pradesh government has also awarded many singers.

Oral History and Myths

Folk songs have been carrying oral histories and leaving a deep impression in the minds of the natives for many years. The impact of those oral histories can be understood through an oral story of *Lorik*,¹⁹⁸ which has an immense effect on the Yadav community. King Lorik is a prominent mythic figure among Yadavs. He is considered the nearest forefather of Yadavs. His life's description can be seen in *lorikayan* (tales of king Veer Lorik) and the Yadav folksingers sing it with a few dissimilar themes in *birha* and remember him for his bravery and immense strength with a sense of great proud. The respondents believe that king Lorik was born in the Yaduvanshi Kul, a Kshatriya of the Panwar lineage in Gaura village of Balia district (Uttar Pradesh).

¹⁹⁸ The story is very popular in the study area (see, appendix: 4.14). I have also extracted this story from a few internet sources).

It is believed that there was immense wealth in the kingdom of Lorik and he had 1600 cows. The singers of *birha* folklore often mention his heroic deeds. The dynasty of king Lorik is assumed to be from Yaduvansh in which Krishna (a significant deity in Hinduism) had taken incarnation. Madhav Ram Yadav (a writer and singer) said, “Veer Lorik belonged to the generation of King Mahabhoja, the youngest and most glorious son of Bhima Stavat. The Bhoj dynasty originated from King Mahabhoja, who was Yaduvanshi. Therefore, Yadavs are counted among the *kshatriya* castes and have a tradition of marrying the bride by displaying muscle power”. The life history of the king Lorik is written in *Lorikayan*, which is the most famous theme of *birha* folklore in the study area. Its protagonist is Lorik. The sense, in which the hero narrates the life-events of Lorik in this folklore full of heroic rasa, is delightful to see and hear. Lorik is remembered as a great ancestor of historical heroes of Ahir caste. It is also called the 'Ramayana' of the Ahir caste. Lorikayan epic, called the earliest epic of the period language, was first written in the period language in 1379 AD by a scholar named Mullah Daud¹⁹⁹ whose father's grandfather came from Armenia near Iraq.

The theme (on *lorikayan*) of the popular *birha* can be understood in the following way: a fort (Agori) of Sonbhadra has a deep connection with the legend of Lorik. This fort is still present in its fractal form, but there is no information about its authentic history, but it was rebuilt by the Kharwar and Chandela kings around the tenth century.²⁰⁰ Lorik had a fierce battle with the brutal, tyrannical king Molagat of Agori fort.²⁰¹ Lorik had tantric powers and established his supremacy over the Aghori Fort. Lorik defeated the very cruel king Molagat of that time. Lorik and Manjari's love story and the war between Lorik and Mulagat are very popular among *birha* singers²⁰². Even today, the mountain named Nargadwa (near Mirzapur railway station) makes this *janushruti* (oral history) live. It is said that after winning the Aghori estate by the war, the

¹⁹⁹ Retrieved on 18/07/2022 from <https://www.geni.com/people/Mulla-Dawood-Shaheed-bin-Mulla-Qazi-Ahmed/6000000011336505561>

²⁰⁰ Retrieved on 18/07/2022 from <http://www.uptourismblog.com/2019/08/>

²⁰¹ Retrieved on 18/07/2022 from <https://makingindiaonline.in/online-news-in-hindi/2017/10/22/history-agori-fort-veer-lorik-stone-story/>

²⁰² Retrieved on 18/07/2022 from <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/travel/destinations/veer-lorik-patthar-in-sonbhadra-tells-a-special-love-story/as69484840.cms>

kingdom of Lorik was anointed and he established the rule of Sonbhadra, in Madhya Pradesh and parts of Chhattisgarh. A listener of *birha* folklore namely Parashuram Yadav, who resides in Tandawa village narrated about heroic deed of Lorik.

“Upon reaching *doli* (palanquin) near Markundi Hill (near Sonbhadra district, U.P.), newlywed Manjari challenges her husband (king Lorik). She wanted to see her husband’s immense force once more and asked him to do something that the people there remember the pair (king Lorik and Manjari)... In reply, Lorik said, ‘tell me what to do that will remain an immortal sign of our love, no loving couple should even return from here’. Manjari shows Lorik a huge rock and asks him to rip off the rock with his beloved sword into two parts in a single blow. King Lorik did the same, and with his immense muscle took a massive sword of 60 kg and cut that huge rock in one blow.” He further said, “This fragmentary rock is still present there today for a lively tale of unbroken love... Manjari also applied the vermilion of his demand to the fragmented rock.”

It is found that a famous landowner and wrestler, Daddan Singh Yadav, belongs to this village and people assume that he is a descendant of Lorik. The narratives of Parasuram Yadav and Madhav Ram Yadav can be concluded in the following way: ‘A fair is organized here on the day of Govardhan Puja and other occasions. Many people, including saints from far and wide, take a bath with milk and salute the heroic Lorik. However, apart from their mythic assumption about ‘Lorik’ and ‘Manjari’, we can see that mostly Yadav community takes part on the day of Govardhan Puja because such myth gives a sentimental genealogical touch to the Yadav community. Birha folksingers try to build superiority complex among Yadavs with the help of the *lorikayan* epic. It is another socio-cultural dimension that is giving Yadavs a platform to get together and build a consolidated caste network.

Contemporaneity in Folklore

Folklore always reflects contemporary social issues; for example, child marriages are still in practice and women seem to be the primary victims of such social practices. Due to child marriages, women are deprived of education, and becoming mothers at an early age which is a common phenomenon. Many times, they lose their lives due to labour pain during childbirth. The reflection of the above pain can be heard in ‘*sahana* folksong.’ Therefore, the local folksingers as well as local members of All India Yadav Mahasabha convince the audience to leave such unhealthy social practices because such evil practices lead Yadav community into shadow of poverty.

Birha folklores also touch the sentiment of the masses. For example, the genre of '*aalha*' focuses on 'bravery' (masculinity) and '*atikamukta*' (hyper-sexuality). We can find that there is an exaggerated description of the subject, like fighting between two kings. The '*aalha*' folklore is full of heroic rasa (deed), affords positive messages such as 'victory of truth' or 'defense of religion' while the theme of the *birha* folklore is centred on 'friendship between Krishna and Sudama', social issues and '*cheer-haran*' (stealing clothes), etc. The purposes of the above themes are to give an in-depth learning of moral and ethical values with an objective to build a consolidated inter/intra caste relation. The above themes create social consciousness among Yadavs. At the same time, the above context also teaches the rural community about the importance of inter-caste relations. A few popular themes like '*Machhli shahr kand*'²⁰³ and '*Jar, Joru, and Ghulam*,'²⁰⁴ etc., of *birha* folklore make people aware of the contemporary socio-political aspects as well as the sadness, resistance, rebellion, anguish, and many social discrepancies. In this context, Shantidevi Jain (1999) points out that 'all the folk's life is depicted in these folk songs. From the baby's first cry to the last episode of life, and emotional pictures are in it. The distraught sister's songs to meet her brother, the love of women's jewelry, the mother-in-law, the sister-in-law, the misfortune of a woman suffering from the atrocities of the *Sautan* (step wife), the heroic tales of heroism and the color rendition of the meeting.' The coordination of antiquity as well as contemporarily in rural folk songs makes it unique. Folklore makes aware of various religious characters and sows the seeds of political ideas in agrarian caste-like Yadavs through many fictional characters. Similarly, rural folklore also reproduces an understanding of the lessons of contemporary national politics, social change, and unity in diversity. It seems that folklorists attempt to create high socio-cultural values through folk songs.

Mythic Figure Krishna: As an Ancestor of Yadavs

Lucia Michelutti (2008) found in her research that today's Yadav community considers themselves in Mathura town (U.P.) 'a caste that learns politics from the stomach.' The new generations claim to the Hindu deity 'Shri Krishna' as its 'ancestor' and 'political guru.' Due to the association with Krishna, a different political understanding has arisen in the Yadav community today. The Yadav youth often claim that 'politics is in my blood.' The main reason

²⁰³ This theme gives a glimpse of scandal in Machhalishahar of Jaunpur district of Eastern Uttar Pradesh.

²⁰⁴ This episode makes us aware about the causes of family and social conflicts in rural society.

for this belief can be seen in their emotional attachment to the Hindu deity Krishna. Such emotional attachments are ingrained among Yadavs with the help of *birha* folklore. In other words, the reason for the development of the perception/consciousness or attachment with Krishna is rural folklore. After talking to some folklorists and knowing the opinions of a few respondents', it can be said that the Yadav community in rural belts felt inferior to Thakur until years ago. They were considered '*ahir*' (rustic) and *shudra* (an inferior category), but the *birha* folklore made them realize that they are descendants of 'Krishna'.

Now, the Yadavs are struggling to make their PAN identity as Kshatriyas with the help of two themes of *birha* folklore: 'Ahir Gaurav Gatha'²⁰⁵ and 'Battle of Rejangala war.'²⁰⁶ These two themes are the most liked and popular themes among Youths (Yadavs). In the contrary, there is a new educated class among Yadav community. They try to build their identity in a dissimilar way. They read the work of *dalit-bahujan* writers like Kancha Ilaiah' (2009),²⁰⁷ Phule, Ambedkar, Periyar, Lalai Singh Yadav,²⁰⁸ etc. They try to make their identity in a secular or socialist outlook.

Noteworthy Remarks

To sum up, *birha* folksongs are very popular among the Yadav community. After going through a few songs of *birha*-folklores, I can say that the major theme of this folklore is more focused on the sadness, child marriage, Krishna, devotion, adornment, and politics of social justice. The above issues give an emotional touch and make the widespread Yadav community closer. These folklores have created a strong caste consciousness among Yadavs. Resultantly, they are able to challenge the hegemony of Thakur caste in the study area.

Only a minimal research has been conducted on the impact of folklore on identity politics in India. A significant reason can be the government's indifference to these rural genres. Sometimes its popularity has been reduced by imposing a lack of primacy in folk songs,

²⁰⁵ Retrieved from <https://yadavgatha.wordpress.com/2012/06/06/yadav-yaduvanshi-aheer-yadukul-ahir-gaurav-gatha-yaduvanshi-history-poem-veer-ras-kavita/>

²⁰⁶ Retrieved from <https://theprint.in/walk-the-talk/56-years-on-remembering-the-battle-of-rezang-la-through-the-eyes-of-two-brave-soldiers/150549/>

²⁰⁷ He belongs to a cattle herder community called Kurma caste, close to Yadav community.

²⁰⁸ Periyar Lalai Singh Baudh was a policeman who became a social justice activist and play writer. He wrote plays like Shambhuk Vadh. He translated Periyar E. V. Ramasamy's 'The Key To Understanding True Ramayan from Tamil to Hindi as *Sachi Ramayan Ki Chabi*'.

sometimes by denying rural folk songs as belonging to a particular caste and their authenticity. Rural folklore also incorporates antiquity into its own. The traditional knowledge and socio-cultural values that were inherited in folksongs were disregarded.

The folklores also give a glimpse of the cultural setting and various achievements of Yadavs. In short, we can say that folklorists try to assimilate the oral history and the way of life in their writings. In the case of women, Mohanand Jha (1989) points out that ‘women are also credited for keeping the songs and stories sung in centuries of customs, rites, festivals, marriages, fasts and rituals in their *kanthas* (throat).’ In the words of Jha, “There are many lullabies, the folklore of quarrels and loneliness and ecstasy, which seem to be the battles added by women who are engaged in mentally sophisticated and sensitive day-to-day work (1989).” Sociologists Robert Redfield and Milton Singer call the tradition of folklore ‘little tradition’ (1956).

The new educated generations are engaged in local business and government jobs. A few of them are making their career in singing and writing. The above progress and social changes are often expressed by folk singers at public places in satirical accents, for instance, “*Larkiya jaba se saykal chalne lagi, tab se aage ka danda khatam ho gya*” (Ever since the girls are getting educated, the dominance of men in the public domain seems to be ended).

It is found that listening to folk songs on social-political issues has created a socio-political understanding among Yadavs. The young generations from Yadav community have been taking various initiatives to be free from the shackles of *harwahi-charwahi* (*gulami*) and caste dominance, which had been carried over the years. Due to this, caste conflicts also take place many times in the study area. Two decades back, a few FIRs were also lodged, and the dominant castes (Thakur and Brahmin) also imposed many types of social restrictions²⁰⁹. However, bypassing those restrictions, local *chaudharis* and leaders of Yadav community successfully built a strong unity among the backward castes. Today, many backward castes, including Yadav, actively participate in the great festival of Indian democracy and are giving a new direction to rural society. As a means of communication, *birha* folklore is widely used by the leaders of Yadav community to reach the larger community members and the voters. *Birha* folklores also

²⁰⁹ The most popular restrictions were as follow: social boycott, no help during economic crisis, restricting to inter into the field, etc.

help to bring political consciousness among Yadavs and it also help in rising the community sentiment at larger scale.

Chapter-6

Have the Ideological Divisions and Contradiction within Resolved

This chapter detailed about a few *goul* (factions) and ideological groups, which exist among Yadavs. I have addressed that how the internal ideological divisions still surface among Yadavs. Similarly, how the local leaders and *chaudharis* come up with an opinion and what are the priorities of such dissimilar groups especially how do they stand for a pan Indian identity despite the internal division. For example, ‘*Akhil Bhartiya Prabuddha Yadav Sangam*’ (a caste association) and the members of Yadav Shakti magazine put more emphasis on democratic and rational values. They also follow the footprint of Kabir, Periyar, Phule, Ambedkar, Lalayi Yadav, etc. The pictures of the above pointed social reformers can be seen on the banners and posters of *Akhil Bhartiya Prabuddha Yadav Sangam*. They also promote rituals free marriages. In such marriages, brides and grooms just read preamble of Indian constitution and even they do not hire priest. The members of the *Prabuddha Sangam* also negate the sub-caste boundaries among Yadavs openly.

In contrast, *All India Yadav Mahasabha* and the members of *Yadav Kuldipika* magazine have been celebrating *Shree Krishna Janamstami*, *Dadhikandon*, *Nandmahar*, *Sadar Festival*, etc. passionately from the last two decades. They also organize the mass wedding ceremonies for the poor families of Yadav community with the help of local leaders and priests. Its members try to project Krishna (a mythic figure) as an ancestor of the allied caste of Yadav community.

It is very clear from both examples that these caste based associations or organizations keep dissimilar ideological position but they promote a pan Yadav identity and negate sub-caste boundaries, which exist among Yadav community. It was found that the members of *Akhil Bhartiya Prabuddha Yadav Sangam* and *All India Yadav Mahasabha* are well-educated and their socio-economic background is much higher than the organizers of *biradari bhoj*. It was noticed that the members of both organizations often criticize to the idea of *biradari bhoj* because they feel that the entire process of celebrating such expensive community feast leads its organisers into the shadow of poverty and backwardness.

We can see that most of the Yadav leaders are closely associated with Samajwadi Party. They actively participate in the *biradari bhoj* and they try to keep frequent relation with the local

chaudharis. Moreover, the Yadav leaders of different political parties, caste associations and ideological groups are also invited to the *biradari bhoj* in order to maintain a consolidated caste network. A few names of caste associations of Yadav community have been given below (table: 6.1). These caste associations keep dissimilar ideological positions but are also connected with each other.

Table No. (6.1): A Few Local Caste Associations of Yadav Community and its Presidents

Local organizations		National Presidents
1.	Akhil Bharat Varshiy Yadav Mahasabha	Mrs. Poonam Krishna Yadav
2.	Akhil Bhartiya Prabuddha Yadav Sangam	Mr. Ram Awatar Yadav
3.	Yadav Sena	Mr. Shiv Kumar Yadav
4.	Bhartiy Yadav Mahasabha	Mr. Indrajeet Singh Yadav
5.	Vishv Yadav Parishad	Dr. Surendra Yadav
6.	Yaduvanshiy Mahasangh	Mr. Jay Singh Yadav
7.	Akhil Bhartiya Yaduvanshi Mahasabha	Mr. Vijendra Singh Yadav
8.	Akhil Bhartiya Yadav Mahasabha	Mr. Ramanand Yadav
9.	Akhil Bhartiya Ahir Mahasabha	Mr. Ved Ratan Yadav
10.	Rashtriya Yadav Sena	Mr. Manoj Yadav

Sources: Primary Data and Internet

Sub-Divisions and Differences at Regional Level

As I have already mentioned, the Yadav community is not a homogeneous category. It has many segments and sub-divisions. A closer look at the multiple divisions among the Yadav castes in different regions provides an understanding of the ways in which different allied cognate castes were incorporated into the regional caste categories. For instance, the Yadav community is divided into a few sub-castes like the Dhangar, Ala, Gangeddu, Golla, Iddyar, Konar, Kurba, Kurwa and Yerragella in the Telugu-speaking regions. In this regard, a local leader of Nizamabad district informed me that there are three major divisions among the Yadavs in Telangana: Yerragolla, Poja and Pakanati. The Yerragollas are placed at the top of the socio-cultural hierarchy while the Pojas and Pakanatis are considered lower than the Yerragollas. These three major sub-divisions exist even today. The Poja and Pakanati Yadavs give their

daughters to the Yerragolla Yadav without any social restriction but the Yerragolla Yadavs prefer to give their daughter to Yerragolla Yadavs only.

In this regard, Rao (1979: 129) pointed out that the Ala or Mekala sub-castes among Yadavs include those who tend sheep and goats rearing while the Gangeddu sub-caste kept performing bulls. Now, owing to the influence of the AIYM and cultural celebrations like the Sadar Festival, such occupational divisions do not exist. It is interesting to note how the '*Sadar Festival*' has transformed the idea of occupational identity and strict sub-caste divisions among the Telugu Yadavs. Meanwhile, there is a very clear cultural gap between South Indian Yadavs and North Indian Yadav. Therefore, many sub-castes among Yadav community still exist (see, table-6.2). On the one hand, the Yadavs belongings to North India have had a clear impression of the popular myths and tales, which are associated with cow and Nand Baba.²¹⁰ On the other hand, Yadavs of South India assert their cultural identity with the help of goat and buffalo during the celebration of '*Sadar Festival*'.

Table No. (6.2): Yadav Community and Their Presence in Different States and Union Territories of India

State	A few other names of Yadavs
Andhra Pradesh	Dhangar, Golla, Iddyar, Konar, Kurba, Kurwa, Yerragella
Assam	Ahir, Ghosh, Gwala, Gop
Bihar	Gwala (Majraut and Krishnaut), Yadav, Gop
Gujrat	Ahir, Ayar, Boricha, Yadav
Haryana	Ahir, Rao, Gawala, Yadav
Karnataka	Gouli, Golla, Gopal, Yadava, Asthana, Golla, Adavi, Gopala, Anubaru, Atanaburu, Hanbar, Hanabar, Dudhigola

²¹⁰ The myth (related to Nand Baba) is very popular in the study area goes like this: Nandbaba and Vasudev were best friend. When the atrocities of king Kans rose out of control, Vasudev along with Rohini sent all his queens to Nand Baba's place. A famous character Balram was born at Nand Baba's house and Krishna, another famous mythic figure, also was delivered to Nand Baba's house immediately after his birth. It is believed that Nand Baba had around one million cows.

Kerala	Iruman, Kolaya, Muniyani, Ayar
Madhya Pradesh	Ahir, Gavala, Goala, Gwal, Kansa, Thakur, Jadav, Yadav
Maharashtra	Gowali, Ahir, Yadav
Manipur	Gwala, Ahir, Yadav
Meghalaya	Ghosh, Gopa, Gawala, Yadav
Odisha	Golla, Gope, Ahir, Gour, Goudo, Punnu Golla, Yadav, Gola, Sadgope, Gauda and Mekala Golla
Punjab	Gawala, Yadav, Yaduvanshi, Gwar, Ahir, Gope
Rajasthan	Ahir (Yadav, Gope)
Tamil Nadu	Jogi, Yadavan (Idayan) or Golla, MondGolla, Asthanthra Golla
Tripura	Goala, Gope, Yadav
Uttar Pradesh	Ahir, Ghosi, Gwala, Yadvanshi
West Bengal	Ahir, Gope, Goala, Yadvav, Sadgope Yadav, Gawar
Andaman & Nicobar Islands	Yadav, Rolal, Kollubhatti, konar
Chandigarh	Gwala, Yadav, Ahir
Dadar & Nagar Haveli	Ahir, Bharvad, Yadav
Delhi	Ahir, Yadav, Gwala
Goa, Daman & Diu	Yadav, Gavli
Pondicherry	Konar, Kolaya, Ayar, Mayar, Muniyan, Eruman

Source: Web Pages of AIYM and a Few Personal Observations

Marital ties Among Sub-Castes of Yadav Community

Kinship and intra-sub-castes marriages are two concerning points here because now the root causes of the existence of caste are based closely on marital practices. It would be worth to begin with an example from the field. A key respondent, Ramraj Yadav (age 70 years), a resident of Tandawa village, told me that, in his childhood, marriage alliances among Yadavs were formed after seeing the *gotra*, *guna* (matching)²¹¹ and sub-castes. Generally, the social status of the Dhador and Ghurpita castes was considered to be the lowest in the socio-cultural hierarchy among the Yadavs, while the Gwala sub-caste was considered at the highest level in social hierarchies. In this regard, his wife Janaki Yadav believes that she was born in a Gwala family, while his neighbour was a Ghantiha-Ahir. She says that the Ghantiha-Ahirs used to give their daughters to the Gwala grooms, but the Gwalas did not send their daughters to a Ghantiha-Ahir's family. If some families disobeyed the rules of marriage alliance between the sub-castes, such families were considered socially inferior for a short period but they did not face any socio-economic punishment in the study area. However, the local leaders and caste heads have been making an effort to bring uniformity with the help of a few new cultural symbols (see, table-6.3). These new symbols, signs and gestures are popularized with the help of *birha* folklore, magazines, banners, posters, websites, etc.

Table No. (6.3): A few Common Shared Cultural Symbols, which are Popularized by AIYM and Local Leaders

Important Details	Symbols, sign, gesture
Caste title	Yadav, Rao, Singh, Jadav, Chaudhari
Clan / <i>gotra</i>	Atri, Banaphar, Banafar, Banafar, Dangar, Dusadh, etc.
Descendants of	Yaduvansh, Nandvansh, Gwalvansh
Main deities	Shri Krishna, Vasudev, and Nand

²¹¹According to Shiv Kumar Yadav (a local inhabitant), "Matching 36 gunas was considered an auspicious sign for marriage."

Flag	Pitambari (good character)
Colours	Saffron, white
Mark	Sudarshan Chakra
Tree	Kadamb, Peepal
Slogan	Jai Yadav, Jai Madhav
Popular festivals	Krishna Janmastmi, Holi, Nagpanchami
Celebrations	Sadar festival (Hyderabad), Dadhikando (Prayagraj), Dangal, Nand Mahar
Traditional game	Wrestling
Folksong	<i>Biraha</i> , Lorikayan, Alha
Traditional dance	Farwahi, Ahiraua
Traditional attire	White Kurta-dhoti, Pagadi, Gamchha
Traditional occupation	Milking, herding, military services
Demigods	Kariya, Goriya, Pholmati, Pawariha
Goddesses	Radha, Subhadra, Vindhveshwari
Traditional cuisine	Sweet-Yoghurt (Lassi)

Source: Primary Data and Website of AIYM

Extending the Caste Boundaries

It was found that the idea of endogamy within the sub-castes was usually practiced in certain regions with the help of the kinship network, and was legitimized by their fellow caste members. The aspiration for socio-economic empowerment led to a greater focus on education and the

resultant migration. Urbanization and the quest for a job in the urban areas also helped them to move beyond their regional (sub-caste) boundaries. After migrating (from Hindi-belts to other palaces), they overcame spatial sub-caste boundaries and moved into broader caste solidarity at a national level (Rao, 1979: 132-135).²¹² As Jaffrelot (2003: 189) points, “Yadav leaders succeeded in their cultural fusion project since they persuaded their fellow caste members to downplay the endogamous units into which they were divided; there were even some inter-regional marriages. Fusion was made easier from the 1930s onwards when North Indian Yadavs migrated from their villages to urban areas.” The practice of inter-caste marriage (within the community framework) was initiated mainly by the Ahir caste and became a turning point for the cattle-herder castes (Rao, 1979: 141). For making it successful, some within the All India Yadav Mahasabha and local Yadav leaders made efforts to arrange group marriages. Group marriages can be seen, even today, various places in North Indian states.²¹³ As a result of which, marital practices among the cognate castes of Yadavs were primarily initiated in the Hindi-speaking belts, especially in urban areas. Rural to urban migration, numerical strength and educational attainment seem to be other reasons behind such new caste mobility.

Internal Sub-Caste Divisions and Kinship Ties

S.P. Agrawal and J.C. Agrawal (1991: 159) pointed that Yadav/Yaduvanshi, Ahir, Ghoshi, Gwala were a few major divisions among Yadav community. There were a few branches (among Yadavs), which were counted 8.7 per cent of total population of Uttar Pradesh (Census 1931). Those branches were counted in following ways: Mahrot, Satmulia, Kishont, Gorla, Venuvanshi, Bhirgudi, Doha, Dhandhuri, Gaddi, Gomla, Ghodchadha, Ghoshi, Gujar, Khoonkhuniya, Rajoria, and Rawat. Due to the continuous efforts of AIYM and local *chaudharis*, now there are three major classifications among Yadavs/Ahirs: Yaduvanshi, Nandavanshi and Golvanshi. The Yaduvanshis Ahirs claim descent from a mythic figure ‘Yadus’. R.U.S. Prasad writes that ‘Yadus represents an ancient Vedic tribe with Yadu as the name of its king. Yadu appeared in

²¹² Migration and education became strategic points for weaving a consolidated identity for the Yadavs in the 20th century combating the disunity which plagued them in the 19th century as the primary barrier to identity formation.

²¹³ Retrieved on 14/02/2022 from <http://www.yadavmahasabharajasthan.com/images/pdf/hadoti-vivah-samiti-samelan-2017.pdf>

several Regvedic hymns, such as Book I, hymns 36.18; 54.6 and 174.9; Book IV, hymn; 30.17; Book V, hymn 31.8; Book VI, hymn 45mn 45.1. They are mentioned together in several other hymns in books VIII, IX and X of the Regveda (Prasad, 2020:72).” Similarly, the Nandavanshashi Ahirs claim descent from the king Nanda, the foster fathers of Krishna (a mythic figure of Mahabhartar epic). The Golvanshi Ahirs claim descent from Krishna's childhood friend (*Gopis* and *Gopas*). The above three major divisions are based on some mythical stories and tales. Such ideological divisions can be seen across India.

Many changes in caste system can be counted across India. For instance, Sudam Yadav, is an inhabitant of Balangir district of Odisha,²¹⁴ informed me that he belongs to ‘Gour’ sub-caste of Yadavs while his wife Rama Devi from Laxminarayan Gola sub-caste. According to NCBC report, there are around ten sub-castes among Yadavs in Odisha. After the marital tie between Sudam Yadav and Rama Devi, a local *chaudhari* Parmanand objected and stopped inviting them to the local social functions and commensality because the sub-castes of Sudam Yadav and Rama Devi Yadav were dissimilar. Sudam Yadav has a doctorate degree in Anthropology and his wife is also a post graduate. Both made a lot of effort to convince the local residents and Yadav *chaudharis* that both Laxminarayan Gola and Gour ethnic group belongs to Yadav community only.

The report of the National Commission for Backward Classes (NCBC) of Odisha was also presented to the local *chaudharis*. After several meetings with local leaders and *chaudharis*, the local *choudharis* imposed a monetary penalty of Rs 50,000 and ordered him to give a community feast for the local Yadav community. After completing the *chaudhari's* order, Sudam Yadav's family could get social acceptance in the Yadav community. The above pointed sub-caste divisions have been also mentioned in the NCBC report (see, table-6.4).

²¹⁴ Many such socio-cultural changes were counted while I was collecting primary data in Odisha for my research paper (see for more details: Prasad and Bibhar, 2020; Jena and Prasad, 2021; Moharaj and Prasad, 2021).

Table No. (6.4): Yadavs in Hindi-Speaking Belts (According to NCBC State List)

State	Sub-Castes	NCBC State List	Resolution No. & Date
Odisha ²¹⁵	Gola, Sadgope, Gope/Gop, Ahir, Gounda, Goudo, Gour, Mekala Golla, Yadav, Laxminarayan Gola, Golla, Punnu Golla, etc.	43	“12011/9/94-BCC dt. 19/10/1994 12015/15/2008-BCC dt. 16/06/2011”
Uttar Pradesh	Ahir, Yadav	1	“12011/68/93-BCC(C) dt. 10/09/1993 12011/88/98-BCC dt. 06/12/1999”
Madhya Pradesh	Ahir, Brajwasi, Gavli, Koli, Lingayat, Gafoli, Gobari (Gyari), Gobra, Gadhari, Gwara, Yadav, Raut, Thethavar, Gop, Gopal	5, 68, 99, 5, 237, 240, 67/113	“12011/68/93-BCC(C) dt. 10/09/1993 12011/21/95-BCC dt. 15.05.1995 12015/15/2008-BCC dt 16/06/2011”
Bihar	Yadav, Gwala, Ahir, Ghasi, Gope, Sadgope	104,	“12011/68/93-BCC(C) dt 10/09/1993 12011/4/2001-BCC dt 13/01/2004”
Rajasthan	Ahir, Yadav	1	“12011/9/94-BCC dt.19/10/1994”
Haryana	Ahir, Yadav	26	“12011/68/93-BCC(C) dt. 10/09/1993 12011/44/96-BCC dt. 06/12/1996”
Punjab	Gawala, Gowala	38	“12011/68/93-BCC dt 10/09/1993”

Source: National Commission for Backward Classes (NCBC)

Another respondent (Alok Kumar Yadav) who belongs to Nawada district of Bihar state narrated a similar story. He told me that the members of Majraut and Krishnaunt sub-castes also did not marry among themselves earlier, but have started getting married for the last decade. Although they still do not accept each other 'openly'. He said, “My *bhabhi* (sister-in-law) is from the

²¹⁵ Retrieved on 14/02/2022 from <http://ncbc.nic.in/Writereaddata/cl/orissa.pdf>

Krishnaut sub-caste, while my family is from a sub-caste named Majraut. If my *bhabhi* commits any mistake, my family members say that you have brought the ‘dirty’ culture of Krishnaut caste. That's why you are doing this.” Such stereotypical comments have also been counted during field work in Tandawa village.

Publicity of Oneness and Homogeneity

To get the people's attention, the organizers of AIYM have been inviting their eminent leaders to meetings since its establishment (1923). These leaders tried to organize group marriages as a strategy to break away regional sub-caste boundaries. It is said that the spirit of democracy depends on numbers. Therefore, the ideas of a larger community formation have close connection with such marital practices, which have, directly and indirectly, contributed to social transformations among the Yadavs in the last few decades (Michelutti, 2008: 101-121). These leaders tried organizing get-togethers on time to time and started annual meets. According to M.S.A. Rao (1979: 141), “The AIYM also introduced certain positive programs of reform. It encouraged inter-sub-caste and inter-Yadav caste dining and marriages. Since each regional sub-caste was endogamous and rarely had any inter-commensal relations, the AIYM pleaded for sub-caste and inter-regional marriages and commensal relations among diverse Yadav castes.”

Therefore, a few conferences of the AIYM were organized in the headquarters of Patna, Allahabad, Lucknow, etc., to cultivate community consensus and improve the inter-connectivity among the Yadavs. To bring uniformity among the diverse Yadav community, inter-sub-caste group marriages were publicized and praised in their most important all-India monthly magazine, ‘Yadav kuldeepika’ (Hindi) (Ibid). A delegitimization of the multiple hierarchical sub-caste boundaries was attempted to transform and strengthen the pan-Indian Yadav identity. This political mobilization of the marginal castes (the cognate caste of Yadavs) helped their kinship and solidified their diversified communities into numerous united blocks.

In the beginning, the practice of restrictions in marriages among the Yadavs was one-sided. The inter-sub-caste marriages among the Yadavs were localized and ‘hypergamous’ by nature. This seems to suggest that, at present, while the marriages between the Yadavs might remain confined to localities, the endogamy of different sub-castes was replaced by a great amount of inter-mixing. They symbolically used the ‘Yadav’ surname to mark their new socio-political identity,

especially in the Hindi-speaking belt. In the South Indian states, the motivation to follow the ‘Yadav’ title is emerging slowly. After the year 1990, the presence of the leaders from the Yadav community can be seen in the socio-political domain from the local to the provincial levels in Eastern Uttar Pradesh (Deshmukh and Sharma, 2015, October 15).²¹⁶

Rajwant Yadav (politically affiliated with the Samajwadi Party), an active member of the Yadav community, says that ‘the Yadavs account for about 20 to 21% of all OBC castes in U.P. However, in the total population of U.P., about 8 to 9% of the Yadav voters were so organized that they have been influential in the periods of politics before and after the Mandal Commission. The leaders from this community have become Chief Ministers five times in U.P. The highest political consciousness among the OBCs has been seen in the Yadavs.’ Etah, Etawah, Farrukhabad, Jaunpur, Mainpuri, Kannauj, Azamgarh, Faizabad, Ballia, Sant Kabir Nagar and Kushinagar districts of U.P. are considered as Yadav-dominated areas.

Sadar Festival: Rising Community Sentiment

The Sadar festival is a unique buffalo carnival where the local Yadavs gather in large numbers in Telangana. It is held once a year between Diwali²¹⁷ and Yekadashi (after 10 days of Diwali) festival. Male buffaloes are expensively decorated, adorned with flower garlands and their horns are painted. These buffaloes are paraded through the streets, often accompanied by group dances to the sounds of ‘teen mar’.²¹⁸ The animals are sometimes provoked to stand up on their hind legs. Sometime, these buffaloes are hired for one week from Haryana and Punjab. Local leaders get invited to participate in the fest. The buffalo carnivals of Hyderabad have been gaining popularity and media attention.

²¹⁶See. *Consolidated identities, but divided loyalties*. Retrieved on February 10, 2018, from [www.thehindu.com: http://www.thehindu.com/opinion/op-ed/consolidated-identities-but-divided-loyalties/article7743799.ece](http://www.thehindu.com/opinion/op-ed/consolidated-identities-but-divided-loyalties/article7743799.ece)

²¹⁷Diwali or Deepawali is a popular festival of lights and one of the popular festivals, which is celebrated by Hindus, Sikhs and Jains. The popular festival usually is celebrated during the Hindu lunisolar month Kartika (between mid-October and mid-November).

²¹⁸A traditional Yadav band, which is also known as Daa Daneeki.

If we examine the history of this fest, we find that it was started by a popular leader, S.N. Chaudhari Mallaiah in 1942 in Narayanguda, Hyderabad²¹⁹. In this regard, Haribabu Yadav (General Secretary, AIYM) said, “We started with four bulls... We wanted to do something different and that is when we got a bull named Yuaraj from Haryana, which became an overnight sensation.” Over time, such fests have been initiated in many other Yadav-dominated localities (like, Begum Bazar, Saidabad, Lingampalli, Ameerpet, etc.) in Hyderabad by their respective Yadav *chaudharis* and local leaders. The buffalo carnival at Narayanguda (near the Women's College, Hyderabad) draws the largest crowd due to its history and popularity. The buffalo carnival at Narayanguda has been organized without a break every year since 1946 to till date. Its founder member S.N. Mallaiah took up the responsibility of organizing it for many years, and later his family members took over. However, this festival gradually started being celebrated in the Yadav-dominated rural areas. After talking to a few leaders of the Telugu Yadavs who belong to rural areas, I got to know that the Yadav community in the rural areas celebrate a few other similar fests (ex., Bathukamma,²²⁰ Alai Balai,²²¹ etc.) apart from the buffalo carnival. These new cultural celebrations not only give them a space to get together and make self-consciousness, but also create a political space for them. These cultural celebrations are important to note here because they have helped the community to mark their presence in the public domain, and so, have become an integral part of their politics.

Ideological Differences and Oneness

Apart from above discussion, some differences in opinion among Yadavs have also been counted time to time. Those dissimilar differences are open now and can be seen in a local magazine (like, Yadav Shakti, Yadav Kuldipika, etc.), newspapers, websites, and *biraha* parties. These are major platforms where different ideological groups express their outlooks. Thus, social media like facebook, twitter, youtube, and print media are used by them widely to reach out to the people. Apart from the primary data, these secondary sources have been used to understand the

²¹⁹ See for more details, <https://www.aninews.in/news/national/general-news/hyderabad-gears-up-for-sadar-festival-a-carnival-of-buffaloes20211104033312/> (retrieved on 14/02/2022).

²²⁰ Historically, the word *Bathukamma* meant "festival of life" and it was celebrated to thank the Goddess Parvati for her blessings. This fest is also very popular among the Yadavs of Telangana.

²²¹ Alai Balai means 'get together'. It is an annual cultural fest held in Hyderabad during the popular festival Navaratri or just before Dussehra.

socio-political activities by which the socio-political ambitions and actions of the Yadav community have been documented. These secondary sources are also helpful in understanding socio-political differences and similarities among them. In this regard, let me give an example of local magazines of the Yadav community.

Two magazines are trendy in the study area. These magazines are being published by the two ideological groups of Yadav community. On the one hand, '*Yadav Shakti*' magazine is run by Chandra Bhushan Singh Yadav. There are more than five thousand members of this magazine. The content of this magazine is covered with the anti-Hindu instance. Recently, two disputed articles were published with the headline, first, "Whether Krishna is 'sur' (god) or Asur (rebel)" and second "The root cause of rape culture is ingrained in Hindu culture." These two articles created a fresh tussle between two ideological groups. The people associated with this magazine seek logic and see the social world through the prism of rationality. An FIR was also lodged against the editor of '*Yadav Shankti*' magazine (Chandra Bhushan Singh Yadav) and other active members. The members of this magazine are influenced by the ideology of Periyar E.V. Ramasamy, Jyotirao Phule, Kabir, and some radicalize thoughts.

On the other hand, the educated people who deeply follow the tradition and believe profoundly in Hinduism keep much interest in '*Yadav Kuldipika*' magazine. The magazine, '*Yadav Kuldipika*' is published by a national organization of Yadavs, namely 'All India Yadav Mahasabha' (AIYM). This magazine is entirely dissimilar to the previous one in terms of its objectives and contents. The pro-Hindutva instances can be seen in the content of this magazine. Most of the articles in the magazine of *Yadav Kuldipika* are associated with Yadav's traditional cultural, public awareness, especially how Yadavs have been suffering due to illiteracy, dowry, alcoholism as well as existence of various sub-castes or class-based divisions for many decades. The editor and members of this magazine seem to be the dedicated volunteers of AIYM. They are also dedicated to bring socio-political awareness among Yadavs. As a strategy, they trace their socio-political history from '*yadu-vansh*' (a mythic figure) in which Krishna (a popular god among Hindu) took avatar (incarnation). It is noted that the iconic character of Krishna has been exemplified to build pan Indian caste solidarity.

In sum, both magazines show ideological difference among Yadavs but oppose *biradari bhoj* openly. The members of these two magazines feel that *biradari bhoj* is an expensive community

feast, which often leads to rural poor families into more economic backwardness. Moreover, it appears that the ambition of building a PAN India identity is not so smooth. The *chaudharis* of the Yadav community tried to construct a connection among the above pointed ideological group. These *chaudharis* show themselves neutral groups politically, but it is found that most of them are associated with Samajwadi Party. It means that the Yadav community is not a homogeneous category because these instances of ideological divisions at the grassroots level are an integral part of Yadav community so far. Therefore, the idea of celebrating *biradari bhoj* and Krishna-janamstami gives them a platform (to show oneness) where both ideological groups get together, interact, and intersect in the name of ancestors. The third group (common people) can be identified as neutral, who are engaged in agrarian activities, shops, businessman, etc. They also play important role to bridge the social gap between two sub-castes. Any disputed matter is tried to solve with a series of meetings between *chaudharis* and writers. Local Yadav leaders of S.P. also mediate to resolve such issue.

Polarization and the Internal Sub-Caste Divisions

To get a pan identity, many efforts are being made by the members of AIMS and a few other local caste associations. Resultantly, we can see many changes at village level. For instance, “*Shaktiha* Yadavs do not put up the religious flag in the house and do not worship any demigod. They believe more in Brahmanism and rites. There is also a tradition of tying the *ghant* (earthen pots)²²² among *shaktiha*. Whereas, *bhaktiha* Yadavs wear *janeu* (the sacred thread) and they put a big religious flag in the house. *Bhaktiha* Yadavs worship local demigods like Kariya, Gorla and Phoolmati,” said, Gaya Prasad Yadav.

²²² Earthen pots hung on a Peepal tree, usually near the cremation grounds, is a rarity in normal times. As per Hindu tradition, the ashes placed in the earthen pot, called ‘Ghant’ is hung on a Peepal tree until the ashes of dead body are immersed.

It is found that Yadavs of Eastern Uttar Pradesh were divided between two major social groups (basis of religious belief): *bhaktiha* and *shaktiha*. The ideological division was based on some socio-cultural assumptions. *Bhaktiha* felt superior to *shaktiha* because *bhaktiha* used to worship a few local deities like Pavariha, Kariya, Goriya, Folmati, Radha, Vindhyavashini, and Krishna while Shaktiha Yadav were associated primarily with local tradition. Shaktiha performed animal sacrifices²²³ and worship demigod like ‘dolha-baba’ and ‘gobardhan baba’ (see, appendix: 4.15). However, there are three social classes among Yadavs - Yaduvanshi, Nandavanshi and Gwalvanshi. These social classes seek their genealogy from a few famous characters of Mahabharata epic. Yaduvanshis call themselves a descendant of Maharaj Yadu. Nandavanshi Yadavs associate themselves as a descendant of King Nand. Gwalvanshi is said to be related to Lord Krishna’s Gwal Sakha (childhood friends).

In terms of caste hierarchies, it is found that Ahir were divided into sixteen sub-castes and used to claim dissimilar cultural identity, which reflected on their day-to-day life. Those sub-castes of Yadavs in Hindi belts used to marry within their sub-caste boundaries to maintain their social hierarchies and dissimilar cultural legitimacy until 1990s. In terms of preference in marital ties, people search for the bride or groom from such family that are from the same social status. Hypergamy and exogamy practices are also common among Yadavs of the study area.

A New Political Rhetoric

Ahir sub-caste can be seen as a one of the majority groups in the study area. Therefore, even in the official caste certificate to be made in Uttar Pradesh, all the sub-castes are addressed by the name of Ahir/Yadav caste. Although Ahirs in India are known by many other names like Ghosi, Gauli or Gop in the north while in the southern (Bundelkhand) region of U.P., some are known as Dauwa. Similarly, in Haryana, the Ahirs are often referred to as Rao or Rao Sahib. Ahirs have more than 10 sub-caste or sub-sub-castes. New generations seem to be forgotten their past and they are manifesting a new identity with the help of local cultural celebrations. As a strategy, the new generations invent or modify local caste based celebrations like *dadhikando*, *biradari bhoj*, *nandmahar*, *birha folklore* etc. They communicate frequently with the help of local *chaudharis* and local singers of *birha* folklore. The main priorities of local *chaudharis* and local leaders are

²²³ Animal sacrifice is the *ritual* killing and offering of one or more animals, usually as part of a religious ritual or to appease or maintain favour with a deity.

to negate regional and spatial sub-castes boundaries. They also try to find out a way to build a pan identity. Therefore, they try to come up with an opinion on any dispute with the help of local *chaudharis*. It appears that the main aims of the local magazines of this community are to bring socio-political consciousness at larger levels. There is very significant importance of both magazines (Yadav Kuldeepika and Yadav Shakti Patrika). Collecting the history of Yadav community is main target of 'Yadav Kuldeepika magazine while the main objective of Yadav Shakti Patrika is to develop a critical approach among new generations.

Creating Unity and Oneness

It is observed that local *chaudharis*, *naye neta* and the members of caste associations make effort to solve the dispute at grassroots level. They also mediate between two *gouls* to come up with consensus on any disputed matter. It would be worth to point here an important respondent, Narsingh Yadav²²⁴. He is keenly interested in traditional folklore. He listens to 'musayara' of 'Kavi Sammelan' (poetry recitation) and *birha* folklore online on Youtube from where he gets a critical approach to see the social phenomena in his surroundings. He also tries to maintain healthy social contact with prominent members of Yadav community.

Narsingh Yadav is connected passionately with social services and political activities. First time, he attended *biradari bhoj* in Bariyauna village, when he was around 25 year old. The *biradari bhoj* was organized by Subran Yadav, who is one of his close friends. He was very excited to see his *biradari* in a more substantial way because the upper castes dominate his village. This kind of get together of the Yadav community gives him a sense of social security and oneness.

Narsingh Yadav reveals that the dominance of Thakur caste can be seen in the village *panchayat* of Bariyauna. Tension and aggression can also be observed between Yadavs and Thakur caste in the village *panchayat* during election time, because Thakur caste is habituated to manipulate the opinion of local people. Therefore, people from the Yadav community organizes 'Jagran' (night awakening) in which they discuss fragmentation and social solidarity among Yadavs as well as

²²⁴ He is 38 years old teacher. He is from the Neemasaray village. He has done graduation, B.Ed., and Master of Art in Sanskrit literature from University of Allahabad, Prayagraj. The journey of his career was not smooth either. At the age of 17 years, he got married. Taking into consideration the family responsibilities, he was in hurry to get a suitable job and finally succeeded to accomplish his dream.

recite '*Shyam charit manas*'²²⁵ which is written by a local Yadav namely Madhav Das. Narsingh Yadav says, "Krishna is intentionally followed by Yadav community in my village wholeheartedly." Due to favourable political atmosphere for Samajwadi Party, Narsingh Yadav becomes a member of this party. He often seeks the way of emancipation through Dalit-Bahujan ideology. He believes in the mantras of 'educate,' 'agitate' and 'organize', which were proposed by a great philosopher, namely B.R. Ambedkar.

Narsigh Yadav keeps good relations with other castes like Mahapatra, Tiwari, Pandey, and Mishra of his small village formally. Narsingh Yadav often visits '*chamar-tola*' (living place of Kori caste) and motivates bright students to go for higher education. His humble and warmth behaviour attracts marginal sections. He also tries to help them as much as possible because he believes that social emancipation and social equality can be brought through 'education' and 'mutual cooperation'.

Kori caste is numerically a dominant caste in Gopalapur village, and numerical strengths always matter in political democracy. His cousin brother, namely Surendra Yadav is a *pradhan* (elected member) at present. The support of the Kori caste during an election becomes accessible because of his good social bonding with them.

Narsingh Yadav tells an exciting story about humiliation, which indicates our attention to the local social environment in which backward castes are forced to live. There is a person from the Dalit community, namely Ram Das.²²⁶ The person was working as '*kotedar*' (as a retailer in Public Distribution System) in the Bariyauna village. Once, a person from Thakur caste became '*pradhan*' of the Bariyauna village *panchayat*, and he was imposing his power and caste supremacy over Ram Das. Due to his influence, Ram Das was not able to do his profession smoothly. Therefore, he decided to visit local M.L.A. to sort out the issue. The local M.L.A. was from Thakur caste and kept his socio-political dominance in many villages. If there is any grievance in the study area, people of the surrounding villages often prefer to solve through '*jan-sunvayi*' (public hearing) of the local M.L.A. Keeping the social pattern in his mind, Ram Das also approached the assembly of S. Singh, and he was convinced that he would get solution very soon.

Narsingh Yadav told me that an active member of the assembly ordered another local person

²²⁵The book is based on the socio-political activities of Krishna (a Hindu god).

²²⁶ Due to personal request of the respondents, a few names have been changed. The dominance of non-dalit castes on Dalit can be seen in many states of India (Prasad and Srihari, 2017; Prasad and Bibhar, 2020).

‘inhe santushat kar do, ye khush nahi hain pradhan se’ (He is not satisfied by the work of his *pradhan*, make him satisfied). While he was going back to his home, a few local puppets of local M.L.A. beat him up and asked him, “Are you satisfied now?” Ram Das replied, “Yes, now I have no grievances against anyone, please forgive me, and from now onwards, I will never complain.” The story of Ram Das has given a glimpse of the local social condition in which people like Narsingh Yadav and other community members had been confronting to such atrocious act in their life.

Seeking a New Socio-Political Space

It is found that a new socio-political consciousness have been emerged among backward section. Therefore, the members of Yadav community have created a new socio-political space and now they are able to deal with such an unhealthy social condition. Now, they do not need to go to solve such issues with the help of the Thakur caste. At present, the cousin brother of Narsingh Yadav is *pradhan* of Bariyauna village panchayat. It appears that people of this village still have ‘fear’ from Thakur caste. Therefore, despite their ideological division, the local Yadavs keep a close contact with Yadavs of their neighbouring village for getting social security. The above story gives a glimpse of social atmosphere and pattern of inter-caste relation in the study area.

It would be wrathful to give another example (of a key respondent) to get real picture of social atmosphere in the study area. Durga Prasad Yadav is a social worker and local leader. He has passionately dedicated his life for the development of Kithawa village panchayat. Durga Prasad Yadav is 55 years of age and is educated until the ninth standard. His illiterate father Ram Lal Yadav migrated from Nimasaray village to Deeh Dhaggaupur. Later, he shifted (nearly five-decades back) to Tandawa village because there was not enough land for surviving a joint family. In 2014, his father passed away due to heart attack. In the last rite of his father (*terhavi*), more than fifteen hundred people participated, and most of them were from the same caste (Yadav). Moreover, he lives in a joint family with his brothers, and four children. He is interested in politics and strongly believes in family welfare through attaining quality education. Therefore, the new generation of his family is getting quality education. He has about ten acres of land and a restaurant, which is popularly known as ‘Yadav restaurant’ in the Sudnapur market (four km away from his native village). The restaurant is also a political spot for local *chaudharis* of Yadav community to discuss. ‘Yadav Restaurant’ is handled by his younger brother, Mata Prasad Yadav.

Hegemony of Thakur Caste

Durga Prasad Yadav has ten acres of land in Deeh Daggupur village. There is a government canal in the village. He has been irrigating his crops from this canal for many years. Durga Prasad Yadav told me, "Once I was watering my paddy crop from the channel. Four people from Thakur caste came to me and ordered me to go away from the channel. I didn't heed to the instructions of the Thakur caste. Later, they beat me very severely." After cross verification, I found that Durga Prasad Yadav was not only a single case (victim) of caste atrocity. Thakur caste also beats others (dalit-backward castes) if their wishes are unfulfilled with due respect. His cousin brothers, Santosh Yadav and Raju Yadav were also beaten up by the people of Thakur caste. Even the socio-economic conditions of both brothers are above average level.

I also asked about the reaction of local Yadav *chaudharis* to the above incident. Durga Prasad Yadav told me, "They sent a few young boys with arms to take revenge on the people who were responsible, but due to some personal reason, I did not allow them to do so." From that incident, Durga Prasad Yadav became careful. Whenever there is a need to irrigate the crop, he collectively goes with three-four young people. The above story shows the Thakur caste's dominance and how they try to dominate at the village level. The sense of fear leads the backward castes to consolidate their caste network and negate the ideological division. After talking to a few respondents, we can say that the Yadav community has also countered the absolute hegemony of the Thakur caste at the village level.

Politics and Faction at Village Level

In Tandawa village, there are fifty-six families, which are divided into three factions. Durga Prasad Yadav leads one largest 'progressive faction'. The word 'progressive' here refers to the way of people working for the welfare of the entire village without caste or personal interest. Such local social conditions are compiling the Yadav community to transcend the sub-castes boundaries.

Meanwhile, political ambition is another factor, which leads them to negate the ideological division. We can also take an instance of Durga Prasad Yadav, who joined 'Communist Party of India (CPI) at the age of thirty, but after working several years, he felt that the main objective (development of his native village) of his dream and political career could not be fulfilled. Therefore, he worked independently with 'gram-pradhan' (elected representatives of village

panchayat), namely, Ram Surat Vishkarma and Ram Kirat Vishkarma.

It is essential to point out here that Tandawa was a very remote village, which lacks basic amenities such as accessibility to road, electricity, school, proper drinking water etc. People were living in pathetic situations. In the rainy season, the inhabitants of this village had to pass through the shallow lake, if they wanted to go outside of the village for livelihood or education.

Wind of Change

With the support of Ram Ratan Yadav (ex-M.L.A.), Ram Surat Vishkarma (village *pradhan*) and a few other volunteers, Durga Prasad Yadav built a bridge and a link-road. Later on, O.P. Singh (local M.L.A.) also helped him to build a school. Two years back, he attempted to create a link road in the eastern parts of the village, and a local elected leader helped him. These instances show that Durga Prasad Yadav is still trying his best for the development of the village. At present, there are availabilities of schools (from first to the eighth standard), well-connected *pucca*-road, electricity, water facility, and a latrine-room in each household because of his efforts. Therefore, people call him '*neta ji*' or '*Yadav ji*' with respect.

In terms of community concern, he also keeps much interest in the welfare of his community, but he often criticizes the idea of *biradari bhoj* because of its expensive nature. Therefore, he often expresses, "*Biradari bhoj* is a very expensive feast which leads to the lower middle background families of Yadav community into poverty and backwardness." Meanwhile, he accepts that the idea of *biradari bhoj* gives an opportunity to make a stronger caste network. He also pointed out the local social hierarchies. He said, "Due to the notion of purity/impurity, peasant castes (Ahir, Kurmi, Gaderiya, etc.) were not participating in the commensality of Thakur caste." It appears that Durga Prasad Yadav is a very active member of the Yadav community. Most of the Yadav *chaudharis* keep close relationship with him because of his polite nature and socio-political links. Therefore, if someone from the Yadav community needs to find a suitable bride/groom for his daughter/son, Durga Prasad Yadav is always ready to help them. Durga Prasad Yadav also keeps himself updated about these relevant issues.

During 1980s, Durga Prasad Yadav fought against the oppression and exploitation done by Thakur caste. A few FIRs were lodged against him, but he continued his effort with dedication for the marginal communities. He also led a few agitations to fight for fundamental rights. Due to his polite nature and looking at his commitment to the development of the village, all 'false'

FIRs were revoked. He said, “If someone finds any brick lay on the road, he will think of my effort (with proud sense).” Whatever development work has been done in Tandawa village, most of the credit goes to Durga Prasad Yadav.

The instances of Mathura Prasad Yadav and Durga Prasad Yadav show very similar social atmosphere i.e. the dominance of Thakurs in both villages. Such cases also attract our attention especially how there is a shift in local leadership took place and the caste hegemony of Thakurs has been challenged by leaders of middle backward caste like Yadav. Off course, they get the support from their community members and local *chaudharis*.

At the grassroots level, the *biradari bhoj* (community feast) and *biraha*-folklore (traditional song of Ahir/Yadav) have been used as a tool to make available the valuable information related to the policies and political activities of the Samajwadi Party. The traditional *biradari bhoj* and folklores of the Yadavs aid in bridging the socio-political gap between the rulers and the ruled and dissimilar sub-castes because such community feasts provide a platform to get together at the local level. Such cultural practices have become an envitable part of Yadav community.

Thakurs have been a dominant caste in the study area. They have occupied every domain of the village. They still have major influence in village *panchayat* elections and district *panchayat* elections. To challenge the hegemony of Thakur caste, the system of sub-caste hierarchies has been demeaned by new generations of Yadav community.

Another instance I firmly believe is worth mentioning is of a poor farmer Ram Asare Yadav who is also an active participant of *biradari bhoj*. He is around 65 year old. He has studied until eight standards. He resides in Tandawa village with his family members. He has two sons and three daughters. He always remained helpful and dedicated for community-related works like participating in *biradari bhoj* and *chittha panchayat*. He has attended many *biradari bhojs* in which he serves food to the guests. If we look at his family background, we can see that his father Ram Jiyawan was a poor peasant and working as wage labour. During the last stage of life, his father was working as a cattle herder. Years back, Ram Jiyawan Yadav passed away. After the demise of his father, Ram Asare has been working as a peasant because there was very limited source of earnings for his family. His educational and economic background and poor health are not allowing him to work in urban areas. Due to close relationship he has with the village *pradhan*, he got fund from ‘P.M. Awas Yojna’ to build a new house.

Ram Asare Yadav is from a lower background family. His social position never allowed him to fight for social injustice. Decades back, an affluent family from a dominant caste (Thakur) encroached his fertile land by saying, ‘this fertile land belonged to them’. However, the disputed matter was brought to the local court of Sultanpur headquarter. The above issue gives a glimpse to the local social milieu, which forced Yadavs to consolidate their caste network at the village level, because several such other instances were observed during data collection. There is one popular tale, ‘*jiski lathi, uski bhais*’ (the one who has a power is always right). This kind of social issue and building caste network are a distinct social reality in rural areas. Lower and backward castes face such challenges daily in their lives.

Ram Asare Yadav talks about *biradari bhoj* (a community feast) among Yadavs very happily. He pointed out a few social dynamics and challenges in the cultural patterns in rural areas. He also talks about how new changes have been taking place in *biradari bhoj* over a period. He said that there has been a sense of superiority and inferiority between Brahmins and non-Brahmins for many years. The influence of Brahmins on *biradari bhoj* could be seen easily during the 1990s. He pointed out a few significant instances about traditional socio-cultural practices among the Yadavs. He said, “During the 1990s, Brahmins did not accept *kheer* (a dessert made by milk and rice) if the *kheer* was made by other castes including Yadavs, because they wanted to show that Yadav community belong to Shudra varna, at the bottom of caste hierarchy.” The notion of purity and ritual supremacy could be the main reason behind it. He has also been counting the degradation of the rituals and symbols in *biradari bhoj* over a period. He responded, “Years back, *biradari bhoj* was known as ‘*brahm bhoj*’ in which the organizer of Yadav community used to invite more than two hundred people from Brahmin caste. Invitation to the Brahmins in such large amount was also a matter of symbol and pride, because the ritual status of an organizer was considered higher in the village, after successful completion of such food. Thus, due to formal education and socio-political activities, new nuances have appeared among the new generation ... the present generation is not giving much importance to the ritual activities. Although it seems that the new generation is enthusiastic about commensality.”

In this regard, his son Ram Surat said, “My mother never attends *biradari bhoj* because the organizer invites the head of the family, especially male members.” Meanwhile, his father Ram Asare Yadav never asks his wife to participate in the *biradari bhoj*.

Throughout the dialogue with him and his wife, I got to know that the dominance of Thakur caste was much prevalent until three decades back. He narrated one instance. It was a matter of 1990s. His father Ram Jiyavan Yadav was busy with some work and could not get time to meet a local person who belonged to Thakur caste. The person (Thakur) came to his house and beat up his father. Moreover, I was informed that his father Ram Jiyavan Yadav used to touch the feet of Thakur caste to survive in the village. Ram Asare said, “Atrocity against backward castes was much higher till three decades ago. At first, the backward castes opposed the *begari* and *harvahi* customs that was imposed by Thakurs during the 1990s. Later on, ex-untouchable castes also began opposing such inhuman practices jointly with backward castes. Therefore, one person from each family was trained in wrestling by Nat community (a traditional wrestler caste).” A few people from the Yadav community used to be *pahalwan* (wrestler), and *pahalwani-sikhana* (to teach wrestling) was their primary objective. Therefore, they worship ‘*pahalwan bir baata*’ and the local people considered Yadav community as a ‘*pahalwan jati*’. While smiling, Ram Asare Yadav said, “*Hamare mananeey netaji bhi achchhe pahalwan the, aur aatmsuraksha unka pahla mantra hai*” (Our honourable leader [Mr. Mulayam Singh Yadav ji] was a good wrestler, and self-defence is his first mantra). Even today, the idea of muscle power still has an important place in the local election. The above pointed instances give a glimpse about dominance of Thakur caste and necessities to unite on caste ground. Therefore, the effort of making a consolidated caste network has become an inevitable task for lower-backward classes.

Local Leadership among the Yadav Community

It is important to point here that power was decentralized in the 1990s. Since then the marginalized dalit-backward community also started taking part in the great festival of Indian democracy. The socio-political dominance of the upper castes at the local level also began to be challenged. As a result, a new leadership emerged, which started follow the principle of equal participation and social justice. Today in every village or at the booth level many such grassroots leaders can be seen. These leaders have a deep understanding of politics as well as they know how to convey the voice and problems of the common man to the big leaders. In the villages of Eastern Uttar Pradesh, loaded with the ideas of Ambedkar, Phule, Kanshi Ram and Lohia, such people are called ‘*bhaiya*’, ‘*baba*’, ‘*netaji*’, ‘*chhote neta*’, ‘*chaudhari*’, ‘*pradhan*’, ‘*master*’, etc. A few of them are also addressed in sarcasm as ‘*vidhayak*’, ‘*lalu*’, ‘*mulayam*’, etc. In the rural areas

of Eastern Uttar Pradesh, *chaudharis* and the '*naye neta*' have a deep penetration at the booth level and also play an important role in determining the voting trends. The local *chaudharis* are identified as the 'heads of the caste' while the 'new leader' is identified as an activist.

For example, Rajwant Yadav (age 30 years) hails from Lala ka Purwa village in Sultanpur district. In view of his active political activities, Rajwant has also been nominated as a general secretary of 'Backward Class Cell' in Sultanpur by the Samajwadi Party. He can be seen campaigning for the Samajwadi Party along with ex-MLA Anoop Sanda and Arun Kumar Verma. Like Rajwant Yadav, many *naye neta* can be seen at present. They have become a link for the development of village. These *naye neta* are mainly associated with the primary sector for the livelihood of their family. However, some people are also employed in the service (tertiary) sector.

Chaudharis and Yadav Community

Traditional popular leaders of Yadav community are called *chaudharis* in rural area. These local Yadav *chaudharis* in rural area enjoy a very respectable place. From settling small disputes to finding a suitable groom/bride, they are seen in the role of a mediator. Durga Prasad Yadav says that in our childhood, people used to choose bride or groom keeping in mind the *gotra*, sub-caste and social status while doing marriages. But now keeping in mind the financial condition and educational achievement, we choose bride or groom. Local *chaudharis* also participate enthusiastically in many cultural activities, as a result of which their popularity remains intact. They also mediate among local M.L.A. / M.P., village *pradhan* and local Yadav community. They raise voices against if any kind of discriminations take place. These *chaudharis* also mediate between two factions of Yadav community. Keeping in mind the community interest, these local *chaudharis* try to solve the ideological or sub-caste divisions. They also raise their voices for dowry free marriages because it leads poor Yadav families in more venerable economic condition.

To understand about local *chaudharis*, especially what is their connection with the elections and their personal impact, we have to have a look at the rural social structure of Eastern Uttar Pradesh as well. Villages are often identified as a group of castes. It is found that the name of a village specifies to a caste, for instance, Lala Ka Purwa (a village of Kayasth), Mishrane (a village of Mishra caste), Gaderiya Ka Purwa (a village of shepherd caste), Tiwari Ka Purwa (a

village of Tiwari caste), Pandey Ka Purwa (a village of Panday caste), Jadavpur (a village of Yadav caste). This means that if there is abundance of shepherd caste in a village, then that village is called 'village of the shepherd' and the village of Mishra majority caste is called by Mishrane. If the population of a village is high, we can see that there would be many caste based '*tolas*' (*mohallas*; sub-localities). These small '*tolas*' are called by the caste names like '*chamrauti*' or *chamratola* (a place where dalits are in majority), '*thakurouti*' (a place where Thakur caste is in majority), *babhan toli* (a place where Brahmins are in majority), Ahirauti (a place where Yadavs are in majority).

Each caste has a *chaudhari* (in a multi-castes village), who represents the people of his caste. Often a socially and politically aware person is considered as *chaudhari* of a village. The *chaudhari* of one village is in constant contact with the *chaudhari* of another village. Local *chaudharis* of each caste meet with each other once or twice a week at local market or a tea stall. For example, Chhedi Yadav (age, 60 years) hailing from Sultanpur district has been declared *chaudhari* of Yadav community in Natauli village. He does not forget to visit the 'Yadav restaurant' (a refreshment shop run by a Yadav family), which is located at Sudanpur market (about three kilometers away from Tandawa village). After getting some time off from agricultural activities, he makes an attempt to meet the local *chaudharis* of other neighboring village. It would be pertinent to mention here that *chaudharis* (often of Yadav caste) from many other local villages regularly gather at the famous shop 'Yadav Restaurant'. These *chaudharis* communicate and express their thought. They also discuss on the manifesto of the Samajwadi Party and the work done by the party. The talks of *chaudharis* and the local workers, who regularly visit this shop, start with family problems and end with the stir in the political corridors. On many social occasions, meetings of these *chaudharis* are also called, in which around one hundred local *chaudharis* participates and discuss local socio-political issues. Even after being politically aware, like Chhedi Yadav, many *chaudharis* never even wish to contest elections in their lives.

After surveying several villages in Sultanpur and Ayodhya districts of Uttar Pradesh, it was found that there is not a single woman *chaudhari* in those villages. Political slogan like '*Nari ho, tum lad sakti ho*' (You are a woman, you can fight) was seen far away from the ground reality. In this area, the '*pradhan-pati*' is discharging the role of the elected woman Gram Panchayat Pradhan without any opposition. It was also often seen that if a seat is reserved for women in the

local elections, then the new leader declares his sister, daughter or wife as a dummy candidate. In this regard, Jai Prakash Yadav of Tandawa village said, “Male leaders take pride in showing themselves as progressive leaders by forwarding dummy women candidates during 'door to door campaign'. That is why one should never take the meaning of '*naye neta*' or *chaudhari* with 'progressive leader' here.” Mostly male leaders and *chaudharis* are leading the thought of community formation and the consolidated caste network.

Chapter-7

Discussion and Concluding Remarks

Thousands of people of Yadav community gather to listen to *birha* during the time of *biradari bhoj*. Sitting under a tent in such a huge amount, discussing various socio-political issues and discussing the caste atrocities on Yadav community in the past years can be called a unique phenomenon. The initiative to prepare a script by *birha* singers overnight on any events or incidents also has sociological significance. Such socio-cultural activities also have political implications. The credit of which can be given to the socio-cultural initiatives like the *biradari bhoj*, folklores, etc.

Reshaping the 'Ahir' into 'Pan Identity'

In view of the social change and political consciousness taking place in the Yadav community, it is often heard saying that '*Ahir ab to yadav ban gaye*' (Ahir has become a Yadav now). The local residents have been witnessing such socio-political consciousness in the Yadav community for the last two-three decades. When someone addressed this community as Ahir, a clear picture of such a class emerged in his mind, which is often engrossed in agriculture and animal husbandry related activities. Whose language is arrogant and who has nothing to do with education and politics. Local residents believe that this community was very backward socially and educationally. That is why they were often beaten up in the hands of the dominant people of the local Thakur caste. Similarly, Shiv Baran of Tandwa village narrates, "*hali pratha* (forced labour) was in operation sometime back. People of Thakur caste used to send messages (regarding forced labour in Thakur's farm) from someone to *ahir tola* (residential place of Yadav community). After receiving such *farman* (order or message), Yadavs and other backward castes were compelled to leave their personal work and go to Thakur's farm. If a person could not go for some reasons, he had to go to the Thakur's house to apologize and tell the reason for not going to the farm. If the local Thakur was not satisfied with the justification, then the disobedient person was often beaten up."

After summarizing a few narratives, it came to know that after the year 1990, a wave of social consciousness erupted because various conferences and '*sayikil yatra*' (bicycle journey) organized by Kanshi Ram and Mulayam Singh Yadav made a special contribution during that

period. Those political waves had a qualitative effect on marginal sections. Most of the people of Yadav community were illiterate and lacked consciousness towards education and politics. If we examine the Indian Census, it is found that there was around 23 per cent literacy rate in U.P. when Mulayam Singh Yadav was first elected as a Member of the Legislative Assembly of U.P. (see, Indian Census: 1980). Meanwhile, after the emergence of Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP) and Samajwadi Party in the politics of Uttar Pradesh, there was a web of socio-political consciousness took place among backward castes. For instance, keeping in mind to the Vidhansabha election of 1993, Mulayam Singh Yadav founded Samajwadi Party in 1992 and he allied with the BSP. Finally, he became chief minister of U.P. and kept giving more attention for marginal sections of the society. Therefore, the literacy rate among backward sections increased drastically during his tenure. When Mulayam Singh sworn as C.M. of U.P. for 3rd times in September 2003, then the literacy rate of U.P. had reached more than 56 per cent (see, Indian Census: 2000). Christophe Jaffrelot, who has done a deep study on this socio-political change in India, also believes that after 1990, a 'silent revolution' started in U.P.

Apart from such political efforts (after the implementation of Mandal Commission report) many qualitative changes can be seen among backward castes in Eastern U.P. The cattle herding caste like Yadav started taking more interest in education and politics.

***Biradari Bhoj* and Community Formation**

If we understand that silent revolution in the context of *biradari bhoj*, we have to pay special attention on two aspects. First, it is seen that the local Yadav *chaudharis* play an inevitable role in organizing the community feast. They become very active (around 10 days) before the end of this feast, as the main objective of *chaudharis* is to gather maximum number of Yadav *biradari* (fraternity) for this feast. Second, the local *choudharis* form a platform from which *birha* singers express their opinions on various issues. Local representatives, MLAs, MPs or popular leaders are also sometimes seen giving speeches during this community feast. As a result of which, the socio-political consciousness emerged among the people living in remote villages of Uttar Pradesh.

During my field visit, I noticed many political statements from which a few would be pertinent to mention here. These statements show the confidence that has come in the Yadav community.

Through the following statements, we can make a sense of the social attitudes of the rural Yadav community. On the one hand, a few claim that '*Yadav and Rajput, bai-bhai*' (Yadav and Rajput are equal like brothers) but on ground there is very clear social and ideological division between Yadavs and Rajputs. It is often counted that neither there is marital relation between Yadavs and Rajput nor they have a consolidated social tie because Yadav community feel that Yadavs are descendants of Yaduvansh, Nandvansh and Gwalvansh. Although Rajputs believe that their community belongs to Raghuvansh.²²⁷ It appears that the members of both castes often claim that '*hamara panth aqua tha, hai, aur rahega*' (My cult was leaders and will remain so).

After going through a series of discussion, it is found that there is a web of socio-political consciousness can be seen among Yadavs. Most of the Yadav respondents claim that '*hamari jaati (Yadavs) ke khoon me rajniti koot-koot kar bhari hai*' (the politics is in our [Yadavs] blood. Meanwhile, the people from non-Yadav castes say that Yadavs are lesser socio-politically aware than Rajput.

Overall, these expressions show that Yadavs have achieved considerable amount of confidence. Illustrative of the above fact is the political sphere of Uttar Pradesh. Such expressions are linked directly with the socio-political consciousness. Due to political consciousness, the *naye netas* from Yadav community trying to build a pan identity and a consolidated caste network with the help of *biraha* folklore, *biradari bhoj*, *dadhikando* (a fair), etc. These above expressive cultural practices are used as a major tool for creating and maintaining caste network. Such cultural practices provide substance for spreading the new myths, tales, and cultural symbols, which helped Yadav community to demean the sub-castes boundaries.

Chitta Panchayat and Khap Panchayat: Mapping Similarities and Differences

In broader sense, both *chitta panchayat* and *khap panchayat* is a larger gathering of local *chaudharis*. *Chitta panchayat* is very similar to *khap panchayat* because both are caste based *panchayat* (assembly). If we examine the structure of such *panchayat*, we find that a *gotra* or all the *gotras* of the community together form the *khap panchayat*. Then it can be of five villages or it can also be of 20-25 villages. It appears that the area in which a *gotra* is more dominant, it has more influence in that local *khap panchayat*. The ethnic groups with less population are also included in the *panchayat*, but only the *khap* of the dominant *gotra* runs in the *panchayat*. All the

²²⁷ It is believed that Raghuvansh is a Kshatriya dynasty and they are considered an offshoot of the Suryavansha (sun deity).

residents (of a /few village/s) are called to the meeting, whether they come or not... and whatever decision is taken is said to be a unanimous decision and it is binding on all. It is found that the influence and importance of *khap panchayats* has decreased, because these caste assemblies are traditional *panchayats* while now elected *panchayats* have come into more practice especially after the 73rd amendment. The *khap panchayat* is headed by the elderly and influential people of the village. *Khap* that is, a clan of one *gotra* can be of five villages and also around 20 villages. The more influence of the *gotra* has, the more influence it has in the *khap*. In western Uttar Pradesh, Haryana, Punjab, Rajasthan, there are still tremendous dominance of *khaps*.

Whenever there is talk of killings in the name of 'honour' of village, caste, *gotra*, family, the mention of *jati panchayat* or *khap panchayat* is repeated. If the *khap panchayat* had any objection in the matter of marriage, they would decide to separate the young man and the girl, boycott a family or expel him/her from the village and in some cases even kill the young man or girl.

As we see that *khap panchayat* is made up of two words, which means an organization that is paramount as well as clean, accessible and judicial in nature. The structure of *khap panchayat* is like a social-administrative system, which is carried as a tradition. The jury members (*chaudharis*) of a *khap* were based on *gotra* (clan) or caste. Sometime, the decision of the *khap* gets media attention because the jury members give unconstitutional decisions on the basis of their traditions on any disputed subject. The *khap panchayat* usually is consolidated with strict powerful elements of the local *chaudharis* as well as with strength derived through non democratic ways in the name of culture, local traditions, *izzat*, village norms (village exogamy), honor, morality and caste honor. This we can see to be prevailing at every level of social set-up. Apart from similarity between *khap* and *chittha*, we cannot find such rigidity in *chittha panchayat*.

On the other hand, the main purpose of convening *chittha panchayat* is to organize the *biradari bhoj* in an orderly manner. The literal meaning of *chittha* is 'a meeting', which is organized for local *chaudharis*. In this meeting, apart from the local *chaudhary*, active Yadav leaders are also invited. It appears that *chittha panchayat* is an alternative form of orthodoxy *khap panchayat* because local *chaudharis* do not take harsh and punitive decision like honor killing. This main purpose of this meeting is to discuss about community feast and its community members.

Removing local inter-caste differences, strengthening the caste network, campaigning for the Samajwadi Party at the time of elections, punishing those who do anti-social activities or inter-caste marriages, etc. are the main tasks of the *chittha panchayat*. Moreover, we can see that *chittha panchayat* tries to break down sub-caste walls among Yadavs. Such *panchayat* also help to fight against social injustice at local level. It also has become an importance means to build a consolidated caste network.

As it is pointed out above, the idea of *biradari bhoj* and *chittha panchayat* are closely linked with social obligation. Local leaders, active members of Yadav community and local *chaudharis* create a space to get together by introducing the *biradari bhoj* or *chittha panchayat* because such caste practices make them little closer and flourish their political ambition.

After going through various studies and primary data, the present work extend the debate on how a socio-political shift took place in the backward class in general and Yadav community in particular. It is well known that people from the backward castes have been trying to claim the Kshatriya (higher) social status since independence. Due to the emergency (1975-1977), J.P. movement and a few other political upheavals, many new changes can be seen in the Indian political structure and the backward castes. In addition, it is found that Yadav community emerged as ‘political block’ and started demanding for greater access to state resources and equal representation in civic institutions in early 1980s. Due to intense pressure from this new political block, the Mandal Commission (1979) was established in which Yadav leaders played leading role. The active participation in the social, cultural and political activities helped the backward castes including Yadavs to strength their representation in legislative assembly of Uttar Pradesh (Kumar, 2015; Jaffrelot, 2003). These new changes in Indian democracy took shape in two ways. The national leaders like Karpuri Thakur, Lalu Prasad, Mulayam Singh Yadav, Jagdev Prasad, etc. tried to bring social awareness and socio-political change among backward classes. Their speeches and concern for the welfare of backward classes got much attention in the mainstream media. It appears that higher economic group, who were politically aware received many benefits. These socio-political changes were noticed by noted scholars like Christophe Jaffrelot, Dipankar Gupta, K.C. Yadav, Gilles Verniers, Lucia Michelutti, etc. However, they could not give much attention on bottom-up approach.

It can be seen that around 70 per cent population of India live in ‘dissimilar’²²⁸ villages. There are many castes and sub-castes. Therefore, I have been interested to examine how Yadav community of rural belts confront the local socio-cultural atmospheres and what are the mechanisms the Yadavs have been adapt to come in mainstream politics. The desire of moving into mainstream politics is closely related to the idea of resolving the internal ideological divisions and the consolidation of Yadav identity. Therefore, the ‘bottom-up approach’ was adapted to understand above pointed socio-political and cultural processes among Yadavs. The present work also gives a glimpse of my lived experiences.²²⁹

Using Hindu’s Deities as Political Tool and Alternative Political Voices

The present research also tried to explore a link between caste and politics with special reference to Congress and Samajwadi Party. There was a time when OBCs in rural belts used to vote Congress, but after realising their representation and voices are not being heard in the Congress party, the voters of backward castes shifted mostly to Samajwadi party and BSP in Uttar Pradesh during 1990s.

On the one hand, BJP tried to give more emphasis on Hindu god Rama to make its existence during the decade of 1980-1990. The issue of building Rama temple is primarily raised by BJP. On the other hand, Samajwadi Party gave more focus on a popular god Krishna to counter such political forces. For instance, the national president of Samajwadi Party Akhilesh Yadav inaugurated a project to build Krishna temple in Mathura district²³⁰ and Saifai (Etawah).²³¹ It appears that the BJP’s idea of building Rama temple at Aodhya attracted the masses because the

²²⁸ Each village can be distinguished from other village on the basis of caste, geographical location, socio-political setup, etc.

²²⁹ Lived experience is an important method of inquiry in qualitative research, because lived experience refers to a representation of the experiences and choices of a given person, and the knowledge that someone gains from these experiences and choices. Lived experience, as it is explored and understood in qualitative research, is a representation and understanding of a researcher or research subject’s human experiences, choices, and options and how those factors influence one’s perception of knowledge.

²³⁰ Retrieved on 21/07/2022 from <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/Akhilesh-inaugurates-project-to-build-tallest-temple-in-world/articleshow/32149681.cms>

²³¹ Retrieved on 21/07/2022 from <https://www.indiatoday.in/india/story/50-ft-krishna-statue-at-saifai-akhilesh-yadav-2019-lok-sabha-elections-1084806-2017-11-12>

Hindu mythology of Rama has great impact in Hindi heartland and to lesser extent rest of the country. It is noticed that the dominant caste like Thakur or Rajput associates itself with Rama while Yadav community seeks its political rethric with the support of a few popular Hindu deities Krishna, Rajabali, Pavariha, etc.

Caste and Cultural Identity

The idea of cultural identity has not only gained its weight but it still keeps significant place in the politics of Uttar Pradesh. Some singers from Eastern Uttar Pradesh, who have established their own identity in the Yadav community, such as Baleshwar Yadav, Vijay Lal Yadav, Madhav Ram Yadav, gave a new dimension to the cultural identity of the Yadav community and a sense of self-respect among the rural youth of this community. As a result of which, a new political class has emerged and this class is making its political identity as a '*naye neta*' today. These newly emerged leaders keep significant influence and keep power to change the perception and opinion of the others in the study area. The roles of these leaders in demeaning the sub-caste boundaries are much significant. It is found that due to their charismatic character, the words of these leaders are heard seriously and followed by a larger section at village level. These leaders often advocate to the idea of a pan identity because it matters more in democratic country like India. These leaders have experienced the test of sub-caste boundaries, the dominance of Thakurs, as well as the drastic changes in the politics of Uttar Pradesh.

Most of the respondents feel that there was a time when Yadav community was divided into many socio-cultural or ideological boundaries. A few dominant castes used to take advantages of those limitations for their own benefit. When the idea of polarization had been taking shape after 1990s among Yadav, the idea of social dominance of privileged castes started disappearing at the same time.

Social Adjustment

After series of discussion with local *chaudharis*, local leaders, *pradhan*, *naye neta*, participants and organizers of *biradari bhoj*, I could get to know that around 100-200 people generally organize *biradari bhoj* every year in Sultanpur district. The idea of community feasts give a chance to the local *chaudharis* of each village to meet with the *chaudhari* of other village. During the field study, it is found that three hundred to five hundred *chaudharis* participate in

each *biradari bhoj* (community feast) in which they discuss about local issue related to their community members. The distance between the living places of these *chaudharis* is one to twenty km. They often make communication or get connected with help of mobile and personal visit. It appears that all *chaudharis* hold similar social status, but good political linkup and economic status create a sense of hierarchy among them. The *chaudharis* of old age group gets more space to make decision on any disputed matter. In case, if someone transgresses the traditional practices of intra-caste marriage, the old age *chaudharis* impose viable fine around ten to twenty thousand rupees on accused (who has broken the traditional social norms).

Scope of *Biradari Bhoj* in Socio-Political Mobilization

It is found that the *biradari bhoj* give a platform to get together. The idea of caste identity motivates to the local *chaudharis* to participate in such meetings. The idea of *chittha panchayat* helps to normalize and pressurize to marry within a larger caste boundary to the local people of Yadav community. It appears that these gatherings have deep impact at village level, but do not have much impact in the provincial level. However, the caste based social norms function at local level and keep significant influence over people. After participating in a few meetings of *biradari bhoj*, this can be said that the *chaudharis* of middle age group often try to demean the sub-caste practices in the study area. These *chaudharis* believe the idea of sub-caste among Yadavs of Uttar Pradesh has become a past phenomenon. However, the *biradari bhoj* alone is not responsible behind the disappearance of sub-castes based cultural practices and idea of polarization, but the organizational efforts of AIYM and a few other collective efforts are also responsible equally behind such changes.

It is found that local *biraha* folk singers of Yadav community make also valuable attempts to demean such traditional practices of marrying own sub-castes. In addition, we can see that many socio-political changes happen after 1990s in the politics of Uttar Pradesh. These changes also gave a new way to make broader caste identity because numbers matter in democracy. These changes in the politics of Uttar Pradesh have larger impact at village level too. Now, *naye neta* can be seen at each village and these new leaders have become a pillar for socio-economic development.

Role of *Chaudharis* in Kinship Ties and Social Status

The idea of *biradarism* (caste basis unity) is regularized with the help of intra-caste marriages and kinship. It appears that kinship and intra-caste marriages are the utmost seems to be common. Kinship is based on ties of marriage, blood, or adoption and social ties. It appears that the idea of social bonding (in kinship system) also gives socio-cultural legitimacy to the present caste system in which the *chaudharis* or *agua* (mediators) still play important role. Local *chaudharis* work as *agua* (mediator) for own caste members and they mediate between the families of bride and groom in rural area. Moreover, these *chaudharis* closely observe the social status and preferences of the both families. If the socio-economic status is matched, they introduce the members of the bride and groom's families. We can see that the *chaudharis* of the study area hold respectable position among Yadavs and the people from this community either they belong to upper strata or lower strata trust them, because these *chaudharis* spend their precious time largely for the welfare of the Yadav community.

Patriarchy, Gender and Folksongs

Yadav community follows patriarchal order in which one can see the eldest male happens to be the head of the family and descent is reckoned through the male line in the study areas. The head of this caste called *chaudhari*. The system of *chaudhari* follows male line. The idea of *chaudhari* is carried forward hereditarily. For instance, the name *chaudhari* is an ancient Sanskrit term denoting the male head of a community or caste. If we trace the *chaudhari* system, we find that there was a time when they often belonged to the zamindar (landlord) families in British India. Moreover, the system of zamindari becomes a past phenomenon after the zamindari abolition act (1950). Now, there is no single such evidence can be found among Yadavs in Uttar Pradesh. Due to emergence of new leadership at village level, the idea of *khap panchayat* (caste *panchayat*) has also lost its traditional virtue in Eastern Uttar Pradesh. Resultantly, the caste basis rigidity has been degraded smoothly.

Its and Buts of Sub-Caste, Class, or Ideological Division

Caste has always been discrete in nature and there are dissimilarities in caste system. As it is explained in the first chapter (in case of Yadav), Yadavs were divided into many sub-castes and sub-sub-castes for long time in Uttar Pradesh while in other states (even now) the people from

Yadav community is known in different names, such as, Goala, Gauli, Golla, Gop, Sadgop, Ahir, etc. Thus, All India Yadav Mahasabha and a few other local organizations of Yadav community have been trying to bridge the socio-cultural gap between these sub-castes across India. These organizations advocate for PAN Indian identity and they insist to follow ‘Yadav’ surname.

A Few Important Facts

In case of socio-economic division, it is found that most of the organizers and participants belong to lower middle class and they are engaged in agrarian activities. They are more concerned about intra-caste consolidation rather than merging or transcending their sub-caste boundary. The range of the participants of *biradari bhoj* are from the middle age group (between 25 years to 50 years old), and they are highly concerned for their caste identity. Samajwadi Party and its iconic figures are very popular among them. There is another group of respondents who are apolitical and keep much concern for the development of the village rather than their political affiliation.

The most of organizers of *biradari bhoj* responded that they went to Gaya before organizing a community feast. The majority of organizers of *biradari bhoj* responded that the main purpose of visiting Gaya for them is to commemorate their forefather and ancestor. Whereas, after coming back from Gaya, each visitor organizes a community feast with the help of native *chaudharis* (caste head) in which three to five thousand people from the same caste participate. After participating in the meeting of *chaudharis*, I observed that the presence of women was negligible in those meetings and as per tradition only male members can become *chaudharis*.

The idea of naming *brahmin bhoj* as *biradari bhoj* is closely related to the sense of resistance and countering the Brahminical hegemony over ritual performance antagonistically. It means that the organizers accept the myth and ritual of Hinduism, but they are not in favour of the dominance of the Brahmin community and Brahmanism in the public domain. Therefore, many non-Brahmin *pandas* (ritual performers) can be seen in the popular religious shrine.

Important Observations

It was noticed that if a widower wants to perform *shradh* rite, she needs to make a symbolic doll. The symbolic doll would represent to his wife. It means the symbolic presence of his (organizer of *biradari bhoj*) wife is mandatory as per traditional belief.

If we talk about rural youth, it is worth to point out here that educated youths listen to more politics-driven *biraha*, whereas illiterate youth have more to listen to folk songs with hyper-sexual roles. Considering the limitations, singers sing such songs with the desire to get more money as rewards. Working-class agrarian women like (prefer to sing more) *chaita*, *nirvahi*, etc., whereas non-agrarian women (who are not related to agricultural work) like to sing songs of *mehadi* (henna), *jhumar*, etc. The male singers of *biraha* folklore often sing hyper-sexual songs.

Symbols and Cultural Belief

Biradari bhoj gives them a social platform to get together and make a collective decision for the welfare of own caste members. To bring uniformity, many new symbols, myths, and a popular narrative (as offspring of Krishna) have been built by the *chaudharis* and local leaders of Yadav community. ‘Yadav’ as a surname is being used by the new generation with the proudest sense of a descendant of King Yadu (forefather of Krishna). Therefore, they believe that they are from Yadukul (Yadu clan). The new generations among Yadavs believe that they are *chandravanshi*.²³² A few other symbols, which are popular among Yadavs, can be described in the following way-

Table No.: 7.1: **Summary of Cultural Symbols, Belief, Cuisine, etc.**

Important Details	Symbols, Sign, Gesture
Caste Title	Yadav, Rao, Singh, Jadav, Chaudhari
Clan / Gotra	Atri, Banaphar
Descendants	Yaduvansh
Main Deity	Shri Krishna, Vasudev, and Nand
Flag	Pitambari (good character)
Color	Saffron, White
Mark	Sudarshan Chakra
Tree	Kadamb, Peepal
Slogan	Jai Yadav, Jai Madhav
Popular Festivals	Krishna Janmastmi, Holi, Nagpanchami
Celebrations	Sadar Festival (Hyderabad), Dadhikando (Prayagraj), Dangal, Nand Mahar

²³²There are two major dynasties in Hinduism: Suryavanshi and Chandravanshi.

Tradition Game	Wrestling
Folksong	<i>Biraha</i> , Lorikayan, Alha
Traditional Dance	Farwahi, Ahiraua
Traditional Attire	White Kurta-dhoti, Pagadi, Gamchha
Traditional Occupation	Milking, Herding, Military Services
Demigods	Kariya, Goriya, Pholmati, Pawariha
Goddesses	Radha, Subhadra, Vidhveshwari
Traditional Cuisine	Sweet-Yoghurt (Lassi)

Source: Primary Data

It is noticed that the people from Yadav community used to worship local gods and goddess like Panwariya, Raja Bali, Kariya-Goria and Folmati largely. Meanwhile, a few new changes can be seen in the old traditions, for instance, the new generations worship popular god and goddess like Krishna and Radha. Now, they prefer to celebrate Krishna Janamstami, Dadhikando, etc. These new changes are closely associated with the Hindutva politics of BJP. I have given many other similar examples in the thesis (chapter 3) to get an in-depth understanding.

Hierarchy and Division

The old age respondents accept that there were multi-layered (sub-castes) hierarchies in Yadav community, but the new generations have a very vague idea about the existence of multiple caste divisions among them.

Most of the cases indicate that the socio-economic conditions of the *chaudharis* are much higher to the common members of the Yadav community. Therefore, their decisions are followed by ordinary members. These *chaudharis* have also good link with political leaders. These *chaudharis* are ready to help if any dispute arises among native Yadavs. Due to good economic conditions, these *chaudharis* are able to connect with other *chaudharis* of Sultanpur district.

Primarily, here are two ideological groups in the study area. One group advocates '*sanatana dharma*'²³³ and deeply believes in rituals based *sanskara* and its associated activities. This group

²³³'*Sanatana Dharma*' translated as 'eternal religion' was practiced by the people of ancient India. It was a God-centered religion which strictly prohibited any form of idolatry.

stands for pro-Hindu ideology and keenly takes an interest in the activities of AIYM. Their socio-political activities are published in the *Yadav Kuldipika* (a popular magazine) of AIYM. Another ideological group (especially the new educated class) is associated with the egalitarian ideology of B.R. Ambedkar, Periyar, Phule, Shahuji Maharaj, Kanshiram, etc. The ‘Yadav Shakti’ magazine is closely related to this ideological group. This group often keeps distance from religious activities.

It appears that the evil practice like taking dowry create a social gap between the lower class and upper-class families. Therefore, local *chaudhari* of Yadav community promotes dowry-free marriages. The local organizations of Yadav community also hold group marriages in order to promote dowry free marriages. Many other such relevant issues are often discussed in the meeting of *chaudharis*.

It appears that the illiterate people and peasant often sit on the ground for listening to *biraha* folksong or eating food in the *biradari bhoj*. Teachers, leaders, and bureaucrats get priority to sit on the chair for taking food and listening to *biraha* folklore.

Mapping Gender in Oral Tradition

We can see that the domestic tasks like cooking, taking care of children, and the hospitality of guests are on the shoulders of women, but in spite of all this, they are not able to get equal status in the society. Even no single woman is allowed to participate in *chittha* (meeting of local *chaudharis*).

Biraha is a famous genre of folk music, which is enormously popular among the Yadav community in Hindi and Bhojpuri belts. There are a few folklores such as *vasant-geet*, *chaita*, *sohar*, *devi-geet*, *faag-geet*, *kajri*, *henna-geet*, *vivah-geet*, *natka*, *bidai-geet*, *ropani-geet*, *malhar*, etc. by which these women express their happiness, sorrow and anxiety.

Folklore speaks openly about the circumstances of the ‘sex-life’ of rural women and their personality, feeling, and communicative skill. Whenever, rural women feel helpless from poverty, patriarchal society, and family problems, they ask for a vow to a native goddess named ‘*durduriya*’. On the fulfillment of their wishes, they gather in the number of seven or fourteen to

express their happiness. They share their happiness through ‘fast-foods’ or sweet based ritual collectively. These new changes are becoming an integrated part of rural culture.

As pointed out by respondents, women like to eat sweets and sour items. Women observe this eating-habit with religion. Usually, seven to fourteen women gather at a predetermined place and worship ‘*chatpata devi*’ (a local Goddess, who likes fast-food). This celebration, so-called ‘*durduria of chatpatamayi*’ (by rural women), is an outstanding example of this. Among the women of the study area, there is a belief that ‘*pipary mayi*’ loves sour and sweet goods. With the hope of her ‘blessing’, a group of women sit together and sing ‘*pachra*’ folksong related to ‘local goddesses’ and they also share sour and sweet food items among themselves. These cultural practices help to build a consolidated social network.

In short, the folklore assimilates the oral history and way of life. The local folklorists incorporate innovative socio-cultural changes in folk songs. As a result of which, this mode of rural culture is still relevant and women are also credited for keeping the songs and stories sung in centuries of customs, rites, festivals, marriages, fasts and rituals in their *kanthas* (throat).

Women have also got an honoured place in this guru-disciple tradition. A few popular women singers- Rana Rao, Kavita, Preeti Pal, Rajnigandha, Ujala Yadav, Nilima Singh, Malini Awasthi, Sharda Sinha, Kalpana Patwari, Kaushiki Chakraborty, Ila Arun, etc. have been playing significant roles for the last few years. There are millions of followers of these folk singers on YouTube. In the era of the internet and social media, today these singers are very popular in North India and they are very successful in leaving a clear impression of their personality on the listeners. During the election, these singers sing for political parties and candidate. Especially, local leaders also take the help of the folksingers to promote their candidature during an election campaign.

The poignant glimpse of folklore can be heard and understood in the folklore called ‘*aalha*.’ Besides, the folk songs *malhar* sung by the male also have the smells of masculinity. The significant renditions of these songs are closely associated with hyper sexuality, occupation, worship, prayer, social change, dress, politics, wrestling, and inter-caste relationships, etc.

The dominance of upper castes over public domain is an existing reality. For instance, Thakur caste often influences the lower castes in socio-political and economic domain. Such social

realities are well-captured and portrayed in *birha* folklore. However, local folklorists also manipulate the deed done by Yadavs and create a social atmosphere for intra-caste relation. Therefore, it can be seen that rural folklore have significant impact in the merging the sub-caste boundary among Yadavs.

Table No.: 7.2: **A Glimpse of Yadav and Their Presence Across the Country**

No.	State	Yadavs known as in a few names
1	Andhra Pradesh	Dhangar, Golla, Iddyar, Konar, Kurba, Kurwa, Yerragella
2	Assam	Ahir, Ghosh, Gwala, Gop
3	Bihar	Gwala (Majraut and Krishnaut), Yadav, Gop
4	Gujrat	Ahir, Ayar, Boricha, Yadav
5	Haryana	Ahir, Rao, Gawala, Yadav
6	Karnataka	Gouli, Golla, Gopal, Yadava, Asthana, Golla, Adavi, Gopala, Anubaru, Atanaburu, Hanbar, Hanabar, Dudhigola
7	Kerala	Iruman, Kolaya, Muniyani, Ayar
8	Madhya Pradesh	Ahir, Gavala, Goala, Gwal, Kansa, Thakur, Jadav, Yadav
9	Maharashtra	Gowali, Ahir, Yadav
10	Manipur	Gwala, Ahir, Yadav
11	Meghalaya	Ghosh, Gopa, Gawala, Yadav
12	Odisha	Gola, Golla, Gope, Sadgope, Ahir, Gour, Gauda, Goudo, MekalaGolla, PunnuGolla and Yadav
13	Punjab	Gawala, Yadav, Yaduvanshi, Ahir, Gwar, Ahir, Gope
14	Rajasthan	Ahir (Yadav, Gope)
15	Tamil Nadu	Jogi, Yadavan (Idayan) or Golla, MondGolla, AsthanthraGolla
16	Tripura	Goala, Gope, Yadav
17	Uttar Pradesh	Ahir, Ghosi, Gwala, Yadvanshi
18	West Bengal	Ahir, Gope, Goala, Yadvav, Sadgope Yadav, Gawar
19	Andaman & Nicobar Islands	Yadav, Rolal, Kollubhatti, konar
20	Chandigarh	Gwala, Yadav, Ahir
21	Dadar Nagar Haveli	Ahir, Bharvad, Yadav
22	Delhi	Ahir, Yadav, Gwala
23	Goa, Daman & Diu	Yadav, Gavli
24	Pondicherry	Konar, Kolaya, Ayar, Mayar, Muniyan, Eruman
25	Other	Majority of families in South India follow their family name.

Source: Web Pages of Many Organizations of Yadav and a few Personal Observations

The above table shows that the cognate castes of cattle herder community who broadly known as Yadav are called in various names. These cognate castes of Yadav community associate themselves with milk-selling and other similar associated activities. In order to bring a pan Indian identity, these cattle herder castes have been developing a common cultural identity. The word ‘Yadav’ has become a popular caste title among cattle herder castes (see, table: 7.2) across India. It can be said that the ideas of celebrating *biradari bhoj*, Krishna *janamstami*, *dadhikando*,

etc. have much influence on the Yadav community in the study area. Such new cultural practices have minimized the socio-cultural gap between two ideological groups and built a consolidated connection between two similar sub-caste groups. They also receive more '*aadar*' (respect) from other castes at present.

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Appendix (1)

Survey of the Field²³⁴ (Tandawa Village)

1.0 Identification of Respondent

- 1.1 Name and surname:
- 1.2 Age:
- 1.3 Sex:
- 1.4 Caste/sub-caste/sub-sub-caste and lineage:
- 1.5 Head of the family:
- 1.6 Village and village panchayat:
- 1.7 District:
- 1.8 Occupation of the respondent:
- 1.9 Type of occupation:
- 1.10 Whether included in the voter list?...
- 1.11 Whether holding the ration card? (A) APL, (B) BPL, (C) Antyodaya, (D) Other (specify)...

2.0 Socio-Economic and Demographic Details

- 2.1 Status of the family
(A) Joint family, (B) Nuclear family, (c) Other (specify),...
- 2.2 Level of education of the respondent (R) and his/her primary relatives:

²³⁴ This is an English translation of the research scheduled employed in the survey. I have interviewed 30 respondents from neighboring villages of Tandawa. Meanwhile, I have done in-depth study of Tandawa village.

Level	R.	Spouse	R's father	R's Mother	Spouse father	Spouse Mother	Son/s				Daughter/s			
1. Illiterate														
2. Primary/5														
3. Middle School/8														
4. High School/10														
5. Inter-mediate/12														
6. Graduate														
7. Post Graduate or Above														
8. Professional														
9. Any other														

Codes: R= Respondents:

2.3. Marital status: (A) Married, (B) Unmarried, (C) Widow, (D) Widower, (E) Divorced

If married, please specify, whether it is inter-caste or intra-caste marriage?...

2.3.1 Whether the idea of sub-caste/lineage/social status matters for you...?

2.4 What is the main occupation of your spouse?...

2.5 What is/was the main occupation of your father?..., and grandfather....?

2.6 Current annual income of your family...

2.6 Current annual expenditure of your family...

3.0 Questions to Organizer

- 3.1 Have you ever organized the *biradari bhoj* (community feast)?...(A) Yes, (B) No. If yes, could you please little elaborate, how did you get to know about this feast? (Audio recording)...
- 3.2 What are the basic steps, which need to follow for a new aspirant? (Audio recording)...
- 3.3 What are the roles played by kul-purohit (family-priests), panda (professional priests) and 'gayawara' (s professional mediator) in the *biradari bhoj*?...
- 3.4.1 How many people participated in the *biradari bhoj*?...
- 3.4.2 Can you little elaborate about their castes/sub-castes and socio-economic background?...
- 3.4.3 Did you know those participants before?...If yes, how did you get to know about them?...If no, how could you send them invitation card?...
- 3.4.4 Do they come from other districts also?...If yes, please explain, how do they come in contact with you?...
- 3.4.5 Do you have any idea about why and how this *biradari bhoj* is being organized? If yes, please explain...
- 3.4.6 Have you ever experienced any new changes in the *biradari bhoj* in your village?...
- 3.4.7 Do you think that after organizing *biradari bhoj*, the organizers get more honour in your community?...If yes, how does an organizer get more respect? Please explain...
- 3.4.8 Do you know any of the mythical stories associated with the *biradari bhoj*?...If yes, would you like to share with me?...
- 3.4.9 In your view, who all are those sub-castes of the Yadav community to whom (which castes), you feel superior?...
- 3.4.10 Did *chaudharis* (caste heads) provide some help (money, goods, etc.) for *biradari bhoj*?...If yes, what types of help did he provide?...
- 3.4.11 Are you getting any help from other communities for organizing this *biradari bhoj*? If yes, for which purpose they provide help?...
- 3.4.12 Did your caste MLA/MP/Officers attend *biradari bhoj*?...
- 4.1 How many castes are there in your village?...
- 4.2 What are the castes which keep socio-political influence in your 'village panchayat'?...or which is the main dominant caste/community in your village panchayat?...

Organization, Network, and Communication

- 5.1 Do you attend *biradari bhoj* and *chittha panchayat*? Kindly, tell your experiences...
- 5.2 Are there any quarrels over the organization of the *biradari bhoj*? If yes, how did it happen?...
- 5.3 Have your *biradari* (caste fellow) helped you ever? If yes, please specify...
- 5.4 Had other community forcing earlier to your family for *begari* custom (forced wage labour) or banded labour?...
- 5.5 Do they force now too?...If no, what do you think, why do they not force now?...If yes, do you deny?
- 5.6 Do anyone try to make dominance on you or your family?...If yes, how do they do so?...
- 5.7 By whom, do you get invitation for *the biradari bhoj* or *chittha panchayat*?...(A) Caste cluster, (B) Kinship network, (C) *chaudhari*, (D) Other (specify)...
- 5.8 Do you get invitation by email/mobile phone too?
- 5.9 Is there any caste association of Yadavs in your district?...If yes, what is the main aims and objectives of that institutions/associations?...
- 5.10 Have those associations ever helped you?...If yes, how did they do so?...

A few Questions Related to Socio-Political Mobility

- 6.1 What do you think, does *biradari bhoj* brings solidarity in your community?...If yes, please specify?...
- 6.2 Is there any change taking place in the traditional beliefs (purity/impurity, touching feet of upper caste people, etc.)...If yes, please elaborate?...
- 6.3 Do you get some information (during *biradari bhoj*) about the myths of the origin of your caste?... If yes, who provides such information?...
- 6.4 Do you worship your traditional demigod like Karia-Goria, Raja-Bali, etc.? If yes, do you find any changes? Please specify...
- 6.5 Which caste does lead to the *deeh* (village deity) worship?...
- 6.6 Which types of cloths do you wear / prefer in *biradari bhoj*?...
- 6.7 Is there any myth related to the particular cloths?...
- 6.8 Do you know anyone who has been out caste from your community and again included in your caste?...If yes, what was the condition of inclusion?...
- 6.9 Do you get invitation for *chittha panchayat*? If yes, do your *biradari* accept your decision?...
- 6.10 Do you think that *chittha panchayat* has replaced the caste panchayat in your village? If yes, please elaborate?...

7.0 A Few Relevant Questions to the Organizers of *Biradari Bhoj*

- 7.1 When did you go to 'Gaya' to do *pind daan*?
- 7.2 Before leaving for Gaya, how many times did you attend Gaya-Jagarnath ji's feast?
- 7.3 Did you study (Hindu) religious books before going to Gaya?
- 7.4 Who inspired you to go to Gaya? ...Give your feedback on any myth or story related to the community feast.
- 7.5 What are the religious processes through which you follow before departing to Gaya?
- 7.6 Can you give some details about the routine of the day (the day you were going to Gaya)?
- 7.7 Did you go there by bus or train?
- 7.8 How many people went with you?
- 7.9 What castes did they (fellow travelers) belong?
- 7.10 From whom did you receive financial help while on your way to Gaya?
- 7.11 Did you take help from any person (or gayawar)?
- 7.12 To which religious places, did you go to do *pindadan* (a rite)?
- 7.13 Who helped you there?
- 7.14 How many days and where did you have to stay in Gaya?
- 7.15 Who had arranged to stay there?
- 7.16 Did you cook jointly with everyone or just with your wife there?
- 7.17 What was the role of the *kula-purohits*, *pandas*, *gayawars* and your relatives in these religious processes?
- 7.18 Did you stay at any religious place while coming back from Gaya?... If yes, please express your opinion?
- 7.19 Give a detailed account of the routine of the day when you came back from Gaya...
- 7.20 How many people attended on the day of the *chittha panchayat*? ...and how many of them were *chaudhari*?
- 7.21 Did women also join the *chittha panchayat*? If yes, what were the major issues of those women?
- 7.22 How many days did the *bhagwat katha* take place and how many people attended it? ...After how long did you host the *biradari bhoj*?
- 7.23 Did your father or grandfather also organize a *biradari bhoj*? What socio-religious processes had to go through to organize the *biradari bhoj*?

- 7.24 Who played a leading role in that feast? ...Kindly, provide some detailed information about the daily routine of the days.
- 7.25 What is the meaning of *kachchi* (a get together for boiled food) and *pukki* (a get together for fried food) at present?
- 7.26 How much money did you spend to perform it (those religious rituals) successfully...?
- 7.27 How many people attended that *biradari bhoj*?
- 7.28 Have you ever met the people who attended the *bhoj* again?
- 7.29 What changes have you seen in yourself and in the Yadav community since the date of the feast?

8.0 Interview Guide for the Participants of *Biradari Bhoj*

- 8.1 Tell me something about yourself, please?
- 8.2 How many times have you attended the *biradari bhoj*? From whom do you get the invitation or who informs you about the *biradari bhoj*? What is your main objective behind attending a *biradari bhoj*?
- 8.3 Do you meet any local leader or *chaudhari*? ...What do they tell you?
- 8.4 Do you ever try to resolve caste/family disputes collectively?
- 8.5 Do you also know about the sub-castes of the Yadav community?
- 8.6 Did those castes marry among themselves?
- 8.7 Give some information about any myth or oral history related to different sub-castes of Yadav community.
- 8.8 Do you like to listen to *birha* folk songs?
- 8.9 Which episodes of *biraha* folk songs do you like the most?
- 8.10 Do the folk singers also give you information about the activities of the Samajwadi Party and the caste associations of Yadav community? Please give detailed information?...
- 8.11 Which section (old or youth) like more *biraha* folk songs?
- 8.12 In your view, does *biraha* folklore help in bringing political consciousness to the Yadav community? If yes, how?
- 8.13 Do Yadav singers also talk about 'Ahir Gaurav Gatha'?
- 8.14 Do you know of any local Yadav organization?
- 8.15 Do these organizations support/oppose *biradari bhoj*?

- 8.16 Have you ever received any kind of benefit from the people who attended the *biradari bhoj*?

Appendix-2

Note: A few important tables (on *biradari bhoj*), which are based on primary data.

Table no. (2.1): Respondents who Actively Participate or Wish to Participate

Village of the respondent	Less interested	Participated	Total
Natauli and others	2 (2.5%)	28 (35%)	30 (37.50%)
Tandawa	18 (22.5%)	32 (40%)	50 (62.50%)
Total	20 (25%)	60 (75%)	80 (100%)

The above table shows that there are 75 per cent of the respondents, who have participated in various socio-political activities or organized the *biradari bhoj* in their life. There are only 25 per cent of the respondents, who keep moderate view on such traditional practices. There are a very less number of respondents who do not want to participate in traditional practices or organize the *biradari bhoj*. The reasons behind no involvement in such expensive feast are the weak economic condition, spending more money on their children for higher education. More aspirations for community can be seen among well-off families because they want to show off their socio-economic mobility through this expressive cultural. The important thing is that women neither sit publically with the male members nor do they get an invitation by the village *chaudharis* in the study area. Such practices show that the continuity of the patriarchal social structure in northern India where women play a weaker role as a mute witness in the ‘public sphere’, and their tasks seem to be mainly in the private sphere. The villages are patriarchal in alike; the data also validates the male-based dominant social structure and gender role set up.

Table No. (2.2): Age of the Respondent and Their Participation

Age in Years	Active Participants	Occasional Participants	Total
20 to 30	4 (5%)	6 (7.50%)	10 (12.50 %)

31 to 40	2 (2.50 %)	8 (10 %)	10 (12.50 %)
41 to 50	14 (17.50%)	2 (2.50%)	16 (20 %)
51 to 60	14 (17.50 %)	4 (5 %)	18 (22.50%)
Above 60	24 (30 %)	2 (2.50%)	26 (32.50 %)
Total	58 (72.50%)	22 (27.50%)	80 (100 %)

The data represented in the table is based on the age of the respondents and their regularity of participation in the *kali mata puja*, *birha*, community feast, etc. It is found that younger respondents are less active than other age groups, may be due to engaging in education,

government/private job, and passive approach towards the ritual activity. The idea of active participants means here about such participants who participate at least three times in such feast. The occasional participants mean here for such respondents who are busy with some works and could not get time to participate at least once in a year, but they have involved a few times in his life.

By measuring the age groups of above 40 years old, the majority of (65 per cent) respondents (like peasants, agricultural labours, small businesses, etc.) have been actively participating for many years. The main aims of active participation are the ambitions of recreation, social interaction, showing the majority or wish to build consolidated caste network. After a series of dialogues with many of them, I could get to know that the old-age group often goes there to listen to *biraha*-folklore because they get information about recent socio-political development. Each organizer hires folk-singers and paid around five to ten thousand rupees for ten hours.

The singers of *biraha*-folklore remind and put more emphasis the ‘glorious past’ by reciting *ahir/yadav gaurav gatha* or *lorikayan* (a kind of folklore) as well as a glance of social progress of Yadav community by giving a few examples of well-known politicians, national players, actors, etc. Thus, it may be stated that most of the respondents are in the upper middle age group (forty to sixty years). The participants of the younger generations are comparatively less than the older age group in the *biradari bhoj*, *chittha panchayat*, etc. Similarly, below the 40 years of age of respondents (25 per cent) can be seen in the table in which 7.5 per cent respondents are active participants, and 17.5 per cent of the respondents are occasional participants.

Table No. (2.3): Educational Qualification of the Respondents and Participation

Education of the Respondent	Want to participate	Wish to organize <i>BB</i> *	Total
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Illiterate	4 (8%)	20 (66%)	24 (30%)
Upto Primary	16 (32%)	2 (7%)	18 (22.50%)
Upto Secondary	10 (20)	2 (7%)	12 (15%)
Upto Sr. Secondary	13 (26%)	3 (10%)	16 (20%)
Graduation and Above	07 (14%)	3 (10%)	10 (12.50%)
Total	50 (100%)	30 (100%)	80 (100%)

Education is one of the essential requirements for social development and critical thinking. It gives way to socio-economic progress. The table shows that out of 80 respondents, 24 respondents are illiterate, and among (uneducated) those more than 66 per cent wish to organize the *biradari bhoj* as well as such

other cultural events. Illiteracy seems to be a major variable for having such ambitions because an illiterate person does not have another way of posing caste dominance and gaining popularity in rural areas. On the row of sr. secondary level of education, the majority (26 per cent) of the respondents represent expressed that they just want to participate keeping in mind the social obligation. From this data, it can be said that respondents having illiterate and primary level education (more than 50 per cent) have been participating and involving in such cultural practices actively than others. It can be said that illiteracy is a significant cause for following cultural practices like *biradari bhoj* and ancestor worship. However, this might lead to a sweeping generalization, as the sample size is very small and significant changes in the sample might lead to substantial changes in the results. After visiting the study area and talking to many organizers of *biradari bhoj*, the above data gives validations thoroughly.

Table No. (2.4): Occupation and Class of the Respondents and Their Opinion

Table 2.4 shows that farmers are more active participants than any other group because *biradari bhoj*

Occupation of the Respondent	Wish to organize	Wish to participate	Total
Farmers	18 (60%)	20 (40%)	38(47.50%)
Govt. Job	2 (6%)	10 (20%)	12 (15%)
Petty Business	6 (20%)	8 (16%)	14(17.50%)
Others	4 (14%)	12 (24%)	16 (20%)
Total	30 (100%)	50 (100%)	80 (100%)

provides a big platform to interact with each-other in rural areas, especially for old-age peasants. Therefore, most of the *biradari bhoj* is planned by peasant families. The category of 'others' include students, contractors, private job, agrarian workers,

housewives, etc. It can be concluded that the occupational group of others are interested to participate only. Farmers are more engaged in organizing *biradari bhoj* since they are comparatively reasonable in the economic sense than landless labour. Therefore, they have fewer challenges than others to survive in rural areas. Even, they can easily participate and organize *biradari bhoj*, if they have any other source of income. In other than farmer category, the respondents have not taken much interest in the expensive

procedure to organize *biradari bhoj*. Similarly, it is found that the landless people in the study area are much interested to open a shop in local market for livelihood. Their social position is less than land owned farmers. Therefore, they seek social mobility with the help of such cultural practices.

Out of 26 per cent government employees, only six per cent respondents wish to organize such cultural events because their social position in rural area is considered higher than other villages. They do not want to seek any identity on the basis of rituals and tradition.

Table No. (2.5): Distribution of Respondents on the Basis of Sources of Their Motivation

Sources of Motivation	Wish to Organize	Wish to participate	Total
Religious Desire	6 (20%)	10 (20%)	16 (20%)
Social Obligation	4 (13%)	10 (20%)	14 (17.50%)
Caste Network	10 (34%)	18 (36%)	28 (35%)
Social Security	6 (20%)	6 (12%)	12 (15%)
Others Inspiration	4 (13%)	6 (12%)	10 (12.5%)
Total	30 (100%)	50 (100%)	80 (100%)

The table gives a clue about the source of motivation by which one regularly participates or eager to participate whenever gets time. This table also goes through the view of respondents who have organized *biradari bhoj* in their life. Many organizers and participants proudly talked about this feast and their source of motivation for organizing the *biradari bhoj*. Broadly, I have categorized their opinion and source of motivation into five rows. Twenty per cent respondents had or wished to organize this feast for religious desire. The idea of moksha and *pitr-rina* (bebt of ancestor) of Hinduism plays a significant role among Yadavs of the study area. If someone becomes economically sound in their native place, his relative or friend circle or local *chaudharis* often, ask to spend some money on community feast to get fame among Yadavs.

The 17.5 per cent respondents expressed that there are some social obligations by which they participate and organize such community feast, which can be seen in the second row of the above table. The study area is dominated by Thakur caste. The celebration of *biradari bhoj* gives a confidence to fight against any kind of social injustice to those organizers who are tortured by local dominant caste. More than a thousand people (including local *chaudharis*, leaders, and officers) get together and collectively

participate in *chittha panchayat* and give assurance to help in the future, if someone has an issue. Therefore, 15 per cent of the respondents narrated that social security is a prime concern for them.

More than one-third of the respondents feel that knowing their caste network is equally important. These respondents are more determined (35 per cent) to consolidate their social network. The thought of becoming part of a larger caste network is closely associated with the ‘social capital’²³⁵. By getting familiar with each other gives an opportunity to build caste network. The idea of making a consolidate caste network also helps to local *chaudharis* to find suitable groom or bride for someone. The opinion of last row ‘other’ (12.5 percent respondents) is associated with sociological factors like illiteracy, economic stability, superiority feelings, demonstration of power.

Table No. (2.6): About Meetings of *Chaudharis* and Local Leaders

Objectives of this Meeting	Agree	Disagree	Can’t say	Total
Handover the invitation	60 (75%)	5 (6.25%)	15 (18.75%)	80 (100%)
Usual for Information	58(72.5%)	10(12.5%)	12 (15%)	80 (100%)
Decision are given in rational way	69 (86.25%)	3 (3.75%)	8 (10%)	80 (100%)
Useful for knowing caste Network	55 (68.75%)	14 (17.5%)	11 (13.75%)	80 (100%)
Alike Khap	3 (3.75%)	0 (0%)	77 (96.25%)	80 (100%)
Other	66 (82.5%)	4 (5%)	10 (12.5%)	80 (100%)

The meeting of local *chaudharis* is held in two situations. First, if someone interested to do marriage with different caste, he/she needs to call a meeting for the local *chaudharis*. In the meeting, these local *chaudharis* decide amount of punishment, which could be in the forms of money, utensils, or social boycott. Similarly, the meeting is held time to time with same purpose, if someone wants to give ‘divorce’ to her wife. Second, this meeting is held to discuss about community feast.

Before one week of *biradari bhoj*, this meeting is often called by such person, who is interested to give a big community feast. This meeting is known as ‘*chittha panchayat*’ popularly in Hindi belts. The 75 per

²³⁵ Social capital broadly refers to those factors of effectively functioning social groups which include such things as interpersonal relationships, a shared sense of identity, a shared understanding, shared norms, shared values, trust, cooperation, and reciprocity.

cent of the respondents feel that the main objective of *chittha panchayat* is to handover the *chitt* (invitation letters) to the *chaudharis*. I attended a few meetings and I could get to know that after getting the invitation cards from the organizer, the duty of local *chaudharis* is to distribute the *chitt* among local Yadav community who are living in different villages.

The local *chaudharis* also mediate and solve the dispute between two Yadav families. More than 86 per cent respondents feel that they give decision in rational way without any prejudices. Therefore, most of the respondents (96.25%) narrated that we cannot compare the meeting of local *chaudharis* of the study area with khap panchayat of Hariyana.

In sum, it appears that the local *chaudharis* are dedicated to the social causes. They mediate between two families if requires during any social conflict and economic crisis. The *chittha panchayat* gives them an opportunity to get or share some information about their caste. More than 72 per cent respondents feel that this meeting is useful for getting information while around 12 per cent respondents feel that these *chaudharis* do not give much information for their neighboring villages. They have no clue about other districts too. Around 69 per cent responded that this meeting gives information about the inhabitants of neighboring village. Such information can be useful for knowing own caste fellow. If someone transgresses community rules (like inter-caste marriage), these *chaudharis* denied to participate in any occasion of such families. In the local term, it is called ‘*hokka pani band*’ but this traditional rule does not work in many cases if the accused families are well off. To some up, *chittha panchayat* is working as a managerial committee at present. Leaders (own caste) and educated persons rationally make a decision. Fewer of respondents believed that it is working as a statutory body within caste for making a decision and building a consolidate caste network. It is found that the traditional reputation of the *chaudharis* has been degraded because the younger generations are not taking so much interest in such hereditary system.

Table No. (2.7): About Fragmental Caste Division among Yadavs

Responses	Agree	Can't say	Disagree	Total
Sub-caste among Yadav	62 (77.5%)	6 (7.5%)	12 (15%)	80 (100)
Caste based hierarchies	10(12.5%)	12 (15%)	58 (72.5%)	80 (100)
Preference of marriage	70(87.5%)	2 (2.5%)	8 (10%)	80 (100)
Goatra	2 (2.5%)	4 (5%)	74 (92.5%)	80 (100)

Hierarchies among Yadavs	4 (5%)	8 (10%)	68 (85%)	80 (100)
Groom/bride from own state	60 (75%)	5 (6.25%)	15 (18.75%)	80 (100)

I have discussed in detail about existence of sub-castes among Yadavs and a few of my respondents narrated that the existence of sub-castes among the Yadav community could be seen till the year 1990s in the study area, but due to socio-political changes among Yadavs, the preference of sub-caste boundary was transgressed smoothly. The respondents (around 72.5 per cent) said that there are no caste-based hierarchies among Yadav in the study area. Even the new generations (who are around 15-30 years old) are not able to recognize their sub-caste. The preference of marrying in own sub-caste has become a past phenomenon. Around 85 per cent of the informants said that the families of the bride and groom match only the socio-economic status because the traditional caste-based hierarchies have become an old fashioned among Yadavs of the study area. The last row reflects the preferences of selecting a groom or bride from other states. We can see that 75 per cent respondents said that they would give more preference to from same state while 18.75 per cent respondents feel, if they find better suitable groom or bride from other states, they would love to do so. More than half of the respondents give preferences to kinship tie not only own state but they also give preference to find a suitable bride or groom from same district too.

Table No. (2.8): The Reason for the Polarization of Sub-Castes and Building a PAN Indian Identity Under an Umbrella Term ‘Yadav’

Opinion of the respondents	Agree	Can't say	Disagree	Total
Impact of Education	50(62.5%)	6 (7.5%)	24 (30%)	80(100%)
Local Situation	65(81.25%)	3 (3.75%)	12 (15%)	80(100%)
AIYM	30(37.5%)	22(27.5%)	28 (35%)	80(100%)
State Politics	42 (52.5%)	4 (5%)	34 (42.5%)	80(100%)
Biraha Folklore	54 (67.5%)	8 (10%)	18 (22.5%)	80(100%)
Panchayati Raj	60(75%)	5(6.25%)	15(18.75%)	80(100%)
<i>Biradari bhoj</i>	44(55%)	6(7.5)	30(37.5)	80(100%)
Socio-economic Mobility, awareness etc.	56(70%)	2(2.5%)	22(27.5%)	80(100%)

More than two-thirds of the respondents narrated that the local caste factors like the dominance of Thakur caste were posing challenges for backward castes. Meanwhile, a few respondents said that 'education' has created confidence among backward sections and local Yadav leaders could understand how politics work as means of empowerment. In addition, 67.5 per cent people believe that the traditional folklore of Yadavs and its singers have created a new enthusiasm among Yadav community in rural area and due to their endless effort the process of polarization for a PAN identity began at village level. The existence of sub-castes among Yadav community could be seen in a few places until 1990s. Due to socio-political and economic mobility among Yadavs, the preference of marrying within own sub-caste boundary was transgressed. The ideas of *biradari bhoj*, Krishna janamstami, and other cultural activities have given scope to validate and acceptance for new changes in social status. The idea of '*roti-beti ka rista*'²³⁶ (ties of food and family) was initiated without looking at sub-caste boundaries. The above table shows 75 per cent respond reported that there is very much impact of panchyati raj on intra-caste relation. If a caste is united, there would be more chances to win election at local level.

The last row shows about the pattern of socio-economic stability and mobility among Yadavs. The 70 per cent respondents reported that Yadav community has become aware for their socio-political rights. Therefore, many qualitative changes have taken place among Yadavs. Thus, 27.5 per cent feel that the changes could not take place in remote areas. The 2.5 per cent respondents could not give any final remarks about caste solidarity among Yadav community.

To sum up, the above table gives a brief account on the opinion of respondents. The process of polarization began long back among sub-castes of Yadavs. At the grassroots level, the process of polarization among Yadavs initiated after the 1990s. Therefore, consolidating their caste network and giving up their traditional hierarchal sub-caste pattern became mandatory to pave their socio-political existence. So, it became also mandatory for the backward classes to challenge the hegemony of upper castes at village level. Meanwhile, with an aim to end bonded labour practice, Indian Parliament enacted 'Bonded Labour System (Abolition) Act , 1976 long back but it could be implemented at ground level after 1990s.

²³⁶ Retrieved on 20/12/2021 from <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/edit-page/Caste-bubble/articleshow/606146.cms>

Appendix-3

List of Maps

Map (3.1): Map of Uttar Pradesh



Source: Google

Map (3.2): Map of Sultanpur district (Tandawa village falls in Jaisinghpur tehsil)



Source: Google

Appendix-4

List of plates

Plate (4.1): This is an official Logo of AIYM



Source: Google image

Plate: (4.2): A Local Folksinger (in White Kurta) is Singing in an Event of *Biradari Bhoj*



Source: Primary Data

Plate: (4.3): Faruahi / Ahiraua Folksingers cum Dancers



Source: Primary data

Plate: (4:4) Faruahi Folksingers and Dancers



Sources: Google image

Plate: (4:5) Faruahi Folksingers and Dancers with Choirs



Sources: Youtube

Plate (4.6): Picture of Madhav Ram Yadav, a Famous Singer and Writer of Folklore



Source: Primary data

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Source: Google image

Plate (4.8): Birha Folksinger in the Advertisement of T-Series (a Famous and Commercial Music Company of India)



Image: Google image

Plate (4.9): Women from the Yadav Community are Singing *Pachara* Folksong Collectively



Source: Primary data

Plate (4.10): While Swinging on the Swing of the Tree, the Girls Sing a Folk Song Called Kajri



Source: globalnewsindiaonline.wordpress.com

Plate (4.11): Listeners of Birha Folklore



Source: Primary data

Plate (4.12): Listeners (Leaders are in the First Row) of Birha Folksong



Source: Primary data

Plate (4.13): Native Women Listeners of *Birha* Folksongs



Source: Primary data

Plate (4.14): An Image of King Lorik (A Mythic Figure)²³⁷



Source: Google image

Plate: (4.15): A Symbolic Image of Krishna and His Association With Cattle²³⁸



Source: Google image of *gobardhan baba*

²³⁷ The image is associated with a mythic figure Lorik. His life story inspires the million of Yadav community.

²³⁸ The above image is often used by Yadavs to depict the association of Krishna with cattle herder castes.

Appendix-5

List of Abbreviations

AIYM	All India Yadav Mahasabha
AIKM	All India Kshyatriya Mahasabha
BSP	Bahujan Samaj Party
MGNREGA	Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guaranty Act.
M.L.A.	Member of Legislative Assembly
M.P.	Member of Parliament
SHG	Self Help Group
SP	Samajwadi Party
U.P.	Uttar Pradesh

Glossary of Selected Terms

Aadar: Respect.

Adhiya: A system of taking half of produced crop from tenants.

Ahir Gaurav Gatha: A booklet of pride tales of Yadav.

Ahir Tola or **Ahiraoti:** Living place of Yadav.

Akadashi: It is the eleventh lunar day of each of the two lunar phases which occur in an vedic calendar month - the Shukla Pakṣa and the Kṛṣṇa Pakṣa.

Andhvishvas: Superstition.

Asharhi Puja: Worshiping in rainy season

Babu and Bhaiya: Patron, like father and elder brother (dominant terminology for Thakur caste).

Bajar: Local market.

Barahi: A celebration which takes place after 12th days of a new born baby.

Bhaiya: Like an elder brother.

Begar: One type of banded or unwanted (forced) labour.

Begari: Local system of the unpaid but compelled labour.

Bhagat: Devotee or a person who follows non-vegetarian.

Bhaktiha Ahir: A sub-caste of Yadav community who believed themselves as spiritual man.

Bhagvat Geeta: A sacred text of Hindu religion.

Bhagawati Mata: Chickenpox. In order to be cured, the villagers offer water with turmeric on banyan / peepal tree.

Bhagwan: God, deity.

Bhoj: Feast, community feast, offering.

Bhoot or Churail: Ghost. The term *bhoot* is used for male while *churail* for female spirit in Hindi belts.

Bidai Geet: The folk songs which are sung during the wedding ceremony (When its time to bid adieu).

Bigha: A land measurement unit. One *bigha* can be divided into 20 *biswa*. Each *biswa* is 125 m² 154.32 sq.32 sq.yd, hence one Bigha is .25 Hectare.

Bikarama or Pap Karma: Bad work (in terms of religion).

Biradari: Caste, community, cognate castes, an umbrella term for Yadav.

Biradari Bandhu: Respectable word for own caste or community.

Biradari bhoj: A get-together of local *chaudharis*.

Biraha: A traditional folklore of Yadav community.

Brahmin Devota: The word is used for Brahmin caste. It is a symbolic dominant terminology which gives a sense of superhuman.

Brahminical: The ways *brahminism* function in Hindu society.

Brahminism: *Brahminism* refers to the domination of Indian society by the priestly class of Brahmins and their Hindu-ideology.

Chaita: It is semi-classical songs, originating from the Indian subcontinent, sung in the Hindu calendar month of *Chait* (March).

Chamar-tola / Chamarauty: The living place of Chamar (ex-untouchable) caste in the study area.

Charwaha: Herdsman. It is a symbolic terminology for Yadav caste.

Chaudhari: Head of the caste in a village.

Chaudharipan: Sense of dominance. This word shows the power and position of a person, who has been assigned as *chaudhari* of a village.

Chauraha: Market, where four roads connect.

Chhat Puja: A local pattern of worshipping of goddess 'chhatt'.

Chilbila Baba: A village deity of Rajanpur. This sacred place is situated between Tandawa and Rajanpur village.

Dadhikando: it is a fair, which is organized by Yadav community.

Dakshina: It is a Sanskrit word found in Buddhist, Hindu, Sikh and Jain literature where it may mean any donation, fees or honorarium given to a cause, monastery, temple, spiritual guide or after a ritual.

Dalit: Ex-untouchable castes. Now, the word scheduled castes has become a synonyms for Dalits.

Dalit-Bahujan: A single word for oppressed castes including Minority (lower castes).

Deen: Religious life.

Devi Geet: Devotional folk songs.

Dhakosla: Pretense or deception.

Dharma: Wordily duty or the fulfillment of one's moral duty in the worldly life so that the soul can make progress toward deliverance from punishment in the next life.

Dan-Punya: Unreciprocated gift for bless of God.

Deeh Baba: Deity of the village or demigod, head (mythical) of the village.

Deeh Puja: A pattern of worship for 'Deeh Baba' (village deity).

Dehat: Rural area.

Dehati: Rude / uncivilized way of living.

Dhandha: Business, livelihood, routine work.

Dolak: The *dholak* is a two-headed hand drum, a folk percussion instrument. The instrument is about 45 cm in length and 27 cm in breadth and is widely used in *qawwali*, *kirtan*, *lavani* and *bhangra*.

Duniya: Worldly life.

Durduriya: A thanks giving ritual. It is an oral tradition where seven or nine women perform some ritual activities collectively after getting their boon.

Faag Geet: It is a folk song and sung on the occasion of Holi (a popular festival in India). The tradition of faag song is alive even today. There is a description of Krishna playing Holi with the Gopis of Braj in the Faag Geet sung in Bhojpuri, Awadhi, and Braj language.

Gambhira Beer Baba: A local deity. This sacred place is situated in the east direction of Tandawa village.

Gotra: Lineage.

Gram Panchayat: Village council.

Gram Pradhan: Elected person of a village panchayat. Gram means a village and panchayat can be referred to 'a village council'.

Gulami: slavery.

Harijan: Man of God / a Gandhian term for Dalit.

Harmoniyam: *Harmonium* is a musical instrument which is a free-reed organ that generates sound as air flows past a vibrating piece of thin metal in a frame.

Harwaha: Plough man / animal herder / a banded labour.

Harwahi-Charwahi: A system of banded labour in rural site.

Henna/mehdi Song: It is a traditional wedding song sung by the women of the groom's relatives.

Hinduism: A set of religious beliefs.

Hoond: Exchange of labour among labour class.

Jagannath-Puri: A sacred place which is situated in Puri district of Odisha.

Jamjutiya: It is a festival in which women keep fasting (*nirjala*, without taking water or food) throughout a day and night for wellness of their sons.

Janeu: A sacred thread in Hinduism. The wearing of *janeu* seems to be an upper caste practice.

Kachchi: Boiled Food or a ceremony.

Kajri: It derived from the Bhojpuri word *kajar*, or *koh*, is a genre of semi-classical singing, originating from the Indian subcontinent, popular in Uttar Pradesh. It is often used to describe

the longing of a maiden for her lover as the black monsoon cloud come hanging in the summer skies, and the style is notably sung during the rainy season. There are three types of Kajri: Banarasi, Mirzapuri and Gorakhpuri. It comes in the series of season songs, like *chaiti*, *hori* and *sawani*, and is traditionally sung in the Bhojpuri region of Uttar Pradesh: around Sultanpur, Ayodhya, Varanasi, Mirzapur and Gorakhpur.

Kali Mayi: A local female goddess. The sacred place for this goddess is assigned in the east direction of each village.

Karma: Works or efforts, fortune.

Kariya, Goriy, Foolmati and Rajabali: Joint deities of Yadav family, but the hierarchy exists among them.

Karwa Chauth: It is an annual one-day festival celebrated by Hindu and some Shikh women in North India. Married women keep fasting from sunrise to moonrise for the safety and longevity of their husbands.

Katha: Storytelling, tale, myth.

Kathakar or Pravachankarta: Storyteller of Bhagwat Geeta (a religious text of Hinduism).

Khaprail: Local word for *kuchcha* house.

Laharerwa Beer Baba: Watchman, local deity of Tandawa village.

Lok Sabha: *Lok Sabha* is composed of representatives of the people chosen by direct election on the basis of the adult suffrage.

Mahabharata: It is an epic of Hindu religion.

Mahamayi: Big chickenpox. Villagers believe that it is an aggressive form of goddess.

Maharaj: The term is used for a chief or a dominant person. It is also a symbolic term for Brahamin.

Majdori: Wages, labour.

Malhar: "Malhar" is a Hindustani classical raga. Malhar is associated with torrential rains.

Mantras or Sloka: Sacred quote, stanza, advice.

Manyi-Tinayi: Slave or banded labour.

Mari Thakurayin: A female (upper caste) deity. The sacred place of this goddess is situated in west direction of Tandawa village and considered to be a protector of village.

Mohana Bir Baba: A protector deity. His sacred place is situated in south direction of Tandawa village.

Mukhiya: Head of the village.

Nagada: is a Middle Eastern drum with a rounded back and a hide head, usually played in pairs.

Nakta: A folk song of farce.

Neota or Neuta: Invitation. It is given in three forms: 'orally' (informal way), in written (formal way, personally) and in combined form. The combined form of circulating invitation is popularly known as 'chitath' in the study area.

Paap: Sin, offence.

Pakka Road: Metalled road

Pahalwan: Worrier, athlete, wrestler.

Pahalwan Bir Baba: A village deity of Rajanpur village. The villagers believe that Pahalwan Bir Baba was a worrier.

Pahalwan Jati: Wrestler caste. The local people from Ahir caste believe that their ancestors were worriers and local kings.

Pahalwani: Wrestling. A practitioner of this sport is referred as a *pehlwan*, while wrestler-teachers are known as *Ustad* or *Guru* in rural belt. This traditional occupation is known as 'pahalwani'.

Palagi: Touching your feet (with sense of a great respect). It means someone wants to touch the feet. It is symbolic term for showing the respect towards elder Brahmin or own relatives. For example, if a person from non-Brahmin caste sees any respected Brahmin in the village, he would say, “Palagan”.

Panch Rina: Four inborn debts of a person (according to Hinduism): Pitri, Deva, Rishi, and Atithi Rina.

Panchayat Bhavan: Administrative house of a village panchayat.

Panchkos Parikaram: Every year Panchkoshi Parikrama starts from Krishnaksha Panchami of Margashirsha (Aghan) month and ends on Dashami Tithi. During the five-day circumambulation, different types of food are prepared and offered to God at different places and after eating prasad, the night is rested.

Panda: Religious expert or pilgrimage priests.

Pandit: The word is used for the intellectual person, but it is also used for unskilled Brahmin priest.

Parampara: Tradition, life style, traditional way of living.

Parhe-Likhe: Literate, educated.

Pindadan: Offering oblations to the departed forefathers or any departed family members at few religious places can be called pindadan.

Pitra Visarjan: Farewell for late father. Pitru visarjan is a religious reverence event of Hindus and held on the day of Amavasya.

Pradhan: Village chief. Elected members of village panchayat are called *pradhan* in the study area.

Prasad: Blessed food given to the worshipper after worshipping.

Pujari: Ritual performer or priest.

Purwa: Sub-village or a new part of the village.

Punya: Punya is referred to as good karma or a virtue that contributes benefits in this and the next birth. Punya can be acquired by appropriate means and also accumulated. In Vedanta, the term punya is the invisible wealth, a part of dharma, the first of four human goals; the other three goals being *artha*, *kama* and *moksha*.

Raja Bali: A demigod. Yadav community worships this demigod.

Rehan: A system in which a tenant makes agreement with landholder and pays money for the field.

Rishi: Saint, seer.

Ropani Geet: This folk song is sung during rainy season.

Sadhu: Devotees

Sanskara: Behaving with proper way or sense of humor.

Sanskara, Sodash: There are sixteen rites in Hinduism namely garvadhan, punshvan, seemantonayan, jatkarm, namkaran, nishkarman, vivah, upnayan, anteshti, etc.

Sohar: Sohar is a folk song sung on the birth of a child in the house. It is sung on occasions like the birth of a child. In such songs, beautiful descriptions of the birth of a child, related stories and festivals are found. Beautiful stories of Rama's birth and Krishna's birth are also in Sohars.

Sufal: A ritual performance is done perfectly.

Shubh Muhurta: Auspicious time

Shudra: Lower castes. Now, the 'Dalit bahun' is a popular word for Shudra castes, which represent OBCs, SCs, STs and minority.

Tabla: A tabla is a pair of twin hand drums from the Indian subcontinent. Since the 18th century, tabla has been the principal percussion instrument in Hindustani classical music, where it may be played solo, as accompaniment with other instruments and vocals, and as a part of larger ensembles.

Tali: One type of ‘kucha/ *kutch*a house’. Such *houses* are defined as structures with walls made of bamboo, mud, bushes, reed, stones, thatch, straws, leaves, etc.

Tarpan: Offerings

Thakuraity: Living place of Thakur caste (so-call upper caste).

Vasant Geet: Spring folksongs.

Vattai Custom: Offering tea in separate glass with a sense of untouchability.

Vedas: Sacred texts of Hindu religion.

Vidhan Sabha: The State Legislative Assembly.

Vivah Geet: The folk songs which are sung during the wedding ceremony.

Yajna: *Yajna* is a ceremony or an event of ritual significance, performed on a special occasion.

Yazwan Baba: Male village deity, situated in east direction at Tandawa village.

Zamindar: Big land-holder or landlord.

Zamidari: A pattern of revenue generation or the system of landholding and tax collection by landlord.

Zila Panchayat: District council.

Castes in the Study Area and Their Traditional Occupation

Ahir: The traditional work of Ahir was to sell and produce milk. The word *ahir/abhira* means ‘fearless’. They are also known as Gavli, Ahire, Golkar, Goalar, Rawat and now Yadav.

Baniya: A merchant caste.

Brahamin: A caste, priests.

Chamar: An ex-untouchable caste that is placed at bottom of caste hierarchies. They had been associated with cleaning related works in Jajmani system.

Darji: Tailoring works.

Kahar or Mahara: This community derives its name from the Sanskrit word 'Skandhakara', which means one who carries things (doli or palki) on their shoulders. In Indian Jajmani system, this caste is known as Praja.

Kurmi: Agrarian work.

Nayee: Barber.

Pal or Gaderia: Shepherd community. Their traditional work is closely associated with the seep and goat forming.

Pasi: Swine forming. This caste is ex-untouchables but their socio-cultural status is considered upper than Chamar caste.

Thakur or Rajput: Rulers and warriors caste.

Vanmanush: Making leaf plates.

Appendix-6

Publications in Scopus Journals

6.1 Prasad, Devi (2015). Thinking against Caste Hierarchies: An Analysis through Yadav Community. *Man in India* (Serial Publications), Vol. 95 (03): 527-539.

Man In India, 95 (3) : 527-539

© Serials Publications

THINKING AGAINST CASTE HIERARCHIES: AN ANALYSIS THROUGH YADAV COMMUNITY

Devi Prasad

The propensity of looking into genealogy, caste-atrocities, social boycott, and the ambition of upward (caste) mobility are consecutive features of rural societies across the country. On the one hand, the rural society has been represented in long time by deep-rooted casteism that creates kind of blind perception or faith towards his own caste and mythological beliefs for showing the pseudo superiority, and its result is being reflected by irrational practices like *Biradari Bhoj* (caste oriented commensality function) in eastern Uttar Pradesh. Although in opponent way, 'village exogamy', in which members of the same village, does not allow intermarry, sexual relationship, and villager are bounded as localized-clan. However, the concerning thing is that, on the one hand the system of village exogamy develops reciprocal 'primary relationship' among villager which ratiocinates as 'multiple-Biradarism' (bilateral relationship) while on the other hand, there are certain practices antagonistically (like food pattern [Kachcha and Pakka], traditional occupation [Jajmani System], untouchability, etc.) show vague scenario for ground understanding of hierarchal pattern among villagers. The paper shows how various new challenges, like '*Dual-Caste Behaviour*', 'Caste-Silencing', *Biradarism* (brotherhood), etc. have been emerged for sustainable or continuous existence of 'casteism' over the last few decades. For in-depth understanding, the two villages, namely 'Rajapur' and 'Tandawa' have been randomly selected for data collection in which, gender, caste, education, occupation, job, etc. variables have been determined. The study has been approached to auto-ethnographic description, mutual discussion, unstructured questionnaire, and grounded theory method.

Key words: Caste Practices, Caste Symbiosis, Hoond System, Biradarism, Caste-Silencing.

Introduction

Justice and equality are the two subjects often talk about by most of the nationalists and leaders of various political and ideological streams across the world including India. Indian was at the forefront in condemning racial discrimination particularly apartheid and also influence of super power (s) on the internal affairs of independent nations. Her commitment to secure its citizens freedom, justice, equality, and

6.2 Prasad, Devi (2018). Revisiting the Issues and Debates on Caste in Rural Society: An Analytical Approach. *The Eastern Anthropologist* (Serial Publications), Vol. 71 (1-2): 83-102.

THE EASTERN ANTHROPOLOGIST		
<i>Editors</i>	: Sukant K. Chaudhury, P. Venkata Rao	
<i>Associate Editors</i>	: Keya Pandey, Vibha Agnihotri	
Volume 71	Numbers 1-2	January-June 2018
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- 6.3 Prasad, Devi (2019). Caste Identity and Community Feast among Yadav: An Interpretation. In *Caste and Gender in Contemporary India: Power, Privilege and Politics* (Eds.) Supurna Banerjee & Nandini Ghosh. New Delhi: **Routledge**. pp. 96-113.

5

CASTE IDENTITY AND
COMMUNITY FEAST AMONG
YADAVS

An interpretation

Devi Prasad

The social characteristics of caste take the form of identity for a group through certain practices of commonality. These practices often show close intersection and legitimisation through the performance of other embedded identities like gender, religion and even social class. This chapter, too, looks at the formation of the Yadav caste identity through political as well as social performances of community activities. Focusing on the commensal feast also known as the biradari *bhoj*, it seeks to unpack the caste-gender intersections inherent in the construction of this identity.

Yadavs articulate their caste identities through their close association with the traditional occupation of animal husbandry as well as milk production, milk-selling¹, etc. They claim to be the descendants of the Yadu dynasty to which a popular mythic figure Lord Krishna belonged (Rao 1979: 124; Jaffrelot 2003). The sub-castes of Yadavs were not equal in their ritual status.² Thus the foundation of a new identity ('Yadav') also indicates multiple divisions. While a few were able to claim a superior status by separate mythological origin, others were treated as inferior. For instance, Goalas were considered the most superior and the Ghurpita occupied the lowest position in the ritual hierarchy. Despite the Ahirs constituting the numerically stronger group, they were placed in the middle of the ritual hierarchy. The strict ritual hierarchy was translated into internal divisions and reaffirmed through a prohibition on intermarriage among the various subgroups

- 6.4 Prasad, Devi and Akundy, A. (2021). Assessing the Issues and Debates on Caste in Rural Society: Some Reflections (co-edited with Prof. Anand Akundy). Journal of ***Social Change*** (Sage Publications), Vol. 51 (4): 554-565.

Article

Assessing Issues of Caste and Selfhood in Rural Society: Some Reflections

Social Change
51(4) 554–565, 2021
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Devi Prasad¹ and Anand Akundy²

Based on a field study of Tandawa village located in east Uttar Pradesh, the article examines the pattern of caste cohesion in a rural society and studies how divisions and hierarchy still surface and remain a reality. This ethnographic study shows that though many socio-cultural traditions are practiced in northern India, some are undergoing subtle changes. The younger generation, especially its leaders, the yuva neta, have been taking initiatives over the last two decades to bring about a change in thinking. This study examines these new changes and challenges, and also tries to explore how these yuva neta have taken some initiatives to resolve internal caste-based hierarchical divisions and social contradictions. Using interviews, oral history, narratives and participant observation techniques, an ethnographic account of a small village has been put together. The research article also revisits a few significant studies to understand the debate on the caste system and how deeply it is entrenched in the day-to-day life of rural India.

Keywords

Tandawa village, caste, culture, leadership, prejudice, social belief, yuva neta

Introduction

Rural India has conventionally been seen as the ultimate symbol of authentic native life, a place where one can see or observe the 'real' India. Villages in India have often served as a lens through which one can gain an understanding of the developmental path whereby local people organise their cultural practices, social relationships and belief systems (Jodhka, 1998, 2012). There has been a long

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Presentation in National Seminars

6.5 Presented a paper titled “Mapping Reciprocity among Yadavs through the Articulation of the Bhoj and AIYM” in a three-day national conference on ‘Examining Intersections: Caste / Gender Narratives in India’ organized by the Institute of Development Studies, Kolkata and sponsored by the ICSSR, held on February 8-10, 2016.



6.6 Presented a paper titled “Village Exogamy and Biradarism in a Multiple Caste Village: An Illustration” in a three-day national conference held on November 29, 30 & December 01, 2014 (UGC, Indian Sociological Society, and ICSSR sponsored it.).



Appendix-7

Plagiarism Certificate (Received from IGM Library, UoH)

Caste, Ritual and Politics among Yadav Community of Eastern Uttar Pradesh: A Sociological Analysis

by Devi Prasad

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