

Chapter XII

VILLAGE COMMUNITY AND INTERRELATION BETWEEN
MAJOR GROUPS AND CLASSES

I stated in the very beginning of the monograph that it is necessary to distinguish between the two connotations of the word 'village', namely, village-site and administrative village. And we have seen in the 'analysis of the pattern of land-ownership, tenancy and agricultural labour in Radhvanaj in 1825' that the area of land owned and/or cultivated by the people resident on the village-site was not coterminous with the territorial unit recognized for land administration. We do not know the boundaries of the administrative village in the earlier periods, but this observation about the relation between village-site and administrative village was, I think, true of the earlier periods also.

As regards the village-site, which was obviously much more important than the administrative village for social purposes, we have seen how the people residing on the village-site of Radhvanaj were divided into diverse groups, classes and categories. The most important of these groups were caste groups. Each caste group had vital relations with similar groups residing on other village-sites, and some of them had vital relations also with their caste fellows residing in towns. Some castes were found only in towns, some only in villages, and some in both towns and villages. Each caste group in the village had its own institutions

and interests. The caste groups composed of more than one household were each divided into lineage groups and/or descent lines, and each lineage group was divided into segments. Each household had its own cluster of affinal and other relatives mostly in other villages and towns, and it was also related with a cluster of other people outside the village by economic, religious and other ties. Moreover, the various people residing on the village-site had varying degrees of attachment to it. A considerable number of them were recent immigrants, and the only interest of many of them in the village was probably to try to find out if they had any chance of settling down in the village. On the other hand there were people who had resided in the village for centuries. Some emigrants also retained some long term interest in the village, and even permanent residents of other villages had some long term interest in Radhvanaj.

All these considerations may lead one to think that the village was nothing more than an architectural and a territorial unit, that it was not a significant social category, or that it was not an 'idea' as some sociologists and anthropologists have said.⁽¹⁾

Of course, the various groups residing on the village site did not live in isolation from one another. They co-operated with one another in a number of activities. They were related with one another as landowners and tenants, employers and labourers, masters and servants, mortgagers and mortgagees, lenders and borrowers, buyers and sellers

of a variety of goods, parties to agreements to use each other's bullocks, suppliers and receivers of a variety of specialised services, members of neighbourhood and recreational groups, friends and foes, participants in a variety of rituals, ceremonies, festivals and feasts, and so on and so forth. Although in each of these relationships, some residents of other villages were also involved, there was a maximum concentration of these relationships among the people resident on the village site. Although these relationships were found in almost every village in the area, the way in which they actually operated in the village depended upon the particular constellation of major social groups residing in the village. For example, the way in which general customs and norms—I mean norms and customs as stated by people—operated in a predominantly Koli village differed from the way in which they operated in a predominantly Rajput or Patidar or muslim village. Not only the customs governing interrelations between castes but also the customs of each individual group were modified by continuous residence in a particular constellation of castes. The fact that some castes, or rather some lineages in some castes, resided in a village for a long time was I think important. It would lead to the development a distinctive set of village customs. However, none of these considerations, important in themselves, would provide us an 'idea' of the village.

However, we have seen that there was also what may be called 'village corporation' with its own institutions and activities. It had its own income and expenditure. It had

its own officials and servants who received remuneration from its own funds. Money was provided from its funds for the performance of religious sacrifices and pujas in temples in its name from its funds. Gifts were sent in its name to temples outside the village. It gave gifts to those who worked for it. The council-house, the pigeon-tower, the temples and shrines, and several other things, were the property of the village corporation. There were gods and goddesses and rituals and charities to guard its welfare. In brief, there were affairs and activities in the village which were considered to be the affairs and activities of the village corporation and not of any one individual group or person. It was in Maine's term,⁵ a corporation aggregate. The village-site was not merely a residential unit but also the seat or locus of the village corporation.

Although most villages in Central Gujarat were corporations, the nature of management of the affairs of the village corporation depended on the pattern of social relations among the members of the corporation. There is not much direct information about Radhvanaj on this point but it is reasonable to think that the vasvaya castes did not have much say in the process of decision making. Among the non-vasvaya castes, the Bania, being an outsider, would not have bothered much with the village corporation, as he did not do in many other villages. This does not however mean that the minor castes did not have a role in the activities of the village corporation. Among the major castes, the Pardeshi and Talapada Kolis, particularly the former, and the Sepoys, were too poor

to have much influence in decision making. The management of village affairs was mostly the concern of the Rajputs, both Hindu and Molesalam, and the Brahmans and the Patidars. Among these castes also some lineages played a more prominent role than the others. The Rathods among the Rajputs, the Wariyas, the Desai and the village headman among the Patidars, and the two lineages providing priestly services to Radhvanaj and Antroli among the Brahmans.

It seems to me that there was a continuous conflict between the Rajputs and the Patidars in the management of the affairs of the village corporation as well as in other general affair^s in the village. The headman, Matadars, and revenue-contractors were Patidars and they were supported by Patidar leaders in the pargana, but they did not have much economic power in the village. The economic power was wielded by the Rathod Rajputs. The history of Radhvanaj after 1827 shows that the Rathod Rajputs always attempted to coerce the Patidar headmen to do what they wanted them to do, and the Rajputs were frequently successful in their attempts.

One question should intrigue any reader of this monograph: Why did Radhvanaj have Patidar and not Rajput headmen and Matadars? It seems that the Rajputs considered it below their dignity to accept these offices. They were trying to imitate in this way the Rajputs who were rulers of independent estates comprised of entire villages, called Talukdari villages, or territorially separate Wanta parts of villages. The position of chiefs was different from the position of headmen and Matadars.

Elphinstone discussed the subject of appointment of headmen in Talukdari or Grassia villages in Ahmedabad District in one of his minutes, in which he instructed the officials of the District, "I would recommend that he (a Grassia) should have no formal appointment as Mookhee Patell, a title which a Rajput chief must look on as a degradation."⁽¹⁾ It also seems the Rajputs attached low prestige to the office of headmanship, because it was usually held by Patidars and other non-Rajput castes, and the Rajputs resented the rising power of the Patidars.

Although the Rathod Rajputs of Radhvanaj did not have a territorially separate Wanta estate, they did try to keep up some of the symbols of a territorially separate Wanta estate. They had their own council house (choro) in both Radhvanaj and Vansar, which was separate from the council house of the village corporation. And they arranged for special services from, and granted revenue-free land to, Brahmans, Charan Bards, a few vasvaya castes, and Koli watchmen and escorts. The Rajputs thus tried to show their social separation from the rest of the village although they did not have a territorially separate Wanta estate. This was possible and socially justifiable because they owned a large area of land, but this was also necessary for them to maintain a respectable position in their caste whose norm-setters were ultimately the Rajput chiefs in Saurashtra, Kutch, highland Gujarat, and Rajasthan.

It can be seen from the above that Radhvanaj was not dominated by any single caste, but there was a struggle for

dominance. The struggle for dominance was a characteristic of many villages in Central Gujarat. In some villages the struggle existed between Rajputs and Patidars, in some, between Kolis and Patidars, in some, between Rajputs and Kolis, in some between a Muslim group and a Hindu group, and in some, a triangular struggle. It seems to me a struggle for dominance between castes in the villages in an area would be found, if the area contains several castes each with a fairly large landowning population, assuming of course that two or more of such castes would be adequately represented in a village. There would obviously be no conflict between castes if there is only one major landowning caste. Changes may also take place in the struggle for dominance over a period of time. I doubt if there was any struggle for power in Radhvanaj during the thirteenth and fourteenth century. It is also possible that the dominant position of a caste group in a village may lead to the identification of village corporation with the caste—a totalitarian situation. This was probably the situation in Radhvanaj in the thirteenth and the fourteenth century, and in some Talukdari, Mewasi, Wanta and Narwadari villages in the early nineteenth century. That is to say, the village corporation was not found in every village in the early nineteenth century. It is however important to note that the totalitarianism of the dominant caste would be complete only if the dominant caste group was composed of only one lineage.

There were many types of villages in Central Gujarat, and Radhvanaj represented only one type. We have here a

paradox: in order to understand a village we should study it in relation to the regional society but an adequate understanding of the regional society is possible only if we understand the many different types of villages in the region. This monograph is only a small beginning toward an understanding of pre-British society in Gujarat. The study of its implications for an understanding of the village and the regional society at the present time is my next job.