

UNCERTAIN REVOLUTION:  
PANCHAYATI RAJ AND  
DEMOCRATIC ELECTIONS IN  
A NORTH INDIAN VILLAGE

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# CONTENTS

Abstract .....	3
Introduction .....	3
Shanti Nagar: Basic Information .....	4
Background of Panchayati Raj .....	5
History and Legal Basis .....	5
Principles .....	7
Political Organization from Lambardar to Panchayati Raj .....	13
Lambardar and <i>Tholladar</i> .....	13
Panchayat and Development Committee .....	14
Panchayati Raj in the Union Territory of Delhi .....	16
Villagers' Evaluation of the Old and New Panchayats .....	18
The Electorate and Its Divisions .....	22
Caste, Faction, <i>Pana</i> , Lineage .....	22
Class .....	29
The Election of 1977 .....	32
Previous Elections .....	32
Candidates .....	34
Nomination Day .....	41
Programs and Promises .....	44
Money, Food, Liquor, Canvassing .....	49
Villagers' Predictions .....	53
Election Day .....	54
Election Night .....	61
Analysis of the Vote .....	63
Aftermath .....	64
Discussion .....	68
Election of December 1984 .....	70
Literature Cited .....	72
Index .....	75

## TABLE

1. Estimated Votes for Each Candidate by Caste and Faction Based on Villagers' Predictions, Shanti Nagar, Election of 1977 .....	64
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## FIGURES

1. Men sitting on a tractor and trolley waiting to go to the election office .....	42
2. Women on the way to the polls .....	55
3. Camp of one of the candidates on the roadside near the polls .....	56
4. Men waiting in line to vote .....	57
5. Plan of polls (not to scale), Shanti Nagar, election of 1977 .....	58
6. Election officials .....	59
7. Election officials counting the ballots .....	60



## ABSTRACT<sup>1</sup>

During the 1950s and 1960s, the Government of India introduced a new system of rural local government known as panchayati raj (rule by council). Rule by panchayat was established by law in the north Indian village of Shanti Nagar (a pseudonym) in 1954 and implemented in 1959. The first panchayat election was held early in the 1960s. We lived in Shanti Nagar and studied the village in the 1950s, before the introduction of panchayati raj, and in the 1970s when panchayati raj was well established.

In 1977, we observed a panchayat election. This study of politics and local government in Shanti Nagar is organized around an intensive analysis of that election, based on our observations and

interviews. We also briefly discuss all the other panchayat elections, including the most recent (December 1984), held in Shanti Nagar. The study is noteworthy because it catches the village during the transition from government by officials known as *lambardars* (the style of local government during the British Raj) through an informal village panchayat, which anticipated some of the features of panchayati raj, to the statutory panchayat and full-fledged panchayati raj. It is a detailed local account of a general process which has occurred all over India, as the Government of India has consciously tried to transform the rural way of life of the world's most populous democracy.

## INTRODUCTION

In late December 1977, the people of Shanti Nagar went to the polls to elect the members of the village council (panchayat). Although the first local election based on uni-

<sup>1</sup> The research reported here is based on intensive fieldwork in Shanti Nagar in 1958–1959, 1977–1978, and some inquiries in 1986. We thank the people of Shanti Nagar for their friendship and cooperation during these many years without which the work could not have been undertaken.

Fieldwork was supported by the Social Science Research Council and the National Science Foundation (1950s), and the American Institute for Indian Studies and the Indo-U.S. Sub-Commission for Education and Culture, the Indo-American Fellowship Program (1970s). We acknowledge with thanks the help of many persons in making these periods of fieldwork possible and successful. We have listed their names and expressed our gratitude in S. Freed and R. Freed, 1976, pp. 28–29; 1978, pp. 9–10; 1982, pp. 200–201; 1985, p. 232; R. Freed and S. Freed, 1979, p. 292; 1980, p. 329; 1981, p. 55; 1985, p. 104.

We thank our field assistants, Renu Jain, Tarun K. Sharma, and Chandra Sharma for their able and enthusiastic aid in covering the election of 1977. Ms. Jain also collected information concerning the 1984 election. In this monograph, our use of “we” may refer to other members of the field team as well as to the authors. Geraldine Santoro, supported by the Urban Corps, helped with the library research and compiled the index.

We thank Laila Williamson and Margaret Cooper for reading, criticizing, and editing the manuscript. Williamson also proofread the galleys. Jeffrey P. Bonner, Pauline M. Kolenda, and Charles Morrison served as referees. Nicholas Amorosi prepared the line drawing. Clarissa Wilbur and Sheila Davis typed the manuscript.

versal adult suffrage had taken place just 16 years earlier and the 1977 election was only the fifth that the villagers had ever experienced, they had apparently taken to the new system with ease and skill and were intensely interested in the current election. Despite some cynicism and considerable criticism of the electoral system, 85 percent of the registered voters went to the polls, and many of the people who did not vote were living away from the village. Probably over 95 percent of the available voters cast ballots; people even carried their older disabled relatives on their backs to the polls so that they could vote. The excitement of this local election and the almost universal voter participation in a country where democracy is new contrasts sharply with the voter apathy that marks most local elections in the United States. Even in presidential elections, voter participation in the United States falls well short of the figure registered in Shanti Nagar.

Universal adult suffrage and election by secret ballot seem so natural and inevitable to inhabitants of countries with long-established democratic traditions that it is hard for them to appreciate this electoral system as a revolutionary social innovation for India: the more so since the Government of India uses the village panchayat as a means of reforming and recasting village life to reflect the ideology of a small highly educated, sophisticated elite. When introduced, the new ideology and associated governmental in-

novations, known today as panchayati raj (rule by council), were largely at variance with traditional village culture. Thus, the stage was set for a conflict between tradition and rapid forced innovation, which gave rise to a complex process of adjustment. Panchayati raj has, to a significant extent, affected the political and economic development of the country. Its influence will in all likelihood become greater as villagers learn to exercise the fiscal and legally coercive potential of the system (cf. Nicholas, 1965, p. 41; Gangrade, 1966, pp. 145–146).

We were living in Shanti Nagar (our name for a village near Delhi in the Union Territory of Delhi) in 1977–1978 including the period of the December 1977 panchayat election. Thus we could study both the electoral process and the functioning of the village panchayat. We had also lived in Shanti Nagar in 1958–1959, just before the establishment of panchayati raj, a period during which the pre-panchayat form of local government was evolving into rule by panchayat. Our periods of residence during two decades of rapid social change afforded us the unusual opportunity of observing panchayati raj in relation to previous executive and judicial institutions, its effects in the village, the attitudes of the villagers toward it, and their adaptations to it. This study reports our observations and analysis of these subjects, adding to the relatively small body of detailed analyses of panchayat elections. India is so large, with about 575,000 villages, and culturally so varied that comparative study of panchayat elections and panchayati raj from different villages has the potential of revealing

theoretically interesting similarities and differences of reaction, resistance, change, and adjustment as they relate to such variables as demography, landownership, salaried employment, and education.

We begin with a brief description of the village, followed by a discussion of the history, philosophy, functioning, and problems of panchayati raj, or democratic decentralization as it is also called. We then recount the evolution of governance in Shanti Nagar, from the system of *lambardars* and *tholladars* inherited from British rule, through a brief period featuring an informal panchayat largely controlled by the more powerful high-caste landowners, arriving finally at the present system of rule (raj) by a democratically elected village council (panchayat). This account is followed by a description and analysis of the panchayat election of December 1977.

Our discussion of panchayati raj concerns the statutory administrative panchayat and not the *nyaya* (Sanskrit for “justice”) panchayat, known also as the panchayati *adalat* (Persian for “court”). In the Union Territory of Delhi, the judicial side of village administration under panchayati raj was entrusted to the circle panchayat, which consisted of elected persons from a number of contiguous villages. However, the circle panchayat was inconvenient for many cases and so informal judicial panchayats functioned in the village; further, the head of the statutory village panchayat acted to some extent as an arbitrator in disputes. In some villages of the Union Territory of Delhi, the statutory village panchayat mediates minor disputes (Ratta, 1961, p. 139).

## SHANTI NAGAR: BASIC INFORMATION

In 1958, Shanti Nagar was located about 11 miles (17.7 km) northwest by road from the City of Delhi, a distance which has decreased slightly since that time due to the gradual spread of the city. Several villages are situated between Delhi and Shanti Nagar. Travel between Shanti Nagar and Delhi was relatively easy in 1958. Except for about 1 mile (1.6 km), the road to Delhi was paved. A bus made four roundtrips daily; during the rainy season, the bus traveled only to the end

of the paved road and passengers had to complete the journey on foot. In 1977, the paved road had been extended to Shanti Nagar, and bus service was more convenient.

Although Shanti Nagar is located close enough to Delhi to make it possible for many men to hold urban jobs and commute daily, agriculture is still the principal occupation. Men often combine more than one occupation, frequently farming and urban employment. Most women also have several prin-

cipal occupations: agricultural work, raising children, and housework.

Shanti Nagar is a type of village, common in northern India, often described as nucleated. The houses are crowded together, sometimes sharing one or more walls with adjacent houses. The compact habitation site is bordered by undivided village common land. Beyond this tract lie the cultivated fields. As the population of Shanti Nagar has grown, the habitation site has been expanded at the expense of the common land.

Since the use and disposal of "common land" was the hottest political issue in the village, the nature of common land and the landowners' attitude about it should be briefly explained. All village land is held privately. However, a significant amount is left undivided to be used for community purposes. Two kinds of undivided village common land are the common grazing area, and land used for such purposes as schools, ponds, cremation grounds, canals, and roads. The individuals who owned the village agricultural land also owned the common land in proportion to their holdings of agricultural land. The habitation site is also common land. It is used for residential purposes not only by the owners of the agricultural land but also by landless villagers. The habitation area is divided into house sites. Landowners frequently occupied common land bordering their fields, partly an expression of their belief that they had a specific share in the village common land. Such encroachment was resented by landowners who were not in a position to occupy village land and by most villagers. The Government has encouraged the distribution of common land to the landless, which the landowners resist, for they would thereby

lose political power and land that they regard as traditionally theirs.

In the interval between our two periods of research in Shanti Nagar in the 1950s and 1970s, a number of social and economic trends had become established: the educational level had risen dramatically; health services had improved; there had been a substantial increase in salaried urban occupations; a few women worked for salaries outside the home; the technological level of agriculture was considerably higher; the villagers were more deeply involved in markets outside Shanti Nagar, owing to the construction of the immense Vegetable Market just north of Delhi and within easy reach of the farmers of Shanti Nagar; electricity had been introduced; radios were commonplace; there were a few television sets and automobiles; and the daily delivery of newspapers had been instituted. The population had grown from 799 to 1324 individuals, an increase of 65.7 percent. The village had a somewhat different appearance: it was larger to accommodate the increased population, and houses made of dried chunks of mud, which were common in 1958, had been almost entirely replaced by structures of brick. The village was more modern, better informed, and more prosperous in 1977–1978 than in 1958–1959. Despite such changes, however, many cultural values, chiefly in the domains of family life, kinship, religion, and proper personal conduct, persisted relatively unchanged. A detailed description of the village as it was in the 1950s, and to some extent in the 1970s, may be found in a series of monographs that have appeared in the last several years (S. Freed and R. Freed 1976, 1978, 1985; R. Freed and S. Freed 1979, 1980, 1981).

## BACKGROUND OF PANCHAYATI RAJ

### HISTORY AND LEGAL BASIS

Although the panchayat was an organ of caste government in ancient times, there seems to be no clear evidence that multicaste villages were governed by villagewide panchayats before the 19th century. Then the British began to form village panchayats as units of rural local government, entrusted with

minor administrative tasks and the power to try petty cases. India's draft Constitution made no mention of villages; but after some debate, the village panchayat was accepted as a basic institution through which the rural masses would participate in Indian democracy. Thus, the Indian Constitution, adopted in 1950, contains several village-oriented



principles of state policy. Article 40 requires the establishment of village panchayats as units of local self-government, empowering state governments to enact laws that endow them with the necessary powers and authority to fulfill their government functions (Baxi, 1982, p. 300). Other village-oriented principles of the Constitution concern rural economic development; for example, the state is required to organize agriculture on modern scientific lines, to encourage cottage industry, and to enhance the educational and economic interests of the weaker sections of society.

In short, the Constitution acknowledged the need for a social and economic transformation of rural India. This transformation was to be realized by a program of community development organized and implemented by the Government. By the beginning of the First Five-Year Plan in 1951, 15 pilot projects had been undertaken in order to design and test such a national program. In 1952, the Community Development Programme was launched with the designation of 55 development blocks in all parts of India. The block, which contains an average of about 100 villages, has proved to be an effective unit for community-development administration (Morris-Jones, 1964, p. 116).

The Community Development Programme affects the full spectrum of rural economic activity as well as education, health, and sanitation. Community development was conceived as "government schemes and programmes with people's participation," though the ultimate objective was "people's programmes with people's participation" (Bhargava, 1983, p. 5). Although the Government sought people's participation in community-development projects (Haldipur, 1971, p. 528), no village institution was designated to organize such participation; the Government sought it largely through the support and cooperation of individuals. Villagers might cooperate, for example, by planting demonstration plots of new varieties of grain or by contributions of cash, kind, or labor. Much good work was done, but by 1956, the end of the First Five-Year Plan, it was clear that community development would not result in the expected revolution. Villagers were not sufficiently involved, as the

important decisions took place at the higher levels of the Community Development Programme. The program was basically bureaucratic rather than democratic.

At the end of the First Five-Year Plan, the Team for the Study of Community Projects and National Extension Service (generally known as the Balwantray Mehta Committee after the name of its chairman) was appointed to study the Community Development Programme and the National Extension Service. The Committee observed that, in general, village panchayats had not become involved with the projects of the Community Development Programme. Noting that community-development officials had tried to encourage local participation by nominating persons to serve on ad hoc advisory bodies, the Balwantray Mehta Committee Report (1957) comments that these bodies failed to supply sufficient leadership and motivation for improving social and economic conditions in the rural areas (Bhargava, 1983, p. 6). To generate enthusiasm and stimulate popular participation in the process of rural reconstruction, the Committee recommended that the Government use democratically elected panchayats as its agents for community development at the levels of village, development block, and district. In effect, the whole community-development structure was to be integrated into a new system of democratic local government (Morris-Jones, 1964, p. 117).

First called democratic decentralization, this institutional arrangement later generally came to be known as panchayati raj. Its key element required that village leaders, who traditionally functioned to keep the Government out of village affairs to the maximum extent possible, would henceforth serve as agents of reform, often involving measures that flew in the face of village traditions. The extraordinary role conflict inherent in such a scheme underlies much of its malfunctioning and is manifest in the emotions generated in local elections, which generally spark more interest than parliamentary elections. Jain (1982, p. 46) summarized this conflict of panchayati raj by noting that the Government sees "... popularly elected village bodies as a projection of itself to carry out its behests.

The village people, in turn, regard them as Government's Trojan horse in their midst and treated them with coldness."

The Balwantray Mehta Committee Report recommended a three-tier panchayati raj system. Although the details of the system vary from state to state, there is generally a *gram* (or *gaon*) panchayat (village panchayat), a panchayat *samiti* (committee) at the level of the development block, and a *zilla parishad* (district council) at the district level. The village panchayat is expected to report twice a year to the village assembly (*gram sabha*), which consists of the entire adult population of the village. The three tiers are linked and handle welfare and development projects at their respective levels. The state governments are supposed to grant the necessary power and funds to these various bodies to enable them to discharge their responsibilities.

### PRINCIPLES

Panchayati raj relies on the concepts of democracy, elections based on universal adult suffrage, governmental decentralization, and political, social, and economic equality. In traditional rural India, democratic elections were unknown; Indian villages were, and largely remain, authoritarian and intensely hierarchical societies where minute status gradations among castes are expressed in terms of economic, political, social, and ceremonial behavior. In this context, one would expect some doubt on the part of the governmental elite about the effectiveness of panchayati raj and its possibly unforeseen ramifications. Yet there seem to have been few reservations. State governments all over India enthusiastically embarked on a program of reconstructing rural local government in the form of panchayati raj (Bhargava, 1983, p. 7), believing that it would serve as a remedy for the disappointing response of rural India to the Community Development Programme. Moreover, panchayati raj receives wide approval both on moral grounds and because it is modern. Indians view the panchayat as an instrument of community development and also as a local governmental body, bringing democracy and popular

participation into these two aspects of public life (Maheshwari, 1979, p. 13).

Both the enthusiasm of the Government for panchayati raj and its relatively easy acceptance by villagers owe much to the ideology and message of the late Mahatma Gandhi and his followers (Morris-Jones, 1964, p. 147; Baxi and Galanter, 1979, pp. 350-351; Baxi, 1982, p. 299). Although most of panchayati raj was new, it was presented to rural people as a revitalization of a traditional institution. Moreover, Gandhi spoke of village self-rule in terms of Hindu symbolism, equating it with the righteous rule of the great god Rama (Baxi, 1982, p. 299). Such appeals to tradition were effective both at high governmental levels and in the villages. They helped to smooth the way for acceptance.

There were additional reasons for the villagers' readiness to accept panchayati raj. Although panchayati raj had a traditional aura because of its name, it was nonetheless new and therefore villagers perceived it as modern. Despite strong reservations concerning sensitive areas such as family life, religion, and caste relations, many villagers want to be modern and welcome innovation in certain aspects of life, such as technology and agriculture. Political innovation would be the more acceptable if it were seen as leading to modernization in the economy and education, for example. The involvement of village panchayats with community-development projects, a basic concept of panchayati raj, enhanced this perception. Panchayati raj also offered financial advantages to villages. State governments were expected to support the new panchayati raj institutions, which meant that governmental funds would be funneled into the rural areas, an appealing prospect for the relatively impecunious villages.

While the connection of the elected village panchayat to community development gave villagers, especially the more progressive ones, reason to accept panchayati raj, the new system also had a conservative aspect: decentralization of political power. This feature fitted well with traditional rural life and would be attractive to those villagers who feared too rapid social change. The general political trend in post-Independence India has been to concentrate political power in the states and the

center. Democratic decentralization partially countered this trend, returning at least some power to the village and raising the possibility that a skillful village panchayat could shield it from some of the interference from state and national governments. Indian villages have traditionally attempted to reduce government involvement with their internal affairs to the minimum. The Community Development Programme had loosed a horde of bureaucrats (block development officers, village level workers, and the like) into the countryside to transform the village without necessarily paying too much attention to traditional village leaders. Panchayati raj created local governmental institutions which could control the new bureaucrats who were conceived of as servants of the democratically elected representatives (Morris-Jones, 1964, p. 117; Pant, 1979, p. 14). Village panchayats were theoretically in a position to determine both the nature and speed of some of the government-inspired change within their jurisdictions.

If some villagers, especially those of the more prosperous castes, were interested in panchayati raj chiefly as a conduit for governmental funds and beneficial economic development, low-caste villagers saw the democratically elected panchayat as an innovation that could help to ameliorate their particularly unfavorable circumstances. In addition to such measures as reserved places in universities and government service, the basic concepts of panchayati raj—democratic elections, social justice, and equality—seemed to the low castes one more sign that the Government was on their side (cf. Somjee, 1964, p. 12; Béteille, 1971, p. 152). Democratic elections meant that high-caste candidates for office had to ask low-caste people for their votes, which put the lower castes in a position to bargain for concessions. Moreover, in villages where a low caste was in the majority, its members could dominate the village panchayat. These factors would all favorably dispose the lower castes to panchayati raj and help to establish it smoothly in the rural areas.

Despite these appealing features, generally acceptable to villagers, panchayati raj was at variance with important and traditional village values and customs. As a result, the system often malfunctioned and generated conflict, dissatisfaction, and disillusion. Many of

the problems encountered in villages by panchayati raj center on the personal characteristics and role of the head of the panchayat, the *pradhan* or *sarpanch*, for he usually controls the panchayat (Narain, 1966, p. 124; Baxi, 1982, p. 310), often reducing the other members to the role of figureheads.

First, the *pradhanship* clashed with the village concept of the moral quality of leadership. Villagers traditionally accepted as a leader a man who embodied *dharma*, that is, conformity to custom, righteous behavior, duty, and his own proper role in society. Village leaders were generally relatively wealthy elderly individuals who represented populous lineages and families; but these qualities had to be buttressed by *dharma* to win the respect that a leader needed. It may be true, as Galey (1984, p. 372) points out, that in India *dharma* enters the "royal function" indirectly through the role of the Brahman and is not an accompaniment of the ruler himself (see Kolenda, 1976, p. 589). Nonetheless, it is *dharma* which makes the royal function legitimate.

Panchayati raj had the effect of separating leadership and *dharma*, partly because of the changed system for selecting leaders and partly due to the dual role of the *pradhan*. Under the traditional system, people became leaders as their moral, intellectual, and social qualities were recognized by general consensus. Although some individuals thrust themselves forward and might be tolerated if they were rich and forceful, the more respected village leader, comfortably manifesting *dharma*, was usually dignified, often quiet and unobtrusive, and was invariably listened to respectfully by his fellow villagers. The new-style leader, depending on anonymous votes, campaigned, schemed, and manipulated to achieve power. Often the new leaders were quite different from the traditional leaders. Panchanadikar and Panchanadikar (1980, p. 121) describe those of the new leaders who come from the upper castes—as most leaders do—in rather unflattering terms: "This moderately educated, white-collar oriented, non-labour class of pseudo-agriculturalists, constitutes the base material for the professional neo-politician class in rural India."

The dual role of the *pradhan*, which affected the type of man elected to the post, required political adroitness more than mo-



rality and contributed further to the separation of political power and dharma. The *pradhan* was a village leader and represented the village to the Government; but he was also a government agent charged with introducing government projects into the village. The old-style leader was all villager, concerned that outside governmental authority do as little damage to the village as possible. If he could obtain some governmental aid under favorable terms, so much the better, but basically he defended the village.

The new *pradhan* faced a dilemma. The more he kept the Government at arm's length, the less effectively could he implement the kind of change in the village favored by the new ideology emanating from higher governmental centers; and the more he cooperated with the Government, the more likely he would endanger village traditions and lose the confidence of the many villagers who valued them. Many villagers liked things essentially as they were and, while welcoming technological innovation, disliked the kind of social engineering aimed, for example, at leveling social distinctions. The lower castes, of course, were more amenable than the high castes to rapid social change in the direction of equality.

An old-style leader attempting to function in the new role of *pradhan*, with its basically incompatible aspects, would probably be ineffective and, administratively, could become largely inactive. A new leader who was perceived as deficient in moral qualities might have trouble rallying village support, especially the support of the traditional leaders who retained a good deal of their power despite the advent of *panchayati raj*.

Bailey (1970, pp. 58–66) phrases the cleavage between the old and new leaders in terms of the “trust” that villagers placed in the old-style leaders versus the effectiveness of the new leaders in dealing with government officials. Villagers and government officials face the same dilemma; both want to deal with the traditional village leaders, but “. . . they have been supplanted, at least in the task of representing the villagers to the Government and the Government to villagers, by a different category of men” whom Bailey calls “brokers” and “touters” (Bailey, 1970, pp. 58, 63). The Government wants to win the village leaders to its side because other vil-

lagers will follow them. But by and large they have not been cooperative and have been supplanted by the brokers. For their part, the villagers want “. . . a man ‘who can stand up to officials,’ a man of the world with the right contacts. Yet any villager who acquires [these qualifications] has forfeited the confidence of the villagers. This is the type of man who is used to bridge the gap between the villagers and the officials. Neither side feel [sic] any confidence in the bridge, but they are forced to use it because there is no other” (Bailey, 1970, pp. 58–59). The difficulties inherent in such role conflicts are not easily surmounted and have hindered the effectiveness of *panchayati raj*.

Sharma (1978, pp. 141–144) discusses the ineffectiveness of old-style leadership in the new role of *pradhan* of the statutory *panchayat* as manifested in a village election and its aftermath. The first *pradhan* of the *panchayat* of Sharma's village was a deeply religious man, seemingly a leader of the old style, who was thrust into the new role of leader of the *gram panchayat*. He served two terms in office but was inactive, doing “. . . nothing that was either good or controversial.” The man who succeeded him, “. . . respected by all for his honesty, humility, good nature, and kindness,” was also a leader cast in the traditional mold. Apparently an ineffective politician, he made no attempt to activate the *panchayat* and it became completely dormant (Sharma, 1978, quotes on pp. 141, 142).

Sharma's villagers were reluctant to choose leaders on bases other than moral character and then, when the elected officials were inactive, criticized the new system for its ineffectiveness. That the kind of leader required by *panchayati raj* might have to be different from the old-style *pradhan* was unacceptable, and some people would abandon the elected *panchayat* rather than accept a new style of leader. Sharma comments that “[b]y far the most pointed criticism leveled against the new government *panchayats* strikes at their very basis, that is, the difficulty of obtaining a group of respected *panchayat* members through universal suffrage.” She quotes the comments of a *pradhan* of another village on this point:

In the old days there was one man in the village whom all selected as *pradhan*, because in the

eyes of the villagers he was the only man worthy of this place. Those days, every man had a feeling of social and moral fear, which is lacking in these voters . . . . But these days there is competition for any post in the village. Naturally, the most improper and unlikely man for that place plays all types of games in order to win. Such games and activities are immoral ones. It is the election system which introduces malpractices and evil ways . . . . I openly say that voting must be finished, but the government is not going to do this because it must eat away the humanity and peace of the nation . . . . (Sharma, 1978, quotes on p. 143)

Sharma remarks, with justification, that her informant presents a rather ideal picture of bygone days, but nonetheless he is clearly disturbed by the difference of the old- and new-style leaders, especially by the decline of dharma as the principal qualification of leadership.

In Indian terms, panchayati raj invites a greater emphasis on *artha* at the expense of dharma. While dharma refers to righteousness, ethical behavior, and divine rules of conduct, *artha* pertains to more secular concerns: property, power, politics, and law that is not in the province of dharma. Although dharma and *artha* to some extent stand in opposition to one another, their domains tend to be different: dharma dominates at the level of family and caste law whereas *artha* guides the official actions of rulers and kings. The traditional *pradhan* was not a ruler in the sense that he wielded sovereign power. However panchayati raj has introduced elections as a new path to power and has strengthened the informal influence of the *pradhan* with governmental authority. These developments are hospitable to a partial shift in emphasis from dharma to *artha*. One should not expect that this shift, if it occurs, will take place without oscillations. In a given village, a new-style *pradhan* might on occasion be replaced by one of the old style. But during a sufficiently long period of years, it may well be possible to discern a displacement of the *pradhan*'s moral center of gravity in the direction of *artha*. Such a development would be all the more inevitable were it to characterize the village population as a whole and not just the office of *pradhan*.

Another point of discord between pan-

chayati raj and traditional village life concerns democracy versus hierarchy. The population of an Indian village is generally composed of several castes arranged in a hierarchy, with wealth and power usually concentrated at or near the top. Sometimes the upper castes do not form the majority of the village population but nonetheless control villagewide affairs. Village leaders come from the upper castes. Before panchayati raj, they were not voted into power but achieved their roles through the tacit recognition by high-caste people of their qualities and competence. When a traditional nonstatutory panchayat controlled the village, its members usually represented the principal high-caste lineages. During British rule, traditional village leaders were formally recognized by the Government and granted a title (*lambardar*) and certain duties and privileges.

Villagers tended to think of the village in terms of the high-caste landowners. When they said, "The whole village will be there," they meant representatives of all high-caste families. It is important to note that in much of northern India, this system of governance largely excluded the participation of women and low-caste persons, especially the lowest castes known collectively as Harijans who, in Shanti Nagar, are the Leatherworkers and Sweepers. Even when low-caste participation was sought, Harijan men might try to avoid involvement in panchayats controlled by the high castes, recognizing that their participation was wanted chiefly to give legitimacy to schemes which might disproportionately favor high-caste landowners. Women not only were excluded from governing bodies but were also barred from entering the meeting house (*chopal*), although they could watch proceedings from a distance.

The democratically elected panchayats of panchayati raj completely changed the position of women and Harijans. They immediately began to participate in village governance, the more so since there are reserved places in village panchayats for Harijans and women. If none choose to run for office, women and Harijans can be co-opted to fill the reserved places. Of these two new constituencies, the participation of Harijans does more than that of women to change the conduct of elections and, to a lesser extent, vil-

lage governance. Women, like men, tend to vote as do other members of their family, lineage, and caste (cf. Lewis, 1965, p. 149). Their participation swells the number of votes cast, but both male and female voters generally are responsive to caste and family interests. The special concerns of women are not as yet expressed politically at the village level. Low-caste participation, on the other hand, means that these groups' interests have to be taken into account in running the village, for they can give their votes to the high-caste candidate most sympathetic to their concerns. Moreover, in villages where low castes are in the majority, they can, and sometimes do, elect the *pradhan* and other panchayat members, thereby taking control of the village government.

Panchayati raj attempted to effect the sudden transformation of a society that emphasized ascribed status based especially on sex (men generally are held to be superior to women), caste, and age (young people defer to their elders) into one featuring democracy and equality. Well-entrenched values are not easily modified, and a rather difficult transition was to be expected. Bêteille (1971) offers some interesting observations, based on his study of a Tanjore village, concerning the problems that may arise from the imposition of democratic forms in a hierarchical society. Comparing the traditional panchayat of the Adi-Dravida (low) castes, which functions well, with the new statutory village panchayat, which has taken hold poorly, he comments:

The weakness of the village *panchayat* seems to arise from the imposition of a democratic formal structure on a social substratum which is segmental and hierarchical in nature. Although the formal structure of power is democratic, the value system within which it operates is egalitarian . . . . Today, when the basic hierarchical values of caste society are intended to be thrown overboard by the introduction of Panchayati Raj, the consensus which existed in former times tends to evaporate. (Bêteille, 1971, pp. 164–165)

He also mentions the importance of moral sanctions (which involve *dharma*) in local governance, noting that "The [traditional] *panchayat* does not have any legal authority. It is, nevertheless, able to function because

moral sanctions have a certain force . . ." (Bêteille, 1971, p. 164).

Besides bringing the low castes and women into political life on the basis of democracy and quasi-equality, panchayati raj disturbs village tradition in that the elections produce winners and losers. A traditional panchayat whose members were designated by consensus would usually have representatives of all major high-caste lineages. Village leaders would recognize that all significant groups would have to be included for the panchayat to be effective, or at least not to cause disharmony. On the other hand, democratic elections, even when decided by a narrow margin, bestow all formal authority on the winners. In those villages where the *pradhan* is the only panchayat member who counts, an election is a serious matter and can be very bitterly contested because, in the end, one individual will control the local government. The loser, usually a person of consequence, is left with no formal political power and usually suffers a loss of prestige. Important persons who lose village elections are by no means powerless; there are always the possibilities of noncooperation with the *pradhan* or of stimulating active popular opposition (cf. Panchanadikar and Panchanadikar, 1980, pp. 153–154). But the *pradhan* controls the governmental machinery and can use it or not as he chooses.

Similar considerations obtain between judicial panchayats modeled on modern courts of law and traditional panchayats. Modern judicial bodies invoke legalities in order to see that justice is done. A traditional panchayat is not particularly concerned with legal niceties; it seeks a compromise between disputants so that village harmony can be restored. Realizing that all villagers have to continue to live together, traditional governing bodies attempt to have disputes and village policy settled by consensus.

Chief among the criticisms of panchayati raj is that it promotes caste antagonism ("casteism") and factionalism. Critics also maintain that panchayati raj is frequently corrupt, does little to improve the villages, often becomes inactive between elections, is weakened by irregular elections and inadequate financing, its *pradhan* (or *sarpanch*) usurps power, its elections are socially dis-



ruptive and expensive, a disproportionate share of its benefits go to the wealthy, and it is bedeviled by bureaucracies of the state and central governments that are often antagonistic. The *gram sabha* (council of all adults) has no effective role. There is considerable evidence that villagers do not understand the role of the new administrative panchayat, often attributing to it the functions of the old traditional panchayat (Ratta, 1961, pp. 140–141; Khanna, 1972, p. 88; Bhargava and Rao, 1978, pp. 55–56).

Villagers tend to be critical, even scornful, of statutory *gram* panchayats. In Mandi, a village of the Union Territory of Delhi, many people "... stated that the new Panchayat has yielded nothing but corruption, party politics, groupism, and factionalism. They charged that the Panchayat has always sided with ... relatives and bribers ... " (Nautiyal, 1961, p. 154). Baxi and Galanter (1979, p. 356) cited an empirical study that "... disclosed that 97% of the villagers in the areas under study were of the view that the working of PR [panchayati raj] institutions (including, in this instance, *Nyaya Panchayats*) 'have encouraged such evils as crimes, theft, personal jealousies, favouritism, litigations, feuds, and insecurity of life and property at the village level.' "

Although uninvolved observers tend to present a more balanced evaluation of panchayati raj than villagers (cf. Baxi and Galanter, 1979, p. 357), they too echo the criticism of the villagers, the people who, in the final analysis, must live with the system and make it work. For example, Ratta (1961, pp. 138–139) comments:

But it seems that the movement far from being an unqualified success has to a great extent led to a great deal of unnecessary and harmful party politics, casteism groupism etc. which is not a very healthy sign.

During the last 3 years of its existence the panchayat in Gokulpur has not been able to perform any of its assigned tasks. Whatever little improvements that have taken place ... were mostly carried out on individual initiative and the Gaon Panchayat has not played any significant role in this respect.

Concerning the ineffectiveness of Gokulpur panchayat, however, it must be pointed out

that the pradhan was a member of a low caste who won election because the votes of the more numerous upper caste voters divided their support between two candidates representing different castes. The high castes then would not accept leadership of the low-caste pradhan and thwarted his plans, thinking it beneath their dignity to associate with him. The imposition of democratic forms in a basically hierarchical society can easily lead to such a governmental stalemate when election results run counter to the traditional local hierarchy.

Analysts of panchayati raj tend to place less emphasis on the advantages of the system than on the disadvantages. In all probability, this critical imbalance is due to the fact that evaluations of an institution tend to focus more on its weaknesses than its strengths, especially if the study aims to propose measures for improvement. In any case, panchayati raj has some formidable advantages over the preceding system of village government. Democracy has been introduced at the grassroots of Indian society. There has been a transfer of power from the bureaucracy to elected officials. Many people participate more actively in governance and economic development, and local leaders emerge and acquire experience which can lead them to higher political levels. The downtrodden acquire dignity. Even factionalism, usually recognized as undesirable, may be healthy in a democracy and in some cases benefits the low landless castes; at the level of village politics, factionalism is chiefly a phenomenon of the higher landowning castes which the low castes can sometimes manipulate to their advantage.

Many results of panchayati raj, often cited as disadvantages, could equally be interpreted as advantages. For example, keenly contested elections are a sign of a healthy democracy. Consensus and unanimity, so highly esteemed in India, can be used by the village elite to suppress opposition and mask the depth of popular emotion.<sup>2</sup> Moreover, elec-

<sup>2</sup> According to the villagers, the Government offered a reward of 500 rupees to villages that chose panchayats unanimously by discussion and consensus. The idea was to save the money that would otherwise be spent in elections. The villagers did not consider consensual choice a possibility in Shanti Nagar.

tions did not introduce factional strife into villages; it was already there in the form of individual feuds, caste rivalries, and tension between landowners and the landless. Democratic elections simply provided another area for the expression of conflicting interests (Opler, 1959, pp. 149–150; Yadava, 1968a, pp. 69–70; Bhatnagar, 1978, pp. 106–111; Baxi and Galanter, 1979, p. 357; Pant, 1979, pp. 14–15; Shiviah, 1980, p. 24).

Although the critics of panchayati raj have clearly spotlighted weaknesses, there is no alternative in a democracy to democratically elected local governments. The great leaders of India insisted that a democratic society could be built only on a foundation of democratic villages.

The late Prime Minister Nehru had correctly observed: "Democracy at the top cannot be a success unless it is built on the foundation from below." Moreover, we remember the words of Gandhiji, who once declared: "True democracy cannot be worked by 20 men sitting at the centre; it has to be worked from below by the people of every village." (Bhargava and Rao, 1978, p. 55)

Moreover, the weaknesses of panchayati raj are not unique; their analogues can probably be found in any democratic system. For example, ethnic politics, the analogue of casteism, are certainly important in urban American political life, corruption is by no means unknown, factions routinely afflict the major political parties, and charges are frequently heard that the government favors one or

another social group or class. However, the basic feature of panchayati raj—the creation by the central government of democratically elected village panchayats which then serve as spearheads of social change—is a somewhat novel development, the more so since it has taken place in a society usually regarded as the most elaborate example ever recorded of a social hierarchy.

It is in the foregoing context that we examine the introduction of panchayati raj into Shanti Nagar. The particular events and the personalities of the principal actors, interesting in themselves, are of consequence chiefly because they form part of the local manifestation of a process that has taken place throughout India. The account that follows, based on two periods of observation in the late 1950s and late 1970s, must depend on the memories of informants for the time just before we arrived in Shanti Nagar and the 20 years or so between our two periods of residence. It was not easy to elicit such information in any detail; although villagers can recall details of personal and family life, they tend to give rather brief accounts of matters that do not concern their own family or caste. Nevertheless, the 20-year record is reasonably complete, firmly anchored to the two periods of intensive study in the 1950s and 1970s. We turn now to the evolution of village government in Shanti Nagar, the introduction of panchayati raj, and the election of December 1977.

## POLITICAL ORGANIZATION FROM LAMBARDAR TO PANCHAYATI RAJ

### LAMBARDAR AND *THOLLADAR*

After Delhi Territory became a district of the Punjab in 1858, an administrative system was established with representatives, known as lambardars, at the village level (Delhi Administration, 1976, pp. 546–547). Despite a series of governmental reorganizations in which the city of Delhi and the surrounding rural region became successively a separate province, known as Delhi Province (1912), a Part C State (1950), and then a Union Ter-

ritory (1956), the office of lambardar continued until abolished by law in 1954. That year saw the passage of three important acts: the Delhi Panchayat Raj Act, the Delhi Land Reforms Act, and the Delhi Land Revenue Act.

In Shanti Nagar, each of the three *panas*, or residential subdivisions, of the village had a lambardar, who was assisted by a *tholladar*, a much less important official. In each *pana* area resided chiefly members of a single *patti*, a division of the cultivable village land held

by the patrilineal descendants of an ancestor who had a major landholding (Yadava, 1969, pp. 498–500; S. Freed and R. Freed, 1976, p. 36). The government appointed the lambardars, taking care to respect the facts of village life. Thus, the men selected were prominent villagers. After the initial appointment, the office tended to become hereditary, passing from father to eldest son.

The lambardar's basic duty was to collect the land revenue (a tax on land) from the individual farmers of his *pana* and to transmit it to the government, for which service he received a fee of 5 percent of the amount collected. However, the role of lambardar often extended far beyond this task. Appointed to his position because of wealth, caste position, and to some extent important lineage connections, and supported by governmental authority, the leading lambardar of a village could effectively become the village headman. Such was the case in Shanti Nagar just before we first arrived there. One of the three village lambardars who represented the strongest lineage of the most important *pana* of the Jat Farmers (the principal landowning caste) was generally acknowledged to be the village headman. He took a leading role in making arrangements for such necessary village work as the maintenance of roads, ponds, and irrigation canals; helped to settle disputes; and, to some extent, protected the rights of the lower castes. A man in his fifties, he was quite ill when we first met him and died a few weeks after our arrival in Shanti Nagar. Although we never knew him well, we had the impression of a person unusually experienced in dealing with the human complexity of his world. He could not be described as a gentle person (gentleness is a quality highly valued by many villagers although generally not by men of his caste, the Jats). Rather he was a dominating personality and drank heavily. In fact, drinking was one of the causes of his death. Despite his faults villagers, even in the late 1970s, sometimes spoke with nostalgia about the time when the lambardar ruled the village, pointing out that he handled all problems effectively and kept the police from meddling in village life.

The office of *tholladar*, like that of lambardar, tended to become hereditary, descending from father to eldest son. The prin-

cipal duty of the *tholladar* was to extend hospitality to visitors. For example, if a group of police came, the *tholladar* fed them, or if a stranger was stranded in the village at night, he might stay at the *tholladar's* house. Although the villagers did not consider the position of *tholladar* to be important, the fact that hospitality was central to his role suggests the importance that the villagers attached to proper hospitality. The obligation of hospitality continued into the subsequent era of panchayati raj and was assumed by the pradhan. The role of *tholladar* was also important because of the prestige inherent in any governmental position. The three *tholladars*, one assisting each lambardar, doubled the number of honorific roles in Shanti Nagar and made it possible to distribute prestige to twice as many lineages. In a society as status conscious as Shanti Nagar, it would probably enhance social harmony to distribute honorific positions rather widely.

#### PANCHAYAT AND DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE

In 1958, the villagers were modifying the governmental organization of Shanti Nagar so that it conformed more closely to the requirements of the Delhi Panchayat Raj Act of 1954, due to be implemented in 1959. Aware that an elected panchayat was to take control of village administration, the villagers had already acted to establish a system of government by panchayat that more or less resembled the intent of the government of the Union Territory of Delhi. Panchayats had long been a feature of village life, but the elimination of the post of lambardar and the death of the village headman early in 1958 probably had the effect of strengthening the informal village panchayat by removing a competing focus of power.

Among significant differences between the informal panchayat of 1958 and the later statutory panchayat, members of the informal panchayat were not elected by universal suffrage; any village man could attend meetings and participate. However, the core of the panchayat consisted of the more powerful Jat Farmer and Brahman Priest landowners. Some of these men were present at most meetings, and most of them attended the more important sessions. Occasionally, low-caste



men participated, but they usually preferred not to do so. The panchayat met irregularly but frequently, almost always in the Jat Farmer meeting house. Women were forbidden to attend meetings in the Jat meeting house, even when the subject under discussion concerned them, but they were allowed to watch meetings held elsewhere.

The informal village panchayat handled both the administrative and judicial aspects of village government. At one meeting it might exercise its executive function; at another, its judicial function; and sometimes it might use both capacities at a single session. The panchayat had no officers, neither a president, secretary, nor headman. However, its members were not equally important; the "big men" of the village clearly controlled what took place at meetings. When the panchayat needed people to execute its decisions, they were appointed for the occasion; others might serve another time. The informal panchayat based its actions largely on unwritten custom rather than on a written set of village statutes and ordinances. There was no village policeman to enforce its judicial decisions. It did not levy permanent taxes to finance its managerial activities; rather, money was raised by special assessments to pay expenses as the necessity arose.

To assist with its administrative functions, the informal panchayat elected a Development Committee of 13 men. In accordance with village sentiment, which strongly favored decisions made by consensus, the committee members were elected by consensus at a panchayat meeting. Two seats reserved for Harijan men were never filled; of the other 11 members four were Brahman Priests and seven were Jat Farmers selected to insure the representation of the major landholding lineages. The problem of low-caste membership was not resolved despite an effort to obtain Harijan representation, and the issue became a source of some rather vehement debate in later months.

At one particularly contentious administrative session of the panchayat, two members of the Development Committee began a heated argument concerning low-caste membership on the committee. The argument continued for some time without resolution, at which point the panchayat sent a

messenger to advise the Harijans that they had better come to the meeting or the people of the village would go to fetch them. So urged, seven men came to the meeting, arriving in a bitter mood. They knew why they had been asked to come: to be forced to work for one day without payment on a village development project. After some discussion, the Harijans agreed to contribute one day of free labor, but they adamantly refused any membership on the Development Committee.

It is easy to understand why low-caste men had no interest in participating in village government. From their point of view, many development projects meant only that they would have to contribute a day's unpaid labor; the benefits would go chiefly to the landowners. At that time, low-caste men did not believe that political activity at the village level would improve their condition. They were more concerned with their poverty, recognizing that any participation in village government would do little to improve their generally unfavorable economic circumstances; if they served on the Development Committee, they knew that it would be difficult to resist insistent appeals to perform unpaid work for the welfare of the village. By the late 1970s, however, the low castes were quite aware that political power could improve their conditions: universal adult suffrage and the secret ballot had created a new political climate.

The formation of the village Development Committee was in all likelihood stimulated by the program of rural development launched in 1952 with the inauguration of the Community Projects Programme (Directorate of Public Relations, 1957, p. 85). At that time, Delhi State was allotted one development block of which Shanti Nagar was a member. As part of the program, a village development council was formed in each village, its members representing, as far as possible, the responsible village leaders. A government official, called a village level worker, was to serve as secretary of the council. The Development Committee of Shanti Nagar closely followed such a format, although it differed in some details. For example, it elected its own secretary, making no use of the village level worker.

The Development Committee that we observed in 1958 was the second one to have been elected in Shanti Nagar. The first committee had been composed generally of older men, and people believed that it had accomplished nothing. A new committee consisting largely of young, well-educated men who could be aggressive with government officials was considered necessary because the village had to deal increasingly with the government of the Union Territory of Delhi in order to obtain funds and other cooperation essential to the success of many development projects. The members of the current (second) Development Committee were generally such men, better equipped than older, sometimes illiterate, men for dealing with government officials. To be sure, the members of the Development Committee were under the control of, or at least influenced by, the village elders; but they were also in a position to develop and to argue for their own ideas.

The Development Committee differed from the parent panchayat in that it had both a small fixed membership and officers. The committee selected three of its members to serve as president, secretary, and treasurer. It had no formal charge but to exercise its best efforts to improve life in the village. There was no division of functions between the panchayat and the committee; the same problem might be managed and discussed by both. Because all the committee members served in the panchayat, this arrangement caused no confusion. The Development Committee acted on controversial matters only after consulting with the panchayat. Many divisive features of village life were reflected in the workings of the panchayat and the Development Committee: the different interests of high and low castes, factionalism, the importance of the lineage, and the clash of personalities; but overriding all these considerations was the recognized need to improve the village as a whole, especially its educational and health facilities, streets, and land.

#### PANCHAYATI RAJ IN THE UNION TERRITORY OF DELHI

The informal village panchayat and its Development Committee were succeeded in

1959 by panchayati raj. Passed in 1954, the Delhi Panchayat Raj Act came into force in 1956. However, as some of its provisions conflicted with the Delhi Land Reforms Act of 1954, the panchayat act could not be implemented until 1959, when both the Delhi Panchayat Raj Act and the Delhi Land Reforms Act were amended. Following these remedial laws, panchayat elections were held beginning in October 1959, and the elected panchayats began to function in March of 1960 (Delhi Administration, 1976, p. 761).

The panchayat system of the Union Territory of Delhi has only two tiers rather than the three tiers common in other parts of the country. The lower tier consists of two bodies: the *gaon sabha* (village assembly) and the village panchayat. All villagers who are registered voters are members of the village assembly. The assembly elects the members (panchs) of the panchayat and also the *pradhan*, who is the president of the panchayat and presides at meetings of both the panchayat and the assembly. Each voter has as many votes as there are candidates to be returned and may cast a single vote for each place in the panchayat. The number of panchs depends upon the population of the area represented by the assembly. Village panchayats have reserved seats for women and Harijans. In Shanti Nagar, the panchayat consists of a *pradhan*, two places reserved for Harijans and one for women, and six other members for a total of 10 panchs. Unlike the *pradhan*, who is elected directly by the village assembly, the deputy *pradhan* (*up-pradhan*) is chosen by the vote of the elected panchayat members. The Deputy Commissioner appoints a secretary for the panchayat who attends panchayat meetings, records the minutes, and keeps records. The term of office for a panchayat is three years, but the period may be extended up to two more years by the Chief Commissioner. The village assembly, at a special meeting convened for the purpose, can remove the *pradhan* or the deputy *pradhan* by a majority of two-thirds of the members present and voting. The Government can also remove them for misconduct or other reasons (Delhi Administration, 1976, pp. 762, 765).

The many obligations of the village pan-

chayat include assisting the development of agriculture, commerce, and industry, the reclamation of waste land, the establishment and maintenance of common grazing areas, the allotment of places for storing manure, the care and control of the village cremation and burial grounds for both humans and animals, and the regulation of those fairs and markets not organized and overseen by the Government. The panchayat is also expected to maintain registers of births, deaths, marriages, and such other records of the human and bovine populations as may be prescribed. In addition to these obligatory duties, the village panchayat may undertake, at its discretion, a variety of other functions designed to promote the moral and material welfare of the village. For example, it may enact minimum standards of cultivation, arrange for the cooperative management of land and other village resources, regulate the use of fertilizers, encourage the use of improved seeds, and provide for the treatment of cattle disease. It may found organizations to promote goodwill and social harmony among the different castes and communities of the village and maintain places of public recreation, including the provision of public radio and television sets, libraries, and clubs. It may regulate the extension of the village habitation area into agricultural land. It may provide relief in the case of famine or other calamity. It is responsible for any loss, waste, or misappropriation of the resources of the village assembly and penalties may be imposed on any member of the panchayat whose negligence has led to such loss (Ratta, 1961, p. 137; Delhi Administration, 1976, pp. 762–763).

In order to finance their activities, village panchayats have the power to levy two taxes: a tax on rent paid by tenants and a tax on the land revenue paid by landowners. The rates of these taxes may not exceed a maximum figure established by the Government. The Delhi Municipal Committee remits to village assemblies the proceeds of various taxes levied on professions, trades, lands, and buildings in their areas after the cost of collection has been deducted. Village panchayats can also apply for grants and loans from the Government. The Delhi Panchayat Raj

Act also provides for voluntary contributions of labor and money for various projects undertaken by village panchayats (Delhi Administration, 1976, pp. 763–764).

In a sense the executive committee of the village assembly, the village panchayat is required by law to hold meetings at least once a month. It must also report to the assembly at general meetings convened twice a year, once soon after the harvest of the kharif (autumn) crop and once soon after the rabi (spring) harvest. These semiannual meetings deal principally with the budgetary and other reports submitted by the *pradhan*. At the autumn meeting, the village panchayat places before the village assembly estimates of income and expenditure for the year to begin on April 1. At the spring meeting, the panchayat presents a financial accounting of the preceding year. In order to take effect, the budget must be passed by the assembly and approved by a government official, the Deputy Director of Panchayats. In addition to budgetary matters, the *pradhan* also presents an account of programs and any other business at the semiannual meetings (Delhi Administration, 1976, p. 764).

The second tier of panchayati raj in the Union Territory of Delhi is the circle panchayat, consisting of elected persons from a number of contiguous villages. Each village assembly, depending on the size of the village population, returns two or three persons to the circle panchayat. Each voter has as many votes as there are candidates to be returned and can cast a single vote for each place on the panchayat. A circle panchayat elects from among its own members a *sarpanch* (president) and also a *naib sarpanch* (assistant president), whom the Government can remove from office, if necessary, for misconduct or other reasons. The procedure for electing the circle panchayat *sarpanch*, differs from that of the village panchayat, whose president (*pradhan*) is elected by all the registered voters. The term of office for the two panchayats is the same.

The circle and village panchayats have different charges: the village panchayat is an administrative body while the circle panchayat has principally judicial functions. The members of the circle panchayat form a panel of

judges from which representatives are drawn to form court panchayats (panchayati *adalat*) to hear specific criminal and civil suits. The panchayati *adalat* was conceived as a court that could render relatively rapid, inexpensive justice in petty cases. Various laws governing court proceedings, such as the Code of Civil Procedure, 1908, and the Code of Criminal Procedure, 1896, do not extend to the proceedings of panchayati *adalats*, and no legal practitioner is permitted to appear before them except to advise a person under arrest. Consequently, the procedures adopted by the panchayati *adalats* are informal and simple. All cases must be decided within six weeks of the initial action. The constituent village assemblies share equally the expenses of a circle panchayat and equally receive any returns in the form of fines and fees. Beyond its principal function of providing judges for panchayati *adalats*, a circle panchayat may be used by the Chief Commissioner as a representative elected body of its constituent village assemblies to coordinate and superintend development projects that concern more than one village.

Panchayati *adalats* may hear various kinds of civil suits, ordinarily limited to Rs. 200 in value. Panchayati *adalats* may also try petty criminal offenses, including violations such as theft, receipt of stolen property worth less than Rs. 50, assault, trespass, public nuisance, injury, and negligent conduct. As punishment, a panchayati *adalat* can only impose a fine not exceeding Rs. 100; it may not inflict imprisonment or imprisonment in default of payment of a fine. Decisions of a

panchayati *adalat* may not be appealed but there is provision for revision by appropriate officials with regard to civil, criminal, and revenue proceedings (Delhi Administration, 1976, pp. 765-768).

The older panchayat to some extent resembled the modern village assembly rather than the modern panchayat because any man could attend meetings of the older village panchayat and participate in the proceedings, as is the case with the modern assembly. The new panchayat, on the other hand, has a small fixed membership. However, big men, who controlled the older panchayat, have generally managed to retain their traditional control under the new system; in Shanti Nagar this feature has been constant despite important changes associated with panchayati raj, such as the participation of women and Harijans in village government.

A noteworthy difference in village government before and after panchayati raj is that the earlier panchayat handled both administrative and judicial matters whereas judicial functions now fall in the province of the newly created circle panchayats. The separation of administrative and judicial functions was adopted because the Government believed that a single body should not manage two such dissimilar activities; the separation was a break with tradition, however, and the villagers responded by trying to bring the new system into informal accord with the traditional one. This rapprochement was accomplished mainly through the *pradhan*, who was sometimes called on to settle disputes.

## VILLAGERS' EVALUATION OF THE OLD AND NEW PANCHAYATS

We drew up a questionnaire designed to investigate the attitudes of villagers toward a wide variety of changes that had taken place in the village between the 1950s and the 1970s. One of the questions concerned the panchayat: we asked respondents whether they thought that the new panchayat, chosen by universal suffrage, was better than the old panchayat and the reasons for their opinion. Almost all our respondents were 30 years of

age or older because younger people would not have been able to appraise the events of the preceding 20-year period on the basis of personal experience. We approached some 66 people with the questionnaire. Some respondents were chosen at random; others were selected because we considered them thoughtful respondents or because the opportunity for an interview arose spontaneously. There were 19 high-caste female re-

spondents, 22 high-caste males, 13 low-caste females, and 12 low-caste males.

In general, people judged the old panchayat to have been better than the new one. Of the 56 people who responded to the question about panchayats, 43 preferred the old panchayat, 11 favored the new panchayat, one person disliked both panchayats, and another thought that both were good. Ten people did not answer the question about panchayats. From the point of view of caste and sex, high-caste men were the most favorably disposed to the old panchayat: 16 respondents voted for the old system and only two preferred the new one. High-caste women were almost as strongly on the side of the old panchayat as high-caste men, 13 preferring the old panchayat and only three favoring the new one. Low-caste women were not far behind the high-caste women in their preference for the old panchayat, seven favored the old panchayat and two the new system. Even among low-caste men, the group most favorably disposed to the new system, a majority still expressed a preference for the old-style panchayat by a ratio of seven votes to four. One must be cautious in drawing conclusions about the village from our sample because only 29 of the 66 respondents were chosen at random. Nevertheless, the general sentiment in favor of the old panchayat probably characterizes the villagers 30 years of age and older.

When we asked respondents why they preferred the old panchayat, the reason most frequently mentioned (24 times) was the character of the panchs in the old system. They were described as respected elderly men who were willingly obeyed. The second most common reason (mentioned 12 times) for choosing the old panchayat was that it settled disputes and dispensed justice. Respondents almost as frequently (11 times) said that they liked the old panchayat because it embodied the values of unity and unanimity: the village was said to have been more united formerly, when both the selection of the panchs and their decisions were unanimous, and all parties (factions) were represented in the panchayat. A few respondents noted (four times) that the old panchayat worked for the welfare of the village and that it operated through its moral influence (four times). There

were ten adverse comments about the system of local government before panchayati raj (both the old panchayat and the lambardar), four pointing out that it featured one-man rule and no elections, and four noting that the old systems either disregarded the low castes or treated them badly. In general, however, the old panchayat was seen as a unanimously accepted body of respected elderly men who worked for justice and the welfare of the village. It was thought to be effective because of village unity and the moral qualities both of the panchs and the villagers.

The people who favored the new panchayat did so chiefly because universal suffrage was judged to be good (seven times). Respondents said (five times) that under panchayati raj good people were elected and that those officeholders who proved to be corrupt and ineffective could be turned out of office after one term. Three low-caste respondents said that panchayati raj had benefitted them, and one woman said that women were better off under the new system. Although low-caste and female respondents did not explicitly talk about a greater sense of dignity under panchayati raj, the feeling was probably implicit when people praised the fact that everyone could participate in elections. It is not far-fetched to suggest that personal esteem would inevitably be enhanced with participation in an important activity from which one had previously been almost entirely excluded.

Most of the criticism leveled at the new panchayat had moral overtones. Respondents criticized the panchayat and/or the pradhan for corruption, favoritism, bias, and bad motives, complaining that the pradhan concerned himself only with his status and personal interests (seven times). Most of the moral indignation was directed at other villagers, however. Respondents accused other villagers in general of selfishness, cheating, failure to cooperate, refusing to listen to anyone else, and lack of respect for the panchs (15 times). The electoral system itself was criticized. People protested that it politicized the village, created factions, encouraged bad or inappropriate people to run for office and to vote, and led to abuses, such as buying votes with money, food, and liquor (14 times). While villagers praised the old panchayat for its role in settling disputes with justice, the



new panchayat was criticized for not settling disputes internally in the village but instead allowing them to go to the police and to the courts (five times). In brief, the new panchayat and the pradhan were judged to be both morally deficient and governmentally ineffective.

The figures given above concerning the number of times that respondents mentioned one or another reason explaining their preference for the old or the new panchayat are approximations. Scoring interviews in which people are encouraged to talk freely and at length necessarily involves subjective evaluations. We scored the question four times, and there were some, usually slight, variations in the counts. However, we were interested only in identifying the basic themes that characterized the responses. These themes emerged quite clearly in each scoring attempt and can be accepted with reasonable confidence as reflecting the attitudes of the villagers.

The comments of eight respondents are quoted here to give an idea of their general nature. We selected the comments of two low-caste men, two low-caste women, two high-caste men, and two high-caste women. We begin with comments in favor of the new panchayat and follow with those preferring the old one.

(1) In the previous panchayat, Harijans were troubled a lot. Now if there is any trouble, the pradhan comes in between and settles things. Now we get plots [of land] too. Previously Harijans never used to get plots. Now people go and elect a pradhan by casting votes. This system is better. [Low-caste female respondent, 49 years old]

Concerned chiefly with the improvement in status of Harijans (low castes) under panchayati raj, this respondent also liked universal suffrage, the most frequently mentioned reason for preferring panchayati raj to the older systems of local government. One feature of her response was unusual: she was the only person who praised the new-style pradhan for settling disputes. When other respondents mentioned the issue, it was to point out that the old panchayat settled disputes and dispensed justice while the new panchayat did not.

(2) Today the panchayat is better in the sense that everyone can register an independent opinion about whom they want. Previously there was a lambardar and he did what he thought was good. He did not have to ask other people what to do. But the pradhan has to consult the panchayat members before he can do something. Previously there was only one man. Now there is a panchayat. It is better. [Low-caste male respondent, 32 years old]

This respondent, who liked universal suffrage and disapproved of one-man rule, was the only one to allege that panchs exercised control over the pradhan. Respondents were not much concerned with the internal structure of the panchayat, focusing instead on the relationship of panchs with their supporters and villagers in general. Many observers have noted that one of the weaknesses of panchayati raj is that the pradhan often dominates the other panchs, a view that fit the situation in Shanti Nagar. However, this young man compared panchayati raj with village government under the lambardar, and in this context his conclusion was probably correct. The lambardar could act more freely than the pradhan of the new-style panchayat.

(3) Previously two to four people used to sit and decide [who was to be] the pradhan. People were less educated and their minds did not work at that time but now they are more educated and now they think and decide. Previously there was a lambardar but now everyone goes and elects the pradhan. This system is better. [High-caste female respondent, 35 years old]

Like the young man (2) quoted just above, this woman compared panchayati raj with the lambardar. She disliked rule by a few persons and favored universal suffrage. She also approved of the current generation in contrast to many villagers who condemned it, chiefly on moral grounds.

(4) The new panchayat is better because previously common men never used to vote. People used to gather and they chose a man of their concern and of their purpose. The common man was ignored. Even though he was a human being, his vote was ignored. But now at least he can exercise

his vote and this is a very good thing. [Low-caste male respondent, 38 years old]

We interpreted "common man" to stand for low-caste persons like the respondent, who seemed to have himself in mind. He liked having the vote, the most attractive feature of panchayati raj. This respondent clearly implied an enhanced sense of self-esteem under the new system.

(5) The old panchayat used to do justice to everyone in the village. Now it has been politicized. Favoritism has increased. They favor the people of their party. There is no justice in favoritism. Nowadays the village common land is being occupied by the people of the panchayat. They do not give it to the poor people—even on lease. If the pradhan wishes, he can try to get the land vacated and give it to the landless on lease and that money can be used for the welfare of the village. But the pradhan himself is occupying the land. That is why no justice is done by these panchayats. Even in other matters, there is the same favoritism. The old panchayat was good. It could give a decision against one's son even. [High-caste male respondent, 62 years old]

In contrast to respondents just quoted, this man decried the favoritism, political character, and corruption of panchayati raj. He mentioned the management of the village common land, perhaps the most critical issue facing the village. The management and disposition of this land involved the fundamental social cleavages of high and low castes, landowners and landless, and rich and poor as well as governmental policies designed to aid the disadvantaged social sector. These were potentially explosive issues: in a nearby village, they had led to severe rioting.

(6) Previous panchayat was better. People used to listen to what the elders said, but now they don't listen to what the pradhan says. The people were honest and simple. Now they are shrewd and selfish. [High-caste female respondent, 45 years old]

In this concise, rather typical response, the respondent compared the simple, honest villagers of former times who obeyed their elders to the shrewd, selfish modern villagers

who refuse to listen. There is, of course, a certain nostalgia in such responses. The good old days were rarely as rosy as fond memories would have them.

(7) Previous panchayat was better as at that time there were no loafers. There were no factions. People used to obey the panchayat and there was justice. But now there are loafers, hoodlums, and party factions in which everyone looks for his self-interest.

There was no cinema previously but now small children see movies . . . [Low-caste female respondent, 33 years old]

This woman mentioned several of the prominent reasons that respondents cited in evaluating panchayati raj and the preceding forms of village government. She emphasized, principally, what she considered to be a decline in the moral character of villagers, but she also criticized factionalism and extolled the relationship of the old panchayat and the villagers: the traditional panchayat dispensed justice and the villagers obeyed.

(8) The old panchayat was better. In previous panchayats, the truly respected persons had the say. [But now] even incompetent, corrupt, ineligible, and inefficient candidates can be elected to the panchayat by illegal and unfair means such as bribery and money . . .

The previous panchs were unanimously respected but the present ones are respected only by their supporters . . .

Previously the panchs were elderly people and so were obeyed willingly by all . . .

Previously [the panchs] had considerable moral influence and were also capable of settling vital issues, such as the dissolution of a marriage. Now they have neither that moral influence nor any considerable legal power. They are not able to decide disputes as effectively as before. This is so mainly due to the election system because the elected persons cannot always be without bias. Now they become pradhans more for status considerations instead of discharging their duties.

It has also been seen that the elected persons have misused their position for their own as well as their supporters' benefit . . .

In many cases they have made money by illegal means by misusing their powers and position.

The present system has caused friction and enmity among the villagers. Cordial relations prevailing earlier have been damaged. Factions have cropped up in the village. Moreover, the electors are also not conscious of their responsibility in using their [vote]. They exercise the franchise without realizing its importance. [High-caste male respondent, 29 years old]

This lengthy response touched on many of the criticisms leveled at panchayati raj. In addition to the common accusations of corruption, favoritism, and factionalism, the respondent pointed out what he considered to be a weakness in the charter of panchayati raj: it does not have sufficient legal power. Therefore, the panchayat cannot be effective because its loss of moral influence has not been balanced by legal authority.

Although this respondent was highly educated and had a legal background, his criticisms partly reflect a common misunderstanding about the two-tier system of panchayati raj in the Union Territory of Delhi. Judicial functions belonged to the circle panchayat rather than the village panchayat, yet people expected the village panchayat to act in a judicial capacity as it had in the days before panchayati raj. In any case, the village panchayat probably had a sufficiently strong legal foundation to execute its proper administrative functions, provided that the *pradhan* and *panchs* were willing to use the power placed in their hands. However, with regard to settling disputes, the new panchayat was on the same ground as the old one; it had to invoke a moral sanction, and its moral influence had weakened. Nevertheless, the *pradhan* did become involved in settling disputes.

## THE ELECTORATE AND ITS DIVISIONS

### CASTE, FACTION, *PANA*, LINEAGE

Although people mark their ballots as individuals, they tend to vote as representatives of social groups whose interests they share. In Western countries, forecasters and analysts of elections speak, for example, of the farm vote, the labor vote or sometimes the vote of this or that religious or ethnic group. Candidates for office usually represent a major social category and design their campaigns to appeal to as many groups of electors as possible. Particular effort is made to capture the votes of people thought to lack a strong commitment to any party.

Elections in Shanti Nagar follow this general pattern. The social groups that shaped all the elections in Shanti Nagar, including the one under discussion, were those typical of rural north India: caste, faction, *pana*, and lineage. Like any society, Shanti Nagar undergoes continual change, and in recent decades the pace of change has accelerated enormously. In conversations with villagers about

the last two decades, variations of such phrases as "Times have changed completely" and "The world changes every six months" kept recurring. And yet it was not so much the political, economic, and educational developments of recent decades that determined the panchayat election of December 1977, but rather the traditional social cleavages of caste, faction, *pana*, and lineage which have characterized the village ever since its founding.

Despite governmental policy that opposes "casteism," caste has retained its traditional role in rural north India. It is one of the starting points in political analysis, and although many other factors must be taken into account, it would be impossible to understand a rural North Indian election without a precise account of the role played by caste. Castes are named endogamous social groups in which membership is acquired by birth. The castes of a village form a hierarchy based on social precedence. A caste has specific attributes, prominent among them being a traditional occupation, although a person is not obliged

to follow the traditional occupation of his caste. In India's modern economy, the people of most castes fill a variety of occupational roles. The castes represented in Shanti Nagar are found in hundreds of other villages and towns in a large region around Shanti Nagar.

The 1324 people of Shanti Nagar were divided among 14 castes, half of which were small and had 10 or fewer registered voters. The largest castes, and therefore the most important from the point of view of the election, were the Jat Farmers (198 registered voters), Brahman Priests (153 voters), Chamar Leatherworkers (75 voters), Chuhra Sweepers (46 voters), and Gola Potters (42 voters). The Jats and Brahmans are high-caste landowners, who had most of the village agricultural land and considerable salaried and professional income. The Chamars, Chuhras, and Golas are low caste; only one man of these castes owned agricultural land although several others engaged in agriculture as entrepreneurs by taking land on contract from one of the high-caste landowners. The Leatherworkers and Sweepers are classed as Harijans. Other castes, the number of voters in parentheses, are Bairagi Beggar (18), Baniya Merchant (5), Chhipi Dyer (2), Khati Carpenter (8), Jhinvar Watercarrier (10), Lohar Blacksmith (10), Mali Gardener (4) and Nai Barbers (18). The Mahar Potters were represented by only one person who was not a registered voter.

Although 633 voters were listed on the election roll, we examined it and noticed that it included the names of a number of deceased persons and also some individuals living at such a distance from Shanti Nagar that they would, in all probability, be unlikely to return to the village to vote. After the elimination of such names, the number of potential voters was reduced to 589. Thirty-four percent were Jats, which meant that if they were united, they could win an election with only minimum support from the rest of the villagers. Such support would be easy to enlist, for many low-caste persons were closely involved with one or another Jat family chiefly through economic ties. As the principal landowners and wealthiest caste of the village, Jats loaned money to landless low-caste families, hired them as laborers, and entered

into contracts with them concerning the use of agricultural land. However, the Jats were riven by factions and far from united, creating the conditions for intensely contested elections. With Jat power to some extent neutralized by internecine feuds, the Brahmans would have been in a position to capture the *pradhanship* except that they, too, were rent by factionalism. All candidates for the post of *pradhan* had, therefore, to seek substantial support outside their own caste.

Factions, a common phenomenon in North Indian villages, are politically important, especially when they develop in large land-owning castes, because they fragment large blocs of votes based on caste and force candidates to seek alliances with other factions both within and outside their own caste. In Shanti Nagar, factions had not coalesced around strictly political issues, perhaps because elections were recent and strong factions existed in the village before *panchayati raj*. It is quite possible, indeed likely, that politically based factions may form in the future, but the structural basis of the chief factions that were critical in the election of 1977 may have existed almost from the founding of the village and another factional split was at least six decades old.

Factions often grew from an emotionally charged event, such as a murder or litigation over a significant amount of land, and formed around the existing social groups of lineage and *pana*. When families of different lineages or *panas* were disputants, other members of their respective groups often supported them. Major disputes might spread beyond these contenders to involve not only people of the same caste but also of different castes and even individuals living in other villages. Villagers referred to these groups as *dhars* or parties. The English word "party" was often used. In anthropological publications about Indian villages, parties have often been designated as factions. Once formed, factions might continue to function beyond the limits of the original dispute from which they had stemmed, in which case they might seize upon any dispute or election to renew the battle with their opponents.

Brief accounts of the factions that were prominent in the election of 1977 will give

some idea of the nature of factionalism, although it should be borne in mind that many cases from scores of villages would have to be considered to give anything like a complete understanding of the phenomenon.

The two Jat *panas* functioned as parties (factions) in the election of 1977. The *panas* of Shanti Nagar had a history that reached back to the founding of the village. Although informants gave varying accounts of the founding of Shanti Nagar, differing chiefly with regard to the sequence in which the ancestors of the current three *panas* came to the village, there is rather general agreement that the village was founded when some Jats of the Man (or Mann) patriclan, whose descendants are today grouped in two *panas* (to be designated as *panas* A and B), left their ancestral village and established a new settlement. The original Jats of *pana* B almost died out, and the surviving family found itself several generations ago with much more land than it could manage. It therefore summoned other Jats of the Man patriclan, giving them land to settle in Shanti Nagar. The ancestors of most of the Brahmans, who are grouped in *pana* C, came to Shanti Nagar with the founding Jats or shortly thereafter. In any case, the two Jat *panas* today live on opposite sides of the village with the houses of the Brahman *pana* generally between them. Thus, the Jat *panas* are separated in space, by blood because of their different ancestors, and through history.

*Panas* do not necessarily behave as factions. It takes a conflict, such as a personal dispute, a clash of personalities, or divergent interests to trigger a transformation into contending factions. In the 1950s, not much antagonism appeared to exist between *panas*. No election or land dispute took place whose unfolding might have revealed incipient factions. Instead, the two prominent Jat factions of the time were based on the lineages of *pana* A. The factions had developed from a bitter land dispute said to have been in litigation for 10 to 15 years and to have been settled some 30 years preceding our first residence in the village. The point at issue, the right of occupancy versus the right of ownership, was a common cause of disputes over land. In this case, a childless widow with a large landholding had died, and a dispute erupted among the heirs. Some of them had farmed

part of the widow's land for years as tenants, and they claimed that they were entitled to the right of permanent occupancy. The opposing families argued that the widow's land should be divided according to the genealogically determined shares to which each family would be entitled on the basis of its relationship to the widow's husband. Those who argued in favor of occupancy right were members of the largest lineage of *pana* A, while the members of two other lineages of *pana* A insisted on the right of genealogically determined ownership. The opposing lineages added various allies and developed into parties.

The courts finally rendered a decision in favor of the group arguing for hereditary ownership, after which an impressive multivillage panchayat was held to insure the eviction of the losing tenants and to end the affair with as little disharmony as possible. However, three decades after the case had been resolved, bitterness was still strong enough to have established more or less permanent political alliances among the Jats: it continued to be expressed in matters such as the election of the president of the board of a nearby higher secondary school (equivalent to an American high school). This antagonism was generated principally by three lineage leaders who had strong personalities and seemed to enjoy contention. Without such leaders, we believe, these factions would not have endured for so long a period (S. Freed and R. Freed, 1976, pp. 186–188).

When we returned to Shanti Nagar in the 1970s, most people told us that the factions of *pana* A, which dominated much of the political and legal life of the village in the 1950s, were finished. All but one of the most contentious leaders had died, and the survivor, although only middle-aged, had been destroyed by drink. However, village opinion was not unanimous about the end of this hostility, and we ourselves were not so sure that it had faded to the point where no individuals would be tempted to make things as difficult as possible for a longtime antagonist. Under the cover of the secret ballot, a well-organized group could do considerable damage to an opponent without its activities necessarily coming to light. The behavior of one of these old Jat factions in the election of 1977 is a case in point. The major leader of the faction,



an intelligent and politically adept man, played his cards close to the vest but in all probability gave his bloc of votes to one of the opponents of the candidate representing the Jat faction traditionally hostile to him. His motives probably derived more from extravillage political considerations than from lingering factional antagonism, but the fact that the motives reinforced one another made his electoral decision easy. Be that as it may, most villagers maintained that the old factional alignment no longer existed, having been replaced by the factionalism of *panas* A and B.

This antagonism involved competition between the leading men of the two *panas*, both formidable personalities who wanted to be recognized as the big man (*chaudhari*) of the village. We use the pseudonym Agitator for the leading man of *pana* A and Probationer for the most prominent man of *pana* B. Although we use pseudonyms for all villagers whom we mention, we make an effort to select names for the leading characters that highlight prominent personality traits or noteworthy occurrences in their lives. The appropriateness of Agitator and Probationer will become clear. The personal competition of these two men was expressed in a number of petty quarrels and harassment. For example, Agitator's house had a wall which projected into the street, and Probationer made it a point occasionally to brush the wall lightly with his tractor as he passed while exchanging verbal abuse with the people of Agitator's house. There were also disagreements over irrigation water and the ownership of a tree.

While not necessarily regarded as trivial by the involved parties, these disputes were almost entirely overshadowed by a major conflict between *panas* A and B over village common land. The management of village common land was at the time perhaps the chief source of political turmoil in the village. The struggle between the *panas* led to a confrontation and fight between Probationer and Agitator and ultimately to a murder. According to Probationer, in the first election for *pradhan* he had supported Agitator, who won the election. After the election, Agitator wanted to take over some common land then occupied by Probationer and distribute it to the low castes. Probationer held that the land in question was common land belonging to

his *pana* and refused to vacate it. Agitator, as *pradhan*, then filed a suit. Agitator went to inspect the disputed area and encountered Probationer and his group. There was an argument and then a fight. Probationer and his supporters first slapped and then punched Agitator. It is a disgrace to be slapped, and Agitator later denied it had happened, in order to maintain his prestige and to satisfy his own lineage. Meanwhile, he plotted revenge.

Agitator was an exceedingly shrewd man. Skilled in village intrigue, he decided to attack Probationer through a third party. Provoking fights among one's enemies or between an enemy and a third party while one stands on the sidelines and reaps the benefits is a time-honored and effective strategy. Among the members of a Brahman family who owned land adjoining Probationer's family land was a man we will call Excitable. Full of barely suppressed anger according to villagers, he could rather easily be provoked into violent episodes during which he became unaware of what he was doing. There had been some mild friction between the families of Excitable and Probationer, not a particularly uncommon situation between families with adjacent fields. Agitator began to associate with Excitable, telling him that Probationer and his group were becoming too proud and arrogant and that something should be done about it. He managed to inflame Excitable against Probationer and, as one informant phrased it, "put a gun on the shoulder of Probationer."

One day in May 1967, a serious dispute erupted over a rather commonplace occurrence, trespass by water buffalo into cultivated fields. Water buffalo are large, powerful animals; they can easily evade their caretakers for a few minutes and slip into a cultivated field where they can do a fair amount of damage. Depredations by cattle frequently lead to disputes. As usual, different informants gave accounts of the event which differ in detail, but they all agreed on the essential elements in the affair. On this day, one or two water buffalo belonging to Probationer's uncle escaped into the sugarcane field of Excitable's family or, according to other informants, the water buffalo belonged to Excitable and they invaded Probationer's uncle's sugarcane field. In any case, a dispute broke out and Excitable struck Probationer's uncle with

his club, knocking him to the ground, where he pretended to be dead. A rumor raced through the village that Excitable had killed Probationer's uncle.

Probationer ran to his room for his rifle and hurried to the fields, where he encountered two brothers of Excitable. He said that he had no quarrel with them, but they were Excitable's brothers and were carrying pitchforks and clubs. A number of people had gathered at the scene and some of them, coming between Probationer and Excitable's group, managed to calm Probationer. He handed his rifle to a woman saying that he would not shoot. But then came another exchange of hot words and Probationer snatched the rifle from the woman, only to have it taken from him by a Chamar Leatherworker man. (Our informant on this occasion was the nephew of this man who had allegedly disarmed Probationer and who was the ultimate source of the account.) Then one of Excitable's brothers started toward Probationer with his pitchfork. Probationer quickly seized the rifle and shot Excitable's brother, who died later in a hospital. The second brother ran to intervene, and Probationer shot him also, but he was only wounded and recovered after a stay in the hospital.

Another account, while generally corroborating the preceding one, added and deleted some interesting details. For example, the informant made no mention of Probationer's handing the rifle to anyone else, and he reported what Excitable was doing while the shooting was taking place. After Probationer's uncle's buffalo had invaded Excitable's field, Excitable hotly admonished Probationer's uncle to control his animals, threatening otherwise to take them to the cattle pound. Probationer's uncle replied, "Who are you to take my cattle to the pound?" They exchanged insults and Excitable knocked Probationer's uncle to the ground. Excitable's three brothers came armed with clubs to support him. Probationer, who is said to have been drinking that day, arrived with a loaded rifle. There were many people in the vicinity threshing wheat, and some of them rushed to the spot to settle the quarrel, but they were unsuccessful.

Probationer challenged Excitable and his brothers. They saw the rifle, but two of them

apparently felt no fear and started toward Probationer. Alarmed, Probationer shouted, "Go to your home. I will see only Excitable." They continued to advance, and Probationer shot and wounded them both. During all the action, Excitable and his third brother hid behind a mound of wheat and escaped unharmed. The two wounded men were taken to a hospital in Delhi where one of them, before dying, made a statement that was recorded in the presence of a magistrate and the doctor. In a murder case, the statement of a dying man is given considerable weight. The other brother recovered and was a witness at Probationer's trial.

After the shooting, Probationer eluded the police, taking refuge in his mother's brother's village, and the police declared that he had absconded. Proceedings to attach his family's property were initiated in the courts, after which Probationer surrendered. He was held without bail, tried, found guilty and sentenced to death by hanging. An appeal to the Supreme Court and a petition for mercy to the President of India were both rejected, and the date of execution was fixed. Somehow, Probationer's family managed to postpone the execution. Then the centennial celebration of Mahatma Gandhi's birth arrived, and all death sentences were commuted to life imprisonment. Probationer's sentence was commuted to 14 years. Because of good behavior, he was released from prison after 10 years with the provision that he remain on probation for the final four years of his sentence and that he post a security bond. He returned to Shanti Nagar in 1977. It is of some interest that until the shooting, there was no serious enmity between the families of Probationer and Excitable. Excitable's father had served as family priest for both Probationer's and his uncle's families.

Although the Brahmans were incensed about Probationer, the role of Agitator had not escaped notice and became increasingly clear as time passed. Eventually, Agitator received almost all the villagers' blame for the murder and Probationer was largely exonerated in village opinion. The common point of view in 1977 was that Probationer could not have helped committing the murder in view of the situation that Agitator had cleverly contrived. "The murder was something that had to happen," said one informant. "It

was done because of Agitator." Another informant, a schoolteacher, said:

Probationer is a nice man. He was a teacher before he went to jail. He did not murder Excitable's brother on purpose. The situation was such that he had to murder him. But it was all Agitator's group that . . . produced the rivalry between Excitable's and Probationer's groups.

While hostility to Probationer had been the principal determinant in the voting behavior of the Brahmans in the third panchayat election, it was an insignificant factor in the fifth panchayat election of 1977. At least one faction of Brahmans had largely forgiven Probationer, holding Agitator responsible for the killing. Even one of the sons of the murder victim said that, although he did not visit with Probationer's family, his family held "no enmity" for Probationer.

It is well to realize that although factions (parties) exist and can be equated to lineage and *pana*, the correspondence is by no means identical; there will always be families or individuals who will either openly align themselves with another party or secretly vote for the candidate of another party. For example, many families of *pana* A did not support the *pana*'s candidate. Most of these people were not members of the candidate's lineage, but at least one defecting family did belong to it. The defector's position became clear when the three principal men of *pana* B attended the engagement ceremony for one of his sons, while all but one of the family heads of his own lineage were conspicuous by their absence. On the other hand, one of the defector's sons, who had established his own family apart from his father, did not share his father's political position, remaining loyal to the candidate of his own party.

Voting behavior is always full of surprises; for example, the wife of the winner of the fourth election for *pradhan* made no secret of the fact that she had voted for his opponent whom she credited with once having saved her life. Despite all the departures from predictable behavior that result from such individual motives, an analysis of the election in terms of *panas*, factions, lineages, and castes is by far the most revealing.

Two factions of Brahmans, both members

of the same clan and *pana* although having no genealogical connection, were known locally as the "Inside" (*bhitarwala*) and the "Outside" (*baharwala*) Brahmans. As with the Jat *panas* the origin of the two Brahman groups goes back to the founding of the village. The events of that distant time are obscure, having a legendary quality, and our informants were understandably vague about details and the sequence of events. Nonetheless, the two groups were clearly marked; Brahman informants could quickly and confidently name the faction of any Brahman family. Although the major disputes and political activity in the 1950s centered on the Jat factions, Brahman factionalism turned out to be one of the keys to the 1977 election. The event that turned the Inside and Outside Brahmans into parties during the election seemed to us trivial, suggesting that a fair amount of hostility probably already existed between the two groups, which needed only a spark to turn them into parties.

The spark was provided by Excitable, an Outside Brahman and the same man who had fought with Probationer and his group. In his characteristically thoughtless way, he managed to heighten the antagonism of the Inside and Outside Brahmans to the point where they became parties. The two groups initially agreed concerning the candidate whom they would support in the election. They both wanted to nominate a young Inside Brahman, a practicing attorney, whom we call Young Lawyer. However, Excitable objected. He is reported to have asked, "Is there no capable Outside Brahman?" His remark is said to have been the reason that, struggle as they might, the Brahmans were unable to unite for the election. We would have thought that people could easily have overlooked Excitable's statement because everyone knew that he was the kind of person who might say something like that; had the source been a thoughtful, wise person, such a pejorative remark would have been serious. Coming from Excitable, the comment appeared to us to be insignificant, but apparently not to the Inside Brahmans. One of our informants, an Outside Brahman, observed, "Because of Excitable's statement, the atmosphere among the Brahmans disintegrated and the election became a matter of party politics."

Although the Jat and Brahman factions

were politically the most important because of the size, high-caste ranking, and economic importance of these two castes, there were factions in other castes as well. The Chamar Leatherworkers had two parties, the aftermath of a murder which had taken place in the 1960s. A pretty Chamar girl became involved in a liaison with a Chamar man, whom we call Young Soldier, and the affair continued for a year or two. Then the girl's father, whom we call Unfortunate, discovered the couple. His daughter's illicit sexual relationship was an extremely grave blow to Unfortunate's prestige, and family honor demanded that he take action.

Unfortunate and his supporters approached Young Soldier and Strongheart, his father, to discuss the matter. Strongheart and Young Soldier denied any wrongdoing, and the meeting escalated into an ugly dispute. Finally, Strongheart told Unfortunate and his allies to come to his house that night, a clever strategy, for if violence erupted, it would appear as if Unfortunate's group had been the aggressors. Armed with clubs, Unfortunate and his supporters went to confront Young Soldier and his group, who were waiting on the roof of Young Soldier's house. Young Soldier invited the other group to come up onto the roof. They did so and there was a fight. Young Soldier clubbed his paramour's father on the head knocking him off the roof. He was taken to a hospital and died shortly afterwards. The court case that followed was dismissed because no witnesses came forward and also because Unfortunate and his group were considered the aggressors as they had come to Young Soldier's house.

Because of the murder, the lineages of the two families became enemies and formed the nuclei of parties, which supported different candidates in the election of 1977. We have the impression that Leatherworker families outside the two nuclear lineages generally sided with Unfortunate's party, especially in the election of 1977: informants stated that Young Soldier's party supported one of the candidates for *pradhan* while most of the other Leatherworkers voted for one of the other candidates.

There were four Lohar Blacksmith families, all headed by brothers; yet even this small, closely related group was split into fac-

tions. While the Blacksmiths numbered only 10 registered voters, the candidates fought very hard for their votes. One of the past elections had been decided by just a few ballots, and the candidates knew that every vote was important. The basis of the factions among the Blacksmiths was a dispute over houses. As usual, the details are unclear and informants give various versions, but the essential elements of the case seem to be clear, as are its political ramifications. The younger of two brothers borrowed money to build a house and had trouble repaying it. His older brother offered him money to repay the debt on condition that they exchange houses, the younger brother at the time having the larger house. The older brother obtained the necessary funds on an interest-free loan from Probationer, who later became a candidate for *pradhan*. Sometime later, the younger brother wanted to repay his older brother and reclaim his original house, but the older Lohar did not want to give it up, at least not without receiving interest on the money that he had lent to his younger brother.

The elder Blacksmith gave a somewhat different account. He said that his younger brother had fallen into debt because of drinking. He began to associate with a wealthy Jat, a member of Agitator's lineage, who drank heavily. Apparently, the Jat charged the Blacksmith for the liquor that he consumed, and the debt mounted to about Rs. 1600 or 1700 in one year. To pay the debt, the younger Lohar decided to sell his house. The man who was to buy the house went to Probationer for a loan. Probationer was shocked; if the Blacksmith sold his house he would have no place to live. He went to the older Blacksmith to find out what had happened. As a result of the intervention, Probationer lent the older Blacksmith money which he gave to his younger brother to pay his debt. It was understood that there was to be an exchange of houses but, according to the older brother, there was no written agreement. We were never able to interview the younger brother about the case, for he was then living in Delhi and spent little time in the village. However, he did return to Shanti Nagar for the election.

Another informant confirmed some of the details in the above account. He said that the

younger brother was thinking of selling his house. His older brother wanted to exchange houses. He gave Rs. 1500 to his younger brother and they exchanged houses. This informant said that there was a written agreement. The two brothers lived that way for about 13 or 14 years. Then someone, probably Agitator, began to urge the younger Blacksmith to ask for the return of his house. There was a dispute. The older Blacksmith did not want to give up the house; in the event that he did, he wanted interest on the money that he had lent to his younger brother.

Politics became involved when Probationer put pressure on the Blacksmiths to vote for him. The older brother, of course, had to vote for Probationer, for he was in the latter's debt. His younger brother, meanwhile, had given a commitment to Agitator's candidate. Agitator, master of intrigue, then had the younger brother make a formal complaint to the police that his older brother had illegally occupied his house. According to the older brother, a bribe of Rs. 200 was also given to the police. In any case, the day before the election a police inspector came to the village to arrest the older brother. That, of course, would have removed his influence and vote from the election. There was a flurry of activity, and Probationer went with the older Blacksmith and the inspector to see a man in a neighboring village, probably the richest and most influential man in the region. He was clearly sympathetic to Probationer's party, for we once saw him at a ceremony in Probationer's household, a gesture that conferred considerable prestige on Probationer's family. This man and the others convinced the inspector that the charge against the older Blacksmith was just a political tactic and persuaded him to delay the arrest for a few days. All the maneuvering was said to have resulted in an almost equal split of the Blacksmith vote between Probationer and the candidate of Agitator.

After the election when the inspector again came to the village to make the arrest, a settlement was quickly arranged. The elder Blacksmith recovered his money from his younger brother but had to surrender the house to him and move back into his old one. No interest was paid on the loan, the younger brother arguing that while he had use of the

money, his older brother had use of the larger house.

We learned of no factions in castes other than the Jats, Brahmins, Leatherworkers, and Blacksmiths. It seems likely that factions existed in at least some of these castes, especially the larger ones, but the election of 1977 did not make them apparent. That a caste lacked factions, however, does not mean that its members necessarily voted as a bloc. There were always individual considerations. For example, the Gola Potters strongly backed Probationer and yet the members of one family were said to have voted for another candidate who had aided them when the police caught them making illicit liquor.

### CLASS

The interrelations of castes and of factions based on *pana* and lineage, qualified by personal ties of friendship and patronage, form the basis of our analysis of the election of 1977. A supplementary analysis in terms of social classes could be attempted, but it is doubtful that the effort would enhance our understanding and could very well generate significant confusion. One problem is the definition of classes both from the point of view of their membership and in terms of basic criteria. The two obvious village classes are landowners and landless people. However, we saw no evidence that upper-caste landless villagers identify with low-caste landless people. Moreover, there is little common cause among the low-caste landless except the issue of the village common land. In this regard, they all have the same interest in receiving a share, but they are not united to take joint action through a political organization, a basic criterion in a Marxian definition of class (Marx, 1964, pp. 188–189).<sup>3</sup> However, they did generally support the high-caste candidate for pradhan who seemed likely to favor

<sup>3</sup> Although Marx mentions political organization as one of the criteria of class, he also is alleged to make an "implicit distinction" between "classes for themselves" and "classes in themselves" (Bloch, 1983, p. 163). The members of a class in itself "... by objective criteria, share a common relationship to the means of production," whereas a class for itself is mobilized for political action (Spangler, 1986, p. 172, note 4).

them. In a previous election, a low-caste man ran for the office of *pradhan*. He was considered to some extent to be a candidate of *Agitator* and did poorly, receiving mainly the votes of his lineage and not of his class or even of his nonlineage caste fellows. The high castes are beset with factions, but as one respondent remarked, they would unite in the face of a challenge from the low castes. If our informant was correct, then the high castes may form an incipient class. However, the concept is of little analytical use, for in the electoral contest of 1977, the traditional cleavages of caste, *pana*, and lineage largely determined voting behavior.

The principal useful classlike term is "Harijan," meaning "children of God." The late Mahatma Gandhi used the term to denote the lowest, "untouchable" castes, and today his usage is common. In Shanti Nagar, Harijan designates the Leatherworkers and Sweepers, but does not embrace the Potters who are also landless low-caste people. The villagers frequently used the term Harijan in discussing the election. Also the terms "landowner" and "landless" have to be used in any discussion of the distribution of village common land. However, in a detailed analysis of voting behavior, both groups should be broken down into their component castes and factions. To regard either the landowners or the landless as a generally undifferentiated class insofar as voting behavior is concerned would completely obscure the dynamics of the election.

The use of class in studies of specific Indian villages seems to derive chiefly from implicit or explicit theories of social evolution and modernization. It is thought that traditional rural Indian social structure, in which caste is one of the basic units, will evolve toward a social organization that characterizes modern industrial society where relatively open classes, often in an adversary relationship, form major social categories. One question is whether in the course of this evolution castes will disappear, become largely irrelevant, or continue, in a reduced role, to coexist with classes. There is, in any case, an attempt to advance the concept of class to a central position in the description and analysis of Indian social structure.

The concept of class has proved to be a slippery one. When class is discussed at the village level, caste often lurks in the background, tending to usurp a leading role when the discussion moves from the general to the specific. The electoral contest here described is a case in point. Many such conflicts are transformed into struggles among traditional groups where classes have a minor role. Moreover, class consciousness is not easy to discern, especially when many families and individuals are members of several commonly recognized classes. A low-caste landless family head may simultaneously work at the traditional trade of his caste, such as shoe-making, engage in contract agriculture, have one or more sons employed in salaried occupations while some members of his family work occasionally as agricultural laborers. Is this a family of artisans, landless sharecroppers, or middle-class salaried employees? Such combinations are common in village India.

Béteille (1971) and Sharma (1978) have tried to deal with caste and class in a village context. They both tend to have reservations about some of the criteria commonly used to define classes: namely, conflict, class consciousness, and membership exclusively in one class. Béteille would place enhanced emphasis on class in modern India because of a lessening congruence of caste, class, and power. He says:

It is the argument of this study that in the traditional structure the cleavages of caste, class, and power tended much more than today to run along the same grooves . . . . This is no longer the case . . . . now there is a tendency for cleavages to cut across one another . . . . In the traditional order . . . both the class system and the distribution of power were . . . subsumed under caste. Both class and power positions have today a greater measure of autonomy in relation to caste. (Béteille, 1971, pp. 4-5, 7)

Be that as it may, problems of definition continue to plague Béteille, thus reducing the usefulness of class as an analytical instrument. He eschews class conflict as a criterion and finds that common interest is elusive because many people belong simultaneously to different classlike groups. Thus, class keeps slipping into caste. Béteille declares:



The different classes are not separated into watertight compartments. Individuals belong to one or more of them, and sometimes they pass from one class to another in the course of a short period. This tends to impede the development of a consciousness of class, although the conflict of interest between classes is often acute and does sometimes come to the surface. More frequently this conflict tends to be posed in terms other than those of class and to run along cleavages which are more sharply defined in the social structure, such as those of caste . . . (Béteille, 1971, p. 119)

Béteille bases his classes on the relationship of people to the means of production, in the case of his rural study chiefly land (see also Mencher, 1974). He draws the basic distinction between the landowners and the landless. It is difficult to see, however, how emphasis on this criterion would relegate caste to a lesser role in comparison to class in the rural social structure. Caste and landownership are strongly correlated even though Béteille notes that land has become somewhat more widely distributed than formerly. Caste seems likely to retain as much significance in Indian rural life as landownership, for, while caste is under attack by the new ideology and post-Independence legislation, the importance of landownership is diminishing with the growth of contract agriculture, salaried employment in business and government, and reserved places for the disadvantaged social sectors in universities and employment. These developments have greatly reduced the domination that landowners formerly exercised over landless villagers.

Like Béteille, Sharma (1978) has problems with the definition of class. She appears to distinguish between "caste" society and "class" society on the basis of cooperation versus competition. Castes are interdependent nonantagonistic social strata whereas classes are marked by conflict (Sharma, 1978, p. 10). However, she quickly becomes uncomfortable with these criteria, declaring that ". . . the political activity of classes does not necessarily depend upon the presence of organized conflict . . . or on a unified class consciousness. Such strict prerequisites entail the danger of defining classes 'out of existence'" (Sharma, 1978, p. 12). Class is becoming a

more important variable, she declares, while the legitimacy of caste is being undermined. Then, in an apparent contradiction, she says, "The strength that [caste] still has in ordering actual relations, however, has not been undermined" (Sharma, 1978, p. 12). The contradiction largely disappears when perspective is shifted from the village to the larger society. "Villagers increasingly have become aware of the existence of two different systems of social relations, one pertaining to the village and the other to that which derives its strength and legitimacy from the world outside . . ." (Sharma, 1978, p. 12).

Ultimately, Sharma (1978, pp. 11-12) finds that class relations derive from the structure of landownership in India. Thus, the basic classes for Sharma, as for Béteille, are the landowners and the landless. This distinction makes the concept of class to some extent superfluous on the local level because of the strong correlation of landownership and caste. Moreover, it is an ineffective concept for analyzing the motives underlying local events because of the lack of a unified class consciousness. In any case, as long as caste still has the power to order "actual relations," its importance cannot be minimized when one seeks to analyze events in specific villages.

When analysis concerns broad regions or states, the concept of class becomes more useful than it is at the local level. Sharma (1978, p. 201) notes a "discontinuity" between village politics and a regional election in which village factions were unimportant and class interests were noteworthy. Moreover, terms are needed to designate groups encompassing several castes broadly similar in hierarchical caste position, landownership, occupation, and wealth. In North India, one can distinguish agricultural laborers, artisans, and a relatively well-to-do agricultural class which hires agricultural labor and leases land to local agricultural entrepreneurs. Such groups are tantamount to classes, allowing for individual mobility between groups. There are classes of more recent origin, such as industrial workers and salaried private and governmental employees. In addition, the Government has created classes (e.g., Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes, and Other Backward Classes) in order to implement an of-

ficial policy of compensatory discrimination, thereby contending with problems of definition similar to those that academic social scientists must face (Galanter, 1984, pp. 120–121). It would be difficult to overestimate the importance of governmental initiatives, including the designation of official classes. However, concepts that are useful at one an-

alytical level or for some purposes may be unnecessary or redundant in other contexts. The choice of concept is partly related to theoretical orientation. A Marxian interpretation would require the concept of class; an ethnographic analysis might find such concepts as caste and *pana* to be sufficient.

## THE ELECTION OF 1977

### PREVIOUS ELECTIONS

The principals in the election of 1977 had played leading roles in previous elections. Although our information about past elections is somewhat sketchy, informants generally reported the principal candidates and the number of votes that each received, named the winner, mentioned outstanding events, such as suspected fraud, analyzed strategy, and described the alliances pivotal for the winners. However, we could not elicit a richness of detail similar to that available from the campaign and election of 1977, which we witnessed. Moreover, some explanations of strategy seemed dubious and required interpretation. Nonetheless, all respondents agreed on the salient facts. The only disagreements concerned minor variations in the total votes and whether the first election was held in 1961 or 1962. Most of our information comes from men who at one time or another ran for the office of *pradhan*.

The first election, 1961, does not seem to have developed into much of a contest. Most of our information comes from Probationer, who reported only that in this election he supported Agitator, who won. Probationer's father, one of the *panchs*, was elected deputy *pradhan*; therefore, at the time of the election, the two *Jat pana*s seem to have been working together. However, after the election the new *pradhan* tried to seize common land that Probationer and his group believed to belong to their *pana* and distribute it to landless people. This action led to a dispute, previously recounted, that made implacable enemies of Probationer and Agitator.

In the second election, 1966, Agitator again ran, this time opposed by Probationer. Probationer won in the initial tally by some five

or six votes, but Agitator insisted on a recount. One informant claimed that Agitator had the election officer count the votes several times. Finally, Agitator was declared the winner by a few ballots. It was widely believed that there had been some chicanery in the recount, and one informant suggested that Agitator had bribed the official. Bribery is routinely suspected in situations of this kind. Six months after the second election, Probationer killed Excitable's brother and was in prison during the next two electoral campaigns.

The third election, 1969, was the first without Probationer, the leader of *pana* B, with the result that all the serious candidates were from *pana* A. Because these candidates represented similar interests, little seemed to be at stake other than popularity and prestige, important considerations in village India to be sure, but in this case not reinforced by intense hostility and the fear of being damaged through the election of an opponent. To judge from the descriptions of our informants years after the event, the campaign seemed to lack the emotional intensity of the 1977 election. The lack of a focus of contention made the election difficult to analyze. We suspect the existence of some motives that were never explicitly stated and, on the whole, we have had to annotate what our informants told us in order to extract a scenario that makes reasonable sense.

In any case, the principal strategist seems to have been Agitator. He is said to have put up four candidates: Chauffeur, who had been a taxi driver in Delhi for a number of years; Old Lawyer (to distinguish him from Young Lawyer), who was a practicing attorney; Actor (said to be clever at creating false impres-

sions and concealing his true thoughts), one of the larger landholders in the village; and Strongheart, the only low-caste man who owned land in the village. He had won his land from a Jat in a lawsuit, prompting one of our informants to comment in discussing the case, "It takes a strong heart to hold the land." The first three candidates were Jats. Old Lawyer was a member of Agitator's *pana* and lineage. Chauffeur and Actor belonged to Agitator's *pana* but not his lineage; in fact, they were members of the old faction in *pana* A which for decades opposed Agitator's faction. However, Actor's lineage was more hostile to Agitator's lineage than was Chauffeur's group, none of whom took a leading role in the factional conflict. Strongheart was tied by patronage to the last lambardar of *pana* A and probably, in a similar way, to Agitator. Strongheart and his group were to support Agitator's candidate in 1977.

Tippler, son of the last lambardar of *pana* A and an alcoholic, also decided to run. However, his lineage elders and Agitator put pressure on him to withdraw, and he did so. Tippler told us that Chauffeur was Agitator's principal candidate. A Brahman may have been in the field as well, although none of our respondents mentioned any. A Brahman, whom we identify as Clerk because he worked as a clerk in a factory, twice ran unsuccessfully for the *pradhanship*. He was a strong candidate in the fourth election, but we are not sure in which of the three previous elections he had campaigned. The second election is a more likely possibility than the third because of the strategy that seemed to prevail in the third election. Also, one informant told us that Clerk withdrew his name when Chauffeur became a candidate. We do not know whether Clerk counted this aborted campaign as one of the two times that he ran for office.

If we assume that Tippler correctly identified Chauffeur as Agitator's favorite candidate, then Agitator's strategy probably had been based on his estimate of how the Brahmans would vote. Ordinarily, he ought to have preferred Old Lawyer, a member of Agitator's lineage. However, Chauffeur's brother, Witness, had given testimony in court against Probationer, the killer of a Brahman. The Brahmans were still angry at Probationer and backed Chauffeur because of the support

that Witness had given in court to the Brahmans.

The principal problem in reconstructing the strategy of the third election is Tippler's statement that Agitator put up four candidates. In that event, Agitator should have been relatively indifferent to the outcome, for one of his candidates was sure to win. However, it seems probable that Agitator would have favored Actor less than the other candidates because of the old factional split in *pana* A. Thus, he would have preferred Chauffeur, who had the best chance of winning because of his support from the Brahmans. If this analysis is valid, then Agitator seemed to have been working against his own interest in having a candidate from his own lineage who "had no chance," according to Tippler, and whose candidacy would probably have deprived Chauffeur of lineage votes that Agitator might have been able to throw in his direction. We are inclined to think that the men of Agitator's lineage, the largest in the village, wanted to have a representative in the election and that Old Lawyer wanted to run. Agitator would have accepted such a decision relatively gracefully because he could do little about it.

With 172 votes, Chauffeur won the election easily. His victory was principally due to the Brahman vote, according to Actor's analysis. Strongheart would have had a chance if the high-caste vote had been split and he could have united the low-caste voters. However, he was unable to do so. The high castes used their ties of patronage to hold their low-caste supporters in line, and Strongheart was further weakened by factions in his own caste. He was the father of Young Soldier, who had killed another Chamar Leatherworker, an event that led to factionalism in the caste. He received only about 32 votes. Tippler did not explain why Old Lawyer had no chance. Our belief, supported by the comments of one informant, is that he had withdrawn too much from the village and was not particularly well liked. He had lived in England for a number of years, had traveled widely in Europe, had constructed his house at some distance from those of the other villagers, and lived most of his life in Delhi. It was rare to find him at home. Many villagers might not have been entirely comfortable with Old Lawyer as

pradhan. Actor did well in the election, receiving the second highest total of votes, about 100. Old Lawyer made a respectable showing, chiefly on the basis of votes from his lineage, and finished in third place with about 75 votes.

The candidates in the fourth election, 1972, were Actor, Clerk, and Tippler, all of whom had campaigned for the pradhanship in previous elections. Actor and Tippler both were members of Jat *pana* A; Clerk was a Brahman from *pana* C. Actor won a closely contested election, scoring 138 votes to 134 for Clerk and 114 for Tippler. Actor maintained that he had won because 10 Brahmans had voted for him rather than for Clerk, a shift tantamount to a difference of 20 votes. Actor claimed that the Brahman vote had never before been significantly divided; he was proud of maintaining friendly relations with the Brahmans.

Tippler saw the election as a contest between Agitator and himself, an episode in their struggle for power in their lineage and *pana*. Tippler ordinarily would have succeeded his father, the former lambardar, as a leader of his lineage and *pana*, but Agitator was gradually to take over the role. He was a stronger personality, especially in view of Tippler's heavy drinking, had a larger family, and was a better politician. Moreover, Tippler was to suffer from a family lawsuit with his brother's widow, which weakened his position. However, in 1972, Tippler was still capable of seriously contesting the election.

Tippler analyzed the election in terms of Agitator's manipulation of the Brahman vote. He said that Agitator persuaded the Brahmans to field a candidate by promising support, thereby undermining the Brahman support that Tippler claimed to have. *Pana* A supported Actor. Tippler tried to persuade Clerk to step down in his favor. He argued that it would be useless for him to withdraw in favor of Clerk, because Clerk would have no chance against Actor. However, Tippler thought that he could beat Actor with Clerk out of the election. It is by no means clear why the Brahmans should have supported Tippler rather than Actor or why Clerk should have withdrawn in any case. Of the two Jat candidates, Clerk ought to have favored Actor more than Tippler because he was Actor's

family priest. The election was close and must have been intensely fought, but the outcome resembled those of the three preceding elections: a Jat of *pana* A was elected pradhan. Tippler filed a lawsuit contesting the results of the election, and it dragged on indecisively until the election of 1977.

## CANDIDATES

With the governmental announcement in late November that the panchayat elections would take place on December 29, 1977, the somnolent political life of the village began to stir. Political activity became intense during the few days preceding December 14, the final date for filing nomination forms, and reached a subclimax on the 14th when large delegations of candidates from many villages and their supporters descended on the election office to file the official forms required of candidates. The fortnight between the 14th and the 29th was a time of concentrated activity; it reached such a peak of emotion on election eve that episodes of violence were barely avoided. Election day itself, the climax of two weeks of hard campaigning, was calm except for a few arguments concerning the eligibility of specific voters and related matters that took place at the polls and were handled effectively by the election officer. Election night featured an emotional celebration by the victorious party.

Most of the principal contestants in the election were familiar from past campaigns. Probationer led the forces of *pana* B, he himself filing for the pradhanship. At age 40 he was a veteran campaigner, energetic, and old enough to be respected in a society which recognizes the practical value of the wisdom that years can bring. He was educated, having passed the higher secondary (high school) examination after failing it three times, and had worked for four years as a teacher before turning to agriculture. As a member of a large joint family with the largest landholding in the village, he was rich. His father was alive, a man of 80, too elderly actively to manage daily family affairs but available to supply advice, stability, and direction to Probationer, his oldest son. Two of Probationer's brothers took care of most of the family agricultural work, leaving Probationer free for

political and governmental activity. His years in prison had added an extra layer of shrewdness to his basic village astuteness. Rich, educated, middle-aged, scion of a large important family, veteran of a previous campaign, and seemingly unintimidated by the world outside Shanti Nagar, Probationer was a redoubtable candidate and the obvious choice of *pana* B.

Probationer wanted the pradhanship for his party principally to avoid harassment by his enemies. Backed by governmental authority, a forceful pradhan could, if he wished, wield considerable power and could definitely damage his enemies. Probationer and his group had learned this lesson in the dispute over village (or *pana*) common land. Prestige was another motive. The man elected pradhan, if already an important person by virtue of wealth, caste, and lineage, became the biggest man in the village; his opponents suffered a corresponding blow to their prestige. Moreover, for an ambitious and able man, the pradhanship was a basis for entry into higher political levels. One could campaign for positions that represented a region rather than just a single village. Some villagers attributed a motive to him that he took pains to deny. It was alleged that if Probationer won the pradhanship, then his probationary period would be waived. In one of our interviews, Probationer spontaneously raised the point and said, "Some people say that I am running to clear my bad record." He accused such people of envying him, implying that the charge was ill-founded. Probationer's declared motives for wanting to be pradhan were "to look out for the welfare of the village . . . to keep it clean . . . to help the poor . . . to do good." These general principles were endorsed by other candidates as well. Probationer may have had the strong additional motive of wiping his slate as clean as possible although he denied it.

Probationer was concerned that his opponents might try to use his prison record as a weapon to force him out of the campaign. His group thought that other candidates might challenge his right to file nomination papers on the grounds that a convict was disqualified from holding the office of pradhan. *Pana* B prepared for that possibility by nominating Probationer's 25-year-old younger brother for

pradhan as well as Probationer. In the event that Probationer was disqualified, his supporters could effectively vote for him by voting for his brother. There would be no doubt that after the election the new pradhan would be directed by Probationer and his father. However, the other candidates offered no challenge and Probationer filed successfully, after which his younger brother withdrew from the election. The failure to challenge Probationer's nomination damaged his opponents in the eyes of some villagers. It was taken as a sign that they were too nice and not aggressive or alert enough to be successful politicians. As the campaign developed, one of the candidates impressed us more and more as a "nice guy," and the American saying, "Nice guys finish last," kept running through our minds as the election neared.

It is important to bear in mind that the only position of significance involved in the election of 1977 was the village pradhanship. The other panchs of the village panchayat and the members of the circle panchayat had almost no importance. We occasionally asked informants about candidates for posts other than the pradhanship and invariably encountered a lack of interest. For example, we once asked Probationer if he was putting up a full slate of candidates, and he responded with the common opinion that only the pradhan counts. He said that he was nominating four panchs and that *pana* A was nominating five. "But the pradhan is the crucial figure," he said. The nominations of the non-pradhan members of the panchayat were quite casual. In some cases, it appeared possible that Harijan candidates who filed under the banner of the candidate of *pana* A really represented *pana* B. In any case, we view the election of 1977 just as the villagers did: as the election of a pradhan.

A Chamar Leatherworker, whom we call Factory Worker, made an abortive move to run for pradhan. He was a 46-year-old man, uneducated although said to be able to read Hindi and English, and employed in the maintenance department of a factory in Delhi. His candidacy was short-lived. On December 14, we heard that he was a candidate and the next day, that he had withdrawn. We were told that Probationer and Factory Worker had held a meeting, after which Fac-

tory Worker had withdrawn in favor of Probationer. The episode illustrates the anomalous political position of the low castes. On the one hand, by voting together they can swing an election to the high-caste candidate of their choice because of high-caste factionalism. On the other hand, they are not numerous enough to capture political power on their own behalf. Therefore, a low-caste candidate, doomed in advance to lose, sees his potential support drift away to stronger high-caste candidates who remind low-caste people of ties of patronage and attract their support with food, liquor, and promises. Strongheart, the Chamar candidate in the third election, had been unable to surmount these circumstances, and Factory Worker would have had no chance in 1977. However, he could have diverted votes from Probationer, who had significant low-caste support, and Probationer was too adroit a politician to allow that to happen. We ought to have interviewed Factory Worker about his reasons for entering and leaving the contest, but we never did. He was in and out of the campaign so quickly that we barely noticed, and the three principal candidates soon monopolized our attention.

The candidate representing *pana A* was a 57-year-old man with a farm of less than average size for a Jat landowner although sufficiently large so that he was well-to-do. The family income was supplemented by the salary of a son, a schoolteacher who also took care of the family farm, freeing his father for political activity. The candidate could read but had only an elementary education, having left school after the fourth grade. As a young man he had worked in Delhi for five years but then turned his attention to farming.

We name this candidate Frontman because he was widely thought to be a surrogate for Agitator. Actor nominated him at a meeting of *pana A*, but we did not learn of the meeting in time to attend. We do not know the circumstances that led to selecting him and not someone else for nomination, but Actor observed that, in the final analysis, there are simply not many men available for the position. Frontman's major strength lay in representing the largest lineage and *pana* in the village, and he therefore began the campaign

with a substantial bloc of votes. Furthermore, the astute Agitator masterminded his campaign.

Frontman's attitude toward his candidacy indicated that he saw himself as a representative of his party rather than as someone with an individual point of view. When asked about his program if elected, he had almost nothing to say, remarking only that he would do what the villagers wanted and that they would tell him after the election. He said that people voted for the party and not the person. His point of view probably explains his unusually relaxed attitude during the campaign. As a representative of his party and therefore of Agitator, he planned to do as he was told. He appeared to accept little responsibility either for his campaign or for what he might do after the election. His principal motive for accepting the nomination, in all probability, was simply the prestige of having been selected by his party. However, he also did not want to see Probationer become pradhan.

Frontman was reasonably intelligent but appeared to lack ambition. He was quite handsome, charming, and definitely a ladies' man—one of his principal weaknesses. A liaison with a Brahman woman had led to a spectacular quarrel, and it was rumored that at one time he had other liaisons with low-caste women. Philandering was regarded as a serious matter in puritanical Shanti Nagar and became a prime cause of murder when it involved someone's daughter. The killing in the Chamar Leatherworker caste recounted above is a case in point. We do not know the extent to which Frontman's history of philandering hurt him in the election, if at all, but it could have cost him some votes. Two of his love affairs were with women of large castes whose votes were crucial. In any case, his peccadillos would have to be balanced against the homicide committed by Probationer.

Frontman was an acceptable but not a strong candidate. His strengths lay in his lineage affiliation, the assistance of an able son, possession of sufficient wealth, and the support of a numerous party. Although he himself did not campaign very energetically, young men from his lineage acted forcefully on his behalf. His political weaknesses derived more from his party's record than from



his personality. He represented the group which had won all the preceding elections, and there was mounting dissatisfaction with uninterrupted rule by the same party. The landless people were angry that village common land had not been distributed to them, and the Chamars had taken the step of making a complaint to the Government. The preceding *pradhan* had blocked all initiatives concerning the common land, and it would be hard to imagine that a new *pradhan* representing the same group would take a different approach. In addition, there is frequently the feeling that from time to time it is good to change the party in power rather than just individual officeholders. However, the residue of dissatisfaction and the feeling that it was time for a change would not necessarily have been sufficient to defeat Frontman.

At the meeting of Jat *pana* A when Frontman was nominated, Tippler also decided to run. Anyone can be a candidate in an election by paying the required fee; the approval of a group is not necessary, although ordinarily a person would not run unless assured of a reasonably large base of support. This consideration never bothered Tippler; he had become a chronic candidate, having been active in the two preceding elections. He told us that he had supported Agitator in an earlier election and then lived away from the village for a number of years. He returned for the third election and found that "Agitator had done everything wrong." He therefore decided to run for *pradhan* but withdrew at the urging of his lineage. Tippler said that he had been forced out of the race because Agitator feared that, if Tippler were elected, he would be fair concerning the matter of the village land. In the fourth election, Tippler ran and, despite a strong showing, was defeated by *Chaufeur*, said to be the candidate of Agitator.

Tippler said that he had no intention of running in the current election but that he had filed to prevent Frontman from winning. Tippler thought that the candidacy of Probationer might be successfully challenged because he had been convicted. In that event, Frontman would win if Tippler were not in the race. When Probationer's nomination was approved, Tippler feared that Probationer could not win because he had only the votes

of his *pana* and the Potters. Tippler therefore told his supporters to vote for Probationer so that he might defeat Frontman. Tippler could not have his name removed from the ballot; a deadline had passed and it was too late. However, he could achieve the same purpose by advising his supporters. We are not altogether sure that he took the step of effectively withdrawing. Although he received only nine votes, he said that three of them came from his own family; apparently he had not advised his supporters to vote for Probationer, for surely his family would have followed his orders. He claimed that the other votes were mistakes, that is, the voters had accidentally marked the wrong line. Despite Tippler's later disclaimer, we think that his candidacy was quite serious, at least at the beginning. Two weeks before election day, he was quite optimistic about his chances, saying that he was sure to win. It was evident that the *pradhan*-ship meant a great deal to him. By the end of the campaign, however, he would probably have been satisfied with the defeat of Frontman by any of the other candidates.

Tippler had no chance. By the time the fifth election took place, he was a ruin of a man, almost completely destroyed by alcohol. He was both a joke, an object of pity, and an irritant in the village. However, he was a rich man, a member of the largest Jat lineage, and still capable of flashes of his previous *élan*. In fact, two Brahmins told us that the Brahmins had once considered supporting Tippler. His motives for running seemed, on the one hand, to be an effort to recapture the great prestige that his father had enjoyed and, on the other hand, to be rooted in his hatred of Agitator who had benefitted from Tippler's decline.

An engagement ceremony in the house of a Brahman two weeks before the election provided an occasion for Tippler to display both his hostility to the world in general and his specific antipathy toward Agitator. Tippler was drunk and was seated right beside the altar holding his small daughter. Loud and abusive, he tried to bait us when we entered the room, but we did not respond. Then he began to quarrel with Agitator, a quarrel which waxed and waned throughout the ceremony but which finally became so intense that most of the audience left the room and

emptied into the street where the verbal quarrel continued. The departure of the spectators effectively ended the engagement ceremony. We could not understand most of what Tippler and Agitator were shouting. However, at one point Tippler said that Agitator was a fraud and that he now had to face the strength of the Brahmans. He angrily asked Agitator why he was supporting Frontman. At one point, he shook Probationer's elderly father. Frontman came to the ceremony, but he left, looking quite disgusted, before the general exodus into the street.

The Brahmans selected their candidate after a lively but indecisive meeting held during the evening before the day when nominations had to be filed. The meeting was the climax of informal discussions which had been going on for some time. A young Brahman man whom we encountered in the fields the afternoon before the meeting brought us up-to-date. He mentioned the names of two young men who had been urged to run, noting that one had already declined, and named a third potential candidate who would run if no one else would serve. These three men all received serious consideration during the meeting, and in the end the choice was made largely by default, as our young informant had predicted. The main problem for the Brahmans, however, was not the identity of their candidate but rather their factionalism. This point was not openly discussed during the meeting but was tacitly recognized. Several speakers emphasized the importance of unity, declaring that if the Brahmans united, they could not be beaten. Moreover, we noticed that candidates were often nominated by men of the opposing faction, as if to demonstrate a willingness to support the Brahman candidate regardless of faction.

The meeting was held in the men's sitting house of a prominent Brahman family. About 25 adult men attended, including both Inside and Outside Brahmans as well as representatives of three other castes: three Barbers, a Carpenter, and a Potter. A number of curious well-behaved boys were in the room watching closely, for in Shanti Nagar children were not excluded from adult activities and are omnipresent. The meeting began about 8:00 p.m. with a ceremony of taking an oath over a small pitcher containing salt mixed with

water. An oath sworn over salt is considered to be most solemn, but an elderly Brahman, whom we name Manipulator because of his adroitness in legal matters, commented that nowadays no one believes in oaths and that even in the courtroom people cross their fingers when they take an oath.

After the oath, the 45-year-old eldest son of the late Brahman lambardar (whom we call Oldest Son) made a keynote speech, saying that the candidate to be selected should be a dedicated person who, if elected, would carry out all the duties of the *pradhan*. The candidate should be someone whom everyone could support. "People should be willing to work and even lose sleep to help the candidate win," he said. He appealed to Brahman pride, insisting that the Brahmans "should have representation in the village," and invoked Brahman tradition, referring to world history which, he said, "shows that in every panchayat and in every kingdom it was the Brahman who was the adviser." He emphasized the importance of unity, inveighing against the defection of anyone to another candidate after the selection of a Brahman candidate who had everyone's support. He concluded by asking the advice of the caste elders.

So the first thing to do is to choose a candidate. It is up to the elders, as they are more experienced and have seen the world, to guide the younger generation. That way younger people will feel safe and protected. Victory and defeat are always there, but if all the Brahmans cooperate, no one can defeat us.

Clerk then stood up and named four possible candidates: Manipulator, a retired government employee, 61 years old; Raconteur, named for his story-telling prowess, who was 79 years old; Official's Son, the 35-year-old younger son of the late lambardar and brother of Oldest Son; and Gentleman, a 51-year-old barely literate farmer. Raconteur, an Inside Brahman, immediately withdrew, explaining that he had been observing the *pradhan*ship for 16 years, did not like it, and did not want the office. Manipulator, an Outside Brahman, also withdrew, saying that the office was beyond his ability; however, he suggested that Young Lawyer, an Inside

Brahman, be considered as the Brahman candidate. Some people then said that Young Lawyer had already refused, but others said that he would accept. Official's Son said flatly that he did not want to become pradhan. There was a moment of silence. Then an Outside Brahman suggested Clerk, an Inside Brahman, as a candidate, praising him as an able man. Clerk replied, "It is very kind of all of you who have proposed me, but I have already fought two elections and was rejected both times. This means that there is some weakness in me that people don't like."

The discussion became disorganized. People began to laugh and gossip. An elderly man admonished the crowd not to laugh and to speak one at a time. Oldest Son said that the nomination should take only 10 minutes and he could not understand why it was taking so long. Official's Son then reiterated that Clerk or Gentleman would be good candidates, and someone again proposed Official's Son. Raconteur noted that the four candidates initially proposed had all refused. Oldest Son threatened to take a woman to the election office if the Brahmans could not decide, a threat designed to shame them into making a selection. After that, everyone urged Official's Son to accept. Clerk, an Inside Brahman, told Official's Son, an Outside Brahman, that although he might think that he would be all alone, everyone would support him. Official's Son replied that the pradhan-ship is not prestigious and, furthermore, that when the time came people would not support him. Another man was proposed, but he immediately declined "because of the circumstances." The Carpenter in attendance said that he could not understand why everyone was refusing and he left the meeting. A Barber said that ability is what counts, but Raconteur replied that "In this village, no one knows anything of ability; what we have here is groupism."

People became impatient. The same names were repeatedly mentioned, but no one would accept the nomination. A young man spoke in favor of Official's Son, which prompted Raconteur and Manipulator to scold him for speaking when his father was in the room. A son is expected to defer to his father and would not ordinarily speak at a meeting where his father was present. The young man paid no

attention to the reprimand and continued to talk. There was a final round of ineffectual discussion and then Manipulator suggested "that everyone go home and think the matter over. Then tomorrow anyone who is interested can file the nomination forms and all the Brahmans will support him." At 9:00 p.m. people began to leave, a few shrugging their shoulders at us to indicate that it had been impossible to reach an agreement. Someone recited a proverb to the effect that Brahmans are like dogs and cannot lie down together—that is, they fight among themselves and cannot agree. The next morning, we heard that during the night Gentleman had been selected as the Brahman candidate and that he had accepted.

Gentleman was the Brahman candidate almost by default, but he was not a bad choice. Both his experience and reputation suited him for the post of pradhan. However, some villagers viewed his strongest qualifications and most commendable personal attributes as liabilities in the current campaign. For example, he was currently vice pradhan of the village and had served in the position for 10 years. Such experience would seem to be a noteworthy qualification; however, the Harijans were resentful that he had been named vice pradhan because they thought that the post had been promised to one of their number, and their resentment could have cost Gentleman some votes. Gentleman was a respected man with little in his background that could be held against him and, as the campaign progressed, he impressed us more and more as a decent person, hence his pseudonym. This quality should have been entirely to his credit, but some people interpreted it as a lack of assertiveness. The issue was raised chiefly over the fact that Gentleman did not challenge the candidacy of Probationer because of his imprisonment. After criticizing Gentleman on this point, a Leatherworker said, "Probationer is the biggest fraud in the village because he has spent years behind bars. And now he is running for pradhan." Another Leatherworker said:

Gentleman won't be able to face situations. When Probationer filed his nomination papers, Gentleman did not raise the objection that Probationer had been to jail. Gentle-

man is a very simple honest man. But in politics, these sorts of people usually fail.

One of Gentleman's major problems was that, unlike his opponents, he was not rich. He was a farmer with a small landholding, only 1.4 hectares, a little less than half the average size of Brahman farms. Had he had to support his family of 12 persons from farming, he would have been in straitened circumstances, but one of his sons was a bus conductor in Delhi and contributed his monthly salary to the family. Even with this regular salary the family was by no means well-off, however, and the lack of money was to prove a definite handicap in the campaign. A Chamar Leatherworker said:

Gentleman is poor and does not have a place where he can invite a guest to sit. In this regard, Probationer has an edge over Gentleman. Probationer has a lot of land and money and can at least make a visiting government official comfortable in his house.

A Brahman woman reported that two of Gentleman's daughters were upset about the money that he would have to spend. Complaining that it would cost 50 rupees to file the nomination forms, they said that it would be better if their father spent the money on clothes for them. Thoroughly disgusted, they advised him that not even his wife would vote for him.

Gentleman's other major problem was his lack of any real education. In 1958, he was said to have learned to read in an adult education course, but he apparently never attended school as a child. In 1977, however, Gentleman claimed to have passed the fifth grade and also to have earned a certificate of adult education, standing first in his class. These claims, if valid, would make him the educational equal of Frontman, if not of Probationer, but the villagers seemed to disparage them. Without naming Gentleman, Manipulator alluded to the importance of education during the Brahman meeting when at one point he said that "an educated man is my preference," and Oldest Son openly stated that he did not want Gentleman because Gentleman was uneducated. While he lacked a formal education, Gentleman was

definitely an intelligent man and the equal of the other candidates in this regard.

Ability, reputation, and experience would all be taken into account by the voters, but factionalism was the key to Gentleman's chances. He was an Outside Brahman; the question was whether he could hold the votes of the Inside Brahmans. He was a brother of Probationer's murder victim, a relationship which at one time might have been sufficient to give him most of the Brahman votes but which appeared to be largely irrelevant in 1977. Both Inside and Outside Brahmans participated in the Brahman nomination meeting. Not the slightest factional antagonism could be discerned as they struggled together to select a candidate, although one would of course expect that they would make a strong effort to conceal any latent hostility on such an occasion. Each faction gave the impression that it would have no objection to a candidate from the other group. However, even if the Brahmans were genuinely united on the evening of December 13, two weeks remained until the election, plenty of time for fresh quarrels and factionalism to lead to defections in favor of other candidates.

It seemed probable that the Brahmans would have preferred either Official's Son or Young Lawyer as their candidate, although this judgment may be influenced by our own evaluation of the candidates. We think that Manipulator and Raconteur, two of the four candidates initially proposed, were nominated only to honor them as senior men. No pressure was brought upon either of them to accept the nomination. Gentleman was proposed as the candidate if no other could be found. Thus reasoning by elimination, we think that the Brahmans probably preferred Official's Son to the other three candidates. Young Lawyer was nominated next but he had already indicated that he was not interested in running.

The attractiveness of Official's Son and Young Lawyer is evident. Official's Son, an Outside Brahman, was energetic, intelligent, and a high-school graduate. He was sufficiently well-to-do to campaign and to serve as pradhan, owning almost twice as much land as Gentleman and also a tractor from which he made quite a bit of money. He had

only one child, a teen-age son, who helped with agricultural work. Furthermore, he was the son of the late lambardar. We think that his chief reason for declining the nomination was his fear of Brahman factionalism. Also, a modest demeanor is considered becoming.

Young Lawyer, an Inside Brahman, had impressive educational qualifications, having earned a B.A. and an LL.B. from the University of Delhi. Although he possessed an insignificant amount of land, he was relatively well-off with a monthly income of about Rs. 1000 to 1200 from his profession.

Young Lawyer had many reasons for rejecting consideration for the nomination. He had a most unfavorable opinion of the panchayat. (He is the "high-caste male respondent, 29 years old" whose views are presented on pages 21–22.) He also believed that he was too young for the position so that he would not be taken seriously if elected. However, a few months after the election, he said that he had given some thought to standing for *pradhan*, believing that "he could have done many things for the village." He refrained, he said, "because uneducated people would bother him while he was working in the courts." It is noteworthy that Young Lawyer had begun to think in terms of what he could accomplish as *pradhan*, and we would not be surprised if we heard that he had run for office in a later election. Although the Brahmans may have been more united behind Official's Son or Young Lawyer than behind Gentleman, it does not necessarily follow that either of them would have been a stronger candidate than Gentleman, who might have been more acceptable to non-Brahmans than either of the younger men.

### NOMINATION DAY

The final day for filing nomination forms had the spirit of a grand country fair. All the candidates from Shanti Nagar had waited until the last day to file. Around 10:00 a.m., crowds of excited men, candidates and their supporters, climbed on tractors and piled into cars and trolleys (carts towed by tractors) for the trip to the election office, which was located in a busy area between villages containing the Block Development Office, a college, and a number of tea shops. By mid-

morning, Shanti Nagar looked as if it had been deserted by men. A similar scenario was taking place in many other villages so that, by late morning, the area around the election office was jammed with people and parked vehicles. The crowd consisted mainly of men, but some women candidates and their supporters were also present. Candidates or their assistants set to work filling out the forms and then rushed to the only open window to file. The crush was so heavy that a second window was quickly opened and, a short time later, three more windows were manned. After filing, candidates treated their supporters to refreshments in one of the tea stalls. Most of the people returned to Shanti Nagar late in the afternoon.

We tried to detect political alliances by observing the people who rode in the vehicles of a particular candidate, frequented his camp, or accepted his hospitality. We learned nothing particularly new from this effort. Our observations only confirmed what villagers had already told us, which is not surprising since our informants based their inferences largely on observations similar to those that we were making at the election office. However, it was comforting that our observations agreed with what the villagers had been telling us.

People went from Shanti Nagar to the election office with other members of their party. Frontman used his own tractor and trolley to transport his adherents. Tippler and some of his followers rode in a jeep belonging to a brick contractor who had leased some of Tippler's land. Probationer's group traveled in the family tractor and trolley as well as in the family car. Gentleman's partisans used three tractors and two trolleys: two of the tractors were owned by Outside Brahmans, but one belonged to the Jat leader Devious, a fact which supported village opinion that Devious and his important lineage were behind Gentleman. On the way out of the village, the Brahman tractors stopped while the men talked with Witness, who was an important member of Devious's group—further evidence that Devious and his followers would support Gentleman. One of the Carpenters rode on a Brahman tractor; the Carpenters were almost certainly in Gentleman's camp. A Leatherworker, one of the candidates for a reserved Harijan seat from Front-



Fig. 1. Men sitting on a tractor and trolley waiting to go to the election office.

man's party, sat on a Brahman tractor. At first that confused us, but later he went to sit on Frontman's tractor. Some people circulated among the candidates and one could not always be sure where their sentiments lay.

Each candidate had to be proposed by a registered voter who signed the form. Tippler was nominated by Manipulator, one of the Brahmans who had been active at their meeting. Manipulator wanted to be known as a supporter of Tippler, and after the election he anxiously asked us which candidate the other villagers thought he had voted for. He was pleased when we instantly named Tippler. However, Actor said that although Manipulator wanted to be known as a partisan of Tippler, he was too intelligent to have vot-

ed that way. In any case, Manipulator and a young Barber completed the nomination form for Tippler, but they made a mistake which invalidated it. Tippler was drunk, very tense, and trembling. He took his form to a young schoolteacher of the Jhinvar Watercarrier caste, who was working on behalf of Probation, and asked him to complete the form. He agreed, but on his first attempt he made a mistake. Tippler became angry, shouted at the teacher, and asked him to fill out a new form. Manipulator managed to calm the two men and he himself asked the teacher to help. The teacher worked on a second form and again made the same mistake. Tippler was furious, trembling, and Manipulator led him away. The teacher successfully completed the

form on his third attempt. Tippler came back and took the form to the window where he was the first of the candidates to file for pradhan. As far as we know, Tippler sponsored only one candidate as an ordinary member for the village panchayat, a Chuhra Sweeper. We saw him give ten rupees to the Sweeper which was the sum needed to pay the filing fee.

Agitator's son completed the form for Frontman who, calm and casual as always, was busy chatting. He was the last of the four candidates to file his form. Actor was sitting on Frontman's tractor where he was joined by Strongheart and three other Harijans, two of whom had been nominated unopposed for the reserved seats. Frontman told Strongheart that his name had also been proposed as a panch, but Strongheart said that he knew nothing about it. However, he permitted his name to be put in nomination and fixed his thumbprint to the form. In addition, two Jats from Frontman's camp filed for the village panchayat. A Jat and a Leatherworker ran for the circle panchayat representing Frontman's party. A candidate for pradhan ordinarily pays the nomination fee, ten rupees, for Harijans representing his party who are running for ordinary membership in the panchayat.

There seemed to be no special activity in the Brahman camp. Several Brahmans were sitting on one of the tractors. Gentleman, assisted by Devious, completed his form and filed it after Tippler had filed his. A Carpenter standing for the circle panchayat and a Jhinvar Watercarrier running for the village panchayat were candidates from the Brahman party. The Carpenters supported the Brahmans, but the Jhinvars were obviously divided since the young Jhinvar teacher clearly sided with Probationer. The Jhinvar teacher and a young Jat from *pana B* prepared nomination forms for Probationer, his younger brother, and other candidates representing his party. Two Potters, one standing for the circle panchayat, and a Barber were candidates from Probationer's party.

It seemed to us that little campaigning was taking place. Apart from the requirement of filing nomination forms, the occasion appeared to be chiefly social. However, we did notice some activity intended to influence important voters. For example, a Brahman

representing Gentleman visited Frontman's camp and talked to Strongheart, an influential Leatherworker. We assumed that the Brahman was trying to enlist Strongheart's support. After he left, a Jat approached Strongheart and discussed various concessions that the Jats were willing to make to the Harijans. We are not sure whom the Jat represented. We did not understand the discussion too well, but the principal demand of the Harijans, the distribution of village common land, was apparently not mentioned. At one point, the Jat told Strongheart that all the liquor shops were closed that day and so he could not obtain any liquor. An influential Jat, a close relative of Actor, arrived at Frontman's camp, and the Jat who was talking to Strongheart then led him away, still busily explaining something to the Leatherworker.

After the nominations had been filed, everyone sat around gossiping while waiting for receipts to be issued. People were mixing with little regard to party or caste differences. They acted very friendly and tried not to offend people from other camps. All the election windows had closed for the lunch hour and receipts were not distributed until mid-afternoon. The candidates then treated their partisans to tea and sweets. Probationer distributed tea and sweets in his camp while other candidates went to one of the tea shops. Tippler had only four guests at the tea shop. He ordered tea and one kind of sweet, but Manipulator asked him to order a different sweet that was probably a bit more costly. A few villagers passed the shop and Tippler called to them to come for some refreshment, but they continued on their way, making excuses. Manipulator then asked Tippler to bring some *pakorās* (vegetables fried in a batter). Tippler brought them reluctantly. Then his guests unsuccessfully asked for more sweets. Manipulator remarked aside that this was the first time that he had seen Tippler behave so stingily on such an occasion. Tippler and his group then left for home. Probationer and his party were the next to leave.

Gentleman made a move to leave without offering his supporters anything, but a Brahman persuaded him at least to do something. After much discussion, they all went to a tea shop where Gentleman bought tea and sweets.



There was a great rush, and the sweets were served half cooked. After the Brahmans had finished eating and were about to leave, Frontman and his group arrived. Frontman was quite generous, spending 57 rupees for expensive sweets and tea. Everyone was satisfied with the quality and quantity of his food. Frontman's group was the last to leave the area, arriving back in the village late in the afternoon.

On the day after the filing of nominations, election officials examined the forms and cancelled those for which there was cause. The following day was the last day for a candidate to withdraw his name.

Nomination day highlighted Gentleman's relative poverty. The day after, two Brahmans were discussing Gentleman's poorly financed campaign for the coming election. They said that the election held little charm for them because Gentleman, the Brahman candidate, had no chance. One of the Brahmans said:

Yesterday the Jats had a lot of money to spend, but Gentleman just can't spend anything. All the other contestants bought *burfis* [a sweet] but Gentleman treated people to *jalebis* [a sweet] which were not good at all. I used my tractor to take people to the election office just to support Gentleman and could have met with a very severe accident, but Gentleman gave us only those bad *jalebis* to eat. But we'll try our best to persuade people to vote for him because we want a Brahman to be pradhan this time.

Clerk's wife said that she also wanted a Brahman for pradhan and believed that if all the Brahmans voted for Gentleman he was sure to win. But she voiced the common fear that Probationer had a good chance to win because he had money and Gentleman had none to spend on the election.

### PROGRAMS AND PROMISES

Two of the three principal candidates for pradhan had detailed programs, necessarily much alike because the villagers were in general agreement about the need for such improvements as more street lights and paved roads. Moreover, the means for obtaining de-

velopments like these were well understood, and candidates wasted no time trying to create innovative approaches in such obvious matters. Only one issue in the campaign, the ultimate disposition of the village common land, was capable of generating any emotion and excitement. Because specific villagers would gain or lose depending on the outcome, voters had to evaluate the promises of candidates in the context of the candidate's own land and caste position. The issue held the potential for sharp conflicts of interest. Would a candidate who had occupied village common land be willing to relinquish it after the election even if he had won largely by so pledging? On the other hand, a candidate might suspect that the Government or the courts would enter the picture to force a distribution of common land in which case he might as well reap any possible benefits by promising the inevitable.

Candidates were at least as concerned with the human aspect of the pradhan's role as with the administrative one. They repeated the theme that they would share people's sorrows, help in time of trouble, and adjudicate disputes so as to keep the police out of family affairs. Villagers saw the pradhan ideally as a protector, supporter, and impartial mediator of disputes. He was expected to deflect unwelcome pressure from outside the village. The villagers held these functions and qualities of the pradhan to be as important as his political ability to extract material benefits from the Government. People wanted a pradhan who would create harmony in the village.

Actor, the pradhan in office just before the current election, saw his role principally in terms of avoiding conflict with or among the villagers. Once he discussed his political philosophy with us in the presence of an elderly Barber who was standing for ordinary member of the village panchayat from Probationer's party. Actor, however, had nominated Frontman for pradhan and was identified with his party. Actor repeatedly emphasized the need for harmony in the village. He critically observed that some people, especially the Harijans, might vote for a bad person for pradhan, thus creating rivalry and disharmony from which they might hope to benefit. The panchayat was supposed to meet regularly, but Actor said that he did not schedule

meetings because they only created disharmony. He did all the work himself.

The Barber praised Actor's handling of disputes. He said that earlier *pradhans* had taken money to help people but that Actor did not. Actor quickly jumped into the discussion to explain what the Barber meant. He said that when people brought disputes to former *pradhans*, they would take money from the disputants to keep the police out of the picture, keeping some money for themselves and using the rest to bribe the police. The Barber added that after being paid, the *pradhan* would then settle the matter in the village.

Actor gave an example of the way that he handled such cases. Two educated youngsters had robbed a village house. The police came. Actor thought that the lives of the two thieves would be ruined if they were arrested. He did not think that they were habitual criminals and argued this position with the police. The police replied that if Actor could convince the victim of the crime to drop the charges, they would stay out of the matter. Actor's intervention was successful but he said that he had to pay 300 rupees to the police from his own pocket. He added that his evaluation was only half correct. One of the youngsters never got into trouble again but the other continued to steal and later robbed a post office in Delhi. The two crimes here described were common knowledge in the village, but we have to accept on faith Actor's account of his bargain with the police.

The Barber succinctly described Actor's character as it affected his activities as *pradhan*: he did not accept bribes and would do nothing to bring enmity on himself. The Barber gave two examples. Paths in the fields were supposed to be one *gatha* (eight feet three inches, 2.51 m) wide to accommodate tractors, but they were actually much narrower because farmers cultivated parts of the paths bordering their fields. Actor did nothing to correct the situation in order to avoid the hostility of the affected farmers and also because the farmers were able to adjust to the narrower paths. In this way, said Actor, no land was wasted. The second example was the distribution of village common land. Much of this land had been illegally occupied, but Actor did not attempt to evict the trespassers and distribute the land because he did

not want their enmity. Therefore, concluded the Barber, "Actor did nothing good but on the other hand he did nothing bad. Other men might take a bribe but Actor will not do so because he does not want to bring enmity on himself. So he just sat for five years."

Actor listened to this evaluation with complete composure and then launched into a long discussion of the village common land, the gist of which was that the Harijans and the landless had no confidence that he would distribute the land and went to Delhi officials to complain that he was not just. They charged that some landless people had paid Actor the fees that the Government required when common land was given to the landless but that he had kept the money without delivering title to the land. They suggested that a committee of the landless be formed to carry out the distribution. Actor was not a member of the committee. The landowners then went to Delhi and objected on various grounds. The committee was duly appointed but it could do nothing since the necessary power was vested in the *pradhan*. Actor said that he had no interest in cooperating with the committee because its members had no confidence in him.

A prominent Leatherworker gave another version of these events. He began by noting the obvious fact that the low castes were politically and economically weaker than the high castes. The reason, he emphasized, was that the Leatherworkers were not united. To show what could be accomplished when the Leatherworkers did unite, he cited the reluctance of Actor to distribute land to the Harijans. The Leatherworkers said that the Government had ordered Actor to distribute common land and that he had even collected money from the Harijans on the promise of so doing. But Actor never gave the Harijans any land, at which point the Leatherworkers united, filed a successful lawsuit, and received their plots. The apparent chief discrepancy between the accounts of Actor and the Leatherworker probably involves the question of "plots" within the habitation area and agricultural land outside it. The Harijans did have plots, as the Leatherworker acknowledged, but they had not yet received any agricultural land.

Lest the landowners be regarded as totally

unreasonable, it should be pointed out that certain aspects of the program concerning village common land were to some extent unfair. Actor mentioned one such complication. If a privately owned field lay uncultivated for a specific period, the panchayat could annex it to the village common land. Sometimes land lay uncultivated because of excessive rainfall; it was not really barren and could be cultivated again when the climate entered a period of diminished rainfall. A provision empowered the village council to return such land to its original owner, but by that time other people often were cultivating it. The original owner then had to bring a lawsuit to recover it. Actor, true to his temperament, preferred to avoid potential conflicts of that nature.

Then Actor shifted the focus of his remarks from the village to the Government. Losing a bit of his composure and becoming more agitated, he described a meeting called by a high government official and attended by the pradhans of the region. According to Actor, the official asked each pradhan in turn about the common land of his village. When his turn came, Actor told the official that village common land was the pradhan's business and that the official could not dictate to the villagers. The official asked Actor why he was so aggressive. Actor replied that it was best that officials not interfere in village life. He added that Jats are dangerous people and could destroy things. Actor said that he also refused to cooperate with the Government in the sterilization program. In short, he sought to avoid disharmony in the village and to defend it from what he considered to be disruptive outside influences from the Government.

However, Actor must have seen the writing on the wall. He said, "I'm happy to leave office. All of the candidates would have withdrawn if I had decided to run. One cannot ask more than that. But it's time to go while I still have good relations with everyone." Pressures seemed to be gathering around the office of pradhan. A strategy of sitting and doing nothing could no longer be pursued indefinitely. The Harijans and other landless people did not necessarily want to create disharmony, but on the other hand they wanted

their share of the common land. They knew that the Government and the times were on their side.

Actor's account of his confrontation with a high government official led him into a discussion of the relation of national and village politics. He considered village politics to be a cleverer, more dangerous game than national politics.<sup>4</sup> He said that national politics have no effect on village politics. If by that statement he meant that representatives of national political parties did not come to Shanti Nagar to recruit candidates and to campaign on their behalf, then he was correct. However, regional and national politics had significant effects on village politics. For example, the specific form taken by the dispute over village common land derived from policies formulated at high governmental levels. In addition, the support that Devious gave to the Brahman candidate was said to be based on the fact that Devious, like the Brahmins, was a strong partisan of the Congress Party.

While an astute village politician like Actor might consider village and national politics to be largely independent, this separation held, in the case of Shanti Nagar, only with regard to matters such as the selection of candidates, the election, and the management of affairs limited almost entirely to the village. In this general domain, village considerations dominated. But from another point of view, rural governing bodies were preoccupied with trying to decide how best to react to governmental initiatives, especially those involving land.

A good example of the way that governmental policies generated rural political activity took place in a nearby village, the scene of a *khap* panchayat of Jats. A *khap* is a large area inhabited by a localized Jat clan (Pradhan, 1966, p. 261). *Khap* panchayats are events of great consequence and relatively rare in the area around Shanti Nagar. This

<sup>4</sup> This remark is similar to the sentiments expressed by a Punjabi villager who had just won a panchayat election. He said, "The Village panchayat election is thousand times more difficult than the election of M.P. (Member of Parliament), because in this election interpersonal relations are at stake" (Yadava, 1968a, p. 69).

*khap* panchayat convened over the familiar question of the distribution of village common land to Harijans and the related matter of reserved positions for them. The two issues were joined in the minds of the landowners: they held that reserved places were intended to compensate people for the disadvantage of being without land and that such people should not, therefore, be given land while at the same time benefiting from reserved places. Harijans regarded reserved places as a right. In any case, Actor said that the Government had been forced to make concessions to the panchayat. He continued:

The Government believed that people would unite and the situation would become explosive. Five hundred people courted arrest and even the women and children were very angry. In the end, the Government had to bend and a committee was appointed to find a solution to the problem of the common land. People were not afraid of guns. Villagers are dangerous people. Even the British had to bend.

Despite the need to deal effectively with the government of the Union Territory of Delhi, the candidates gave it perfunctory attention—only as a source of funds. They thought almost entirely in terms of the village when they described what they would do as *pradhan*. All the candidates had much the same idea as Actor about the role of *pradhan*, which is no surprise because Actor and the current candidates all had similar backgrounds. The principal difference was that the candidates rejected the inaction for which Actor was notorious, two of them even vowing to deal with the issue of the village common land. Probationer said:

I will see to the welfare of the village. I will keep it clean. If a poor person wants to open a shop or a small-scale industry, I will help him. For the last 16 years, the *pradhans* have been worthless. The principal thing that I will do for the Harijans and Potters is to distribute land. For the landowners, I will pave the road around the village and the main road in the fields and install lights on them. The Government will pay. I will settle family disputes and

not let them go to the police. Certain people want parties, but I want just one panchayat in which everyone believes.

This program was specific, well conceived, and addressed the concerns of almost everyone. The only point that might give pause is the promise to distribute land. Probationer himself was said to be occupying village common land. Would he be willing to give it up voluntarily? He could escape the dilemma by classifying common land into various categories. For example, he considered the common land that he occupied to be *pana* land. This was the basis of his refusal to allow *Agitator* to take and distribute it. On this principle he might be able to retain the land that he occupied and distribute the common land held by other farmers.

Gentleman presented a similar program. As he described his program to us, he emphasized the issue of the common land, concerning which he would be more likely than Probationer to take action. Gentleman said:

I will work for the welfare for the village. There should be no parties. The *pradhan* should belong to every family. He should consider another man's sorrows to be his sorrows. When families have disputes, I will make people understand and try to prevent cases from going to the courts.

The problems of the Harijans are scholarships, plots [in the habitation site], and common land [in the agricultural area]. I have the same love for the sons of the Harijans as for my own sons. Some people don't believe that common land should be distributed to Harijans. Probationer has occupied common land and so has Frontman. The members of Frontman's lineage support him in order to prevent the distribution of common land. I have not occupied any village common land.

The main thing is that the *pradhan* should be honest. Some *pradhans* make two families fight and then extract money from both. Some *pradhans* get government grants and then eat the money and do not use it for its designated purposes. I am not afraid of doing justice. If a *pradhan* does something bad after taking the oath of office, he will spoil his life.

The problems are electricity, sewage, and roads. Actor sent applications to the Block Development Office but otherwise did nothing. The main road in the fields should be paved and lights should be installed.

Although the details of this program closely resemble points made by Probationer, there is a noteworthy difference in emphasis. Gentleman stressed the quality of honesty. For him, it was the chief consideration. But when we asked him if the voters would decide on the basis of the personal qualities of the candidates, Gentleman avoided answering directly. Later in the interview, he returned to the issue of honesty, intimating that rich candidates would try to compensate for basic dishonesty by spending money for food and liquor to win votes. Gentleman saw the election in terms of character versus money. This interview took place only two days before the election, and we asked Gentleman what he thought of his chances. He hesitated a long moment before replying that he was satisfied with his position. But he expected a close election.

Frontman had a simple program if elected. He would do what the villagers wanted, and they would tell him after the election. He was concerned neither with personal qualities nor a specific program, believing that people voted for the party and not the person. Agitator, the man behind Frontman, was a better source for the program of his candidate. He disavowed the tactic of making promises to get votes, specifically with regard to the distribution of common land to the Harijans. Agitator and the people sitting with him during our interview said that anyone who promised to do that would later be sorry. Agitator added that candidates make promises and then do not keep them. Thus, the main point of Frontman's program is clear. By refusing to promise land to the landless, Agitator in effect committed Frontman to an effort to leave the occupied common land in the hands of the landowners, just as Gentleman had said. Agitator also raised the question of the quality of the candidates, not on the grounds of honesty, as had Gentleman, but rather in terms, it seemed, of their popularity. He said, "Probationer has no chance because people do not like him. All he has is money and you

cannot buy votes." This comment made us wonder if Agitator was losing his political touch. However, he may simply have been putting a good face on the fact that while Frontman had money, he had nothing like the wealth of Probationer.

Probationer's program found a sympathetic hearing among the Sweepers. A Sweeper man liked Probationer because, he said:

Probationer has a program. He has promised to give every Harijan some land from the village common land. He admits that he is cultivating a little common land, but when he becomes *pradhan*, he will see that no one cultivates village common land. Landless people will be given priority. Actor took money from the Harijans but never gave them land. Probationer has criticized this. Second, he has pointed out that until now no *pradhan* has looked to the welfare of the village. He has promised to do so. Electricity and paved roads are part of his program.

Two other Sweeper men, echoing these opinions, said:

Although Probationer has admitted that he has some village common land, when he becomes *pradhan* he will give it up and see that no one else uses common land illegally. He will distribute the land to Harijans. He is a nice man, despite the unintended murder, and he will listen to all the sorrows of the Sweepers.

The Sweepers did not mention Gentleman's program which contained similar features. Moreover, Gentleman was not occupying common land so that no conflict existed between his program and his landed interests. In the course of the interview, however, the two men discussed an event which in all likelihood helped to turn the Sweepers against Gentleman. Three large families of Sweepers were registered voters in the village but were living in Delhi. When Devious was elected *sarpanch* (head) of the circle panchayat, he took steps to strike these voters from the roll. The Sweepers tried to persuade Devious that although the three families were living in Delhi, they were residents of Shanti Nagar. Devious rejected the Sweepers' explanation. The Sweepers became angry and would not sup-

port a candidate whom Devious backed. The two informants at this interview thought that Devious was supporting Frontman; however, everyone else who expressed an opinion maintained that Devious was behind Gentleman. Therefore, the Sweepers would not have been favorably inclined to Gentleman even though his program favored them. In addition, there was resentment over the fact that Gentleman, rather than a Harijan, had become vice pradhan.

### MONEY, FOOD, LIQUOR, CANVASSING

A week before the election, we encountered Gentleman at the edge of the village. He seemed to be in an excellent mood. He had spent the morning going through the village asking people to vote for him. We asked him about his chances, but he was reluctant to discuss them other than to mention that two important Jats, Devious and Witness, were behind him. Frontman passed by and stopped. For a moment, the situation was somewhat tense, but we joked with Frontman and both candidates began to laugh. Frontman stayed only a minute. Then Agitator joined us. He told us to come to see him and he would tell us everything about the election. He was carrying the heavy staff that he always had with him when he was away from his house. Gentleman pointed to the staff and said that force would win the election. He meant financial strength as expressed principally in food and liquor rather than physical intimidation, for both men then commented that trying to win votes by gifts of food and liquor was a bad system.

No aspect of the campaign was more important to the outcome or more condemned by villagers than the use of food and, especially, liquor to influence the voting. The villagers who criticized the practice were not thinking of the tea and sweets to which candidates treated their supporters the day when nominations had to be filed. Rather they had in mind the heavy drinking that went on; generally it happened behind the scenes in the homes of candidates or their supporters, but on the eve of this election it overflowed into the lanes of the Harijan quarters. On election eve, if not before, liquor formed a

component of canvassing. Some of the workers for the various candidates carried bottles of liquor with them as they canvassed for support. Young Lawyer, for his part, believed that bribing voters with money and liquor corrupted the entire electoral system and led to the election of incompetents. He expressed the extreme opinion that the panchayat law ought to be repealed. To us, the surprising feature of the prominence of alcohol in the campaign was that orthodox Hindus generally consider drinking to be disreputable. It nonetheless had a powerful attraction for many villagers.

We saw considerable drinking and heard about a good deal more, but informants also mentioned payments of money. We may have witnessed one such payment, although we are not sure. Once when we were sitting with some Sweepers, Tippler appeared at the end of the lane. A few of the men went to talk to him, and one returned with 50 rupees which Tippler had given to him. The man displayed the money to the other men and then they drifted away, leaving us with an old woman and a young man who began to praise Tippler and his late father extravagantly, describing Tippler as a nice man who would certainly help the poor. They were quite sympathetic to his problems, among them his drunkenness. It did not seem to us a coincidence that such favorable comments immediately followed the transfer of money.

Of all the candidates, Probationer made by far the most effective use of food and liquor, concentrating mainly on the Harijans and Potters but not neglecting other possible sources of votes, including some Brahmans. Two days after nomination day we heard that Probationer had decided to make energetic use of liquor, and whenever we visited his house in the course of the campaign, there were signs that people were drinking in the interior rooms. For example, a week before the election we went to see him and at first were told that he was in a "meeting," but a few minutes later he put in an appearance. Apparently he had been in an adjacent room drinking with his guests, for one could smell the liquor. While we were talking to him, a Sweeper passed by and went into the adjacent room. We had the impression that Probationer's house offered more or less continu-

ous hospitality for potential supporters during the fortnight preceding the election. This aspect of Probationer's campaign became more and more noticeable as election day approached. The day before the election, Tippler entered our house to announce, rather dramatically, that Probationer "has bought chickens and liquor." Tippler was obviously impressed by this evidence that Probationer had brought up his heavy artillery to hold his supporters in line and to win those voters who might still be undecided.

The impecunious Gentleman, making a virtue of a necessity, eschewed the use of food and liquor. He said:

Rich people think that they can give food and liquor and get votes in return. I have no money and do not believe in giving food and liquor. Rich people can spend up to 15,000 rupees in an election, but I have only 200 rupees to spend. My son earns 400 rupees per month, and I have taken 200 rupees to use in the election. If I lose, I will have wasted 15 days of my son's salary. I spent 50 rupees as a filing fee, 50 rupees for sweets to distribute to my supporters on nomination day, 25 rupees for sample ballots [on which candidates showed supporters how to mark their ballots on election day], and the rest to be spent during the final days of the campaign. I am not afraid of doing justice but I cannot afford to feed people. I tell people to eat elsewhere but to vote for me.

He contrasted the money spent by wealthy candidates with what they could earn through corrupt practices after taking office, giving the impression that a pradhan would recover his election expenses. Yadava (1968a, p. 64) points out this aspect of village government by quoting villagers to the effect that "a Panch can make as much money as an average farmer can earn from his land."

The climax of the campaign from the point of view of eating, drinking, and canvassing took place during the two days before the election, especially on election eve. Young men did most of the canvassing although even small children passed out sample ballots during the daylight hours. Typical of the canvassers were two groups that we encountered in the Sweeper quarter at about 7:00 p.m. two

evenings before the election. One group of three young Jat men about 20 years old were working on behalf of Frontman. We met them just a few steps from the Sweeper quarter where they had just finished soliciting votes. Most canvassing took place among the low castes. In the Sweeper quarter itself, we saw another group of seven or eight young men, Jats and also a Barber, soliciting votes for Probationer. They carried sample ballots, green for pradhan, white for ordinary panch, and pink for circle panchayat, and visited every Sweeper house, explaining where to stamp the ballots on election day. Each candidate was identified both by name and a specific symbol. The symbols of the four candidates for pradhan were a cow, elephant, umbrella, and tractor. Voters who could not read could choose their candidates by marking the line on the ballot with the appropriate symbol. Canvassers made sure that voters knew which symbols designated their candidates. After canvassing, they stood for several minutes below a streetlight in the Sweeper quarter discussing Probationer's position. They were confident that he would win the Sweeper vote. Their confidence was in all likelihood justified. The next day, two Sweeper informants, who appeared to have quite precise information, told us that all but three families of Sweepers would vote for Probationer.

On election eve, teams of young canvassers representing all candidates except Tippler roamed the low-caste side of the village soliciting votes. For four or five hours until a little after 10:00 p.m., the campaign seemed to be fueled almost entirely by alcohol. Men who worked in Delhi offices returned home early to begin drinking as soon as possible. Activity was more than lively—it was frantic. There were even a few occasions when violence seemed possible, but the villagers never lost control to that extent. By that time, however, the officials and police officers who were sent from Delhi to insure an honest and peaceful election were on the scene, and their presence in all probability helped to avoid any serious trouble. The officials were quartered in the school just outside the village where the polling was to take place. Early in the evening we encountered two young men from Frontman's party on their way back



from the school where they had met the officials and arranged for their comfort with food and quilts. Later in the evening, we spotted a young man from Probationer's camp on the way to the school carrying food. The young men said that this sort of hospitality was necessary.

Back in the village, we joined a group of five Brahman canvassers heading toward the Harijan quarter. The Brahmans entered various Leatherworker homes. We glanced up and down the main Harijan lane and saw several groups at different locations. It was hard to recognize people because the men were wearing shawls which partly covered their faces. One of the Brahmans greeted one of Strongheart's sons, who assured the Brahman that his family would vote for Gentleman. Strongheart was really supporting Frontman. Strongheart's son smelled of liquor, and one of the Brahmans accused him of saying that he would vote for Gentleman while drinking in another candidate's camp. Strongheart's son then swore in the name of God that he was telling the truth. A drunken Leatherworker passed us on the way back from Probationer's house. The Brahmans finished their work in the Leatherworker houses, reassembled in the lane, and went home.

We headed toward Probationer's house accompanied by a young Jat from Probationer's party whom we call Boxer because we once saw him giving a rather good account of himself in a brief fight in the fields. On the way, we met two drunken Leatherworkers. At Probationer's house a grand party was in progress. There were bottles of country liquor everywhere and some of the rooms smelled of vomit. The Harijans and Potters had turned out in force, and we also saw Barbers and Watercarriers. Women were there as well as men, but they ate and drank in separate rooms. Not everyone was drunk, and some of the older Jats were quietly engaged in intense discussions. Probationer was in complete control. He greeted us and began to discuss his prospects. "My position is very sound," he said, "and I will win by a big margin. All the Sweepers, Leatherworkers, and Potters are with me. The rest will be clear by 6:00 p.m. tomorrow." A young intelligent Watercarrier also predicted victory for Probationer, at the same time expressing fear of

what might happen if Frontman won. He said, "If Probationer wins, everything will be all right, but if Frontman becomes pradhan, then Agitator will play all his usual politics and the whole village will suffer." While we were talking to the Watercarrier, some Brahmans came in smelling of liquor. Boxer explained that the Brahmans had been offered liquor at the home of one of Probationer's partisans because Probationer did not think it seemly to invite Brahmans to his own house.

We left Probationer's house accompanied by Boxer. As people left the party, they were waylaid by Frontman's supporters, carrying bottles of country liquor, who tried to solicit their votes. We went back to the Leatherworker quarter where we saw a group of Probationer's supporters standing just a few feet away from some of Frontman's partisans, one of whom carried a staff. One of Frontman's young men started in our direction to talk to us when a drunken Leatherworker lurched forward and embraced him. As the young Jat started to lead the Leatherworker away, Probationer's partisans became tense for fear of losing a vote. They told Frontman's canvasser to let the Leatherworker alone, but the young Jat was adamant. He said that since the Leatherworker had come to him, there was no reason for him to leave the man. Two of Probationer's partisans muttered that if Frontman's young supporter said anything more, they would tear him to pieces, while he proclaimed that he would die rather than abandon the Leatherworker. For a moment, a fight seemed likely, but the crisis passed and the young men gradually became calmer. Frontman's supporter took the drunken Leatherworker away. By the end of the evening, campaigning had almost become a matter of body snatching. Any Harijan who appeared in the lane would be caught by the group that could reach him first, led away, and his vote importuned. The main participants were the two Jat parties; the Brahmans were not much in evidence.

By a little after 10:00 p.m., the evening's activity had almost come to an end. There was a final hot rumor that excited the people at Probationer's house. Someone came to tell Probationer that the Brahmans had threatened to kill one of the Barbers if he failed to vote for Gentleman. A wave of indignation

followed, but we do not think that Probationer's partisans took the rumor at all seriously. Probationer's brother advised everyone to pay no attention, but in case something did happen, they could always go to confront the Brahmans.

It is noteworthy that the use of food and liquor to influence voting, so prominent in the Shanti Nagar campaign, seems to be rarely described in other studies of Indian rural elections. We ran across only two accounts that mentioned liquor whereas almost all reports note other techniques for garnering votes, such as canvassing and the use of handbills (of which sample ballots are perhaps the simplest form). Panchanadikar and Panchanadikar give an explicit but quite brief discussion of liquor and voting in their superb detailed study of an election in Mahi, Gujarat. A village politician, whom they describe as the "scheming genius of Mahi politics," was said to know "the fatal art of Mahi politics, namely, manipulating lower caste votes," which he achieved "due to his readiness to cater to their habitual caste weakness for drink" (Panchanadikar and Panchanadikar, 1980, pp. 98, 100). Yadava (1968a, p. 67) also notes that candidates in a Punjab village election gave "parties of sweets and wine in order to win the favour of voters." Yadava's candidates, like those from Mahi, concentrated such efforts among the lower castes (Yadava, 1968b, p. 903).

The strategy of concentrating on lower caste votes, as was the case in Shanti Nagar and the two studies cited just above, is simply practical politics. In villages where the lower castes represent a minority of the population and the high castes are divided along caste and factional lines, the low-caste vote will determine the outcome of the election. Gifts of food and liquor are effective for recruiting lower-caste votes, not so much because of a "weakness for drink," which is no monopoly of the low castes, but because of the relative monetary value of the comestibles and the symbolism of the gifts. For an agricultural laborer earning, at the time, less than one dollar (U.S.) a day, free meals are no small consideration, and if a few drinks make a hard life seem a bit more cheerful, so much the better. A few dozen drunks lurching about on election eve may not be too attractive in

the eyes of a sober observer, but no real harm was done, as drinking on this occasion led neither to violence nor to accidents. The most potentially dangerous groups on election eve were not the importuned voters but the hot-headed young canvassers. We are definitely not defending the practice of drinking. While in the 1950s, it was relatively insignificant, in 20 years it had grown into a major problem. Just among people whom we knew well, one was killed in a drunken accident, another was seriously injured, and Tippler had almost ruined himself physically by drinking and had damaged himself economically as well. The gravest alcohol problems seemed to occur among well-to-do upper caste males. As villagers have become more prosperous, alcohol has become a greater problem.

The distribution of food and liquor to low castes has both a traditional aspect and contemporary symbolism. Under the traditional *jajmani* system of economic interaction between castes, high-caste patrons paid their low-caste workers with food to a significant extent. Gifts of food at elections would therefore be a logical extension of traditional arrangements. However, in the context of the bargaining that accompanies democratic elections, a gift of comestibles takes on a new contemporary meaning. As a concession that a high-caste candidate must make to his low-caste constituency, it symbolizes the fact that the high castes must henceforth recognize the political power of the low castes. Moreover, the gift is not only a concession in its own right but also a symbol of more significant concessions to come, such as the distribution of village common land.

Concessions should not be interpreted as deference, however. In the context of the traditional caste hierarchy, gifts of food pass from high-caste to low-caste persons; on the other hand, a high-caste individual does not in general accept cooked food from the lower castes. Such one-way food transfers reaffirm the status of the high-caste donor in relation to the low-caste recipient. Thus, the transfer of food during political campaigns follows the caste-based rules of food exchange. Were a high-caste candidate publicly to eat the food of a Sweeper, the lowest of the castes in Shanti Nagar, he would symbolically be placing himself on the same level as a Sweeper, and

such a gesture at the present time would be impossible both socially and politically. Socially he would be outcaste, and politically he would lose almost all high-caste votes.

Canvassing is more an act of deference than gifts of comestibles, for the candidate must ask for support with a certain humility. However, the deferential aspects of canvassing can be minimized in several ways. For example, a candidate can assign the labor of canvassing to youthful supporters; Frontman and Probationer used this technique. In contrast, Gentleman, who as a Brahman was a member of the highest caste, seemed to do proportionately more canvassing himself. Another method to tone down the deferential aspect of canvassing is to travel with a large entourage; the candidate shows respect for the voter while at the same time displaying his own importance. There clearly has been a gradual decrease in the differences of status that are a part of the traditional social system. For example, one no longer sees so many small deferential gestures. However, it is our impression that although the low castes hoped for the elimination of status differences, they did not expect it in the near future. Hierarchy is ingrained.

### VILLAGERS' PREDICTIONS

Villagers generally agreed about the probable voting behavior of the major castes and factions. *Pana A* supported Frontman, and he would receive scattered votes from the Harijans and a few other castes. *Pana B* was behind Probationer, and he had the votes of most of the Harijans, almost all the Potters, and some support elsewhere. The Outside Brahmans would vote for Gentleman, as would a significant number of Jats. He also enjoyed a little support in other castes. The plans of the Inside Brahmans never became general knowledge until almost the last moment, and this uncertainty made it difficult to predict the outcome of the election. In general, it was the high-caste informants who based their predictions of the winner on the behavior of the Inside Brahmans. Low-caste respondents, on the other hand, paid little attention to Brahman factionalism, emphasizing instead the importance of the Harijan and Potter votes.

Actor expressed a common high-caste point of view, declaring two weeks before the election:

If the Brahmans vote as a bloc, Gentleman will win. No power could stop him. The election is between Probationer and Gentleman. Probationer is rich and can spend a lot of money on the election. But if the Brahmans are united, the other candidates have no chance. If the Brahmans are split, however, Gentleman has no chance.

The day before the election, Actor and Manipulator were discussing the probable result. Actor predicted that only one or two Brahman houses would defect and that a significant number of Jat votes would go to Gentleman. "In that case," said Manipulator, "Gentleman will win." A young Brahman man analyzed the vote in much the same way nine days before the election. He said that if the Brahmans united, Gentleman would win. A few Brahmans would defect but Gentleman would pick up enough Harijan votes to balance the defections. Moreover, a significant number of Jats would back him. He predicted that the real fight would be between Gentleman and Probationer. A Brahman woman and man echoed the common view that a united Brahman community could elect Gentleman. But the man added that they were not united. Using a simile that we had heard applied to the Brahmans before, he said, "The Brahmans are like dogs and fight among themselves."

Harijan forecasters emphasized the importance of the low-caste vote while not even mentioning the possible effects of Brahman factionalism. Two Sweeper men said that the contest was essentially between Frontman and Probationer and that Gentleman had no chance. They predicted flatly that "Probationer is going to win because he will sweep the Potters and Sweepers and to some extent the Leatherworkers. Three Sweeper families will vote for Frontman but that won't make any difference." A Leatherworker man said that most Leatherworkers would back Probationer but that some voters would choose Frontman or Gentleman. He himself planned to vote for Frontman, who he thought would win. Another Leatherworker man gave us a

brief but precise analysis and prediction. He said that Frontman was fighting the election with his lineage votes and two or three families of Leatherworkers. Gentleman had the Brahmins and a few Harijans. Probationer had a relatively small number of lineage votes but most of the Harijans would back him. "The contest is between Probationer and Gentleman, and Probationer will win." We did not attempt an extensive survey among the Harijans, but our several respondents were generally convinced that Probationer would win.

Of the candidates themselves, Probationer was confident, Gentleman was hopeful, believing two days before the election that the Brahmins were united, and both Frontman and Tippler predicted victory. Probationer knew how to count votes. He said with complete certainty:

I have 250 votes. There are 633 registered voters, but some people are out of town or may not vote for other reasons so that the total vote will be about 500. Tippler will get 40 or 50 votes so that with two other candidates in the field, 250 votes will surely win.

He knew that the lower castes were with him and predicted victory by a big margin. His popularity among the low castes was merited. As one Jat man observed, "Probationer is the one candidate who is good to the lower castes." Frontman also counted votes. He said that he was sure of over 200 votes, which would be enough to win. For his part, Gentleman predicted a close election and could not name the winner. A fortnight before the election, Tippler was confident that he would win although he qualified his prediction in a rather unusual way. He said, "All the nice people of the village will vote for me but all the bad characters and liars will vote for the others. So this is the time to check how many good people are in the village."

On the basis of our pre-election interviews, it seemed that the Inside Brahmins were the key to the election. If they backed Gentleman, the election would be very close; without them, Gentleman had no chance. The day before the election, Manipulator told us, "The election is between Probationer and Gentleman and certain events have taken place that

give the lead to Probationer." The "events" turned out to be the defection of a number of Brahmin families, all but one of them Inside Brahmins. We heard that the Brahmins held a meeting on election eve to try to re-establish unity in their ranks and that they took a renewed pledge of solidarity, but the meeting apparently failed to halt the erosion. The problem of the Brahmins seemed to be the lack of a leader. Manipulator told us, "Many years ago the position of the Brahmins was good. There was unity and they were strong in the village. Today there is no wise leader among the Brahmins and people do not listen to Brahmin men who are wise." He said that there was no major divisive issue among Brahmins. However, the traditional factions were always in the background, so a strong leader would be needed to hold them together. Gentleman was not the strong leader that the situation required, and his position began to deteriorate as Inside Brahmin families slipped away.

## ELECTION DAY

Election day was a holiday, foggy and chilly in the morning. The polls opened at 8:00 a.m. We went to the Harijan quarter at 6:00 a.m. because we were told that canvassers would be working in the area to remind those Harijans committed to their candidate to be sure to vote. However, no one was about at that hour, probably because many people were tired from the election eve activity. Later in the morning, we began to encounter a few people clustered in small groups, talking earnestly. At the schoolhouse that was to serve as the polling place, young men representing Frontman and Probationer were serving tea to the election officials and police and clearing away the bedding. Then they helped the officials to arrange tables and chairs in preparation for the voting. We briefly visited the cultivated fields only to find them deserted.

Outside the polls along the edge of the road that led to the schoolhouse, the supporters of each candidate had spread a cloth and established a camp. Voters on the way to the polls went to the camp of the candidate whom they favored. Usually well dressed for the occasion, women generally went to the polls in groups based largely on caste and kinship,



Fig. 2. Women on the way to the polls.

singing on the way, just as they did passing through the streets when they celebrated a festival. The attendants at each camp had a copy of the official list of voters. They checked the name of each voter against the list and then wrote the voter's name, roll number, and also the name of his or her father or husband on a slip of paper. The voter took the slip of paper to the polls where it served as an initial identification. The camps of Frontman, Probationer, and Gentleman were well staffed, but Tippler's camp was a joke. No adult was there to represent Tippler, and children were playing on the cloth.

Two queues of voters, one of women and one of men, waited patiently outside the polls. A policeman stood guard at the door. People due at city jobs at a specific time were permitted to advance to the head of the queue. In the middle of the morning, when the queues were quite long, an inspector arrived with a few policemen. He entered the polls and asked

the presiding officer if the voting was running smoothly. The official replied that everything was fine. The inspector looked around the room and left.

The polls were arranged as diagrammed in figure 5. Along one wall near the door stood a table at which five election officials were seated. A voter entered and handed the identification slip to the first official who, having matched the voter's name against his own list, called out the name and number of the voter so that his or her identity could be heard and verified, or an objection made, if necessary, by any of six representatives of the candidates (known as polling agents) sitting at a nearby table. Frontman, Probationer, and Gentleman were each represented by two men. No one was there to represent Tippler, but he himself spent considerable time at the polls and served in effect as his own representative. After having been announced by the first official and passed by the candidates'



Fig. 3. Camp of one of the candidates on the roadside near the polls. Sample ballots and a copy of the voters' list can be seen on the ground.

representatives, the voter moved along in front of the officials' table, receiving a pink ballot for the circle panchayat from the second official, a green ballot for *pradhan* from the third official, and a white ballot for ordinary member from the fourth official. The fifth official marked the voter's finger with ink to prevent multiple voting. A sixth official stood near the three screened voting booths to help elderly persons drop their ballots into the slot in the metal ballot box situated in the center of the room. The presiding officer sat at a table opposite the other officials where he could see and supervise everything. His major duty during the balloting was to adjudicate disputes, of which there were a fair number.

We observed several disputes and chal-

lenges, all of which the presiding officer handled tactfully and effectively. The common practice of a young person marking ballots for an older, especially female, blind or partially blind relative occasionally led to challenges. We observed several instances of young men who marked ballots for elderly female relatives, after which the women gave their ballots to the election official who put them into the ballot box. Such episodes usually proceeded systematically and without incident. Some really old and feeble people were brought to the polls. Proxy balloting was watched closely by the candidates' representatives, and they were quick to challenge irregularities. For example, a young man marked ballots for two elderly widows of Gentleman's party, but one of Probationer's

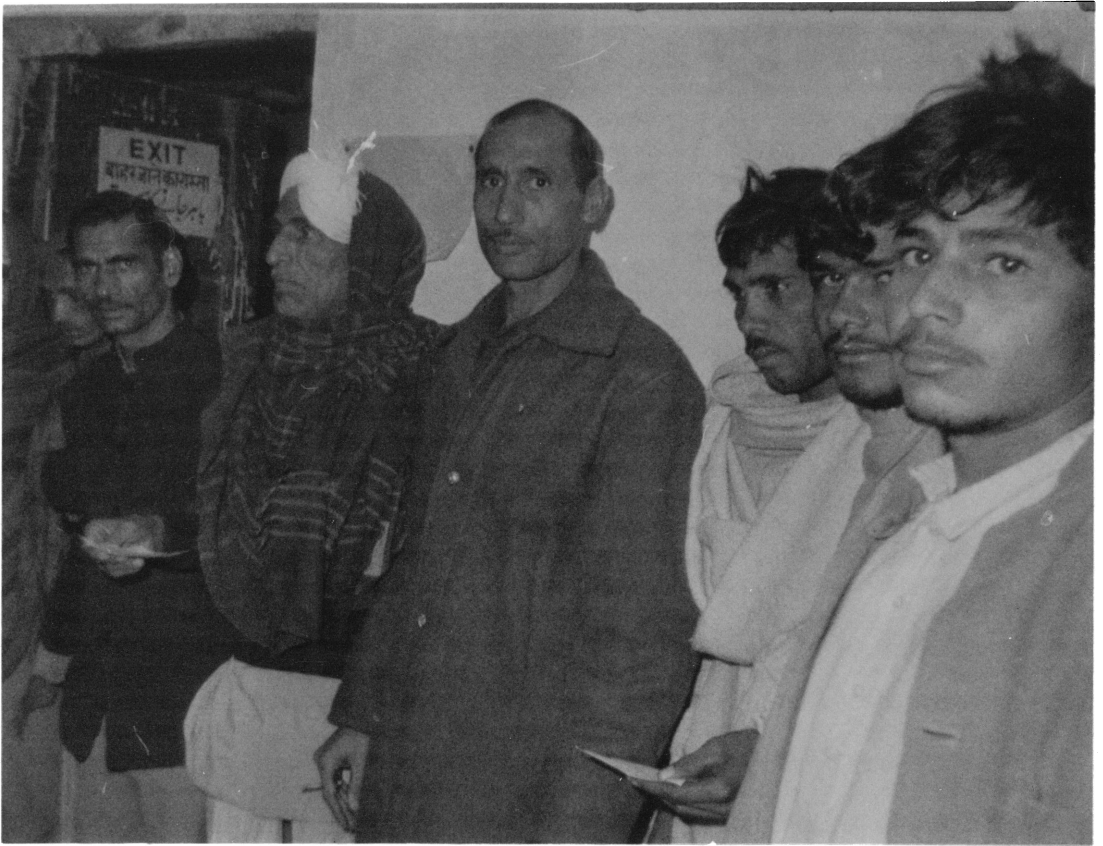


Fig. 4. Men in line waiting to vote.

representatives objected, pointing out that a proxy can act for only one person. The presiding officer explained that restriction to the young man and then offered to mark the second widow's ballots himself, but an agent of Gentleman objected. A compromise was reached when the presiding officer asked for a different proxy, and a young Brahman of Gentleman's party stepped forward and marked the ballots.

A similar situation cropped up an hour later when a man carried his father on his back to the polls and marked the father's ballots for him. The two representatives of Frontman protested that the son had marked the ballots without consulting his father. The presiding officer suspended all voting, had the doors closed, made the old man sit on a chair, and asked him for whom he wished to vote. The old man whispered into the ear of the

presiding officer who then announced that the ballots for pradhan and for ordinary members had been marked correctly but that the ballot for circle panchayat was faulty. The presiding officer suggested that the faulty ballot be cancelled, but the representatives withdrew their protest, a move which indicated chiefly the relative unimportance of the election for circle panchayat. All ballots were therefore deposited in the ballot box, and the voting started again. A comparable scenario was enacted when a man marked an old woman's ballot without consulting her. A challenge was upheld by the presiding officer. In this case, the official did not halt the voting to question the woman.

The presiding officer had to rule on two other matters while we were at the polls. A young man of Probationer's party approached the presiding officer on behalf of a



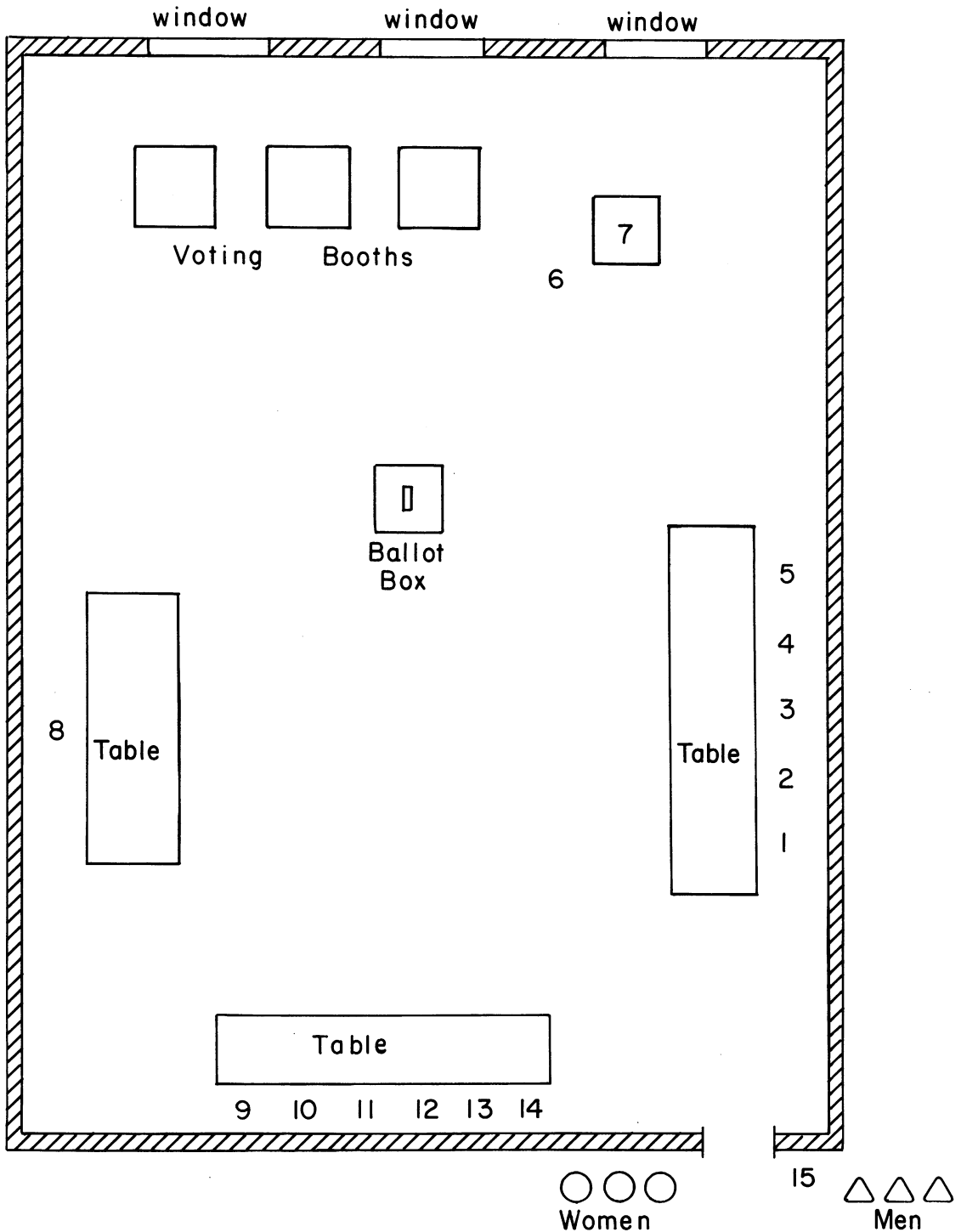


Fig. 5. Plan of polls (not to scale), Shanti Nagar, election of 1977. Numbers 1-6, election officials; 7, table; 8, presiding officer; 9-14, representatives of the candidates; 15, policeman.



Fig. 6. Election officials.

female relative who had either just given birth or was about to do so. In any case, she could not come to the polls but wanted to vote. The presiding officer told the young man that the woman would have to come to the polls if she wanted to vote. The other case was that of a woman who attempted to vote, only to find that someone else had given her number and voted in her place. Thus, she could not vote. Despite the precautions taken at the polls to establish the identity of voters, such a deception, or mistake, could take place for two main reasons. The polling agents were all men and in all likelihood did not know some of the women particularly well. Second, married women covered their faces before senior men, a practice which would make it difficult to identify relatively unfamiliar women. When the presiding officer ruled that the woman could not vote, Tippler protested and threatened a lawsuit. The presiding officer suggested that the woman mark a ballot

and it would be set aside pending the outcome of the suit. If it were successful, the vote could then be counted. The presiding officer tactfully advised Tippler that a lawsuit would be expensive and that it would be best to drop the matter. Although the presiding officer skillfully handled the incident, it clearly upset him. While we were in the room, a young man from Probationer's party brought food for the election officials.

We left the room for a while and went outside into the adjoining schoolyard, where many people were standing. People were tense and a dispute broke out between two men. A police constable from Shanti Nagar intervened and calmed the disputants. The police sent from Delhi to control the crowd did nothing, for they knew the local man to be a policeman and saw that he was handling the situation. We found it difficult to escape from the schoolyard because of the many people idling about, awaiting the results of the vot-

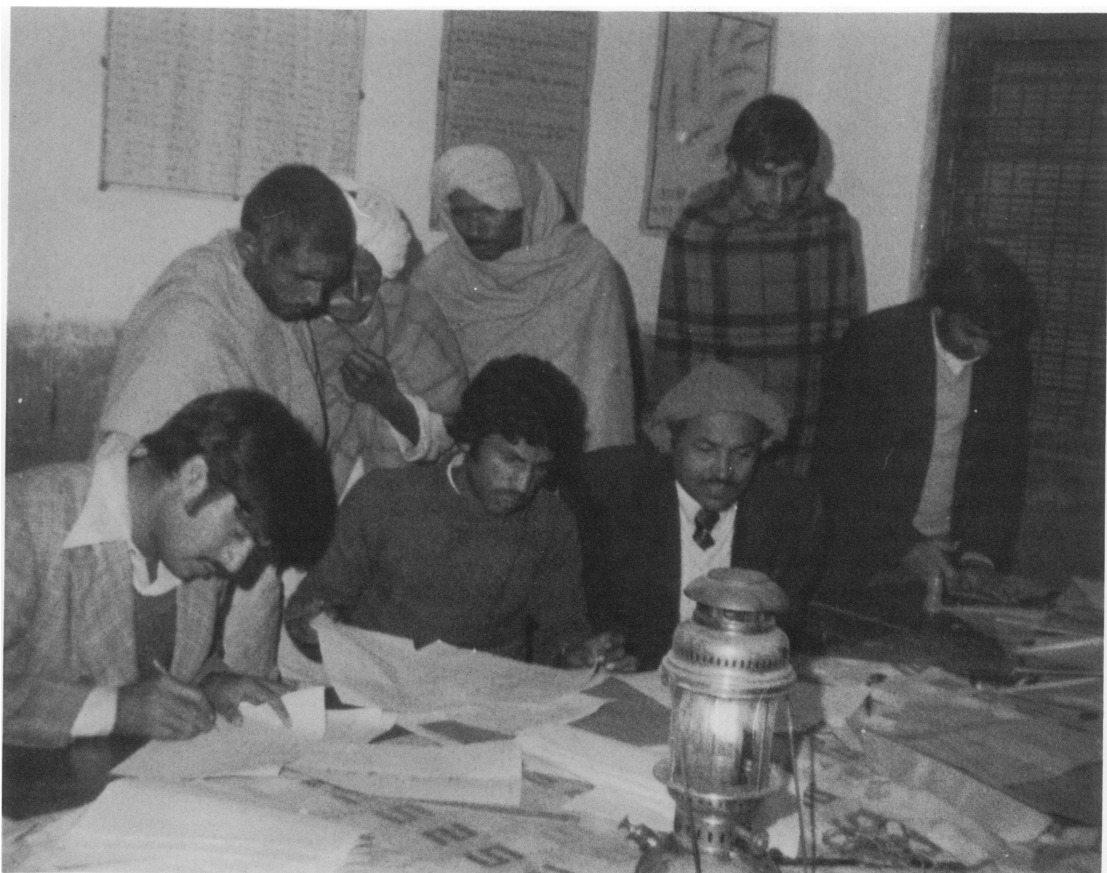


Fig. 7. Election officials counting the ballots.

ing. With little better to do, people crowded around us and asked quite detailed questions about American elections. When they had exhausted that topic, they began to question us about agriculture in America.

Exactly at 3:00 p.m., the officials stopped the polling and sealed the ballot box. There was a 10-minute interval while the last voters departed; then the doors were closed. The presiding officer asked the candidates, their representatives, and the other election officials to sit down, the seal of the ballot box was broken and the ballots were sorted by color. The presiding officer made a brief speech to the effect that winning and losing are two sides of a coin and the candidates who lose should not take the defeat very seriously. Everyone was watching the ballots very carefully. Frontman, Gentleman, and Tippler were sitting beside the presiding of-

ficer while Probationer sat at the back of the room. An election official sealed the unused ballots. One of Probationer's young men brought tea for the officials.

At this point, the police who had earlier visited Shanti Nagar paid a return visit and asked how things were going. The presiding officer assured them that there were no problems, that the voting had just ended, and that they were about to start counting the ballots. Before leaving, the police announced that in a neighboring village, 90 percent of the voters had cast ballots, and the presiding officer responded that the vote in Shanti Nagar had also been heavy. After the delegation of police left, Probationer's assistant offered tea to Gentleman, but he refused. Then Probationer himself asked Gentleman to have some tea, and Gentleman accepted, as did Tippler.

The counting of ballots began with the

elimination of invalid votes, such as those with no marks or extra marks. During the process of identifying invalid ballots, everyone stood up and watched intently. After the elimination of the invalid ballots, the votes for the office of *pradhan* were counted. The votes for the other offices were counted next, but the excitement and tension ended at 4:15 p.m. when the winner of the election for *pradhan* was announced.

Probationer won in a landslide. He received 229 votes of a total of 503 valid ballots. Gentleman won 135 votes; Frontman, 130 votes; Tippler, 9 votes; and 34 ballots were invalid. A Barber, Leatherworker, Potter, and Sweeper won four of the nine non-*pradhan* seats on the village panchayat and Jats won the other five. The Leatherworker and Sweeper were elected to the two places reserved for Harijans, and a Jat from *pana B* won the seat reserved for women. Although the Harijans ran as candidates from Frontman's camp, they probably supported Probationer as panchayat members. The Barber and Potter ran as representatives of Probationer's party. Only one of the male Jat panchs represented *pana B*; the other three were from *pana A* and therefore opposed Probationer. Thus, Probationer had a majority of six panchs to three. We heard that the male Jat from *pana B* was later elected vice-*pradhan*. In our opinion, the surprising feature of the new village panchayat was that the Brahmins, the second largest of the village castes, were unrepresented. As for the circle panchayat, the three successful candidates were a Carpenter, Potter, and a Jat from *pana A*.

A total of 537 people went to the polls. Although there were 633 registered voters, the list contained the names of deceased persons or people who lived so far away from Shanti Nagar that they could not possibly have returned to vote. We estimate that there were 589 persons who could have voted, which means that a minimum of 91 percent of the available voters cast ballots. We were conservative in culling the voters' list and left the names of some individuals living some distance out of town who nonetheless could have traveled to Shanti Nagar to vote. It seems likely that the turnout of voters exceeded 95 percent of those who were genuinely available.

In addition to the high percentage of voter participation, two other aspects of the election were noteworthy. First, there was almost no trace of disorder on election day; although the election was tense and emotional, the villagers acted with great decorum. Second, aside from Tippler's displeasure with one decision of the presiding officer, there were no complaints concerning the conduct of the election by the officials, and not even the slightest breath of scandal. We thought that the performance of the officials, especially the presiding officer, was impressive in view of the fair number of rather difficult judgments which had to be made quickly and decisively.

Despite the admonition of the presiding officer that losing ought not to be taken too seriously, Frontman and Gentleman found it painful. When the counting began, Frontman saw that the size of his bundle of votes was smaller than the other bundles and left the room. Gentleman also left before the tabulation had been completed. Probationer cheerfully left the room for a while but later returned. Counting continued until about 6:40 p.m. when all the results were declared and the winners signed the required forms. Then everyone left the schoolhouse, a smiling Probationer leading a crowd of supporters to his house for a victory celebration.

## ELECTION NIGHT

At Probationer's house, everyone crowded into a large room to listen to speeches before beginning the victory party, which was the main business of the evening. Probationer was sitting in the middle of the all-male crowd, which we estimated at about 40 men and 30 boys. A 37-year-old Inside Brahman was the first speaker. His participation as a speaker and the presence of Inside Brahmins at the celebration confirmed the almost universal prediction that the Inside Brahmins would desert Gentleman. He spoke essentially as follows:

I thank all the brothers who have voted Probationer to victory. I especially thank the Harijans. After a long time, distinctions between people on the basis of caste are ended. Probationer is not a *pradhan* of the Jats but of the entire village, and for him every man of the village is the same. Now

the path is open for Probationer to show his ability, and we are sure that he will prove himself. He will not act all by himself; we are all with him. And if he does anything wrong, we will catch his ear.

The crowd applauded and the Brahman sat down.

A 35-year-old Jat of *pana* B spoke next. He was the only person to show much emotion during the victory celebration and so we name him Emotional. His face shone with joy, and later in the evening he danced and sang with abandon, in the end becoming vulgar and abusive. He said:

Probationer's victory is everyone's victory. It is a victory over shrewdness [probably an allusion to Agitator]. I thank all the brothers. Now we all have to march with Probationer, shoulder to shoulder, but if he does anything wrong, it becomes our [the people's] duty to correct him. Previously the Harijans were given no hearing, but that will no longer happen because the support of the Harijans is the reason that Probationer won.

There was some applause and Emotional sat down.

A 45-year-old Jat of *pana* B was the next speaker. He said:

The pradhan should work for the welfare of the village. The village decided that it did not want any of the old pradhans but wanted a new pradhan. He is young and so the old people should put their hands on his head and guide him. There are no longer any caste barriers. If anyone sees the pradhan going in the wrong way, he should catch him and try to correct him.

There was light applause after the speech.

Next a 32-year-old Leatherworker arose to say a few words, and he was followed by a 50-year-old Jat of *pana* B. Their remarks were similar to the three speeches quoted above. Finally, Probationer stood up and said:

I am very thankful to everyone. I will work for the improvement of the village and will be concerned with the sorrows of every man. Anyone who has a problem can come to me. I will solve all problems.

The Brahman who made the first speech then stood and announced that the main purpose of the evening was to celebrate and that liquor would be provided. He told people to form small groups and to sit in whichever rooms they wished. He said that the groups should not be formed on the basis of caste, however. The boys were sent away so that the men could drink. The men split into four or five groups of eight or so members and went to different rooms where they sat on cots talking quietly and drinking. Although there was some mixing, the groups were based mainly on caste. The party was good humored. We were served tea and salty snacks. A few men who probably did not drink were also offered tea.

After everyone had dispersed to other rooms, Probationer came to greet us and we congratulated him. He thanked us and reminded us that he had predicted victory by 100 votes, and that was what happened. Earlier in the evening, we had noticed a financial transaction that we did not understand, and Probationer explained. He said that the Harijans had collected 221 rupees for village improvement and had given the money to him. He had added 301 rupees for a total of 522 rupees and had deposited the money with a senior Inside Brahman.

The most noteworthy feature of the speeches at the victory party was the apparent satisfaction with which the high-caste speakers accepted the decline of barriers based on caste. This assertion was exaggerated; caste barriers in some important areas, such as employment and education, had disappeared or become much weaker, but the importance of caste in daily life was by no means negligible. Moreover, the speakers were relatively young and liberal and expressed a modern point of view. However, many quite traditional people living in the village would not attend a political drinking party and were little inclined to discard all caste restrictions. One could not live in the village and casually infringe caste norms without provoking comment. This outlook applied even to foreigners whose sometimes odd behavior was usually excused on the grounds that they knew no better. For example, we once had to conduct a Sweeper, a member of the lowest caste, to

the second floor of a Brahman house, so that an interview could take place. In passing through the first floor, we noticed that the bottom of the staircase lay close to the cooking area, which could be ritually polluted by the touch of a low-caste person. The minute we saw this arrangement, we expected trouble because climbing to the second floor necessitated passing very close to the stove. Sure enough, a few minutes after our arrival on the second floor, the senior woman of the household appeared and called one of us aside. She said:

This is a Brahman's house and that Sweeper has come inside. It is a bad thing. The Sweeper is sitting on a Brahman's cot, which is really a bad thing. In any case, do not offer him tea because if a Sweeper eats and drinks from the same dishes that we [Brahmans] use, that would be even worse. Please do not spoil my dharma.

To win the Harijan vote, a candidate and his partisans would have to avoid as much as possible this traditional point of view.

All the speakers raised the possibility that the new pradhan might misbehave or make mistakes, in which case the community would have to correct him. We suspect that this warning may be a more or less standard feature of the kind of speech called for in a situation such as the election night party. On the other hand, the speakers may have been thinking specifically of Probationer's history and temperament. Several villagers had pointed out to us that one could not be sure how any pradhan would behave until he took office. Such concern might have been aroused more by a man like Probationer than by someone with a less turbulent background. Speakers also expressed such standard sentiments as the need for working together and the value of guidance by elderly people. Probationer's vows to work for the welfare of the village and to help people with their problems were customary whenever an officeholder or candidate expressed his intentions.

As people began leaving Probationer's party, Boxer invited us to visit Emotional's house where a number of men were drinking to celebrate Probationer's victory. We noticed Leatherworkers, Brahmans, and Jats, and a

few men whom we did not recognize. Emotional arrived, rather drunk, and for some reason began to discuss his family finances. He mentioned more than 50,000 rupees in cash assets and concluded, illogically, that we were sitting in a poor man's hut. He began to speak in a vulgar manner and danced using obscene gestures. We tried to leave but could not escape gracefully. Then a Barber who lived nearby arrived and shouted at Emotional, scolding him for his vulgarity. He said that there were women in the surrounding houses and that Emotional should be ashamed of his behavior. The confrontation between Emotional and the Barber gave us the opportunity to slip away.

### ANALYSIS OF THE VOTE

Because the village was small and people knew one another very well, some could predict rather accurately how the various castes and factions would vote. From our point of view, however, prediction was difficult for several reasons. We could never be sure of the validity of our informants' testimony; they depended on gossip and their general knowledge rather than on up-to-date surveys. Further, we used genealogical information to determine the membership of the factions among the Leatherworkers rather than conducting interviews directly on the subject. We could therefore have misclassified some families. However, the major uncertainty affecting prediction was the behavior of the Inside Brahmans. Statements to the effect that they would defect to Probationer had to be balanced against Brahman efforts to maintain caste unity. Only during the last few hours before election day did it become reasonably clear that the Inside Brahmans would generally vote for Probationer. In any case, by combining in one analysis the predictions of the villagers and the total vote that each candidate received on election day, we can make a reasonable estimate of how castes and factions voted. The analysis is presented in table 1.

It is clear that the Inside Brahman vote swung the election to Probationer. He won by 94 votes over Gentleman. Had 48 of the estimated 59 Inside Brahman votes gone to

TABLE 1  
Estimated Votes for Each Candidate by Caste  
and Faction Based on Villagers' Predictions:  
Shanti Nagar, Election of 1977

Caste Faction	Proba- tioner	Front- man	Gen- tle- man	Tip- pler
Bairagi Beggar	15			
Baniya Merchant	4			
Brahman Priest ( <i>Pana C</i> )				
Inside	59			
Outside	4		65	3
Chamar Leatherworker				
Strongheart		25		
Other	39			
Chhipi Dyer	2			
Chuhra Sweeper	30	9		
Gola Potter	33		3	
Jat Farmer				
<i>Pana A</i>				
Devious			34	
Actor		20		
Agitator	8	62		3
<i>Pana B</i>				
Probationer	28			
Other			15	
Jhinvar Watercarrier	6		3	
Khati Carpenter			7	
Lohar Blacksmith	5	4		
Mali Gardener			2	
Nai Barber	15			
Total estimated votes	248	120	129	6
Total actual votes	229	130	135	9

Gentleman, Probationer would have lost to Gentleman by two votes. Agitator, the veteran village politician, needed no elaborate analysis to understand this point. He had once told us to visit him and he "would tell us everything about the election." Shortly after

the election we encountered him in the street. He was in a chatty mood, and so we asked him to explain what had happened. Not a man to waste words, he replied, "The Brahmans voted for Probationer," and walked away. We were a bit embarrassed by the episode because the conversation took place not far from a group of Brahmans, and Agitator had a loud voice. Not only Agitator but all the villagers could easily explain what had happened. But no one gave a really good explanation of why the Brahmans could not stick together. Maybe we expected too dramatic a reason for their factionalism, such as a murder or major litigation. The truth may have been just as the villagers told it: the lack of a strong leader combined with the traditional Brahman factions and a fair number of minor squabbles, insults, and irritations between the two groups would have made it difficult for the Brahmans to unite behind a single candidate.

Probationer's support was more evenly distributed among castes than that of either Frontman or Gentleman. Probationer's largest single bloc of votes came from the Inside Brahmans and amounted to roughly a quarter of his total. In comparison, Frontman received roughly half of his votes from members of his own lineage, and about half of Gentleman's supporters were Outside Brahmans. Villagers pointed out that one could not fight an election only on the basis of lineage (party) votes. To win, a candidate had to make a broader appeal. With the smallest party base of support, Probationer won the election partly by cultivating the Harijans and Potters. Because the other castes were divided, it proved to be the winning strategy.

## AFTERMATH

Immediately after winning the village election, Probationer made an effort to gain the chairmanship of the Block Panchayat *Samiti* (committee). This body had 58 members, among them the pradhans of 46 villages, 11 governmental delegates including two members of Parliament, and one representative of an agricultural marketing cooperative society. The chairman, elected from among the pradhans, was a relatively important official

because he sanctioned development projects in the villages of the block. Less than a week after the village election, we encountered Probationer passing through a nearby village. He said that he was busy going around meeting people and campaigning. He claimed to have spent 10,000 to 12,000 rupees on the village election and was willing to spend twice that much money to win the chairmanship of the block panchayat. We were a bit startled by



his ambition. In any case, his bid failed. He later told us that the chairman was elected by an 11-member committee of the *pradhans*. He received four votes as did another candidate; a third candidate had the other three votes. One *pradhan* was given the power of breaking the tie, and he selected Probationer's opponent. We had earlier heard a rumor that Probationer was supported by a very wealthy man, the ex-*pradhan* of a neighboring village. The man who selected Probationer's opponent was reputed to be an enemy of Probationer's supporter.

During the four months following the election, we became aware of only one development project undertaken by Probationer, but it was a rather considerable effort. One evening, we saw a gang of 12 laborers from Bihar digging earth from one of the village ponds. The earth was loaded into a trolley (metal cart) and transported to the street on the west side of the village where it was used to raise the level of the street. Thus, the project had two coordinated aspects. It served to enlarge one of the village ponds, which would ultimately be given a brick bottom to keep the water clean enough for bathing. In addition, it improved a village street, lying so low that water collected in it during the rainy season and mosquitoes bred there. Once the surface of the street had been raised to the desired level, it would be paved with bricks. The work was being done in *pana* B, Probationer's *pana*, which had been largely ignored when *pana* A held the *pradhanship*. For example, the part of the main village street that lay in *pana* A was paved with bricks, but the section in *pana* B was unpaved. The bricks stopped right at the boundary (unmarked) between *panas* A and B.

Probationer told us that the Delhi Municipal Corporation was paying for the work on the pond and street. The general process of obtaining support begins with a resolution by the village panchayat which is then sent to the Block Development Officer who initially approves it. He sends it to the appropriate officers who make an inspection to see if the project is justified and also estimate the cost. If they approve, the *pradhan* calls for bids. When the work is finished, the *pradhan* informs the Block Development Officer who sends an officer to make another inspection

and to issue a certificate of completion, if warranted. The *pradhan* then pays the contractor.

Probationer had other projects in mind, just as he had pledged during his campaign. He wanted to pave the road around the village and plant trees along it. He would also pave the principal road in the fields and install lights on both roads. He planned a dispensary and an animal hospital in the village. However, Probationer lost some of his enthusiasm for the job. Four months after the election, he told us:

My enthusiasm is down. Party politics bother me. I will go ahead and do all these projects but I do not have the same enthusiasm. I have a majority in the panchayat and have no problems there, but individuals are trying to block my plans. I could make a report to the police but am waiting to see if the involved individuals will adjust. The problem is that farmers on each side of the road around the village (*phirni*) have taken one-third, leaving a road only one-third as wide as it should be, and they won't let me do the village work on the *phirni*. There are so many things that I want to do but there are hindrances and I am afraid to go ahead. The planting of trees presents problems. The Government does not supply trained gardeners and also the trees need water. Moreover, children may pull them up.

At this point in the interview, a Barber, one of Probationer's supporters, arrived and the talk turned to the possibility of building a hospital in the immediate area. Both Probationer and the Barber observed that the idea had been under consideration sometime earlier, but the villagers objected on the grounds that a hospital would attract their relatives from out of town who would bother them.

Probationer had also pledged to settle disputes and to solve problems. We asked him what he had done in this regard, and he mentioned four specific disputes that he had settled. A spectator commented that Probationer wanted to settle disputes in the village so that money would not be wasted. Probationer was not in a mood to discuss this aspect of his activities and kept referring to party pol-

itics, which he regarded as evil. The other villagers would generally have agreed with him, but nonetheless parties were very important. Although party politics, especially Brahman factionalism, had been basic to Probationer's victory, he now had to contend with party opposition in his new role as a responsible official, expected to handle effectively all manner of village affairs. The effort needed to overcome party opposition seemed to be tiring him. He also had to endure a certain amount of what we took to be unjustified covert criticism. For example, three expensive tubewell motors had recently been stolen, and villagers were dissatisfied with the alleged inaction of the police. Tippler seized on the affair to charge Probationer with a lack of initiative, as if the pradhan were expected to overcome police inertia and force them into action.

Some immediate problems facing Probationer and all the pradhans of the area were made clear during a meeting of the Block Panchayat Committee about four months after the election. For half an hour or so before the pradhans began to take the floor to express their major concerns, the Block Development Officer suggested, or announced, a variety of schemes for improving the villages and for aiding the poor and unemployed. Among them was the Block Development Officer's suggestion to turn the village common land into forests, a scheme not acceptable to any of the pradhans, who pointed out that it would in any case do nothing to help the poor and unemployed. Instead, the pradhans proposed encouraging various occupations such as animal husbandry, tailoring, and food processing. The Block Development Officer suggested that such occupations be implemented in the women's domain, for the investment cost would be low and profits high. We note that the urban officials at this meeting were men and had an unrealistic idea of how much time women had to spare. In fact, most women worked hard for long hours and had little leisure. For their part, the pradhans believed that businesses based on traditional items would be more successful than unfamiliar ventures and they preferred home industries to factories. They emphasized that training was essential for success in business and said that it would be helpful if the training currently offered at

various industrial training institutes could also be made available at the Block Development Office. In addition to training, the pradhans asked that the Government make loans for such small industries and also arrange to market the finished goods.

The Block Development Officer made an announcement concerning the formation of women's societies. He informed the pradhans that UNICEF (United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund) had begun a project for the training and advancement of women that involved financial assistance and also the distribution of prizes for the best work. The Block Development Officer pointed out that the women's societies had to be registered with the Director of Industries before seeking any help. The pradhans dug in their heels at this requirement. They said that it was too much trouble to go to the Director's office where the rules were long and confusing. They wanted the Block Development Officer to take care of the registration.

The Block Development Officer next reminded the pradhans about preparing the budgets for their respective villages, pointing out that the budgets had to be approved in a meeting of the village council (*gram sabha*) attended by at least one-third of the members. The Block Development Officer recognized that this condition was difficult to meet and suggested a way out of the dilemma. He then announced a scheme having to do with tubewells and invited applications. The pradhans complained that they had submitted applications for other schemes but nothing had come of them.

After a little more than half an hour devoted to such announcements, the pradhans suddenly began to talk among themselves; then one of them stood and made a speech about the problems that seemed to be most on their minds. First, he stated that malaria had become a menace in all the villages and asked the Block Development Officer to do something about it. Then he criticized the land consolidation program because the roads and lanes drawn on the maps did not exist on the ground, having been encroached upon by farmers, and the situation was causing many fights. He asked for governmental intervention. His third complaint concerned the problem that arose when a panchayat tem-

porarily annexed barren private land to the village common land and then had to return it to its owner when it again became cultivable. In practice, the real owner might lose the land because illegal occupants had begun to cultivate it. The issue caused disputes and fights. Legal action was required to evict the illegal occupants, with the result that pradhans and panchayat secretaries had to spend many days in court.

The pradhans made known that a shortage of buffalo and zebu bulls was causing great hardship to the villagers. They passed a resolution asking the Government to provide bulls. They also asked that the Block Development Officer act to insure a regular supply of electricity in all villages (electrical failures were common). It was pointed out that no government agency kept a record of the ownership of land in the village habitation site (records were kept only of the cultivated fields), and the pradhans decided that they and the panchayat secretaries should maintain an Immobile Property Register. A few other complaints were made, but the pradhans agreed that the greatest problem in all the villages was the illegal occupancy of village common land.

Toward the end of an hour's discussion of these issues, one of the pradhans stood and made a general pronouncement about the condition of pradhans. He said, "If individuals object to my projects what can I do? A pradhan has no status and cannot expect help from any quarter. Where can a pradhan go for help? What is the fun of being pradhan if I cannot do anything for the village?" Other pradhans joined him almost in a chorus: "Pradhans have no power and their resolutions are worthless. Pradhans can do their work only through personal power and influence. They should not expect any outside help." A pradhan concluded the meeting by alluding to widespread fraud involving a program to assist villagers to buy water buffalo. He said that a pradhan is in a bad position because he has to verify all sales under the program and cannot refuse to verify fraudulent sales for fear of spoiling relations with the villagers. The pradhan complained that rules had been drawn up but "if someone breaks them, the pradhan has no power to punish him or to do anything about it. The rules are just like impotent buffalo bulls."

The different views of the Block Development Officer and the pradhans regarding village governance and development were manifest in this meeting. The Block Development Officer considered the pradhans to be chiefly agents of community development through which projects generally conceived at upper governmental levels would be funneled into the villages. For the Block Development Officer, development meant primarily material and social improvement through introducing technology, such as more tubewells, innovative use of what he took to be relatively idle resources, such as village common land, or encouraging segments of the village population that he thought were underemployed, such as women. He showed no interest in improving the harmony of village life and was only mildly sympathetic about the political and administrative problems that pradhans faced in their own villages and with the Delhi Administration.

The pradhans, on the other hand, made harmony in village life their chief concern. They wanted more effective governmental assistance with the major cause of contention in the villages, the encroachment on village common land. They also decided to create records of landownership in the habitation site in order to avoid disputes over specific parcels of land. They valued material improvements, of course, such as bulls, electricity, and protection from malaria. But they lived in villages, whereas high government officials did not, and hoped to hold turmoil to a minimum. They wanted governmental help in this regard: among other reasons, they were too closely involved with the land and the people fighting over it to have adequate freedom of action.

The pradhans' complaints of their lack of power appear to be a paradox when juxtaposed with the villagers' statements about the power inherent in the office. One of the prime motives for becoming pradhan is to obtain this power or at least to deny it to one's enemies. Moreover, the importance of the position is apparent even to the casual observer, for village development projects largely result from the initiative of the pradhan and are carried out under his control. However, while a pradhan can apply for governmental funds, he cannot easily enlist government power in a village fight with a contending party that

wants to be obstructive. If it is true that personal power and influence are more important in dealing with the Government than the status of the pradhan, then a pradhan confronted by a rich and influential leader of another party might indeed feel himself to be powerless. Although Probationer won the election in Shanti Nagar, Agitator was not without recourse, and we would expect that he would prove himself quite capable of looking to his own interests and those of his party.

That Probationer found the role of pradhan to be difficult and somewhat discouraging is no particular reflection on him. He was head of a village of over 1300 persons with a substantial physical plant of roads, ponds, and common lands. He had to deal with village politics on the one hand and the Delhi Administration on the other. He received neither salary nor expenses (except a small travel allowance when he had to go to Delhi to par-

ticipate in a lawsuit about village common land). He had colleagues but no subordinates, his family members serving as assistants. He made frequent trips to Delhi, using his own automobile. He was expected to become involved in the settlement of disputes, which should have been the province of the circle panchayat. He faced the problem of the village common land where his moral authority was dubious, legal recourse was time-consuming and uncertain, and in any case he could not offend too many people. In short, the position was expensive, replete with psychological stress, time consuming, physically tiring, and largely devoid of financial and legal resources except as they could be extracted from higher governmental levels. The advantage of the office was that the incumbent controlled governmental development funds and held a strong position in disputes with opponents. It also gave Probationer the opportunity of restoring his reputation.

## DISCUSSION

Whether panchayati raj can be described as a social revolution depends on how radical a change one believes must occur before innovations or events qualify as revolutionary. If the term "social revolution" describes only those upheavals when power passes from one class to another or when basic social and economic arrangements are overturned, then panchayati raj has not been a revolution. However, it is part of a larger program, which aims to produce a "revolution" in rural life and which has resulted in substantial, relatively rapid change, even though basic social, political, and economic arrangements have not been upset. The mutual accommodation of traditional structure and modern developments made the village in the 1970s both similar to what it was in the 1950s, and yet far different, "as different as day and night," one informant said. But the role of panchayati raj in generating change should not be given an exaggerated importance by attributing to it social ramifications that probably derive chiefly from developments that have occurred in other areas, such as economics and education. When this larger setting is kept in mind, panchayati raj seems to be an em-

bellishment of village life whose principal effects are symbolic and psychological, important considerations to be sure, but of less practical consequence to the average villager than technical training, a good civil service job, or the opportunity to engage in contract agriculture.

The feature of panchayati raj that departs sharply from tradition is universal adult suffrage and the secret ballot. Democratic elections have brought the Harijans and backward groups into village politics and government, enhancing their power and reducing differences in status between them and the high castes. But the greater power and status of the low castes are probably due more to education and economics than to participation in village elections. The lower castes are increasingly educated and, thanks in part to reserved places in employment, obtain secure, relatively well-paying jobs. Although the Harijans appreciate the right to vote, the considerable decline of high-caste domination has meant more to them than casting a ballot once every three or five years. A Sweeper, expressing lack of interest in the election said, "The panchayat election doesn't matter to

the Sweepers. The Brahmans and Jats fight and any aid that the Government gives to the village is consumed by the Jats and Brahmans." A Leatherworker, analyzing the relative importance of village elections, education, and jobs said:

The election means nothing to the Leatherworkers. It is simply a dispute among the landowners. However, pressure will be brought to bear and the Harijans will have to vote. My sons are educated and therefore have gotten jobs, not good jobs, but good enough. They are earning and contributing to household expenses. In this way, the Harijans are less dependent on the high castes. My sons will educate their sons to a higher level and then there won't be any sort of dependence on the higher castes.

Democratic elections in Shanti Nagar seem to be basically a new method of achieving a traditional result. The men who run the village are Jats, just as before panchayati raj. A relatively minor change took place when, for the first time and at great expense, a man from the smaller Jat *pana* won the office of *pradhan*. Also, two Harijans and a woman, delegates of previously unrepresented constituencies, were elected as *panchs*, but they had relatively little influence because of the dominance of the *pradhan*.

The other major feature of panchayati raj, the fusion of community development and village government, is an innovation which principally protects the village from too rapid or disruptive change. The *pradhan* serves as a gatekeeper, selecting the projects that he and his party want while attempting to deflect undesirable governmental initiatives. From the perspective of the Block Development Officer, the *pradhans* are his agents in the villages. However, they are neither passive nor shy about presenting their point of view at meetings of the Block Panchayat Committee and do not hesitate to reject what they consider to be poor suggestions by the Block Development Officer.

The private villager is at least as important as the panchayat in changing the village. Individuals and families select the crops they will grow, the technological level they will adopt in their agricultural operations, the trades they will follow, and the jobs for which

they will train. Such decisions are made in response to a host of governmental activities not necessarily involving the village panchayat: for example, the fortuitous location of the new Delhi Vegetable Market within easy reach of Shanti Nagar which encouraged the cultivation of vegetables. In the domain of development, panchayati raj is just one element and not necessarily the most important one.

Panchayati raj is a permanent feature of village life. India is committed to a democratic form of government, which has to include democratic local government. The advantages of panchayati raj are the transfer of some power from the governmental bureaucracy to the villagers, the involvement of all adults in village government, the partial control that the village can exercise over development, and regular elections which permit the expression of dissatisfaction and the dismissal of corrupt or ineffective officeholders. On the other hand, the system has impressive weaknesses: a partial list would include the money spent in elections, campaigning with food and liquor, casteism, factionalism and party politics, a shift from *dharma* to *artha* as a qualification of leaders, the *pradhan's* disproportionate authority, irregular elections, confusion of mediating and administrative roles, lack of income so that the *pradhan* depends on family resources, and the tendency for the panchayat to become inactive between elections. The *gram sabha* is ineffective, which is probably all to the good. Administrative decisions in villages of any size cannot be made by the electorate acting as a committee of the whole; authority has to be delegated to elected representatives, that is, to the panchayat. Some of these weaknesses are not specific to panchayati raj but are general features of a democratic political system. Party politics, for example, are one such feature, and it is generally accepted that "Money is the mother's milk of politics" (Hazary, 1975, p. 16).

One of the most striking differences between panchayati raj and the preceding informal panchayat is the secrecy which surrounds the functioning of the new statutory panchayat. The activity of the panchayat, once conducted in the open for all to see, has retreated behind closed doors. In the 1950s,

there were frequent panchayat meetings held in the open courtyard of the Jat meeting house (*chopal*) near the center of the village. There was no secrecy about the time and place of meetings; any man could attend a session and participate, or simply watch. In the 1970s, panchayat meetings, which should have been open to anyone, generally took place in the *pradhan's* home, if held at all. We were never able to attend a single panchayat meeting. The time and place of a scheduled meeting were changed at the last minute, or the meeting was cancelled. The secrecy was aimed not at us but at all the villagers. Political activity between elections had become reclusive.

This development reflects a changed distribution of power brought about by panchayati raj. In the 1950s, power was shared chiefly in direct proportion to population, caste status, and wealth; no mechanism existed for modifying this fundamental distribution. Therefore, decisions of any significance could not be taken without the participation of the major power-sharing groups. Secrecy would have been a futile strategy because of the basic power relations.

Panchayati raj and elections modified the distribution of power. Even if the contending parties were roughly equal in terms of power before an election, the party that won the office of *pradhan* immediately monopolized

formal power. Led by the *pradhan*, the panchayat alone was authorized on behalf of the village to deal with the Delhi Administration, the major seat of governmental power. The losing party's chief weapon was obstruction. In this setting, a *pradhan* could easily find secrecy to be an irresistible temptation. If he could keep his opponents largely on the sidelines, he could avoid arguments and, to some extent, obstruction. He did not need the defeated party to plan and to carry out many of his projects. However, projects that involved tampering with private or common land would call forth a strong reaction from those adversely affected.

The conduct and outcome of elections and the activities of panchayats would in all likelihood be different in villages with other characteristics. One must be careful about drawing general conclusions from any case study in a country as large and culturally complex as India. The chief interest of this detailed study of politics and a panchayat election in Shanti Nagar is that it catches the village during the transition from *lambardar* to informal panchayat to statutory panchayat. It is a specific local account of what has happened all over India in the recent past, as the world's most populous democracy adopted a political innovation of almost revolutionary proportions.

## ELECTION OF DECEMBER 1984

We left Shanti Nagar four months after the election and had little opportunity to observe how Probationer fared as *pradhan* or to see how the villagers would judge his term of office at the next election. As our analysis of the election and panchayati raj in Shanti Nagar proceeded nine years later, our curiosity about what had happened since our departure grew more and more intense. We were especially curious about whether Probationer had distributed common land to his low-caste supporters, as he had promised. Since he was illegally occupying some of the land, we thought it likely that he would distribute as little of it as possible or none at all.

One member of our team, Ms. Renu Jain, lives in Delhi, so we wrote to her, asking her to contact one of the villagers who works in

Delhi and find out about the events of the last nine years. The man in question, a member of *pana* A, had previously shown himself to be both perceptive and reliable. We reproduce his quoted words from Ms. Jain's letter with only slight editorial changes. It should be borne in mind that villagers do not pull their punches in discussing the failings of their fellow villagers, especially those of opposing factions.

After 1977, elections were postponed twice . . . . Next elections were held in December 1984. Probationer and Witness [*pana* A], brother of Chauffeur, filed the nomination papers. Chauffeur himself was a *pradhan* for some time. Objections were raised against Probationer since he was a convict.

But Probationer managed to bribe the Government authorities and contested [the election]. He had not given any piece of land to the Harijans as promised, but just two months before the elections he played a smart game and distributed 80 square yards [66.9 square meters] of land each to 20 to 25 Harijan families for residential purposes. The Harijans all supported Probationer and it was a tough fight. Witness still managed to win though only by *one* vote. Probationer is now debarred to contest elections for life because he was a convict—charged with murder.

Probationer also managed to grab 11 acres [4.45 hectares] of land belonging to the Gram [village] Panchayat. This land is towards the north of the village . . . He is a fraud and gets away with a lot of things because of his money.

This letter raised a number of questions, and we wrote to Ms. Jain for more information. We were particularly interested in the fact that one vote had decided the election, for an election that close would almost certainly have involved several recounts of the ballots and probably, in the end, a court case. We also suspected that there might have been other candidates in the race, especially a Brahman, because they usually nominated someone. Further, we asked for an estimate of how each caste, *pana*, and faction voted, hoping to be able to identify the vote that swung the election to the winner.

Ms. Jain met her informant in his Delhi office, but this time he was a disappointment. She wrote, "Either he had a bad day in the office or there was something else bothering him. He sounded most indifferent and unhelpful." He said that he had already given all the important information and could not provide more details. He wondered "Why should you be interested in knowing more about a criminal like Probationer, his supporters, and village politics?" Jain was unprepared for such an attitude and reminded him of his past helpfulness. He advised her that "he had changed and would not part with any information about the village."

The informant was basically a friendly man, and we believe that his reaction had nothing to do with Jain or us. Rather he was bothered

by the fact that the election of 1984 and the activities of Probationer in particular reflected unfavorably on the village. People were quite concerned about maintaining the good name of the village. Efforts to hide information from us often centered on factionalism, disputes, and politics. However, after some general conversation, the informant became his old self and announced that he would help. He answered some of our direct questions and also gave an analysis of how the various castes voted.

Although her informant had been helpful, Jain was not satisfied and decided to interview another villager. She went to see Clerk, an Inside Brahman and former candidate for *pradhan*, in his Delhi office. They were old friends, and he was very happy to see her. His account of the election gives more detail than that of Jain's first informant but generally agrees with it. Although some of the events of the election were rather unusual, we have confidence in the account that follows because independent interviews with two informed sources generally corroborate each other.

Clerk confirmed that Probationer and Witness had contested the election of 1984. Jain's first informant mentioned a third candidate (a Jat of *pana* A) who had received a handful of votes, but Clerk said that only Probationer and Witness had run. Jain did not mention her previous interview and let the discrepancy pass. The Brahmans did not nominate a candidate because they knew that Probationer would run and expected trouble. They decided to sit back and enjoy the spectacle of two Jats fighting.

The election hinged on eight votes from a family of Carpenters who had moved to a distant town but were still enrolled as voters in Shanti Nagar. Knowing that they supported him, Witness paid their way to Shanti Nagar to vote. Probationer objected on the grounds that they were not residents and did not possess ration cards of the village. The presiding officer decided temporarily to set aside those eight ballots, and they were sealed in an envelope. Both candidates agreed that his decision of whether to include or exclude them would be final.

The ballots were counted in the evening. Probationer won by seven votes. The presid-



ing officer decided that the votes of the Carpenters had to be counted, for their names were on the official voters' list of the village, and he opened the envelope. All eight votes went to Witness, who therefore won by just one vote. The ballots were counted three times to be sure. Probationer was furious. He ran to get his rifle and fired it into the air, threatening the villagers. At that very moment, the electricity failed (a common occurrence) and the village was plunged into total darkness. People were panic-stricken, knowing that Probationer was capable of almost anything when he was angry. The presence of a number of roughnecks whom Probationer had brought from various villages to Shanti Nagar to create mischief added to the general panic. However, because the police were expecting trouble, enough officers had been sent to the village to preserve order during the election, and they quickly took control of what might have become a dangerous situation.

Probationer insisted on another recount. As the officials were counting the votes, Probationer stole one of the ballots marked for his opponent and ate it. Five people saw him do it but could not believe their eyes. It was only after the recount had been completed that people realized that one vote was missing and that the two candidates were tied in the balloting. Trying his best to handle a confusing situation, the presiding officer decided to toss a coin to settle the election, and the candidates agreed. Probationer won the toss, but Witness took the matter to court. The court decided in favor of Witness because the official summary sheet of the total vote showed that one ballot was missing. Probationer was barred for life from running for office and he also was indicted for the illegal possession of a rifle. Jain's first informant, who tended to abbreviate his accounts, reported that Witness won the coin toss, omitting mention of the court case. In any event, the result was the same: Witness won by one vote.

The absence of a Brahman candidate gave the election to Witness. He garnered important blocs of votes that in 1977 had gone to

Gentleman: most of the Outside Brahmans, the Carpenters, and a group of Jats from *pana* B who were hostile to Probationer. Although Probationer retained most of the voters who supported him in 1977, Witness not only managed to hold the votes that normally would go to the candidate of *pana* A but also captured the lion's share of the voters who had backed Gentleman in the earlier election. Despite the realignment of voters, which strongly favored Witness, the election was as close as possible.

After the excitement of the election, the villagers faced the future with few guidelines as to how the new *pradhan* would perform. One of our informants said, "The villagers are waiting to see what he can do for them." Our guess is that he will be able to do very little. Witness was elderly, dignified, and seemed to lack the assertiveness that would be required to wring concessions from a large, complex bureaucracy. The problem of finding a *pradhan* whom they can trust and who is also effective with high government officials still bedevils the villagers. In any case, individual ability usually takes second place in village elections to caste and party politics.

Panchayati raj is now an established feature of village life, for India is committed to a democratic form of government. If panchayat elections in Shanti Nagar until now have been largely a new method of achieving a traditional result, this need not always be the case. In 1977, the low castes generally disclaimed practical benefits from village elections, saying that government aid was preempted by the landowners. But before the 1984 election, many low-caste families received plots of land, a substantial concession made to win votes. The potential practical benefits for the low castes from village political activity will in all likelihood continue to increase, especially if village panchayats are given greater powers of taxation. The villagers know very well that important economic benefits can be won or lost in village elections. Future elections will be as hard-fought as those of 1977 and 1984.

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## INDEX

This index also serves as a glossary. Non-English words not found in Webster's *Third New International Dictionary of the English Language, Unabridged* are italicized and defined in the text, usually on the earliest listed page.

- Actor, 32–33, 34, 36, 42, 43, 44–45, 46, 47, 48, 53  
*adalat*. *See* panchayat  
 Adi-Dravida, 11  
 Agitator, 25–29, 32–33, 36, 37, 38, 47, 48, 49, 51, 62, 64, 68  
 alliances, 23, 24, 32, 33, 41  
*artha*, 10, 69  
 authoritarianism, 7
- Backward Classes. *See* caste  
*baharwala* (Outside Brahman), 27. *See also* caste  
 Bailey, F. G., 9  
 Bairagi Beggar. *See* caste  
 Balwantray Mehta Committee, 6, 7  
 Baniya Merchant. *See* caste  
 Baxi, Upendra, 6, 7, 8, 12, 13  
 Bêteille, André, 8, 11, 30–31  
 Bhargava, B. S., 6, 7, 12, 13  
 Bhatnagar, S., 13  
*bhitarwala* (Inside Brahman), 27. *See also* caste  
 Bloch, Maurice, 29 fn.  
 Block Development Office, 41, 48  
 Block Development Officer, 8, 65, 66, 67, 69  
 Block Panchayat *Samiti* (committee), 64, 69  
 Boxer, 51, 63  
 Brahman Priest. *See* caste  
 bribery, 12, 19, 21, 32, 45, 49, 70  
 British rule (Raj), 3, 4, 5, 10  
*burfi*, 44
- campaigns, 33, 34, 35, 36, 43, 44, 50, 51, 52  
 candidates,  
   1977, 32–70 *passim*, 72  
   1984, 70–72  
 Factory Worker, 35–36  
 Frontman, 36, 37, 38, 40, 41, 42, 43, 44, 48, 49, 50, 51, 53, 54, 57, 60, 61, 64  
 Gentleman, 38, 39, 40, 41, 43, 44, 47, 48, 49, 50, 51, 53, 54, 55, 56, 57, 60, 61, 63–64, 72  
 Probationer, 25–29, 32–44 *passim*, 47–57 *passim*, 60, 61–62, 63, 64–66, 68, 70–72  
 Tippler, 33, 34, 37–38, 41, 42–43, 49, 50, 52, 54, 55, 59, 60, 61, 66  
 Witness, 33, 41, 49, 70–72  
 canvassing, 49–54 *passim*
- caste, 4, 5, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 14–15, 16, 17, 18–22, 23, 30–31, 43, 44, 52–53, 61, 62–63, 64, 69, 71, 72  
   Backward Classes, 31–32  
   Bairagi Beggar, 23  
   Baniya Merchant, 23  
   Brahman Priest, 8, 14, 15, 23, 24, 26, 33, 34, 37, 38, 40, 41, 43, 44, 45, 49, 51, 52, 54, 61, 62, 63, 64, 65–66, 68–69, 71, 72  
   Brahman Priest, Inside, 27, 38, 39, 40, 41, 53, 54, 61–62, 63–64, 71  
   Brahman Priest, Outside, 27, 38, 39, 40, 41, 53, 64, 72  
   Chamar Leatherworker, 10, 23, 26, 28, 29, 30, 39, 40, 41–42, 43, 45, 51, 53–54, 61, 62, 63, 68  
   Chhipi Dyer, 23  
   Chuhra Sweeper, 10, 23, 30, 43, 48–49, 50, 52, 53, 61, 62–63, 68–69  
   Gola Potter, 23, 29, 30, 37, 38, 43, 49, 51, 53, 61, 64  
   Harijan, 10–11, 15, 16, 18, 20, 23, 30, 35, 39, 43, 44, 45, 46, 48, 49, 51, 53, 54, 62, 63, 64, 70–71; in governance, 10–11, 15, 16, 18, 39, 41, 47, 49, 53, 61, 68, 69  
   high caste, 33, 36, 45, 52, 53,  
   Jat Farmer, 14–15, 23, 24, 27, 28, 29, 32, 33, 34, 41, 43, 46, 50, 51, 53, 54, 61, 62, 63, 68–69, 70, 71, 72  
   Jhinvar Watercarrier, 23, 42–43, 51  
   Khathi Carpenter, 23, 38, 39, 41, 43, 61, 71, 72  
   Lohar Blacksmith, 23  
   low caste, 33, 34, 45, 50, 52, 53, 54, 68, 70, 72  
   Mahar Potter, 23, 37, 38, 43, 49, 51, 53  
   Mali Gardener, 23  
   Nai Barber, 23, 38, 39, 42, 43, 44, 45, 50, 51, 61, 63, 65  
   Scheduled Caste, 31–32  
   Scheduled Tribe, 31–32. *See also* factionalism  
 cattle, 17, 67  
 challenges. *See* voting  
 Chamar Leatherworkers. *See* caste  
*chaudhari* (big man), 25  
 Chauffeur, 32–33, 37, 70  
 Chhipi Dyer. *See* caste  
 Chief Commissioner, 16, 18  
*chopal*, 10, 70  
 Chuhra Sweeper. *See* caste  
 circle panchayat. *See* panchayat  
 clan, 27  
 class, 13, 29–32  
 Clerk, 33, 34, 38, 39, 71  
 Code of Civil Procedure, 1908, 18  
 Code of Criminal Procedure, 1896, 18  
 common land, 5, 16, 30, 44, 48, 52, 66–67, 68, 70–71  
   *pana*, 24, 35, 47  
   village, 5, 21, 35, 37, 43, 44, 45, 46, 47  
 Community Development Programme, 1952, 6, 7, 8

- Community Projects Programme, 15  
Congress Party, 46  
Constitution of India, 5–6  
corruption, 11, 12, 13, 19, 21, 22, 45, 49, 50
- debt, 28–29  
Delhi, 4, 13, 28  
    Part C State, 13  
    Province of, 13  
    State of, 15  
    Union Territory of, 4, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 22, 47  
Delhi Administration, 13, 16, 17, 18, 68, 70  
Delhi Land Reforms Act, 1954, 13, 16  
Delhi Land Revenue Act, 1954, 13  
Delhi Municipal Committee, 17  
Delhi Municipal Corporation, 65  
Delhi Panchayat Raj Act, 1954, 13, 14, 16, 17  
Delhi Vegetable Market, 5, 69  
democratic decentralization, 4, 6, 7–8, 13  
Deputy Commissioner, 16  
Deputy Director of Panchayats, 17  
deputy pradhan (*up-pradhan*). *See* pradhan  
development, 4, 5, 6, 7, 15, 16–17, 67  
development block, 6, 7  
Development Committee, 15–16  
Devious, 41, 43, 48, 49  
*dhar*, 23. *See also* party, political  
dharma, 8–10, 63, 69  
Director of Industries, 66  
[The] Directorate of Public Relations, 15  
disputes, 4, 18, 19–20, 22–26, 28–29, 44, 45, 47, 56, 59, 65, 67, 68  
district council. *See* panchayat, *zilla parishad*
- education, 4, 5, 6, 7, 15, 16, 22, 34, 36, 40, 41, 66, 68, 69  
elections, 3, 4, 6, 8–10, 11–12, 13, 16, 19, 21–25, 27, 68–70  
    1961, 32  
    1966, 32  
    1969, 32  
    1972, 34  
    1977, 4, 13, 22, 23–24, 25–30, 32–70 *passim*, 72  
    1984, 70–72  
    parliamentary, 6  
election office, 8  
election officials, 32, 34, 41, 43, 44, 50, 51, 54, 55, 56, 58, 59, 60  
electricity, 5, 44, 47, 67, 72  
Emotional, 62, 63  
employment, 30, 66, 67, 68–69  
    urban employment, 4, 5. *See also* women  
engagement ceremony, 27, 37–38  
Excitable, 25–27  
factionalism, 11, 12–13, 15, 16, 19, 21, 22, 23–24, 36, 40, 52, 69, 71  
Brahman Priest, 23, 24, 27–29, 38, 40, 41, 53, 54, 63–64, 65–66  
Chamar Leatherworker, 28, 29, 33, 45  
Jat Farmer, 23, 24–25, 28, 29  
Lohar Blacksmith, 28–29  
Factory Worker. *See* candidate  
favoritism, 12, 19, 21, 22  
First Five-Year Plan, 1951, 6  
Frontman. *See* candidate
- Galanter, Marc, 7, 12, 13, 32  
Galey, Jean-Claude, 8  
Gandhi, Mahatma, 7, 13, 26, 30  
Gangrade, K.D., 4  
*gaon panchayat* (village panchayat). *See* panchayat  
    at  
*gaon sabha* (village assembly), 16. *See also* *gram sabha*  
*gatha*, 45  
Gentleman. *See* candidate  
Gokulpur, elections in, 12  
Gola Potter. *See* caste  
*gram panchayat*. *See* panchayat  
*gram sabha* (village assembly), 7, 12, 66, 69
- Haldipur, R.N., 6  
Harijans. *See* caste  
Hazary, Narayan, 69  
health services, 5, 15  
Hinduism, 7
- Immobile Property Register, 67  
informal panchayat. *See* panchayat
- Jain, G.P., 6–7  
Jain, Renu, 3 fn., 70–72  
jajmani, 52  
*jalebi*, 44  
Jat Farmer. *See* caste  
Jhinvar Watercarrier. *See* caste  
judicial panchayat. *See* panchayat
- Khanna, R. L., 12  
*khap panchayat*. *See* panchayat  
kharif (autumn crop), 17  
Khati Carpenter. *See* caste  
Kolenda, Pauline, 8
- lambardar, 4, 10, 13–14, 19, 20, 33  
land, 5, 14, 16, 17, 37, 45–46, 47  
    consolidation, 66  
    ownership of, 4, 5, 10, 12, 13–14, 17, 21, 23, 24, 30–31, 33, 40, 41, 45, 46, 47, 66–67, 72.  
    *See also* common land

lawsuits, 33, 34, 45, 46, 59, 68  
 leadership, 8–10, 12, 34, 54, 64, 69  
 Lewis, Oscar, 11  
 lineage, 11, 13–14, 15, 22, 23, 24, 27, 28, 29, 33,  
 34, 36, 37, 64  
 liquor, 19, 28, 29, 36, 43, 48, 49–50, 62, 63, 69.  
*See also* bribery  
 Lohar Blacksmith. *See* caste

Mahar Potter. *See* caste  
 Maheshwari, S.R., 7  
 Mahi, Gujarat, election in, 52  
 malaria, 66, 67  
 Mali Gardener. *See* caste  
 Mandi, elections in, 12  
 Manipulator, 38, 40, 42, 43, 53, 54  
 Man patriclan, 24. *See also* caste, Jat Farmer  
 Marx, Karl, 29  
 Mencher, Joan P., 31  
 modernization, 30  
 Morris-Jones, W. H., 6, 7, 8

Nai Barber. *See* caste  
*naib sarpanch* (assistant president), 17  
 Narain, Virendra, 8  
 National Extension Service, 6  
 Nautiyal, K. C., 12  
 Nehru, Jawaharlal, 13  
 Nicholas, Ralph W., 4  
 nomination, 34, 35, 37, 38, 39, 40, 41–44  
 nucleated village, 5  
*nyaya* panchayat. *See* panchayat

Official's Son, 38, 39, 40–41  
 Oldest Son, 38, 40  
 Old Lawyer, 32, 33–34  
 Opler, Morris Edward, 13

*pakora*, 43  
*pana*, 13–14, 22, 23, 24–25, 30, 32, 65, 71  
   *pana* A, 24–25, 27, 32, 33, 34, 35, 36, 37, 53,  
   61, 65, 69, 70, 71, 72  
   *pana* B, 24–25, 27, 32, 34, 35, 43, 53, 61, 62,  
   65, 72  
   *pana* C, 24–25, 27, 34  
 panch, 16, 19, 20, 21–22, 32, 35, 43, 50, 61, 69  
 Panchanadikar, J., 8, 11, 52  
 Panchanadikar, K. C., 8, 11, 52  
 panchayat (village council), 3–13, 14–15, 16–22,  
 35, 41, 43, 44–45, 46, 47, 69, 72  
   circle panchayat, 4, 17–18, 22, 35, 43, 61, 68  
   executive committee of, 17  
   *gaon* panchayat, 7, 12  
   *gram* panchayat, 7, 9, 10, 12, 14, 71  
   informal panchayat, 3, 4, 14–16, 69  
   judicial panchayat, 4, 11

*khap* panchayat, 46–47  
*nyaya* panchayat, 4, 12  
 panchayat *samiti*, 7  
 panchayati *adalat*, 4, 18  
*zilla parishad*, 7  
 panchayati raj, 3–13, 16, 17, 68–70, 72  
   evaluations of, 18–22  
   three-tier system, 7, 16  
   two-tier system, 16, 17, 22. *See also* panchayat  
 Pant, Miranjan, 8, 12  
 Parliament, India, 64  
 party, celebration, 34, 49–50, 51, 61–63  
 party, political, 13, 19, 21, 36, 37, 43, 46, 48, 64,  
   65–66, 67–68, 69, 70, 72  
*patti*, 13–14  
*phirni*, 65  
 police, 15, 19–20, 29, 45, 47, 50, 55, 58, 59, 60,  
   65, 66  
 polls, 34, 54, 55, 58, 59  
 power sharing, 70  
 pradhan, 11, 12, 16, 17, 18, 19, 23, 24, 27, 28,  
   29–30, 32, 34, 35, 37, 44, 45, 46, 47, 50, 61–  
   62, 63, 64, 65, 66, 67, 69, 71, 72  
   role of, 8–10, 33–34, 35, 38, 41, 44, 47, 48, 67–  
   68, 70  
   *up-pradhan*, 16, 32, 39, 49, 61  
   vice pradhan, 61  
 Pradhan, M. C., 46  
 President of India, 26  
 presiding officer, 55–61 *passim*, 71. *See also* elec-  
   tion officials  
 Probationer. *See* candidates  
 proxy vote. *See* voting  
 Punjab, 13, 46  
  
 rabi (spring crop), 17  
 Raconteur, 38, 39, 40  
 Rama, 7  
 Rao, S. Rama, 12, 13  
 Ratta, G. P. Medi, 4, 12, 17  
 religion, 5, 7, 22  
  
*sarpanch* (president, circle panchayat), 17, 48. *See*  
   *also* pradhan  
 Scheduled Caste. *See* caste  
 Scheduled Tribe. *See* caste  
 Sharma, Miriam, 9–10, 30, 31  
 Shiviah, 13  
 Somjee, A. H., 8  
 Spangler, Eve, 29 fn.  
 status, ascription of, 11, 14, 19, 21, 52, 53  
 statutory panchayat, 4, 9, 11, 12, 70. *See also* pan-  
   chayat, *gram* panchayat  
 sterilization, 46  
 Strongheart, 28, 33, 36, 43, 51  
 suffrage. *See* voting  
 Supreme Court of India, 26

taxes, 14, 15, 17, 72

Team for the Study of Community Projects and  
National Extension Service. *See* Balwantray  
Mehta Committee

*tholladar*, 4, 13, 14

three-tier system. *See* panchayati raj

Tippler. *See* candidates

tubewell, 66

two-tier system. *See* panchayati raj

Unfortunate, 28

UNICEF (United Nations International Chil-  
dren's Emergency Fund), 66

University of Delhi, 41

*up-pradhan*. *See* pradhan

Vegetable Market. *See* Delhi Vegetable Market

vice-pradhan. *See* pradhan

victory celebration. *See* party, celebration

Village Level Worker, 8, 15

violence, 28, 34, 50, 52

voting, 3, 16, 17, 18–19, 20–21, 22, 24, 27, 30,  
32, 33, 34, 50, 54–61, 68–69, 71–72

challenges to, 34, 56–57

proxy vote, 56–57

recount, 32, 71–72

sample ballots, 50, 52

suffrage, 3, 7, 10–11, 15, 19, 68. *See also* women

water buffalo, 25–26, 67. *See also* cattle

Witness. *See* candidates

women, 18–22, 36, 54–55

employment of, 4–5, 66, 67

in governance, 10–11, 15, 16, 18, 41, 61, 69

suffrage, 11, 18, 19, 56, 59

Yadava, J. S., 13, 46 fn., 50, 52

Young Lawyer, 27, 32–33, 38–39, 40, 41, 49

Young Soldier, 28

zebu. *See* cattle

*zilla parishad*. *See* panchayat











