

THEFT, PATRONAGE & SOCIETY IN WESTERN INDIA

ANASTASIA PILIAVSKY

Institute of Social and Cultural Anthropology and Wolfson College
Thesis submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Social Anthropology
Hilary Term 2011
Supervised by Dr Paul Dresch and Prof David Gellner

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Abstract

This thesis is an ethnography of a community of professional thieves called the Kanjar—a ‘caste of thieves’ by practice, public perception and self-designation—in the northern Indian province of Rajasthan. It is also an argument that spells out the broader logic of rank in local society. Insofar as it offers the first ethnography of the Kanjar community—and of caste-based, professional, hereditary theft—this study is new. My analytical concern with hierarchy and rank, however, is old, engaging in the once central, and now largely out-fashioned, discussion in the sociology of South Asia. My project began with a narrow set of concerns with the place of thieving and thieves in local society. In the course of my fieldwork, however, it became apparent that the received wisdom of South Asian sociology regarding the principles of rank did not offer useful explanatory tools and that a different conception of rank was necessary to make sense of what I observed, both about the social position of Kanjars and the hierarchical social formation at large. As is so often the case, what began as a study of historically and sociologically particular circumstances became an inquiry into the pervasive regnant aspects of the local order of things.

For those who survived 23 June 1990

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Anastasia Piliavsky
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A NOTE ON TRANSLITERATION

I make use of Hindi, Mewari and Kanjari languages (standard Hindustani, the regional language and the dialect particular to the Kanjar community) in which I operated during most of my research, as well as some Sanskrit, Persian and Urdu terms in local use. All terms in the Indian languages, excluding personal and proper names, are italicized and follow the diacritical standard of Platts' *Dictionary of Classical Hindi and Urdu* (1886), with suffixes added (*lāthis, dharmic*). Each Indian term used in the text appears in the glossary, where I indicate the language of its usage. Where vocabularies overlap, I mark terms as belonging to the most broadly used of the three languages. So, a word that appears in Kanjari, Mewari and Hindi is marked as a Hindi term. For words like chai, goonda or charpoy, which have passed into English, I use the common Anglicized forms without italics.

GLOSSARY

<i>ādhī-jāt</i> (Hin)	a half-caste, degraded person
<i>adle-badle kī śādī</i> (Hin)	'swap-wedding' or bilateral cross-cousin exchange of women practiced by Kanjars
<i>aḷmoḍā</i> (Kanj)	gallbladder
<i>ām ādmī</i> (Hin)	common man
<i>amāwas</i> (Hin)	new moon
<i>āndolan</i> (Hin)	uprising, strike
<i>ann</i> (Hin)	grain, bread, food
<i>Anndātā</i> (Mew)	honorific for superiors/patrons, literally 'Grain Giver' or 'Bread Giver'
<i>anyay</i> (Hin)	injustice
<i>apahnava</i> (Skt)	deception
<i>āpne log</i> (Hin)	one's own people
<i>aprādhī jātī</i> (Hin)	criminal caste
<i>aprakāṣataskara</i> (Skt)	invisible thief
<i>arj</i> (Hin)	treasure
<i>ayār</i> (Mew)	spy, emissary
<i>āyat</i> (Raj)	contract relationship
<i>bābū</i> (Hin)	bureaucrat, clerk, colloquial and derogatory
<i>badmās</i> (Hin)	ruffian, hoodlum
<i>badnām</i> (Hin)	a 'bad name,' a title of disrepute
<i>bāgī</i> (Hin)	rebel
<i>bahādur (kom)</i> (Hin)	brave, heroic (community)
<i>bahetū</i> (Hin)	vagrant
<i>baiṭhānā</i> (Hin)	to 'seat' someone by forcing them into a lower standing
<i>bakśīs</i> (Hin)	a tip, a charity
<i>Baḷāī</i> (Hin)	Leatherworker
<i>balī (caṛhānā/calānā)</i> (Hin)	(offering) blood sacrifice
<i>bālutā</i> (Marathi)	a South Indian form of patronage
<i>banānā</i> (Hin)	to make, produce, manufacture
<i>Bāñcṛā</i> (Hin)	caste involved in prostitution
<i>Baṇiyā</i> (Hin)	sedentary trader, merchant, businessman
<i>bansāwalī</i> (Raj)	genealogy
<i>Banjārā</i> (Hin)	caste of itinerant cattle and salt traders
<i>barbādī</i> (Hin)	ruination

<i>bardhānā</i> (Raj)	genealogical recitation
Barī Navarātri (Hin)	major autumnal festival of the Goddess in the month of Aświn (Sept-Oct)
<i>bastī</i> (Hin)	settlement
<i>begār</i> (Hin)	compulsory and unremunerated labor
Bey Mātā (Kanj)	‘baby mother’ to whom offerings are made by the mothers of newborn children prior to the hair cutting rites during <i>Barī Navarātri</i>
<i>bhābhī</i> (Hin)	brother’s wife
<i>bhāi</i> (Hin)	brother
<i>Bhagavān</i> (Hin)	God
<i>bhāgnā</i> (Hin)	to abscond, run away
Bhāmbhī (Hin)	Leatherworker
Bhangī (Hin)	Sweeper
<i>Bhāṅṭu /Bhaṭāṅī</i> (Kanj)	member of the ‘vagrant fraternity’
Bhāṭ (Hin)	Genealogist, Bard
<i>bholā/bholī</i> (Hin)	innocent, artless, vulnerable
<i>bhraṣṭ(ācār)</i> (Hin)	corrupt(ion)
<i>bhūmiyāvat</i> (Hin)	raid
<i>birā(darī)</i> (Hin)	brother(hood)
<i>birat</i> (Raj)	the donor-servant relationship
<i>biratkārī</i> (Mew)	the right to service
<i>bolī</i> (Raj)	speech, language, talk
<i>boṭī</i> (Kanj)	a chunk of meat, cooked meat
Brāhmaṇ/Bamaṇ (Hin/Mew)	Brahman, priest
<i>brat/vrat</i> (Mew/Skt)	long-term right to service to a particular patron
<i>byāv</i> (Raj)	marriage
<i>cabutarā</i> (Hin)	platform used in villages as a place of congregation or as a seat for local divinities
Camār (Hin)	Leatherworker
<i>caprāsi</i> (Hin)	an office orderly
<i>cāra</i> (Skt)	spy
Cāraṇ (Hin)	Eulogist, Bard
<i>tsāri</i> (Kanj)	brideprice
<i>caukī</i> (Hin)	(police) outpost
<i>caukīdār(ī)</i> (Hin)	watchman(ship)
<i>caurāsī buddhiyān</i> (Hin)	eighty-four wisdoms
<i>cauryadharmā</i> (Skt)	the <i>dharma</i> of thieves
<i>cauryavidyā</i> (Skt)	the science of stealing

<i>contrā</i> (Kanj)	cenotaph
<i>corī</i> (Hin)	theft
<i>coroṇ kī jāṭ</i> (Hin)	caste of thieves
<i>cūlhā</i> (Hin)	hearth
<i>dādā</i> (Hin)	(gang) boss, 'don,' literally 'father's father'
<i>dado</i> (Kanj)	father's sister
<i>dahej</i> (Hin)	dowry
<i>Daī</i> (Hin)	midwife
<i>dalāl</i> (Hin)	go-between
<i>Ḍamāmī</i> (Hin)	Drummer
<i>dān</i> (Hin)	gift
<i>dānadharma</i> (Skt)	law of the gift
<i>darbār</i> (Hin)	king, court, (kingly) government
<i>dārū/madh</i> (Hin/Kanj)	liquor, alcohol
<i>ḍerā</i> (Mew)	encampment, tent, temporary dwelling
<i>deyārī</i> (Mew)	donor-goddess, literally 'the giver'
<i>dhāḍ</i> (Hin)	a raid
<i>Dhākar</i> (Hin)	a farmer caste
<i>dharma/dharm</i> (Skt/Hin)	order, law, duty
<i>dhok</i> (Hin)	a bow or prostration before a superior, obeisance
<i>Ḍholī</i> (Hin)	Drummer
<i>dhūp</i> (Hin)	burnt offering
<i>dost(ī)</i> (Hin)	friend(ship)
<i>dukh</i> (Hin)	suffering, privation
<i>ektā</i> (Hin)	unity
<i>farār</i> (Hin)	an outlaw
<i>gandhā</i> (Hin)	dirty, immoral
<i>garbar</i> (Hin)	confusion, mix-up
<i>garīb ādmī</i> (Hin)	poor man, the poor
<i>gāoṇ</i> (Hin)	village
<i>Gārīyā Lohār, Gaḍoliyā Lohār</i> (Hin)	Itinerant Ironsmith
<i>gemi</i> (Kanj)	theft
<i>ghī</i> (Hin)	clarified butter
<i>ghūmnewālā</i> (Hin)	vagrant
<i>ghūṅghaṭ</i> (Hin)	veil, veiling
<i>ghūs</i> (Hin)	bribe
<i>gobar</i> (Hin)	cow-dung
<i>god lenā</i> (Hin)	to adopt
<i>gotr/got</i> (Hin/Mew)	exogamous subdivision of a <i>jāti</i> , a patriclan

Gujar (Hin)	pastoral caste
gulām (Hin)	slave
gulli (Kanj)	raw meat
gūṇḍā (Hin)	goon, gangster, strongman, muscleman, ‘tough’
gupt (Hin)	a secret
guptcār (Mew)	spy, secret agent
gurudakṣiṇā (Hin)	
inām (Hin)	award, grant, payment
izzat (Hin)	respect, honor, status
jādū (Hin)	magic
jaḡat (Hin)	universe
jāḡīr(dār) (Hin)	(holder of) an estate
jaḡmān (Hin)	patron
jamadār (Hin)	(gang, troop) leader
jāṅḡalī (Hin)	uncouth, savage, forest-dweller
jāṅkaṛī (Hin)	knowledge
jānwar/janāwar (Hin/Kanj)	animal
jāsūs (Hin)	spy, emissary
jāti/jāt (Hin/Mew)	genus, class of being, ‘caste’
jhaṭkā (Hin)	‘jerk’ method of Hindu blood sacrifice with the sword severing the head at top of the neck
jimmedāri (Hin)	responsibility
jīv (Mew)	life
jīvṇā (Kanj)	ear of a sacrificial animal offered to the goddess during Baṛī Navarātri
Jogaṇiyā Mātā (Mew)	Vagabond Mother, regional goddess in Mewar
juḡāḍ (Hin)	the ability to liaise and negotiate effectively
jurm peśā qaum (Hin)	community criminal by profession
jūṭhā (Hin)	pollution by mouth contact
kalā (Skt)	art
kamīn (Hin)	servant or ‘client,’ a lower person
kamjor (Hin)	weak
kammā (Kanj)	work, labor, service
kāṇḍ (Hin)	incident
kaner (Hin)	oleander (<i>Nerium oleander</i>)
kanūn (Hin)	(state) law
kanyādān (Hin)	‘gift of a virgin,’ bride presented at a Hindu wedding
kasam (Hin)	promise

<i>kaṭal kī rāt</i> (Hin)	‘Night of the Long Knives’ when the final electoral feasts are staged by candidates in political campaigns
<i>kathā</i> (Skt)	story, tale
<i>Kādzā /Kādzī</i> (Kanji)	gentile, outsider
<i>khānā</i> (Hin)	to eat, food
<i>khān-pān</i> (Hin)	‘food-drink,’ victuals, nourishment
<i>khāndān</i> (Hin)	communal character, identity, community
<i>khel-tamāsā</i> (Hin)	show, performance
<i>khilānā</i> (Hin)	a feeding, to feed
<i>kom</i> (Hin)	community
<i>kṣatriya</i> (Skt)	ruler-warrior class
<i>kul devī</i> (Hin)	clan goddess
<i>kumkum</i> (Hin)	reddened turmeric liquid
<i>kūñṛā</i> (Raj)	a well
<i>kurtā-dhotī</i> (Hin)	tunic-and-loincloth men’s ensemble
<i>kuśā</i> (Hin)	(<i>Poa cynosuroides</i>) grass used in animal sacrifice and on other ceremonial occasions
<i>laḍḍū</i> (Hin)	a sweetmeat
<i>lākh</i> (Hin)	100,000
<i>laṭī caṛhānā</i> (Kanji)	haircutting initiation of newborns during Baṛī Navarātri
<i>log</i> (Hin)	people
<i>maḍḍā</i> (Kanji)	raw, uncooked
<i>Mahābrāhmaṇ</i> (Hin)	Funerary Priest
<i>Mahārājā</i> (Hin)	Great King
<i>Mahārāṇā</i> (Hin)	‘Great King,’ the current title of rulers of Mewar
<i>Mā-ī-Bāp</i> (Hin)	‘Mother-and-father,’ honorific for a patron
<i>majbūrī</i> (se) (Hin)	(out of) helpless necessity
<i>Mālī</i> (Hin)	Florist, Gardener
<i>māmā</i> (Hin)	mother’s brother
<i>māṅgnawālā/māṅgat</i> (Hin)	beggar
<i>māṅgtā</i> (Mew)	itinerant bards’ and other mobile professionals’ annual ‘begging tour’
<i>man</i> (se) (Hin)	(from) the heart of hearts
<i>matdān</i> (Hin)	vote-gift
<i>matsya-nyaya</i> (Skt)	‘law of the fishes’ in the degenerate epoch, in which superiors devour rather than nourish subordinates
<i>mausi/māwasī</i> (Hin/Kanji)	mother’s sister

<i>meḷi mātā</i> (Kanj)	‘Lower Mother’—one of the iconic forms of the Deyārī that is set in the lower part of the altar during Barī Navarātri
<i>mindā</i> (Mew)	ram
<i>mīṇe loṇo</i> (Mew)	‘taking inside’ ceremony upon the bride’s entry into the husband’s home during weddings
<i>mukhbīr/mukhbar</i> (Hin/Kanj)	informer, spy
<i>mūrti/maurat</i> (Hin/Mew)	devotional image
Nāī (Hin)	Barber
<i>nakābzani</i> (Hin)	house burglary involving the making of a wall breach
<i>namaskār/namaste</i> (Hin)	reverential salutation with palms pressed together
<i>nāniyāl</i> (Hin)	mother’s natal home
<i>nannā/nanni</i> (Kanj)	small
Naṭ (Hin)	Acrobat, Ropewalker
<i>netā</i> (Hin)	political leader
<i>nuktā</i> (Hin)	funerary feast
<i>nyay</i> (Hin)	justice
<i>pādā bharan nazarānā</i> (Mew)	Buffalo Load Payment, a standard traditional form of fine in Rajasthan, consisting of a young buffalo and the grain that could be loaded onto its back
<i>paḥcān</i> (Hin)	distinguishing mark or trait
<i>pañcāy/pañcāyat</i> (Mew)	village or caste council
<i>pātī (māṅganā)</i> (Mew)	the practice of ‘(soliciting) the consent/blessing’ of a goddess for successful undertaking
<i>paṭwārī</i> (Hin)	accountant
<i>parivār</i> (Hin)	family
Parsāi (Hin)	Village Priest
<i>pārsī</i> (Hin)	secret, insider language
<i>peṭ</i> (Hin)	stomach, belly, innards
<i>peṭ māṅganiyā</i> (Hin)	literally ‘belly fetching,’ the forging of marriage alliances before the birth of children
<i>piḍāwali</i> (Hin)	genealogy
<i>pīhar</i> (Hin)	natal home
<i>prakṛti</i> (Skt/Hin)	nature
<i>praśāsan</i> (Hin)	administration
<i>pūchnā</i> (Hin)	to ask
<i>pūj(n)ā</i> (Hin)	(to offer) devotional service
Purohit (Hin)	Family priest

<i>rājadharmā</i> (Skt)	royal code of conduct
Rājput (Hin)	the ruling class, literally ‘the son of king’
Rāwat (<i>Raj</i>)	Chief Noble
Raykā/Rebarī (Hin)	caste of Itinerant Pastoralists
Regar (Hin)	Leather Dyer
<i>ristedār/ristedārī</i> (Hin)	relative/relationship
<i>riśvat</i> (Hin)	bribe
<i>riwāj aur ādat</i> (Hin)	customs and habits
<i>roṭī</i> (Hin)	flatbread, food, sustenance
<i>rūp</i> (Hin)	form, image, manifestation
<i>sacc</i> (Hin)	truth
<i>sagā/sagī</i> (Hin)	‘true’ sibling, literally ‘from the same womb’
<i>sāgawān</i> (Hin)	a tree of the palm species (<i>Sagus rumphii</i>)
Sāgā Rānī (Hin)	Palm Tree Queen, regional goddess near Fararpur
<i>śakti</i> (Skt, Hin)	potency, strength, the Goddess
<i>samāj</i> (Hin)	society, community, group
<i>śarāb</i> (Hin)	liquor, alcohol
<i>sarīr</i> (Hin)	body
<i>sarkār</i> (Hin)	the state, master, overlord
<i>sarkārī naukar</i> (Hin)	state employee
<i>sarpāñc</i> (Hin)	head of caste or village council
<i>sasur</i> (Hin)	father-in-law
<i>sās</i> (Hin)	mother-in-law
<i>sasurāl</i> (Hin)	spouse’s natal home
<i>satī</i> (Hin)	widow immolation, a good woman, a woman who dies on her husband’s funeral pyre
<i>sevā</i> (Hin)	service, devotion, worship
<i>sipay</i> (Mew)	derogatory term for a low-ranking police officer, ‘cop’
<i>siroli birat</i> (Raj)	‘patronage shared by all,’ a generalized form of donor-servant relations
(<i>nā</i>) <i>śubh</i> or (<i>ku</i>) <i>śubh</i> (Hin)	(in)auspicious, (un)fortunate, (un)well
<i>śubhrāj</i> (Hin)	panegyric verses for a patron
<i>sūcnā</i> (Hin)	information
(<i>a</i>) <i>śuddh</i> (Hin)	(im)pure
Sutār (Hin)	Goldsmith
<i>svabhāva</i> (Skt)	one’s own nature
<i>svadharmā</i> (Skt)	community-specific <i>dharma</i> , literally ‘one’s own <i>dharma</i> ’
<i>tahsīl</i> (Hin)	administrative subdivision of a district

<i>tahsildār</i> (Hin)	revenue official
<i>tāmbā pattar</i> (Hin)	copper plate used as a certificate of service rights
<i>tārīkh</i> (Hin)	(calendar) date, court hearing or other official appointment
<i>teydā</i> (Kanj)	superstructure altar erected at <i>Barī Navarātri</i> by Kanjar clans of the Aḷmoḍī-moiety
<i>ṭhaḡī</i> (Hid)	deception, counterfeiting; used by colonial officials to describe the practice of robbery by strangulation
<i>thānā</i> (Hin)	police station
<i>thānedār</i> (Hin)	senior officer at a police station, colloquially used to refer to any officer above the rank of Assistant Sub-inspector
<i>tsāḷi</i> (Kanj)	goat
<i>ṭuṭā</i> (Hin)	broken, fractured
<i>tyohār</i> (Hin)	festival
<i>ujaḷi mātā</i> (Kanj)	‘Upper Mother’ placed on the second level of the <i>teydā</i> by the Kanjars of the Aḷmoḍī moiety
<i>upparmālī/dāḡlī</i> (Kanj)	second level of the altar constructed by some clans of the Aḷmoḍī moiety
<i>vikās</i> (Hin)	development
<i>yajamāna</i> (Skt)	patron of sacrifice
<i>zarūli nikhālnā</i> (Kanj)	hair lock cutting rites

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CHAPTER ONE

PATRONAGE & THE LOGIC OF RANK IN WESTERN INDIA

Rama vowed to free the earth of Kshatriyas [warrior-rulers] and took up arms ... Possessed of great energy, he quickly reft the earth of all Kshatriyas. Then Sudras [servants] and Vaisyas [farmers and merchants], acting most wilfully, began to unite themselves ... with the wives of Brahmanas. When anarchy sets in on earth, the weak are oppressed by the strong, and no man is master of his own property. Unprotected duly by Kshatriyas observant of virtue, and oppressed by the wicked in consequence of that disorder, the earth quickly sank to the lowest depths.

(*Mahābhārata* 12.50, trans. Ganguli [1883-1896] vol. 7: 102-3)

This thesis is an ethnography set within the structure of an argument. The ethnography focuses on the organization and social location of a caste of professional thieves, known as Kanjars, in rural Rajasthan. As such, the thesis offers the first full-length ethnographic study of this community. The argument has the much more encompassing aim of revising our understanding of rank and hierarchy in Rajasthan, and perhaps broader abroad in Northern India. I argue that the formula of donor-servant relations is the ideological anchor of social organization—of the calculus of identity, relative rank, and social worth—in Rajasthan and perhaps also further afield in India. More broadly, I argue that the logic of donor-servant relations is a basic structural and moral basis of rank, rather than a *contingent consequence* of a transcendent ideology of substance. On the broadest analytical level, I propose a shift from analysis based on an ideology of substantive value (whether Brāhmaṇical purity, Rājput valiance and strength: values that apply to persons and substances, not to relationships) to analysis that proceeds from ideas and ideals about

social relations. This introductory chapter outlines my argument, which I set out ethnographically in the remainder of this thesis.

My original interest in the Kanjar community had to do with the unusual nature of their business, the history of thieves, and the uses of theft today. There was also of course the appeal of producing the first ethnographic account of the Kanjar community. In the course of fieldwork, however, it became increasingly apparent that both the internal workings and the social position of the Kanjar community are rooted in the ideology of patron-client relatedness, which, in order to make sense of my material, I had to spell out. The location of Kanjars as men with no publicly recognized patronage ties on the extreme social periphery, revealed the importance of durable, exclusive and publicly recognized patronage bonds in the local status-calculus. As so often happens in the course of fieldwork, particular questions generated answers of broader importance and the emerging image expanded far beyond the viewfinder with which I initially came to the field.

1.1 THE PLACE AND THE PEOPLE

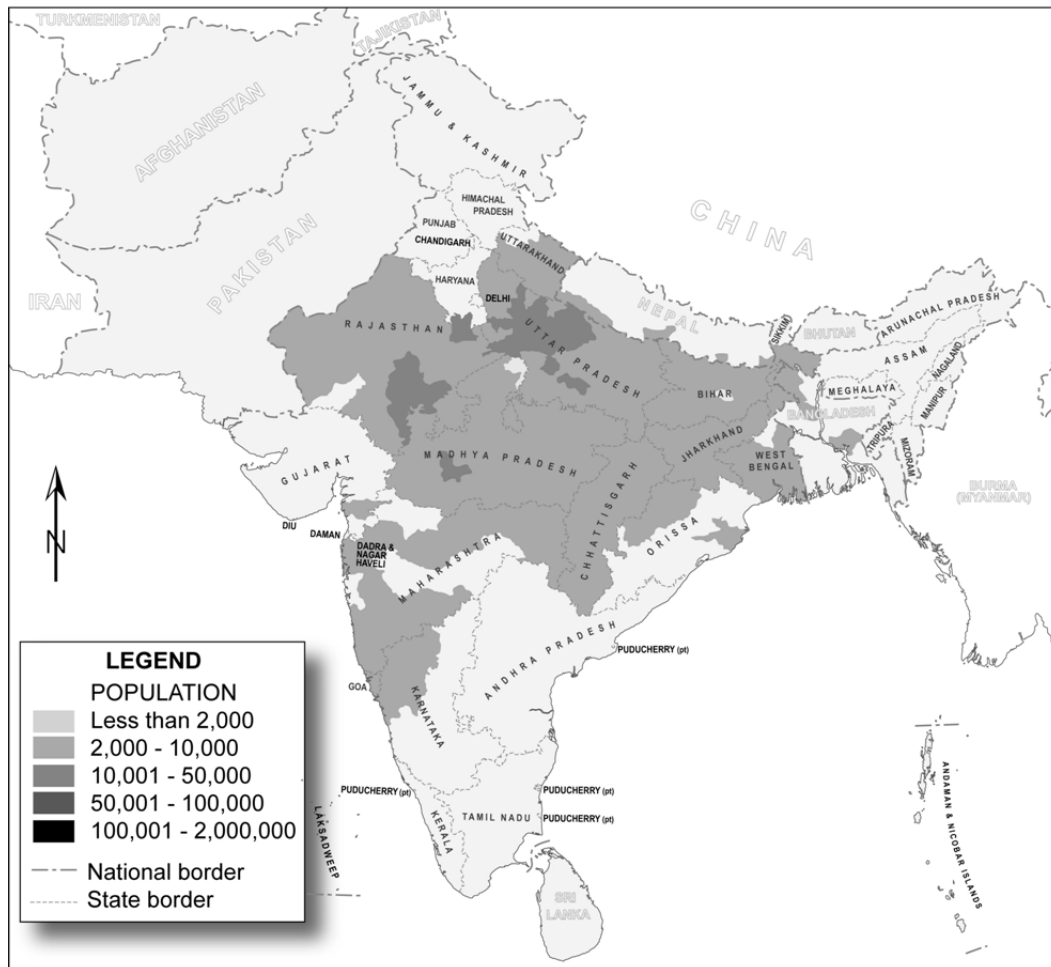
An estimated 211,000 Kanjars live in Pakistan, India and Bangladesh today. In India, where the Kanjar majority (189,000) resides, most Kanjars (100,000) live in the northern province of Uttar Pradesh and approximately 38,000 live in Rajasthan, where I conducted my field research (see Map 1.1 below).¹ Historically, the name 'Kanjar' applied loosely to a

¹ According to the 2001 *Census of India Report*, there were 159,761 Kanjars living in India, with most of the (93,207) resident in the northern Indian province of Uttar Pradesh and 37,971 in Rajasthan. The Joshua

variety of itinerant groups involved in mobile trades, ranging from prostitution to ropewalking, basket making and professional theft. Over time, the name acquired a negative moral sense akin to the English 'gypsy' or 'bastard' and came to be applied to various socially marginal 'vagrant' groups. Some of them that have appropriated the name, securing their position on the periphery of respectable social life. The close association between the name and extreme social and moral marginality means that groups that have retained the title of Kanjar have the special (and often lucrative) license to engage in various morally marginal trades, most prominently prostitution and theft. Although today Kanjars are by and large settled and many own and cultivate land, most continue to be involved in various types of socially and formally illicit businesses. In southern Rajasthan, where I conducted most of my field research, most Kanjars practice professional thieving, which not only constitutes a key source of income for the community and the bulk of adult men's professional activity, but also serves as the anchor of Kanjars' identity, both in their own eyes and in the eyes of their significant others.

In India thievery has long been a recognized, albeit not a plainly legitimate, trade that has played an important role in local political life. Thieves have been and continue to be employed as backstage agents of protection, intelligence, resource extraction, and

Project, a worldwide missionary organization, provides a more up-to-date count based in part on census data, which I use here. Given population growth estimates, the Joshua Project figures reflect appropriate population growth among Kanjars over the past decade. For a graph layout of Kanjar population and occupational statistics, see Appendix I.



Map 1.1: Kanjar population in India and Bangladesh

mediation. Communities of professional thieves have, therefore, historically clustered in particularly uneasy political zones: on the fringes of princely estates and states, along the foothill frontiers of tribal hill polities, and on the lands of mutinous nobles. I conducted most of my own field research in one such zone in southeastern Rajasthan: on the estate of one dissident Rājput family, located at the once turbulent confluence of erstwhile Rājput, Marāṭhā and Muslim states, which still houses the highest concentration of Kanjars in Rajasthan today (see Map 1.2 below).

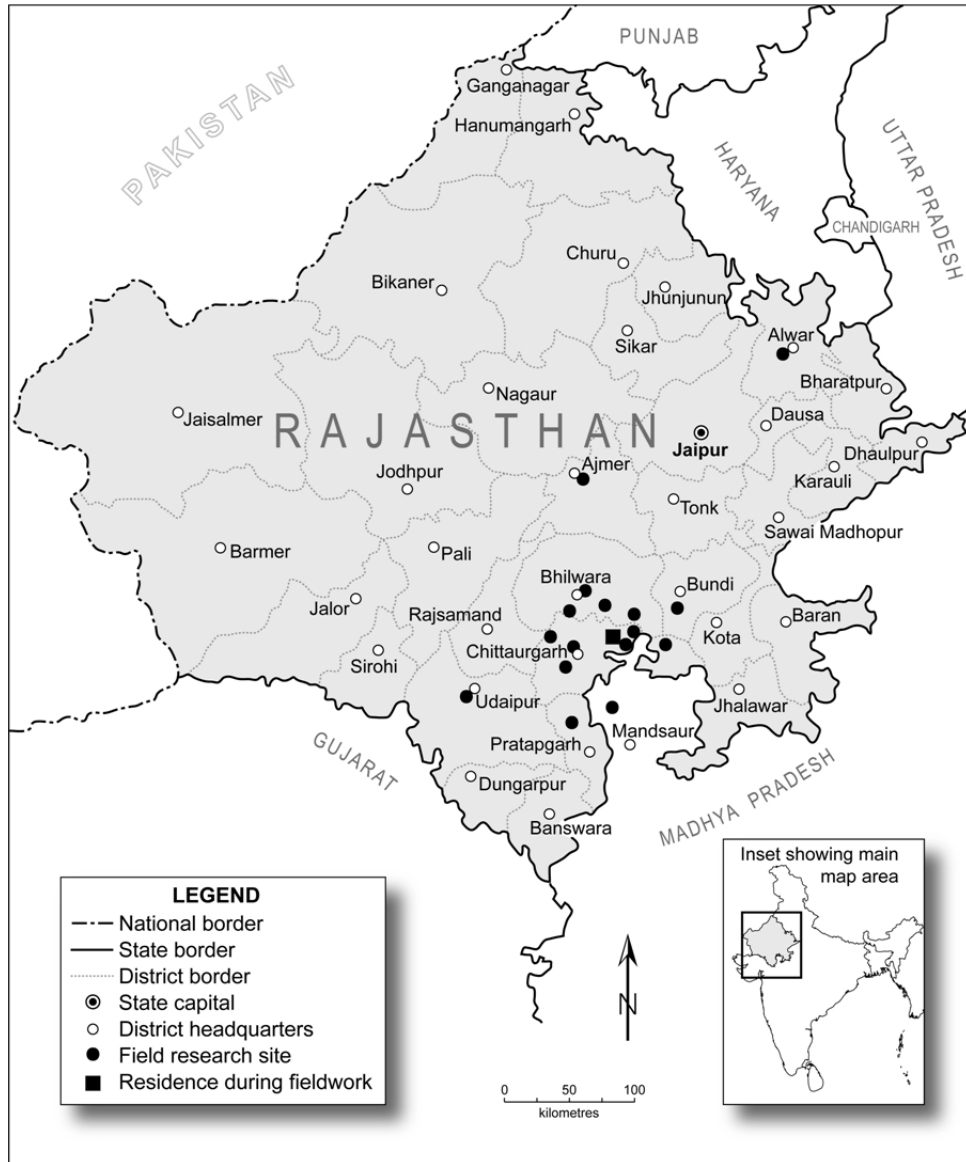
The estate, which following India's independence became an administrative block (*tahsīl*) in the southern district of Chittaurgarh, and which I shall call 'Fararpur,' stretches across a patchily forested, hilly valley of one of the region's main rivers Brahmani. The block has a total population of approximately 40,000 people, about half of whom reside in the market-town that serves as the block's administrative headquarters.² Fararpur town spreads westward from the foot of a citadel, which is the ancestral home of its Chief Noble (Rāwat Sawāī) family and which now houses a family-run heritage hotel.³ The relatively fertile area has long been a site of lively agricultural production, where the majority farmer caste, called the Dhākar, has historically dominated local political and economic life.⁴ Today farmers continue to collect three annual harvests of the cash crops of wheat, maize, garlic, peanuts, and opium poppy (the last of these cultivated by the permission of the Indian government, which also formally controls its sale and distribution). As elsewhere in Rajasthan, however, irregular rainfall and the resultant dramatic drop in the water table have made large-scale agricultural production an increasingly unreliable and costly

² According to the 2001 *Census Report*, there were 19,335 residents in Fararpur town and 35,678 in the administrative block.

³ The family opened the hotel in March of 2009, just after the completion of my field research. The Fararpur Rāwat is one of the last major nobles in southern Rajasthan to turn to the tourist and hotel business, in which most high ranking Rājput families in the region are increasingly involved.

⁴ Rājput, Gujar, Brāhmaṇ, Mīṇā, and Bhīl communities constitute another significant presence.

business, driving over the past two decades a growth of chronic indebtedness, informal debt economy, farmer suicide rates, and opium trafficking.⁵



Map 1.2: Field research sites

The Fararpur block is home to sixteen Kanjar settlements, which ranges in size from a five-house hamlet to a settlement of nearly five hundred homes, and which house

⁵ In the course of my fieldwork, four farmers within the Fararpur block committed suicide.

approximately 7,500 people.⁶ Most Kanjars resident in Fararpur were originally invited to the area by Rājput chiefs, farmers and village communities, who employed them to pillage, protect from, learn things about, and negotiate disputes with rivals. In the latter days of the Raj, many such bonds dissipated as Kanjars were classified (together with almost 120 other communities across India) as a Criminal Tribe and became subject to special policing and penal measures prescribed by the Criminal Tribes legislation. Between 1930 and 1952, the year when the Criminal Tribes Act was repealed and its administration disbanded, two Criminal Tribe colonies were run in Fararpur, their Kanjar inmates subject to systems of compulsory registration, regular roll-call, absentee passes, and preemptive arrests. In this period, Inspectors in charge of the colonies took to protecting some of their residents, allowing them to thief freely on the territory under their jurisdiction in exchange for a share of their spoils.

Current relations between Kanjars and the police, on which the success of the community's thieving business largely relies, carry on the legacy of the community's ties to colonial Criminal Tribe administrators. Police patronage, which allows protected Kanjar thieves to run free within the jurisdiction of the police station, had inverted the long-standing conventions of patronized theft: whereas employment by Rājputs or village communities assumed that Kanjars would plunder *outside* of their patrons' territories, under today's police protection, Kanjars safely thief *within* the territories of their patron-

⁶ According to the 2008 election-time population count in Fararpur.

stations with the result that their operations have been largely confined to the territory of the block and that the population of Fararpur has been subjected to consistently high levels of predation. The farmers have reacted to this barrage with violence.⁷ In 1990, the Kanjar settlement, in which I lived for the duration of field research (first during a three-month stint in the summer of 2005 and then during the fourteen-month stretch in 2007 and 2008) and which I shall call ‘Lakshmipura,’ became the site of the worst Kanjar pogrom in northern India in recent decades. The settlement was almost entirely razed, ten of its residents were murdered and dozens were injured (see Section 5.6 for more on the event). Although the pogrom attracted a great deal of media attention, so much so that Rajiv and Sonia Gandhi came to visit the settlement, since then on average one Kanjar has been murdered in Fararpur every year.⁸

Lakshmipura is located six kilometers west of Fararpur town. To reach the settlement from there, one travels along a paved road through poppy and wheat fields to the multi-caste village of ‘Lakshmipura’ (from which the Kanjar settlement takes its name); the pavement ends there and the rest of the way is a stony path which winds through a shrubby stretch of land toward the ruins of a police outpost that juts out on the horizon,

⁷ See Section 4.6 of this thesis and Piliavsky (forthcoming b) for a fuller discussion of this change.

⁸ The Kanjars are murdered by various people in the area, but most commonly by wealthy and influential farmers (most of them Dhākars) who have less fear police persecution.

marking the settlement's outer boundary.⁹ The path gets narrower there as it skirts a row of low-set slab-and-mud houses toward the center of settlement, where I lived during my

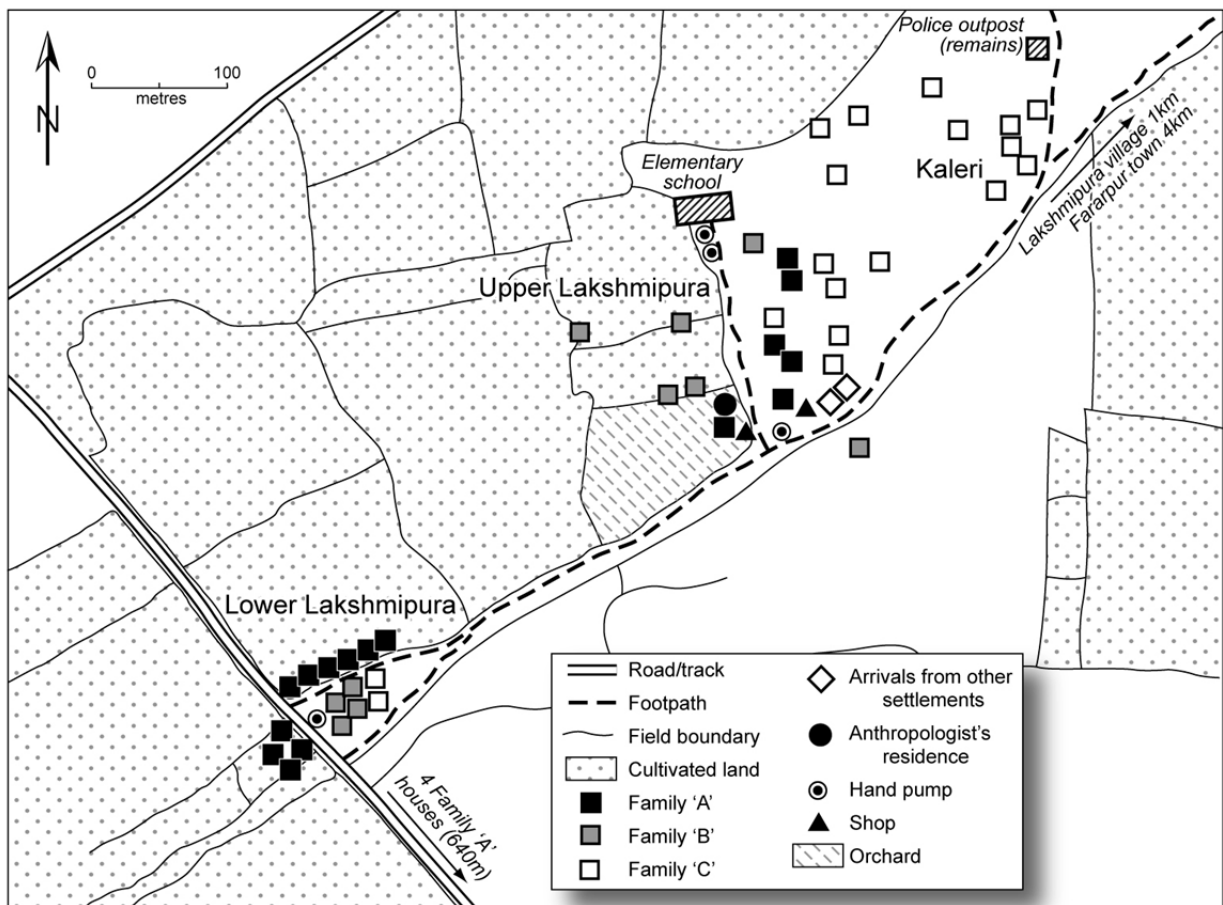


Figure 1.1: The remains of a police outpost built after the 1990 pogrom on the outer boundary of Lakshmipura

fieldwork in the household of 'Gopal,' a successful thief and police informer (the two roles almost always go together) and a community leader on the rise. Lakshmipura is divided into three sections that house two extended families belonging to a single patriclan (*got*) called Karmāwat. At the time of research in 2007 and 2008, Lakshmipura comprised 50

⁹ The outpost, which was built in the aftermath of the pogrom (ostensibly to protect, but in fact to keep an eye on the settlement), was razed by Kanjars within a year of its construction, its ruins now standing as a reminder of the pogrom (see Figure 1.1 above).

households and 170 residents (see Map 1.3 below). Most families in the settlement own arable land and some hire laborers for its cultivation. Like other Kanjars in the area, however, most residents of Lakshmipura derive a major portion of their earnings from two specialist trades: the distillation and sale of liquor (*dārū*, or *madh* in Kanjarī) and the business of theft.



Map 1.3: Lakshmipura Kanjar settlement. All families in Lakshmipura belong to the same Karmāwat patriclan and each is comprised of the households of the descendants of one paternal grandfather. Families 'A' and 'B' are segments of a larger family (they are descendants of two paternal grandfathers who were blood brothers) and family 'C' are offspring of two unrelated men.

1.2 A MASTERLESS FOLK

Sometime after midnight, on the last leg of a particularly long government bus ride across Rajasthan, I shared a seat with a very talkative court clerk. My efforts to prevent dialogue having failed, I told him about my research. At the mention of Kanjars, his eyes grew wide and he repeated—‘*jurm peśā qaum!*’—a phrase that he inscribed in my diary, glancing at me emphatically when finished. This expression, which I came to hear often in the course of my research, is an Urdu phrase that means literally ‘community criminal by profession.’ Other common epithets—*aparādhī jāti* (criminal caste), *coroñ kī jāt* (caste of thieves), *farār* (outlaw), or simply *badmās* (ruffian, hoodlum)—used in everyday speech, newspapers and police files alike, describe Kanjars as moral outsiders. Their indecency is not just common knowledge, it is proverbial. So, parents often say to their ill-behaved children: ‘*Kanjaroñ kī taraf mat karo!*’ (‘Don’t act the Kanjar way!’ or ‘Don’t do it like a Kanjar!’), and rude youths in Southall and the Punjab use ‘Kanjar’ as a slur equivalent to the English ‘pimp,’ ‘bastard’ or ‘whore.’ Perceptions of Kanjars as criminal, ‘dirty,’ and vulgar—as a peripheral folk *par excellence*—are not new: in the eighteenth century, Punjabi poet Waris Shah wrote that ‘Kanjars know not what love is. God’s curse on the casual light-loves. Touch them not’ (Shah 1966 [1766]: 79).

The marginal reputation of Kanjars (and other similar groups) is not confined to the realm of marketplace rumor, but is also perpetuated in local press and official accounts, where Kanjars are almost invariably classed as a ‘criminal caste’ (Piliavsky 2011: 7). A recent

Chapter One

newspaper article about Kanjars alleged to be peacock poachers described them as descendants of ‘famed highway plunderers ... said to be habitual criminals and [to] always carry country-made pistols and crude bombs with them’ (Srivastava 2005). The supposed inability of the police to track them down is written off with the claim that Kanjars ‘disappear on the spot into their secret lairs’ (ibid.). In 1998, the Chief Minister of the Indian province of Madhya Pradesh lamented that the state’s educational programs had little effect on ‘the criminal instincts’ of Pardhis (another ‘ex-criminal’ caste of the same social standing) because, as he explained, their instincts were nourished by the ‘*hidden nature of their society, which is resilient to the ideas of modern education*’ (Telegraph 1998; emphasis mine).

While most groups tried to shed the name and the stigma, some re-appropriated it as their ethnonym, taking up the marginal identity that it denotes and the license it provides to engage in ‘immoral’ trades such as prostitution and theft. Today, those who call themselves Kanjars describe themselves as outsiders to ordinary society (albeit with a positive spin): as a fierce and dangerous caste of thieves with secret practices, magical powers and a language of their own (Piliavsky 2011: 10-12). Engagement in trades that are excluded from the visible sphere of polite social life has further entrenched them on the extreme social margin rhetorically and quite literally—‘in the jungle,’ the perennial periphery of civilized life in South Asia. Today Kanjars are almost invariably sequestered in single-caste ‘camps’ (*deṛās*) or ‘settlements’ (*bastīs*)—never ‘villages’ (*gāoṅs*) proper—which

are located outside of ordinary multi-caste villages and which are rarely connected to the rest of the landscape through roads or electrical wiring. By repute, and often in practice, Kanjar settlements are dens of the ‘vices’ of meat-eating, drinking and sexual promiscuity. Upright people avoid Kanjar settlements altogether or visit them surreptitiously to buy a bottle of freshly brewed country liquor (*dārū*) or to have a ‘good party’ (an opportunity to drink alcohol and eat meat in the open).

Prudish talk about the Kanjars’ criminal, secretive, uncivilized, and foul nature describes Kanjars as social pariahs, but does not explain why they find themselves in this position. The rhetoric of Kanjar marginality, expressed in the familiar language of Brāhmaṇical piety (and its derision for meat-eating, drinking, remarriage, and other ‘filthy habits’) obscures the logic of Kanjars’ exclusion. One does not need to look far beneath such narratives, however, to get a sense of this logic. Time and again, the following phrase appears in my field notes: Kanjars are outsiders because they are ‘beggars’ (*māṅgnewālās*) or people who ‘eat from everyone’s hands’ (*sabhī ke hāth se khāte*). Or, in the words of one farmer, Kanjars ‘will serve and eat from anyone who will give them work.’ That is, Kanjars have the repute of people with no attachments to particular patrons. Although as thieves Kanjars have acquired, and in some cases sustained, bonds with *jajmāns*, the underhanded nature of thieving business has necessarily kept their attachments to patrons from public view, leaving Kanjars with the reputation of masterless rogues. Kanjars are not just exemplary, they are representative of such marginalization. Itinerant traders, craftsmen

and entertainers, who come in and out of sight, have long been held in disrepute as 'nobody's' people with no set patronage ties, and, as such, as socially and morally loose 'vagrants.' Such 'beggar' communities make up the bottom-most class that occupies the extreme margin of local society.

The history of becoming Kanjars is the story of an insistent and mostly failed pursuit of patronage ties as a way into respectable social life. Although groups that re-appropriated the name 'Kanjara' as their ethnonym and established themselves in the notorious trades of prostitution and theft did manage to find patrons, the underhanded nature of their work has kept such attachments from public view. Thieves have been and continue to be important agents of South Asian political practice, helping their employers to wrest out resources or negotiate conflicts. Thieving, nevertheless, has not been a legitimate part of polite politics; thieves employed by kings, landlords or farmers have been kept behind the scenes of polite and public political and social life. While in practice engaging in some of the most important negotiations and in fact occupying some of the innermost social spaces, in public perception Kanjars have remained a masterless folk. The history tracked in this chapter shows that groups that have failed to sustain proper, durable and publically recognized ties to patrons on the subcontinent have remained beyond the ambit of respectable society.

Thus, contrary to the received wisdom of Indianist sociology, communities that stand on the extreme social periphery are *not* those involved in 'polluting' trades

(Leatherworkers, Barbers, Washermen, etc.), but the various ‘masterless’ groups like the Kanjar, and it is this that prompted my thinking about the importance of patronage ties in local society. I shall argue here that ties to patrons—the identities of patrons as much as the quality of bonds with them—are the key gauge of identity and relative rank in local society on all levels of social inclusion: within the Kanjar community, the broader social ‘universe’ (*jagat*) of Fararpur, Rajasthan and perhaps society in northern Indian more broadly.

1.3 THE RISE AND FALL OF THE ANTHROPOLOGY OF PATRONAGE IN INDIA

The anthropology of patronage in India is all but dead. This was not always the case and it used to be that patronage was an important empirical and an analytical hub of ethnographic concern in South Asia. Village-based ‘*jajmānī* system’ of patron-client exchange constituted a central object of ethnographic work and a focus of some key debates in the sociology of India. Over the past two decades, however, this discussion has been largely abandoned and terms like ‘patron,’ ‘patronage,’ ‘client,’ ‘*jajmān*,’ and ‘*jajmānī*’ have all but disappeared from the indexes of ethnographies written today.¹⁰

The *jajmānī* ‘system’ was first systematically described in 1936 by the missionary William Wiser. According to him, in the North Indian village of Karimpur, where he spent some time, castes were bound to one another through hereditary exchange of payments (in

¹⁰ A notable exception is a recent volume by Mines (2005).

cash or kind) for the provision of various services, with each caste both employed by and employing the others. Wiser wrote:

[T]he priest, bard, accountant, goldsmith, florist, vegetable grower, etc., etc., are served by all other castes. In turn each of these castes has a form of service to perform for the others. Each in turn is master. Each in turn is servant. Each has his own clientele comprising members of different castes which is his 'jajmani' or 'birt' (Wiser 1936: 10).

An entire generation of village-based ethnographies followed his cue. With varied emphasis, *jajmānī* relations were described as village-based 'systems' of exchange between dominant patron-families, clans or castes and their servants via customary, inherited bonds of patronage and service provision. Over the following five decades, Wiser's description was both extended and ossified into a pan-Indian model—a 'system' of exchange that bound rural Indians into socially, politically and economically self-contained village-communities.¹¹ By the early 1970s, the *jajmānī* model was entrenched, in Dumont's substantive definition, as a 'system corresponding to the prestations and counter-prestations by which the castes as a whole are bound together in the village, and which is more or less universal in India' (1980: 97). It had 'taken on a life of its own through the various simplifications and idealizations of innumerable textbooks and lecture courses' (Good 1982: 31) and became an ideal type of non-monetary pre-market economies in sociology textbooks. *Jajmānī* relations consolidated into a 'village exchange system' went

¹¹ This body of literature is too extensive to mention pieces individually. For overviews, see Broniger (1975), Parry (1979), Good (1982), Commander (1983), Fuller (1989), Caldwell (1991), Lerche (1993), and Mayer (1993).

hand in hand with the installation of the age-old, immutable, pan-Indian ‘village republic’ (Caldwell 1991: 3)—a ‘village-community’ à la Maine (1861)—as the centerpiece of ethnographic inquiry in South Asia.

By the early 1980s, however, the analytical system had begun to crumble, coming to be criticized as at once too broad and too narrow a category for analysis. Some argued that *jajmānī* networks comprised neither an age-old nor a pan-Indian institution, but were in fact present on a much narrower historic and geographic scale. These critics argued that what was assumed to be an ancient legacy of the *Laws of Manu* (Wiser 1958: xxv) and a phenomenon of at least medieval (Beidelman 1959), if not 2,500 year-old (Gough 1960: 89), provenance, could be traced back in the written record to the middle of the nineteenth century and its first systematic description by Wiser in 1936.¹² In its ideal form, the *jajmānī* system appeared to be a distinctive North Indian phenomenon, and one that appeared only in ‘areas of predominantly small-holding peasant husbandry’ (Commander 1983: 287).¹³

¹² See Mayer (1993), Commander (1983), Raychaudhuri (1984: 9), and Fuller (1989). Heesterman has moreover argued that even the connection between the Hindustani term *jajmān* and the Sanskrit *yajamāna* (patron of sacrifice), which has been perennially invoked in support of the antiquity of the *jajmānī* system, is ‘at best a flimsy one’ (1985: 88).

¹³ Neale and Adams also observed that *jajmānī* was only one of at least nine village systems of production, distribution and exchange in Northern India (1990: 52-54). In various South Indian configurations of traditional village exchange (known by a variety of names, such as *bālutā*, *mirāsi*, *paniwallu*, *padiyal*, or *kaniaci*) the identities of patrons and clients, the types of payments and the duration of bonds have differed markedly from those of ideal *jajmānī* bonds (Fukuzawa 1972; 1984; Reiniche 1977). South Indian exchange patterns, in which services are normally performed for entire villages, have been styled ‘generalized’ and, as such, contrasted to the ‘particularistic’ *jajmānī*. So, Fukuzawa 1972; 1984), for instance, opposed the ‘generalized’ or ‘demiurgic’ *bālutā* exchange (between a servant and an entire village) in Maharashtra and the ‘dyadic’ *jajmānī* ties (between a servant and a particular patron-family, clan or caste) (also see Orenstein 1965: 216; 1962).

Others argued that *jajmānī* was too encompassing a category for comparing exchange across the subcontinent because it only properly applied to relationships between patrons and providers of ‘ritual’ or ‘religious’ services: ideally and paradigmatically the Brāhmaṇs. Foreshadowing later criticisms, Pocock had argued that ‘proper’ *jajmānī* relations involved only ‘ritual specialists’ like Washermen, Barbers and Priests, who remove accumulated ‘impurity’ (Pocock 1962: 82; also Gould 1964: 31; Dumont 1980: 97-98). Others later noted that historically the term ‘*jajmānī*’ applied only to relations between Family Priests (Purohits) and their patron-castes, which were consequently emulated by others (Dumont 1980).¹⁴ Mayer (1993), for instance, argued that the term ‘*jajmānī*’ had restricted usage until the nineteenth century, during which it was increasingly adopted by menial ‘non-ritual’ service-castes (Ironsmiths, Woodworkers, Potters, etc.). Prior to that, he wrote, ‘artisans and others like Chamars [Leatherworkers],’ were not attached to particular patron-families, but ‘had *general obligations of service to the entire class of village landholders* and were compensated for those services by all cultivators, either directly by payment at harvest time, or indirectly through grants of village land’; not all service relations were called *jajmānī* (Mayer 1993: 373, italics in original).

¹⁴ The same restricted application of the term *jajmānī* to the patrons of ‘ritual specialists’ was also reported in northern Uttar Pradesh (Berreman 1972a: 57-58), Haryana (Miller 1975: 82), Himachal Pradesh (Parry 1979: 59-70), Tamil Nadu (Good 1982: 32), and Orissa (Lerche 1993: 243). Pocock likewise argued that the term *jajmānī* is applied only to relations with ‘religious specialists’ (1962), which ‘serve as a model for the others’ (1970: 107).

While some discredited the *jajmānī* system as an all-encompassing pan-Indian phenomenon, others thought it to be too narrow a category: the idealization of *jajmānī* relations as a system of non-monetary, intra-village, inter-caste transactions overlooked the fact that donor-servant exchange extended into political, economic and ritual spheres that stretched beyond the village and permeated relationships within, not just between, castes. In 1977, Fuller argued that *jajmānī* prestations were historically made to both village-based *jajmāns* and supra-local military elites, and that it is only the colonial reshuffling of local political and economic structures that truncated *jajmānī* exchange, leaving anthropologists with the artifact of a village-bound, 'caste-based economic system' (Fuller 1977: 107-9; 1989; also Wolf 1966: 47-57; Karanth 1987: 2217). Ethnographers further observed that on the village level *jajmānī*-type exchange was a feature of intra- as much as inter-caste relationships (Good 1982; Raheja 1988b). Good showed that prestations that have been conventionally treated as exclusive to customary exchange *between* service-castes and their *jajmāns*, were also part of exchange *within* castes at various rites of passage (Good 1982: 26). In sum, it was argued that stretching beyond the boundaries of village and caste communities, *jajmānī* exchange did not constitute an isolable, village-based, inter-caste exchange 'system.' Others yet argued that the geographical scope of the 'system' was limited: the types of prestations and the tenure of service-bonds differed substantially across the subcontinent; in different contexts payments have been made in kind, cash or

both. Long before the current trend to make payments in cash was observed,¹⁵ Grierson noted that ‘traditional’ payments comprised sums of cash, piles of grain, clothing, or some combination of cash and kind, and that each kind of payment was designated with a different term (Grierson 1926 [1885]: 317-22). The duration of such bonds, which ideally were seen as hereditary and everlasting, was also likewise to be varied.¹⁶

In Rajasthan, patronage ties known as *birat* (also *barat*, *bart*, *birt*, *brat*, or *brit*) have been no less varied in detail: the identities of patrons and clients, the exclusivity and duration of bonds, as well as the frequency and forms of exchange have differed over time and space. Bonds between landed *jajmāns* and the sedentary providers of more regular services, such as accountants, milkmen, florists, or priests, thought by convention to be the ideal form of *jajmānī* relations,¹⁷ have also been varied. Whereas some servant-families worked for individual patron-households, others attended *jajmān*-families, and others yet have been employed by entire localized segments of clans, village communities, or town neighborhoods. Exchange between *jajmāns* and their servants could amount to daily encounters (as in the case of Sweepers and Washermen) or be confined to annual visits (see

¹⁵ One type of prestation offered to Brāhmaṇs in Orissa, for instance, which was previously given in paddy, has now been replaced by a cash payment of five Rupees (Lerche 1993: 246).

¹⁶ In early-eighteenth-century Maharashtra, for instance, some servants enjoyed hereditary and permanent rights of service while others were bound into temporary arrangements (Fukuzawa 1972: 34). In Karnataka, servants like Barbers and artisans neither held hereditary rights of service nor received customary forms of payment, but instead negotiated the terms of their employment every year anew (Harper 1959: 772). And in Bengal patronage bonds ranged from ‘fixed’ (*dhārā*) to semi-fixed ‘exchange’ or ‘bartering’ (*badlāi*) and ‘casual’ (*nagat*) (Mukhopadhyay 1969).

¹⁷ For some classic examples, see Kolenda (1967), Mandelbaum (1970: 161-62) and Dumont (1980: 98).

Kushner 1967); while some bonds persisted through a number of generations, others formed and dissipated within a few years. The *jajmān* may have been an individual or a corporate entity, such as a household, a localized segment of a clan, a *jāti*, or indeed an entire village community. Clients, referred to across northern India by a variety of descriptive terms, such as *kamīns* and *kām-karne-wālās* (workers), *biratkārīs* (holders of service rights) or *māṅgats* and *māṅgnewālās* (beggars)—be they Priests, Barbers or Bards—often received a mixed payments in cash, kind or both. While some of these gifts become formalized (like fixed amounts of cash, or *ināms*, given to entertainers in Rajasthan [Kothari 1994]), most of them comprise a varied and negotiable assortment of food, dress, drink, cattle, immovable property, land, and so on.¹⁸ Indeed, in Commander's words, 'the fragmented and rather partial sense in which the *jajmānī* structure can be found to be functioning' bears 'a very dim resemblance to the pure model' (Commander 1983: 307, 310).

The *jajmānī* system was finally discarded as an analytical category, following Fuller's pronouncement that 'there is no pan-Indian jajmani system of the patron-client type' and that the term is indeed 'a complete misnomer' (Fuller 1989: 37, 41). Thus, the internally integrated, pan-Indian '*jajmānī* system' of village exchange, which was a centerpiece of 'classical' South Asianist ethnography, was declared dead. The death of *jajmānī* studies attended the end of an era of village-based ethnography in India. The death of the *jajmānī*

¹⁸ Some constitute a percentage of the patron's harvest, others are set sums of cash, and yet others prescribe particular items to be given as gifts.

system precipitated some broader transformations in South Asian anthropology, some constructive and some less so. Among the former, was the ousting of the myth of a timeless village community impervious to broader political and economic forces; among the latter, was a wholesale removal of patronage as a subject of interest in the anthropology of South Asia. This change was not necessarily willed by the critics. Fuller himself, whose 1989 article was received as the tombstone of *jajmānī* studies, did not argue against the importance of patron-client relations as such, but against the ossification of *jajmānī* exchange into a discrete, pan-Indian, immutable, 'systematic, integrated entity' (1989: 39). With the end of the *jajmānī* era, the discussion of broader sociological implications of patron-client relations was abandoned rather than resolved. The baby was lost with the bathwater: patronage *relations* disappeared together with the *jajmānī* system (Karanth 1987).

1.4 DONORS, SERVANTS & SOCIETY IN INDIA

Jajmānī networks certainly do not constitute an isolable self-contained system, but a manifestation of a much more pervasive idiom of relatedness throughout local society, which, as I shall show, structures ranked relations in spheres ranging from the household to the marketplace and the electoral campaign. The elementary configuration of patron-client relations (whether termed *jajmānī*, *bālūtā*, *birat*, or otherwise)—the ranked relational dyad bound by bonds of asymmetrical reciprocity—is a relational formulation whose basic principles form a set of values that are central to local calculations of social value and rank.

The patron-client formula is both the *form* of proper relatedness between superiors and subordinates (husbands and wives, parents and children, gods and devotees, politicians and voters) and the *ideal* on the basis of which the status of those involved in the relationship is determined. In Rajasthan everyone seeks at once *to have* and *to be* a patron. The central figure to be both bound to and to emulate is the *jajmān*, the patron connected to a community of servants by sustained and substantive ties. He may be a king, a minor landholder, or indeed anyone who manages to establish himself in such a role. In Rajasthan, the pompously generous Rājput king is the archetypal *jajmān*, whom everyone, all the way down to Kanjars, seeks to emulate by assuming patronage over servants who will hail them ‘Kings’ (Rājās), ‘Bread Givers’ (Anndātās) or ‘Gods of Grain’ (Ann Devs).¹⁹

Social asymmetry has long been a central preoccupation of South Asianist sociology, which has given to anthropology perhaps the closest thing that it has to a sustained theory of rank. From Hocart to Dumont, Marriott, Raheja, and Parry, anthropologists of South Asia have shown that rank difference is the key binding force in local society and that, counter to the general supposition of Western sociology, in India intimacy correlates directly—not inversely—with difference of rank.²⁰ However, aside from Raheja’s (1988b) study, little concerted effort had gone into understanding the moral logic of ranked relatedness as an

¹⁹ The Kanjars of Lakshmipura patronize Leatherworkers (Camārs) and Sweepers (Bhangīs). See Snodgrass for the bards’ use of such terms in reference to their lowly Leatherworker (Bhāmbhī) *jajmāns* (2006: Ch. 3).

²⁰ The most explicit statement along those lines was made by McKim Marriott (1978), who argued that the more clearly ranked a relationship is in South Asia, the more intimate are commensal and other types of exchange within it.

ideological source of social organization in its own right, rather than a *contingent consequence* of a transcendent ideological scheme. The regnant (although these days largely latent) view in the sociology of South Asia is that rules of relations stem from, and are an expression of, an overarching ideology, rather than being the ideological framework of social order in their own right. This view is the legacy of an old tradition of idealism, which was set forth most elegantly by Dumont (1980), but that has a long prehistory in the sociology of India and sociological theory at large, whose philosophical roots lie with Hegel.²¹ According to this view, the logic of social differentiation in India stems from the opposition between the transcendent ideals of ‘purity’ and ‘pollution.’ This opposition is basic to the ‘hierarchical totality’ of Indian society and to the way in which persons and groups fit into this whole. That is, elements of Indian society are ranked in reference to the criterion of purity and relations among these elements reflect the differential degree of purity that they contain.

Since the publication of the English edition of Dumont’s *Homo Hierarchicus* in 1970, a mass of criticism had been leveled at this model. ‘Materialist’ critics (most notably Berreman 1979) contended that the ideology of purity is ‘merely’ a mask for the ‘true’ nature of political and economic inequalities on the subcontinent.²² Further developments in caste analysis, however, have shown this view to be untenable, if only in light of the fact

²¹ For overviews of Dumont’s philosophical and sociological precursors see, for instance, Collins (1989) and Parry (1998).

²² For an overview of the main advocates of the ‘materialist’ approach and their ‘idealist’ opponents, see Krause (1988: 31).

that in India status and economic or political power often do not coincide (cf., Quigley 1993).

An early wave of criticism of the Brāhmaṇical purity ideal, which was part of the debate about Srinivas's (1952) concept of 'Sanskritization,' suggested that values other than the ideology of purity may be at play. Some have argued that in many areas the Kṣatriyā (or Rājput) valor and strength constitute the dominant ideological force (cf., Sinha 1962; Fox 1971). More recently, it was noted that merchants too, for instance, hold wealth, economic independence and urbaneness as values central to the reckoning of status (Hardiman 1996; Babb 2004; Cort 2004). Others have posited different combinations of Brāhmaṇical purity and kingly power as the ideological constellation from which the order of castes derives (Burkhart 1978; Das 1982; Lerche 1993) or noted that a combination of ideologies (whether Brāhmaṇical purity, kingly strength, merchant wealth, or otherwise) are invoked in different contexts as sources of social worth (Burghart 1978; Malamoud 1982; Gupta 2000; Cort 2004). Such replacement of the Brāhmaṇical with another ideology or a combination of ideologies does not, however, change the basic analytical calculus: a transcendent ideology (of purity, power, wealth, or a shifting constellation of these) at the basis of social order. Together with this calculus, the general configuration of social order—the hierarchical totality, whether a 'ladder' stretched between two status-poles (Dumont 1980) or as a concentric whole with a center and a periphery (Hocart 1950; Raheja 1988b; Quigley 1993)—has remained intact.

Another line of criticism came from the ‘neo-Hocartians,’ most notably Dirks (1987), Raheja (1988a; 1988b; 1989) and Quigley (1993; 1994; 1995). Following Maurice Hocart’s (1950) model of a society centered on the sacrificer-king, they have argued for a marriage of the idealist and the materialist positions by presenting the ideology of purity as the legitimizing force behind the supremacy of kings and other patrons. They contended that in India the political and the ideological (or the ‘religious’ or ‘ritual’) could not be divorced: that, in Dirks’ adage, ‘ritual and political forms were fundamentally the same’ (1987: 5) or in Quigley’s words, ‘those who rule must be pure’ (1993: 169). Thus, having ousted the Brāhmaṇ from the apex of social hierarchy, these ‘neo-Hocartians’ retained the Brāhmaṇical ideology of purity as the basis of social structure.

Raheja (1988b) designed another model in the spirit of Hocart’s analysis, arguing that the preeminence of kings and dominant castes is upheld by the ongoing transfer of ‘sin’ (*pāp*) or ‘inauspiciousness’ (*nāśubh* or *kuśubh*) via gifts from patrons to servants. Insisting that ‘auspiciousness’ (*śubh*) and ‘purity’ (*śuddhi*) are distinct values, she argued that it is the former that is instrumental to the supremacy of patrons and the difference of rank in northern India (*ibid.*: Ch. 2). Yet, as Parry has shown, in everyday north Indian speech, the semantic ranges of ‘purity’ and ‘auspiciousness’ substantially overlap, if not entirely coincide, making ‘the two aspects difficult to unravel’ into distinct and mutually

exclusive categories (1991: 271; also Parry 1994: 112).²³ I observed the same overlap of these categories in Rajasthan: for instance (contrary to what Das [1976: 249ff] argued), people express the moral preeminence of the right over the left hand in terms of both the *śubh/nāśubh* (auspicious/inauspicious) and the *śuddh/aśuddh* (pure/impure) opposition. Thus, notwithstanding Raheja's attempt to move away from the value of purity as the key source of social divisions, the architecture of her scheme has remained homologous with Hocart's and Quigley's models. A replacement of the term 'auspiciousness' with 'purity' in her analysis would suffice to reveal the familiar image of the maintenance of superiority by means of purification. In other words, in her analysis the overarching ideal of 'auspiciousness' plays the same role as 'purity' in the structure of rank difference, whether as articulated by Hocart or Dumont.

Now, Raheja was a student of the 'Chicago school' spearheaded by McKim Marriott and Ronald Inden, who have argued that Indian persons are not individual beings, but are made up of bio-moral 'coded particles,' which shift the status in transactions (such as feeding, marriage or sexual intercourse), something they termed the 'dividual particle theory' (cf., 1973; 1977). In their model, the configuration of the social order emerges from the transactional process in which more and less pure substances are exchanged, altering

²³ Much earlier Srinivas (1952) and Dumont (1959: 33) implied, but did not articulate explicitly, the idea that purity and auspiciousness are not entirely distinct values. In classical Hindu texts the concept of 'sin' and 'impurity' are no less entwined than in contemporary day-to-day usage, making it difficult to treat them as sharply distinct moral categories (Doniger 1976: Ch. 6; also Heesterman 1964; Trautmann 1981: 287).

the substantive makeup of persons and groups. Although adopting the monistic view that rejects the mind/body dualism and the broader distinction between the ideological and biological, Chicago analysts have upheld the value of purity as the basis for the relative evaluation of 'coded particles' that constitute persons in South Asia. While the Chicago analysts shifted the attention of Indian sociology to social exchange, the ideological underpinnings with their roots in the opposition between purity and pollution have remained intact.

I uphold Dumont's view that the arithmetic of rank in Indian society is ideologically driven, that it is based on 'a system of ideas and values' (Dumont 1980: 35) rather than on the market logic of individual benefit, whether material gain or power. I also follow Hocart and his disciples in their insistence on the social centrality of the patron and the structural significance of the patron-client bond. I depart, however, from their shared insistence on a transcendent, substantive ideology as the ontological source of Indian sociality. I argue that it is not transcendent and substantive ideals, but an ideology of relatedness that form the calculus of local social organization. This is not to reiterate the Chicago school insistence on the generation of the social order from the transactional sphere, but to say that the order of local social divisions derives from a relational ideology—from *ideas and ideals about social relations*. Ideologies of substance (pure Brāhmaṇ, impure menstrual blood, powerful Rājput, meek Merchant, etc.) treated by generations of anthropologists as basic premises in their analysis have only reproduced various self-validating narratives, whether

the Brāhmaṇs' claims to purity, the Rājputs' claims to power or the Merchants' claim to economic supremacy. But to invoke these narratives as models for social analysis is to use the rhetoric of justification as an explanatory framework, a bit like using Jesuit theology to understand the social structures of sixteenth-century France. This has led to considerable analytical confusion. Quigley, for instance, begins with an observation that 'it is impossible to explain caste as the product of a particular ideology' (1993: 1) and concludes by smuggling in the ideology of purity as the key to the supremacy of kings (or the *kṣatriya* class or any other dominant patron-caste), who, according to him, 'must be pure' (ibid.: 169).

There are certainly a number of ways to describe status-difference: in terms of a contrast between pure and impure, auspicious and inauspicious, strong and weak, big and small, respectable and disrespectable, or high and low. The words 'pure,' 'auspicious,' 'strong,' 'big,' or 'high' can all be invoked as markers of superior standing: one may say that a higher standing caste or a deity are 'strong,' 'pure,' 'big,' or 'high.'²⁴ However, these terms describe but do not explain the superiority of those to whom they apply. If the rhetoric of justification differs from group to group and from context to context, the principles of social relations exert a much more durable, although not as easily or willingly articulated, structuring force. People are loath to let go of ideas about how social relations ought to be conducted; and these ideas persist over time, space and levels of social inclusion. Thus,

²⁴ As with the terms *śubh* and *śuddh*, the concepts expressed with the above terms are not coterminous with the words, but can be used to designate a common range of meaning (1991).

relational conventions form not only the structural underpinnings of social bonds, but also the ideological basis for calculations of value and rank in local society. The ‘hierarchical order’ is thus a result of a recursive application of the ideals of relatedness—ideals of rank, generosity, encompassment, and particularity of attachment—to separate, rank and link persons and groups across the scope of Rajasthani society, so as to produce an *ordered series* rather than a *hierarchical whole* with its extreme ends standing in a direct complementary relation to each other.²⁵ I hope that by shifting the value-compass of our analysis from substantive ideology to an ideology of social relatedness we may begin to disabuse Indianist sociology of its prevailing propensity to theologize.

In reformulating Dumont’s ‘hierarchical totality’ as an ordered series produced by the recursive application of a common relational principle, I take my cue from the anthropologists of Austronesia who have posited the ‘order of precedence’ as an alternative to ‘hierarchy’ as a model of social differentiation (Fox 1988; 1994; Fox & Sather 1996; Vischer 2009). The ‘order of precedence’ refers to the repeated application of the structure of asymmetrical coupling of complementary and encompassing categories (superior>inferior, elder>younger, first >last, husband>wife, etc.), the aggregation of which produces an ordered series (Fox 1994):

The concept of precedence defines a relative relationship. It is significant not in its focus on this single relationship but rather in the possibility it offers for a concatenation of relationships, thus producing an ‘order of precedence’ in which

²⁵ See Parry (1998) for an argument against Dumont’s ‘stress on the symbiotic complementarity of the high and the low’ strata of Indian society.

relations are recursively arrayed ... an 'order of precedence' can operate at various levels, differentiating relations within families, within larger social groups or throughout an entire society (Fox 2009: 1).

In the same key, I argue, the recursive application of the principles of asymmetrical donor-servant exchange throughout the ambit of Rajasthani society generates the architecture of local social order. I depart from the Austronesianists' conception in one significant sense. Whereas they take precedence to be a purely structural principle, I see the logic of patron-client relations as both a *structural* and an *ideological-moral* mechanism which guides both the form of the relationships and the value and relative rank of those involved in such bonds.

It is an axiom of Indianist sociology that rank difference is a fundamental quality of Indian society. Proper moral relationships are necessarily ranked, and unranked relationships such as friendships are thought of as at best confusing and at worst a threat.²⁶ The 'patron-client' bond is the basic formulation of ranked relatedness, whose principles structure relations on levels ranging from the household to the village, the erstwhile kingdom, and the election campaign today. The core feature of this asymmetry is the difference in the contribution of patrons and clients to the exchange: superior 'patrons' are those who *give* and subordinate 'clients' are those who *serve*. That is, it is the obligation to provide gifts and the reciprocal obligation to provide services that defines the roles of

²⁶ I discuss friendship as a space where the illicit and deviant can thrive elsewhere (Piliavsky forthcoming c).

patrons and clients, respectively. This is a very old and long-observed Indian formulation.

As Raheja wrote,

Most of the epigraphical record of kingship and polity in South India, for example, concerns royal largesse [Stein 1980: 46], and kings are praised in the inscriptions precisely to the extent that they are munificent givers of gifts. Kings are enjoined, in the textual traditions, to give gifts if they wish to enjoy sovereignty [Gonda 1966: 62, 31]; and to give is seen as an inherent part of the royal code-for-conduct, *rājadharmā* [Price 1979] (1988a).

In this way, what is conventionally glossed with the familiar phrase ‘patron-client’ relationship is more precisely termed the ‘donor-servant’ bond. Whatever the permutations of patronage arrangements (whether *jajmānī*, *bālūtā* or *birat*), at base they all involve relations between donors and servants. As Mauss remarked in his discussion of *dānadharmā*, the classical Hindu ‘law of the gift’ is about ‘the way they [Brāhmaṇs] solicit and receive a *gift*—without reciprocating it save through their religious *services*’ (2002 [1954]: 70, emphasis mine). The Brāhmaṇs of course must reciprocate, but asymmetrically—by offering, as subordinates, services in return for gifts.

Giving and serving are not just different transactional modes, but aspects of the identities of super- and sub-ordinate parties in the relationship. The asymmetry between giving and serving is basic to the relative standing of the two parties in the relationship. The superior paradigmatically gives and the subordinate serves. Thus, in Rajasthan a common warning goes out to youngsters and foreign guests who attempt generosity: ‘it is the big/superiors among us (who) give’ (*hamāre baṛe dete*). The roles of donors and servants

are clearly marked in local language. The traditional common term of address for donor-patrons (gods, kings, Rājput chiefs, village *jajmāns*, and fathers) across northern India is the honorific *Anndātā* (Bread Giver), which designate them as those who ‘feed,’ the South Asian idiom for the provision not only of sustenance, but of personal substance.²⁷ By ‘feeding’ donors transfer to subordinates their bio-physical substance and with it a degree of their status (something I discuss below). ‘Clients’ are referred to as those who serve: as ‘servants’ (*sevaks*) or ‘workers’ (*kamīns* or *kām karne wālās*). ‘Gifts’ and ‘services’ are not defined in absolute terms. One act may be conceived as both a ‘gift’ and a ‘service,’ depending on the relative position of the actor in the relationship. So, when subordinates offer food to their superiors (wives to husbands, devotees to deities, laymen to ascetics), feeding constitutes a ‘service’ (*sevā*); conversely, when food is offered by superiors (kings, *jajmāns*, political candidates), feeding constitutes a ‘gift’ (*dān*).

The intrinsic link between donorship and superiority makes largesse a central pursuit, whether in the context of courtly rites, household hospitality or feasts staged during election campaigns. Negotiations of status commonly take the form of competitions over the right to give. Hospitality, which is eagerly lavished, but accepted with much reserve, is but one ever-present means to attain, however momentarily, the donor’s

²⁷ In the human sphere, Rājput kings are the paradigmatic donors. As Harlan points out, ‘The ideal of sacrificing or giving one’s life was linked with the duty to give throughout one’s life’ (Harlan 1992: 122; drawing on Ziegler 1973: 69).

superior standing.²⁸ Gifts that have been interpreted by anthropologists as ‘upward’ flowing (cf., Dumont 1966: 101; Campbell 1976: 102; Bennett 1983: 145ff), including parting gifts to teachers (*gurudakṣiṇā*) and dowries presented together with ‘gifts of a virgin’ (*kanyādāns*) at weddings, are explained by Rajasthanis as momentary contestations of status by inverting the ordinary order of gift giving. An elderly Brāhmaṇ, who was my host in the early weeks of my field research, explained his expectation to receive a gift upon my departure: ‘your education is your teacher’s gift [*dān*] to you, but once your studies are finished, you too become big and that is why you must give a gift [*gurudakṣiṇā*] to your teacher.’ On another occasion a friend in the Potter community who was busily amassing a large dowry (*dahej*) for his daughter remarked that he was going to give a huge dowry and the most precious thing (his daughter as *kanyādān*) to remind the in-laws ‘that we are not small people, so that they do not treat my daughter as an inferior.’

The intrinsic connection between giving and superiority, and receiving and subordination, is reflected in classical Brahmanical texts, which describe the reluctance of Brāhmaṇs to receive gifts from kings (e.g., Manu 4: 190). While Raheja (1988b; 1989) and Parry (1986) have argued that this reticence reflects a fear on the part of the Brāhmaṇs that they will receive the donors’ karmic detritus or moral ‘poison’ contained in the gift, Mauss contended that Brāhmaṇs’ aversion to kings’ gifts has to do with the fact that the gift

²⁸ The centrality of the value of generosity in Rajasthan has been remarked on by others (cf., Harlan 1992; Snodgrass 2006). A comparable preoccupation with compulsive hospitality that elevates the host has been observed in a various Middle Eastern contexts. For an overview of this literature, see Shryock (2004b).

necessarily places its recipient in a subordinate position. And, as the kings' ancient rivals for superiority, Brāhmaṇs were understandably reluctant to accept kings' gifts:

The recipient puts himself in a position of dependence *vis-à-vis* the donor. This is why the Brahmin must not 'accept' gifts, and even less solicit them, from the king. A divinity among divinities, he is superior to the king ... The gift is therefore at one and the same time what should be done, what should be received, and yet what is dangerous to take (Mauss 2002 [1954]: 76).

In sum, the exchange of gifts for services is the basic condition of ranked relatedness, which lies at the base of all ethnographically described forms of patron-client exchange that I have reviewed above. The details of such relationships—the degree of their fixity and exclusivity, the identities of patrons and clients, and the details of payments—certainly vary. Such variation is, however, understood not as categorical differences, but as variations on the theme of the donor-servant bond. While some servants are employed by single households, others are employed by entire villages that act as corporate persons and are treated by their servants as *jajmāns*. In the words of a Mobile Ironsmith (Gāṛīyā Lohār),²⁹

Just like a Purohit [royal family priest] takes Rāoji's family to be his *jajmān* or the way Kanjars treat police officers to be their *jajmāns*, we take each village [that employs us] to be our *jajmān*. So, we say that the villages of Pālkā or Pīpalī Kheḍā are our *jajmāns*. Gujars who bring milk around in the mornings—they too see the whole village is a *jajmān*. A single man can be a *jajmān* or a family [*parivār*] can be a *jajmān*, or a village can be a *jajmān*.

On, in the words of one friend of mine from the Drummer (Ḍholī) community,

²⁹ His family still services a number of multi-caste villages in eastern Mewār, in a manner not dissimilar from the *bālutā* exchange between servant-families and entire village communities observed in Maharashtra (Orenstein 1965; Fukuzawa 1972)

Birat is *birat* and a *jajmān* is a *jajmān*, whether he is a king (*darbār*) or a Drummer like me. And the *kamīn* are the *kamīn*, be they Royal Priests, Gardeners, Drummers, or Kanjars. What do the *jajmāns* do?—they feed. And what is the work of the servant [*kamīn*]—they do work. They [*jajmāns*] are big [*barē*] and we, clients [*biratkārīs*], are small [*choṭe*]. A servant will beg, whether he is a Priest or a Sweeper, from his Anndātā. Brāhmaṇs like to say that they are the biggest. But during [the festival of] Dipāwalī and at [the *jajmāns*] weddings Brāhmaṇs come to fetch their *birat* [payments] from Rājī [Rāwat] together with my mother because *birat* is *birat*—for Brāhmaṇs, Drummers, Florists—for all [service castes] *kamīn jāts*.

Rājput informants likewise asserted that custom binds their families to Barbers, Brāhmaṇs and Bards in the same sort of way: into a *birat* or a *jajmānī* relationship. The difference between ‘superior’ ritual or religious specialists and ‘inferior’ providers of ‘non-ritual’ menial services, on which Brāhmaṇs and anthropologists alike like to insist, is lacking in such statements.³⁰ All types of servants, whether itinerant Ironsmiths or Brāhmaṇ families, engage in the donor-servant relationship. Thus, contrary to Fukuzawa’s (1972) and Fuller’s (1989) argument, there is no categorical difference between ‘particularistic’ *jajmānī* and ‘generalized’ *bālutā* exchange: both are at base dyadic relations between servants and donors, be they single *jajmāns* or corporate patrons like village communities; the more and less generalized forms of such bonds are different grades of the same type of arrangement.³¹

³⁰ In the Rajasthani context, see, for instance, Kothari (1994: 206), Bharucha (2003: 218) and Snodgrass (2006: 86).

³¹ It is the contrast between the ‘particular’ *jajmānī* ties to patron households and ‘generalized’ *bālutā* bonds with entire villages, which has been cited as evidence of the limited presence of *jajmānī* relations on the subcontinent (Fuller 1989: 36-39; Lerche 1993), is similarly absent.

The donor-servant bond is a mutually constitutive relationship: the identity and relative standing of each party is fashioned vis-à-vis the other. This constructive property of the relationship hinges on the intrinsic inseparability of persons and gifts and on the capacity of gifts to carry personal substance, formulated by Mauss (2002 [1954]). Indian society, as Mauss himself thought (*ibid.*: 70-77), offers an excellent example for this proposition. The notion that Indian gifts—most paradigmatically food—carry the giver’s nature has been discussed in great detail by South Asianist ethnographers.³² It is, in fact, the anthropologists of India who perceived Mauss’ concept of the ‘spirit of the gift’ as the key to his argument about the substantively real inseparability of persons and gifts, rather than spurious mystification (Parry 1986; Raheja 1988a and b). It is Indianist sociology that developed Mauss’ idea of transposition of personal substance through gift exchange into a full-fledged theory of substantive contingency (Marriott & Inden 1973; 1977). Donors transfer their identity to their servants who receive their gifts and internalize, or in the Indian idiom ‘eat,’ their donors’ substance, which determines their communal identity.

The vernacular term for such ‘communal identity’ is *khandān*. It designates a set of ascribed mental, physical and moral traits shared by members of a community and, as such, can be glossed as ‘identity,’ ‘bio-moral substance,’ ‘communal character,’ or simply

³² For recent overviews of this literature, see Heim (2004) and Copeman (forthcoming).

‘community.’³³ The idea that one’s nature is received and incorporated from a donor is inscribed in the etymology (both popular and lexicographical) of the word, which means literally the ‘gift of food’ (*khānā-dān*) (Platts 1884: *ad loc*). As the primary receptacle of people’s nature in India, food carries most effectively the substance of the giver to its recipient. *Khandān* is thus understood as nature transferred, by means of gifts, from the donor: from parent to child, from *jajmān* to *kamīn*, and from patron-deity to the devotee. Thus, Rajasthanis refer to their patrons, whether *jajmāns* or patron-deities, with the honorific *Anndātā*, or the ‘Giver of Grain or Bread.’ Patrons do not only give sustenance, but also transfer their own substance to their recipients, and thus incorporate servants into their own *khandān*. Servants advertise such belonging to a patron’s *khandān* by boasting of the gifts received from their patrons and emulating the habits and practices (such as dress style, food preparation methods or veiling patterns) of their donors.³⁴

The significance of patrons as sources of identity is reflected in the fact that one is never thought of as simply a Drummer, but as a Drummer *for* someone, so that the servants of each patron-class form a status-stratum of their own. Thus, in Fararpur the Rāwat’s

³³ Platts translates *khandān* ‘(for *khāna-dān*)’ as a ‘family, household; race, lineage, descent, house (of a prince, &c.)’ (1884: *ad loc*) and Parry, as a ‘group of agnates’ (1979: 137).

³⁴ Such emulation is, of course, not without tensions as it treads the line of belonging to the same *khandān* and of ranked difference between patrons and servants. So, a friend from a Drummer (Ḍholī) community, traditionally in the service of local aristocrats, was once told to ‘improve’ (*sudhārnā*)—that is trim—his moustaches by a local Rājput, so that he would not look so uncouthly like a Rājput. Clothing restrictions, such as the regulations of the length of loincloths (*dhotīs*) and turbans (*pagrīs*), or the quality and variety of jewelry worn, have always been rigidly enforced by patrons on their servants, so as to preserve the distinction of rank between the two, which are ever under the threat of being blurred.

specialist servant-castes form a distinctive status-class, whose members (whether Drummers, Florists or Priests) enjoy a comparable degree of esteem in local society. As one man from the Florist (Mālī) family, which was once employed by the Rāwat, put it,

We, Rāojī's [Rāwat's] servants, are part of the Fararpur [social] universe [*jagat*]. All sorts of people have moved here after independence—Sindhis, Pakistanis, Bengalis—but we know who is and who is not a servant to Rāojī. And that is how we know the real residents of Fararpur. We give people whose grandfathers and great grandfathers served our Anndātā [the Rāwat, literally 'Bread Giver'], be they sweepers or Brāhmaṇs, our respect.

The transfer of gifts thus incorporates the community of servants into the donor.³⁵

For donors, giving constitutes the enlargement of their persons: the more people one 'feeds,' the 'larger' (or more superior) one's is and the greater one's rank. That is, generosity is not only a matter of prestige and pomp, but of a very substantive enlargement of persons. Suitably enough, in Rajasthan, as elsewhere in South Asia, one usually speaks of 'big' and 'small,' rather than 'high' and 'low,' people. As a high-ranking Rājput of my acquaintance once remarked, 'the man who gives is a big man and the more he gives, the bigger he is. This is why in Rajasthan people think us, Rājputs, to be the biggest of all.'

If the privilege of munificence elevates persons, it is the right to service that is the basic condition of social belonging. Everyone needs a patron. It is precisely the ostensible lack of Kanjars' ties to patrons that excludes them from polite society. Attachment to

³⁵ Dumont posited the principle of encompassment, or 'the idea of the hierarchical relation as a relation between the encompassing and the encompassed,' as a central structuring force in his *Homo Hierarchicus* (Dumont 1980: xvii, 239). This idea (which he credits to his reading of Anthonpe's [1956] unpublished DPhil thesis), however, appears only after the fact of writing *Homo Hierarchicus* in the 'Postface' to its revised edition (Dumont 1980: 239ff).

patrons is so fundamentally significant not because it provides sustenance but because it is the source of substance—the nature, character and relative standing—the *khandān* of persons and groups. One's keep, after all, can often be earned in other, often more profitable, ways. To sell one's labor in the bazaar, however, is to serve promiscuously and to receive 'gifts' from a disheveled array of sources, acquiring the reputation of an 'eater from everyone's hands' who lacks integrity of character and substance, and is thus morally and socially decrepit.

The importance of having a master is rooted in a more basic idea that the source of identity is outside the self. That is, the nature of persons and communities—their *khandān*—must be received. Everyone must have a donor, on whose benefactions one's identity relies. Those who do not have a particular donor must endeavor to find one. This is why the pursuit of patronage bonds is most obvious at the status extremes, both of which lack such attachments: among vagrants like Kanjars on the one end and among Rājput royalty on the other, who, as supreme patrons, lack patrons of their own. It is at these status-poles that, for lack of human *jajmāns*, divine patrons acquire such central significance.

Because the patron is the source of one's personal substance and communal character, the integrity of persons and groups relies, ideally, on affinity with a *single* patron. A diffuse and varied circle of donors transfer to their recipients an equally diffuse and varied array of substances, making for the fragmented, motley and unhinged nature of the recipients. Thus, 'beggars' who 'eat from everyone's hands,' whether those who

actually beg on the streets, itinerant performers and craftsmen, or people like Kanjars whose attachments to patrons are not publicly recognized, are seen as social mongrels or 'half-castes' (*ādhī-jāts*) who lack integrity, or wholeness, of personal substance. Intrinsic connection between particular patronage ties and social belonging is evident in the strategic avoidance of such bonds by those who seek to leave mundane society. So, Jain ascetics employ elaborate means to avoid taking alms from a particular set of hands: they vary their begging routes, relocate frequently, and take alms from multiple households on each begging round so as to avoid being fed by one donor; to further prevent eating food from a single household, 'food collected is taken back to the rest-house and mixed with that brought by other members of the group into a single mass' (Laidlaw 2000: 619). Thus, no dish from any particular household is consumed by the ascetics and no particular substantive attachments are formed.

The dyadic bond between donors and servant-communities is not a necessary requirement, but the most minimal expression of the principle of particularistic attachment. This principle is manifested in its ideal form in the pure *jajmānī* model of exclusive and durable bonds between a community of servants and their patron. *Jajmānī* relations are not the only manifestation of this ideal, which is reified in a number of other relationships: between a husband and his wife or wives, between a king and his subjects, or between a patron-deity and its devotees. The degree of particularity of attachment to donors is the key gauge of status-difference among service communities. Simply put, the

more exclusive and fixed are a people's ties to their donor, the higher their social standing.

The argument I develop here for Kanjars is of general relevance.

Status-difference among three different kinds of Brāhmaṇs—Family Priests (Purohīts), Village Priests (Parsāis) and Funerary Priests (Mahābrāhmaṇs)—offers an illustration. While Family Priests have historically occupied one of the most preeminent social positions (cf., Parry 1979: 59), Village Priests have been among the middling castes like Potters (Mayer 1960: 71), and Funerary Priests have been among the lowest communities (Parry 1980; 1985; 1994). Because all three types of Brāhmaṇs at one time or another perform 'polluting' funerary rites, their status cannot be fundamentally linked to the nature of their trade. Instead, the key difference among them is one of fixity of attachment to patrons. While Family Priests have enjoyed exclusive hereditary rights of service to particular patron-families (Parry 1979: 59), Village Priests are employed by less particular village communities, and Funerary Priests collect gifts from a motley mass of donors who flood the banks of the Ganges to cremate their dead. As such, the Mahābrāhmaṇs are seen as socially, morally and physically decrepit 'cess-pits' or 'moral sewers' (Parry 1994: 123). The Mahābrāhmaṇs of course have a theology that vindicates their lowly standing as the unavoidable consequence of their profession and *dharma*: 'the Brahman priests of Benares see themselves as endlessly accumulating the sin they accept with the gifts of the pilgrims and mourners who visit the city, and ... liken themselves to a

sewer through which the moral filth of their patrons is passed' (Parry 1986: 460; also 1980; 1989; 1994).

However, if all gifts transferred the poison of donors' 'sins' to recipients, Family Priests, Village Priest and in fact all service-communities would be marred with a comparable degree of 'pollution' and would, as a consequence, have equivalent status. This, of course, is not the case. My view of this is that the degraded state in which the Mahābrāhmaṇs find themselves derives from the fact that, much like the Kanjars, they receive gifts from a motley and unrestricted array of donors. Just like Kanjars, Mahābrāhmaṇs lack the integrity of bio-moral substance and social worth. In the case of the Mahābrāhmaṇs there is the added threat of eating for the dead, but temple priests are likewise seen as bio-moral mongrels by virtue of their communion with a disheveled array of donors. Indeed, such priests can be likened to prostitutes, but worse, since in India eating is a more powerful means of communion than sex. Thus, contrary to what Parry, Raheja and Quigley have argued,³⁶ gifts as such are not dangerous or 'poisonous,' but are a hazard only insofar as they are received from a haphazard array of sources. Conversely, when they come from one's specific patron, they are highly desired.³⁷ As Trautmann noted,

³⁶ Raheja, Parry and Quigley do distinguish among a number of different kinds of prestation and show that only some gifts, conventionally glossed as *dāna* or *dān*, are 'poisonous' (Raheja 1998b: Ch. 5; Parry 1994: 140-41; see Copeman [n.d.] for a recent overview of reflections on the 'multivocality' of Indian gifting by Raheja and Parry as well as by their critics). Nevertheless, in their work, the 'toxic' *dān* remains the most important socially connective prestation and, as such, most crucially informs their analysis.

³⁷ For an argument for the positive value of *dān*, see Laidlaw (2000). Indeed, the moral ambiguity of gifts is implied in Parry's own analysis, if read more broadly: gifts transfer the donors' substance (good or bad,

gifts from patron-gods are a form of grace (*prasāda*), not threat (1981: 287). Put plainly, the moral worth of the gift depends on the social fixity of the donor.

The same principle of particularity is at work in various contexts and levels in Rajsthani society. A schematic and necessarily crude rank organization of communities in Fararpur offers an illustration. Traditionally, the fiefdom's ruling elite comprised the Rājput chief (Rāwat Sawāi) and his subordinate clansmen, who employed the bulk of the local population. Below them, stood their servants (farmers as well as the specialist *kamīn jātis*³⁸), and below their servants in turn stood the servants of other lower-caste communities. The servants of Rājputs were further divided into the servant-elite (royal servants, or *rāj kamīns*) employed exclusively by the chief family and lower-ranking servants of subordinate Rājputs employed by the entire local segment of a clan, rather than by a particular family. Below these again stood servants to various other castes and below them in turn, the various 'masterless' groups such as Kanjars. This stratification continues to inform the reckoning of rank in Fararpur. So, elderly Royal Drummers (Rāj Ḍamāmīs) and Royal Family Priests (Rāj Purohits) are still greeted with comparably respectful forms in the bazaar and enjoy a comparable degree of sartorial, commensal and ceremonial

desirable or not). If gifts from ordinary sinners imperil the receiver, gifts from princes or saints transfer the morally desirable qualities of the donors (see Copeman n.d.: 6). As Susan Bayly, for instance, observed, the transfer of a revered teacher's saliva is considered 'a source of grace and power' by its recipients (1989: 52).

³⁸ Traditionally, there were twelve core *kamīn* castes, including Genealogists, Panegyrists, Family Priests, Sweepers, Milkmaids, Drummers, Washermen, Gardeners/Florists, Farmers, Potters, Barbers, and Dancing Girls.

privilege. In fact, status-difference between servants of royal and low-caste communities is great enough to make marital and commensal relations between them impossible: Royal Drummers, Barbers and Priests certainly neither eat with nor marry the Drummers, Barbers and Priests of low-caste communities. Thus, the traditional broad status-groups in Fararapur—and indeed local ‘castes’ more broadly—emerge primarily not as occupational guilds, but as service-communities.

The value of particular patronage bonds is equally at play, say, in the relative ranking of Rajasthani craftsmen and entertainers, who engage in at least four types of differently valued patronage bonds, all understood to be variations on the theme of the *jajmānī* or *birat* relationship.³⁹ One type of *birat* relationship binds families to a single *jajmān* or a *jajmān*-family; another, to a number of patron-families; the third, to one or more villages; and the fourth, known as *siroli birat* (‘patronage shared by all’) binds service-castes to entire patron-castes (Bharucha 2003: 218; Snodgrass 2006: 86). The looser and more generalized the bond, the lower the standing of the service-community engaged in it: relations with a single *jajmān*-family are more highly valued than the generalized *siroli*-type patronage bonds, and service-communities engaged in the former type of relationship rank above those involved in the latter.⁴⁰ The same logic of particularity applies to the ranking of

³⁹ In Rajasthan the sustained, hereditary and (more or less) particular bonds of *birat* are morally contrasted with the short-term contractual *āyat* relationships (Kothari 1994: 206).

⁴⁰ Snodgrass likewise notes that the bards of leatherworkers in Udaipur thought ties to a limited number of *jajmān*-families to be the most desirable sort of patronage bonds (2006: 87).

communities in Fararpur. On a rung above the lowest-standing masterless groups like Kanjars stand communities that have been traditionally in the service of a diffuse and heterogeneous circle of patrons: Barbers, Leatherworkers, Ironsmiths, Washermen, Potters, Drummers, and other servants of a mixed crowd of ordinary folk. On the rung above these stand servants of a more restricted circle of patrons: the Brāhmaṇs', merchants' and Rājputs' Barbers, Ironsmiths, Washermen, Leatherworkers, Potters, Drummers, Milkmen, etc. Still above these stand servants of the Rājput elite, who have enjoyed the most socially and historically particular *jajmānī* ties: families from each of the twelve key servant-castes (*kamīn jātis*) and various other servants, whose professional titles are marked with the honorific prefix of 'Rāj' (Royal). At the very top of this status-ladder is the chief Rājput family bound by the most fixed 'eternal' ties to the apex of local hierarchy: the family patron-god Dvārkadiś (a form of Kṛṣṇā).

The value and pursuit of particularity in patronage bonds is evident, although not explicitly noted, in ethnographic accounts of other places. Berreman, for instance, reports that in the foothills of the Himalayas, while the high-ranking Family Priests are attached to patron-families through durable and exclusive service-bonds, the lower-ranking servants are tied into loose and more generalized service relations (1972: 57-8). Parry's ethnography in Kangra likewise documents the disparity of status between more and less particularly attached servant-groups: the Family Barber-Priests (Purohits) who are bound to patrons through exclusive bonds rank above craftsmen (*kamīns*) who are tied to patrons by more

generalized bonds and who, in turn, rank above even more unattached 'beggars' (*māṅgāts*) (1979: 59-71). In the context of *bālutā* exchange, the holders of hereditary, land-tied (*watandāri*) service-rights have likewise ranked above the holders of temporary (*upari*) service-rights (Fukuzawa 1972: 34).

In sum, the logic of rank in local society revolves around the formula of relatedness between donors and servants. Every person and group seeks to have a patron and each at the same time strives to be a donor. In Rajasthan, and perhaps more broadly on the subcontinent, the formulation of donor-servant relations lies at the heart of determining the qualitative and ranked difference among—the identities and status of— persons and groups. That is, the standing of persons and groups is not defined by the degree of their proximity to the transcendent substantive ideal of purity, power or wealth, but on the basis of their attachments to patrons on the one hand and to servants on the other. Rank is not reckoned relative to ideals describing substances, but relative to ideals about social relations, making the logic of social relations foundational, not epiphenomenal, to the ideology of value and rank in local society.

1.5 AN OUTLINE OF WHAT FOLLOWS

The following chapter provides a historical illustration to my contention that bonds to donor-patrons constitute the foundations of belonging to and worth in local society. In this chapter I trace the history of the Kanjar community from the late sixteenth century to

the present, arguing that the vagaries of their history have been marked by a persistent, and persistently frustrated, pursuit of fixed, durable, publicly recognized patronage bonds. I argue that it is their failure to attain and sustain such ties that has left Kanjars on the extreme periphery of social life. Although communities that appropriated the pejorative title of 'Kanjari' and assumed the identity of professional thieves, did acquire, and occasionally sustained, bonds with *jajmāns*, the underhanded nature of their thieving business has necessarily kept such attachments from public view, leaving Kanjars with the reputation of masterless rogues, of moral and social pariahs. By tracing the history of Kanjars' acquisition of the thief-identity, I also argue in this chapter that the 'criminal caste' is a much older category on the subcontinent than the dominant voices of post-colonial criticism would have us believe.

In Chapter Three I spell out the logic of donor-servant relatedness within the confines of the Kanjar community and, more specifically, in the context of the community's relations to their patron-goddesses. Using the annual goddess festival of Navarātri as the ethnographic backdrop, I describe the ways in which segments of the Kanjar community and their goddesses are constituted through their relationship to each other. The ethnography illustrates the ways in which divisions between, solidarities within, and relative rank of the structural segments of the community (moieties, clans, families) are defined *vis-à-vis* their patron-goddesses. In doing so, it shows that communal bonds among Kanjars are formed not through transactions among the community's members, but

‘vertically’—via communion with a common patron. The discussion also touches on the old debate about the relationship between Hindu pantheon and society. I note that, contrary to what Dumont argued in his study of the Tamil god Ayyanar (1959 [1953]; elaborated in 1957), the Kanjar community and the pantheon of its deities are not related by homology—through the shared structure based on the opposition between the pure and the impure—but through a mutually constitutive exchange of the goddesses’ gifts for the community’s services.

The ethnographic focus of Chapter Four shifts from Kanjars’ affinities to their patron-deities to their relations with human *jajmāns*. While the previous chapter focuses on the significance of patrons for the formation of substantive and relational identity of the structural elements (moieties, clans, households) of the community, this one is concerned with the role of ties to human patrons in the identities and relative rank of occupational segments of the community: Kanjars engaged in the trades of bards, tarts and thieves. Whereas Chapter Three illustrates the mutually constitutive nature of donor-servant relationships, Chapter Four demonstrates the significance of exclusivity of such bonds to the assessment and assignment of rank to segments of the community. In this chapter, I show that the more reputedly durable and exclusive is the relationship between each occupational segment of the Kanjar *jāti*, the higher is its standing in the community.

In Chapter Five, the discussion turns to the position and role of Kanjar-thieves in local society. In this chapter I describe hired theft primarily not as a means of resource

extraction, but as a practice of backstage negotiation used to resolve disputes that cannot be negotiated in the open. I argue that social invisibility is a crucial aspect of Kanjars' identity and role as go-betweens who negotiate matters that must be kept from public view. As backstage agents of communication, Kanjars play an important role in the maintenance of the public face of polite society. I argue that the maintenance of society's public face depends on demonstrable adherence to appropriate communicative form: the social order of ranked relations assumes an equally ranked order of communication, which forbids certain types of public interaction; inasmuch as inferiors may not press demands or even initiate negotiations with superiors, superiors cannot act as supplicants, lest they lose face. Improper communicative forms—speech, comportment and action 'out of turn'—threatens a particular community's public face and violates the social order at large. Family disputes, therefore, require outsiders—people who do not matter—like Kanjars. The marginality of Kanjars thus forms an important resource both for members of upright society and for Kanjars themselves. Thus, their marginal reputation is actively nurtured through the rhetoric of secrecy by Kanjars and their significant others alike. The necessary outsider, however, is also a disposable and at times a necessary, victim, so that violence can be consistently and casually meted out against Kanjars.

In the final chapter I move into the arena of state politics, which, I will argue, is guided by the same set of principles that underpin the patron-client relationships that I have outlined in other unofficial contexts. While most Kanjars remain on the vulnerable

social periphery, for some police patronage offers a way to better standing in respectable society, what they call ‘VIP’ status in their own community, and the possibility of becoming patrons in their own right. Through contacts in the police, the more resourceful of Kanjars have established connections with politicians, establishing themselves as servants of public figures. By following the careers of two ‘VIP’ Kanjars, the chapter traces the possibilities of social mobility within and beyond the confines of the Kanjar community. Against the backdrop of this plotline, the chapter details the local moral economy of the ‘everyday state’⁴¹—the views about and practices of modern state governance—and of ‘corruption,’ the state’s ugly twin. I argue that the fundamental principles of the donor-servant bond govern as much the relationship between the state and ‘the people’ as those between *jajmāns* and servants or patron-deities and devotees. State functionaries are popularly styled donors, a role they seek to fulfil. Resourcefulness and generosity are the key qualities required of elected and appointed state officials; it is when policemen, civil servants and members of parliament fail to deliver the expected gifts—to provide medicine for an ill child or bring gifts to a wedding—that they are accused of being ‘corrupt.’

Popular narratives of ‘corruption’ abound (Gupta 1995; 2005; Parry 2000), but the sense of the term in many cases differs substantially from its meaning in the global discourse of Good Governance (and state law), which labels the distribution of resources and favors by public officials as ‘corrupt.’ The most common (at least rural) understanding

⁴¹ Fuller and Harriss’ phrase (2001).

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of state governance, on the contrary, sees generous distribution as the essential quality of a political leader and derides 'fair political practice' as tightfisted and therefore corrupt.

More broadly, I show in this chapter that in the experience and rhetoric of local everyday life, the global formulation of ranked difference between 'the government' and 'the people' is articulated in the local idiom of donor-servant bonds, giving the global machinery of democratic statehood a distinctly Indian shape.

CHAPTER TWO

THE PERILS OF MASTERLESS MEN

They runne roging like vagarents vp and downe the countries like maisterlesse men.

Philip Stubbes (1583).

‘Kanjar’ is a Hindustani term of abuse that can be glossed as ‘vagrant,’ ‘beggar,’ ‘tramp,’ ‘pimp,’ ‘thief,’ ‘bastard,’ or ‘whore.’¹ Like its English equivalents, it refers to a person of no certain origin or belonging, someone beyond the pale of ordinary social and moral life. Across Pakistan and Northern India, the word has been used as both a term of abuse and a name for various ‘vagrant’ (*ghūmnewālā* or *ghūmatkar*) groups—communities not attached to a particular place, profession or patron—that have occupied the outermost social periphery on the subcontinent, much like the vagrants or ‘masterless men’ of Elizabethan England (see Tawney 1912; Beier 1985). Most of those known to others as ‘Kanjars’ sought to shed the label and the

¹ In Punjab in the early twentieth century ‘Kanjar’ was ‘the ordinary word for pimp or prostitute’ (Rose *et al.* 1911, vol. 3: 474, also 454-55; Ibbetson 1916: 288-290). Across Northern India, ‘Kanjar’ is ‘so proverbial is it that it is a common thing amongst natives to term a quarrelsome foul-mouthed woman a “Kunjurnee”’ (Gunthorpe 1882: 80). Today one often hears parents say to their ill-behaved children: ‘*Kanjarō kī taraf mat karo!*’ (‘Don’t act like a Kanjar!’). An on-line dictionary of British South Asian slang defines ‘Kanjar’ as ‘a pimp,’ ‘a person who dont [sic] care even if they are banging their own sis’ or as a ‘Punjabi word describing one who has earned the anger of fellow Pakistani neighbour’ (www.urbandictionary.com). Associations of moral looseness are not particular to the name ‘Kanjar;’ a woman from a similarly vagrant Vāgrī community (*singhī*), a South Indian counterpart of Kanjars, is synonymous with ‘whore’ (Moffatt 1979: 143).

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stigma inscribed in the name. Some, however, reclaimed the epithet as their caste-name in a bid to insert themselves into the caste order and to obtain a license that the name affords to engage in underhanded, illicit or illegal trades, such as prostitution and theft. Professional identity, however morally dubious, meant not only that those who have come to call themselves 'Kanjars' could find employment, but that by thieving for someone they could establish ties to patrons of their own, ties that held out the promise of entry into polite society, if only through the back door.

This chapter traces the historical consolidation of Kanjars as a discrete *jāti* from the broad class of India's 'vagrants,' and the crystallization of Kanjar identity as hereditary, professional thieves. Those who now claim membership of the caste historically belonged to an amorphous 'vagrant' class of itinerant groups known in different places by different names (such as *Sāñsī*, *Beṛiyā* or *Ḍom* in northern India and *Vāgrī* or *Paraiyār* in the South) and engaging in a variety of trades. Such people have stood at the very bottom of the status ladder: in the position, as Michael Moffat put it, of 'untouchables of untouchables' (Moffatt 1979: 226; Werth 1996: 67-71; Alex 2009: 30). While other marginal 'tribal,' low-caste or 'untouchable'

communities have attracted a fair deal of ethnographic attention, ‘vagrant’ communities have remained as excluded from ethnographers’ accounts as from mainstream caste society.²

2.1 Conjuring KANJARS

The term ‘Kanjar’ has long defied efforts to define those who go by the name as a ‘community’ or, by Indianists’ convention, a ‘caste.’ The boundaries of endogamy within the Kanjar ‘caste,’ as well as its relationship to other related communities, have remained unclear. Colonial ethnographic accounts of such groups provide contradictory statements that add up to confused taxonomies: in such accounts Kanjars claimed to be Sāñsīs, and Sāñsīs claimed to be Kanjars; Kucchbandhīs said that they were Beṛiyās; Hāburās and Kanjars each claimed that the other was a subgroup of their own caste; others yet reported that Kanjars constituted a segment of castes like the Jāt, Hāburā or Banjārā; while some Kanjars saw Beṛiyās and Sāñsīs as Kanjar clans, Sāñsīs insisted that Bāgrīs, Badhiks, Gidiyās, Hāburiyās, Kicaks, Kanjars, and Moghiyās were all clans belonging to theirs.³ Inasmuch as Kanjars did not appear to constitute an endogamous community, neither did they appear to comprise a discrete and unified

² While there are several ethnographic accounts of mobile professionals like Banjārā traders, Gaḍoliyā ironsmiths or the pastoralist Raykās, multi-professional itinerants have gone almost entirely unobserved. For some exceptions, see Sher (1965: 93; 1966: 69, 146), Trawick (1991), Werth (1996: 67-71), Agrawal (2004: 225 fn.10), and Alex (2009: 30).

³ Sleeman (1849: 253), Wise (1883: 218), Rose *et al.* (1911, vol. 1: 475), *Gazetteer of the Bombay Presidency* (1873-1901, vol. 9/pt. 1: 510), Williams (1889), Gayer (1909: 55), Russell (1916, vol. 1: 374), Blunt (1931: 149).

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occupational guild. Those referred to as ‘Kanjars’ engaged in a variety of mobile trades, ranging from rope, mat and toy-making to prostitution, stone-cutting, snake-charming, trapping, ropewalking, dancing, and professional theft.⁴ Despairing of establishing the customary occupational and kin parameters of the Kanjar caste, colonial ethnographers resorted to comparing Kanjars to European gypsies or, designating them as a ‘tribe,’ the perennial default of uncertainty in colonial ethnography, concluded that the name is ‘used in a very loose manner’ to describe a ‘much subdivided’ body of ‘loosely allied communities’ or ‘an aggregate of vagrant tribes of a gypsy character.’⁵ Contemporary ethnographers have reached no greater certainty, concluding that Kanjars comprise a collection of ‘various small nomadic

⁴ In 1766 the Punjabi poet Waris Shah noted that in his native village in Western Punjab ‘Kingsars’ [a Punjabi pronunciation of ‘Kanjars’] were hawkers in small articles of earthenware (Shah 1966 [1766]: 112). In colonial literature Kanjars have been described as itinerant snake-charmers (Williamson 1808, vol. 2: 173-74; 1810, vol. 2: 181; Sleeman 1849: 391; Crooke 1896a, vol. 3: 138), mat-weavers (Williamson 1810, vol. 2: 39; Sherring 1872: 389; Crooke 1896a, vol. 3: 137-38; Russell 1916, vol. 1: 76), vegetable, dairy and fish-sellers (Wilson [ed.] 1855: 333; Carnegie 1868: 16-17; Waterfield 1875: 28; Plowden 1883, vol. 1: 301, 305; Wise 1883: 73, 86), the makers of ropes and strings (Sherring 1872: 389; Plowden 1883, vol. 1: 305; Ibbetson 1916 [1883]: 289; Balfour 1885, vol. 2: 236; Gayer 1909: 56; Russell 1916, vol. 1: 76), weaver’s comb-makers (Sherring 1872, vol. 1: 389; Ibbetson 1916 [1883]: 289; Crooke 1896a, vol. 3: 137; Russell 1916, vol. 1: 76), hunters and trappers (Plowden 1883, vol. 1: 305; Crooke 1896a, vol. 3: 137), hat and glove-knitters (Gunthorpe 1882: 81), iguana-catchers (Ibbetson 1916 [1883]: 289; Nesfield 1883: 968; Crooke 1896a, vol. 3: 137; Rose *et al.*, vol. 3: 474), stone cutters (Nesfield 1883: 968; Crooke 1896a, vol. 3: 137), makers of clay pipe-bowls (Ibbetson 1916 [1883]: 290), palmists and medicine men (Ibbetson 1916 [1883]: 289; Russell 1916, vol. 1: 76), executioners (Ibbetson 1916 [1883]: 289; Crooke 1896a, vol. 3: 137), weavers of baskets (Balfour 1885, vol. 2: 497; Baines 1912: 106-7, 150; Russell 1916, vol. 1: 76); the makers of toys (Berland 1982); sieve and comb-makers, wood-cutters, as well as occasional dealers in oxen and camels (Crooke 1896a, vol. 3: 137-38).

⁵ Crooke (1896b: 136), Ibbetson (1916 [1883]: 289), Rose *et al.* (1911, vol. 3: 475), Russell (1916, vol. 3: 331), and Baines (1912: 106-7), respectively.

communities' or 'a large amorphous set of communities' (Singh 2004, vol. 5: 1539; Agrawal 2004: 225fn, respectively).

In all their confusion, such accounts introduce us to the central aspect of our subject's identity. All sorts of people—farmers, traders, ascetics, hillsmen, and pilgrims—took to the road in South Asia in search of land, riches, power, or *karmic* gain.⁶ The label of 'Kanjar,' however, has been historically applied to a distinctive sort of itinerant folk. The mobile population of the subcontinent can be broadly divided into (1) people who temporarily left sedentary life (businessmen, pilgrims, temporarily displaced farmers, or Rājput rebels), (2) professional nomads (itinerant traders, herders, ascetics), (3) *jāṅgalī* hillsmen, and (4) vagrants.⁷ While the first three kinds of people upheld, or even nurtured, a more or less specified set of social attachments in the course of their travels,⁸ the vagrant groups retained

⁶ For a collection of essays on varieties of mobility in South Asia, see Markovitz *et al* (2006).

⁷ These types are matched by an indigenous classification of society into settlers/field-makers (*kṣetkārīs*), nomadic professionals (referred to by caste-names such as Banjārā and Raykā), hillsmen (*jāṅgalīs*), and vagrants (*ghūmne-wāle*).

⁸ Pilgrims, businessmen and renegade Rājputs retained in the course of their travels attachments to established social networks. They moved with fellow pilgrims or entertained regular patrons and allies, returning at the end of the journey to their established sphere of relations. While moving in space, they remained—at least in repute—socially fixed.⁸ Nomadic traders such as the Raykā herders, Banjārā traders in cattle and salt, or Gaḍoliyā Lohār ironsmiths were also, although much more loosely, attached to a defined set of patrons, enjoying thus a degree of recognition among respectable people. As such, these communities are known, like other members of caste society, by caste-names (Raykā, Banjārā, Gaḍoliyā) rather than as socially and morally indeterminate 'vagabonds' (*ghūmne-wāle*) or any epithet applied to such folk. Even *jangli* hillsmen, who formed occasional alliances with plains-folk (*kṣetkaris*), have been recognized as part of society. Such groups, nevertheless, have often formed lasting alliances with settled folk, earning for themselves a place within, albeit on the outskirts of, polite society.

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no such attachments. Changing their line of work as need arose, they had no regular occupation or masters of their own; and their spatially, occupationally and socially erratic movements have been publicly construed as vagrancy. Moving between Kolkata, Lahore and Bombay, they put on ropewalking and snake-charming shows, peddled ropes, baskets and toys, or practiced thieving and prostitution, offering their services to anyone who was willing to pay (cf. Waterfield 1875: 28; Wise 1883: 86). As and vagabonds (*ghūmnewāle*) who engage in a random array of relations and beggars (*māṅnewāle*) who ‘eat,’ as respectable people like to say, ‘from everyone’s hands’ (*sabhī ke hāth se khāte*), they had no proper social attachments, no particular service to perform for a particular master. As such, they belonged to no particular jāti and, as such, have been referred to loosely and indiscriminately by a variety of names. Today such groups remain socially peripheral and morally suspect. In the words of one urbanite Brāhmaṇ,

These [Kanjar] people keep roaming about [*ghūmte rahate*], coming and going like animals. They have no business of their own, no aim in life and no *jajmān* [patron]. All they do is beg from our doorstep. So, we give them some clothes and food and they go away. They speak a different language and their society is entirely different / separate from our own. They honor no master [*sarkār*] and no law [*kanūn*]; they steal and sell their girls on the streets by night and in the day they sit around drinking. Nobody knows where they come from and where they go and nobody knows their *jāt*—Kanjar, Naṭ or Sānsī—they are all the same, they are all vagrant castes [*ghūmne-wālō ke jāt*].



Image 2.1: 'Kanjars making ropes' (Russell 1916, vol. 3: 333)

Members of mainstream north Indian society have applied names like Naṭ, Ḍom, Sāṅsī, Bāgrī, Beriyā, Hurukiyā, Ḍhāḍī, Moghiyā, Pārdhī, Badhik, and Kanjar, loosely and interchangeably to various vagrants. Some of these names have occupational origins, some are eponyms and others are demonyms derived from place-names.⁹ In common parlance, however, they bear no association with a particular trade, person or place, but refer, like the English 'vagrant' or 'tramp,' to the moral and social outsider. In the middle of the nineteenth century, William Sleeman, the mastermind of the early nineteenth-century Thuggee

⁹ 'Bāgrī,' for instance, derives from the Bāgar area in the North-West Provinces (*Gazetteer of the Bombay Presidency*, vol. 9/pt. 1: 510). From the times of Akbar, the names of mobile communities of performers often derived from the names of the instrument in which they specialized. The players of the *huruk* and *dhāḍā* (*dhāḍ* or *dhāḍī*) drums, for instance, came to be known as Hurukiyās and Ḍhāḍīs, respectively (Abu'l Fazl 1873-94 [c. 1590], vol. 3: 271).

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campaign, observed that itinerant dacoits were ‘by other people, called Sanseeas, Khunjurs, Meinds, or Mahais, Jāṭs, &c. &c., according to the countries in which they happen to be, for they have no where any fixed habitation, and the people, among whom they encamp, call them after the wandering or vagrant tribe, whom they appear most to resemble’ (Sleeman 1849: 265, also 269-70). In the words of another colonial police officer writing four decades later,

[the vagrants] are known by a multitude of names, and the names vary every hundred or so miles of space. This is what happens:—Say [a man named] Massānia’s ... camp is in Oudh. People will say, ‘Here are the Beṛihas.’ Massānia treks to Aligarḥ; the public in Aligarḥ will exclaim, ‘Here come the Habūras.’ In Delhi and Karnāl, no one will have any doubt that Massānia’s people are Kanjars. In Ferozepur, they become Kīkan; in Multan, Gedari; and in Sindh, Gīdiya. Massānia will acquiesce in this nomenclature because it suits him to do so. But all these names are in bad repute, and, if Massānia is hard pressed, and the Kājas [outsiders] gather together with bludgeons and sharp-edged instruments to attack and drive him away, he will protest that he and all his people are Cangar (the name by which the basket-makers go), and the Kājas [outsiders] may, or may not, be appeased (Williams 1889: 38).

My own search for the ‘Kanjars’ and ‘Sānsīs’ of middle-class description in Delhi, Jaipur and Bhopal led me to people who called themselves Banjārās, Kalbeliyās, Kucchbandhīs, or even Mīṇās and Bhīls. The inconsistent, and often contradictory, usage of such names, reported by ethnographers since colonial days reflects the fact that, in conversation with others, the bearers of the labels echoed the outsiders’ own vague, indiscriminant, and often contradictory use of such terms.

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Most communities labeled in such a way sought to shed their dubious accolades by adopting more respectable occupational titles, such as Brush Maker (Rāchbandh), Snake Charmer (Sapeṛā), Stone Cutter (Sankaṭ, Pātharkaṭ), or Woodman (Lakaṛhār) (Nesfield 1883; Crooke 1896a, vol. 3: 137-38).¹⁰ As one colonial police officer noted, ‘very little really is known about the Kanjars [because] they generally hide their identity [and] seldom admit they are Kanjars’ (Gayer 1909: 55). Attempts to adopt a new name and a new identity, however, often failed. A man who identified himself as a ‘Kucchbandhī’ in Kanjarpurā (‘Kanjar Colony’), a slum I visited in Bhopal, lamented that his community of mobile hunters, branded as ‘Kanjars’ in the days before independence, has still not been able to shed the burden of this dubious ‘stamp’ (cāp).

While for outsiders such groups have comprised a scattered array of vagrants, the vagrants themselves have shared a sense of common identity. Those identified as Kanjars, Kanjars, Jogīs, Sānsīs, Gowārs, Moghiyās, Bāgrīs, Naṭs, etc. by others, see themselves as

¹⁰ While the 1881 census in the North-Western provinces (where ‘Kanjar’ was strictly a term for a pimp or a prostitute) identified more than 100,000 ‘Kanjars’ (Plowden 1883, vol. 1: 18, 302), ten years later, their numbers dwindled to 29,186 in Hindustan (where the name was associated with a much wider variety of moral ills) (Baines 1893: 206), where ‘Kanjars’ became ‘Berīyās,’ ‘Sānsīs’ or ‘Naṭs’ (Gayer 1909: 55). Indeed, as Rose noted in his *Tribes and Castes of the Punjab*, ‘Sansis in Hindustan and the Districts of the Punjab east of the Ghaggar river are known as Kanjars’ and ‘Wandering Sansis style themselves Kanjars only in the Delhi territory and parts of the east, dropping the name when they approach the Sutlej’ (1911, vol. 3: 474-75). Although most groups have adopted one of these names as their ethnonym, such fluidity of names continues until this day. For example, in the course of my research I discovered that a ‘Naṭ’ family in northern Rajasthan was traceably related to the Kanjars in Lakshmipura. Having been persecuted for theft and later settled in penal colonies under colonial rule, the family moved from Mewar in the early 1950s, ‘divorcing,’ in one elder’s words, ‘the [native] country and the name [Kanjar]’ and adopting the ‘clean’ title of Naṭ.

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members of a single ‘fraternity’ (*birādarī*) of mobile peoples, and refer to themselves by the common endonyms (m.) ‘Bhāṭus’ and (f.) ‘Bhaṭāñīs,’ opposed to the outsiders called (m.) ‘Kādzās’ and (f.) ‘Kādzis.’¹¹ The unity of the *birādarī* is construed by its members not only in opposition to ordinary caste society, but in terms of internal bonds of marriage, commensality, language, and a shared myth of descent.¹² Although most people of the sort are now settled, with effective localized ties broadly defining their communities’ limits, the boundaries between these tenuously discrete and endogamous *jātis* remain porous: members of different sections of the *birādarī* recognize one another as Bhāṭu ‘brothers’ (*bīrās*), eat together and form marriage alliances more frequently than they care to admit.¹³ In conversation with an Outsider (Kādzā), Bhāṭus may say that ‘Sānsī’ and ‘Kanjar’ are names of two clans in the *birādarī*, or that ‘Kanjar’ is a subdivision of the ‘Sānsī’ clan. Naturally, such fluid application of

¹¹ The use of such terms by certain communities was noticed by colonial officials: Sleeman (1849: 265, 269-70), Plowden (1883, vol. 1: 316, 321), Williams (1889: 38), Crooke (1896a, vol. 3: 136), Grierson (1922). On the contemporary use of such terms among Sānsīs in Punjab and among Naṭs and Beṛiyās in Rajasthan, see Singh (1966: 69, 146; 1965: 93) and Agrawal (2004: 225 fn. 10). Such terms continue to be in use among Kanjars, Sānsīs, Naṭs, Bācṛās, and Moghiyās in northern and southern Rajasthan. The use of cognate terms has been observed among European Roma. For the use of ‘Gadjo’ (or ‘Gadžo’), a cognate of Kādzā, in Romani, see Fraser (1992) and Saul & Tebutt (2004). Sociolinguists have long thought Roma to be linguistically related to itinerant Indian communities like the Ḍom, Beṛiyā, Sānsī, and Kanjar (Rüdinger 1990 [1782]; Turner 1926; Hancock 1998: 378-79; Matras 2004: 57ff).

¹² On a myth of common descent, see Gunthorpe (1882: 45) and Williams (1889:41).

¹³ Thus, Kanjars in Rajasthan and Madhya Pradesh marrying Beṛiyās, Bācṛās, Sānsīs, Gowārs, and Naṭs today. In her study of Beṛiyās involved in sex trade in Jaipur, Agrawal notes that ‘the majority of Bedia men in Nagla [near Jaipur] were married to women from the Nat and Kanjar communities’ (2004: 237 fn. 31; also 2002)

public epithets persistently upset colonial and contemporary ethnographic attempts to define the parameter of Kanjar or Sānsī or Moghiyā ‘castes.’

The opposition is mutual: inasmuch as respectable Indians see vagrants as external and opposed to their own society, Bhāṭus see mainstream society as foreign and hostile to their own. Much as the Bhīls of western India have appropriated their popular image as ‘wild men into their narrative of self-worth’ (Skaria 1999), Bhāṭus celebrate themselves as a fierce, secretive and unruly people unfettered by the strictures of Brāhmanical ways of life. On many occasions, Sānsīs, Kanjars and Naṭs across Rajasthan insisted that Bhāṭus are special people because they have never been anyone’s ‘slaves’ (*gulāms*), unlike members of ordinary caste society. Ironically enough, however, it is the pursuit of servitude that has driven the trajectory of the Bhāṭus’ history. As I shall argue, it is precisely their inability to secure service bonds that has kept Kanjars excluded from mainstream society.

While many sought to shed the ‘bad names’ (*badnāms*) like ‘Sānsī’ or ‘Kanjar,’ others turned the pejorative into a prerogative of their own. In the words of a young and resourceful Kanjar, ‘a *badnām* is an idiot’s ruin and a clever man’s watering well.’¹⁴ By adopting ‘Kanjar’ as their ethnonym, a number of vagrant groups took advantage of the special license that the name affords to engage in work otherwise unsuitable for decent folk. Groups that took on the

¹⁴ *Badnām bevkufō kī barbādī aur hośiyārō kā kuṛā hai.*

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title of 'Kanjar' as their caste-name took to various underhanded trades, including prostitution, liquor production and, thieving, establishing themselves in different parts of Hindustan either as a 'caste of prostitutes' or a 'caste of thieves.' As such, they did find patrons. It is, however, not enough for persons and communities to be bound to patrons of their own. Their bonds must be acknowledged publicly.¹⁵ The secretive nature of such trades has meant that relations between Kanjars and their patrons remained invisible to, and not legitimized by, public opinion, leaving Kanjars unrecognized as a people with proper social attachments and keeping them excluded from respectable social life. The ties of Kanjar-thieves, however well-established, have remained hidden from the public.

Village communities, landholders and *rājās* had long employed professional thieves as watchmen, escorts, mediators, and spies.¹⁶ Although some thieving groups managed to establish lasting patronage ties, and some even acquired land-grants and hereditary rights of office,¹⁷ for most patronage remained a highly uncertain arrangement. Unlike drummers,

¹⁵ This is precisely why in the context of *jajmānī* relations, courtly ritual or devotional practice the exchange of gifts for services has been necessarily a public exhibition (see Chapter Four for more on the politics of display in donor-servant exchange).

¹⁶ One colonial official was so impressed with the work of such thieving communities that he observed that in Rajasthan and Central India they possessed 'a perfect system of intelligence' and that 'they knew everything that is going on in the country side' (The National Archive of India in New Delhi (hereafter NAI). Muir, W.J.W. 1877. Report on the Moghias of Hadoti and Tonk. Foreign (Political-A), January 1877, proceedings 190-94.

¹⁷ In the late nineteenth century, families employed as watchmen (*caukīdārs*) in one or a group of villages in Western Rājput and Maratha states received monthly salaries of 3 Rupees and sometimes 3-4 *bīghās* (each measuring 5/8 of an acre) of tax-free land, their office at times becoming a hereditary right. In 1879 the Political

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barbers and priests, who enjoy publicly recognized rights of service, thieves work in the murky sphere of hidden negotiations that lack the recognition and security of open trades. Employed for protection, resource extraction, rebellion, conquest, resolution of dispute, and protection, thieves were often used furtively and temporarily; failure to perform their duties, accusations of infidelity by their patrons, or conflict within the thieving communities themselves easily sent such groups and their fragments adrift. A late nineteenth-century description of the vagaries of Moghiyās, one such thieving community employed as marauders-cum-watchmen in Mewar, illustrates the volatile nature of such arrangements:

[C]ommon report ascribes the introduction of the Moghias in the country about Neemuch and Nimbahera to the Maharaja of Bheendir, a border noble of Meywar, who many years ago when preparing to oppose his suzerain the Maharana [of Mewar] sent for [Moghiyās] from [the kingdom of] Marwar and entertained as many as several thousands of the tribe. Matters were accommodated, but many of the Moghias instead of returning to Marwar settled down in Meywar. Be this as it may, the Moghias began some twenty years ago to appear in these districts, coming from Marwar in twos and threes. They were entertained as watchers of fields and in other petty offices. At that time the open country was harassed by the Meenas, who lived as a rule in the hilly portion towards Bheendir and Kanor of Meywar. The villages paid them chowkidari [watchman dues], but this was simply a purchase of exemption from plunder, the Meenas so paid residing at their homes and affording no protection. The Moghias,

Agent in Gwalior wrote that in the State 'as a vacancy occurs among the Moghia chowkidars, it is always filled up by the appointment of a Moghia, even though a boy of five or six years old may be the only one available. I saw a child', he writes, 'about that age in Nikum, who is in receipt of his Rs. 3 a month' (NAI. Fitzgerald, J.R., 25 February 1879. Letter (No. 76A) including his 'Report on the control of Moghias in Central India and Rajputana' to T. Cadell, Political Agent in Mewar. Foreign (Political -A), October 1879, proceedings 36-48; NAI. Muir, W.J.W. 1877. Report on the Moghias of Hadoti and Tonk. Foreign (Political-A), January 1877, proceedings 190-94). For more general descriptions of Indian systems of village watch and ward, see Elphinstone (1884), Indian Police Commission (1913), Matthai (1915: esp. Ch. 4), Griffiths (1971), and Arnold (1976; 1986).

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proving useful, were gradually employed as village watchmen ... The Moghias were in consequence further employed for the protection of the roads and mails and in the local police.

In keeping with the local dictum that 'it takes a thief to catch a thief,' watchmen needed to be familiar with the local marauding communities. An insider's knowledge was certainly best.

Thus, most watchmen were themselves members of thieving groups, being themselves the agents of threat from which they protected.¹⁸ For those who employed such watchmen, hiring them was never a stable solution:

The excesses of the Meenas were thus put down, but it soon appeared that the country had only been freed from one evil to fall into a greater, and that the Moghias were professional robbers and dacoits of no mean order..., they became so formidable, that the very authorities who had introduced them had, as a measure of self-defense, [had] to treat with them. [As] they were expelled, their wealth immediately purchased them shelter and protection elsewhere, and from their new residence they revenged themselves on the territory they had been driven from, either by robbing its people or bringing it into trouble by committing outrages in it. The authorities as their only resources had then to entertain fresh Moghias as watchmen. This secured the protection of their own territory, but sooner or later brought them into difficulties with others, the Moghias whenever opportunity offered robbing or committing excesses elsewhere. The history of the past is said to have been a succession of expulsions and fresh entertainments.¹⁹

Employment of such groups prevailed in politically uneasy zones. Even now, the settlements of professional thieving communities dot the footholds of hilly tracts, the margins

¹⁸ See Gordon's (1969) account of similar arrangements between 'marauders' of various stripes, who both posed the threat and offered protection from it.

¹⁹ Thornton, T.H. 1877. *Report on the Moghias of Mewar*. NAI. Foreign (Political-A), January 1877, proceedings 190-94.

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of estates and kingdoms, the peripheral ‘outpost’ estates (*ṭhikānās*), and the fiefdoms (*jāgīrs*) of mutinous nobles, where such surreptitious muscle force was in high demand. As a result, the thieving groups have ended up quite literally on the territorial peripheries of polities on the subcontinent. Most thieving communities in Rajasthan today still reside in the foothills of the Aravalli Mountains and in the districts of Chittaurgarh, Bhilwara, Kota, and Bundi—on the once turbulent junction of former Afghan, Maratha and Rajput states (Mandal 1998: 498). Many continue to cluster on the fiefdoms (*ṭhikānās*) of renegade nobles. And it is no coincidence that in Mewar the territory formerly controlled by the kingdom’s most tumultuous Rājput clan (where I carried out most of my field research) is still home to more than half of Rajasthan’s Kanjar population today.²⁰ Before turning to the ethnographic and historical particulars of the community in which I conducted my research, I will first trace their history back to their earliest known mention.

²⁰ Occupying the topmost position within the state hierarchy of chiefs and some of its biggest *ṭhikānās*, the Cuṇḍāwats have long been at odds with the center, often rivaling the Rāṇā for supremacy. Over the past four hundred years, Cuṇḍāwats continually subverted the Mahārāṇā’s authority by staging coups and rebellions, conquering its *khālsā* [state] lands, or even allying with hostile states against the head of their own. The Mahārāṇās were no kinder to the rebels, at times directing the Maratha invaders to occupy Cuṇḍāwat lands instead of his own. Perennial contests with the center have contributed as much to the fragmentation of Mewar as to the decline of the Cuṇḍāwat estates, made ever more vulnerable to Maratha conquest in the eighteenth century. Arriving in Fararpur in February of 1821, the historian and first British Political Agent of Rajasthan James Tod saw an estate of only 122 villages, reduced by the Marathas, often at the behest of the Rāṇā, from its earlier holdings of more than five hundred. Tod later negotiated with Sindhiā the restoration of the Fararpur *ṭhikānā* to its present size of 165 villages, for which he is still gratefully remembered among the locals. For a history of such relations, see Somani (1985).

2.2 AKBAR'S GOLDEN GIRLS

Around the year 1590 Akbar's vizier and historian Abu'l Fazl remarked on the presence of certain Kanjars at the imperial court in Delhi: 'the men of this class,' he wrote, 'play the *Pakhāwaj*, the *Rabāb*, and the *Tāla* [barrel drum, lute and hand cymbals], while the women sing and dance,'²¹ whom 'his majesty [Akbar] calls Kanchanis' (Abu'l Fazl 1873-94 [c. 1590], vol. 3: 257), or the 'blossoming, gilded or golden ones' (Bernier 1891 [c. 1660]: 273).²² Seventy years later, Jean de Thévenot, a French traveler who visited the court of Akbar's grandson Shāh Jahān in Delhi, described 'the feasts and dances of Quenchenies ... the women and girls of a caste that goes by the name, who have no other occupation but dance' (1727 [c. 1661], vol. 5: 151, translation mine). Singing and dancing was only part of these Golden Girls' business,

²¹ The use of the *rabāb* lute, a barrel drum like the *pakhāwaj*, and portable cymbals such as the *tālā*, noted by Abu'l-Fazl (1873-94 [c. 1590], vol. 3: 257), suggests that Kanjars were itinerant performers (Wade 1998). The inscription beneath the eighteenth-century painting of a Kāncanī performing for the *rājā* of a hill state (Image 2.2, below), which mentions a previous visit, suggests that such entertainers moved from place to place (Goswamy 1997: 88). Although William Crooke speculated that 'Kanjari' is a derivative of the Sanskrit *kānana-cāra*, or 'wanderer in the jungle' (1896a, vol. 3: 136), it is more likely that the name refers to an instrument, which, as we shall see, they used as dancers. The word may have derived from *khānjarī*, a small tambourine (possibly related to the *Kānjira*, a South Indian lizard-skin frame-drum) played in the Mughal courts (Wise 1883: 253; Hunter 2010: 6, 8) or from *khanjar*, a dagger used in certain dances. Although I have not seen Kanjars use *khanjar* daggers, I observed women perform dances with swords (*talwārs*) at a wedding.

²² From the Hindustani *kāncan* for 'gold,' 'gilt' or a yellow pigment used by women to paint their skin (Yule *et al.* 1903: 280). Indian 'dancing girls' are broadly divided into temple servants (such as *Devadāsīs*, *Ceṭīs* or *Kanīz*) and those in the 'secular' sex trade (i.a. Forbes 1834 [1813], vol. 1: 61). Aside from Kanjarīs, Lūlī, Hurukhī, Ḍomnī, Kamācanī, and Natwā dancing girls, whose names derived from the accompanying instruments that they used or the type of dance they specialized in, performed in the Mughal court (Abu'l Fazl 1873-94 [c. 1590], vol. 3: 272; Bhakkāri 1961-74, vol. 2: 191).

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which was just one part of their trade in a wider variety of pleasures, which they offered to their male audiences.²³

The imperial court was not the only stage for the spectacles put on by the Golden Girls, who also entertained more humble audiences in the bazaars. In the late seventeenth century, Aurangzeb's French physician François Bernier observed that Kāncanīs 'dance in the principal open places in the city' (1891 [c. 1660]: 274).²⁴ He qualified this by noting that they also performed in court and that they 'were not indeed the prostitutes seen in bazaars ... Most of these Kenchens are handsome and well dressed, and sing to perfection; and their limbs being extremely supple, they dance with wonderful agility, and are always correct in regard to time' (Bernier 1891[c. 1660]: 274). More than a century later, aspiring servants of the East India Company learned that in India the 'kunchenee ... dance and sing for the amusement of the male sex, and in every respect are at their command' (Williamson 1810, vol. 1: 386).

²³ Later descriptions of Kanjars suggest that some segments of the community persisted in the sex trade through the nineteenth and twentieth centuries (Plowden 1883 [1881], vol. 1: 316; Eastwick 1883: 88; Ibbetson 1916 [1883]: 263, 288-89; Rose 1908: 411; Rose *et al.* 1911: 474-75; Gayer 1909: 55; Rose *et al.*: 454-55, 474-75; Baines 1912: 106-7; Russell 1916, vol. 1: 76, vol. 2: 223; and Blunt 1931: 150-51). Some Kanjar communities are still involved in the sex trade on the subcontinent (Agrawal 2004), indeed dominating the business in Lahore, Pakistan (Saeed 2002; Brown 2006).

²⁴ Shāh Jahān's Venetian doctor Niccolao Manucci likewise took note of the marketplace shows put on by the dancing girls: 'beginning at six o'clock in the evening and going on till nine, lighted by many torches, and from this dancing they earn a good deal of money' (Manucci 1907 [1708], vol. 1: 196). In the course of his travels through Gujarat, Anglican chaplain John Ovington also observed such nighttime performances, at which he was taken by the 'Dancing Wenches, or Quenchenies [who] entertain you, if you please, with their sprightly Motions, and soft charming Aspects, with such amorous Glances, and so taking and irresistible a Mien, that as they cannot but gain an Admiration from all, so they frequently Captivate a zealous Rich Spectator, and make their Fortunes and Booty of the Incharnted Admirer' (1689: 257).

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In the early days of the Mughal Empire, the names ‘Kanjarī’ and ‘Kāncanī’ were used interchangeably to refer to both marketplace dancing girls and dancers in court. Over time, however, the names came to designate two distinct classes of entertainers: ‘Kāncanī’ was reserved for elite danseuses who enjoyed royal patronage and ‘Kanjarī,’ for lowly marketplace entertainers. By the late nineteenth century, Henry Jarrett, the translator of Abu’l-Fazl’s *Ain I Akbari*, was noting that whereas ‘Kāncan’ was an honorific, ‘Kanjar’ was ‘synonymous with “Greek” in the lowest sense of this word’ (Abu’l-Fazl 1873-94 [c. 1590], vol. 3: 257fn), meaning ‘a cheat, a roisterer, or a loose person’ (*Oxford English Dictionary: ad loc*). The difference of status between the two kinds of dancing girls had little to do with their trade: the courtly Kāncanīs and lowly Kanjarīs, after all, performed the same sorts of tasks. Rather, their status-difference reflected the differences in the status of their patrons and in the nature of their relationship to them. Kāncanīs were attached to the royal court and enjoyed exclusive and often long-lasting bonds of royal patronage (Oldenburg 1990: 263). So, ‘this [Kāncan] class,’ wrote Shāh Jahān’s Venetian physician Niccolao Manucci, ‘is more esteemed than others [dancing girls] ... When they go to court, to the number of more than five hundred, they all ride in highly embellished vehicles, and are clothed in rich raiment. All of them appear and dance in the royal presence’ (Manucci 1907 [1708], vol. 1: 196). By the early eighteenth century, the relationship between Kāncanīs and the Emperor was established as a formal arrangement: Kāncanīs were obliged ‘to



Image 2.2: The Rājput ruler of Jammu Zorawar Singh watching a performance by a Kāncanī (Nainsukh of Guler, c. 1740-45, Government Museum and Art Gallery, Chandigarh, acc. no. 419[23], in Goswamy 1997: 87).

attend twice a week at court, for which they received pay, and to perform at a special place which the king [Shāh Jahān] had assigned for them' (ibid.).²⁵ By the nineteenth century, such dancing girls had become part of the high establishment of courtesans, who had legitimate

²⁵ Bernier wrote that 'when they came to him on the Wednesdays to pay their reverence at the *Am-Kas* [royal inn], according to an ancient custom, [Shāh Jahān] often detained them the whole night, and amused himself with their antics and follies' (1891[c. 1660]: 273-74). While Shāh Jahān's puritanical son Aurangzeb forbade Kāncanīs from entering the royal quarters, 'complying with long established usage, [he did] not object to their coming every Wednesday to the *Am-Kas* [royal reception hall], where they ma[d]e the *salam*' (Manucci 1907 [1708], vol. 1: 274).

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status, commanded a great deal of respect, and were a centerpiece of the Mughal court and urbane society. In fact, their relationships to royal and aristocratic patrons were often treated as a form of marriage bonds (Oldenburg 1990: 263).²⁶

In contrast, Kanjarīs who failed to secure and sustain attachments to respectable patrons and were left to entertain crowds in the marketplace, formed a very different status-group of disreputable performers.²⁷ Status-difference between the two classes of dancing girls reflected not only the difference of their patrons' status, but also the nature of the dancers' relationship to them. Whilst Kāncanīs enjoyed durable and exclusive attachments to their royal patrons, Kanjarīs entertained a hodgepodge clientele in the bazaar; the former received their sustenance from a specific source, the latter received gifts from any and every man, earning the reputation of 'eaters from everyone's hands' with no social or moral integrity: the

²⁶ By the fourth century BCE, courtly prostitution had acquired the status of a legitimate and highly formalized 'art' (*vaiśik kālā*), and was studied and taught by state-sponsored experts (Sharma Sastri 1967: 2.27; also see Chunder 1987: 98-113), or *gaṇikās*, who were at the center of elite life, associations with them being a matter of privilege for men of high society (Trivedi 2002: 153). Celebrated for their refinement and wit, and indeed thought of as one of the 'five roots of cleverness' by the Rājapūts (Forbes 1856, vol. 1: 247), *gaṇikās* (known from the nineteenth-century as the *tawā'if*) were ensconced in 'mansions as large as palaces' (Wheeler 1867-81, vol. 4/pt. 2: 325), hosted high-culture salons, and enjoyed the lavish sponsorship and protection of the political and mercantile elites (Chandra 1973; Oldenburg 1984: 131-42; 1990). For the continued influence of courtesans in the early colonial context, see Pinch (2004) and Ghosh (2006: Chs. 2 & 4).

²⁷ In South Asia, such public dancing girls have long been held in disrepute (along with other street entertainers), in contrast to courtly courtesans held in great esteem. In his *Arthaśāstra*, for instance, Kauṭilya distinguishes courtly courtesans from common prostitutes or public women (including wandering actors, dancers, singers, players of musical instruments, Buffoons (Vāgijīvanas), Mimes (Kuśīlavas), Ropedancers (Plavakas), Jugglers (Saubhikas), and Bards [Cāraṇas]), who unlike the *gaṇikās* kept in the king's court, were not admitted into the imperial quarters without a license fee (*prekṣāvetana*) and were to occupy separate quarters in cities (Kauṭilya 1967 [c. 4th cent BCE]: 141).

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Image 2.3: 'Nautch girls' (1922) identified as Kanjaris by my Kanjar informants in Lakshmipura (Old Picture On-Line Archive, image #ACFC7B73 [Geo G Bain Collection] www.old-picture.com).

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socially marginal, morally suspect and archetypically loose women. The distinction between Kanjar and Kāncan is still invoked in the red light district of Lahore, ‘Kanjarī’ designates a ‘common prostitute’ and ‘Kāncanī’ refers to a respectable dancing girl (Brown 2006: 415). The name ‘Kanjar,’ which referred to such unattached groups of entertainers passed into common parlance as a label for all sorts of vagrant groups and a generic label of ill repute.

Kanjars have a story that describes their fall from grace. They tell of their descent from Bajorī Kanjarī—a Śakti (Goddess), a magician, a ropewalker, a danseuse—and they lament the loss of patronage bonds and their doom to perpetual wandering.²⁸ The story goes like this. One day a *rājā* was merry with drink, which put in a mood to entertain.²⁹ So he stretched a rope between two mountain peaks. He called on Bajorī, challenging her to walk the length of the rope in return for a promise of half of his kingdom.³⁰ As the crowd looked on, Bajorī

²⁸ Rajasthanīs say that Bajorī Kanjarī was a rope dancer and one of the seven ‘magician-sisters’ from Bengal, including Behrī Yogin (Yogin), Gangalī Telīn (Oil-presser), Kapurī Dhobīn (Washerwoman), Setalī Khamārī (Potteress), Lūṇā Camārī (Leatherworker), and Camanī Kalālī (Wine-seller); occasionally an eighth, Phūlā Mālīn (Gardener), is added to the list. The sisters, for instance, appear in the epic of King Gopī Cānd recounted by Rajasthanī bards (Gold 1992: 223, 226, 249). In other narratives, Bajorī appears as a dancer in the court of Rājā Jay Singh of Jaipur (Chandra 1993: 25).

²⁹ The Kanjars of Mewar say that the rope was stretched across the Khaṛī River by the *rājā* of Deogarh, a major fiefdom in Mewar. Local Rājputs have their own version of the narrative: the tale of ‘Nāthnī’s (Ropewalker’s) Curse.’ The challenge is said to have been set by Mahārāṇā of Mewar Jawān Singh (r. 1828-1838), known for his drunken antics. In this version of the narrative, a nobleman rather than the *rājā*’s wife severed the rope so as to protect his king. The Ropewalker’s Platform (*naṭnī kā cabutarā*) was erected in the kingdom’s capital to appease the Ropewalker (Masters 1990: 81-82).

³⁰ When Rājputs relate this story they like to say that the king was both drunken and debauched and made the offer in jest. Kanjars, however, treat this promise as a solemn pledge. In some versions of the narrative it is the King himself who cuts the rope in fear of losing half of his kingdom to a dancing girl.

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walked further and further down the rope and the *rājā*'s jest turned into a grave threat to the kingdom. Fearing that the ropewalker would take away half of her son's kingdom, the queen, who was standing by, cut the rope. But Bajorī did not plummet to the ground. Being a *śakti*, she rose to the sky, cursing the *rājā* with no heirs to his throne. She also decreed that from that time on no Kanjar would ever serve Rājputs, by whom they had been betrayed. It is said that it is by the ropewalker's curse that the last seven rulers of Mewar since the offender-king Jawān Singh had to be adopted. Bonds between Rājputs and Kanjars were forever severed and Bajorī's children were bound to forever roam with no masters or place in proper society. The moral of the story is simple: the Kanjars' current exclusion from ordinary, respectable life is intrinsically bound to the lost privilege of Rājput protection.

The story is not without historical parallel. During the austere reign of Emperor Aurangzeb (1658-1707), who endeavored to do away with the courtly arts (Wheeler 1867-81, vol. 4/pt. 2: 325; Trivedi 2002) and later, in the aftermath of the 1857 rebellion, when courtly patronage of the arts was substantially undermined by colonial authorities, most communities of entertainers lost their employment and social standing (Trivedi 1999: 104-105). Many performers, especially itinerant groups that anyway had only loose bonds to patrons, were driven to seek new sources of livelihood. Vagrants like Kanjars were some of the first to be displaced and to take up a variety of other mobile trades.

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2.3 BARDS

Genealogists have long been much sought-after on the subcontinent. From the early medieval period, and increasingly with the elaboration of the Rājput 'great tradition' from the sixteenth century onwards, genealogy emerged as the cornerstone of social status and political legitimacy in western and central India (cf., Kolff 1990: 72, 110).³¹ Being a Rājput, the status to which many groups have aspired, relied not only on land ownership and an overlord's protection, but also on pedigree, complete with sacred (*purāṇic* or epic) lineage, divine origins and a patron-deity (*kul devatā* or *kul devī*) of one's own. From the sixteenth century, 'every royal clan depended on a line of bards for its recognition' (Tams-Lyche 1997: 61).³² By the middle of the seventeenth century, as the Rājput model entrenched as the benchmark of social status and political legitimacy, 'genealogical orthodoxy' was firmly established as an essential aspect of respectable social standing (Kolff 1990: 73). Thus, lamenting that 'the affairs of State are falling into the hands of [non-Rājput] castes,' all of which claim Rājput status, the Commissioner of the 1891 census report quoted the popular adage that 'The beggar's book

³¹ A thirteenth-century Gujarati tale of one Rāṭhoḍ Rājput who in vain sought the hand of a high-ranking princess, tells us that 'the entrenched Rajput dynasties of the desert considered Rathods socially inferior and indeed not even Rajputs because they did not have, as is customary with Rajputs, their Charans [Eulogists].' The unhappy suitor was told that for a Rājput, forging a proper relationship with bards was indeed 'more important than founding a kingdom' (Ujwal n.d.: 36, in Tams-Lyche 1997: 195).

³² Active genealogizing among Rājputs in Western India from the sixteenth century onward not only helped to consolidate Rājput political identity in opposition to Mughal rule (Kolff 1990: 73), but also elevated the status of Rājput lineages in the eyes of Mughal emperors (Tessitori 1917: 25; Henige 1974: 202).

[genealogist's register] outworths the noble's blood' (Baines 1893: 204). All upwardly mobile aspirants to Rājput status, from major landholders to hillsmen and the lowliest leatherworkers, relied on the production and maintenance of pedigrees and sought to employ bards of their own (Sinha 1962; Chambard 1963; Sinha 1992: 242-43; Kothari 1991: xi; Snodgrass 2006).

Originally, most bards came from the vagrant ranks. In fact, 'Cāraṇ,' the North Indian word for a genealogist, is derived from the Sanskrit *cāra*, 'motion' or 'wandering about' (Monier-Williams 1876: 321).³³ As communities secured royal or aristocratic standing, their bards also acquired elite standing. So, the history of Rājputization in Western India, which resulted in the emergence of a Rājput elite, led to rise of two classes of bards³⁴: the elite bards of Rājputs and other dominant landed communities³⁵ and the lowly Bhāṭṣ (Genealogists) and Naṭṣ (Ropewalker-Entertainers) of various low-status groups (Russell 1916: 339; Snodgrass 2004: 275-80). From the thirteenth and certainly by the early nineteenth century, eulogists known as Cāraṇs and the Genealogists known as Bhāṭṣ who managed to secure the right to employment by Rājput clans and other dominant landed communities came to occupy the an

³³ As Luigi Tessitori (1917) points out, even the high-ranking royal Cāraṇs were once lowly wandering minstrels who descended from itinerant herdsmen.

³⁴ Across India chroniclers and panegyrists are known by a much wider variety of function, region and community-specific names, including Atit, Devalvakiyā, Bhāṇḍ, Kāpḍī, Lāvāṇiyā, Māgaṇ, Nagārī, Pālimagā, Rāṇimagā, Tūrī, Jagā, Rāvaḷ, Barvā, Rāv, Bāroṭ, Vahivancā, Mīr, Mīrāsī, Ḍhāḍhī, Kaṭṭiyakāran, or Bhaṭṭu, among others (Shah & Shroff 1958: 248; Chambard 1963; Waghorne 1985: 9-24).

³⁵ Such as the Gujars described by Raheja (1988) or the Koḷīs of Shah and Shroff's study (1958: 264-68).

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uppermost social echelon. The other bards have remained on the periphery of local society.

Many of those who became bards came from entertainer-communities: Snake charmers (Jogī-Kālbeliyās), musicians (like Ḍhāḍhīs, Lāngās or Maṅganiyārs), Dancers, Ropewalkers, and Acrobats (like Naṭs and Kanjars), with Kanjars figuring prominently among them.³⁶

Prior to their dislocation from positions of authority in the colonial period, royal bards were equal, or even superior, in status to royal Brāhmaṅs (Tessitori 1917; Vidal 1997: 92). Just like royal Brāhmaṅs, they had a place in the court (Waghorne 1985: 11)³⁷ and received permanent tax-free land grants, known as *muāfis* and *śāsans* (*Imperial Gazetteer of India* 1908, vol.

³⁶ Colonial accounts observed that itinerant communities commonly served as bards for non-Rājputs. Nomadic Banjārā traders have been the Bhāṭs of Cāraṅs (ul Hassan 1920: 17-21); the Ḍoms, Beṛiyās and Sānsīs, the Jāṭs', Gujars' and other relatively low-ranking communities' (on Ḍoms, see Williams 1889: 125; Baines 1893: 200; Risley 1908: xxviii; on Beṛiyās, Williams 1889: 44-45, 55; Agrawal 2004: 223 fn. 5; on Sānsīs, Sleeman 1849: 253; Griffin 1865, vol. 1: 219; Gunthorpe 1882: 78; Williams 1889: 42; Baines 1912: 109), the Ḍhāḍhī drummers, the Jāṭs' (Bor 1987: 62; Vaudeville 1996: 292); the Lāngā and Maṅganiyār musicians, the merchants' and lesser Rājputs' (Kothari 1994); the Naṭ acrobats, the leatherworkers' (Richardson 1803; Snodgrass 2006); and the Jogī-Kālbeliyā snake-charmers, the Bhīls.' Just as the clan names of the high-ranking bards often derive from their patrons' clan or case names of their (Shah & Shroff 1958), the clan names of many low-ranking Bhāṭs come from the clan or caste names of their patrons (Williams 1889: 40ff). Manu recommends that an unemployed Śūdra should take to genealogical writing (in Baines 1893: 204), and the engagement of various low-standing itinerant groups as genealogists may be a very old practice. Kanjars figure prominently in colonial accounts of low-caste bards, a number of which describe them as the bards of upwardly mobile low-ranking Gujar, Mīṇā, Bhīl, Koḷī, and Jāṭ clans (see Richardson 1803: 470; Sleeman 1849: 265, 404; Gunthorpe 1882: 78, 81, 87; Crooke 1896a, vol. 2: 25; Gayer 1909: 55-56; Gajrani 2004: 136).

³⁷ On various ceremonial occasions in Rajasthan, the Cāraṅs received a bowl of sweetened water mixed with opium before the Rājputs (Vidal 1997: 97) and at royal assemblies, the highest ranking Rājput present rose whenever a Cāraṅ entered or left, as an expression of utmost deference. The royal Bards ate and smoked *huqqas* together with Rājputs (Russell 1916, vol. 2: 339) and had 'their seats of the hide of the lion, tiger, panther, or black antelope' (that is, on the throne) beside the ruler. They bore honorific titles of *Mahārājās* (Great Princes) (Tod 1920 [1829-32], vol. 1: 342) and *Pol Paṭs* (Gate Keepers), and at weddings received generous sums (*tyāg*) before all others (Qanungo 1957: 93).

24: 100).³⁸ Royal bards thus came to comprise a sort of landed nobility in Rājput kingdoms and were listed in British accounts among the ‘leading men of the [Rājput] State’ alongside nobles, state officials and royal priests (Bayley 1916 [1894]: 46, 11, 25).³⁹ Indeed, they were held in such high esteem that their persons were treated as sacrosanct and inviolable: from the thirteenth century, the Cāraṇs and Bhāṭs of Rājputs have been thought of as the sacred brothers or sons of their patrons’ clan goddesses (*kul devīs*), referred to as the Devīputra (Sons of the Goddess) (Shah & Shroff 1958: 249) and, as such, ‘classed together with “the cow and the Brahman” whose slaughter was forbidden to the Rajput’ (Qanungo 1960: 40).⁴⁰

³⁸ Tod tells us that a bardic tradition holds that in the eighth century king Rām Parmār gave the whole province of Kutch to his Cāraṇs (1920 [1829-32], vol. 1: 110 fn.1). In the early twentieth century, for instance, in Merwara ‘in most of larger estates there are villages held by Charans’ (*Imperial Gazetteer* 1904-1909, vol. 1a: 91).

³⁹ Tod wrote that in Rajasthan ‘the Rājput has always, until recent times, favoured the Bhāt or bard more than the Brāhman’ (Tod 1920 [1829-32], vol. 1: xxxiii) and that ‘The Rajpoot slays buffaloes, hunts, and eats the boar and deer, and shoots ducks, and wild fowl (*cookru*); he worships the horse, his sword, and the sun, and attends more to the martial song of the bard than to the litany of the Brahmin’ (Tod 1920, vol. 1: 57). In the early nineteenth century Mahārājā of Jodhpur Mān Singh (r. 1803-04) proclaimed in his verses of praise for the Cāraṇs that they ‘excel the Rājput in four things, namely brains, education, purity of heart and religious piety’ (Ujwal n.d.: 24-5, in Tambs-Lyche 1997: 196). Colonial presence changed this order. While Brāhman *paṇḍits* were incorporated into the colonial administration and ultimately fixed at the apex of Indian society (Derrett 1968; Dirks 1987), by the late nineteenth century, royal Cāraṇs and Bhāṭs, who were important legal, diplomatic and scholarly authorities (Tod 1920 [1829-32], vol. 1: xxxiii, vol. 2: 500; Bayley 1916 [1894]: 46, 11, 25), and whose functions colonial officials sought to replace with state institutions, were removed from their position of prominence in local courts and society (Vidal 1997).

⁴⁰ The Cāraṇ women are thought of as the sacred embodiments of the Goddess (Enthoven 1975 [1920-22], vol. 1: 283). Since it was believed that anyone who shed the blood of a sacred Cāraṇ would meet with ruin, Cāraṇs and Bhāṭs employed ‘threats of suicide’ (*trāga, trāgu, tāga, cāṇḍnī, or dhārnā*) to press their claims (Tod 1920 [1829-32], vol. 2: 814-16). Tod narrates a suicide of eighty Bhāmuṇiyā Bhāṭs before the king of Mewar who confiscated their lands (*ibid.*: 815) and Forbes gives a picturesque account of the self-immolation of a Cāraṇ who contested a claim against one Gujarātī chief. The headless ghost of the Cāraṇ later injured the chief’s wife, threw stones at the palace, killed a servant girl, and finally possessed the chief himself, bringing his kingdom to a near ruin (Forbes

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Image 2.4: Bhanwar Singh Rav, Rāj Kavī (Royal Poet/Panegyrist) of the Fararpur *thikānā* reading couplets (*dohās*) of his composition. His son (left) does not compose poetry, which is no longer sponsored by the local aristocrats.

1856, vol. 2: 387), a story much alive in Gujarāt today (Singhji 1994: 254). Today the Rajasthani and Gujarati countryside is dotted with stone memorials (*pāḷiyas*) to bards who performed *trāga* in defense of herds or village communities (Tod 1920 [1829-32], vol. 2: 1700; Shah & Shroff 1958: 251; also Forbes 1856: 691; Enthoven 1975 [1920-22], vol. 1: 284, fn. 2). The British began trying *trāga* as cases of murder in 1808, although the full punishment for murder was not awarded until 1872 (*Gazetteer of the Bombay Presidency* 1899, vol. 9/pt. 1: 212; Vashishta 1982 & 1985). Their impunity had Cāraṅs and Bhāṭs employed as messengers, carriers of goods, caravan escorts, village guards, as well as guarantors for agreements and revenue collection (Tod 1920 [1829-32], vol. 2: 813-15; Forbes 1856, vol. 1: 447, 466; Shah & Shroff 1958: 250-51; Vidal 1997: 94-97); and their homes were often used as sanctuaries by Rājput rebels (Forbes 1856, vol. 1: 435; Vidal 1997: Ch. 4).

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Bards of low-caste communities ended up at the opposite end of the rank scale, not only because they had lowly masters, but also because their ties to *jajmāns* remained loose, at least in the eyes of the public. Although engagement in a respectable profession bettered the lot of vagrant communities, they retained the reputation of socially loose vagabonds who ‘come and go’ (*āte-jāte*) and ‘eat from everyone’ (*sabhī kā khāte*). Within the broader bardic community, they bear the pejorative accolade of ‘begging bards’ (*Brid-dhārī* or *Bradesarī Bhāṭs*) (Russell 1916, vol. 2: 338), and in colonial caste catalogues are located at the bottom of the rank scale alongside camel-men, barbers, mendicants, laborers, and other ‘persons of disreputable occupations’ (cf. *Census of India, Ajmer-Merwara* 1901, vol. 2/pt. 1: 120).

The bardic business itself was not in disrepute: both royal and low-caste bards perform essentially the same sorts of services: they write, perform and record panegyrics and genealogies (*bansāvalīs* and *pidhāvalīs*). The status-difference between the different classes of bards was inherited from their *jajmāns*. So, contrary to the received wisdom of Indian sociology, the status of bards does not depend on the purity of their work (i.e., the polluting nature of carcasses pollutes leatherworkers), but on the status of their *jajmāns*. While the Rājput bards are part of the elite, the bards of Gujars or Bhīls are among the riffraff.

The standing of bards has depended not only on their patrons’ reputation, but also on the quality of their patronage ties: the more particular, exclusive and durable are the bards’

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bonds to their *jajmāns*, the higher their status. The patrons' claims to the antiquity of their lineages and the bards' claims to the longevity of attachment to their *jajmāns* buttress the patrons' as much as the clients' status. Visible signs of attachment to patrons—titles, property and land grants received from their *jajmāns*—further anchor the bards' claim.⁴¹ Although today many bonds between bards and their Rājput *jajmāns* have been dissolved and many bards have now changed profession, they still like to point to gifts, honors, land received from *jajmāns*, and genealogical registers as markers of their attachment to patrons and respectable social standing. The bard who once served the Fararpur chief family explained:

you can see how far Rāojī's lineage [*piḍāwalī*] goes and that is how long my forefathers were tied to Rāojī's family. You see, this land and this house were given to my grandfather by our Rāo Sahāb's grandfather. Everyone in Fararpur knows that. And everyone respects us because they know that we have been with Rāojī's family from the very origins of their clan.

On the contrary, itinerant low-caste bards could lay no such claims. However long-lasting their ties to *jajmāns* may have been, in actual fact they have accumulated little proof of such attachments. Receiving no formal titles or land from their patrons (most of whom have had little or no land to give), they remained beggars in the eyes of respectable people.

Although, as I shall discuss at a later stage, mobile bards have done their best to flaunt their attachments with flamboyant performances for their *jajmāns* (see Chapter 3), they have

⁴¹ The same applies not only to Royal Bards, but also, for instance, to Royal Priests (Rāj Purohīts), who have likewise enjoyed the repute of ancient and exclusive attachment to kings, the repute that has placed them at the top of the status scale, alongside the Royal Bards.

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remained suspect in the eyes of the public, which sees them as a socially stray, morally wayward, untrustworthy, and threatening people. In conversation with a farmer in Fararpur I once observed that the itinerant bards do the same sort of work as the royal Cāraṇs and Bhāṭs, and that they should, therefore, be treated as members of the same caste, guild and status-group. He laughed:

We do not see it this way. You see, we know that the Royal Panegyrist (Rāj Kavi) has been singing for Rāo Sahābjī for a very long time. He has land and a house. We know the hand from which his family has always taken bread. But with these roaming bards—who knows where they have come from and where they will go? How do we know how many hands feed them? They come and go. We see them as beggars and vagabonds.

The perceived uncertainty of the mobile bards' attachments to the *jajmān*—accusations of indiscriminate 'eating'—aligns them with other vagrants. The *jajmāns* are no less mistrustful of their Bards, whom they suspect of dancing and singing en route for anyone willing to pay. Their suspicions are not entirely unfounded. I first encountered a group of Kanjar- Bhāṭs when Gopal, one of my main informants and best friend in the community, spotted a cluster of their tents just outside a Bhīl village. Parking the motorcycle in the shadow of a tree, we stopped for a chat. At the sight of an approaching motorcycle, the Kanjars grew wary, getting particularly nervous when they learned that my Kanjar companion was from Fararpur, where many of their Gujar *jajmāns* reside. One of them drew Gopal aside for a brief chat. And when we left, Gopal said to me:

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Bastards [*sālahs*], here they are dancing for Bhils and somewhere else they will be dancing for Drummers and Washermen; and he asks me not to tell his *jajmān*. What do I care for telling? Sooner or later he will lose his *jajmān*'s trust and that will be the end of his business. Everyone knows that they beg from everyone. Kanjars they are, but small Kanjars. They disgrace our caste. This is why we don't give our daughters to such beggars.



Image 2.5: The retired head of a Kanjar-Bhāṭ family (in red turban) watches his wife, eldest son, daughter-in-law, and oldest grandson perform *khel-tamāṣā* for their Gujar *jajmāns* (Dhul Khera village just outside of Fararpur, 5 February 2008). Note the ropewalking setup in the background.

2.4 SPIES

The mobility and the elusive social location of vagrant groups have made them particularly well-suited for work as *dalāls*, or agents of intelligence and backstage negotiation.

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Undercover surveillance and communication has long been at the heart of South Asian statecraft (Bayly 1996).⁴² Authors of ancient legal and statecraft treatises advise the king to employ a variety of spies to inform on proceedings within their own and neighboring kingdoms.⁴³ From antiquity, the ability to know, and to rule knowingly, while maintaining the face of politeness in relations with one's neighbors and subjects, relied on the maintenance of a secret intelligence force. And the best of this force have long been thought to be various itinerant folks. In fact, the Sanskrit word *cāra* means both to 'spy' and to 'move about' (Monier-Williams 1876: 321). Statecraft treatises have long recommended the use of mobile groups for the purposes of intelligence gathering. In his *Arthasāstra*, Kautilya tells the king that to keep an eye on his servants, he should assemble a cohort of 'wandering spies' (*sancāra*) from the ranks of actors, dancers, singers, musicians, jugglers, prostitutes, buffoons, wandering heralds, and bards (Kautilya 1967 [c. 4th cent BCE]: 1.11-12, 2.27). Royal Spies who

⁴² The author of a seventh-century Sanskrit epic *Śiśupālavadhā* writes that 'statecraft without espionage seems to us like the science of grammar without the Paspasha [the introduction to Patanjali's great commentary on Panini's Grammar]' (Durgaprasada & Sivadatta 1914: 2, 112, in Bayly 1996: 12 fn. 4).

⁴³ Early modern sources are peppered with references to elaborate networks of messengers, informers and spies maintained by the Mughal and Rājput statesmen. Manucci, for instance, writes that

The best means that kings possess for the good regulation of their kingdom is through trusty spies. These report to the prince what goes on in the realm, chiefly amongst the officials. And with truth it may be said that the Mogul country is behind none other in having that kind of person, from whom may be learnt all that passes. But throughout his reign Aurangzeb had such good spies that they knew (if it may be so said) even men's very thoughts. Nor did anything go on anywhere in the realm, above all in the city of Dihlī, without his being informed (1907 [1708], vol. 2: 18).

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do not come from wandering communities, he recommends, ought to disguise themselves as vagabonds by wearing the clothes of itinerant actors, picture-reciters, dancers, puppeteers, and the like (Kautilya 1967 [c. 4th cent BCE]: 1.12). Kamandaki, the author of another statecraft treatise, *The Elements of Polity* (*Nītisāraḥ* c. 400-600CE), similarly advises that intelligence agents should be *jāṅgalī* (uncouth, savage) folk and that other spies should masquerade as mendicants, travelling merchants, ascetics, forest-dwellers, and mercenaries (Kamandaki 1896 [c. 400-600CE]: 190).

While we know that the once-itinerant royal bards have been historically employed as messengers, negotiators and secret intelligence agents (Vidal 1997), the employment of lower-caste itinerant bards for similar purposes has not been widely documented.⁴⁴ A handful of sources, however, suggest that low-caste itinerants, and among them most often those who have worked as bards, were commonly employed in this way. Abu'l-Fazl, for instance, tells us that the migratory Meos of Mewat worked as runners and spies for the emperor Akbar (1873-

⁴⁴ As custodians of words and history with a special license to gather and relay the truth, bards have been thought of as particularly reliable informers, messengers and negotiators (Vidal 1997: Ch. 4). In Rajasthan, bards often performed the tasks of match-makers, who found appropriate matches, kept up communication between the families of bride and groom, and ensured that agreements were maintained on both sides (Suri 1977: 87). In times of revolt, *Cāraṇ*s were employed by their Rājput patrons to communicate with the ruler, and by kings to send messages to the 'tribal' regions (Vidal 1997: 94). In the popular Mārṅwārī tale of the lovers *Ḍholā* and *Mārū*, the traitor *Ūmar-Sumāra*, representing an ancient Rājput tribe, has a *Cāraṇ* for his emissary and spy (Vaudeville 1996: 292). In a similar fashion, the royal *Bhāṭ*s served as negotiators and messengers 'between kings and some of the groups from whom they drew their allies and military recruits, including the so-called Tribal Populations' (Snodgrass 2006: 68).

94 [c. 1590], vol. 1: 252).⁴⁵ Bhīl and Sahariyā tribes, mobile Banjārā traders and Raykā pastoralists likewise gathered information and carried messages within and between Rājput states,⁴⁶ and in Central India Sahariyā tribesmen are still known as ‘Rāwats’ (from the Sanskrit *Rājā-dūta*) or ‘King’s messengers’ (Mandal 1998: 192). The use of mobile people as intelligence agents persisted well into the twentieth century. In Mewār in the 1920s and 1930s, Mahārāṇā Bhopāl Singh, for instance, employed two illiterate beggars, who supplied him with detailed reports on the goings-on in his kingdom.

Secret intelligence agents were employed not only by royals, but across the spectrum of social and political rank. Rājput nobles used mobile communities to learn about and negotiate conflicts with their rivals (Servan-Schreiber 2003: 279), and in Mughal India ‘merchants and rival nobles employed spies and agents to obtain reliable information from the entourages of the great [noble] men’ (Richards 1995: 61). Sensitive matters such as thefts, land disputes and elopements called for hidden means of negotiation: in princely and marketplace politics alike, each man needed a backstage *dalāl* (go-between) to negotiate and inform. In the 1860s, writes Chris Bayly,

⁴⁵ Indeed, one of the innovations of Akbar’s governance were the *Ḍāk-Mewṛas* (Meo Posts) ‘who were stationed at every place’ (Abu’l-Fazl 1873-94 [c. 1590], vol. 1: 252 fn. 2).

⁴⁶ Cf., *Gazetteer of the Bombay Presidency* (1883, vol. 16: 318), *Census of India* (1962: 32), Sharma (1970: 166), Westphal-Hellbusch (1975: 126), Gordon (1985), Skaria (1998). In Rajasthani tales about the legendary ruler of Mewar Rāṇā Pratāp, Bhīls repeatedly appear as the king’s informers, escorts and messengers.

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Rather than informing the police, ... a man who suspected someone of cattle theft would have the animals traced by his private agents and would then hire a professional go-between (*dalal*) to confront the suspected criminals. A large portion of the value of the animals would be recovered, but absolutely nothing would have come to the notice of any official agency (1996: 334).

Much like elite bards, low-ranking bards gathered information and helped to resolve disputes and to negotiate deals. In the words of one Kanjar, whose family is still employed as Bards by the Rājputized Kolī hillsmen,

Our ancestors worked in the business of espionage [*jāsūsī kā kām karte the*]. If there was a need for warring with another *rājā*, how would [a *rājā*] learn about his enemy's state of affairs? As Naṭ-Bhāṭs, we put on performances [*tamāsās*], we danced and sang and then we found out that this *rājā* gave such a gift to another *rājā* and then we advised [our *jajmān*] that he should give the same [so as to keep his honor]. And we brought news about the other *rājā*: how much money he has in his coffers, how many men, how big an army, how many field guns. In this way we gathered all the information [*jānkārī*] and would tell our *rājā* that [his enemy] has five hundred field guns and ten thousand soldiers, so [we would tell him], go there with twenty thousand soldiers. For this service we received gifts [*dānpurn*] and a contribution [*candā*] from the harvest [collected by each] household. The *rājās* gave us whatever we asked for: guns and swords, cloth, pots and pans, and liquor [*śarāb*].

In all likelihood, few Kanjars stood in the service of such high-profile patrons. They did, however, and still often do, work as backstage agents of enforcement, intelligence and negotiation for Rājputs, farmers, village communities, and these days, the police.

2.5 THE DIPLOMATICS OF PLUNDER

When contention defied dialogue and words failed, negotiations called for more potent communicative means. *Dalāls* often served not only as messengers or ‘information brokers’ (Bayly 1996), but also as a muscle force. Mobile communities have long played a central part in the politics of plunder that has been at the heart of statecraft on the subcontinent, central as much to the turbulent structure and process of state-formation in the eighteenth century as to the gentrified Rājput politics of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries (Gordon 1969; Vidal 1997; Kasturi 1999).⁴⁷ Travelling ascetics, for instance, often doubled up as spies-cum-messengers and gun-bearing toughs and Bhīl chiefs asserted their protection rights by raiding villages and caravans (Kolff 1971; Guha 1999; Skaria 1999). Mughal rulers conducted their combat through robber-bands, Marathas established dominion by methodical plunder, and Rājputs founded kingdoms, rebelled and feuded by rustling cattle and marauding the

⁴⁷ The use of robbery in warfare and governance can be traced beyond the turn of Common Era. Kauṭilya tells us that ‘by proclaiming war, [the king] can carry off, by force, the grains, cattle and gold of his enemy’ (Kauṭilya 1967 [c. 4th cent BCE]: 7.4). On the political uses of robbery by hill chiefs, see Kolff (1990: 17), Guha (1996; 1999) and Skaria (1999: esp. Ch. 9); on Mughal raids, see Gommans (2002: esp. Ch. 2); on Marathas, see Gordon (1993, 1994); on Southern ‘bandit-kings,’ see Dumont (1957), Blackburn (1978: 44), Richards & Rao (1980), Shulman (1980), and Bes (2001); and on the Rājput politics of plunder, see Fox (1971: Ch. 3), Humes (1985), Vidal (1997), Kasturi (1999; 2002). The raider-king is a common protagonist of the broader Indo-European narrative tradition, where ‘raiding is presented as a heroic action, sanctioned by divine approval, hedged with ritual, and open in its use of force to regain that which rightfully belongs to the Indo-European warrior and/or his people’ (Lincoln 1991: 11; also Dumézil 1969).

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countryside.⁴⁸ Aside from being an important, and sometimes the sole, method of procuring resources, robbery has been a key ‘diplomatic’ means, used to subjugate and sway rivals and subordinates by penetrating their domains. Robbery was so central to the politics of the subcontinent, that ‘cattle-raiding was considered a standard feature of the relations between neighbouring “kingdoms”’ (Shulman 1980: 289) and ‘the very act of leading raids was crucial to imagining a raja, his bravery and his daring. To rule, in other words, was to raid’ (Skaria 1999: 145).

The turbulent, ever shifting and fragmenting political structure of South Asian polities demanded a great deal of marauding manpower. On every political level—from Mughal Emperors to Maratha leaders, Rājput kings, hill chiefs, minor landholders, and village communities—eclectic cohorts of robbers were mobilized for resource-extraction, conquest and governance; bands of marauders ranged from the ten thousand-horse Piṇḍārī armies to a motley handful of thieves (Gordon 1969: 427-29).⁴⁹ While some of these were professional

⁴⁸ On tribal chiefs, see Kolff (1990: 17), Guha (1996; 1999) and Skaria (1999: esp. Ch. 9); on Mughal raids, Gommans (2002: esp. Ch. 2); on Marathas, Gordon (1993, 1994); on Southern ‘bandit-kings,’ Dumont (1957), Blackburn (1978: 44), Richards & Rao (1980), Shulman (1980), and Bes (2001); and on the Rājput politics of plunder, Fox (1971: Ch. 3), Humes (1985), Kasturi (1999; 2002) and Vidal (1997).

⁴⁹ The structure and substance of this vast ‘military labor market’ (Kolff 1990), from which the politics of raiding and protection drew its force (and which embraced, by Kolff’s estimation, at least ten percent of active male population in pre-British India [*Ibid.*: 3]), as well as the origins, identities and social organization of plundering entrepreneurs have attracted a good deal of historians’ attention. See, among others, Fox (1971), Kolff (1971; 1990), Shulman (1980), Gordon (1994), Gommans (2002), and Pinch (2006). Employment of robbers for warfare and protection is mentioned in some of the oldest available legal and statecraft texts. In his *Arthaśāstra*, Kauṭilya recommends that thieves be employed to ‘destroy the flock of the enemy’s cattle or merchandise in the vicinity of

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mercenaries like the Piṇḍārīs, the bulk of marauders comprised a diverse mass of landless and uprooted men in search of patrons, prestige and land: immigrants from Central Asia, displaced chiefs, migrant workers, peasants driven off their lands by wars or droughts, peripatetic traders, mendicants, pastoralists, hillsmen, and vagrants (Kolff 1971; Lorenzen 1978; Levi 1994; Gommans 2002: 42-3; Pinch 2006).⁵⁰ For the identities of different sorts of marauders, plunder had different meanings. While habitually settled communities (Rājputs, farmers) and professional nomads (herdsmen, itinerant traders) treated thieving primarily as a source of income rather than of identity, which they derived from their primary occupations, for many tribal and vagrant communities, theft came to comprise not only a key source of income, but also of identity and of status. Engagement in thievery, long-recognized as a vocation on the

wild tracts' (Kaṭṭīlya 1967 [c. 4th cent BCE]: 13.3; also 7.14), and that 'when a king finds that as his enemy's subjects are ill-treated, impoverished and greedy and are ever being oppressed by the inroads of the army, thieves, and wild tribes, they can be made through intrigue to join his side' (ibid.: 7.4). He also advises that 'brave thieves, and wild tribes who make no distinction between a friend and a foe' be employed for negotiations with other kings (ibid.:13.3). The legal commentator Bṛhaspati sets down the rules for sharing the spoils of raids with hired robbers: 'When everything has been brought from a hostile country by freebooters, with the permission of their lord they shall give a sixth part to the king and share (the remainder) in due proportion' (Jolly 1889: 241). British authorities on the subcontinent were duly unnerved by such practices. In 1774 Warren Hastings lamented that the *zamīndārs* of Bengal were the 'nursing mothers' of thieving groups (O'Malley 1925: 305-6) and Sleeman later observed that 'a Rajput chief, next to leading a gang of his own on great enterprise, delights in nothing so much as having a gang or two, under his patronage, for little ones. There is hardly a single chief, of the Hindoo military class, in the Bundelcund, or Gwalior territories, who does not keep a gang of robbers of some kind or other, and consider it as a very valuable and legitimate source of revenue' (Sleeman 1844, vol. 1: 188). On relations between Rājput landlords and Thugs, see Sleeman (1840) and Wagner (2007). As I shall show later (in Chapters 4 and 5), the patronage of robbers persists both in informal and state politics today.

⁵⁰ India's landed population has long been known to take to roadside banditry at times of need, whether to earn or rebel (c.f., Guha 1983; Kolff 1990; Gordon 1994; Vidal 1997).

subcontinent, held out the promise of ties to patrons and, through them, to respectable society.

2.6 THE VOCATION OF THIEVERY

The common consensus in current historiography tells us that in India the notion of a community of professional robbers is a brainchild of British colonial administration, dreamt up in the first half of the nineteenth century by William Sleeman in the context of his Thuggee and Dacoit crusades.⁵¹ According to this literature, British officialdom invented the idea of caste-based professional theft, inscribing it in the legal category of a ‘criminal caste’ so as to justify the application of special policing and penal measures to a variety of ‘innocent’ mobile communities.⁵² The argument holds that although various people (from rebellious Rājputs to hungry craftsmen, peasant-rebels and heterogeneous bands of freebooters) occasionally engaged in robbery, theft was not practiced as a regular caste-based occupation. A look beyond the colonial archive, however, suggests that the idea of theft as an occupation practiced and transmitted professional guilds—and the category of a robber-caste—has had a much longer life on the subcontinent.

⁵¹ For this view, see for instance Blackburn (1978), Major (1999), Nigam (1990a & b), and Mayaram (1991; 2003).

⁵² For some expositions of this view, see Chatterji (1981), Freitag (1985; 1991; 1998), Radhakrishna (1989; 1992; 2001), Tolen (1991), Singha (1993; 1998), and Lloyd (2008).

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Theft has long been conceptualized as a formal knowledge and skill-set: the ‘science of stealing’ (*cauryavidyā*) appears in lists of ‘official arts’ (*kalās*) alongside politics and astrology⁵³ and was until recently included in the classical curriculum of Brāhmaṇical education.⁵⁴ In the expansive body of classical story (*kathā*) literature theft is described as a guild-based occupation: (1) a set of specialized knowledge and skills (2) performed under the auspices of specific patron-deities and (3) transmitted and practiced within closed communities, which are (4) possessed of their own nature (*svabhāva*) and are (5) subject to a distinctive moral code (*dharma*).⁵⁵ Authors of Indian stories and dramas attribute to their thieving characters a distinctive, secretive and highly formalized set of methods and skills (the construction of tunnels and breaches, a set of breach-entering precautions, a dress-code, and a secret argot).⁵⁶

⁵³ De Rosairo (1985-86), Jacobi (1886: 22), Tawney (1901: 32), Bloomfield (1913: 620), Chakravarti (1932; 1950: 230-32), Glücklich (1994: Ch. 8), Passi (2001; 2005: 515).

⁵⁴ *Steḥa* (Skt. theft) has been presented alongside subjects like *jyotis* (astronomy, mathematics and astrology), *śilpa* (arts and crafts, including architecture), *vyākaraṇa* (analysis), *nyāya* (logic), *vedānta* (philosophy), *dharma* (law), *artha* (statecraft), and *alaṅkāra* (poetics) (Wujastyk 1981: 32; Scharfe 2002: 270).

⁵⁵ For overviews of writing on thieving and thieves in classical Indian literature, see Bhattacharya (1990, on theft in classical Hindu law) and a series of articles by Bloomfield (1913; 1923b & b; 1926, on thieves in the *kathā* literature).

⁵⁶ For the construction of tunnels and breaches, see Chalmers & Cowell (1895, vol. 5: 248), Ryder & Lanman (1905: 47-48), Schiefner & Ralston (1906: 37ff), Parker (1910-14, vol. 2: 45-6, 326), Bloomfield (1919: 223, 225; 1923a: 116), and Johnson (1920: 159ff); for a standard set of entrance precautions, Ryder & Lanman (1905: 49), von Schiefner & Ralston (1906: 39), Woolner & Sarup (1930-31: 39), and Kale (1966: 1.48); for clothing, Ryder & Lanman (1905: 49), Passi (2001: 1.45); and for the secret signals (*caurasamjñā*), Bloomfield (1919 [8th cent BCE]: *Pārśvanātha Carita* 7.148) and Hertel (1920, vol. 2: 170). Such practices are at times described in exacting detail, the thief-hero of a Sanskrit drama written in the 2nd century BCE providing a technical list of seven breach shapes (*sapta samjñāḥ*), including ‘*padmavyākoṣa*, “blown like a lotus;” *bhāskara*, “sun;” *bālacandra*, “crescent moon;” *vāpī*, “cistern;” *vistīrṇa*, “extended;” *svastika*, “cruciform;” and *pūrṇakumbha*, “full pot”’ (Ryder & Lanman 1905: 47-48). A Tamil play

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A whole genre of 'thievery treatises' (*steya-śāstras*, *cora-śāstras* or *steya-sūtras*) written by Brāhmaṇ authors and presented as records of 'the thieving tradition' or manuals of the thief's craft,⁵⁷ describes thievery as an art received and practiced, as all other trades, within closed circles of heirs and initiates: in *kathās* robbers almost invariably appear in 'banded, cartelized and organized groups, that live together' (Bloomfield 1926: 205)⁵⁸ and operate under the guidance of chiefs (Jacobi 1886: 13; Bloomfield 1926: 206). And like all other guilds, they enjoy the patronage of special deities (Somadeva 1923: 141-2).⁵⁹ So, robber-bands are described as

(thirteen Trivandrum plays) includes a similar list of breach-names: 'jhaṣāśya, "mouth like the fish *jhaṣa*;" *gajāśya*, "elephant's mouth;" *vyāghravaktra*, "tiger's snout;" *pūrṇacandra*, "full-moon;" *candrārdha*, "half-moon"' (Woolner & Sarup 1930-31: 37; also Jacobi 1886: 67, 74; *Mallinātha Caritra* 7. 804; Chalmers & Cowell 1895, vol. 1: 68).

⁵⁷ Three texts of the sort are now available in translation. See Goodwin (1893) for a liturgical extract from the *Atharvaveda* prescribing the worship of Skanda (Kārttikeya), the 'patron of thieves.' For a manual of robber's magic incantations, recipes and formulas rendered into German, see Dieter (1991). Another Sanskrit text, called the *Elixir of Dharmic Thievery* (*Dharmacauryarasāyana*) combines a thief's adventure-tale with a discourse on the ethics of robbery and some practical prescriptions of the trade (Narahari 1946; Aklujkar 1996; Passi 2001; 2005). Thanks to Peter D. Szanto for alerting me to Passi's translation of the text. While none of these works of Brāhmaṇical fiction, with their focus on liturgical and ethical ruminations, can be treated as descriptions of actual thieving practices and communities, such texts propagate an idea of theft as a specialist sphere of learning and professional enterprise. For further references to thieving treatises in Sanskrit literature, some dating to the second century BCE, see Bloomfield (1913: 619; 1923a: 97-8).

⁵⁸ Also Chalmers & Cowell (1895, vol. 1: 121-24, vol. 3: 264-66, vol. 4: 71-5, 268), Johnson (1920: 166), von Schiefner & Ralston (1906: 286).

⁵⁹ These include Rudra, the 'Lord of Thieves' (*stenānām pati*) (Falk 1986: 60-5; Scharfe 2002: 270, fn. 102), Rudra's son Skanda, the 'father' and patron of thieves and author of a 'Burglary Manual' (Goodwin 1893: vi, *Atharva-Pariśiṣṭa* 20; Ryder & Lanman 1905: 47-48; Masson & Kosambi 1907: 46ff; Bolling & von Negelein 1909, vol. 1: 128ff; Woolner & Sarup 1930-31: 11. 2 *et seq*; Scharfe 2002: 270), the various regional thief-deities, such as Budha Trivikrama in Dwārkā (Tod [1829-32] 1920, vol. 1: 90), as well as the perennial protectress of robbers, the Goddess.

age-old hereditary guilds,⁶⁰ where the trade is passed down, like in any other guild, through lineages.⁶¹ The thieving protagonist of the 18th century *Dharmacauryarasāyana* thievery tale, for instance, inherits his father's craft, which, the author claims, has been practiced 'by the book' in the family for generations (Passi 2005: 514). Rāuhineya, the thief-hero of the abovementioned Jain text *Rāuhineyacārīta* declares himself to be 'the scion of a distinguished thief-family, proud of its reputation and position among fellow thieves' (Johnson 1920: 189).⁶² Descriptions of robber-castes in Brāhmaṇical narratives match the wildest of colonial phantasms about Criminal Tribes. See, for instance, one description of a robber-village from a fifteenth-century Jain text:

In this country of Magadha, on the banks of the Ganges, there was situated a beautiful town, named Rājagrha, adorned with wealthy inhabitants. Nearby was the mountain of Vāibhāra, delightful with its plateaux, which was ever a place of repose for both thieves and ascetics. The mountain—where thousands of lions and tigers roared by day, while (by night) it was terrifying with the howls of jackals and the hooting of owls—was resplendent with *vanaspatī* [trees or tree-ornaments] measured by eighteen *bhāras* (a large weight; or, a load), and with cascades like marvelous ropes of pearls. By virtue of magic charms, amulets, and simples the young of the thieves habitually played there with the young of the lions. Many ascetics, who lived on bulbs, roots, and fruit, dwelt in

⁶⁰ In the *kathās* and Buddhist *Jātaka* tales theft almost invariably appears as a guild-based occupation: the *Vedabbha* (48) and *Pāṇīya Jātakas* (459), for instance, describe robbers known as 'the dispatchers' (*pesanakacora*), who 'of every two prisoners they made ... used to dispatch one to fetch the ransom' (Chalmers & Cowell, vol. 1: 121-24, 111-15).

⁶¹ Chalmers & Cowell (1895, vol. 1: 68), Meyer (1902: 15), Hertel (1920: 66ff), Bloomfield (1923a: 100-1).

⁶² In numerous other tales thieves likewise operate within family circles, burgling together with their fathers, uncles and sisters (Jacobi 1886: 65ff; von Schiefner 1906: 39ff; Parker 1910, vol. 3: 41ff; Hertel 1920: 66ff; Somadeva 1923: *kathās* 88, 112, 147 *et seq*; Emeneau 1934: 14; Rajan 1995: 13).

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the woods around the mountain and performed manifold penance; and hundreds of families of thieves dwelt in the caves, which, shut in by bamboo network, were in the recesses of the mountain (Johnson 1920: 165-66).

Another narrative of blood sacrifice to the goddess Durgā by a tribe of forest-dwelling bandits in an eleventh-century collection of stories (Tawney 1923: 141-42) reads like a script for the more exotic scenes in Steven Spielberg's *Indiana Jones and the Temple of Doom*.

Just like other caste groups, robber-communities have a distinctively wild, cunning, brutal, and valiant nature (*svabhāva*)⁶³ and a moral code of their own (*svadharma*), the 'dharma of thieves' (*cauryadharmā*) (see Passi 2001; 2005). As Wendy Doniger points out,

dharma includes within its many semantic ranges the idea of one's nature (*bhāva* or *svabhāva*). ... Dharma implies that 'should' and 'is' are one—that one should do what one's nature inclines one to do. The nature of an individual is the source of his dharma and that of the group to which he belongs; it is the nature of snakes to bite, of demons to deceive, of gods to give, of sages to control their senses, and so it is their dharma to do so. ... it is the dharma of thieves to steal (1976: 94-5).

It is both the nature and moral duty of members of thieving *jātis* to steal, just as it is the nature and moral duty of Rājputs to rule or of Potters to make pots. In sum, presented as the business of hereditary occupational guilds whose members have a distinctive nature and morality, theft has been historically installed in Brāhmaṇical narratives in the idiom of caste, making the robber-*jāti* a much older category than critics of British colonialism would have us believe.

⁶³ Indeed, before the turn of the era, some robber-communities must have already been so well defined as to be recognized by their distinctive appearance: in his *Arthaśāstra*, Kauṭilya recommends that spies be employed 'under the guise of old and notorious thieves with their student bands' (2.35, also 4.5., 13.3, emphasis mine).

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This is not to say that theft has been perceived as an unambiguously legitimate profession and aspect of political life on the subcontinent, as has been suggested (Bayly 1996; Freitag 1998). If not plainly excluded, as a ‘criminal’ activity, from the range of *dharmic* possibilities, theft has been no ordinary trade. Instead, it has been practiced as an underhanded and a secretive business by people who are (either permanently or temporarily) outside ordinary moral and social life. Although open raids (*dhāds*, *bhūmiyāvats*) have long been lauded, alongside battles and hunting feats, in celebration of kingly valor and strength, clandestine theft has been conceived of as the business of those excluded from mainstream society. Manu, for instance, describes theft as an art of disguise and deception and professional thieves, as ‘invisible thieves’ (*aparakāśataskaras*) (Manu 1886: 9.258; Bhattacharya 1990). *Kathā* narratives almost always locate thieves in the moonless night, the underground lair or the perennial periphery of civilized life on the subcontinent—the jungle. In practice as much as in narrative, theft has been a secretive exercise carried out by persons sequestered from the order of public politesse: tribal burglars, ‘rebel-kings’ (*bāgī-rājās*) and vagrant marauders like Kanjars.⁶⁴

Nevertheless, the category of a robber-caste—of a hereditary, endogamous and expert guild of professional thieves—has been an important resource for marginal communities

⁶⁴ See, for instance, Vidal (1997: Ch. 2) on the structure of Rājput rebellion in southern Rajasthan: in order to oppose opponents by force of robbery, Rājputs styled themselves ‘rebels’ (*bāgīs*), placing themselves, if only temporarily, outside of the ordinary conventions of political politesse.

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seeking a way into proper society. At one time or another, tribal and vagrant groups adopted the robber-identity in variably successful bids to find employment and insert themselves into the order of polite, caste society. The robber-caste reputation was often not externally ascribed, either by Brāhmaṇs or colonial officials, but often asserted by its bearers.

Sometimes, communities like Kanjars, Mīṇās or Bhīls succeeded in establishing for themselves the reputation of thieves and entrenching in the robber's trade for multiple generations.

Explicit assertions about being a proper, professional and reliable thief—a member of a thieving caste—needed to be made when a potential patron needed to be convinced of the necessity of their employment.

In the record of Sleeman's early nineteenth-century interrogation of his Thug informers, Thugs invoke the old conception of a marauder-caste in a bid to prove themselves worthy of Sleeman's protection. An excerpt from one of Sleeman's conversations with his Thug informers, who try to convince him of the existence of an age-old cult of Thuggee, offers an illustration:

Sahib [Muslim Thug].—We suppose that all Thugs originated by descent or initiation from the Delhi clans. ...

Q. [Sleeman's question]. Do you think there is any truth in their assertion that your ancestors drove bullocks?

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Sahib.—I think there is. We have some usages and traditions that seem to imply that our ancestors kept bullocks, and traded; but how I know not.

Here a Brahman Thug, of one of the most ancient Thug families, interposed, and declared that he had seen the funeral rites of Musulman Thugs, and that the women who brought the water there chanted all the occupations of the ancestors of the deceased, which demonstrated that they were originally descended from gangs of wandering *Khunjurs*, or vagrant Musulmans, who followed armies and lived in the suburbs of cities, and in the wild wastes, and that their pretensions to higher descent was all nonsense. Several Musulman Thugs protested sturdily against this, but the arguments were too strong against them, and after a time the dialogue was resumed. ...

Q.—What do you think, *Sahib Khan*, am I right in thinking that we shall suppress Thuggee, or is *Nasir* right in thinking we shall not?

Sahib.—There have been several gurdies (inroads,) upon Thuggee, but they have ended in nothing but the punishment of a few; and, as *Nasir* says, we have heard our fathers and sages predict these things as punishments for our transgression of prescribed rules...

Q.—... do you never feel any dread of punishment hereafter?

Sahib.—Never; we never murder unless the omens are favorable; and we consider favorable omens as the mandates of the deity.

Q.—What deity?

Sahib. —*Bhowanee* [Goddess]. ...

Q.—And you believe that if you were to murder without the observance of the omens and regulations, you would be punished both in this world and the next like other men?

Sahib.—Certainly; no man's family ever survive a murder: it becomes extinct. A Thug who murders in this way loses the children he has, and is never blessed with more.

Q.—In the same manner as if a Thug had murdered a Thug?

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Sahib.—Precisely; he cannot escape punishment (Sleeman 1836: 144-46).

Sleeman's interlocutors invoke the familiar anchors of legitimacy—pure and ancient pedigree and divine tutelage—necessary establishing of robber, no less than of Rājput, status. The conversation carries on:

Q.—How can you murder old men and young children without some emotions of pity—calmly and deliberately as they sit with you and converse with you,—and tell you of their private affairs,—of their hopes and fears,—and of the wives and children, they are going to meet after years of absence, toil and suffering?

A.—From the time that the omens have been favorable, we consider them victims thrown into our hands by the deity to be killed; and that we are the mere instrument in her hands to destroy them. ...

Q.—Do you in the Duckun send any offerings to the Brahmans of the temple of Davey?

Feringeea [another informer].—Never; we neither make offerings to her temples, nor do we ever consult any of her priests or those of any other temples. Our sages alone are consulted, and they consult omens alone as their guides. ...

Q.—You think that a *Kuboola* or tyro [amateur] could not any where form a gang of Thugs of himself?

Sahib and *Nasir*.—Never; he could know nothing of our rules of augury, or proceedings; and how could he possibly succeed? Does not all our success depend upon knowing and observing omens and rules?

Q.—It would therefore never be very dangerous to release such a man as a *Kuboola*?

Sahib and *Nasir*.—Never; unless he could join men better instructed than himself. Everyone must be convinced that it is by knowing and attending to omens and rules that Thuggee has thrived. ...

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Q.—Have you any ... instances [of Goddess's protection]?

Inent.—Hundreds! When Madhajee Seindheea [a Maratha ruler] caused seventy Thugs to be executed at Mathura, was he not warned in a dream by *Davey* [Goddess] that he should release them? and did he not the very day after their execution begin to spit blood? and did he not die within three months? ... (ibid.: 147-57).

The Thugs claim to be driven solely by their caste-calling, forsaking sentiment for their martial duty, much like Arjun, the hero of *Bhāgavat Gītā*. The mention of special rules, omens, and augury serves to further confirm the Thugs' professional character. Their group identity is further sealed with physical markers:

Q.—Do you not think that if we persevere, we shall be able to do in the Duckun what we have done here, and in the Dooab [eradicate Thug gangs]?

Inaent.—No doubt.

Sahib Khan.—It will be a work of greater difficulty. Half or three quarters of these gangs were Kuboolas [amateurs]. In the Duckun they are almost all composed entirely of Burkas—men well born, staunch and able; above all the men of Arcot.

Feringeea.—And the Hindoo Thugs of Talghat upon the Krishna river?

Sahib Khan.—Yes; they are extraordinary men.

Feringeea.—They have three painted lines on their foreheads extending up from a central point at the nose. I served with them once for two months.

Sahib Khan.—Yes; they have those lines (ibid.: 161).

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The Thugs say that, like any other *jāti*, they can be distinguished by special physical traits: ‘staunch and able’ bodies and special marks on their foreheads. Sleeman is not convinced:

Q.—But do not all Hindoos in that quarter wear the same marks?

Sahib Khan.—All Hindoos put them on occasionally, but they always wear them. ...

Feringeea.—You may hear and say what you please, but your funeral and marriage ceremonies indicate that your ancestors were nothing more than Khunjurs and vagrants about the great city?

Inaent.—It is impossible to say whether they were really what is described in these ceremonies, or pretended to be so; that they performed these offices for a time is unquestionable, but I think they must have been assumed as disguises.

Feringeea.—But those who emigrated direct from Delhi into remote parts of India, and did not rest at Agra, retain those professions up to the present day; as the Moltanies?

Sahib Khan.—True; but it is still as disguises to conceal their real profession of Thuggee.

Feringeea.—True, and under the same guise they practised their trade of Thuggee round Delhi before the captivity, and could never have had any other (*ibid.*: 161-63).

Much has been made of Sleeman’s of misrepresentation of what was in fact a mixed gathering of part-time marauders as an exclusive and unified ‘cult of Thuggee’ (e.g., van Wærkens 1995; Freitag 1998; Lloyd 2008). However, in this conversation, as in many others reported by Sleeman, while he remains sceptical of the Thugs’ insistence on the closed cultic nature of their trade, it is his Thug interlocutors who struggle to convince him of their belonging to an age-old, closed fraternity of murderous robbers. Sleeman suggests that

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Thuggee was not a closed and unified guild from time immemorial, but rather a collection of various 'itinerant tradesmen, wandering with their herds and families about the country.'

Thugs counter him with the assertion that these trades were merely 'disguises to conceal their real profession of Thuggee,' which has been practiced within the fraternity since time immemorial. In a later account written by Sleeman's grandson James, a Thug cries out: 'I am a Thug, my father and grandfather were Thugs, and I have thugged with many. Let the government employ me and I will do its work. (He afterwards became one of the best approvers.)' (Sleeman 1918: 233).⁶⁵ While Sleeman's informers insist that members of a particular Thug subdivision can be distinguished by three vertical lines drawn on the forehead, Sleeman reminds them that the same marks decorate the brows of many Hindus, leaving his approvers to fumble for a dubious counterclaim that, unlike ordinary Hindus, such Thugs *always* wear this mark.

Thugs had good reasons for making such claims. By vying to qualify as approvers, informers sought not only to save their own and their relatives' lives, as Wagner argued (2007: 17), but also to earn Sleeman's patronage and a place in the British bureaucracy of rule. Much

⁶⁵ Sleeman recruited Thugs as informers (or 'approvers'), whose statements he used both in his writing about Thuggee and as evidence against accused Thugs in court. In exchange for their testimony, his approvers were pardoned and some, like 'Feringeea' who interrogates the Thugs alongside Sleeman in the above excerpt, became regular employees in Sleeman's Thuggee and Dacoity Department. The reported exclamation closely echoed the declaration made by the thieving protagonist of a fifteenth-century Jain tale, who declares: 'Let all people hear! I was a thief, sprung from a thief-family, of pure thief-lineage on both my father's and my mother's side' (Johnson 1920: 189).

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of Sleeman's discovery and persecution of Thuggee relied on his use of Thug informers, who were not only pardoned, but also protected and employed by him. In fact, many of them come to reside in his compound, so that, as Sandria Freitag points out, their employment in the Thuggee and Dacoity Department under Sleeman's protection was an arrangement that in many ways reproduced the patronage arrangements with local landlords; 'the similarity between the spatial and psychological configurations of his compound and those of thag-landlord relations in a village is not coincidental' (Freitag 1991: 236).

Sleeman's formal codification of Thuggee certainly congealed the image of a Thug-caste in colonial imagination, administrative practice and law. But the content of Sleeman's descriptions of the Thug-cult was not substantively new: the secret know-how, omens, rites of initiation, argot, ancient pedigree, and the claimed tutelage of a patron-Goddess are all familiar from the old repertoire of Brāhmaṇical conceptions of thieving castes.⁶⁶ In Thugs' own description, Thuggee appears to be an expert enterprise of a closed professional guild

⁶⁶ For an overview of descriptions of thieving guilds in Sanskrit and ancient vernacular Indian literature, see a series of articles by Maurice Bloomfield (1913; 1923a; 1923b; 1926). For descriptions of thieves' professional practices, see, for instance, *Jātaka Stories* (1895, 5: 248), Śūdraka (1905:47–49), von Schiefner and Ralston (1906: 37ff), Parker (1910–1914, 2: 45–46, 326), Johnson (1920: 159ff), Bhāsa (1930–1931: 39), and Daṇḍin (1966: 1.48). For descriptions in 'thievery treatises' (*steyā-śāstras*, *cora-śāstras*, or *steya-sūtras*), see *Ṣaṇmukhkalpa* (1991), Akhujkar (1996) and Passi (2001; 2005). These appear to be part of a larger genre of imaginative writing about thieving and thieves (Passi 2005). For the hereditary nature of the thieving profession, see, for instance, *Jātaka Stories* (1895, 1: 68), Hemavijaya (1920: 66ff) and Bloomfield (1923a: 100–1). For descriptions of thief-deities and peculiar ritual practices, see Śūdraka (1905: 47–48), Bhāsa (1970: 46ff), *The Parisistas of the Atharvaveda* (1909, 1: 128ff), Somadeva (1923: 141–42), and Bhāsa (1930–1931: 11.2 *et seq.*). For descriptions of thieving 'families,' see Johnson (1920: 165–66) and Somadeva (1923: 141–42).

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possessed of special and privileged knowledge of rules, portents and practical means, rites of initiation, and a professional know-how. Although it appears that Sleeman's interlocutors in fact comprised a mixed cohort of men from different places and different castes (some were Muslims, some Brāhmaṇs, and others members of various itinerant groups), approvers insisted that Thuggee was the business of a closed guild—in effect, a caste—defined by common ancient descent, endogamy, the rule of its own elders ('sages'), a distinctive bio-moral character (*khandān*), and its own *dharma*. Thus, the Thugs' Thuggee emerges in the old idiom of a robber-caste that possesses (1) a set of specialized knowledge and skills (2) performed under the auspices of specific patron-deities and (3) transmitted and practiced within closed communities which are (4) possessed of their own nature and (5) subject to a distinct moral code (see on page 93 above). Sleeman's approvers did not merely mirror British fantasies (Wagner 2007: Ch. 1), but presented him with an ancient, indigenous construct of a robber-caste.⁶⁷

It can be argued that in his reports Sleeman altered such conversations to suit his rhetorical purpose: to show that (to his own surprise!) there was indeed a veritable cult of Thuggee, a community with all familiar attributes of a caste. My own discussions of the nature of thieving *jātis* with my Kanjar informants often proceeded along similar lines, making me

⁶⁷ Gordon (1985) likewise observed that the idea of a Criminal Tribe was not purely a product of colonial imagination, but a combination of old Brahmanical and Victorian ideas.

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think that perhaps Sleeman did not entirely invent the substance of Thugs' assertion. Here is an excerpt from one of such dialogues that I had with one elderly Kanjar:

Anastasia: Is there anyone in this village who knows about Kanjar history?

Gopal: Yes. I can tell you all about it myself! We Kanjars are a very old *jāt*.

Anastasia: What kind of work did the people of your *jāt* do in the past?

Gopal: Our old vocation is theft. Sometimes we begged from *jajmāns* and some Kanjars who have not kept their honor [*izzat*] are still doing such work today. But we are old-time thieves. I am a thief and my father and my grandfather's grandfather [*pardādā kā pardādā*] were all thieves.

Anastasia: But don't people of other castes steal too? If I went now and stole some sugar from your wife's shop, wouldn't I too be a thief?

Gopal: Absolutely! Men of all castes steal, but they are all new players [*naye khilārī*], who do not know anything about this [thieving] work. They steal in the daytime and they get caught. They are never good thieves because theft is not the business of their castes and it is not in their blood. Our ten year-old boys are better thieves than such men.

Anastasia: How is it that Kanjars are so much better at stealing than any others?

Gopal: [laughs] Don't you understand? Look, Asia [Anastasia], you know the old cobbler who sits in the bazaar? He is an old man. He is blind and he is deaf and you know that when we go to him, I have to scream so that he can hear me. But when he makes shoes, they shine. You and I could not make shoes like that no matter how much we tried. The shoemaking business is in the old man's blood and all the cobblers have their own knowledge [*apas kī jānkarī*] and that is why they make excellent shoes. In the same way, Kanjars steal better than others. Everybody knows that we are a caste of thieves [*corō kī jāt*] and we have Mātājī's [the Goddess's] special blessing for our business. These days too many Kanjars betray their caste: they tell others that they are Acrobats [Naṭs] or

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bards [Bhāt]. They go dancing and begging, hiding their true caste [*saccī jāti*] and so our society has become weak and many misfortunes have befallen us ...

Anastasia: Can you teach me how to steal?

Gopal: We have our secret ways to steal and our secret language and nobody can ever know our ways. If I taught a Kādzi [outsider] how to steal, our business and our society would be ruined.

This conversation took place in the early months of my fieldwork, when I was unambiguously treated as an outsider, a Kādzi. I did learn the Kanjarī thieves' argot and every evening I ate the meat of stolen goats and drank the freshly brewed liquor with them. As time went on, guests who queried the Kādzi's presence in the village were half-jokingly told that she is not a Kādzi but a Bhaṭānī. And at the very end of my stay I was taken along on a goat-rustling excursion as an ultimate gesture of admission into the community, as participation both signified and was made possible by my tentative entry into the *jāti*.

If my participation in the thieving outing sent a ripple of concern through the village, the more persistent worry is the 'betrayal' of the *jāti*—its name and its trade—by the community's members. For some, being a Kanjar and a thief is a lucrative business and for some an opportunity for moving up in society. For most, however, it is a source of exclusion and vulnerability: Kanjars are not only external, below the low, in the local scale of rank, but are in very palpable terms easy target of violence (see Chapter 5). Thus, families have long endeavored to adopt a new name, profession and caste identity. Those who continue to marry

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Kanjars, but who have remained in the bardic trade will say to an outsider that they are ‘Bhāṭṣ’ or ‘Naṭṣ.’ Some Kanjar families moved to a new location, where they found employment as bards, prostitutes or distillers of country liquor and adopted ethnonyms, such as Naṭṣ, Bhāṭṣ or Bāñcṛās. While gaining a more respectable standing in broader society, such families lose their footing among their own, who disown them as ‘traitors’ who threaten the integrity and reputation of the Kanjar *jāti*.⁶⁸ With some groups adopting and others dropping the title of Kanjars, the community has continued to fragment, its parameters have remained fluid, and the process of caste-formation remained observably incomplete.

2.7 A NEW CLASS OF THIEVES

In western (much as in other parts of) India the repute of robbers has been historically nurtured by tribal communities. Koḷī and Bhīl hillsmen, for example, have long cultivated an ethos and reputation of professional robbers in order to maintain their rights to levy dues and claim the patronage of Rājput chiefs, who employed them as watchmen, escorts, go-betweens, and thieves (Forbes 1856, vol. 1: 104; Guha 1999: 52; Skaria 1999). The Gujarati Highland Bhīls still boast of their thieving prowess, of being ‘Mahādev’s thieves’ (Skaria 1999: v) and in rural Mewar Gujars pride themselves on having once been the boldest raiders of buffalo herds,

⁶⁸ One such family moved to the north of Rajasthan, took up work as bards and prostitutes and adopted the name ‘Naṭ.’ Although just two generation ago they used to marry Kanjars in the south of the province, the Kanjars in Mewar no longer give them their daughters in marriage.

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insisting that once upon a time they were so like the Kanjars in their thieving habits that they considered them brothers. The reputation of thieves gives special burgling license. Long after their settlement and the development of primary identities as farmers and herdsmen, the tribal communities of northern India continued to exploit the robber's niche. In the tumultuous days of the 1857 rebellion, for instance, the roads to Delhi swarmed with Gujar bands (Dalrymple 2007: 185, 145fn); and in Rajasthan, Mīṇās, as much as Kanjars, continue to be employed as thieves by landed authorities (on Mīṇās, see Chakravarti 1975: 73; also Chapters 3 and 4). By now, Mīṇās, Gujars and Bhīls have by and large established themselves as respectable communities in Rajasthan: many are now employed in government service and some groups wield considerable political power. Their renown as bandits, nevertheless, lives on in popular narratives and in their own tall tales of thieving feats.⁶⁹

Over the course of the nineteenth century, hill tribes gradually dropped out of the echelons of marauder-castes. By the early nineteenth century, many tribal communities, which had long dominated the robber trade, were increasingly employed as watchmen, escorts and guards by heads of states, gentry and village communities, from which they received farmlands (Broughton 1892 [1809]: 85-86, 105, 233) and occasionally even permanent land

⁶⁹ The Gauri drama, for instance, performed by Mīṇās and Bhīls in Mewar today celebrates their robbery of the Gangaur Festival in Jaipur (Erdman 1985: 169-71). The popular history of Mīṇās in Gold and Gujar's description of a village in central Rajasthan, is one of banditry (Gold & Gujar 2002: 60ff). In the same way, the prominent part played in recent decades by Gujars in the famous Chambal River Valley gangs is understood as a natural continuation of their ancestral business of banditry.

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grants, thus settling and adopting more respectable trades.⁷⁰ Moreover, as Stewart Gordon suggests, ‘after 1815, the British were occupied with establishing regular relations with various levels of the prevailing power structure [in central and western India] and with destroying the large scale marauders (“Pindaris” and tribal groups)’ with the result that ‘smaller-scale groups (such as “dacoits” and “Thugs”) flourished’ (Gordon 1969: 429). So, in the first decades of the nineteenth century, John Malcolm observed that in central India Bhils ‘have not yet abandoned their habits, but their robberies are upon a very limited scale to what they were a few years ago’ (1832, vol. 1: 525).⁷¹ By the middle of the nineteenth century, the gentrification and further colonial pacification of hill tribes in western India led to the increased settlement and incorporation of tribal communities into the structure of Rājput polities and later of the British state.⁷²

⁷⁰ By 1806, in the district of Jahazpur (Bhilwara district in southeastern Rajasthan) alone there were twenty-four Mīṇā towns and villages (Broughton 1892 [1809]: 105). Four decades later, Sleeman observed that most Mīṇās were employed as watchmen, occupying fifty-nine villages across northern Rajasthan and around Delhi (1849: 331).

⁷¹ Sleeman too noted that the employment of hillsmen as thieves was on the decline (1849: 331).

⁷² From the early nineteenth century, many such hills robber bands of Western and Central India became increasingly patronized by the British, who, applied the old Indian method of employing marauders for protection and military enterprise. Colonial army officers employed Bhil robber-bands, for instance, in military parties (the first of such Bhil Corps formed in 1825 in Khandesh) and assumed, in a typically Rājput manner, formal patronage over them through gifts of food and land (Russell 1911, vol. 2: 375). For more on the history of British ‘reclamation’ of hillsmen in western India, see for instance Unnithan-Kumar (1997), Guha (1999) and Skaria (1999).

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The decline of hill tribes in the business of robbery saw the rise of vagrant communities as the new dominant class of thieves.⁷³ By the third decade of the nineteenth century, the vagrant marauders were acquiring robbers' repute independently of their plunderer-patrons and were increasingly hired as watchmen by village communities, landlords and occasionally even heads of states.⁷⁴ It is clear from colonial accounts of this new class of robbers that they belonged to the vagrant Bhāñṭu fraternity. In his *Report on Budhuk alias Bagree Decoits* (1849) Sleeman notes that his 'dacoit' informers referred to themselves as 'Bhāñṭūs.' And his list of Dacoit Tribes includes Sāñsīs, Beriyās, Bāgrīs/Baorīs, Badhiks, Hāburās, Kālbelyās, Moghiyās, Pārdhīs, Kanjars, and Naṭs—all groups belonging to the Bhāñṭu fraternity.⁷⁵ Sleeman observed that these Dacoit Tribes did not practice banditry from time immemorial, but had been historically engaged in various itinerant trades. He noted that Kanjars, who figure prominently in his catalogues of Thugs and Dacoit Tribes, 'were itinerant tradesmen, wandering with their herds and families about the country ... [or] vagrant Musulmans, who

⁷³ Such a shift was gradual and incomplete. While by the end of the eighteenth century many vagrant communities were increasingly engaged in the business of plunder, some settled tribal groups persisted in the business of theft well into the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

⁷⁴ One of Sleeman's Baorī informers told him that his gang was hired by the Mewar Mahārāṇā (at the monthly rate of six Rupees per man) to defend the kingdom from Bhīls. 'My father, Zalim Sing, and Gyanah Naek,' insisted the informer, 'were the chiefs of one party of one hundred men, which was stationed in attendance of the Rana himself, at the city of Oodeypoor; and I have now in my possession, a certificate shewing that rent-free lands were given to him by the Durbar [ruler], in consideration of services rendered to the State' (Sleeman 1849: 377).

⁷⁵ Sleeman is not the only source on this rising 'brotherhood' of professional thieves. His contemporary John Malcolm, for instance, noted that certain Baorīs protected by Marwari aristocrats were hired in the late eighteenth century to aid in the prison break of Jai Singh, the young prince of Jodhpur (1832, vol. 1: 469).

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followed armies and lived in the suburbs of cities, and in the wild wastes,' and thus analogous to the European Gypsies (Sleeman 1836: 162, 144).⁷⁶ In a later account he also reported that Beṛiyās, another Bhāṅṭu group, 'wandered about, playing the *dhol* (drum) and begging,' and that 'Sanseas live[d] by begging, by stealing cattle, goats, [drawing] tattoos, [selling] grain, bundles of cloth, &c. &c., and trafficked in animals' (Sleeman 1849: 252). According to Sleeman, such peoples claimed to have been the bards of hillsmen and other low-ranking communities (ibid.: 239, 253, 265-66, 270):

the Sanseas ... in former days, called themselves 'beggars from the Jat tribe' ... In the Sansee tribe, it was customary to chronicle the names of the Jats, and of their ancestors, and of their children, and when they used to beg from the Jat families, it was their custom to recite their praises. The Jats, on this account, styled the Sanseas their bards, or 'Jat ka Bhat.' ... [they] used to attend at all the festivals of the Jat tribe, sing the praise of their ancestors, and flatter them by attempts to trace their descent, from some ancient chief of great renown in war. In return, they received donations or allowances, according to the abilities of the donors, till in time they came to be considered as the Bhats, or bards, of the Jat tribe, and an honorable class. Their numbers increased; and unable to subsist upon the charities of one tribe, they spread over Mewar and Marwar, and the other Rajpoot States, who had bards of their own, to flatter the pride of their families, at feasts and festivals; and the Sanseas, not to lose the advantage, which association and combination of powers had given them over the rest of the community, took to robbery, by fraud or open violence, as the occasion required (1849: 252-53, 266).

⁷⁶ His Delhi-based informants, for instance, used the name 'Kanjar' interchangeably with 'wanderer,' describing Kanjars as 'vagrants about the great city [Delhi]' who 'followed armies and lived in the suburbs of cities, and in the wild wastes' (Sleeman 1836: 162, 144).

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Vagrant communities were useful for hillsmen and other low-status aspirants to the status of Rājputs not only as bards, but also as *dalāls*: spies, watchmen, marauders, and escorts. Much as the landholding aristocracy, and later British officials, employed Mīṇās and Bhīls for intelligence gathering, military business and policing tasks, the gentrified Mīṇās and Bhīls came to keep marauding groups of their own.⁷⁷ In 1809, Broughton observed that the landholding Mīṇās in Maratha employment ‘assured [him] that they could, upon any pressing occasion, assemble a body of twenty thousand men.’ Of these, they claimed, ‘nearly a third were sprung from one family, the founders of their tribe; the rest are aliens, who have been incorporated at different times into the community’ (1892 [1809]: 105). Although Broughton provides us with no details about the constitution of the Mīṇā auxiliary force, we know that in 1824, the Koḷī hillsmen of northern Maharashtra gathered their intelligence and supplies of food through the itinerant servants of local landholders (Guha 1999: 53). In all likelihood, the Mīṇās’ auxiliary force described by Broughton likewise comprised various vagrant groups.

Itinerant bards often joined their patrons’ gangs. Thus, a number of leaders (*jamadārs*) of the Kanjar, Sānsī, Kālbeliyā, Beṛiyā, and Moghiyā ‘dacoit gang’ lists compiled by Sleeman are Jāṭs, Mīṇās, Rājputs, and Bhīls (1849: 406; 1836), all of whom once patronized vagrants as their

⁷⁷ Itinerant bards were so commonly employed in military operations that the very name ‘Bhāṭ,’ used for all mobile low-status bards, derives from the Hindustani *bhaṭ*, or ‘combatant’ (Platts 1884: *ad loc.*) a title often adopted by warriors, such as the Bhaṭṭā Rājputs (Walker 1968: vol. 2: 119). Just like Rājput *jāgirdārs*, royal bards (Cāraṇs as well as Bhāṭs) performed military duties and gathered mercenary forces, services for which they received land-grants (Singhji 1994: 249 fn).

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bards and to whom Kanjars and other similar groups continue to claim connections. Indeed, Kanjars and Sānsīs across Rajasthan pride themselves on having once raided the countryside together with their Gujar, Bhīl, Mīṇā, Kolī, and Jāṭ *jajmāns*—the ‘true castes of thieves’ (*sacce corō ke jāṭ*)—who taught them, as Kanjars insist, the art of thieving. An elderly Kanjar explained the infiltration of the plunderer’s business by Bhāṅṭus:

Kanjars here in Mewar begged [*māṅgte the*, meaning, were employed by] mostly from Gujars, Mālīs [gardeners], Mīṇās, and Bhīls. Our family [*birādari*] ate [*khāte the*] from the Gujars. We kept their genealogy [*banśāvālī*] and songs of praise [*piḍāvalī*]. Wherever there were Gujars—in Tonk and Devgarh, on the Manāsā and Kharī Rivers, in Kota and Mewar everywhere in Rajasthan—we had our *jajmāns*. Around here, you know, Gujars were the biggest bandits [*ḍākūs*]. They robbed on the roads and stole buffaloes [*pāḍās*] and cows. They were our *jajmāns* and we went with them whenever they looted. Sometimes they sent us to loot for them and sometimes we went together with their parties [*palti*]. And so, gradually everyone in Rajasthan came to know us too as the toughest bandits, just like the Gujars. Until this day people say that there is a difference of but one syllable between a Gujar and a Kanjar [*Gujar aur Kanjarō mē ek akśar kā farq hai*].⁷⁸

Then, Gujars slowly took to work in the fields. Their herds grew and they moved less. [Many of them] received land from the Rājputs and they stopped stealing so much. Bhīls and Mīṇās—who were also once great dacoits—also slowly settled. Since the old days, Mīṇās were great friends [*dost*] of kings [*rājā-mahārāja*] and you know that here in Mewar Bhīls have always been the king’s [*darbār*] oldest companions [*sāthīs*]. You see how many villages they have got around here? They all received land from the king [*darbār*]. Here near Begūn many Gujars, Mīṇās and Bhīls mostly settled after the

⁷⁸ This proverb is echoed in a Punjabi saying recorded by Rose:

*Zamīn ba yak sāl banjar shawad,
Gujar be yak nukta Kanjar shawad.
‘In one year land becomes waste,
By one dot “Gujar” becomes “Kanjar”’ (Rose et al. 1911, vol. 3: 351).*

The Perils of Masterless Men

Marathas had gone, from the times of Rāṇā Bhīm Singh jī [r. 1778-1828]. By that time, some Kanjars still ate their *jajmāns*' protection, but many were already in the 'business of theft' [*corī ka dhandhā*]. They were looting all around Rajasthan and in Indore and Ahmedabad and even in Lahore.

My grandfather did some bards' work for Mīṇās, but that was a new business for him because our people have been thieves 'from the time of great kings' [*rājā-mahārājā kā jamānā*] and thieving is our old work. ... It is the same with Sānsīs and Moghiyās, who are also 'old-time thieves' [*purāne jamāne ke cor*]. Even today, there are still some Gujar, Mīṇā and even Bhīl bandits [*dākūs*], but these days Kanjars are the greatest thieves [*sab se bare cor*].

The Kanjars of Fararpur were likewise summoned to the area in the early decades of the twentieth century by the local Rājput chief who employed them as a marauding force. As Rājput rule gave way to colonial and later to independent India government, Kanjars have come to be patronized by the police, on whose protection their thieving business now largely relies (see Section 4.6). Although Kanjars continue to thief under the tutelage of various patrons, and such bonds have been an important source of status *within* their community, in the public eye they have remained masterless riffraff, since the police and Rājputs' connections with them remain hidden from public view. As we shall see in a later chapter, such invisibility and of Kanjars' bonds with their patrons makes them expendable, and at times required, victims. For the many Kanjars who do not have the good end of police patronage, this carries tangible consequences. Those with no patrons in the police are subject to persistent predation, 'erroneous' convictions and imprisonment with no evidence, warrant or trial. Even

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well-established informers often find themselves as vulnerable as their unprotected caste-mates. As I write, my Kanjar host Gopal, who is one of the area's most successful informers, has been in prison for more than two months, having been thrown there by the new and 'less friendly' head of the local police station. When violence is directed at Kanjars, police patronage often proves ineffectual. Lakshmipura itself is the site of one of the biggest Kanjar pogroms, in which the village was demolished, ten Kanjars were clubbed to death, and a hundred were seriously injured by a mob of nearly four thousand farmers (for more on this, see Section 5.6).

CONCLUSION

This chapter illustrates the centrality of patronage ties as the source of status and identity in Rajasthan. I trace the history of Kanjars' attempts and failures to secure exclusive, durable and publicly recognized attachments to patrons, as a way of arguing that the lack of publicly recognized patronage bonds has left Kanjars, and other groups in the fraternity of Bhāñṭu vagrants, on the very bottom of the rank pile in local society. Employed as tarts, bards, spies, and thieves, Kanjars and other Bhāñṭu communities historically failed to secure legitimate patronage bonds and thus remained for their significant others vagrant rogues. Those who have retained the Kanjar label are those who have remained masterless outsiders. Having re-appropriated the name and the thief-identity, they did manage to find patrons. But

the sequestered nature of their business left such ties hidden from the public gaze, leaving Kanjars on the periphery of respectable life.

I have also argued that the occupational identity is rooted not in performing a particular task, but in the fact that it is performed *for somebody*, the patron from whom the one's status is substantially derived. In order to attain professional status, thieves must not simply thieve, but thieve *for* a patron. A thief without a master is a pickpocket (*jeb-kaṭ*), a stray man (*ruḷne wālā*), a vagabond (*ghūmne-wālā*), and a beggar (*maṅgne-wālā*) who 'eats from everyone' (*sabhī kā khātā*). As such, he is a man of no import. Patronized theft, however, has the status of a service (*sevā*) and a legitimate vocation (*dhandhā* or *peśā*). A Barber (Nāī) does not just shave, he shaves the cheeks of Rājputs, Brāhmaṅs or Sweepers. So, Royal Barbers (designated with the special title Rāj Nāī) are so different in rank from Sweepers' Barbers that the two groups do not intermarry.⁷⁹ The same principle that applies to genealogizing, dancing, shaving and trade, applies also to theft. In short, patronage gives work occupational status; it is only in being performed for a patron that any activity acquires legitimacy as an 'occupation.' As a corollary, contrary to the received wisdom of South Asianist anthropology, it is the standing of patrons rather than the purity of one's trade that centrally determines one's social

⁷⁹ Komal Kothari similarly pointed out that the 'Dholi [Drummer] caste' is divided on the basis of affiliation to different patrons into 'Gujar Dholis, Bania Dholis, Patel Dholis and so on,' noting that '[t]hese individual groups do not intermarry' (Bharucha 2003: 226).

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standing. The case of Bards offers a sharp illustration: while historically the Bards of kings have occupied the apex of social hierarchy, the Bards of low-caste communities have remained on its bottom. The two classes of Bards are as different from each other in status as Rājputs and leatherworkers and certainly neither eat with nor marry each other. Likewise, all Barbers do not occupy the same hierarchical standing by virtue of common profession, but are ranked relative to their patrons.

CHAPTER THREE

THE MORAL LOGIC OF DONOR-SERVANT BONDS

Myāliyā [Kanjar] was a thief from [the village of] Pander. He was a great thief [*barā cor*] famous in all of Mewar. He was special to [the goddess] Jogāṇiyā Mātājī: she gave him great strength [*śakti*], so that he never came into the hands of the police. How many goats and buffaloes did he kill for Jogāṇiyā Mātājī?! But one day the [Mewar] *darbār* [ruler] caught him and threw him into the Mandalgarh jail. You have seen the walls of that fort! Nobody has ever managed to escape from it. But Myāliyā asked [Jogāṇiyā] Mātājī to grant him release. Day and night he begged [*māṅgā*] and finally Mātājī granted him a boon [*bar-dān*]: he ran from the prison by night and nobody saw him go. He climbed the wall and jumped down. You have seen that wall. No man could come out alive having jumped it, but Myāliyā fell into the tree branches and was saved. With all the shackles on his hands and chains on his feet he could not walk. At that time a Gujar [herdsman] man was cycling along; so Myāliyā told the Gujar to take him to Jogāṇiyā Mātājī's temple. Seeing the shackles on Myāliyā's feet, the Gujar grew frightened. But what could he do? Everyone knew Myāliyā and the Gujar knew that Myāliyā would kill him if he did not take him along. So, he put Myāliyā on his bicycle and brought him to Jogāṇiyā Mātājī. There with his own eyes he saw how Myāliyā's shackles automatically [*oṭometik*] fell off and Myāliyā was left standing free. You can still see those shackles and chains at Mātājī's shrine (as told by Myāliyā's son Devi Lāl Kanjar).

For outsiders Kanjars remain masterless rogues. Among their own, attachment to patrons is as key a measure of identity, value and rank as it is for anyone else, and, as such, forms the basis of the community's internal social organization. Patronage bonds form the basis of ongoing negotiations of identity, status and evaluations of rank within the community, to which I turn in this chapter.

3.1 COURAGEOUS STOCK

Common account holds Kanjars as members of a ‘courageous stock’ (*bahādur kom*)¹ distinguished by strength, pluck, cunning, and even a special capacity for magic, the dispositions necessary for thieving, a ‘heroic business’ (*bahāduron kā dhandhā*) in its own right.² Such qualities bespeak the ‘special relationship’ (*khās sambandh*) between Kanjars and the Goddess (*devī*), to whose benefactions the community is thought to have privileged access. Local goddesses favor their Kanjar devotees, who, when ‘soliciting consent’ (inf. *pāṭī māṅganā*)³ to a thieving excursion, are said to receive her blessings before all others. That is, local goddesses sponsor the Kanjars’ thieving business; they bless their excursions, ensure plentiful spoils, prevent their discovery, aid in prison breaks, and remove their shackles upon escape. Thus, Jogaṇiyā Mātā, the most important regional goddess in eastern

¹The phrase *bahādur kom* has been conventionally translated as ‘martial caste,’ the gloss inherited from colonial literature. Although the phrase has been criticized as a colonial essentialism used to designate certain communities, such as Bhīls, Rājputs or Kanjars, as particularly violent, predatory and criminal (Arnold 1979; Streets 2004), the phrase in fact captures the Indian sense of a community that is both fierce, dangerous and deviant as well as tough, courageous, gallant, and honorable (e.g., Allen 2000: 199). I gloss the phrase as (*bahādur kom*) in order to highlight the positive qualities attached to the term rather criticize the colonial ‘martial caste.’

² For details of popular descriptions of Kanjars as a secret and magical people, see Chapter 5 of this thesis and Piliavsky (2011).

³ In Mewar, the *pāṭī māṅganā* (soliciting consent) rite is a common means of petitioning the goddess’s blessings for various undertakings, such as sowing and harvesting, or betrothal and conception. Most villagers seek blessings from the two most popular local goddesses, Jogaṇiyā Mātā (Vagabond Mother) and Sāgā Rāṇī (Palm Tree Queen). *Pāṭī* literally means a ‘leaf’ or a ‘note’ and refers to the leaves of the oleander (*kaner*, *Nerium oleander*) shrub, which devotees offer to the goddess as tokens of their requests. The leaves are placed in individual bowls in front of the goddess’s image and if a flower falls from the altar—or, as the villagers say, the goddess throws it—into a bowl, the petitioner will walk away with a blessing (see Image 3.2).

Mewar, has earned the reputation of a ‘thieves’ goddess’ (*coroṅ kī devī*) and, more specifically, the ‘Kanjars’ goddess’ (*Kāñjaroṅ kī devī*),⁴ by virtue of her favoritism of local Kanjars. Her accolade is advertised with a garland of shackles and chains, which have been left by Kanjar jailbirds in her temple and which now serve as its central adornment (Image 3.1).

For local Kanjars, Jogaṇiyā’s protection has significance beyond the pragmatic. The goddess’s benefactions (*bar-dān*), or gifts (*dān*), are not one-off grants of help, but are a source of special potency, which the goddess possesses and which she transfers to her recipients. As an officiant at the Jogaṇiyā temple explained,

When Mātājī grants a boon [*bar-dān*] to her supplicant [*māṅgne-wālā*], she gives him her *śakti*. The [petitioners’] work gets done because they have Mātājī’s *śakti* ... Mātājī gives many boons to Kanjars. They always get their blessings [*pātī*] first. This is why they are so sharp and strong [*tej*] and are such awesome [*zabar-dast*] thieves.

Śakti, literally ‘power,’ is the common epithet of the goddess who personifies the energy that animates the Hindu cosmos and which devotees seek in the temples of

⁴ The temple of Jogaṇiyā Mātā has long been known as the refuge of thieves, who have kept up a busy sacrificial schedule there. Although, following an ‘anti-violence’ campaign by a Jain nun, animal sacrifice was officially banned in 1974, goats, rams and buffaloes continue to be offered to the Goddess in the nearby jungle. Jogaṇiyā is said to have once been the clan-goddess (*kul devī*) of the Hāḍā Rājputs. Having promised to be a guest at the wedding of a Hāḍā prince, Jogaṇiyā appeared in the form of a beggar (*jogaṇ*, from which the name Jogaṇiyā derives) and was refused entrance. Insulted, she destroyed their kingdom, so that the Hāḍās moved east to the town of Būndī, and the ruins of their erstwhile residence in the Bambāwadā Fort have remained to remind pilgrims of the importance of being generous hosts.



Image 3.1: The irons of jailbirds at the temple of Joganiyā Mātā in the Bhilwara district, southern Rajasthan regional *devīs* or at the shrines of village Mātās (mother-goddesses). When transferred to human persons, the cosmic *śakti* translates into the qualities of courage (*himmat*) and physical strength (*ṭakaṭ* or *bal*) necessary for successful engagement in the difficult and

dangerous tasks of warring, hunting, killing, and theft. As heirs to *śakti*, the privileged recipients of the *devī*'s gifts earn the distinction of *bahādur kom* (heroic stock).⁵ The patron-goddess is thus not only the provider of sustenance, but also the source of a community's identity, substance and character—its *khandān* (see Section 1.4).



Image 3.2: Petition (*pāṭī*) bowls presented at the temple of Sāgā Rāṇī. Each contains an oleander leaf and the offerings of grain seeds, coins and sometimes a note with the petitioner's name to mark the bowl.

Divine patrons' servants inherit the nature and emulate the qualities of their protectors no less than servants of human *jajmāns*. As much as the Kanjars' martial nature is said to reflect the potency of *Jogaṇiyā Mātā*, the sloth and cunning of *Brāhmaṇs* is

⁵ Rājputs make for the most extolled exhibition of the virtues of *śakti* (potency) and *bahādurī* (bravery, valor), which are manifested in their power to rule and their manners (from moustaches to drinking habits) emulated by others who claim heroic status.

thought to be the heritage of their patron-god Kṛṣṇa's luxuriance and crafty wit.

Communities under the tutelage of the goddess, whether Rājputs, Mīṇā and Bhīl hunters, or Kanjar-thieves, are described in terms identical to those used of the goddess: as *garam* (hot), *zabar-dast* (upper handed) and *tej* (sharp, strong, luminous).⁶ A high-ranking Rājput once told me (in English) that 'images of his *kul devī* serve as [the devotee's] mental maps, on the basis of which [he] style[s his] actions. Each item in her iconography represents a quality—courage, generosity, equanimity, etc.—that we seek to cultivate.' Such devotion is a practice of creating oneself in the image and likeness of the patron-deity, which serves as the source of one's *khandān*.

Those who lack ties to human *jajmāns*—groups at the lowest and highest ends of the status-scale—cultivate relationships with divine protectors with special zeal. At the high end of the hierarchy, kings, who are themselves the ultimate human patrons lacking human patrons of their own, have historically staged the most elaborate cults of regional goddesses, clan goddesses (*kul devīs*) and other divine protectors.⁷ In Mewar, for instance, the kingdom's rulers have styled themselves servants of the patron-god Ekliṅg jī. The god

⁶ In Sanskrit texts the Goddess and the king under her aegis are described in the same terms. The Goddess and the king are both dominated by the active humor (*guṇa*) of *rajas* (the word *rājā* [king] in fact being a cognate of the term), which is derived from the verbal root 'to shine brightly' (Humes 1995: 223). The king in *The Laws of Manu* (2nd century BCE—2nd century CE) and the Great Goddess of the *Devīmāhātmya* (a 6th century text that extols the Goddess as ultimate reality, part of the *Markaṇḍeya Purāṇa*) are described in the same terms: as valiant and irascible and embodying the quality of 'fiery luster' (*tejas*) (Coburn 1991: 25-26).

⁷ Historians and anthropologists have written extensively about the significance and grandeur of Rājput *kul devī* devotionism (cf. Dirks 1987; Harlan 1992; Vidal 2001; Peabody 2003; Simpson 2007).

is locally thought of as the kingdom's head and the Mahārāṇā, as the god's *dīwān*, Mewar's worldly warden who rules on the god's behalf.⁸ At the other extreme, the vagrant Bhāṅṭu groups have likewise been obsessed with the veneration of divine patrons.⁹ As one Kanjar put it,

Our *jāt* has always roamed in the jungle. From ancient times, we have always been coming and going. No *rajmān* has kept us [in his service]. Sometimes we serve Rājputs, sometimes Gujars, Bhīls, Mīṇās, and now the police. But we have always been in Jogaṇiyā Mātāji's service and she has always given us food [*ann*, literally 'grain'] and protection [*rakṣā*]. Our relationship [*sambandh*] with Mātāji is the glory [*shān*] and recognition [*pahcān*] of our *jāt*. Everybody recognizes our community [*kom*] because they know that we are Mātāji's special people [*khās log*].

For communities involved in the morally ambiguous marauding business—whether Thugs, Kanjars or kings—bonds to patron-deities have always held special significance as sources of patronage and of legitimacy.¹⁰ From antiquity, becoming a ruler depended on

⁸ The Mahārāṇā of Mewar still makes a show of weekly prostrations at the temple of Ekliṅg jī.

⁹ Patron-goddess worship is at the center of devotional practice among the peripatetic pastoralists Raikā (or Rebāris), who treat the goddess Pārvatī (under various names) as their protectress. Cāraṅs and Bhāṭs, the genealogists of Western India, were worshippers of the mother-goddess and were thus once referred to as Devīputr, or the 'Sons of the Goddess' (Shah & Shroff 1958: 249). 'In Rajasthan,' confirms Ziegler, 'Carans and Bhats are generally worshippers of Siva Mahadev's female consort, the *sakti* or the *kuldevi*' (1976a: 226, fn. 28). The thug burglars likewise referred to themselves as Bhawānīputr, or the 'sons of the goddess' (Sleeman 1839: 34) and were described by Sleeman as zealous devotees of local goddesses.

¹⁰ As men who carved out dominions and often ruled by plunder, Rājputs often shifted in status between bandits and *rājās*, making 'Rājput' (meaning simply 'the son of king') a relational term, contingent on the legitimacy of their authority (Shulman 1980; Gordon 1994; Vidal 1997). See, for instance, Sinha (1962), Singh (1971), Ziegler (1978), and Kolff (1990). Just as the status of Rājputs in northern India often shifted between that of bandits and that of rulers, the South Indian heroic Kallār caste, were sometime thieves (Dumont 1957) and sometime kings, ruling, for instance, the Tamil kingdom of Pudukottai from the fifteenth century (Dirks 1987). More generally, if at odds with authority, rulers often turned to banditry and, if reconciled with their neighbors or overlords, back to the legitimate status of rulers. For instance, in 18th-century Mughal Telugu

establishing a relationship with a local deity—usually a goddess—as the source of power and political legitimacy, so that bids for political authority on the subcontinent often revolved around contests over the right to perform services for local goddesses.¹¹

Authority had to be maintained through lavish displays of devotion to the goddess: the building of temples, the staging of elaborate celebrations and the founding of festivals in her honor. In a similar vein, Thugs too emphasized their patronage by the Goddess. In a bid for their own legitimacy, Kanjars have also put much effort into their ties to local goddesses. It is this relationship that the Kanjars of eastern Mewar restate by exhibiting the fruits of their labors—rustled cattle, stolen gold, or shackles removed by the will of the goddess—as markers of their devotion at the temple of Joganiyā.¹²

regions, two men operated in tandem, the Mughal governor Riza Khan and the ‘bandit chief’ Papadu, both shifting in status from outlaw to overlord (Richards & Rao 1980).

¹¹ See, for instance, Appadurai & Appadurai Breckenridge (1976), Stein (1978), Preston (1980), Fuller (1985), Humes (1995), and Harlan (2003). Not only *rājās*, but plunderers of all kinds appealed specially to the Goddess as a source of authority. The robbers identified by British colonial authorities as Thugs, for instance, were known as particularly ardent devotees of the Goddess, with Sleeman describing Thuggee as ‘the murderous Goddess cult.’ Cynthia Humes notes that rather than being a fantasy, Sleeman’s insistence on the importance of the Goddess is well justified. Like any other plunderers (whether princely Rājputs of tribal Bhīls), Thugs were ‘seeking legitimation and therefore following the normal, even routine, customs of *vijayā*, a manifestly political ritual that seeks the dominant regional Goddess’s support yearly in grand processions, complete with the pledge to offer shares of their spoils’ (1995: 227).

¹² Such patronage of and communion with the goddesses must be earned through a great deal of effort on the part of Kanjar devotees. A narrative, describing the origin of the special relationship between Kanjars and Joganiyā Mātā, underscores this point:

Some time ago two Kanjars came to [Joganiyā Mātā’s] temple asking for her consent [*pāṭi*] to steal. The two sat there day and night for many days, but received nothing. Finally, the temple priest [*pūjāri*] himself approached Mātāji, asking her to grant her boon [*bar-dān*] to the two men who have sat there begging [inf. *māṅgnā*] for days. At last, Mātāji granted her consent and the petitioners left

Jātis are not the only segments of Indian society defined by common ties to patron-deities. Common allegiance to divine patrons is a source of identity for communities on all levels of social inclusion, from clans, *jātis* and village communities to professional and political associations.¹³ Structural segments of the Kanjar *jāti* (moieties, clans, families, households) are likewise united in their common allegiance to deities of their own, so that the structure of the pantheon reflects the structure of the community. In this chapter I will outline the structural configurations of the Kanjar *jāti* and the ways in which the community is structured via their relations to patron-goddesses.

the temple. The *pujārī* of course did not know that the two Kanjars were asking for the Goddess's permission to steal his own buffalo kids [*pāḍā*]. When it turned out that the Kanjar petitioners, on whose behalf the *pujārī* pleaded with the goddess, took off with his buffaloes, the priest begged Mātājī to return his animals. So she showed him where they were hidden, restoring to him his buffaloes.

¹³ Aside from *kul devīs* and village goddesses, patron-deities have been central to the production of modern caste associations. Parry, for instance, remarked on the correspondence between shrines and factions in Kangra (1979: 144-46). One politically influential association in the north Indian province of Uttar Pradesh, the Yadav, has adopted the god Kṛṣṇa as its progenitor and patron, defining itself as a robust, pastoral, democratically disposed, and politically capable community, the qualities inherited from the god (Michelutti 2004: 45ff; 2008: Chs. 3 and 6). Each professional guild likewise usually has a patron-deity of its own. Those who deal with machinery, for instance (mechanics, sellers of tools and machine parts, engineers, industrialists, blacksmiths, architects, goldsmiths, bronze smiths, as well as bus and rickshaw drivers) dedicate their work to the professional patron-deity Viśvakarmā, the 'lord of universal engineering.' The god is worshipped in the form of any particular instrument of one's work, whether a blacksmith's mallet or a driver's bus. Merchants have their own patron-deity, Lakṣmī the goddess of wealth, who is worshipped in the form of the account books when they are first purchased and whose images are kept in the account books. I thank Whitney Kelting for sharing with me these details. Particular business communities likewise lay claims to their own patron-deities, the opium traffickers in Rajasthan, for instance, worshipping a form of Kṛṣṇa called Sawaliyājī. Patron-deities have loomed large in the formation of political and nationalist organizations, each one, from Vishva Hindu Pariṣhad (VHP) to its militant youth branch Bajarāṅg Dal, claiming the aegis of a divine patron of its own (the former the God Rām and the latter the god Hanumān). The iconography of such deities has provided the images in whose likeness members of such groups have styled themselves, the bow-wielding Rām and the mace-carrying Hanumān providing models for Hindu-nationalist activism. Members of Hindu nationalist organizations set these gods as their role models, often parading dressed as these deities.

3.2 THE STRUCTURAL CONFIGURATIONS OF THE KANJAR JĀTI

Kanjars divide people into those who are of their ‘society’ (*kom* or *samāji*) and those who are not, referring to their own as *Bhāñṭu* or (f.) *Bhaṭāñiī* and to outsiders as *Kādzā* or (f.) *Kādzī* (see Section 2.1). *Bhāñṭus* are further bifurcated into two exogamous moieties, each in turn divided into a number of patrilineal (*gots*), which are further subdivided into their village-based segments, families (the households of all ancestors of a paternal grandfather), and nuclear households (*ghars*). Kanjar clans do not add up to a fixed set: the clan composition of the *jāti* has varied over time and from place to place. As I noted in the previous chapter, ethnographic descriptions of the ‘Kanjar society’ have provided very different lists of clans that comprise the caste.¹⁴ If one were to ask Kanjars from three different settlements to list the clans constitutive of their society, they will likewise provide three very different lists. As discussed in the previous chapter, the community has historically absorbed a number of ‘stray’ or ‘masterless’ groups that have been incorporated into it as clans. Internally, the community has been subject to continuous fragmentation, with families, village-segments or even entire clans splitting off to join other *jātis* (including *Bāñṭrā*, *Sāñsī*, *Kālbelyā*, *Bhāṭ*, or *Naṭ*, to which Kanjars trace a varied

¹⁴ While I have compiled a list of Kanjar *gots* generally recognized within the community across Rajasthan (twenty-two clans in the *Aḷmoḍā* and fourteen in the *Āśāpāl* moiety, see Appendix II), the clan-composition of moieties shifts across time and space. So, sources from the late-19th and early-20th centuries describe an almost entirely different set of Kanjar clans, both in Rajasthan and elsewhere (Nesfield 1883), from sets of finds recorded today (Gautam 1983; Mandal 1998).

degree of relatedness) or to form new segments within the Kanjar community. This irregular and continually changing gathering of clans, nevertheless, constitutes a whole that Kanjars call ‘our society.’

The Kanjar society is united by and organized around the opposition between its two exogamous moieties. Each half is opposed to the other and its subsets are opposed to those of the other half. This boundary between the moieties is the basis for most significant types of intimacy and exchange in the community: women and bride-price, information, resources, and business contacts are shared primarily across the moiety divide. Intra-moiety and intra-clan relations, conversely, are marked by antagonism and an ongoing segmentation of clans, families and households. In marriage conventions, the structure of moiety opposition is expressed in the isogamous cross-cousin marriage arrangement, ideally a ‘swap-wedding’ (*adle-badle kī śādī*)¹⁵ in which households exchange brides of the same generation (see Singh 1995: 679).¹⁶ Other types of solidarities in the

¹⁵ Kanjars usually arrange marriages before the ages of five and fourteen. Although pre-partum marriage arrangements (*peṭ māṅṅniyā*, literally ‘belly fetching’) were once common, these days most weddings are arranged when the bride and groom are between three and fourteen.

¹⁶ This does not, however, mean that all spouses are actual ‘womb’ (*saḡā*, literally ‘of the same womb’) cousins (mothers’ brothers’ daughters and fathers’ sisters’ daughters) or even traceably related cousins. In Lakshmipura, marriages with ‘womb’ cross-cousins constitute 17% (11 of a total 65 marriages), and marriages with secondary cross-cousins constitute 32% (21 of a total 65 marriages) of exiting alliances. Prescriptions of alliance with persons involved in such exchange (between maternal uncles, paternal aunts and cross-cousins in other moieties) classify all persons of the other moiety, so that parents-in-law (*sasur* and *sās*) are referred to as *māmā* (mother’s brother) and *dado* (father’s sister). Croke (1896a, vol. 2: 217, vol. 3: 2, 345) reports cross-cousin marriage among Kanjars in the North-Western Provinces. Rivers, however, noted that in the

community, such as thieving parties, also rely on cross-moietal ties. Training in the thieving trade and the formation of thieving parties relies almost entirely on exchange across moieties. It is standard practice for boys between the ages of five and thirteen (before the arrival of their wives) to ‘abscond’ (inf. *bhāgnā*) from their parental homes to their father’s sister’s and mother’s brother’s villages for some months or even years.¹⁷ Boys often refer to these villages as their ‘second home’ (*dūsra ghar*) or as their ‘real school’ (*saccī skūl*), where they learn the ‘tricks of the trade,’ often joining a thieving party with which they retain durable ties. For most thieves, bonds with communities in the opposite moiety provide crucial support for their trade, serving as the main source of bail sureties, funds, intelligence, and contacts essential for the identification of raid targets and the sale of spoils. Rather than the sum of its parts, the ‘Kanjar society’ emerges as a relational object whose integrity resides in the opposition between its halves. As one elderly man noted in a moment of drunken reflection,

What are we [men of our moiety] without the others [men of the other moiety]? Whom would we marry? There would be nobody to give to and take from [*ledā-denā*]. Who would we be? What would our Kanjar society [*samāj*] be? Our Kanjar society would be nothing.

early 20th century while Kanjars encouraged marriages with the daughters of mothers’ brothers, they forbade alliances with the daughters of fathers’ sisters (1907: 626).

¹⁷ These villages are also often the natal homes of a boy’s mother (*nāniyāl*) and wife (or wife-to-be) (her *pīhar*), as well as his sisters’ marital home (*sasurāl*), housing as extensive a circle of his relations as their natal village.

Moieties are further subdivided into a number of nested subsets, each ranked in relation to those it encompasses and by which it is encompassed. Within this structure, households are encompassed by families, which are encompassed by clans, which are, in turn, encompassed by one of the two moieties (see Figure 3.1 below for a diagram of the arrangement). The more inclusive segments—and their patron-goddesses—supersede in rank those that they encompass and are, in turn, superseded by ones that encompass them. Segments of the community are ranked on the basis of their ‘potency’ (*śakti*)—a measure of cohesiveness (*yektā*) and its members’ capacity for living and working together. As the degree of encompassment drops from the level of *jāti* to moiety, clan, family, and household, the measure of a community’s ‘potency’ diminishes. While the moieties are upheld as cohesive communities—and as sources of strength, fortune and integrity for its members—families are thought of as ‘weak’ (*kaṃjor*) and households even weaker units mired in squabbling, with sons ever running off or establishing homes or thieving ‘parties’ of their own.

3.3 DONOR-GODDESSES AND THE LOGIC OF SACRIFICE

The primary source of each moiety’s identity is a patron-goddess of its own. All Kanjars claim the aegis of one of the two goddesses—Aḷmoḍī Mātā or Āśāpāl Mātā—

allegiance to which designates them as members of one of the two moieties.¹⁸ Ties to the goddess are so basic a marker of identity within the community¹⁹ that when Kanjars first meet, the name of their moiety-goddess is the first thing they ask for. Bonds with the goddess are a basic measure of good standing in the community, so that the loss of a clan's, family's or individual's status is normally explained as the dissipation of their bonds with the goddesses. When Kanjars describe a 'fallen clan' (*girī huī jāt* or *girā huā got*), for instance, they say that its relationship with the patron-goddess 'has been fractured' (*ṭūṭi jā*) or that the goddess has 'abandoned' (*calī jī* or *chor dī*) the clan.²⁰

¹⁸ Āśāpāl Mātā (also known as Āśāpurā or Āśāpuri), is the *kul devī* of the Cauhān Rājputs, who in southern and eastern Rajasthan were the rulers of Kotā and Būndī, as well as a number of *ṭhikānās* (estates) connected to Udaipur (Harlan 1992: 56). Āśāpurā is also the protectress of the Jāḍejā Rājput lineage (*kul*), which has ruled the Kutch region in western Gujarāt. The Goddess is still widely revered in Kacch, where her most important temple is now located (at Mātā-no-Madh). The goddess is mentioned in the *Skandā-purāṇā* (Dilipsinh 2004: 65), her name literally meaning 'the giver of hope' (Simpson 2007: 101), and in Rājput lore she 'is understood as an emanation of the [Sanskritic] Goddess, Annapūrṇā' (Harlan 1992: 60, 57). The *kul devīs* of the ruling clans were also the protectresses of their service-communities, suggesting that the Kanjar clans of the Āśāpāl moiety were once in the service of both the Cauhān and the Jāḍejā Rājputs, whose patron-goddess they have inherited. Indeed, most Āśāpāl clans trace their descent either to Būndī or Gujarāt, making it fair to assume that they at least some of the clans were once patronized by the Cauhān (Hāḍā) rulers of Būndī and Jāḍejā Rājput families from Kacch. Today some Āśāpāl-moiety families living near Bundi revere their moiety-goddess under the name of Chauth Mātā, the particular emanation of the Āśāpurā goddess who is the protectress of Hāḍā rulers of Būndī. Kanjars say that the goddess resides in the Aśok tree (*Saraca indica*) sacred to clans of the Āśāpāl moiety. In Mewar, the tree is commonly known as Āśāpāl, from which Kanjars derive the goddess's name. Aḷmoḍī Mātā is a goddess unique to the Kanjar community, whose name derives from the Mewari word for 'gallbladder' (*aḷmoḍā*), the organ which, as I will discuss in more detail further in the chapter (Section 3.6), embodies the essence of the goddess and which is a special commensal substance for Kanjars of the Aḷmoḍī moiety.

¹⁹ Most other local communities have tutelary clan goddesses, which they call, just like the Kanjars, their moiety-goddess.

²⁰ In the Begūn area, members of the Guḍarāwat clan in one village have for some time been known to indiscriminately inform on others to the police, coming into disrepute in the broader community, which calls

Just like the moiety, each moiety-goddess is segmented (like the Tamil goddess Mariyamman of Fuller's [1988] description), into a number of ranked forms: the 'nascent,' the 'small' and the 'great,' each of which receives of its own particular order of devotional service. While her 'great' manifestation is connected to the entirety of the clan and the moiety that it represents, the 'small' and 'nascent' forms are, respectively, bound to discrete families and to newborns (along with their mothers). The production of communal divisions (village-based segmentation, family schisms) is accompanied by the creation of goddesses for each newly formed segment, so that the ongoing proliferation of goddesses within the Kanjar pantheon reflects the community's continuous fragmentation.

The relationship between Kanjars and their moiety-goddesses is arranged according to the donor-servant formula: the moiety-goddesses are known as Deyārīs,²¹ or literally 'ones who give,' and each moiety is referred to as its goddess's 'service-community' (*sevā-samāj*). Ties between the two are maintained through the ongoing exchange of the goddess's 'gifts' (*dāns*) for the community's 'services' (*sevās*). Jogaṇiyā Mātā bestows gifts on the local Kanjars, transferring her own character to the community at large, so that each Deyārī passes through her gifts to each moiety her distinctive nature, making for the

it a 'half-clan,' (*ādhi-got* or *ādhi-jāt*) or a clan with 'no brothers' (*koi bhāi nahīn hai*), that is, other clans who see them as belonging to their moiety. Marrying them has become a matter of last resort and a number of village communities no longer eat with them, saying that they 'have no mother-goddess' (*mātājī nahī hai*).

²¹ Across Northern India, clan goddesses are commonly known as *kul devīs*. Across Rajasthan, they are commonly known as Deyārīs (see, for instance, Ann Gold's description of Diyārī Mān, 1988: 97).

difference between the two halves. Such donorship, in turn, is contingent on the beneficiaries' performance of service for the Deyārī, through which they fulfill their obligation and compel the *devī* to continue giving. The relationship between Kanjars and their donor-goddesses is not particular to this context, but is just one expression of a widespread formula of ranked relatedness in Rajasthani society more broadly.

Culinary manipulations are at the heart of Kanjars' communion with their goddesses. Most significantly, commensal union is articulated through the butchery, preparation and consumption of meat. The flesh of goats and sheep is the most important of the Deyārīs' gifts to the community, through whose consumption Kanjars commune both with their donor-goddesses and with other members of their moiety. As the goddess's gift, meat has much moral value for Kanjars, who take great pride in rustling, slaughtering, and eating goats and sheep. In any settlement, Kanjars butcher animals virtually on a daily basis, and during the fourteen months of my stay in Lakshmipura there was hardly a day on which I did not eat meat at least once. Of course not everyone can enjoy daily feasts of meat, which remain largely the reserve of active thieves who bring in meat as part of their almost daily spoils. To a great extent, it is their constant consumption of meat—seen as communion with the Deyārī—that gives the most active Kanjar thieves the stature of *khandāṇī* (proper) members of the community.

Kanjars commune with their goddesses primarily through the butchery, preparation and consumption of animals, the processes which together comprise the act of ‘sacrifice,’ or *balī*. To carry social value, meat (whether consumed during daily meals or at more formal ceremonial events like wedding feasts) must be sacrificed, or offered in service to the goddess and received as a gift from her. The sacrifice of *balī* is a concentrated form of the relationship between the community and the *devī*, which encapsulate the logic of relatedness not only between Kanjars and their patron-goddesses but between superiors and inferiors in India at large.²²

Sacrifice is an exchange of a deity’s gifts for its devotees’ services,²³ in the course of which the nature of the donor passes, via consumption of sacrificial substances (most significantly, but not exclusively, of meat), to the devotees and determines their community’s *khandān* (character), received in the ceremonial context quite literally as the ‘gift of food.’ In turn, services for the Deyāṛī—including the slaughter, presentation,

²² In the way that the order of ancient kingship and patronage South Asian was played out in the structure of Vedic sacrifice order (cf. Hocart 1950).

²³ Contrary to conventional descriptions of Hindu sacrifice, Kanjars do not conceive of it as an act of giving, but as ‘work’ (*kammā*) or ‘service’ (*sevā*) for the deity. Accordingly, they do not refer to sacrifice as a ‘gift,’ or *balī dān* (the common Brāhmaṇical term), but as *balī calānā* or *balī caṛhānā*—the *killing, driving forth or sending up* of sacrificial animals for the Deyāṛī.²³ As one woman put it, ‘these goats belong to Deyāṛī Mā. When we kill [*calāte*] them, we perform a service for her [*sevā karte hai*]. They are not ours to give. All that talk of gifts [*dāns*] is the talk of Brahmins!’ It has been noted that in Tamil Nadu ordinary people commonly refer to sacrifice as ‘cutting the goat’ (Dumont 1957: 377; Good 1985), which Fuller treats as ‘a literally descriptive phrase’ that glosses the same idea of sacrifice as a gift (1988: 23; 1992: 84). I think that the phrasing, however, offers a clue to a different conception of sacrifice as an act of ‘service’ or ‘work.’ A fellow ethnographer reports that in central Karnataka, where he conducted fieldwork, low-caste villagers thought of the sacrificial animals as *gifts from* and the act of *balī* as a *service for* the gods (Neil Armstrong, personal communication).

preparation, and consumption of food—effectively manufacture the goddess, whose nature is quite literally composed of the services performed for her. Kanjars speak of the sacrificial rites as the ‘making of the Deyāṛī’ (*mātāji banānā*). In other words, sacrifice is a mutually constitutive act in which the identity of each party is generated vis-a-vis the other. At base, *balī* is an act of consubstantiation rather than exchange, whose aim is commensal union rather than the swapping of one thing for another. Commensal bonds among Kanjars are not forged directly, but via communion with the goddess: occasioning no collective feasts, sacrificial rites do not bind members of the community through ‘lateral’ commensal union. Instead, sacrificial meat and bread are cooked to completion by each household and eaten separately by its members.

3.4 BAṘĪ NAVARĀTRĪ²⁴

The most significant annual sacrifice takes place during the nine days of autumnal Navarātri (Naurat in Kanjarī), when Kanjars stage the most elaborate devotional services for their Deyāṛīs.²⁵ By reiterating the community’s bonds with its patron-goddesses, the

²⁴ The rites I describe below all took place in the community of thieving Kanjars, some of them in Lakshmipura and some in a closely allied village.

²⁵ The autumnal festival of Navarātri (literally ‘nine nights’), also known as Baṛā Navarātrā (Great Nine Nights), is one of the two major Indian celebrations of the goddess, the other festival (Choṭi Navarātri, or ‘Minor Nine Nights’), happening in the spring. The autumnal festival, which I describe here, takes place during the first nine lunar days (*tithi*) of the month of Aświn (September–October). Across the subcontinent, the festival usually begins on the night after the new moon. Kanjars begin their celebrations a day earlier, on the dark night of the first new moon of the month. For a fuller description of the Navarātri mythology and its celebrations in more Brāhmaṇical form in South India, see Fuller & Logan (1985).

festival ratifies the distinctive character (*khandān*) of each moiety, creating, as one man put it, ‘a map of the Kanjar society’ (*Kanjar samājoṅ kā naksā baṇāwe*).²⁶ The festival is so central to the reiteration of the community’s structure that a number of villagers insisted that I start ‘my book’ with an account, or better yet photographs, of its proceedings.

Navarātri includes two main events—devotional services to the Deyārīs and the initiation of infants born that year—both of which center on the rite of animal sacrifice. During the first six or seven days (depending on moiety), the festival remains a quiet affair. On each of these nights offerings to the family Deyārī,²⁷ whose icon (*maurat*, or *mūrti* in Hindi) is set up in his home for the occasion, are made in the households of the oldest brothers in each family. During this time, the mothers of newborn children also mold egg-shaped images of the Deyārīs, to which they make offerings on behalf of babies. Between the seventh and ninth days of the festival, the celebrations turn into an elaborate village-wide event, which witnesses the sacrifice of animals to the Deyārīs and the initiation of newborn children. In preparation for sacrifice, each clan constructs a makeshift altar,

²⁶ The Kanjars’ idea that sacrifice is an act that generates the order of existence echoes the old textual conception of sacrifice as a cosmogonic act. In Vedic understanding, the cosmos is a product of sacrifice of the Primordial Man Prajāpati, so that ‘sacrifice is at the foundation of all things’ (Biardeau 1976: 16) or, to use Masson-Oursel’s words, the world is ‘literally a sacrifice’ (1948: 82, cited in de Heusch 1985: 193). Herrenschmidt (1978; 1979) likewise argues that sacrifice create and maintain the proper order of differentiation. See also Heesterman (1959: 245f), Zaehner (1962: 57) and Eliade (1965: 11; 1969).

²⁷Typically, including incense, oil flame, as well as burnt cow dung, coconut and *ghī*.

where the sacrifices will later take place. Each clan then slaughters one animal and one animal is sacrificed by the parents of each initiate child.

In the practice of most Kanjar clans, the animals are immolated with the conventional Hindu *jhaṭkā* (jerk) of the sword across the neck, which ideally severs the head in a single stroke (Image 3.3).²⁸ The villagers pour blood that first emerges from the wound onto the Deyārī's icon and set out the victims' heads on the altar.²⁹ The carcasses are then skinned, dismembered and gutted, the entrails are grilled and the meat is boiled in front of the altar. On the final day of the festival, the parents of the initiate infants prepare 'half-cooked bread cakes' (*maḍḍe roṭī*) at the altar, which they then share, together with sacrificial meat, with other villagers. Each village household later prepares and eats its portion of sacrificial food in its own home. The same avoidance of communal dining is typical of Kanjar culinary practice more generally. Kanjars organize few communal meals: they hold no common mortuary feasts (*nuktās*, commonly hosted by other *jātis*), but cook

²⁸ Three clans—Bamaṇāwat, Nannāwat and Guḍarāwat—slaughter the animals in the Islamic Dhabīhah (or Halāl) method by a bloodletting cut on the neck.

²⁹ The heads are presented on the altar with one foot placed in their mouths, an expression of the idea that anything offered to the Deyārī must not be 'empty' (*khāli*), so that the hollow of the mouth must be filled. This practice reflects a more general anxiety about things understood to be 'hollow.' So, for instance, a woman carrying empty water pots (*maṭkās*) crossing a party's path upon departure will doom the planned thieving excursion. The same sight is an inauspicious omen for Rajasthanis in general, who take it to be a bad omen for travel. The fear of 'emptiness' finds a variety of other expressions. When Mewari brides first enter their husbands' homes, during the rite of *mīṇe loṇo* (literally 'taking inside'), they make a footprint of *kumkum* (reddened turmeric liquid) on a white cotton sheet; if the heel and ball are disconnected, the bride's foot is thought to be 'empty' and the marriage destined for poverty, illness and other woes.

and eat food in separate homes, even during weddings, the commensal occasions *par excellence* in Hindu India.³⁰ The community altogether shuns eating outside of their own homes. So, when Kanjars receive food from another household in the village, they do not normally eat it there, but carry it away from the hearth in their own bowls to eat it at their own hearths. Inside houses, dining is also a commensally fragmentary affair rather than an organized collective event, as it normally is in Brāhmaṇ and most other Hindu households (Khare 1976a; Appadurai 1981: 497ff). From the moment they can handle a spoon, Kanjars help themselves to stew (*masālā*) and bread (*roṭīs*) throughout the day, serving themselves and often finding a corner of the homestead to eat alone.³¹

³⁰ The significance of Indian weddings as central commensal events has been discussed at length in the anthropological literature. For some analyses of marriage feasts, see Marriott (1968; 1976), Hanchett (1975), Khare (1976a: 189-203; 1976b: 51ff), and Appadurai (1981: 502-05).

³¹ If Brāhmaṇs are, according to Appadurai, the ‘bulwarks of culinary orthodoxy’ (1981: 497), Kanjars are its heretics. They mind little separation of cooking duties, observe little mealtime order, and do not worry much about ‘mouth-pollution’ (*jūṭhā*) within the community. While members of households tend to gather around the hearth during the four cooking times (once in the morning, once in the evening and twice for tea, at dawn and in the early afternoon) in hopes of catching freshly prepared fare, the consumption of food is not formalized as a meal. The presence of all members of the household at such times is not expected, and the hierarchy of preparation and service, and the order of consumption are not clearly set, like they are in the Brāhmaṇ households (*ibid.*). Although the preparation of *roṭīs* is customarily women’s duty and the preparation of meat (or fish) is men’s work, all members of the household routinely get involved in the cooking process, with children and men helping to grind spices and stir the stew (*masālā*) while it is being cooked. Although the main chef (normally a woman, but sometimes also a man) often dishes out the food to those present (in order to assure fair distribution of food), everyone (barring the smallest children) is free to take their own portions themselves. Indeed, women do not serve *roṭīs* individually, as they normally do in Brāhmaṇic households, but leave them on a platter to be taken by all as required. Observing no rules of ‘mouth-pollution’ (*jūṭhā*), Kanjars can return their leftover *masālā* in the cooking pot and the *roṭīs* on the platter, on which members of the household snack throughout the day.



Image 3.3: A sacrificial ram moments before its slaughter

During Navarātri the Deyārī appears in a succession of distinct forms (*rūps*), each receiving prestations from a segment of the community which that particular form represents. Kanjars say that the goddesses are ‘created’ (*baṇe*) in the course of the ritual, so that the rites of Navarātri do not only constitute *services for*, but effectively the *production of* the Deyārīs.³² In other words, the prestations of Navarātri are not only *for* the goddess, but

³² This concept of ‘manufacturing Deyārīs’ through prestations is not specific to Kanjars, but has a general presence in Mewar and indeed in India at large. My informants from the Ḍholī (Drummer), Regar (Tanner) and Telī (Oil Presser) communities also spoke about ‘making’ their Deyārīs during the rites of Navarātri. For a description of such ritual production of similar ‘otiose’ deities in Bengal, see Korom (1997).

are in fact constitutive of her. The more encompassing the community, the more participants are involved, and the more elaborate their prestations, the greater the given form of the goddess. Thus, the rank of each form of the *devī*, expressed in terms of her 'size' and measure of potency, is relative to the expanse of its community of devotees.

3.5 MANUFACTURING DEYĀRĪS

Central to the celebrations are the hair cutting initiation rites (*laṭī carhānā*), through which infants born in the previous year commune with the Deyārī and are thus incorporated into the community.³³ Until the event, newborns have no name, no clothing, no commensal rights, and no privileges of mourning or proper burial at death.³⁴ Thus, according to Hertz's proposition, they are not yet part of human society (1960: 84). Before the *laṭī carhānā* rites, newborns are not part of a clan, a moiety, or the Kanjar society as such, and are thus not properly human. Their only ties are to their mothers, themselves isolated from the community in the period between birth and the *laṭī carhānā* rites.³⁵ The newborns and their mothers are socially disconnected and, as such, 'vulnerable' (*bholī*) to

³³ Among other communities in Mewar, the practice is known as *zarūlī nikhālnā* (Hair Lock Cutting).

³⁴ Unlike adults, who are cremated, the uninitiated children are buried inside a *conṭrā* (cenotaph), which otherwise serves as a repository for the remains of cremated bodies. This follows a more widespread Indian idea that children are not born into human society, but enter it after a period or a rite of passage. Parry, for instance, notes that 'in Kangra an infant of less than 22 month (some people say 27 months) is buried and not cremated' and that no proper mortuary rites are followed (1979: 142).

³⁵ Mothers of uninitiated newborns are prevented from consuming meat and alcohol, the key media of communion within the community. Such postpartum segregation derives from the 'unborn'—or socially



Image 3.4. The icon of the 'nascent' *bey mātā*. A few grains of offering rice are stuck to the image.

unspecified—status of their infants. Kanjars do not conceptualize childbirth as a 'polluting' event that brings on the state of 'impurity.' Instead, it brings on a de-socialized period between the birth and the initiation of the newborn into the clan via the forging of ties with the *Deyārī*. Depending on the time of the child's birth, this period can span from a year to a week, so that the idea of pollution, recovery from which requires a fixed span of time, has no bearing on this process of separation and (re)incorporation.

ghosts, illnesses and other misfortunes.³⁶ During the first days of Navarātri prior to the initiation, new mothers and newborns remain under the aegis of their own Deyāṛīs called *bey mātās*, or ‘birth goddesses.’³⁷

On the first day of Navarātri, the mothers of newborn children mold a mixture of *ghī*, cow dung and water into egg-shaped icons of *bey mātās*, to which they then offer boiled rice, milk, incense, and oil flame in the days preceding the rites of initiation (Image 3.4). As one woman put it, ‘*bey mātājī* is just like a child—she is very vulnerable [*bholī*]. She is so small [*nannī*] because she is a small child’s Deyāṛī. She takes rice and milk and she is very weak [*kamjor*], so we must take good care of her.’³⁸ As patronesses of newborns and their households, *bey mātās* are themselves nascent, inferior forms of the goddess with limited *śakti*. The weakness of *bey mātās* reflects the state of her devotees, whose isolation

³⁶ See Gold for a discussion of the moral sense of the term *bholī* (1988: 13).

³⁷ Across the subcontinent, *be mātā* (*bey mātā* in Kanjarī) is revered as the goddess of birthing and newborns. She is the patroness of midwives (Daīs), who are said to embody her *śakti*, pregnant women, as well as infants. Across northern India, Daīs and parturient women invoke *be mātā* at childbirth, asking her to expedite the birth. She protects the fetus and animates newborns. *be mātā* is a fickle goddess and, if not properly honored, can complicate birth and cause the illness or death of both the mother and child. She leaves the birth home after the *chaṭī* naming ceremony, which is performed on the sixth day after the birth of a child and at which the goddess is thanked for having protected the infant.

³⁸ The vegetarian offerings made to such goddesses befit their vulnerable character, reflecting the general equation between weakness—the moral and corporal lassitude attributed to the ‘grass-eating’ Brāhmaṇs and merchants—and vegetarian diet.

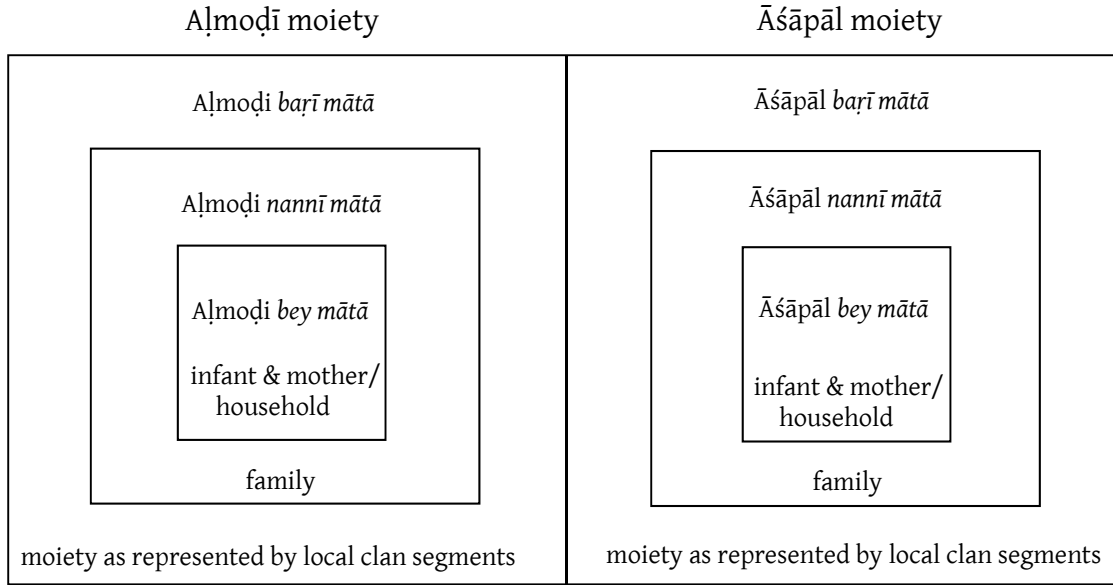


Figure 3.1: Diagram of the major structural divisions of the Kanjar *jāti* and corresponding forms of the goddess

from the community makes for their social insignificance. The impotence of these goddesses, in turn, makes for the susceptibility of infants and mothers in the postpartum period,³⁹ so that high maternal and infant mortality is often explained as a result of the *bey mātās*' weakness. By the end of the festival, however, *baṛī mās* (great mothers) 'take over' the patronage of the child, and *bey mātās* thus 'mature' (inf. *baṛā baṇ jānā*) together with the infant initiates.

On each night of Navarātri, the most senior men in each family light oil lamps and make offerings to their family Deyāṛīs: the donor-goddesses of multi-generational sets of 'womb brothers' (*sage bīre*) and their children (Image 3.5). Although superior to *bey mātās*,

³⁹ Of eleven children born during my stay in Lakshmipura, three died at birth and one did not live to the haircutting ceremony.



Image 3.5: Pūjā for the *nannī* (small) manifestation of Āśāpāl Mātā

the family goddesses rank below the great moiety-goddess and are thus referred to as ‘small mothers’ (*nannī mātās*).⁴⁰ Presiding over the families’ internal affairs, *nannī mātās* are meant to protect families from quarrels, illness, poverty, and the police, tasks at which they often fail. Relations within families are frequently volatile and households in settlements remain incommunicado for extended periods of time; even when they are on speaking terms, brothers visit, but rarely enter each other’s homes.

⁴⁰ In this context, Deyārīs can be visually represented either with anthropomorphic images or with a set of smear marks made on the inside walls of houses with vermilion.

Kanjars blame such a 'lack of unity' (*yektā koi*) in families on the weakness of the Small Mothers. The fault, however, is not wholly with the goddesses. Entire families almost never partake in Nannī Mātās' *pūjā*; typically, only the households of the eldest brothers perform the rites.⁴¹ While prestations to Nannī Mātās (including burnt offerings of cow dung, clarified butter and coconut) are more elaborate than those offered to *bey mātās*, the ceremony almost invariably remains a modest affair, befitting the modesty of her modest rank. Thus, the misfortune of disunity within families, which Kanjars often lament, is a catch twenty-two, the fragmentation both the cause and the result of the impotence of the Family Goddess. As one man in Lakshmipura put it, 'if Nannī Mātās had more strength, our villages and families would stick together and brothers would not quarrel. But how can they [the goddesses] have strength, if there is no unity in our families, and brothers never light an oil lamp for their Deyārī together?'

On the seventh and eighth days of Navarātri the villagers carry the icons of Āśāpāl and Aḷmoḍī Deyārīs, respectively, from their household altars to the open shrines set up for the occasion.⁴² Here Nannī Mās transform into the Great Mother-goddesses (*baṛī mās*) of

⁴¹ During the one Baṛī Navarātri that I witnessed in Lakshmipura, only members of the senior households did *pūjā* to their families' Nannī Mās.

⁴² This may mean an actual transfer of the *maurats* used in the family worship. More often, however, it means an installation of a larger and more elaborately decorated image of the Deyārī (Image 3.6).

the clans and moieties that they represent. On the night of the installation, Kanjars hold a night vigil (*rāti jugā*)⁴³ so as to ‘wake’ (*jugānā*) the Great Deyārī with bright oil lamps and



Image 3.6: A plaster image of Āśāpāl Deyārī in her ‘great form’ dressed in a new shawl and decorated with garlands of flowers and rupee notes.

sing raucous songs of praise (*thālī*).⁴⁴ They explain that the vigil does not only ‘awaken’ or make the goddess ‘accessible, approachable, and active’ (Erndl 1993: 102), but effectively transforms Nannī Mā into the Great Deyārī. As one man explained,

⁴³ Such all-night vigils, called *Jagrātā* (literally, ‘waking’) in standard Hindustani, are a common part of goddess worship across the subcontinent (Erndl 1993: Ch. 4).

⁴⁴ In this context, Kanjars often become the *jajmāns* of *bhopās* (temple officiates and spirit-mediums) from the Bhil community, offering them sacrificial meat in return for their service in the Rāti Jugā vigil. Like other

The more of us get together and the louder we sing, the more things we offer, the more *ghī* [clarified butter] we burn, the greater our *Mātājī* becomes. Why do you think our *Mātājī* has so much *ṭakaṭ* [strength]? Because we celebrate [*manāte*] Navarātri with the most bustle-and-pomp [*dhūm-dhām se*], more than any other *jāt*, except maybe the Rājput.



Image 3.7: A *cauk* altar made by the Karmāwat clan of the Āśāpāl moiety

The makeshift altar, constructed for the purpose of the final sacrifice rites, is the first form in which *baṛī mā* appears before her devotees. Kanjars speak of the process of altar construction as the *pūjā* (homage) central to the ‘creation of the moiety-goddess’ (*Mātājī*

jajmānī ties, both sides strive to retain such relationships from year to year and, ideally, across generations. In Lakshmipura, the current relationship with the Bhīl *bhopās*, who officiate the rites, goes back four generations (confirmed by both Kanjars and the Bhīls) to the original settlement of the village.



Image 3.8: A *teyda* altar built by the Bamaṇāwat clan of the Aḷmoḍī moiety

banānā). As one woman put it, ‘when we make Mātājī’s altar [*teydā*], we pay homage [*pūjte*] to our *devī*. We make the form of the mother-goddess [*ham mātājī kī rūp baṇāwe*] and then offer service [*sevā karte*] to her.’ Each moiety arranges a structure that is particular to its own Deyārī: the Āśāpāl-clans outline an altar (*cauk*) with cow dung on the ground and the Aḷmoḍī-clans erect a superstructure called the *teydā* (Image 3.7 & Image 3.8). The Deyārī’s icon (dressed in a new shawl and adorned with garlands of flowers or money) is then set up at the head of the arrangement and the altars are decorated with flowers, flags and various offerings.⁴⁵ Kanjars say that the goddesses reside in the altar, which must therefore be constructed in a distinctive manner appropriate to the given Deyārī.⁴⁶ The opposition between the two Deyārīs—and the moieties—finds expression in the opposition of spatial orientation of the two altars: the horizontal *cauk* and the vertical *teydā*.⁴⁷ Accordingly,

⁴⁵ The altar is normally set up in the western or southern side of the village and the offerings normally include spirits (*madh*), incense (*dhūp*), oil lamps (*dīpaks*), raw grain, rice pudding (*khīr*), jaggery (*gur*), vermilion, turmeric, henna, as well as the burnt offerings of cow dung, coconut and clarified butter (*ghī*).

⁴⁶ That is, the goddess does not come to inhabit her icon (*maurat*), as is normally assumed in more Brāhmaṇic forms of worship, but rather the entire structure of the altar.

⁴⁷ The opposition between the Deyārīs is also expressed in the placement of the sacrificed animals’ front feet in the mouths of the heads of the sacrificed animals offered on the altar during sacrifice. The Āśāpāl clans place the right feet, and those of the Aḷmoḍī moiety, the left. Kanjars talk of this arrangement as representative of complementary opposition, summed up by one man as ‘left and right legs make up a whole animal...the way Āśāpāl and Aḷmoḍī [moieties] make up the Kanjar *samāj*.’



Image 3.9: The Catrāwat clan *teydā* altar with the second-level *upparmāli* or *dāgli*

during Navarātri, Kanjars refer to Āśāpāl Mātā as Nīc Mā (Low Mother) and to Aḷmoḍī Mātā as Ucc Mā (High Mother).⁴⁸

The *cauk* and the *teydā* can be further differentiated through special features particular to a given clan. The Catrāwat *got* (of the Aḷmoḍī moiety), for instance, constructs a second level (*upparmāli* or *dāgli*)⁴⁹ on their *teydā* (Image 3.9) and the Āśāpāl-moiety Karmāwat clan shapes its *cauk* into a triangle. The structure of the altar and the arrangement of offerings can be further distinguished to reflect its relationship to a particular village-based clan segment. The Catrāwats in one village, for instance, have added an ear (called *jivṇā*) of a sacrificial ram to the offerings placed on the *upparmāli*, and the Karmāwats in another have begun veiling their Deyārī's image during sacrifice. In this way, the Deyārī's form becomes further segmented into a variety of clan- and village-specific manifestations. Distinctive features are readily invented to differentiate the Deyārī of a particular segment of the community. Some old Catrāwat men from the village mentioned above explained that they began to offer a ram's ear no more than two

⁴⁸ This vertical idiom does not express a hierarchical relationship between the goddesses, but simply the difference between the two Deyārīs.

⁴⁹ The *upparmāli* is a distinctive feature of the altars erected by the Kanjars of eastern Mewar. It takes its name from 'Upparmāl,' the name of the area southeast of the Mewar plains, which stretches from Chittaurgarh to Begun, Bijolia and Mandargarh, extending to the Kota-Bundi Hadoti region and Jhalawar on the one side, and up to Ajmer on the other.

generations ago so as to distinguish themselves from the Catrāwats who then came to settle in a nearby village.⁵⁰



Image 3.10: Men of the Bamaṇāwat clan making offerings of vermillion, *kuśā* grass and burnt cow dung to Aḷmoḍī Mātā in her ram-manifestation moments before sacrifice

The final and most important manifestation of the Deyāṛī is the sacrificial animal itself, which, as Kanjars say, embodies both the form (*rūp*) and the nature (*prakṛti*) of the Deyāṛī. Each Deyāṛī demands an offering of one of two kinds of animals: Āśāpāl Mātā

⁵⁰ Herzfeld (1990) likewise observed that the aesthetic variation of Orthodox icons in Crete reflects the structure of segmentation in local society.

receives he-goats (*tsālis*) and Almoḍī Mātā receives rams (*minḍās*).⁵¹ The living animal presented for sacrifice is the embodiment (often referred to as the *maurat*, ‘image’ or ‘form’) of the goddess. As such, the sacrificial victim becomes the recipient of the community’s services, so that for a day before their slaughter, the animals chosen for sacrifice are fed rice pudding (*khīr*) and sprinkled with spirits (*madh*). In the moments immediately before their slaughter, the victims receive yet another service: before the sword hits the animals’ necks, young men sprinkle the animals with water and *madh*, waft the burnt offerings (*dhūp*) of cow-dung (*gobar*) and clarified butter (*ghī*) before the animal’s face, and tie a bundle of sacrificial *kuśā* grass (*Poa cynosuroides*) across their mouths (Image 3.10).⁵²

Kanjars do not see the pre-slaughter rites as purifying or in any way preparing the animals as offerings for the goddess (in the manner conventionally described in literature on Indian sacrifice⁵³) but as offerings of service to the goddess, which resides in the animal during sacrifice. As one woman explained, ‘when we offer burnt offerings [*dhūp lagāte*] to these goats [*tsāliyā*], we do not venerate [*pūjte*] the animal [*janāwar*]. We serve our Mātājī, who has gone inside [*ghus gāi*] the goats.’ Slaughter is the ultimate service offered to the

⁵¹ Just as the altar structures vary according to clan, the sacrificial animals are differentiated by their *got*-specific coloring. The Karmāwat clan, for instance, sacrifices only black he-goats; the Catrāwat white rams; the Caṇḍāwat silver or mixed-color rams; and the Singhāwat, red he-goats.

⁵² The overall sequence of the event follows the classical formula of Hindu sacrifice (Biardeau 1976: 138-53).

⁵³ See, for instance, Whitehead (1921: 55, 68ff, 99) or Moffatt (1979: Ch. 6).

goddess in her animal form, an act called the *calānā pūjā* (slaughter service). The slaughter of animals does not get rid of the goddess. Instead, the killing generates flesh, which, as I have already noted, is understood as the vessel of the Deyārī's 'nature'—the distinctive qualities which she embodies and which are transferred to her devotees through the consumption of sacrificial meat.

3.6 EATING THE GODDESS

Meat is not commensally significant by default. In order to be ratified as a communal substance, the animal must be served to the *devī*. That is, the victim must not simply be slaughtered, but slaughtered *for* the Deyārī: to produce socially significant substance, butchery (whether during Navarātri or in everyday life) must be accompanied by sacrifice.⁵⁴ The animal properly sacrificed binds men to their goddesses—and to the community under her tutelage—thus, as one woman put it, 'making a Bhāṅṭu from a human' (*bhāṅṭu banātā*). Non-sacrificial slaughter only generates 'stomach filler' (*peṭ bhārne kā mā*) that 'swells the belly' (*peṭ phūlātā*). It is an asocial act, so that the butchery and consumption of meat that was not ratified through sacrifice are judged as immoral acts. Those accused of routinely slaughtering and eating animals without offering them to the

⁵⁴ The same logic guides the everyday consumption of meat, where sacrifice is, ideally, the necessary condition of butchery. In daily slaughter, as the blood first falls onto the ground, the butcher pronounces the name of his (only men slaughter animals) Deyārī, transforming the spill into a libation, butchery into sacrifice and goats into commensal meat. This is an old and widespread notion on the subcontinent, expressed in the Brāhmanical adage: 'Meat-eating goes with sacrifice' (Biardeau 1976: 53).

goddess acquire a reputation akin to drunkards. Understood to have forsaken their *dharm* (duty or role) for the sake of their bellies (*peṭṣ*), they are said to have ‘turned into beasts’ (*janāwaroṅ kī taraf ban jāwe*) who follow their stomachs, the individuating organ that internalizes persons, segregating them from society. Both drunkards and eaters of unsanctioned meat are asocial—thus immoral—self-serving ‘individuals’ (*alag-wālā ādmī*) who are said to ‘reside in their innards’ (*peṭ mei rewe*).⁵⁵ Kanjars call such individuation an illness (*bīmāri*), a dangerous malady that leads to the collapse of households, villages and the *jāti* at large.

Blood libations sanction slaughter as an act of service for the Deyārī, marking the transformation of flesh into socially meaningful meat. Blood, conceived as the reified form of the animal’s life (*jīv*), becomes the vehicle of this transformation.⁵⁶ At the beheading, the life of the animal is offered to the goddess through a ‘blood-service’ called *khūṅ sevā*, at

⁵⁵ At first, I thought that all the meat I was served in Lakshmipura was, as I was told, the meat of he-goats, the only animals that the residents of the village can sacrifice to the Deyārī. I soon learned that other types of meat—mutton, the flesh of female animals (which cannot be sacrificed to the goddess), and even buffalo—were often consumed in the village. However, their slaughter was carefully hidden from the gaze of the larger village and performed inside homes or behind walls. Older men aware of such indulgence complained that in their days nobody dare eat unsacrificed meat and that the community lacks cohesion today because every man ‘resides in his innards’ (*peṭ mei rewe*).

⁵⁶ Kanjars think of blood as reified life, which can be physically manipulated through the handling of blood. Kanjars say that ‘life resides in the blood’ (*jīv khūṅ mei rewe*), so that when an illness befalls, they (and Rajasthanīs at large) speak of the ‘spoiling of blood’ (*khūṅ bigārnā*) and refer to the healing process as the ‘purging of blood’ (*khūṅ safāi*). Accordingly, the blood-libations made during sacrifice are understood as a transfer of the animal’s life. Moffatt, for instance, has also observed that the absorption of the victims’ blood by the ground in South India is understood as the goddess receiving the animal’s ‘life’ (1979: 260).

which the blood that emerges from the wound is poured onto the goddess's icon (*maurat*).⁵⁷

In this way, the victim's life is understood to have been taken for, and thus under the auspices of, the Deyārī. Kanjars say that without the blood-service the animal's life and flesh are 'spoiled' (*bigrā huyā*) or simply 'wasted' (*ujaṛā*).

The meat thus produced is not an offering of food *for* the deity (like the Brāhmaṇical *naivedya*), but on the contrary a gift *from* her.⁵⁸ Kanjars call the sacrificial meat the 'gift of meat' (*gulliyā cī dān*), which carries the distinctive 'nature' (*prakṛti*) of the goddess, and is sometimes referred to quite literally as 'the goddess's chunks' (*Mātājī ke boṭṭiyān*).

Sacrificial meat does not comprise the leavings (*prasād*) of deities' feasts (*naivedya*), but constitutes the substance of the goddess as such, so that the rites of communion with the *devī* culminate in her devotees' consumption of, and incorporation into, her nature. Thus, contrary to the conventional conception of *pūjā* and *balī* prestations as the rites of feeding,⁵⁹ Kanjars understand *balī* as communion:

⁵⁷ The display of animals' heads on the altar likewise speaks for the slaughter having been performed in service of the goddess.

⁵⁸ Only cooked fare is suitable for consumption by humans and gods alike. The meat is boiled and the entrails roasted at the altar is cooked without the use of spices and grease, necessary for full preparation (*pakkā*), remaining thus only parboiled (*maḍḍi*). The *roṭīs* prepared for the initiation of infants are likewise 'half-baked' (*maḍḍe*). Parents of the initiate infants bake dozens of *roṭīs* on special sacrificial hearths, lay them out on the altar and finally pass them around the village (Image 3.11). These *roṭīs* are prepared with grease (in addition to the flour and water of daily *roṭīs*), so as to keep them fresh until they are cooked to completion in each household.

⁵⁹ In reference to *balī*, see Dumont (1959 [1953], 1957), Babb (1975: 139), Biardeau (1976), Moffatt (1979: 261-4), Fuller (1988); in the context of *pūjā*, see Babb (1975: Ch. 2). More broadly, Appadurai argued that the

Where is our Mātājī? When we eat [sacrificial] meat, she enters us [*ghus jāwe*]. She resides [*rewe*] in every chunk of meat [*boṭi*] that we eat. When we slaughter the goats [in sacrifice], when we eat the meat, she is inside us, her servants [*sevā karne wāle*]. Because Mātājī is inside us, you can understand our society [*samāj*] as her ‘form’ [*rūp*] or you can say that our society is Mātājī’s ‘body’ or ‘image’ [*maurat*].

The community is thus connected by its members’ shared consumption of the divine essence, rather than through commensal union with the deity.



Image 3.11: Parents of an initiate infant preparing *madda roti* for the initiation rites

Kanjars often speak of moieties as communities of mutton- and goat-eaters, each bearing the distinctive qualities of their sacrificial animal’s flesh. The nature of each Deyārī

alimentary relations between Hindus and their gods take the formula of ‘feeding the gods and eating their leftovers (*prasadam*)’ (1981: 496).

is reified in the material properties of each type of meat, and by eating sacrificial meat Kanjars internalize these properties, rendering the opposition of moieties in substantive terms. In their own version of the expression ‘one is what one eats,’ Kanjars say that ‘one becomes the animal that one eats’ (*jo janāwar ko khāwe, wo janāwar ho jāwe*). While the sinewy meat of goats, ‘hot’ (*garam*) in its nature and ‘potent’ (*tej*) in texture and flavor, gives ‘strength’ (*takaṭ*) to the Āśāpāl-clans, the soft and fatty meat of rams makes the Aḷmoḍī-clans more gentle (*mulāyam*) and generous (*udār*). As one old woman put it, the goat-eating servants of Āśāpāl get their potency from the meat of goats, and because of this make better thieves; the tender flesh of rams, on the contrary, makes mutton-eaters ‘softer,’ their families more peaceable and their villages more harmonious.⁶⁰

The moiety opposition is further reified through the consumption, or avoidance, of the animal’s gallbladder (*aḷmoḍā*). The essence of Aḷmoḍī Mā—a name derived from *aḷmoḍā* and meaning literally the Gallbladder Goddess—is concentrated in the organ. At their initiation during the *laṭī calānā* ceremony, children born into the Aḷmoḍī moiety receive, along with a dose of spirits (*madh*), a taste of the gallbladder, which is symbolically swiped across their mouths (Image 3.12). The infants are rarely keen on this, so that the event invariably provokes much wailing on their part and the rejoinder of laughter among the

⁶⁰ As strength is the preferred quality, the Āśāpāl moiety is generally thought to be superior to the Aḷmoḍī half, an idea expressed in origin narratives, where ancestors of the Āśāpāl moiety conventionally appear as older brothers of the Aḷmoḍī progenitors.



Image 3.12: The *laṭī caṛhānā* infant initiation of the Bamaṇāwat clan of the Aḷmoḍī moiety. The child's and mother's hair locks are cut, both have a drink of the *madh* spirits and the infant symbolically ingests the *aḷmoḍā* (here located on the sheepskin on the left).

observers. The mirth of the moment, however, belies its significance. By eating the gallbladder, the child received some of the goddess's substance, a communion that marks the beginning of its relationship with the Deyārī, and the child's entry into the moiety and the Kanjar *jāti*. On the contrary, devotees of Āśāpāl Mātā discard the gallbladder, both during Navarātri and during everyday slaughter. This distinction is important for the maintenance of the moiety separation that my host once said: 'if we ate gallbladder, whom do you think we would marry?'

The communal event of a meal is part of neither everyday eating practice nor of the rites of Navarātri (see Section 3.3 above). But solidarity is the gastronomical aim of the Navarātri festival. As one Lakshmipura resident put it, 'when we eat Mātāji's bread and meat, our Kanjar society comes together—never mind all the squabbling that may happen during the year—our clan and village become one [*yek ho jāwe*].' If the community does 'come together,' it does not do so commensally: its members dine neither with their goddesses nor with one another. Instead, all of them consume the goddess—and thus achieve communion with her—not by eating together, but by eating the same thing. Much as in Christian communion, the corpus of the community is created through its members' shared yet separate internalization of the divinity's essence. By consuming the goddess's essence, the devotees are incorporated into the deity, and thus united into a single communal entity. In their more pious moments older Kanjars say that their community

comprises the ‘body of the Deyāṛī’ (*deyāṛī cī sarīr*). Just as Kanjars are incorporated into and unified in the goddess, the goddess is reconstituted within the corpus of her service-community. Exchange of the *devī*’s gifts for her devotees’ services, then, is a mutually constitutive process: while the donor-deity takes form in the community of her servants, the community itself is defined through its assumption of its patroness’s character. The event thus culminates with the consumption of the goddess, through which her body (*sarīr*) and the corpus of the community become one. Horizontal exchange is not the binding force here: the Kanjar community is constituted not by direct communion or transactions among its members, but via a common point of reference to the goddess.⁶¹

CONCLUSION

The Kanjar *jāti* as a whole and each of its segments (from moieties and clans to families and individuals) are defined in relation to their particular patron-goddesses, which function as sources of each segment’s character, rank, worth in the eyes of others, and ‘value’ within the community. The pantheon of Kanjar goddesses—the identities of the *devīs* and their standing in relation to one another—reflects the organization of the Kanjar *jāti*, forming a ‘map’ of the community. The worlds of Indian deities have long been treated as social maps, or models of and for human society. In his study of the Tamil god Ayyanar,

⁶¹ See Dresch (1998) for a parallel description of communal formation via vertical bonds with God, rather than through transactional interdependence among persons, in a Middle Eastern context.

Dumont had programmatically argued that the organization of relations among Indian gods mirrors the organization of the caste system (1959 [1953], elaborated in 1957), a view that has been reiterated with minor adjustments by anthropologists until the past two decades, when gods all but disappeared from ethnographic discussions.⁶² Dumont's analysis views the Hindu pantheon and society as homologous, that is as sharing the structural parameters defined by the purity/pollution opposition.

The pantheon of Kanjar goddesses is a 'map' of a different sort. Neither the patron-goddesses nor their devotees are related by a common structural principle, but through their relationship to each other. Just as Dumont had argued, both the segments of the community and the deities to which they correspond are relational entities. What I mean by relation, however, departs from Dumont's sense. The Kanjar *deyārīs* are not defined in relation to other deities, but in relation to their devotees.⁶³ That is, the character and rank of the goddesses stem from their bonds to their Kanjar service-communities.⁶⁴ The

⁶² Babb (1975) and Fuller (1979; 1980; 1988), for instance, have likewise argued that the divine hierarchy mirrors the human. For descriptions of similarly structured relations between humans and gods in Nepal, see Toffin (1986), Levy (1990) and Gellner (1992).

⁶³ The goddesses are not gathered in narratives, temples or shrines; nor do they constitute a sort of society of their own, so that, the 'pantheon' signifying anything more than a collection is a misleading term. *Deyārīs* are not placed in fables, adventure stories or genealogical narratives. Neither are they envisioned in anthropomorphic, or otherwise ascriptive, terms. See similar comments on the Bhilālā *kul devīs* by Haekel (1963: 197). Confusion arises when 'common descent' is assumed, something, for instance claimed by Haekel (1963) about the Bhilālā community of Gujarat, for which, however, he finds no evidence.

⁶⁴ Alex notes a parallel phenomenon in a South Indian context: 'Hierarchical relationships between brothers or clan brothers with regard to sacrifice are mirrored in the ranking of their goddesses' (2009: 35).

character and rank of the structural segments of the Kanjar community, in turn, likewise derive from the Deyārīs. Thus, divine and human worlds are not homologs that share a common organizational principle, be it the purity/pollution opposition, the measure of ‘power,’ or anything else. Rather, the structure and character of Kanjars’ divines and human spheres are based on their relation to the other vis-à-vis a common moral economy of relatedness.

In this chapter I have illustrated the terms of relatedness that structure the reciprocal, asymmetrical and dyadic bond of the ‘donor-servant’ relationship. I have argued that such relationships are, ideally, characterized by an exchange of gifts for services, whose asymmetry is basic to the ranked separation of and relation between the two parties. I have worked to show ethnographically that the donor-servant bond is a mutually constitutive relationship: both donors and servants are substantively manufactured vis-à-vis the other. The interdependence between Kanjars and their goddesses is at base not transactional, but commensal and consubstantive: the bond is formed not through a swap, but through the creation of one by the other party. In a very Maussian sense, gifts embody and transfer the essence of donors to the recipients,

incorporating in a very material sense the servants into the donor's body.⁶⁵ In this way, the character of the Kanjar community and the character of each one of its structural segments is inherited from donor-goddesses through common service to and incorporation into the deity.

More broadly, relationship to a donor is significant not only as a source of the servants' ascribed character, their *khandān*, but also as the bedrock of their status. Servants retain their worth in the eyes of others by belonging to a master of their own. And the standing of patrons is likewise derived from their servants, their rank dependent on the extent of their service-communities and the elaboration of services offered to them. In the context of relations between Kanjars and their Deyārīs, these principles appear in a spatially and temporally concentrated, ritually reified, form: the devotees literally consume the goddess's body and the body of the goddess is literally manufactured through prestations that are offered to her. The union between Kanjars and Deyārīs takes on further material form in the transformation of the goddess's body into the corpus of the community. This observation inverts Dumont's assertion that social relations in South Asia depend on, and are logically epiphenomenal to, the inherent and essential personal and communal identities. I hope to have shown that, conversely, personal and communal

⁶⁵ Mauss has of course postulated that together with gifts, donors (in India as much as anywhere else) give away a part of their selves (1967 [1925]: 57).

Chapter Three

identities result from social relationships and are, as such, subject to ongoing change. In the following chapter I turn to the question of rank-division within, and the consequent fragmentation of, the broader Kanjar community.

CHAPTER FOUR

PATRONS & RANK

From the old days real men have adhered to this rule: if we are your bards, we will only eat your food, will only take your money and we will not take from an unknown man. That has always been our rule.

Kalu Rām Kanjar

In this chapter the focus shifts from the Kanjars' divine patrons to their human *jajmāns* and the role which relations with the latter play in the organization of rank within the community. Just like the patron-goddesses, human patrons among Kanjars (and in northern India as a whole) are styled donors and referred to with *Anndātās*, the 'Givers of Grain,' the honorific used across northern India in reference to all those meant to protect and provide, be they gods, Rājputs, parents, District Collectors, or superiors in the civil service.¹ Relationships with patron-deities are largely stable arrangements which are easy to maintain in the ideal form described in the preceding chapter. They form the basis of established differences between and solidarities within the structural segments of the *jāti* (moieties, clans, families, households). Ties to human patrons are much more fickle: they range and change a great deal, and the identities of the patrons and the quality of relationships with them shifts with time and space. These variations prompt differentiations of rank and kind that lead to the fragmentation of the Kanjar community

¹ For usage in reference to Rājputs in Rajasthan, see Harlan (1992: 122), and Inden & Nicholas (2005 [1977]: 71) for uses in Bengali homes. For the use of the term in reference to state representatives and superiors in the state bureaucracy, see Roy (1965: 560), Saxena (1998: 499) and Khanna (2007: 36).

into discrete status-groups and, ultimately, into different *jātis* that no longer exchange or ally with one another.

4.1 JAJMĀNS AND DIFFERENCE AMONG KANJARS

Remembered connections to human patrons—referred to conventionally as *jajmāns*—are central to the identity of each Kanjar clan. Members of each clan trace links to patron-*jātis* of their own, including the Gujar, Mīṇā, Bhīl, Koḷī, and even Rājput. The status of patrons has a bearing on the rank of their subordinates, giving the servants of Rājputs hierarchical precedence over the servants of Mīṇās or Bhīls. It is not only the status of patrons, but also—no less significantly—the quality of the relationship to them that serves as a basic criterion for the assignment of rank. Relations between Kanjars and their human patrons are appraised, and the parties involved in them are ranked, in relation to the ideal form of the donor-servant relationship, whose principles I discussed in the previous chapter. The closer a relationship is to this ideal type, the greater its social value and the higher the rank of those involved. So, Kanjars who have managed to establish the most durable ties with specific patrons enjoy the highest status within the community and those who have failed to secure or lost such connections are the lowest. As I note in the introduction, the same principle applies to the evaluation and relative ranking of persons and groups in Rajasthani society more generally. The Kanjar case offers a clear example.

The Kanjar community in Rajasthan today is broadly segmented into three occupational segments: the bards referred to as Kanjar-Bhāṭs, the prostitutes called Bāñcṛās or Naṭ-Kanjars, and the thieves known simply as Kanjars. Each segment is ranked relative to the others. The thieving Kanjars, who have generally managed to secure the most durable ties with patrons of importance (Rājputs, Gujars and more recently police officers), enjoy the highest standing, and the prostitutes, who are engaged in the most haphazard array of relations with a great number of varied patrons, have the lowest. Today the three segments form largely discrete spheres of exchange and alliance, whose members do not in general collaborate professionally, eat together or intermarry.² Each of these three status-groups is further subdivided into sub-groups with different status, within which, in turn, the order of rank is always subject to negotiation. This arrangement is an order in flux. As the presence and forms of relations with patrons are continually shifting, with some groups losing and others acquiring patronage ties, the community is subject to ongoing fragmentary motion, through which segments of the community form distinct status groups, split away, move outwards, and ultimately form communities known by different names, such as Bhāṭ, Bāñcṛā or Naṭ, and which eventually come to form discrete *jātis*.

² Although economic, marital and commensal exchange is allowed within the limits of such communities, in practice, such interactions are nowadays largely restricted to the more localized brotherhoods (*birādarīs*).

4.2 THE RULES OF *BIRAT*

Bonds between patrons and servants are locally thought of as constituting an ongoing transfer of something known as *birat* from *jajmāns* to their subordinates. What Rajasthanis call *birat* (also *barat*, *bart*, *birt*, *brat*, and *brit*) is referred to more generally as *jajmānī* on the subcontinent. Locally, the concept is understood in the following way.

Every Indian person—whether an individual, a deity, or the corporate persons of family and *jāti*—has to have and do a number of things in order to maintain the order of propriety termed *dharm*.³ One must have a home, one must maintain cleanliness, one must have food, one must perform ritual and other caste-specific tasks, such as the performance of juridical and policing functions historically required of Rājputs. Many of these are normally performed by individual persons or shared within the family or caste-communities whose duty they are.

Means permitting, however, tasks can be delegated to specialists outside of one's own community. As more and more tasks are relegated to others, the person becomes a bigger and bigger donor and, as such, rises in society. In the words of one high-ranking Rājput,

a man is as great as the community [*samāj*] that he can support. We know that a man is great if five different Gujar clans alone bring milk for his children. Look at

³ Essentially every daily or ceremonial activity can be thus subcontracted, means permitting, to a servant. While traditionally in northern India, Rājput (and Rājput-like) *jajmāns* entertained twelve formal servant castes (see Section 1.4), even the most intimate 'household duties,' such as breastfeeding, or the cutting of hair and weeping in mourning were relegated to servants of aristocratic households.

the rulers of Mewar: they had a servant for each and every task—one man made their bed, one man tied their turban, and two noblemen guarded their bedroom. They had servants to do each tiny thing for them. Each man in Mewar was his servant, so we say that the Mewar *darbār* [ruler] is as great as Mewar.

The more servants are incorporated into the *jajmān*'s sphere of patronage, the greater his social corpus. Or, in the more elegant terms of one local adage, 'a man is as big as his circle of relations.'⁴ Just as the greatness and potency of the Kanjar patron-goddesses are relative to the magnitude of its community of devotees (see Section 3.3), the status of *jajmāns* is contingent on the expanse of their service-communities.⁵

The delegation of labor is conceptualized as the transfer of *birat*, which, although commonly translated as 'patronage,' is better understood as the 'right to service.' This right is conceived of as the ongoing transfer of *birat* from *jajmāns* to servants and which, as such, binds the two together. Much like the sacrificial substances, which pass as gifts from goddesses to their Kanjar devotees, *birat* is understood as something that intrinsically belongs to the donor and which is passed temporarily, if continually, as a sort of running loan, to the servants. The language of patronage reflects such thinking: the *jajmān* 'gives *birat*' (*birat detā*); the servants 'take *birat* into their keeping' (*birat rākh rākhte*); they 'fetch

⁴ *Jitnā baṛā ristā, itnā baṛā ādmī.*

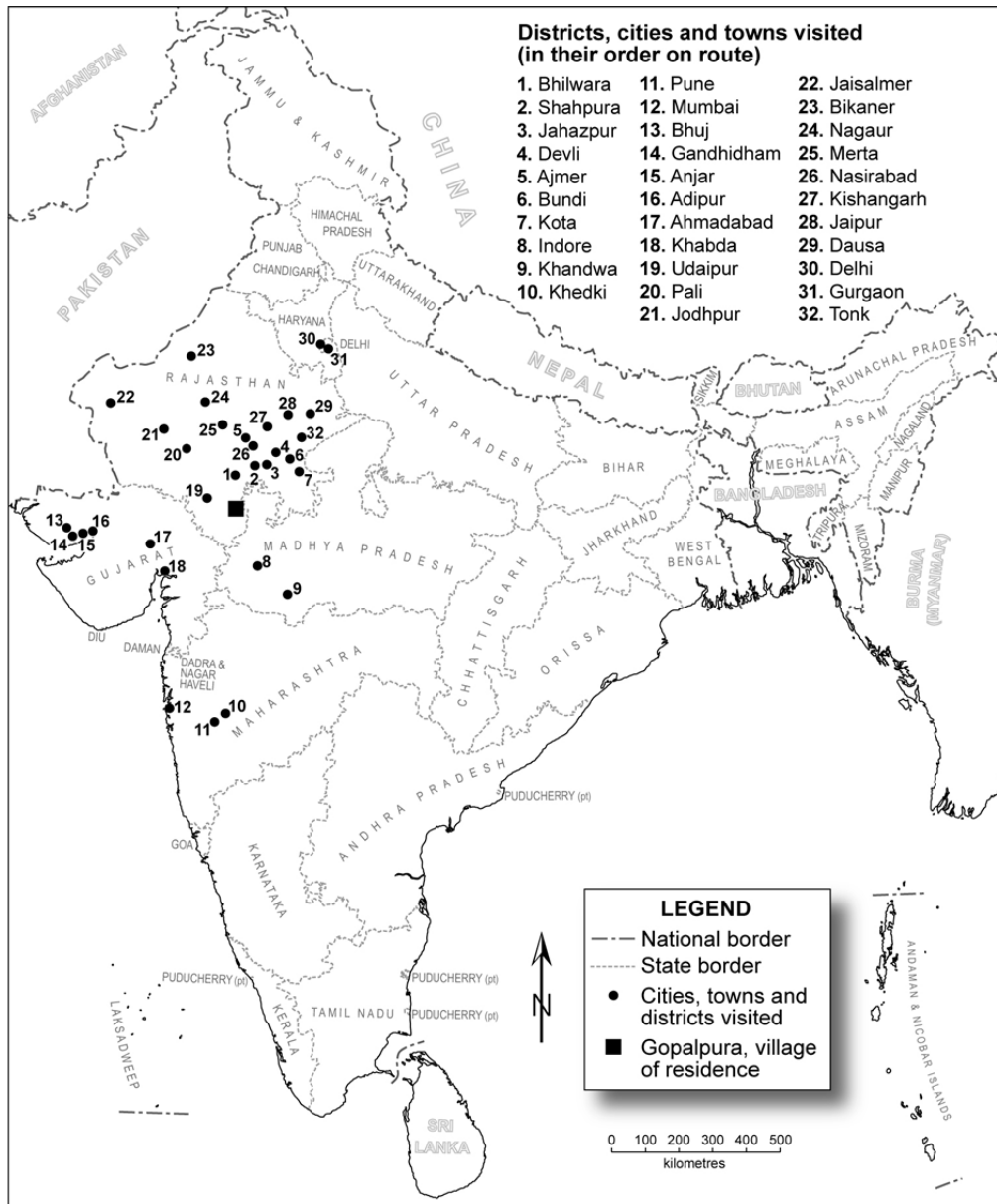
⁵ Thus, in some of the highest ranking Rājput families a great number of tasks, all the way down to mourning rites have been historically delegated to servants, who wept at funerals and cut their own hair in mourning on their *jajmāns*' behalf. At the other end of the status scale, even the lowliest of Indian communities, such as the Leatherworkers (Bhāmbhīs), have endeavored to patronize servants of their own (Snodgrass 2006). As we shall see in Chapter 5, even some upwardly mobile Kanjars have managed to patronize masons, sweepers, tanners, and even Brāhmaṇ priests.

their *birat*' (*birat māṅgte*) when they serve their patrons; and are thus referred to as 'beggars' (*māṅgne-wālās*) or 'those who do birat' (*biratkārīs*). *Birat* refers to both the right to service and the right to payment received in return; as such, it designates the reciprocal *exchange* of gifts for services rather than either the gift or the service.

Two hours' drive south of Cittaurgarh City is a large Kanjar village of almost two hundred homes. This village, which I shall call Gopalpura, houses one of the few remaining Kanjar-Bard communities in Rajasthan. Their business keeps the residents of the village on the road between the months of August and May, leaving Gopalpura vacant for most of the year. At the start of the month of Sāwan (July-August) every household in the village sets out on a 'begging tour' (*māṅgtā*), in the course of which each will traverse up to two thousand kilometers (by foot, bus, donkey, and horse cart); each will go as far as Bombay, Pune and Delhi, and visit up to three hundred villages, hamlets and suburbs on their way (see Map 4.1). To cover such distances, the bards keep a tight schedule, travelling almost every day and putting on performances, known as *khel*, most evenings.

The annual performance of *khel* is the central moment of affirmation of bonds between the Bards and their *jajmāns* and the key occasion for exchange between them.⁶ Much like the festival of Navarātri described in the previous chapter, the *khel* reifies the relationship between the two parties and, as such, encapsulated the fundamental principles

⁶ The bards may also attend their patrons' weddings or other life-cycle ceremonies. Routine visits, in the course of which the relationship between the two parties is played out in full, however, remain the focus of exchange with their *jajmāns*.



Map 4.1: Places visited annually by a Kanjar-Bhāt household from 'Gopalpura'

of donor-servant exchange. Like the Navarātri proceedings, *khel* is a mutually constitutive act: as the *jajmāns* swap gifts for the bards' services, each party reaffirms its role in the relationship and its identity and status *vis-à-vis* the other. The event is also a public exhibition of patrons' generosity and servants' fidelity, the qualities fundamental to the respectable standing of each. Whereas the bards display their exclusive allegiance to their *jajmāns*, the latter display their role as generous benefactors. The *khel* consists of four

parts: the genealogical recitation (*bardhānā*), the performance of panegyric verses (*śubhrāj*), a rope-walking routine, and the cataloguing of births, deaths, marriages, and asset transfers that took place in the previous year into the bards' ledger (*pothī*) (usually performed in that order). In return for their services, the bards receive a variety of payments and gifts: turbans, cloth, food, cash and occasionally a ram or a goat.

For *jajmāns*, the significance of *khel* goes beyond the upkeep of pedigree,⁷ providing them with a special opportunity to display their capacity as donors and highlight their social centrality in public. Publicity, which (as I shall discuss in greater detail in the following chapter) is central to the establishment of personal honor and integrity, is a crucial aspect of such performances. As a Gujar *jajmān* of one Kanjar-bard household in Gopalpura explained, 'a *jajmān* is as big as the turban he gives to his servants [*kamīns*]. When we give gifts [*ināms*] to our Bhāṭs, the village people see that we, Boṛ Gujars, are a great *jāt*. It is important that the village people see how much we give to our servants' (see Image 4.1 below).⁸ Generosity is the key feature of being a patron, whose status depends on his continual performance of the donor-role. The more one gives, the greater one is, so

⁷ Which, affording him recognition within circles of kith and kin, in itself is certainly an important aspect of the performance. For the *jajmāns*, the bards, as Komal Kothari put it, 'carry the weight of our genealogy on [their] heads.' The loss of bards and of pedigree can lead to great difficulties in procuring marriage partners for children and indeed the risk of being ostracized by the caste (Bharucha 2003: 220-21).

⁸ See, for instance, Dirks (1987) and Peabody (2003) for a comparable significance of public displays of largesse in the context of pre-colonial Indian polities.

that displays of generosity, whether in relations with clients or in the context of hospitality, are one of the main sources of prestige.

Unlike the inconspicuous, routine services of Sweepers or Washermen, the bardic *khel* provides an occasion for a spectacular display of *jajmānī* largesse. The consciously conspicuous performance, with its raucous drumming and singing, and the massive rope-walking contraption, which is invariably mounted in the most central part of the village, leaves no villager ignorant of the proceedings. As such, the bardic *khel* draws a great deal of attention to the grandeur and generosity of patrons—to their role as Bread Givers (Anndātās).⁹ So, for weeks prior to their arrival, a number of Gujars of my acquaintance incessantly reminded me of their bards' forthcoming visit, fearing that I would miss the event and fail to document it.

Gifts presented to bards on such occasions are highly varied, but typically include fixed sums of cash (*ināms*), turbans (*paghs*), and varied amounts of dress, cloth, cattle, food, smoke, and drink.¹⁰ While the cash sustains their business in practical terms, it is the

⁹ Kanjars are aware of such public quality of their work. As the man donning the turban in the above image (Image 4.1) explained, the size of their donations is relative to the size of the village in which their patrons reside. Whereas the residents of large multi-caste villages, who can exhibit their generosity before their neighbors, tend to give more, fearing the loss of their pedigree, the dwellers of single-household hamlets often refuse to pay at all. For similar reasons, many Cāraṇ genealogists of lower-than-Rājput communities, who make their genealogical entries in the privacy of their patrons' homes, have lost their patrons, who, having no audience for their donorship, mostly offer them no more than a customary cup of chai. This observation suggests that the significance of the display of donorship takes precedence over keeping of history as such.

¹⁰ While the patrons are quick to dole out chai, large turbans and bright-colored shawls to their clients, their feet often go cold when it comes to the gifts of cash, the transfer of which, although heavy on the *jajmāns'* pockets, is not nearly as useful a display as the tying of turbans and adds little to the *jajmāns'* public donor-



Image 4.1: A Kanjar-Bhāṭ from Gopalpura (left) and his Gujar *jajmān* (second from right) with his grandson and son. The Gujar insisted that I immortalize in print the ample turban and cash gifts wielded here by the bard.

clothes that most prominently display the bards' ties to their patrons. Garb akin to the

patrons' is one of the most important markers of servants' attachment to their *jajmāns*,

incorporation into whose *khandān* lies at the basis of their social worth. Clothing received

by servants—shawls, turbans, cloth, bodices, and skirts—is identical in its pattern to that

appeal. The bards, nevertheless, drive a hard bargain here, refusing to inscribe in their ledgers the genealogical detail of households that have not paid. To cajole their *jajmāns* into paying up, the bards placed a list of patron-households on display and announced payments as they were being made. Once received, the notes were visibly wedged into the ledger and then wielded before the villagers, my camera and the approving *jajmāns*. Within an hour, the bards succeeded in coaxing payments out of all fifteen households in one Gujar-village, walking away with an impressive total of 1500 Rupees. In 2008, when I recorded the occasion, each patron-household was obliged to give to their Bards 100 Rupees (a sum equivalent to a day's wages for manual labor on government-funded construction sites). Thus, in an evening the bards collected fifteen times a manual laborer's daily wages and half of a police Constable's month's salary, which at the time amounted to 3005 Rupees. As we shall see, such plentiful collections are not common and, few instances like this aside, bards often struggle to receive any cash or even gifts in kind.

worn by the patrons and indeed in many cases was once worn by the *jajmāns*. The manner in which these are worn (skirt length or the way in which the turban is tied), however, must differ (a matter insisted on by the patrons), lest the difference of status between donors and recipients be obscured. Thus, clad in their *jajmāns*' garb, communities are readily identifiable as servants of particular *jātis*.¹¹ As a key repository of communal identity on the subcontinent,¹² clothing, including the centrally important turban (*pagh*),¹³ transfers one of the most visible badges of belonging to the same *khandān*. As one Kanjar-Bhāṭ woman put it, 'when we put on the *jajmāns*' shawls, skirts and turbans, we wear their *khandān* and everybody knows that way that we are the Gujars' bards.' Pointing to her husband, dressed almost indistinguishably like his Gujar *jajmān* (see Image 4.2 below), she laughed: 'there is but a syllable's difference between Gujars and Kanjars.'¹⁴

¹¹ Most local villagers could name a travelling band of bards as servants of Gujars, Mīṇās or Bhīls.

¹² An old Indian adage tells us that a human being resides in five articles of clothing (turban, shirt or overcoat, trousers, shawl, and handkerchief, comprising a complete suit of clothes) and can, accordingly, thus be referred to as *pāñcō kapṛe*, or 'five items of attire.' Although modern anthropologists have given little attention to clothing, it has been observed that in India clothing and communal identity are intimately entwined. Srinivas, for instance, remarked that when a Nāyar man puts on his office job uniform—the shirt—he literally 'takes off' his caste and when he takes off the shirt in the evening, he puts his caste back on (1968: 123). For a detailed discussion of the significance of clothing in Indian identity negotiations, see Tarlo (1996).

¹³ On the significance of turban-exchange in Rajasthan, see, for instance, Peabody (1991) and Sahai (2006: 131).

¹⁴ Such sartorial union of servants and patrons is also common among servants of Rājputs, whose members are entitled to wear clothing like their noble *jajmāns*'. Colonial ethnographers observed with surprise low-caste people wearing the fine clothes otherwise worn by their rank superiors (e.g., Enthoven 1975 [1920-22], vol. 1: 343). Wiser likewise noted that in the north Indian village of Karimpur *jajmāns* often passed down clothing to their *kām karnewālās*, who entertained 'a smug satisfaction in that the clothes which were formerly worn by one of the Twice-Born, may bring them special protection' rather than fear that 'someone see them wearing second hand clothes' (1936: 104).



Image 4.2: A Kanjar-Bhāṭ (left) from Gopalpura with two of his Gujar *jajmāns*. Those who did not personally know the men depicted here could not tell them apart.

The transfer of *birat* engages servants in the fulfillment of their *jajmāns'* *dharm*, or intrinsic duty. With distinctive *dharm* and its fulfillment lying at the heart of Indian identities, *birat* thus passes a central aspect of patrons' selves to their service-communities, which are incorporated, much like the ancient Roman families are absorbed into the person of the *pater familias* (cf. Saller 1984), into their *jajmāns'* *khandān*. Thus, Gujars and Potters often claim that they belong to a Rājput or a Brāhmaṇ *khandān*. As one elderly Brāhmaṇ explained, 'when we take *birat* into our keeping, it is our responsibility [*jimmedārī*] to keep

our *jajmān's dharm*. As the keepers of his *dharm*, we become part of his *khandān*, and he must take care of us as if we were his children.’¹⁵

The status of both parties depends on the continued performance of their respective duties: on the patron giving and the servants performing the work required of them.

Patrons who renege on their duties have always risked public disgrace at the hands of their bards, who, if slighted by their patrons, could publicize their tightfistedness, either by threatening self-hurt, so as to exhibit the suffering caused by their patrons' neglect (see Section 2.3) or, more commonly, through discursive accusations of miserliness.¹⁶ An elderly Gujar told me that when he was a child his family feared the Bards' songs of ridicule, which the snubbed *Bhāṭṣ* might use to shame their patrons. Inasmuch as displays of generosity and praise maintain the status of donors, exposure of parsimony places it under threat. 'It was a matter of honor [*izzat kī bāt*],' said one elderly Gujar, 'that we were not thought of as miserly [*kanjūs*], so we always gave them [the Bards] their due.' Even if such tactics were

¹⁵ Such incorporation is often expressed in familial language, with *jajmāns* referred to as the 'Mother-and-Father' (*Mā-ī-Bāp*) who provide protection, sustenance and substance to their subordinates.

¹⁶ In his study of low-caste bards, Snodgrass has likewise argued that 'Bhats insult their Bhambhi [leatherworker] patrons ... primarily by drawing attention to their stinginess.' He documents a variety of devices by which bards advertise their patrons' stinginess to discourage them from failing to give:

If not properly rewarded for services rendered, I was told, my informants parade a skinny, pitiful-looking human figure of wood and cloth around the village ... Bhats, shouting abuses, yell, "Look at this poor, skinny man! Thanks to his patrons, he is starving! Look at how they take care of him!" In similar fashion, it was reported to me that my informants parade a dog around the village with a rope around its neck, shouting ironically, "Look what our generous patrons have given us!" (2006: 94).

The bards described by Snodgrass also use poetic insults, which speak about the tightfistedness of the patrons and the penury of their servants (ibid.: Chs. 3 & 5).

not always effective, and are increasingly less so these days, references to penny-pinching in insult-poetry derive their abusive power from the fact that generosity has been the benchmark of superior standing (cf. Harlan 1992: 122; Snodgrass 2006).¹⁷

In exchange for their generosity, the servants owe not only work, reverence and obedience, but—most importantly—loyalty to their *jajmāns*. As the unfaithfulness of his servants is treated as a sign of the patron's unwillingness or inability to satisfy or control his subordinates, the fidelity of servants is a matter of great significance for the *jajmāns*. As one village *ṭhākur* of my acquaintance, who still maintains a sizeable entourage of servants, explained,

If people see my workers [*kām karne wāle*] begging from somebody else, they will think: he is poor, stingy or weak; he has no control over his own servants. If my servants beg from somebody else, it is as if my wife and children are eating another man's food. The people who will see this will say that this man does not keep his *dharm*, that he does not keep his family well and that his household and his life had gone astray [*ghūm gaye*]. It is just like that with our servants. As long as we keep them, they must be true to us and take from no one else. This is their and our duty [*dharm*] and honor [*izzat*].

Because servants are incorporated into, and are thus constitutive of, the patron's service-family—and indeed his person—the integrity of the *jajmāns*' communities and of selves relies on the faithfulness of their service-communities. The *biratkarīs* may lose much of

¹⁷ Such abuse is increasingly ineffective, because *jajmāns*, as Snodgrass (2006) points out, are increasingly drawing on other sources of status and authority. Insofar as Rājputs, the ultimate donors, occupy the apex of social hierarchy in Rajasthan, the bards' *jajmāns* are encouraged to be, and ought to act as, generous benefactors. Common imagery presents the Brāhmaṇ as approaching the Rājput with his palms as a recipient of gifts and the Rājput approaching the Brāhmaṇ with his palms down in a giving gesture (Harlan 1992: 122).

their skill, remain idle for years or altogether abandon their hereditary occupation,¹⁸ and yet retain their *birat* and its contingent entitlements.¹⁹ Promiscuity on part of the servants can put the relationship in jeopardy, and accusations of unfaithfulness can be, and are in fact, often used by *jajmāns* to retract the rights of service.²⁰

The fracture of such ties can be catastrophic for service-communities, resulting in the loss of not only their livelihoods, but also of the key source of social standing. As we saw in Chapter 2, low-caste Bards who have no patrons quickly acquire the repute of vagrants who ‘eat from everyone’s hands.’ The fracturing of such ties amounts to a loss of integrity, identity and proper standing both within broader society and among their caste-mates.

¹⁸ The drummer families employed by the Fararpur Rājputs may deploy family members who cannot drum, or drum badly, to the weddings of their *jajmāns*, where they receive (irrespectively of their lack of skill) customary payments of food, clothing and cash at all festive events hosted by their *jajmāns*. Three Brāhmaṇ families once in the Fararpur Rāwats’ employ have forsaken their priestly profession for the business of law. Although employed now as advocates, they are locally known as ‘Rāo jī’s Brāhmaṇs’ and are invited by the Rāwat to life-cycle events and festival celebrations, an omission of invitation provoking much offence in their midst. Kothari likewise observed that among the Māṅganiyār musicians in western Rajasthan performers who sing badly or cannot sing at all still receive a customary sum of cash (called *nēg*) from their patrons (Bharucha 2003: 222). In his classic study of *jajmānī* relations, Wisner observed that *jajmāns* are often ‘stuck’ with poorly skilled servants, to whom they are bound by customary relations.

¹⁹ Such entitlements may include the patrons’ protection in local council and in court; invitations to weddings, funerary feasts and festival celebrations; and token customary gifts, among other markers of their continued relationship.

²⁰ When *jajmāns* are no longer capable or no longer wish to sponsor their servants, accusations of infidelity are the most commonly invoked means of breaking the relationship. Thus, I observed one Gujar family which was no longer interested in employing their Kanjar-bards chase away their clients with the following reproaches: ‘You eat from everyone! Where is your *birat*? Where is our *birat*? Go! We will no longer feed you.’ A number of Gujars around Fararpur, who have abandoned their *jajmānī* obligations toward the bards have likewise told me that they have done so because their Bhāṭs started to ‘eat from everyone’s hands.’ The erosion of such relationships has more to do with pedigree losing its significance as a marker of status or with the inability of *jajmāns* to continually sponsor their Bhāṭs. It is important, however, that the rhetoric of infidelity is invoked as a legitimate reason to break the ties.

Reflecting on the current erosion of their *jajmānī* ties, a young Kanjar-Bhāṭ remarked: ‘these days we are not only losing our daily bread, we are losing our honor [*izzat*] and our *khandān*.’ For mobile communities like Kanjar-Bards, who ‘roam about’ out of sight for most of the year, assertions of loyalty are important. Thus, much of their annual performance amounts to a pledge of allegiance to their patrons.²¹ The patrons, however, remain distrustful of their wandering workers, whose fidelity is ever threatened by prospects of profit that can be made on the side.²² Most Gujar patrons of the Gopalpura Kanjars suspected their Bhāṭs of entertaining other low-ranking communities. One said that

the Bards come and go and we are never sure whether they dance for others or remain true to us. People say that they see them dancing and singing for Bhīls. Who knows—maybe they are even dancing for Sweepers [Bhangīs]? Why should we feed them if they go around selling our *birat*? If we give them money, it is like feeding an unfaithful wife.

²¹ Each practicing Kanjar-bard family owns a much cherished ‘copper letter’ (*tāmbā pattar*), which ought to be presented only to patrons and from all others, which functions as a certificate that must be presented at every *khel* as evidence to the bards’ right to service (see Image .3 below; for a recently manufactured *tāmbā pattar*, see Image 4. in Section 4.2 below). Although such certificates are meant to be summaries of patrons’ family histories, their text is typically more a proof of the document’s authenticity. The short 364-word text of one such certificate contains eight assertions of the certificate’s authenticity and fourteen oaths (see Appendix III for transcription and translation of the document). The patrons’ genealogy (*bansāwalī*) recited during the *khel* is likewise punctuated with oaths of loyalty to the patrons, which serve as refrains after most every line. Analysis of the textual content of *khel* is beyond the scope of the present discussion, but will be written about in the coming months.

²² Within the market value of goods and services being typically much higher than what workers receive for their work from their *jajmāns*, and hereditary patronage altogether dwindling these days, many are keen to make a few extra rupees on the side. As the market price of goods and services is typically much higher than that workers get from their patrons, such sales are potentially profitable business. A study of *birat* exchange at the Kṛṣṇā temple in Nathdwārā (western Mewar) shows that the market price for pottery exceeded in some cases that received from the patron-priests by fifty fold (Jindel 1976 129-30).

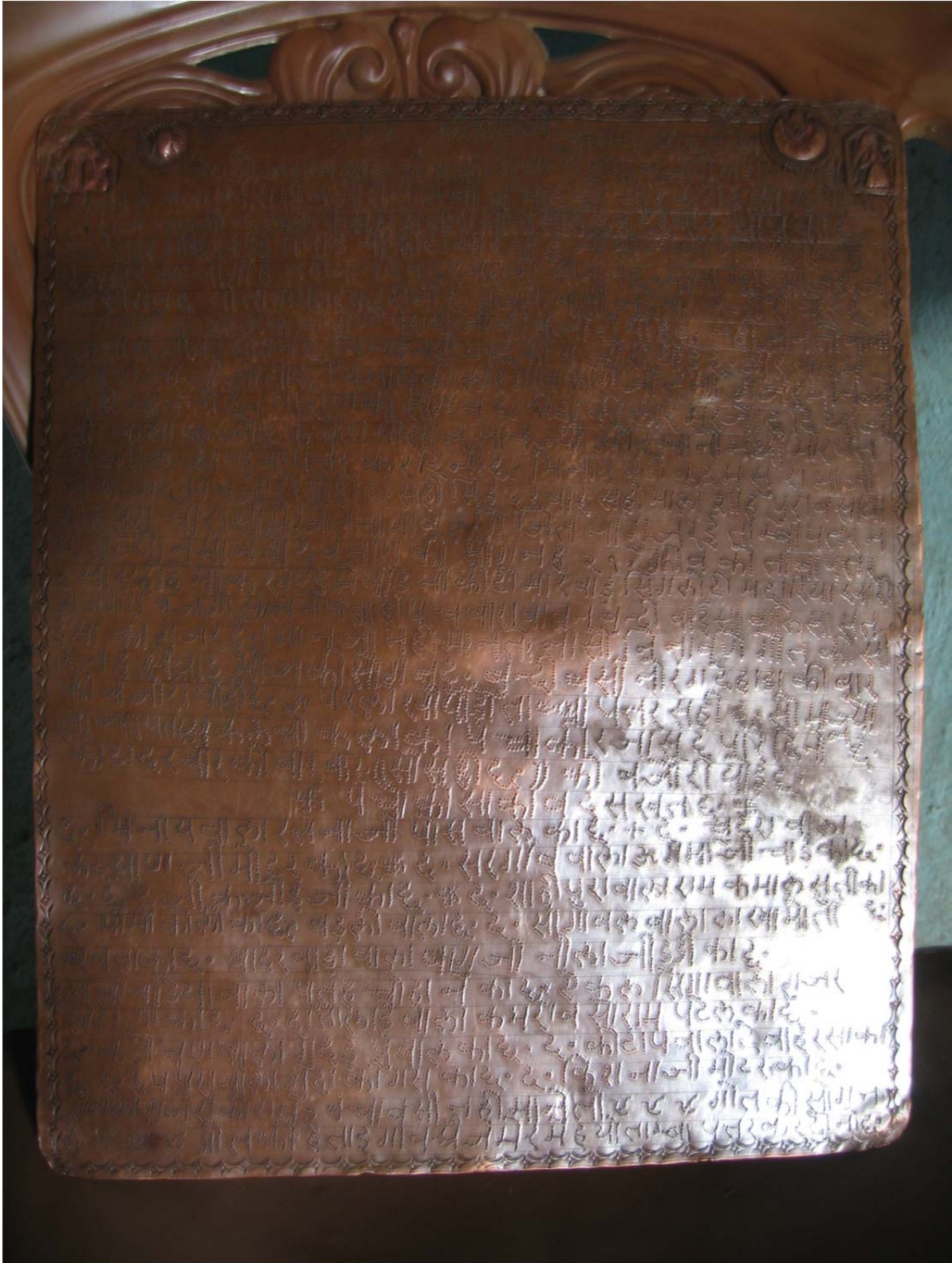


Image 4.3: A *tāmbā pattar* (copper plate) for Bor Gujar clan in possession of a Kanjar-Bhāt family from Gopalpura. The plate is a record of the genealogy and includes, as such, both the divine and human ancestors of the patron-family. See Appendix III for a transcription and translation of this tablet. Compare to a more recently manufactured plate (Image 4.6 below).

4.3 TIES UNDONE

Many *jajmāns* no longer patronize Bards. Pedigree has lost much of its former currency for upwardly mobile communities, many of whom now look to education or political and bureaucratic connections as sources of status. Hereditary ties between upwardly mobile low castes and their Bards have thus been substantially undone (Snodgrass 2006). Whereas fifty years ago a Kanjar-Bhāṭ caravan was a common sight on the byways of Rajasthan, today the Gopalpura Kanjar are the last Kanjar-Bards left in Mewar. According to the elders of Gopalpura, about half of the *jajmāns* whom they entertained twenty years ago no longer employ them, and those who still do give much less: cash needs to be pried out of their pockets and gifts of cattle are virtually nonexistent. The generosity described above is today largely a shadow of bygone days.²³

Many bards, however, have found new ways to earn a living and occasionally to prosper financially. Over the past few decades the Kanjar-Bhāṭs have increasingly supplemented, or altogether replaced, the dwindling incomes that they collect from their *jajmāns* with sales of their services as entertainment in villages that they visit on their

²³ The bards told me that the Gujars, whose generosity I describe, constituted one of only three patron-communities that still pay an appropriate (*khandaṇī*) amount for their services. When patrons refuse to give, the bards usually continue to come for another few years, each time cajoling or castigating their patrons into generosity. Near Fararpur I met a family of Kanjar-Bhāṭs from western Madhya Pradesh, who have been coming to the area and leaving empty-handed for the fourth year. They said this was the last year that they would come to Fararpur. If their trips, however, persist to be futile, they eventually give up and the bond is thus lost. Perhaps somewhat pessimistically, the young Bhāṭs from Gopalpura thought that their exchanges with the *jajmāns* will not survive another three years.

annual tours.²⁴ One old woman from Gopalpura remembered this shift, which took place when she was a child:

One year when there was a drought we came to serve our *jajmāns* and they sent us away. They said—go, we have no money and no food to give you, go! Still we did our work. We set up the rope and I danced for them, but they did not come out to see and nobody gave us even a cup of chai. The same happened in the next village and in another one. Then we had no grain with which to make bread. So, we went and sang some songs in a Bhīl encampment nearby.²⁵ And many Bhīls came and they liked our work, so they gave us some vegetables and some wheat. And so our stomachs were filled.

²⁴ Snodgrass (2006) has described the various niches for employment that bards find in the modern tourist and hotel businesses.

²⁵ Serving as entertainers, rather than bards, Kanjars sing a mixture of local and popular Bollywood tunes, dance and occasionally give a rope-walking performance.



Image 4.4: A Kanjar-Bhāt in front of his house in Gopalpura. The ground floor was built in the late 1950s and the upper story was added ten years ago. The owner, here posing with his donkey, recently bought three *bīghās* of land, where he now cultivates peanuts.

Such work can be quite lucrative. Villagers are often happy to share a basketful of grain and a few rupees for an evening of entertainment and a night's performance in a small village can bring in few kilos of wheat and up to a couple of hundred Rupees. With the audience expanded in each location from a handful of patron-households to sometimes the population of entire multi-caste villages, daily collections often amount to somewhere between one and three hundred Rupees. So, at the end of their 2007-2008 'begging tour' one family from Gopalpura brought home (according to them) almost twenty thousand Rupees.²⁶ Since Independence, a number of Kanjars in Gopalpura have been able to erect *pakkā* (solid, proper brick) houses and some even managed to buy small plots of land (see Image 4.4).

Such wealth, however, comes at a dear cost, as the Bhāṭs gain the disrepute of beggars, both in local society and among their caste-mates. Other Kanjars say that, having forfeited their *birat* to fill their bellies, which they fill with everyone's—even the Sweepers²⁷—gifts, the Bhāṭs have become 'half-castes' (*ādhi-jāts*). Many say that, having betrayed their *jajmāns*, they lost their *khandān* and with it, their caste. As one Lakshmipura Kanjar explained, 'they take everyone's gifts [*dāns*] and way they eat everyone's *khandān*. So, what is their *khandān*? What is their *jāt*? They have no *jāt* and we do not see them as Kanjars any longer. Only drunkards and no one else in our brotherhood [*birādarī*] sells [

²⁶ Equaling approximately GBP 250 at the time.

²⁷ Kanjars maintain commensal superiority over Sweepers: they give to, but do not accept food from them.

becte] their daughters to them.’ Respectable Kanjar-thieves indeed altogether avoid contact with the Gopalpura Bhāṭs, and only the poorest and most degraded Kanjar-thieves give their daughters in marriage to the Bhāṭs for an exorbitant brideprice.

The collapse of the Bards’ standing among Kanjars has led to a dramatic shrinking of their intra-caste exchange and alliance relations. The community previously maintained relations—gave and took women, lent to and borrowed money from, visited, and exchanged information and contacts—with a wide community of Kanjars, going as far afield as Agra, Indore and Pune. Today, because most Kanjars in Mewar are in the thieving trade and consider themselves above the now degraded bards, the extent of the Bards’ marriage and professional bonds has dramatically shrunk: over the past two generations, nearly 90% of marriages in Gopalpura have taken place with two neighboring Kanjar-Bhāṭ communities and most of these (60.6%) are confined to the village.²⁸

²⁸ I include in this count marriages between Kanjar-Bhāṭs from Gopalpura who are married, but whose children do not yet live with their spouses. As village elders insist, before the coming of British Rule (*Angrejō kā Rāj*), the Kanjars of Gopalpura ‘did nothing but steal,’ taking up the profession of bards over the course of the past century. The village started as a temporary encampment of one (Dasāwat clan) family, whose men became genealogists to some local Gujars in the latter decades of the nineteenth century, when demand for the production of pedigrees among actively Rājputizing communities was at its peak. Thus, in the late nineteenth and early decades of the twentieth century, the Kanjar-Bhāṭs acquired a growing number of *jajmān*-families. According to village elders, by the time Independence arrived, they had so many Gujar villages whose records they kept, that they could no longer service them all, passing on some of their patrons-villages to a family of (Singhāwat clan) Kanjars, who were part of their marriage circles. Today’s residents of Gopalpura are descendants of these two families, which were, in the wake of Independence, permanently settled, along with another (Udāwat clan) Kanjar-bards to Mīṇās.

Although the residents of Gopalpura accept their inferior standing,²⁹ they are loath to admit to working for anyone but their patrons. It was only a number of bottles into one long evening that I managed to have a more candid discussion of the transition to the new form of their trade. Here too, however, it was important for them to prove that they continued to engage in *birat*-like ties. That evening, one young man explained that their work for different communities was a variant of *birat* relations, called *āyat*. *Āyat*, he said, was just like *birat*, with the exception that servants could receive gifts from a wide range of *jajmāns*. As he went on, the Kanjars grew uneasily silent. They did not speak, as my Kanjar later explained, because they knew that this explanation of *āyat* was a lie, since that evening it was I who bought the spirits, it was not good for him to mislead me so.

Āyat refers to short-lived or contractual exchange of services for money or gifts that does not bind the parties into a lasting *birat* relationship (Kothari 1994: 206). As such, *āyat* is morally opposed to *birat*. Whereas the durable and orderly *birat* relationships are thought of as the bedrock of loyalty, trust and good social standing, *āyat* relationships are a corrupting force, which leads to equally unhinged and jumbled personhood and immorality. Rajasthanis thus cite the *āyat*-like nature of Merchants' (Bāṇiyās') transactions as a source of their moral decrepitude: 'it is because, as we say, they take from all and give

²⁹ When my host from the thieving community visited Gopalpura together with me, his food was cooked separately from the rest.

to all [*sabhī kā lete, sabhī ko dete*] that we do not trust the Bāṇiyās.³⁰ Āyat, then, is not simply a variant of *birat*, but its moral antithesis, with the standing of Bards who have become increasingly involved in such non-binding multiple transactions plummeting among their caste-mates.

The patrons' gifts of food, clothing and cash have social worth for the recipients—as containers of the patron's *khandān* and vessels of servants' incorporation into the patron's community—only insofar as they are made in the context of an exclusive and long-lasting relationship. With gifts containing and carrying people's nature, the regulation of their transfer is central to the establishment of status. The integrity of persons and communities relies on their receipt of substance from a known and restricted circle of patrons, ideally a single patron, with whom one would maintain an exclusive, long-term relationship. This is why beggars and vagabonds, who receive gifts from a motley assortment of sources, are composed of a motley array of substances and thus to lack physio-moral integrity and social worth as such. As one Rājput explained,

When a person eats from one *jajmān*'s hand, we know what kind of person they are and we give them respect. But when people start to take from everyone, confusion [*garbar*] happens in their bodily nature [*prakṛti*] and we don't know any more what they are like or what they may do. This is why it is important for workers to serve and eat only from [one's] *jajmān*.

³⁰ A Rājput of my acquaintance.

While gifts from strangers are a threat to one's status, and are accepted with much apprehension,³¹ donations from regular patrons are sought after as sources of social attachment, identity and social worth.

4.4 THIEVES AND TARTS

In contrast to thieves, Kanjars involved in prostitution, who are employed by an unrestricted array of men, rank lowest among Kanjars. Historically, many Kanjar groups in Pakistan and northern India have been, and continue to be, involved in prostitution (see Section 2.2).³² In Rajasthan, they are commonly known as Bāñcrās, Naṭ-Kanjars or simply Naṭs.³³ While some sell sex for ten Rupees in villages and on highways, a number of such groups (mainly in central and northern Rajasthan) have attracted wealthier clientele and are now financially much better off than the Kanjars in thieving and bardic trades. The

³¹ Thus, while my Kanjar host's young son always keenly gobbled up chocolates, which I, as his 'aunt' presented him with, on the way to his grandparents' home he refused to accept from me food that I wanted to buy for him in a roadside chai shop, where it was clear to all that I was not his relative and thus not his legitimate senior donor.

³² For most, prostitution is a family business run by members of and within the confines of the household, so that entire families, rather than the sex workers alone, participate in the trade. While the heads of the household, both women and men, manage the business, men in subordinate positions (the sons, brothers and husbands of prostitutes) take over the duties of wives. The scope and purpose of this ethnography does not leave room for a detailed discussion of Kanjars in the sex business, which I will describe in a separate piece. See Agrawal (2002; 2004) for a description of a similar arrangement among a related Beḍiyā community in Jaipur and Brown's (2006) ethnography of Pakistani Kanjars in the sex trade.

³³ 'Bhāṭ' and 'Naṭ' are both terms used in reference to low-caste bards, like the Kanjars, who are often called Naṭ-Bhāṭs. As a title used in reference to elite bards, Bhāṭ is a more respectable name than Naṭ, which is commonly used for low ranking street performers. Thus, Snodgrass observes that when the community of low-caste bards in Udaipur split into two sections, one serving a newly Sanskritized higher ranking Bhāmbhīs and another lower-ranking Raigars, the former took on the title of Bhāṭ and the latter of Naṭ (2006: 70). The separation of Kanjars into bard-Bhāṭs and prostitute-Nāṭs confirms the ranked difference between the two segments of the community.

latter, however, see them as a 'fallen' (*gire hue*) lot and do not (at least openly) maintain commensal or marital ties with them.³⁴ Sexual promiscuity as such is not cited as the main



Image 4.5. Anthropologist with a prostitute from a Kanjar-Naṭ family in northern Rajasthan

reason for the dishonor of Kanjars in the sex trade.³⁵ Rather, the key cited cause of such Kanjars' fall lies in their engagement in relations with a motley set of 'feeding hands' and

³⁴ Girls from the thieving and bardic segments of the community are, occasionally, married to Kanjar-Naṭs, who, ever in search of housewives and prospective working girls, offer extremely high brideprice payments (some reaching in recent years 150,000-200,000 Rupees, equaling approximately £2000-3000). If girls are given to Kanjar-Naṭs in marriage (frequently in order to cover a debt, build a house or to pay advocates' fees), Kanjars in her native community say that the parents have 'sold' (*bec diyā*) rather than 'married' (*byāv kiyā*) her, a tragic transaction that rendering her lost to her kin, as if she married a Kadzā (non-Kanjar). It turned out that in Lakṣmīpurā two girls have thus been sold to the Naṭs over the past decade. Such sales, however, were not mentioned and the girls were excluded from the otherwise faithful enumeration of kin by my hosts.

their communion with a random assortment of their different donors' substances. As one Kanjar-Bhāṭ put it, 'we see it this way: because Naṭ-Kanjars have started selling their daughters to anyone who comes to them—Bhīls, Leatherworkers [Balāīs], Drummers [Ḍholīs], Sweepers [Bhangīs]—they have forsaken their *khandān* and we no longer accept them as our kin [*ristedār*].' Unlike Kanjar-Bhāṭs, who have retained (in however attenuated a form) ties with *jajmāns* and continue to claim a degree of respect within the broader Kanjar community, the Naṭ-Kanjars claim no particular or durable ties of patronage. In a desperate bid to prove themselves worthy to higher standing Kanjars, whose daughters they continue to attempt to marry (and for whom even very high brideprice is not always sufficient compensation for the loss of a daughter's reputation), some Naṭ-Kanjars have fabricated copper letters (*tāmbā pattars*) as evidence of their bonds with hereditary *jajmāns* (see Image 4.6 below). Such 'evidence,' however, fools few. So, one villager who was approached by the Naṭ-Kanjars with a marriage proposal told me that 'the certificate was "fake" [*nakli*] because the copper was too shiny and the engraving too sharp. My son,' he added, 'could read it. What kind of bardic language is that? We know their work. They can show us thousands of copper letters and we will still not give them our daughters.' He is of course right: the script and the quality of the tablet are indeed suspiciously modern.

³⁵ Among Kanjars, regulations of sexual intercourse apply only to relations with other Kanjars, as it is only such relations that are subject to the rule of the caste *pañcāyat*. Men are permitted to have casual relations with women of other castes. Relations with men in other castes result normally in the exclusion of women from and the severance of all ties with the Kanjar community.



Image 4.6: The *tāmbā pattar* (copper certificate) of a Kolī clan in possession of a Naṭ-Kanjar family in northern Rajasthan. The certificate provides a synopsis of the *jajmān*’s genealogy, insistence on the relationship between mythical ancestors of Kolīs and Kanjars, and a list of senior clansmen from the patron-community. The stated date of the certificate is 1351 *Vikram Samvat*, or 1294 CE. Compare this to another certificate of the sort used by the bards in Gopalpura and thought to be authentic (Image 4.3 above).

The thieves comprise a status-elite, if not an economic elite, among Kanjars in Rajasthan. While Brāhman̄s and Merchants may treat Kanjar-thieves as depraved vagrants, their own caste-peers respect them as men with proper and durable bonds with respectable patrons. As I suggest in the first chapter, the sustained success of thieving business among communities like the Kanjar had relied historically on the protection of local authorities, be they village communities or the landholding families of Rājput chiefs. It still does today. Although in practice allegiances between thieves and their masters have often been highly

unstable, Kanjars conceive of thieving as work that necessarily requires the protection of patrons and the engagement in *birat* bonds. The thieves with the reputation of men tied into patronage bonds enjoy a privileged standing among their peers. As one resident of Lakshmipura explained,

Without a *jajmān*, a thief [*cor*] is not a real [*pakkā*] thief. He is a thief for a day [*yek roj kā cor*]*—*a new player [*neyā khelārī*]. If you have no *jajmān*, you will be caught in a minute and—*furrr*—you go to prison! Or another man will kill you and nobody will say a word ... But if a man is a thief and his grandfather and great-grandfather were thieves, we know that he has a master [*mālik*] and he has got *birat*, so we give him respect. Everyone in our *jāt* knows that our forefathers [*bujrak*] were thieves since the days of Rām. And that is how everyone knows that we are true and original [*khandānī*] Kanjars and men of honor [*izzat-wāle*]

Historically, unlike bards patronized by the lowly Bhīls, Gujars, Mīnās, or Mālīs, many Kanjar thieves had enjoyed, and continue to enjoy, the privileged protection of local political authorities—Rājput chiefs, important landowning families, and more recently the state via the police—connections with whom continue to form the bedrock of the thieves' superior standing within their *jāti*. The differences and changes in such bonds form the basis of rank-difference within the thieving community. The following discussion of status negotiations among the Fararpur Kanjar-thieves illustrates this point.

4.5 THE OUTLAWS OF FARARPUR

The families of two Kanjar brothers arrived in Fararpur some ninety years ago at the behest of its Chief Noble (Rāwat Sawāi), who employed them for quelling the peasant uprising that broke out on his territories. In the early 1920s, the Rāwat faced both a large-

scale peasant uprising (*kisān andolan*) and British pressure for its speedy suppression. In 1921, the peasant movement, which started twenty-four years earlier on a neighboring estate, erupted in Fararpur.³⁶ Farmers demanded the abolition of excessive taxes (*lāgs* or *lāgats*) and unremunerated labor-dues (*begār*) levied by *jāgīrdārs*, and the reinstatement of the right to the cultivation of opium poppy.³⁷ Fearing the spread of such unrest to their territories (perceived as the beginnings of a revolution akin to the Russian), British administrators pressured the head of Mewar and its individual nobles to quickly quell the uprising.³⁸ Responsibility for policing and punishing the peasants was largely placed on the nobles, who, failing to deliver, faced retribution at the hands of the British.³⁹ Local chiefs

³⁶ The *kisān andolan* that broke out in Mewar was the first large-scale peasant uprising in India, and is thought to be one of the major harbingers of the Independence movement. For an overview of archival resources pertaining to the peasant movement in Fararpur, see Sharma (2005: 58-60).

³⁷ NAI. 1923. Fortnightly memorandum No. 45 for the period ending 31st May, 1921. Foreign & Political (Secret), File No. 428-P. The farmers of Fararpur (mostly of Dhākaṛ caste) appealed to the Mahārāṇā, refusing, once their pleas were left unheard, to pay land revenue. A staging of one meeting in protest in Lakshmipura resulted in the arrest and injury of several farmers (NAI. 1923. Report on Disturbances in the Begun Estate in May, 1921. Foreign & Political [Secret], File No. 428-P).

³⁸ In a letter to the Agent to the Governor General of Rajputana, the Resident in Mewar wrote:

Mewar is becoming a hot bed of lawlessness. Seditious emissaries were teaching people that all men are equal. The land belongs to the peasants and not the state or landlords. It is significant that the people are being urged to use the vernacular equivalent to the word 'comrade' instead of the customary honorific styles of address. His Highness is said to have been threatened to be meted the fate of the 'Czar'. The Movement is mainly anti-Maharana, but it might soon become anti-British and spread to adjoining British area (NAI. 1923. Report on Disturbances in the Begun Estate in May, 1921. Foreign & Political [Secret], File No. 428-P).

When after a year of negotiations the Rāwat of Fararpur came to an agreement with his farmers, disapproving of this 'Bolshevik Settlement,' the British center sent out its troops, killing two and temporarily putting down the revolt (Gupta & Bakshi 2008: 328).

³⁹ The practice of punishing the Chiefs for crimes committed on their territories was not new. In 1864, the Fararpur Rāwat Megh Singh III was sentenced to nine months of imprisonment and levied a fine of 5,000

were largely incapable of summoning and sustaining a reliable force to contain the rebellion.⁴⁰ Occasional public persecutions achieved little more than further provocation of the rebellion.⁴¹ In order to put more sustained pressure on their peasantry, the nobles invoked the old method of using thieves as a strong hand, employing an increasing number of thieving communities (mainly Moghiās, Sānsīs and Kanjars) to harass the farmers into submission (Pande 1974: 52; Surana 1983: 131; Ram 1986: 26). Such groups were set to steal anything from a single goat (*Navīn Rajasthan* 1922) to twelve oxen along with cartloads of fodder (*Rajasthan Kesari* 1921: 1).

Prior to their arrival in Fararpur, the brothers were employed by a close relative and a fellow senior clansman of the Fararpur Rāwat on another estate, where Kanjars were employed (together with Sānsīs and Bāgrīs) as the chief's marauders. Around 1920, however, a dispute broke out between the Kanjar and Sānsī segments of this community, resulting in the death of one Sānsī man and the expulsion of Kanjars from the area. The group, however, was soon employed by the Fararpur Rāwat and the Kanjar brothers thus remained in the service of the same Rājput clan.

Rupees by the British authorities as punishment for *sātī* (widow immolation) committed by a woman on his *jāgīr* (RSAB. *Rajputana Agency Record*. 1868. [Sati], No. 74).

⁴⁰ Anop Singh requested Mahārāṇā's help for armed assistance, but to no avail (Saxena & Sharma 1972: 268). The Rāṇā could not provide such aid, himself appealing to the Resident for military assistance (NAI. 1923. Fortnightly Memorandum No. 48 for the Period Ending 15th July, 1921. Foreign & Political [Secret], File No. 428-P).

⁴¹ In 1921, Anop Singh, for instance, imprisoned a few protestors and staged public floggings and beatings with shoes. This, however, led to further and more violent protest (*Rājasthān Kesari* 1921).

The chief of Fararpur settled them together with the other thieves in his employment, giving the newly arrived Kanjars two *bīghās* of land in a settlement (which I will call Dusra Khera) with Kanjars already resident in the area. The newcomers soon brawled with the resident Kanjars, killing one of their men. As Kanjars explain today, the skirmish resulted from the local Kanjars' fear of being displaced by the newcomers in their role as the Rāwat's thieves. As one elderly Kanjar from Lakshmipura put it, 'it was like a conflict between two wives when the old one fears, when a man brings [another] woman, that he will now only feed his new wife. But it is not like that and [the two wives] soon learn to live together and the man feeds them both.' Bringing together the rival parties, the Rāwat adjudicated their dispute, deciding that the plaintiffs present him with a customary Buffalo Load Payment,⁴² in return for which he gave them two *bīghās* of land fifteen kilometers away from Dusra Khera just outside the multi-caste village of Lakshmipura. In order to prevent further dispute, he set up a territorial boundary, which he demarcated with a cenotaph for the victim (see Image 4. below), which was to divide the hunting and thieving beats of the two families. As one woman explained,

Rāwḷu jī [Rāwat] divided our land [*deś bāñṭ kar diyo*]. He explained to us [*hamjotā karāyā*]: you will stay on this side and you will stay on the other. From that day on, we do not go there and they do not come here, we do not hunt pigeons there and we do not take their wives; we do not eat or drink with them and they do not eat or

⁴² In Rajasthan the Buffalo Load Payment (*pāḍā bharan nazarānā*) is a traditional form of fine, consisting of a young buffalo and the goods that could be loaded onto its back

drink with us [*vake-māke koī aṅ-pan nahī hai*]; and we do not give and we do not take; they do not come to our *pañcāyat* [council] and we do not go to theirs.



Image 4.7: The Kanjar cenotaph, constructed by the Rāwat of Fararpur in the 1920s, which still marks the dividing line between the territories of the two Kanjar *birādarīs* in Fararpur.

The cenotaph still divides the territories occupied by the two Kanjar families, which are now part of two different brotherhoods (*birādarīs*), or communities bound by professional and marriage alliances. Until this day, as a rule, the two families do not form professional or marriage bonds, hold common *pañcāyats*, hunt, or thief on each other's lands. Local

police are well aware of this arrangement, which they invoke as evidence in their investigations. Thus, a report on a burglary kept in the Dusra Khera police outpost tells us that ‘the village X is part of the Dusra Khera Kanjars’ [thieving] territory, so that the burglary [which occurred in village X] must have been committed by a Dusra Khera Kanjar gang.’ Thieves themselves of course put such wisdom to their own advantage by thieving on their neighbors’ beats and thus laying blame on the other *birādarī*. Transgressions of the sort cause a great deal of conflict, which continually reinforces the hostile divide between the two *birādarīs*.

While in fact playing an important role in the Kanjar community, the Rāwat publicly denied any relations to Kanjars. Although the peasants knew very well at whose behest the thieves committed the burglaries, responsibility could not be easily pinned on the chief. In response to the king’s inquiry into the theft of twelve oxen, of which the farmers accused him, the Rāwat denied any connections to or indeed any ability to control local Kanjars. He said that ‘there are many lawless bands that wander in and out of my territory committing dacoities. I have no knowledge of their whereabouts and certainly no control over their activities.’⁴³

The newly arrived Kanjars’ tenure in the Rāwat’s employment was to be short-lived. The Rāwat’s ongoing conflict with the center and the ultimate fallout between him and the Mewar Mahārāṇā Bhupal Singh led to the Rāwat’s consequent exile to Mount Abu (where

⁴³ NAI. 1923. Foreign & Political (Secret), File No. 428-P.

he remained until his death in 1947) and the assumption of crown control over Fararpur in 1930, which left local Kanjars without a master. Kanjars' fidelities to the Rāwat, however, outlasted their employment: today the Kanjar gangs continue to leave his property untouched on their raids and gang leaders still say that they are 'always prepared to serve him.' Kanjar women veil (*ghūnḡhaṭ lagāte*) from the present-day Rāwat, signaling their belonging to his 'family' (*parivār*) of servants.⁴⁴ Although the present-day Rāwat of Fararpur has maintained few ties with his family's erstwhile servants,⁴⁵ Kanjars still remember that on several occasions he protected them from the police.⁴⁶

The legacy of such alliances remains a matter of privilege within the Kanjar community, in which the Dusra Khera and Lakshmipura Kanjars are still referred to as *rāo sahāb jī ke kamīn* (the Rāwat's servants). This accolade marks their superiority over the Kanjar-thieves patronized by lesser Rājputs and other lower-status communities. Their

⁴⁴ Veiling indicates belonging to the same community. For veiling from one's agnates in the conjugal households or the clan, see Jacobson (1974), Sharma (1978; 1980), and Raheja & Gold (1994: 114). Thus, the Kanjars' veiling from the Rāwat and his family recognizes him as a member of one patron-servant 'family' with them. The recognition of the Rāwat as head of a community is implied in the more widespread veiling from him by women from the Rāwat's service-communities. For analyses of veiling as a means of structuring relations *within* communities, see Anderson (1982) in an Afghan context and Abu-Lughod (1986) among the Bedouins.

⁴⁵For most of his adult life the current Rāwat of Fararpur was involved in national politics and lived in Delhi, where he served as a Minister and later as member of the State Legislative Assembly.

⁴⁶ Many chiefs who remained in the area maintained ties with their Kanjar servants. Ties between Kanjars and the Rāwat, which lay dormant for more than six decades, may soon be renewed because as the Rāwat has now moved back to Fararpur, where he has converted a portion of his family fort into an international tourist hotel. Assuming that the Kanjars may soon prove themselves useful as a security force, the Rāwat's sons have been keen to re-establish their relationship with the community, indeed asking me to introduce them personally to local Kanjar leaders.

superior standing is most clearly manifested in the disparity of brideprice amounts collected during marriages.⁴⁷ Brideprice differential is the clearest indicator of status-difference. As I note in the previous chapter (Section 3.2), Kanjars practice bilateral cross-cousin marriage, ideally ‘swap marriage’ (*adle-badle kī śādī*), in which households exchange brides of the same generation. The egalitarian ethic within the community demands that the value given and received by each party in this exchange should be equal so as to maintain rank equality between the families. ‘Value’ that is transferred at marriage comprises two key variables: status (*izzat*) and brideprice (*tsāri*).⁴⁸ Status equals who ‘swap’ brides also exchange the same amount of brideprice, bringing the transaction to a zero-sum. This is the morally ideal, ‘uncalculated,’ kind of marriage. Any difference in the status of two families must be compensated for with greater bridewealth: the lower-status family pays a higher brideprice and the higher a family’s status, the lower the bridewealth that it will pay and the higher the bridewealth that it will receive.⁴⁹ As one man explained, ‘if you have *izzat*, then you will receive a high brideprice and you will give little, but if your family has little *izzat*, it is the opposite: you give a lot and receive little.’ In short, status is

⁴⁷ Other markers of their superior status include rules of comportment, communication and eating precedence, an involved discussion of which is beyond the scope of this thesis.

⁴⁸ Other variables of lesser importance, such as the qualities of intelligence and resourcefulness of the bridegroom or industriousness and beauty of the bride, are taken into consideration in marriage arrangements.

⁴⁹ The ‘swap-marriage’ is a common practice among Afghan Pashtuns, who much like Kanjars value equality and recompense lacking status with greater brideprice. Like Kanjars, Pashtuns value the ‘disinterested’ zero-sum marriages between equals and deride marriages between status-unequals as calculated and immoral (Tapper 1991: esp. Ch. 7).

bride receivers (bridewealth givers)	bride givers (bridewealth receivers)	bridewealth transferred (in Rupees)
former servants of high-ranking Rājputs	former servants of high-ranking Rājputs	9,500-11,000
former servants of high-ranking Rājputs	former servants of low-ranking Rājputs or other low castes	3,500-7,000
former servants of high-ranking Rājputs	Kanjar-bards	- (no marriage alliances forged)
former servants of high-ranking Rājputs	Kanjar-prostitutes	-
former servants of low-ranking Rājputs or other low castes	former servants of high-ranking Rājputs	17,500-18,000
former servants of low-ranking Rājputs or other low castes	Kanjar-bards	2,500-3,000
former servants of low-ranking Rājputs or village communities	Kanjar-prostitutes	-
Kanjar-bards	former servants of high-ranking Rājputs	-
Kanjar-bards	former servants of low-ranking Rājputs or other low castes	23,500-25,000
Kanjar-bards	Kanjar-prostitutes	-
Kanjar-prostitutes	former servants of high-ranking Rājputs	150,000-250,000
Kanjar-prostitutes	former servants of low-ranking Rājputs or other low castes	85,000-100,000
Kanjar-prostitutes	Kanjar-bards	75,000
Kanjar-prostitutes	Kanjar-prostitutes	-

Figure 4.1: Bridewealth transferred in Kanjar marriages between 2006 and 2008 in Chittaurgarh district (based on information about 42 marriages in eighteen villages).

inversely proportional to brideprice and this differential is carefully calculated in marriage arrangements (see Figure 4.1). The range of bridewealth shown in the table reflects the status differences between wife-givers and wife-receivers. So, the highest brideprice was given (150,000-250,000) by the lowest ranked Kanjar-prostitutes to the highest ranked Kanjar-thieves who were once in the service of high-ranking Rājputs.⁵⁰ In the case of marriage between status-equals, brideprice remains a modest amount (9,500-11,000).

4.6 SHIFTING ALLEGIANCES AND THE MAKING OF THE KANJAR ELITE

As the authority of Rājput chiefs gave way to the rule of the colonial state, thieving communities came to be displaced by new institutions, which gradually took over their role in dispute negotiation, policing and resource-extraction. The establishment of new state institutions assumed the eradication of such communities, which in the course of the nineteenth century were declared to be ‘criminals’ and subjected to special policing and penal measures.⁵¹ Thieving gangs, whose loyalties lay with local chiefs, posed a threat as

⁵⁰ This has been exploited both by Kanjar-prostitutes to gain access to women and by higher ranking Kanjars to obtain high brideprice amounts, which other Kanjars in their communities deride as the dishonorable ‘sale’ of girls.

⁵¹ Some of the first measures taken against them (Piliavsky forthcoming a) and which served as the prototype for the Criminal Tribes Act (XXVII of 1871) passed in the British territories a decade later, were first tried in the territories of western and central Indian princely states. An involved history of Criminal Tribe legislation is beyond the scope of my work here. See Yang (1985), Nigam (1990a & b), Freitag (1985, 1991, 1998), Radhakrishna (1992, 2001), and Singha (1993) for the history of the creation and implementation of the Act. When in 1930 the Mahārāṇā of Mewar Bhupal Singh assumed control over Fararpur and the Rāwat left his dominions, the Kanjars’ relationship with local authorities took a sharp turn. Whereas previously the local chief provided them with employment, land and protection, for the new authorities, Kanjars were criminals who had to be controlled. The interests of the Mewar *darbār* thus agreed with those of the British authorities, which perceived such thieving groups as a major threat to their administration.

much to the stability of the colonial state as to the authority of the *rājās*, making the native and colonial governments ally in their most systematic campaign to eradicate robber-communities from Indian governance⁵²

By the turn of the twentieth century, the British Government had developed extensive machinery for dealing with such groups, which it declared criminal by law, classifying nearly two hundred South Asian communities as Criminal Tribes. These were settled en masse in reformatory settlements and controlled through the system of roll-call, registration, and a number of special legislative and penal measures.⁵³ Keen to curb the activities of their nobles, many heads of Indian states encouraged such 'reclamation campaigns' on their territories, actively supporting the application of the Criminal Tribe legislation on their domains. Before 1947, sixteen Criminal Tribe colonies were established across Rajasthan, four of them in Mewar.⁵⁴ Two of these colonies were located in

⁵² This was not the first time that the British colonial presence in India directed attention to thieving communities patronized by the landed chiefs. As early as 1793, Regulation XXII of the East India Company government under Lord Cornwallis empowered Magistrates in Bengal to exercise summary penal powers over certain tribes identified as dacoits, recidivists and vagrants (Guha 1963) and in the first half of the nineteenth century special administrative, judicial, policing, and penal measures were introduced for the suppression of Thuggee (Gordon 1969; Freitag 1998; Wagner 2007).

⁵³ From the turn of the twentieth century, such settlements were established in a number of Central and Western Indian princely domains. The principal settlements of the sort that housed Badhaks, Bagrīs, Moghiyās, Sānsīs, Bhīls, Miṇās, Naṭs, Kanjars, and others who were designated as Criminal Tribes, included colonies at Mirkabad in Gwalior, at Bani and Bodhanpur in Rajgarh, Mughalkheri, Kurarwar and Kalkheri in Narsingharh, at Dhamana in Kachhi-Baroda, at Kularas in Maksudangarh, Chamari, Bhawangaon and Bichpuri in Khilchipur, and at Nowgong in Bundelkhand, Bharatpur (*Imperial Gazetteer of India* 1908-31, vol. 9: 384; Mayaram 2003: 139).

⁵⁴ *Encyclopaedia of Social Work in India* (1987, Vol. 3: 377).

Fararpur.⁵⁵ Thus, in August of 1930 the Kanjar settlements of Dusra Khera and Lakshmipura were converted into Criminal Tribe colonies (*Census of India, 1961* 14/3 1962: i, 8, 12, 26).⁵⁶ At first, such colonization introduced some major changes into the lives of local Kanjars, whose work was now not only unsupported by the Rāwat, but substantially curbed. This, however, did not last.

The supervision of settlements was placed (as was often the case) in the hands of an Inspector selected from the ranks of the Rāwat's administration.⁵⁷ During the first six months of the settlement's inception Initially, the Inspector kept an eye on the movements of the colonies' residents, maintaining regular entries into the roll-call register and, according to the record, promptly incarcerating all those absent without a pass.⁵⁸ Soon, however, he developed a much more intimate rapport between him and his Kanjar subordinates. Within a year, the roll-call record became less irregular. It tells us that the

⁵⁵ As a fiefdom recently repossessed by the *darbār*, its chief expelled, and his thieving gangs left unprotected, Fararpur was a particularly good place for such experiments.

⁵⁶ Their establishment followed a common pattern of converting the largest thieving communities into Criminal Tribe colonies, which in Rajasthan were typically supported and settled by major chiefs, who could afford to keep a sizeable thieving force and to allot to them plots of land. Most Criminal Tribe colonies, which were established in places of greatest concentration of such folk, were thus converted from noblemen's thieving settlements and were occupied mainly by the erstwhile servants of high-ranking Rājputs. All four of the Criminal Tribe colonies in Mewar housed predominantly the thieving communities that served Rāwats, the highest ranking nobles in the kingdom (Gautam 1983: 18ff; *Village Survey Monographs: Ramnagar Kanjar Colony* 1967: 5-6).

⁵⁷ Since the administration of Criminal Tribe settlements was formally run by local authorities, it was common practice for Rājput chiefs to employ their own men to oversee the running of settlements, a practice that promoted the endemic administrative corruption in the settlements. So, the Nowgong Kanjar settlement in Central India, for instance, likewise became subject to the direct supervision of local authorities within two years of its establishment in 1902 (*Imperial Gazetteer of India: Provincial Series* 1908, vol. 12: 72).

⁵⁸ FFC. 'Dusra Khera' and 'Lakshmipura' roll-call registers 1928-33.

officer frequently failed to visit the settlement for several days and, when he did, he noted increasingly protracted absences that are explained as authorized visits of a relative or to a wedding. Some residents were marked as missing from the settlement for several weeks at a time.⁵⁹ While the record tells us that the residents of the colonies ‘absconded’ with greater frequency, the story, as told by the villagers who remember those days, differs. According to three people, who still remember those days, five households in Dusra Khera and two in Lakshmipura were ‘adopted’ (inf. *god lenā*) by the Inspector. This meant that they were allowed extended absences from the settlement, that a blind eye was turned to their burgling exploits in Fararpur, and that while they were protected others in the community were penalized in their stead. Such privileges were exchanged for a share of their thieving profits and for occasional help in resolving the Inspector’s private disputes.⁶⁰ Adopted households conceived of this new bond in much the same terms as their former ties to the Rāwat, treating the Inspector as their link to the new and much grander patron—

⁵⁹ Such lengthy absences are recorded in the FFC. ‘Dusra Khera’ and ‘Lakshmipura’ roll-call registers 1928-33.

⁶⁰ Chakravarti’s study suggests that such liaisons between Criminal Tribesmen and their overseers were commonplace. So, in 1945 one Rājput village leader in Jaipur district was accused of hiring the thieving services of local Mīṇās in order to force his neighbors to agree with his decisions in the *pañcāyat*. He writes that prior to independence the Rājput’s

father had been deputed by the police to take a roll-call at night of all the Meenas of the village. After his father’s death the register was maintained by him. It was alleged that he permitted two Meenas ... to go out and steal. Through them he also developed contacts with other Meenas ... [some of whom became his] *dharm* brothers. ... [The Rājputs’] association with Meenas provided them with an additional means of coercing their opponents (1975: 73).

For more on corruption in the administration of Criminal Tribe colonies in Rajputana, see Bhargava (1949: 111) and *Village Survey Monographs: Ramnagar Kanjar Colony* (1967: xx).

the king of Mewar—and accepting resources allocated to them as *dāns* from their *jajmān*.⁶¹

Indeed, in the context of Criminal Tribe colonization, Kanjars were some of the first to experience the workings of the welfare state, whose donorship they (as many of India's poor do today) took to be an expected aspect of patronage. Today, the former residents of Criminal Tribe colonies still proudly display the registration numbers (known as 'Mewar numbers') tattooed on their forearms, describing them as 'awards' (*ināms*) from and markers of their bonds with the royal court (*darbār*). Inspectors themselves nurtured their images as *jajmāns*, styling themselves *Anndātās* before their subordinates. Remembering the days of the colony, an elderly man from one adopted Kanjar family in Dusra Khera reflected:

When Rāo jī left Fararpur, we became Mahārāṇā Sahib's servants. The In-charge Sahib [colony Inspector] told us—Mewar *darbār* is the new boss [*sarkār*] in Fararpur and he will be your new *Anndātā*. Oh, and how he fed us! He gave us land and buffaloes and we got money to build pukka houses. He said: as long you do not steal in Fararpur, I will give you passes and you can go as far as you wish. So, we went and whatever we brought back, we shared with the In-charge Sahib. And in this way we lived well and no one was hungry.⁶²

In time, some members of these adopted families were even appointed by the Inspector as his assistants and were entrusted with, and rewarded for, keeping an eye on their less

⁶¹ Such 'gifts' included land, buffaloes, agricultural tools, and money for building homes that were provided as part of the 'reclamation' by agricultural development scheme in the settlements (*Village Survey Monographs: Ramnagar Kanjar Colony 1967: 10-12*).

⁶² Such arrangements, where the residents could not be found missing for too more than three or four weeks, nevertheless restricted their movements. Whereas prior to Independence the Kanjars of Lakṣmīpurā (who were, as I observed, never subject to colonial policing measures) used to go as far as Lahore and Bombay on their thieving raids, the range of the Dusra Khera Kanjars was now largely restricted to nearby territories within an approximately two hundred kilometer radius.

privileged neighbors. As the king's administrators replaced the Rāwat in his role as the Kanjars' *jajmān*, the new administrative system remained nested in the old idiom of donor-servant relatedness.

The shift, nevertheless, precipitated some significant changes within the community. In the old system, Rājputs employed entire families or sets of families, which enjoyed *birat* rights as a community. As with *birat* patronage of musicians in western Rajasthan, *all* members of the community were entitled to the support and protection of their patron; those who were too young, too old or otherwise incapable of profitable thieving retained the support of their *jajmān* as members of his servant-community (Bharucha 2003: 222). It was only if the whole community altogether failed in its duties that the patron could seek to abandon the relationship. This changed under the new arrangement. On the one hand, the supervisor of Kanjar colonies was obliged to control his subjects and to demonstrate the results of his work to his superiors. On the other, it was in his interest to secure the labor and loyalties of the colonies' residents. This meant that the Inspector patronized settlers selectively, adopting only the best thieves, while using others to prove his diligence to his superiors.

Whereas adopted families enjoyed the Inspector's leniency and received the bulk of resources (land, livestock, money) allotted for the development of such colonies by the state, others were promptly penalized for short absences and incarcerated for burglaries committed by their privileged neighbors. While the former erected two-story houses and

bought more and more land, the latter became increasingly impoverished, indebted and humiliated, finding themselves regularly chained to the walls of the police outpost in Dusra Khera, a spectacle still well remembered in Fararpur. ‘When Rāo Sahib was our Anndātā, nobody had much, but all had enough,’ remembers one woman in Dusra Khera, ‘but during *darbāri* [crown rule] times some filled their bellies and others starved [*bhūke mare*].’

The new administrative order nestled into the old system of patronage, yet in an attenuated form. Kanjars who previously stood in the Rāwat’s service acquired employment and protection from the state administrator. By further institutionalizing their superior position among local Kanjars, the new order further reinforced existing gradations of rank in the community. The nature of the Kanjar elite, nevertheless, changed. Not only did it shrink to a much smaller group that constituted no more than ten percent of local Kanjars, but its membership was based on a new set of terms. The new system encouraged the most skilled thieves, who gained the favor of local administrators. Their promotion of such thieves to the status of clients, and occasionally even formal employees, of the police depended on the systematic degradation of their caste-mates. With the privileged Kanjars directly or incidentally involved in such denigration of their caste-mates, the ranked separation within the community has been transformed into increasingly antagonistic segregation, where difference of rank is much sharper, the elite much smaller, and relations are marked by animosity, jealousy and fear. This divide remains starkly evident in Kanjar villages, where the pukka two-story houses of police

clients tower over the ramshackle homes of those who failed to form such bonds and who now work for miserly wages on the fields of elite Kanjar households.⁶³

However reviled or feared for their dealings with the police, those who manage to secure bonds with the colony Inspector command respect within the community. The transfer of patronage from the Rāwat to the Inspector was not seen as the degradation of erstwhile *birat* bonds, but as a *promotion* to patronage by the *darbār*, which was construed in the old idiom of donor-servant bonds. Kanjars who were adopted by Criminal Tribe settlement administration received not only material benefits, but also the privilege of assumed connections to the *darbār*. Those who remember the days of the settlement speak of the homes that were built by such privileged families as ‘royal’ (*darbārī*), which were, in their view gifts from the Mahārāṇā to the Kanjars in his employ.

As the involvement of Rājputs in local politics—and their use of thieving groups—was increasingly eroded after independence, bonds between Kanjar-thieves and the police (*pulis*) were consolidated, emerging as a central structuring force for the community. The character of this new *Pulis*-patron and the modes of relatedness to it became the key source of rank difference among local Kanjars. As the case of the Lakshmipura Kanjars illustrates, the territorial and hierarchical markers of police organization now largely dictate the limits of exchange, marriage alliances, gradations of status, and the structure of authority

⁶³ While most households in Dursā Kherā own no more than ten *bīghās*, the children of five patronized families still own the biggest fields, some of them as large as one hundred and fifty *bīghās*. The privileged families moreover continue to dominate village politics, as most elders (*pāñces*) are drawn from their ranks.

within the community. As such, the parameters of state police organization are reproduced within the structure of the Kanjar community (Piliavsky forthcoming b).⁶⁴

After 1948, when Mewar merged into the newly formed Indian Union, relations between Kanjars and the police were reorganized yet again. The Inspector of Kanjar colonies was replaced with a newly appointed head of police (Senior House Officer, or SHO) in Fararpur, posted there by the head of the district police. Patronage of Kanjars was no longer a priority for the SHO, who was not acquainted with the local Kanjars, had a much wider range of duties, and was subject to more direct supervision from Chittaurgarh and Jaipur. Whilst Kanjars who once enjoyed the patronage of Criminal Tribe Inspectors were left masterless again, the entirety of the community continued to be subject to special policing measures until 1956, when the Criminal Tribes Act was repealed and the colonies were formally disbanded in Rajasthan. However, the new Habitual Offenders Act, which was put in place of the Criminal Tribes Act, virtually reproduced the provision of preceding legislature. Like most other 'de-notified' Criminal Tribesmen, residents of the disbanded Kanjar colonies were relisted as Habitual Offenders and subjected to the already familiar special policing measures of impromptu raids, roll-call and preventative incarceration.

Regular surveillance and the punishment of absences by imprisonment restricted the radius of Kanjar mobility to a distance that could be travelled within a night, forcing

⁶⁴ As an aside, institutions of the state here are not at odds with local realities (cf. Scott 1998 and 2009), but are instead woven into its social fabric, where they are articulated in vernacular forms of relatedness and play a structurally key role. See Li (2005) and Scheele (2007) for similar criticisms of Scott's argument about the incongruous top-down imposition of state structures and representations.

them to thief closer and closer to home. The resulting upsurge of burglaries committed by local Kanjars in the Fararpur *tahsil* (which contains the densest Kanjar population in Rajasthan) soon attracted the attention of police superiors in the district, who pressed the staff of the *thānā* to deal with the problem promptly. The staff of the local station resorted to ‘softer measures,’ as one retired officer (who was posted in Fararpur in the 1950s and 1960s) put it. He explained:

We could not control Kanjars then. We raided and we took roll-call, but how could we catch them? Every time we came, they ran away into the jungle. We were in much trouble with our superiors, who were cutting our pay because Fararpur was rife with robberies and the culprits were free. In 1954 or '55 we finally caught one big thief from Dursā Kheṛā, whom we enrolled as an informer [*mukhbīr*]. Within five years or so, five more Kanjars from different settlements in Fararpur came to us of their own accord and became men of the police [*pulis ke ādmī*]. ... They were all intelligent men who understood the benefits of working for the police. This way we gained some control over their activities.

All Kanjars thus conscripted by the police were men from families formerly employed by the Inspector of Criminal Tribes colonies. They all had experience of police patronage and trusted the new officers to take over their patronage. As such, they were also some of the best established and most active thieves. Informers (*mukhbīr* or *mukhbar* in Kanjarī) were to inform on, aid in the pursuit of and facilitate negotiations with other members of their villages.⁶⁵ In exchange, they received virtually free rein to thief in Fararpur and those who negotiated matters with the police through them enjoyed a greater

⁶⁵ These days, officers contact (usually via mobile phones) their informers if a robbery is committed and make them responsible for tracing the offenders and, if the culprits are from their village, for arranging an exchange of payment for leniency between the thieves and the police.

degree of leniency.⁶⁶ Like the old system of patronage, the new arrangement was also termed 'adoption' (inf. *god lenā*). Unlike under the Criminal Tribe administration, however, the Rajasthan State Police sought to adopt entire villages via the agency of informers resident in them.⁶⁷ Kanjars without police connections remained subject to systematic harassment. Used by police officers, who needed to account for thefts committed by their clients, they were made perpetrators of offences committed by the informers' gangs, on paper and in law. Such masterless thieves hid in the nearby jungle or, failing to escape the police, languished in confinement with no warrant or trial. In order to secure their release, their families were pressed to burgle with increasing frequency so as to meet the costs of 'bail' sums and court proceedings, in the process amassing long criminal records. The same system continues to function in much the same way today.

Since adopted thieves enjoy protection within the jurisdiction of the local *thānā*, the old spatial arrangement of thieving patterns has been inverted. Whereas previously thieves employed by Rājputs or village communities thieved *outside* the areas of their patron's lands, thieving patronized by the police is conducted largely *within* the territories of

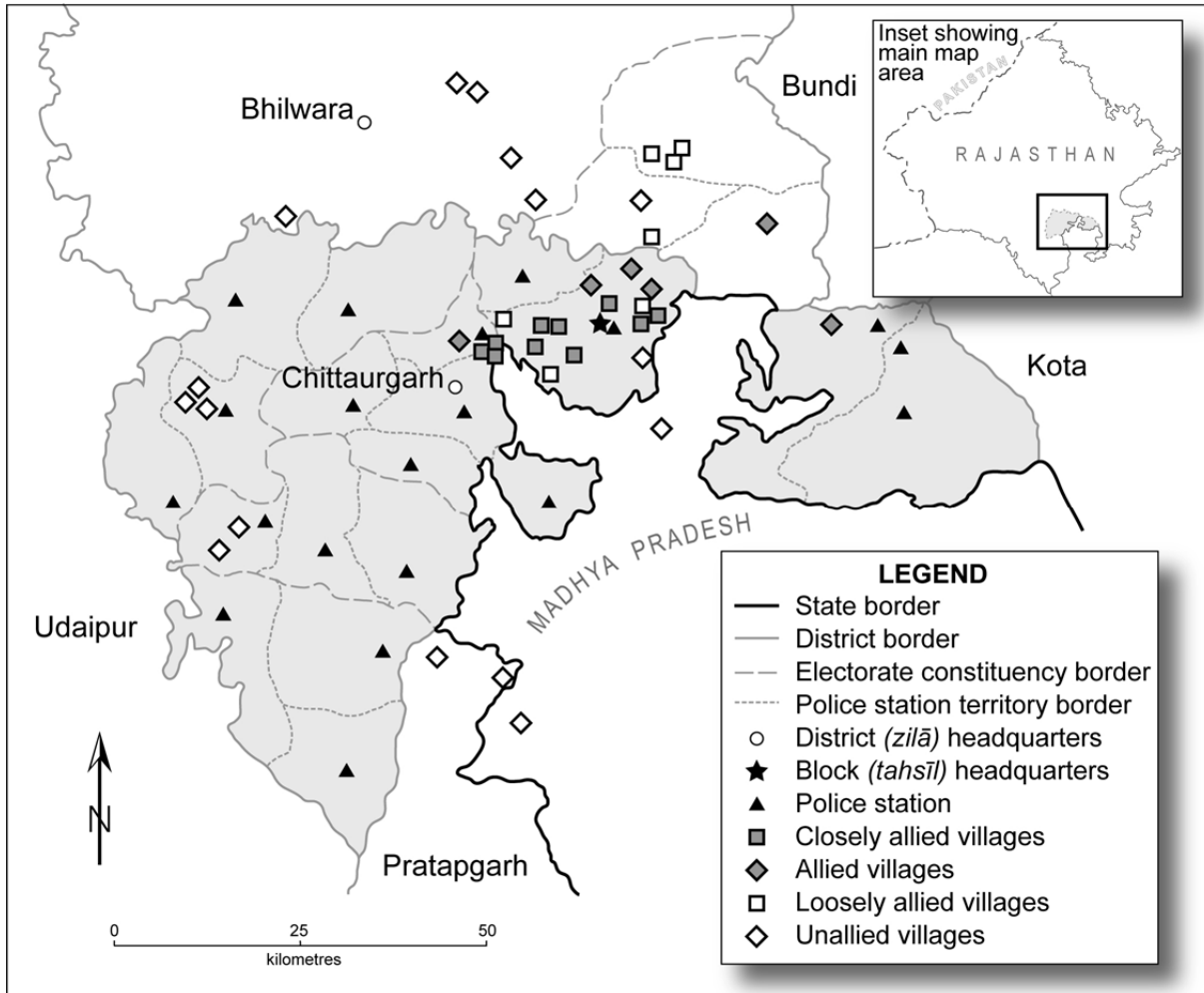
⁶⁶ That is, the police turned a blind eye on burglaries perpetrated by them, 'wrote off' arrest warrants (that is, reported to court the absence of wanted offenders), and made the filing of court cases redeemable with modest sums of cash.

⁶⁷ Such institution of adoption has been standardized to the point of bureaucratization in Rajasthan today. It is expected, for instance, that SHOs will inherit informers from their predecessors who leave the details of the relationship (lists of reliable and unreliable informers, descriptions of their parties and thieving beats, and other minutiae) recorded in a special file that is kept in the *thānās*. By established convention, within a fortnight of his posting the new SHO pays a personal visit to each of his newly inherited informers, so as to confirm the tenure of the relationship. Of eighteen Kanjar villages in Fararpur *tehsil*, twelve had the status of adopted villages in 2008.

patron-*thānās*. The thieving terrain has thus become coterminous with the spatial extent of jurisdictions of the thieves' patron-stations.⁶⁸

Within the old system, where theft *outside* of patrons' dominions was sponsored, Kanjars formed professional and marriage bonds with a number of villages, some of which were located quite far away. Under the new system of police patronage nuptial ties, like professional ties, have come to be increasingly restricted to communities resident on the territories of a few neighboring *thānās*. Changes in marriage patterns in Lakshmipura over the past four generations offer an illustration. Whereas four generations ago Lakshmipura exchanged four women in marriage with the villages in Bhilwara, a different district, and as many marriages were formed three generations ago (this time in a more populous village), one marriage alliance was forged two generations ago, and none were secured during the most recent nuptial round. Thus, in the span of four generations alliances with villages outside of the Lakshmipura police territory have dwindled from twenty-four and seventeen percent of total marriage exchanges to four and zero percent today, so that more than half of the villages within the Lakshmipura *birādarī*—the community of professional exchange and marriage alliances—is circumscribed by the boundaries of two neighboring *thānās* (see Map 4.2, below).

⁶⁸ Such localization of thieving beats has placed increasing economic pressure on local farmers, who are already hard-pressed to make ends meet by the dwindling water supply and the steady population growth. Tensions between Kanjars and their land tilling neighbors have led to an increasing incidence of violence against Kanjars. Over the past two decades, twenty-four men of the *birādarī* have been murdered by their farmer-neighbors.



Map 4.2: Villages of the Lakshmipura *birādārī* and other nearby Kanjar villages. ‘Closely allied’ villages are connected by more than ten marriages (traceable over four generations) and are marked by frequent contact and professional collaboration, ‘allied’ villages are connected by five to ten marriages and regular contact, and ‘loosely allied’ villages are connected by fewer than five marriages and occasional visits. ‘Unallied’ villages maintain no regular contacts with the *birādārī*.

Structures of rank and authority in the *birādārī* have, moreover, come to reproduce the hierarchy of rank among policemen. Patronage is not distributed evenly among the residents of adopted villages. Instead, gangs and their leaders form bonds with particular officers within their home-stations, and the difference of patron-officers’ rank is reflected in the ranked differentiation within Kanjar *birādārīs*. Most Kanjars who enjoy police patronage form relationships with officers in the lowest ranks of the police: Constables, Head Constables, and Assistant Sub-inspectors, known collectively among Kanjars as

sipāhīs. The territory under the jurisdiction of each police station is divided among such junior officers, who are entrusted with the everyday field duties of policing these beats. Unlike the frequently transferred senior officers (Inspectors and Sub-inspectors), these officers often remain in the same posting for many years, if not for the duration of their careers⁶⁹ and many of them develop long-lasting relationships with local Kanjars. As locally employment in particular positions (in the police as much as in other government services) is often inherited (multiple generations of men of the same family being commonly employed in the same or similar post⁷⁰), such relationships can last across several generations, acquiring the gravity of ‘traditional’ (*paramparik*) ties.⁷¹ They are the officers who routinely visit the Kanjar villages, establishing personal—and often mutually beneficial—relationships with their residents. Local villagers like to say that for the *sipāhīs*, the patronage of Kanjars is a source of three things: *paise, dārū aur izzat*, or ‘money, liquor and respect.’ The officers themselves like to boast of their knowledge of Kanjar language, their ‘customs and habits’ (*rivāj aur ādat*), connections with and influence over their Kanjar

⁶⁹ Although the Rajasthan Police Rules prescribe a maximum term of two years for these ranks, most commonly remain in their posting for many decades, if not for life. The stringently competitive system of promotions paired with no real financial incentives makes for virtually no movement between ranks on this level. Moreover, while Police Rules prescribe posting outside one’s native Judicial Circle, most low-ranking officers are posted in their home villages. These days such administrative favors on the part of the posting authorities are simply considered part of the ‘deal’ in the routine purchase of such positions.

⁷⁰ In Rajasthan this trend is particularly prominent in the Rajput and Mina communities.

⁷¹ Of the sixteen Constables, Head Constables and Assistant Sub-inspectors in the local *thānā*, twelve had been well acquainted with the local Kanjars for more than ten years and four had multi-generational relationships (two of these going back three generations) with the local *birādarī*.

‘workers’ (*karamcārīs*), whom they treat as their personal clients. The *sipāhī*, however, exercise only limited sway over their Kanjar clients by offering or retracting small bureaucratic favors (such as writing off arrest warrants). Such favors are easily purchased with nominal payments of fifty Rupees or a bottle of homemade liquor, which the *sipāhīs*, who face virtually no career advancement prospects and for many of whom their posting cost as much as 100,000⁷² Rupees, are usually happy to accept.⁷³ I examine such relationships in greater detail in the following Chapter (Section 5.5).

For senior station officers, on the contrary, Kanjars are most useful as a source of intelligence that boosts their ‘statistics’ and thus aids in the progress of their careers. Such officers select their informers carefully, recruiting the most intelligent and resourceful of them. Kanjars of such standing acquire a special weight within their community. Although patronage by the SHOs is often less durable than alliances with the *sipāhīs*, it often entails more substantial privileges. Apart from enjoying virtual impunity in their home police jurisdictions, Kanjars under the tutelage of senior officers are more effective at securing arrest warrant dismissals, settling a better ‘deal’ whenever the need to pay off the police arises, or arranging a speedy release of their kith and kin on bail. Their connections with

⁷² Equaling at the time approximately £1,500, a substantial sum for someone of their background.

⁷³ While locals often blame policemen for their ‘greed’ (*bhūk*, or literally ‘hunger’) and international observers and upper-echelon officers are quick to describe such activity as ‘corrupt,’ the dire underpayment of such officers makes such collusion virtually inevitable. For the first five years in service, Constables earn a monthly wage of Rs. 3,005. This is less than half of an average Government school teacher’s salary of Rs. 8,000. The success of senior officers, on the contrary, relies more heavily on their satisfaction of target quotas, or the percentage of reported cases investigated, resolved and offenders apprehended rather than on the relatively measly sums of cash that they can procure from Kanjars.

senior officers allow them to both protect and harass their caste-mates. Complaints that they may file against other Kanjars are taken seriously in the *thānā*.⁷⁴ Thus, today the old system of *paṭels* (headmen), each representing a family and acting as arbiters in disputes is now paralleled, and in many villages entirely replaced, by a circle of *sardārs* ('bosses' or 'gang leaders') employed as informers for the police. Their growing significance as agents of justice means that matters of *jāti pañcāyat* (caste council) are increasingly referred to and mediated by means of police and court authorities, where *sardārs* have much more sway than traditional *paṭels*. Such changes mean not only a shift of authority from hereditary headmen to thieving parties, but a more fundamental transfer of the community's legal apparatus into the sphere of the state and court institutions, which stands behind the authority of this newly emergent class of *sardārs*.

The dominant standing of senior officers' clients among Kanjars, however, does not reside solely in their access to state resources. They are not simply feared, but held in high regard, even by those who fall prey to police harassment because of them. Relationships with superior officers are taken to be—and enacted as—patronage ties proper. Kanjars often speak of work that they do for such officers (which often amounts to intelligence or thieving work rather than bribery) as 'service' (*sevā*) or 'work' (*kammā*) and perceive benefactions that they get in return as gifts. The officers, who are well aware of their role

⁷⁴ That is, unlike in most cases of appeal by Kanjar (and other poor) villagers, an intra-communal complaint reported by the *sardārs* is likely to be filed and pursued.

of donor-*jajmāns* and often pass on their old clothes to or feed their clients when those visit the *thānā*, so as to encourage their image and treatment of as Anndātās. Policemen can of course be coercive, abusive or else inappropriately insistent on the Rajasthan Police Rules, in which case both the Kanjars and the *sipāhīs* complain of mistreatment. If reciprocity is maintained, Kanjars reverentially refer to such officers as ‘fathers’ (*bāps*) or in the already familiar language of Mā-ī-Bāp (Mother-and-Father) and Anndātā (Bread Giver).⁷⁵

The spatial limits of the Lakshmipura *birādarī* are now defined by the territorial configurations of the local police jurisdiction, the social organization of the local Kanjar community thus reproducing a key aspect of police organization.⁷⁶ As one gang leader remarked, ‘we are like the police: they have their land and we have ours, they guard their borders and so do we, they have their bosses and so do our villages. Each *birādarī* is like a *thānā*, except that we, Kanjars, have got no SP [Superintendent of Police, who acts as the chief of district police force].’ While the territorial demarcation is reproduced often

⁷⁵ The rules of comportment that apply to interactions with Rājput superiors apply likewise to such patrons in the police. When receiving instructions, informers stand erect with hands folded in front and eyes lowered before the officers, responding with ‘Hukum’ (Sir) traditionally used in reference to Rājputs by their subordinates.

⁷⁶ Territorial divisions have been an essential feature of Indian police since its establishment in the 1860s (i.e., Arnold 1986; Chattopadhyay 2000). If an officer observes a crime just outside the territory of his own station, he is not held responsible for its pursuit. In practice, the jurisdictions of *thānās* are virtually impermeable to officers from other jurisdictions. In Western and Central India the history of the significance of territory in establishing police rule is witnessed not least by the extensive colonial archive of correspondence about police ‘extradition’ rules (Madhya Pradesh State Archives [Bhopal], Police and Judicial files). Much of the discussion was preoccupied with the difficulty of apprehending offenders across the boundaries of police jurisdictions, habitually treated by officers as their own exclusive dominions. According to the Rajasthan Police Rules, even if in ‘hot pursuit,’ officers must obtain permission for the pursuit from the local police station, making tracking down offenders across the boundaries of police jurisdictions effectively impossible.

unwittingly, Kanjars quite consciously adopt other markers of police identity. Thus, since Independence, an increasing number of children have been named *Sarkāriyā* or *Ḍiṭṭiyā* (derived from '*sarkār*' for state and '[police] deputy,' respectively) and a trip to the bazaar (where I offered to buy some clothes for a child in my host village) ended with a purchase of a child-sized police uniform. Although in Lakshmipura Kanjars do not wear police uniforms, as do some Kanjars in other settlements, they invariably have their shirts made in the print worn by the local 'undercover' constables.

CONCLUSION

While Outsiders perceive Kanjars as vagrants with no attachments and proper social standing, Kanjars see members of their *jāti* as connected to different patrons in varying degrees of relatedness. I have argued that such connections, whose principles I outlined in Chapter 3, is basic to the status calculus in the Kanjar *jāti*. That is, relative rank between and within segments of the community substantially depends on the differences among, and the quality of the relationship to, their patrons. While the disrepute of the prostitute-Kanjars and the recent downfall of the Kanjar-bards is tied to a lack, or a loss, of particular patrons, the Kanjar-thieves in Fararpur have retained their high standing because of their relationship with a successive line of local political authorities—first the Rājput chiefs, then the administrators of Criminal Tribes colonies and most recently with officers in the Rajasthan State Police. I have also shown that it is not only the social standing of patrons,

but also the exclusivity and durability of relationships with them that affects the status of clients. In the second half of the chapter I have argued that just as the erstwhile allegiances to nobility, contemporary relationships with the police continue to be the key force in the structure of divisions and rank among Kanjar-thieves. Although the ethnography is taken largely from the particular context of the Kanjar community, I suggest that the same principle applies to the structuring of rank more generally in Rajsthani society and perhaps across Northern India more broadly. The policing institutions and officers of the crown and post-Independence states slid into superior positions in the long-familiar system of donor-servant relations, where they are styled—and style themselves—*Anndātās*, distribute various ‘gifts’ and are perceived as sources of status and authority by their Kanjar subordinates. (I treat Kanjars’ interactions with state institutions in greater detail in Chapter Five.) While patronage constitutes the benchmark of identity and rank among Kanjars, for outsiders Kanjars remain masterless vagrants who are excluded from proper society. Such invisibility is central, however, to the role of Kanjars in local society, where, as I will show in the next chapter, they often occupy some of the innermost social domains.

CHAPTER FIVE

SECRET AGENTS

... the hiding of realities by negative or positive means, is one of man's greatest achievements. In comparison with the childish stage in which every conception is expressed at once, and every undertaking is accessible to the eyes of all, the secret produces an immense enlargement of life: numerous contents of life cannot even emerge in the presence of full publicity. The secret offers, so to speak, the possibility of a second world alongside the manifest world; and the latter is decisively influenced by the former.

Georg Simmel (1906: 462; translated by Wolff 1950: 330)

Relations between Kanjars and their patrons are subject to two diametrically opposed kinds of rhetoric: one promulgated by Kanjars themselves and the other espoused by outsiders. If for Kanjars ties to patrons form the basis of establishing rank gradations within their community, for members of respectable society, neither such bonds nor the very social presence of Kanjars are recognized. This chapter is about the outsiders' view of Kanjars and about how this view reflects not only the social location of Kanjars, but also some general aspects of local society. I shall argue that Kanjars are kept outside of ordinary public life through the rhetoric of secrecy that produces a hidden social sphere in which Kanjars play a key role. This offstage terrain—and the 'secret agents' who populate it—manufactured through the rhetoric of secrecy is of fundamental significance for the maintenance of the public face of local society. Insofar as matters of rank, prestige and status within the Kanjar

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jāti depend on Kanjars' relations with outsiders, propriety within local society too relies on the presence of invisible people like Kanjars. What is explicitly said about such matters is markedly different.

5.1 SECRETS REVEALED

A few of years ago I was in Jaipur, Rajasthan's capital, drinking midday whiskeys with some aristocratic Rajput families, people I like to visit periodically to keep myself abreast of current gossip. Our conversation drifted leisurely from polo ground drama to the new zinc factory inauguration party, the matrimonial matches to be made with the Jodhpur Rathores (a high-ranking Rajput clan), and the recent kills by man-eating panthers on the border with the neighboring province of Madhya Pradesh. I brought up Kanjars, an 'ex-criminal' community connected in the minds of many with illicit liquor production, prostitution, and petty theft. At the time, I had come to frequent some Kanjars in a local slum. I mentioned to my Rajput acquaintances, rather cautiously, that I had heard that certain families in their midst maintained mutually beneficial relationships with 'criminal castes' and that I wondered whether the present company could help me to learn more about Kanjars and other such groups. Expecting tacit suspicion at best, I prepared to blame the midday heat and the spirits for the implied accusation of criminal involvement.

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Instead of suspicion, my question was met with enthusiasm, and brought forth a host of stories about the bizarre beliefs and habits of Kanjars. My Rājput informants, eager to see me fill my notebooks with Kanjar 'ethnography,' overwhelmed me with 'secrets' of Kanjar life. With a raised brow and in a lowered voice one of my informants said that Kanjars have many secret practices, the details of which he proceeded to describe; from the training of wall-climbing lizards (used in house burglary) to bizarre wedding arrangements, blood-thirsty goddess worship involving human sacrifice, and ritual rooftop defecation, my company claimed to know it all. In the heat of the moment someone even suggested that there was little need for me to spend time among Kanjars because I could learn most of their secrets from the present party and other similarly "knowledgeable people," of whom, as I came to realize, there was never a shortage. How the storytellers came to possess such secret knowledge was yet another mystery. None of them of course ever had any dealings with Kanjars. What they told me, nevertheless, was qualified as 'the truth' (*sacc*) known only by Rajasthanis and offered gingerly to the deserving foreigner. In other words, I was in. Kanjars, on the contrary, were out: hidden in and magically disappearing into the jungle, they were creatures one could not so much as see, let alone have dealings with.

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The treatment of vagrant communities like the Kanjars has a long history of mystification in Indian lore.¹ The practice of thieving itself, often assigned to such groups, has been thought of as the art of disguises and the domain of hidden possessors of secret knowledge and powers. Respect for and fear of thieves in classical scripture had to do precisely with their secrecy, which has been cause of much fascination in legal, scriptural and narrative texts.² While describing them as hidden, authors of various classical Indian texts did not leave the reader in the dark about the secret lives of thieves, claiming, much like my Rājput acquaintances in Jaipur, to know all about their hidden worlds.³ Colonial musings about ‘criminal fraternities,’ whether of Thugs in the first half or Criminal Tribesmen in the second

¹ Texts ranging from the corpus of *Dharmaśāstras* to the *Brahmāṇas* and the epic of *Mahābhārata* describe mobile communities such as Bhīls, as dwellers of the jungle, the perennial periphery of civilized life in South Asia. These include folks who know no sacrificial formulas (a key mark of social belonging), half-breeds, exiles, and deposed Kṣātriyas. So, ‘jungle-dwelling’ Mlecchas and Niṣādas know no sacrificial formulas (*Mahābhārata* 12.59, 14.29); Kirātas or Kirrhadae (counted as Śūdras) have neglected sacred rites (Manu 10.43-4); Drāviḍas, Ābhīras, Puṇḍras, and Śābaras are descendants of Kṣātriyas who flee into the jungle, failing to perform their duties (*Mahābhārata* 14.29); and Āndhras, Puṇḍras, Śābaras, Pulindas, and Mūtibas are exiles of rebellion (*Aitareya Brahmāṇa* 7.18). Manu, for instance, describes robbers as those who are ‘invisible’ (*aprakāśataskara*), repeating throughout the text that theft itself is an art of deception and disguise (Bhattacharya 1990).

² A number of ‘thievery manuals’ (*steyā-śāstras*, *cora-śāstras* or *steya-sūtras*) written in Sanskrit in different places and at different times have described the magic thieving techniques transferred in secret to the initiate. Three texts of the sort are available in translation: *Skandayāga*, or *Dhūrtakalpa* (*Skanda-Sacrifice* or *Rogue Ordinance*) in Goodwin’s (1890) translation; *Ṣaṇmukhakaḷpa* (*Practice of the Six-Faced God*) in German translation by Dieter (1991); and *Dharmacauryarasāyana* (*Elixir of Dharmic Thievery*) in Passi’s (2001) Italian translation, which draws on Narahari’s (1946) *devanāgarī* edition of the manuscript and Aklujkar’s discussion of it in a later paper (1996). A summary and a brief analysis of this latter text in English appears in a recent article by Passi (2005). Thought to be written relatively late, sometime in the eighteenth century, the text is part of a much older genre of thievery manuals (Passi 2001: 3ff; 2005: 12-14).

³ Indologist Maurice Bloomfield gathered references to such descriptions in Sanskrit and vernacular Indian literature in a series of encyclopaedic articles (1913; 1923a & b; 1926).

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half of the nineteenth century, ran along the same lines (as we saw in Chapter 2). Much like the thieves of Brahmanic narratives (Bloomfield 1926), Sleeman's Thugs belonged to a closed cult, whose secret tongue, methods of operation and ritual practices he voluminously catalogued (1836; 1839). As Radhika Singha observed, it is through claims to 'mystery unveiled and mastered that a group of officers of the Political Department had lobbied for operations against th[e] "murderous fraternity"' of Thugs, policed by the Thuggee and Dacoity Department, in the early decades of the nineteenth century (1993: 83). The discovery of Criminal Tribes in the latter half of the same century inherited the language of the Thuggee campaign. Turning his attention to the newly discovered 'fraternities of hereditary robbers' (1849), the prototype for the Criminal Tribes in later colonial legislation, Sleeman described the 'underworld' of itinerant robbers (among which Kanjars figured prominently) as 'secret criminal societies' (Sleeman 1849, vol. 1: 360, 391).

Today the continued mystification of Kanjars and other related communities pervades marketplace rumor, press accounts and official paperwork alike. Retaining their criminal identity in marketplace as well as official discourses, if no longer in statute, Kanjars and other 'ex-criminal' continue to be understood as a people hidden from the gaze of ordinary society and state law (see Section 1.2). While local monographs on 'de-notified' or 'ex-criminal' castes call for their 'upliftment' through integration into general society (e.g., Bhargava 1949; Garg

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1965; Kapadia 1967; Shah 1967), administrative descriptions continue to propagate the view of such groups as secret societies. So, the 2001 *Census Report* places sixty-six per cent of India's Kanjars in the category of 'non-worker:' the official rubric of socio-economic nonexistence.⁴ Allegations of magic and secrecy fill the records of local police stations. In areas of Kanjar residency 'Village Crime Note Books' (VCNBs), which are meant to be records of all local crime, read as records of Kanjar crime exclusively and emphasize the Kanjars' secretive nature. A characteristic account opens the Lakshmipura VCNB:

This area belonged to the chief [*jaḡirdār*] of the Fararpur estate [*ṭhikānā*]. The chief used to live here. He used to collect land revenue [*lagan*]. But after the *jaḡirdāri* system was abolished, the revenue was collected by the tax collector [*tahsīldār*]. This area is 300 years old. People of the following castes reside in this area: Rājput, Brāhman, Bālāi, Regar [Leather Dyer], Rebārī [Herdsman], Dhākar [Farmer], Sutār [Goldsmith], Nāi [Barber], and Kanjar. Kanjars live in the southern and western corners of the village. These people are involved in burglary and cattle theft. They kill and steal goats. In the village there is a primary school, the village council [*pancāyat*] headquarters, an accountant [*paṭwārī*] office, and other government offices. Agriculture is the local people's main occupation. Kanjars are involved in crime.... They have their secret [*gupt*] methods [of stealing] and a language of their own [*pārsī*]. It is very difficult for the police to catch them (Lakshmipura VCNB 1973-present: 3; account written in 1973).

Another police document, the 'Compendium Concerning the Kanjar Gangs,' a Kanjar 'ethnography' kept on file in the Chittaurgarh police headquarters,⁵ opens like this:

⁴ See Appendix I for the 2001 *Census Report* account of the Kanjar population in India.

⁵ The 'Compendium' is compiled and updated by the district police office staff by the order of the District Superintendent of Police. As one police clerk explained, its contents combine information collected from Kanjar informants by officers designated as 'Kanjar experts' (whom I discuss later) and 'people's knowledge' (*logō kī jānkarī*) about Kanjars gathered by more junior officers.

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The Kanjar caste is a criminal caste. From ancient times these people have roamed about committing group crime [including] theft, roadside burglary, looting, and dacoity [gang robbery]. They are a caste that is addicted to crime. They are very difficult to find because they can run very fast and when they commit a robbery, they disappear into the jungle or across the [state] border (Records of the Chittaurgarh District Superintendent of Police Office 2003).⁶

Each document makes a point of mentioning the inability of the police to round up Kanjars.

Such disclaimers, as we shall see, have their own *raison d'être*, the mystifying rhetoric that they invoke masking a set of relationships that are not meant for public or official observation.

While statements regarding their disappearance may raise a reader's smile, villagers took them to be matters of obvious fact. Whenever I summarized such descriptions to my friends among local farmers, they nodded with approval: 'Of course,' said one Dhākar, 'everyone knows that Kanjars can disappear—they have magic [*jādū*]*—nobody knows how they speak and how they steal and where they go and whence they come. How could the police catch them?*'

The consistency of terms and images: the recurrence of lizards, of 'addiction to crime,' magical healing techniques, secret tongues, and supernatural endowment in descriptions of Kanjars by farmers, state officials and the police is remarkable. If one expects the official sphere to be pure of such 'rumor' and 'fantasy,' descriptions of the sort come as a surprise. The

⁶ The 'Compendium' proceeds to describe the deities worshipped, garb worn and foods consumed by Kanjars, who, the document claims, are hopelessly 'addicted to crime.' It goes on to mention miraculous bone setting practices, which involve an overnight immersion of the patient in a barrel of cow manure and describes a practice of rearing lizards, used in wall-scaling burglary. A section entitled *riwāj aur ādat* ('customs and habits') states that a Kanjar youth is considered unmarried until he partakes in a minimum of two burglaries.

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contents of police and bazaar knowledge have a great deal in common. The VCNBs are curious places where popular images permeate official documents and are thus cast as expertise, and consequently as official knowledge. A section of regular entries in the Lakshmipura VCNB reads as follows:

August 9, 1995

Today I came to village N to investigate case #264, 265/95 and inspected the area. The village people believe that X associates himself with Kanjars and takes their stolen goods. This will be investigated. The entries are complete and correct.

Signed, SHO [Senior House Officer] A, Lakshmipura *thānā*...

December 17, 1996

SHO Z checked the area during his patrolling session and blocked off all passable roads for the inspection. No Kanjars were found. The entries are complete and correct.

Signed, SHO B, Lakshmipura *thānā*

September 12, 1997

Today the Kanjar settlement was raided for the arrest of Y. He was not found. Most Kanjars run away upon the approach of the police. They cannot be caught. The entries are complete and correct.

Signed, SHO B, Lakshmipura *thānā* ...

May 11, 2000

Today we made a patrolling round of the village, talked to the village people and collected information from reliable sources. The entries are complete and correct.

Signed, SHO B, Lakshmipura *thānā* (Lakshmipura VCNB 1973-present: *ad loc.*).

The primary sources for such wisdom, the chronicle tells us, are stories that villagers tell about their Kanjar neighbors: constables ‘hear that so and so visited town N,’ that ‘the village people believe that so and so associates with the Kanjars,’ and so forth. Such information is always

gathered from ‘reliable sources,’ so that the entries invariably end up ‘complete and correct.’ The officers appear to have no direct contact with Kanjars, which is explained through reports of Kanjars’ disappearance acts.⁷ The records contained in such chronicles are what police officers call, using the English word, a ‘formality’ that serves as evidence of their work in case of an inspection ‘from above’ (*uppar se*). Real information (*pakkī sūcnā*), as one Sub-Inspector suggested, never makes it to such records. Observations of relations between policemen and Kanjars strike a contrast with such descriptions.

It is not only the stories told in the marketplace, newsprint and police documents, but Kanjars’ own narratives that describe them as a secret society. When I first arrived in Lakshmipura, my Kanjar informants insisted that nobody outside of their community knew their language. Not only was it unknown to outsiders, they said, but it was intrinsically unknowable to them. As Kanjars (much like their neighbors) explained it, this language (*pārsī* or *āpas kī bolī*, literally ‘insider language’) did not lend itself to learning as such. Rather, it propagated itself as instinctual knowledge, acquired only through being born and raised within the Kanjar community. As I slowly picked up the Kanjarī dialect (which turned out to be a slightly modified form of the local Mewārī language), consternation spread: either (according

⁷ This particular VCNB, which documents thirty-four years of patrolling one village, notes only one occasion of direct communication with Kanjars: a particularly earnest officer recorded ‘counseling’ (*saṃjhānā*) the residents of one Kanjar settlement on the evils of drinking and theft.

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to Kanjars' neighbors) I too had magical powers, much like the Kanjars, or (according to Kanjars) I had been invested with special powers by the *sarkār*—the state—itsself subject to much mystification. As I learned more words, Kanjars began to insist that there is yet another level of secrecy to their language, a 'secret tongue' (*pārsī*)⁸ beneath their everyday speech. This tongue turned out to be a professional argot, consisting of no more than a few dozen words.⁹ As my friends, mostly my host and best informant, in the community taught me more of this *pārsī*, others insisted that there were two, four or even ten secret tongues aside from the one I was learning, and that no matter how much I tried I would never achieve their 'total knowledge' (*ṭoṭal jānkarī*). My host and key informant continued to teach me the tongues, which constitute a kind of pig Latin formed by standard substitutions of phonemes and addition of prefixes. Our lessons were a transgression: while outsiders (*Kadzās*) are to know *about* Kanjar secrets, they are not to know *what* they are. It is precisely such deviousness that made for my host's thrill in teaching me the secret tongues. Each time he prodded me to produce a sample of the argot for his bewildered neighbors (an activity that never ceased to

⁸ Literally, a 'separate, distinct or peculiar language' (Platts 1884: *ad loc.*)

⁹ Such jargons are commonly used by various guilds in South Asia: *Cāraṇ* genealogists use the specialist language known as *Ḍingal* to compile their records (Shah & Shroff 1958; Smith 1975; Ziegler 1976); merchants use special terms to conceal things from their customers; within the police each rank-grade in the police has its own argot used to keep things from outsiders as well as from officers of different rank. David Washbrook (1991) has pointed out that Sanskrit too functioned as a *Brāhmaṇ* argot. For some colonial-time compilations of 'secret' vocabularies of Criminal Castes and thieves' cants (cf. Sleeman 1836; Rose 1919, vol. 3: 451; Grierson 1927, vol. 1: 188). For a general discussion of secret languages in an Indian context, see Mehrotra (1977).

amuse him) and I came up with a ‘secret’ word or phrase, it was assumed that I did not ‘learn’ it as one learns English in school, but gathered it on the basis of some strange natural predisposition. As it became increasingly apparent that I grasped the content of most—including the most secret—conversations, a general consensus was reached by Kanjars and their neighbors alike: I was a Kanjar in a previous life.¹⁰

Another secret held by the Kanjars *jāti*, I soon learned, consisted in the ‘eighty-four wisdoms’ (*caurāsī buddhiyān*¹¹), into which I was only initiated at the very end of my stay in Lakshmipura, when my host arranged the long-promised lesson. We took my motorcycle a few kilometers out of the village—to the ‘jungle’—where my host revealed to me the eighty-four wisdoms (of which he could only remember twenty-seven). The wisdoms turned out to be a varied collection of prescriptions for thieving methods, ancestral practices and regulations regarding matters like bride wealth and incest. Most of them replicated the speculations that I

¹⁰ By the end of my research, I realized that a number of other non-Kanjars who frequented Kanjar villages, whether to drink or make deals with them, understood the Kanjar ‘tongues.’ Having more tact than I, however, they often did not advertise the fact. Most Kanjar ‘experts’ and other police officers were similarly privy to these languages.

¹¹ Eighty-four is a conventional number of parts that constitute a whole in South Asia. For instance, Rajasthani merchants, Gujarati Gujars, Brāhmaṇs, and even Ṭhags have historically claimed eighty-four clans or tribes to be constitutive of their communities (Tod 1920 [1829-32], vol. 1: 120; Elliott 1859, vol. 2: 58ff; Wagner 2007: Ch. 4). The number also refers to the complete set of stages of transmigration, so that ‘to suffer the eighty-four’ (*caurāsī bhognā*) means ‘to undergo all the transmigrations in store for one; to be punished for one’s sins’ (Platts 1884: 450). A local maxim, repeated to me by my Kanjar informants, says that ‘eighty-four wisdoms live in a thief’ (*cor mē caurāsī buddhiyā rahate hai*), that is, a thief has access to knowledge that is otherwise only partially available to others.

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so often heard in the bazaar or read in the police files (and at first dismissed as ‘mere gossip’). So, I had to hide disappointment. The long-awaited revelations of ‘ancient mores’ and ‘secret practices’ replicated what I thought to be tall tales on the lips of others. From the use of wall-climbing lizards to human sacrifice, my friend was repeating much of the stuff of my drinking conversations with Rājputs. When I asked why I had not seen any of this in their village, he explained that these were very old practices and that, although humans were no longer sacrificed and lizards no longer reared, it was important that all Kanjars knew these ‘secret signs of [their] distinction’ (*gupt pahcān*). Divulging such secrets, I was warned, would bring on the ruin (*barbādī*) of their community and I promised not to record the detail of any of them in My Book. Much like their neighbors, my Kanjar hosts also claimed that each family in the community had a treasure (*arj*) hidden ‘in the jungle.’ I did not learn the location of such treasures, and neither, I believe, did my Kanjar informants.

The rhetoric of secrecy is just as central to Kanjars’ representations of self as it is to their descriptions by others. The contents of secrets turned out to be hollow: either spurious or well-known. The movement of their creation, studied concealment and propagation, however, proved instructive. The trick here lay in at once revealing that secrets exist, and concealing what in fact they were. Things said to be hidden were commonly known, but required nurture through the processes of calculated concealment, allusion and revelation in

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circles of studied gossip. As Jenkins observed, ‘What is concealed, and the reasons for its concealment, serve to distract attention from the dynamic of the secret: what at first sight appears to be static and indeed dead, possessed by and known to only a few, kept in some dark place, in fact has a life and movement of its own; the secret propagates itself through a structure of secret and betrayal’ (Jenkins 1999: 225–26). Much like ‘the *active milling, polishing, and promotion of the reputation of secrets,*’ described by Johnson as ‘secretism’ in a Brazilian context (Johnson 2002: 3; italics in original), the discourse of secrecy that surrounds Kanjars generates mystified knowledge that acts as a screen for the absent, the well-known and the banal. Ethnography itself often amounts to such process of concealment of the banal and revelation of the extraordinary. As Dresch, an anthropologist of Arabia, put it: ‘The experience [of fieldwork] was not well described as simply “dialogue.” Nor was it “data collection.” It was more like a trade in secrets, though in a curious way. The more thriller-like the material, the less difficult to gather, to the point where one [is] constantly being told things unfit for print: the more mundane and empirical the published facts, by contrast, the more collecting them resembled clandestine intrigue’ (2000: 109–10).

The Kanjars’ unease about revealing their tongues, wisdoms and treasures had nothing to do with a fear that the police may find out things that they either already knew (such as their *modi operandi*) or did not care to know about (such as wedding or bride wealth

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arrangements). Rather, the disclosure of things meant to be hidden threatens the mystery that gives Kanjars a place in local society. As one of my Kanjar informants succinctly, if enigmatically, put it, ‘our secrets [*gupt*] are our watering well [*kūṅṛā*].’ Such mystification screens a social sphere that needs to be hidden from view. The relations, activities and persons concealed within it—and the reasons for their concealment— reveal an important aspect not only of the social location of Kanjars and like communities, but also a more general aspect of local society.

The order of ranked relations in South Asia finds expression in a correspondingly ranked order of conduct and communication.¹² Codes of deference, norms of comportment, forms of gesture and speech, as well as the order of precedence, quality and content of statements are asymmetrical and¹³ the rules of asymmetrical communication reflect the broader formulation of donor-recipient exchange between rank unequals. The communicative choreography of gift and receipt is condensed, for instance, in the standard orchestration of greetings between younger and elder kinsfolk: a child touches her aunt’s feet in a gesture of

¹² References to rules of communication on the subcontinent pepper ethnographic writing (e.g., Babb 1975: 51; Fuller 1992: 4). Osella & Osella (1998) have discussed the physical and verbal hierarchical and subversively ‘egalitarian’ communicative forms among youths in Kerala. A focused ethnography of the Indian communicative landscape, however, is yet to be written. There is not space enough here for a proper analysis of this communicative order, of the sort applied, for instance, to communication in Iran by Beeman (1986), a preliminary sketch will set out the broad context for my argument.

¹³ In linguistics, status asymmetry on the morphological and syntactic levels, where one form encompasses the other, has been analyzed, most notably by Jakobson, van Schooneveld and Greenberg, in the articulation of ‘marking’ or ‘markedness theory.’ See Andrews (1990) for an overview of this literature.

supplication and receives in return a blessing delivered with a magnanimous and kindly touch of the head. In a range of interactions, superiors offer a palm-down greeting, delivering a pat on the inferior's shoulders or head or, in cases of extreme status-difference, a barely noticeable magnanimous nod of acknowledgment, which signifies giving and projects the attitude of largesse. Inferiors, conversely, face their superiors with 'a bowed head and lowered eyes, so that they may receive from their superiors,' to quote one Brāhmaṇ of my acquaintance. An inferior's salutation, which ranges from a slight bow with palms pressed together in a 'praying' gesture below the chin (the *namaskār* or *namaste* greeting gesture¹⁴) to a full prostration (*dhok*), literally diminished the actor, making her fit to beg and receive. The supplicant's salutation is cognate with the begging gesture. As one Rājput explained, the *namaskār* gesture is a form of the 'beggars' sign' (*māṅgne wālō kā nīśān*) made by the cupping of palms in an alms-seeker's gesture.¹⁵ So, a 'popular Rajasthani adage that whereas a Brahman approaches a Rajput with his palms up (seeking alms), a Rajput approaches a Brahman with his palms down (giving alms)' locates Rājputs above Brāhmaṇs (Harlan 1992: 122).

¹⁴ From the Sanskrit *namaḥ*: 'to bow' or 'give obeisance.'

¹⁵ Fuller (1992: 3-4) has pointed out the significance of the *namaskār* as a marker of rank difference. He has not, however, observed that it is also a gesture of supplication. The link between the *namaskār* and an alms seeker's gesture is readily apparent, for instance, in the street beggar's standard form of address, which moves from the *namaskār* with the cupping of hands in one uninterrupted motion.

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The same principles guide verbal communication. Rank superiors give blessings and instructive messages (construed as ‘gifts of knowledge’ or *jānkaṛī kā dān*), and inferiors petition for and receive these ‘gifts.’ In the words of one Brāhmaṇ:

Everybody knows that superiors [*baṛe*, the large] must give and inferiors [*choṭe*, the small] must receive. The old speak first and the young speak second; we [the elders] explain and the young listen. That way they receive gifts [*dān*] of [their superiors’] knowledge [*jānkaṛī*]. We speak [*bol dete*], we ask [*pūchte*], and the young respond [*jawāb dete*].

Inferiors may appeal for favors to their superiors, but may not ‘command’ or make demands on them. Superiors, on their part, may not plead with, supplicate or accept ‘gifts’ (whether sums of money or declaratory speeches) from their subordinates. Everyday interaction between husbands and wives, parents and children, gods and devotees, or teachers and students is subject to the rules of communicative asymmetry, which makes for both an elegant economy of everyday communication (with messages passed and received with a minimum of gestures and words) and a lopsided, monologic, quality of many communicative events.¹⁶

Proceedings of village *pancāyats*, for instance, have been described as unilateral flows of complaints from petitioners matched by a similarly monologic stream of declaratory speeches and ‘explanations’ offered by elders (Gupta 1997: 47). Situations in which the order of rank is

¹⁶ Communication in families, for instance, is largely unilateral. When bilateral exchange does occur, it is often in response to conflict and, in turn, commonly instigates matches of shouting or even physical violence. William Beeman has observed similar problems of communication in situations when the order of rank is blurred in Iran (1986: 174ff).

blurred (in the diaspora, between unranked cousins or among parliamentarians) are commonly riddled with communicative problems.¹⁷ In the Indian National Parliament, where, unlike in the *pancāyat*, the order of rank among parliamentarians is not clearly set, MPs habitually rise out of order to shout out speeches with little regard for the agenda of the discussion, the particular questions raised or the authority of the Speaker.¹⁸

This choreography of communication is intrinsically public: it is presented before and arbitrated through the public gaze, and is fundamentally constitutive of the public sphere. And, as I shall explain in the final chapter, publicity lies at the core of local recognition of status. As such, it is readily observable in a wide variety of contexts, from the household to the village assembly, the session court, and the ultimate public proscenium of the bazaar. The ‘public,’ referred to as ‘the people’ (*log*) or as ‘*pablik*,’ is the observer. A child or an anthropologist often hears what things ought (or, more often, ought not) to be done ‘in front of the others,’ ‘in front of the people,’ or ‘in front of the public.’¹⁹ The public is the audience before which persons and groups must perform propriety and which acts as their judge and

¹⁷ Pocock (1957a & b) offers a classic example of the perils of communication among Gujarati immigrants to East Africa, whose order of rank has been upset by their removal from the local context.

¹⁸ In the Lower House in 2007 alone disruptions cost 128 hours of parliamentary sitting time (Spary 2010: 338). Such parliamentary ‘communicative disasters’ have been dubbed symptomatic of the decline of India’s political institutions and the ‘disease of democracy’ (Rubinoff 1998; Chatterjee 2007).

¹⁹ *Dusrō ke sāmne, logō ke sāmne, pablik ke sāmne.*

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their source of social worth, expressed locally in the language of honor (*izzat*).²⁰ ‘The people’ are said to ‘give honor’ to persons or communities that get to ‘keep it’ by adhering to proper form. Thus, *izzat* is a fundamentally public, extrinsically assigned, rather than an intrinsic, quality: in everyday speech *izzat* is given by others and kept by those whom it describes. In other words, *izzat* is worth in the eyes of others.²¹

The makeup of this *pablik* is relative to the social unit whose honor is at stake, and it shifts according to situation. For spouses, for instance, the *pablik* may include members of their household, before which wives may not openly speak to their husbands (a fact often bemoaned by wives and husbands alike in private). A family, whose marriage-status is relative to other families in its caste, may see its caste as ‘the *pablik*.’ Members of a caste, in turn, may refer to their neighbors or even the entire nation vis-à-vis which they lay claims to honor. However fluid it may appear, the public is always opposed to whatever ‘we’ is being invoked in each particular moment, and references to the public as such mark the parameters of a community whose honor is being earned in each situation. In order to earn honor for the communities to which they belong, people must display properly orchestrated comportment

²⁰ Although a conspicuous category of moral judgment in local society, honor has not been taken into focus by South Asian ethnographers. There is not space enough here to engage in an extended discussion of honor in Rajasthani society, which will appear in a separate piece elsewhere.

²¹ A woman who observes the proper form of veiling is thus said to ‘keep [her family’s] honor’ (inf. *izzat rakhnā*) (cf. Papanek and Minault 1982; Raheja and Gold 1994). For analyses of the relationship between veiling and honour in other contexts, see for instance Pitt-Rivers (1965), Anderson (1982b) and Abu-Lughod (1986).

that projects unity (*ektā*) within. Publically projected unity is a key value in the assessment of a community's worth:²² the good standing of persons and collectivities depends not only on the performance of practices appropriate to one's kind (or one's *khāndān*, as discussed in Chapter 3), but also on the public display of proper communicative norms.

Correct forms of comportment and properly performed communicative practices are not only a condition of a community's worth, but also of its presence as such. That is, a community is fundamentally defined by relational cohesion within it. If the display of hierarchical order projects internal cohesion,²³ public displays of insubordination or disagreement mark social discontinuity. So, while communicational hierarchy belongs to exchange *within* communities, public disputes are the reserve of interactions *between* them. In other words, only outsiders constitute legitimate dispute-parties, and displays of dispute can

²² As locals say, 'honorable communities live in unity' (*izzat-wāle khāndān ekte mē reve*). Communities like the Kanjar, where the order of rank is not clearly set and communication within which is riddled with conflict between elders and youngsters or husbands and wives, are thought of as *jātis* that lack integrity and honor. The same value of internal coherence applies to the evaluation of persons, so that madness is described as the 'soul in dispute with itself' (inf. *jīv gabrānā*).

²³ So, by reverentially touching an elder's, a guru's, a king's, or a politician's feet one at once indicates belonging to a family, a community of devotees, a polity, or a political party, and reifies the presence of such communities. Although rent by factionalism, pre-colonial kingdoms and post-colonial political parties alike have maintained their polite masks. While rebel nobles ravaged the by-ways of erstwhile Mewar, the dance of pomp and deference as ever constituted its courtly show (Vidal 1997; Balzani 2003). Although factional rivalry may shake a political party, its public meetings will nevertheless proceed in their well-orchestrated form, producing an image of perfect unity within.

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be used deliberately to draw and reify social boundaries.²⁴ Most often, however, open rows are perceived as threats to community, and open conflict is largely avoided, lest it deface particular communities and the society at large. Disagreements call for an external force.

5.2 SECRETS CONCEALED

Life on display stands alongside a hidden social terrain, on the existence of which it relies.²⁵ This hidden terrain houses activities, relations and persons that facilitate negotiations that have no place in life on display. As such, the hidden world forms the backstage necessary for the staging of politesse. Production of this offstage terrain relies on the rhetoric of mystification that screens certain places, proceedings and persons from public view. For members of polite society the public sphere is a moral and orderly domain. The hidden world, on the contrary, is an immoral, lawless and dangerous space where meat-eaters, alcohol

²⁴ Establishment of new independent polities in pre-colonial South Asia, for instance, was conventionally attended by an open and often violent conflict between the ruler and the dissenting party. Open attacks on Kanjars and their settlements, to which I will return at the end of this chapter, have likewise been used to underscore contrast between society proper and Kanjars. The latter example parallels the public nature of communal violence on the subcontinent, which does not only reflect, but also reifies the Hindu-Muslim divide; violence against Muslims bespeaks the distinctiveness of the Hindu Nation that stands in opposition to the Muslim outside.

²⁵ Contrast between external and internal spheres is not restricted to Rajasthan, western India or even South Asia, but is a phenomenon of at least pan-Asian provenance that has been observed in Bali (Geertz 1960), Japan (Doi 1986: 35-40) and Iran (Beeman 1986: Ch. 4). The moral valuation of these spheres differs from place to place, so that (contrary to what I have observed in Rajasthan) in Iran and Bali the inner domain is a morally positive space associated with the intimacy of friendship and domesticity, as well as with positively viewed freedom of expression (Geertz 1960; 1966; Beeman 1986: 11). As Herzfeld (1997) and Shryock (2004) have argued, mass-mediated and nationalized modernity has generated a new inner social domain separated from the openly staged 'public culture' across the globe, which closely parallels the opposition between the South Asian opposition between the open and the hidden social spheres.

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drinkers, illicit affairs, illegal dealings, and rogues like Kanjars thrive. Much like the ubiquitous alcohol shops (*śarāb kī dukhāns*), Kanjar settlements are said to be the dens of vice. As the embodiment of virtue, public society is an essentially different sphere of being from the immoral, which is set categorically apart from the polite and public.²⁶ Public vilification of the hidden realm, meanwhile, does not only reflect fears about secret things, but plays an active part in the rhetorical production of the hidden. Moral opposition between the public and the hidden, creates an ontological divide between the two spheres.

The ubiquitous dens of ‘vice’ sprinkled across the local landscape—butcheries, alcohol shops and Kanjar villages—are publically absent. So, when I first came to Fararpur, my respectable acquaintances (advocates, merchants, Brāhmaṇs, and especially their wives) told me that there are no drinking places or butcheries in the town. When I did learn about such places, I was told they are ‘dirty,’ full of ‘bad people’ and that ‘nobody goes there,’ so that in practice they are not part of the local landscape. Set either on highways outside towns and villages or tucked away in particularly narrow alleyways and hidden behind high walls and heavy curtains, local meat and alcohol shops bespeak this separation.²⁷ The same is true of Kanjars and their settlements, which are both normally set at a distance from multi-caste

²⁶ To put it in Simmel’s terms, it is evil that produces associations with secrecy, rather than the other way around (1906; translation by Wolff 1950: 331).

²⁷ Such moral separation is often knowingly projected by their owners, who may advertise their shops at ‘immoral and hidden’ by butchering chickens at the entry or letting empty bottles outline their outside walls.

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villages and, although not necessarily further off the beaten track than any other villages, are described both by Kanjars and their neighbors alike as inaccessible locations ‘in the jungle’ to which one must be introduced only by a special guide.

Such hidden locations are the sites of much important negotiation and in fact are often filled with the local wheelers and dealers. And it is here that many important business and political deals are made and family negotiations are carried out. Relations within such hidden spaces are often termed ‘friendship’ (*dostī*), a morally suspicious relationship that stands in contrast to the acceptable and well-ordered ties of kin (*ristedārī*).²⁸ In rural Rajasthan *dostī* is commonly associated with illicitness. The term describes illicit sexual relations and is used in reference to relations within spheres of illegal or otherwise illicit activity: among drinking buddies, among local opium smugglers (see de Wilde 2009: Ch. 5) or between Kanjars and local farmers or officers in the police.²⁹ As such, ‘friendship’ is thought to be spared the conventions which otherwise structure relations in the public sphere: ‘friends’ are not bound by prescriptions of ranked exchange and have the license to engage in illicit dealings.³⁰

²⁸The concept of friendship in South Asia has received relatively little attention from anthropologists so far. For some exceptions, see Osella & Osella (1998), Khan (2006), Nisbett (2007), and Dyson (2010). I am currently working on a more elaborate discussion of the concept of friendship (see Piliavsky forthcoming c).

²⁹ Women commonly connect suspicions of their husbands’ drinking, meat-eating and sexual infidelities with their association with a group of ‘friends.’ Likewise, ‘friendship’ (*dostī*) between a man and a woman designates an illicit affair.

³⁰ A local saying, ‘blood is thicker than water’ (*khūṇ pānī se gaharā hai*), relays this sense of loosening of relational forms among ‘brothers’ (blood) in the context of friendship. Parallel conceptions of friendship as a suspension of

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Historically, the publically visible sphere of social relations in South Asia has been backed by a large communicative backstage concealed from public view (Bayly 1996). This offstage sphere of has long been run by various surveillance, intelligence and mediation-agents—spies, runners, gossips, informers, and go-betweens who gathered intelligence, conveyed messages, negotiated deals, provoked or intimidated opponents, and mediated disputes—the kinds of persons that populate Kipling’s *Kim*.³¹ While playing a crucial role in upholding the polite veneer of local society, such agents themselves have stood outside of its mainstream.³² In minor quotidian contexts it is often children, who have not yet fully entered family hierarchies and do not substantially take part in public performance, who run messages between households and fetch things from the market. For more weighty negotiations, spies, messengers and negotiators have long been drawn from the ranks of peripheral persons and communities: *jāṅgalī* ‘tribals,’ wandering ascetics, nomads, beggars, street performers, or itinerant bards.

ordinary structures of relatedness has been described in related contexts in Afghan and Pakhtun societies (e.g., Anderson 1982; Lindholm 1982: Ch. 7).

³¹ Governance treatises (*nītiśāstras*) give a sense of the extent of involvement of secret agents in the Indian political sphere. Kauṭilya, the author of the best known text of the sort, devotes much of his *Arthaśāstra* to the description of spies, secret agents and the methods they are to employ in helping the king.

³² South Asia is not the only home to such invisible people who negotiate the social backstage. In the Middle East there is a whole class of ‘invisible’ go-betweens (*dalāls*) who run errands, deliver messages and act as mediators for respectable people (Dresch 1989: Ch. 4; 1998). In Amazonia, the nomadic Makú have a similar relationship with the Tukanoan-speaking settled peoples (Stephen Hugh-Jones, personal communication).

5.3 MEDIATION AND THE MORAL ECONOMY OF THEFT

Theft employed in negotiations is a communicative act. When hired by patrons, it is primarily not a means of resource extraction, but a means of negotiation. In the first months of my research I was constantly baffled by the fact that, although thieving excursions and dealings with Kanjars were certainly hushed affairs, the people from neighboring villages who visited Lakshmipura to negotiate the return of a stolen anklet or goat often seemed to know exactly who the thief was. As I came to realize that much theft committed by Kanjars was not a form of resource extraction, but a communicative practice, how and why its victims came to be in the know became less of a mystery. For theft to be an effective means of communication, it is essential that the victim is made aware of the identity of the messenger and that he understands the message of the raid.

Most adult Kanjar men in Lakshmipura are employed as watchmen (*caukīdārs*) by village communities, families, households, or individual men.³³ Such employment can last for several generations, a few years or constitute one-off arrangements. The title of ‘watchman,’ however, is misleading because the *caukīdār*’s duties encompass much more than the protection of property, involving him in the negotiation of disputes within and between his employers’ families. The *caukīdār* guards not only against theft, but also against scandal.

³³ This is one of the most stable sources of income, and almost two thirds of adult men in the all-Kanjar village where I did research are currently employed as *caukīdārs*.

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Protection from theft itself is more of a diplomat's than a policeman's business. One hardly finds *caukīdārs* making nightly rounds of their employers' fields. Instead, their policing work involves them in locating the thief and negotiating the return of stolen property to its owner or the remuneration of loss. That is why most, and the best, *caukīdārs* come from thieving communities, where they have contacts crucial for obtaining intelligence and for facilitating discussions between victims and thieves. Some negotiations in which *caukīdārs* get involved can be long and laborious affairs requiring from the watchman a great deal of patience, delicacy and diplomatic skill.

In the summer of 2008 my Kanjar host became involved in resolving a case of theft that took place in one of his Gujar-*jajmān* families. His job was not to investigate the matter, as the perpetrator was already established, but to ensure the restoration of stolen goods through amicable means. In this particular case, the wife of the youngest of three brothers in the family stole five goats from the household of the eldest and sold them in a Bhil village some twenty kilometers away. The victim of theft could not himself discuss the matter with her; as in most *jātis* in Northern India, contact between Gujar men and their younger brothers' wives is strictly constrained and the relationship is visibly marked with the veil and the physical distance which men keep from their younger brothers' wives (cf. Freed & Freed 1964: 153; Mandelbaum 1970, vol. 1: 64-65). Verbal communication between them is almost entirely

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banned: inasmuch as a woman cannot directly address her husband's elder brother, she is also spared the obligation to respond to him.³⁴ Any persistence on his part to provoke dialogue would be interpreted as a violation of her, his and the family's honor.³⁵ Besides, as Gopal explained, as an elder (*barā*), it was shameful for him to openly 'beg' (inf. *māṅgnā*) for the return of the goats. The family needed an 'outside man' (*bahār kā ādmī*) for 'instructing' or 'counseling' (*samjhānā*) the woman.³⁶ 'I am,' he added, 'just such a man!' Unlike members of the family whose dispute he worked to resolve, as an outsider Gopal could speak and be spoken to on both sides of the conflict. In the course of the following months, he made a series of visits to both parties, delivering their concerns—and finally threats—to each other. The matter was ultimately resolved and the woman paid the price of the stolen goats and my Kanjar host received one fifth of this sum from the plaintiff.

Words often do not suffice to reconcile the differences, whose resolution then calls for more muscular means of negotiation. This is when the Kanjars' thieving expertise is invoked. In early July, when the garlic was safely gathered, all were having tea and I was snuggled up with pneumonia on a charpoy, an elderly Gujar, whom I recognized as one of my Kanjar host's

³⁴ So, to my naïve question as to why the Gujar could not raise the issue with her directly, my host explained, with some exasperation, that 'she is his younger brother's wife [*choṭī bhābhī*]! How could he speak to her?'

³⁵ It is precisely on this prohibition that the younger brother and his wife attempted to capitalize, deputing the wife to steal the goats and thus depriving the plaintiff of any obvious response.

³⁶ '*Samjhānā*' means literally 'to make understand,' 'explain' or appeal to reason thought to be blurred by passion. On the didactic significance of the term see Carstairs (1957: 47).

jajmāns, appeared at our doorstep. Producing a bottle of *dārū*,³⁷ he lowered himself on the charpoy next to my Kanjar host and explained the following: his elder brother, with whom he had been sharing the use of a field, decided to appropriate a quarter of his portion of land. Two days ago the plaintiff woke up to find the low makeshift stone wall that separated his and his brother's fields had been moved a meter into his land. As a younger brother, my host's *jajmān* was not in a position to demand the restoration of the boundary. He said that he had tried to 'beg for an answer' (inf. *jawāb māṅgnā*), but his brother has ignored his approaches, which of course as an elder he has the right to do. Although our guest had been cultivating this section of family land since his father's death almost ten years ago, officially, his portion of the field belonged to the elder brother. If a semblance of family cohesion was to be maintained, the dispute needed to be resolved quietly, without a public display of dispute, which would jeopardize the family's honor by making it appear 'fractured' (*tuṭā*) in its neighbors' and caste-mates' eyes. Like most other family disputes, this one was kept from the public arenas of caste or village *pancāyat*, police station and court.

The *jajmānī* relationship between my host and the Gujar encroacher dissolved a year ago, after the patron for the third time refused to make his semiannual payment (*caukīdārī*).

³⁷ Although watchmen receive regular payments (at the time of research, each household made semiannual payments of 100 Rupees), when their services are required for a particular job, gifts (usually in the form of alcohol) are often brought to negotiations so as to underscore the donor-role of the *jajmān* and the *caukīdār*'s obligation to service.

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Offended by his refusal, my host resolved to demonstrate the value of his service to the renegade patron; the dispute between the two Gujars came as an opportunity to redress his own grievances and, hopefully, to regain his patronage. After another three hours of drinking, during which both men became increasingly vocal about the offenses they had suffered at the hands of the elder brother, it was decided that my host would soon orchestrate a burglary at the offender's homestead, so as 'to seat' (*baiṭhānā*) the offender.

To 'seat,' 'squeeze' or 'press down' (infin. *dabānā*) someone means to lower or diminish their position relative oneself. Commissioned theft can 'seat' people in two ways. First, by making their homesteads vulnerable to penetration, it 'exposes,' as locals put it, 'their weakness' (inf. *kamjorī dekhānā*). In Rajasthan (as I pointed out in Chapter 3) a man of good standing, enshrined in the figure of a sword bearing *rājā*, is a tough man who can protect his household, family or dominions from intrusion.³⁸ By penetrating a rival's home, burglary exposes weakness and diminishes its victim's relative worth. This is why penetration in its own right, without the extraction of goods, is often sufficient. During my fieldwork, for instance, one Rājput of my acquaintance woke up to find the contents of his living room (including the coffee table, chairs, curtains, china, and stationery) burgled and neatly arranged

³⁸ Mewaris stake the history of their resistance to Mughal invasion, at the cost of many local lives, as the marker of their honor.

in his own front garden.³⁹ Second, by forcing victims ‘to ask’ (*pūchnā*) or ‘to beg’ (*māṅgnā*) for the return of their possessions, burglary briefly places victims in the inferior role of a supplicant. Such momentary inversion of the relative standing of the parties in conflict locates the thieves’ employers in a superior position from which they can make demands. One farmer with whom I became well acquainted and who likes to employ Kanjars to ‘seat’ his cousins and neighbors, explained that after he had ‘his boys’ (his Kanjar *caukīdār* and his brothers) ‘collect harvest’ (*uḡāi uṭhānā*) from the home of one of his cousins, the cousin was forced to

ask [him] to give back what they had taken. He came begging like a dog to return his wife’s gold. So, I told him—now you too will have to give me an answer, where is that money I lent you last year? So, he returned the money, which [until then] he refused so much as to talk about. And we got his gold, but not without interest [*baṛhī*] ... [laughs].

Commissioned theft does not simply compel compliance by means of blackmail, but makes otherwise prohibited negotiations possible via a momentary inversion of the ordinary rank order.⁴⁰

³⁹ A similar episode was reported in Calcutta in 1923. The police report states that upon arrival in his new posting, a British Sub-Inspector was approached by local Kanjar watchmen, who suggested that he would not manage without their help. The officer refused their ‘aid,’ ignoring their request to be employed. In a week, the contents of his office were neatly laid out in front of his house and in his back garden. Not a single item was missing, but the message was clear. It was later reported that soon thereafter the Inspector employed the Kanjars (Pinhey 1925).

⁴⁰ Debt repayment is one of most common causes of confrontations that involve the aid of Kanjars is invoked. Of the fourteen cases of Kanjar-facilitated mediation, of which I was aware, that took place during my fieldwork in 2007 and 2008, nine were concerned with debt repayment. As most loans are made informally within circles of

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In the context of the dispute between the two Gujar brothers, the younger brother wished to accomplish just this: to lower his brother momentarily so as to put him in a position to heed his demands. As he himself put it, he wished ‘to press [his brother] to respond [*jawāb denā*].’ A few minutes after midnight on the following moonless night of *amāwas* (the best time for such excursions) my host sent two of his younger brothers and a young cousin to extract the two kilos of silver, which, as his employer claimed, were hidden in the back bedroom of their victim’s home. By four o’clock in the morning, the party returned, whispering with great excitement. The silver was where it was said to be and they had little trouble getting to it. It was the hot season and the family (like most villagers) was asleep out of doors. Within a fortnight of the raid, at five o’clock in the evening, the twilight hour at which drinking in Kanjar villages begins, a Gujar man bearing a bottle of *dārū* appeared at the threshold of my host’s front yard. He was the victim of the recent excursion, who proceeded to make, in the course of the following months, regular visits through which he negotiated the return of his silver for a payment of 300 Rupees and the reinstatement of my host’s position as his *caukīdār*. Although the relationship between the two Gujar brothers did not at once return to speaking terms, the boundary between their fields was soon restored to its prior position.

kith and kin, their repayment cannot be enforced through official means (see Appendix V for a list of dispute cases resolved by the Lakshmipura Kanjars in 2007 and 2008).



Figure 5.1: A Lakshmipura Kanjar and his Gujar *jajmān* negotiating

The victim could make an easy guess at the identity of the raid's sponsor and the reasons for such aggression. He suspected, as it later turned out, that the burglary was my host's handiwork. His suspicions were soon confirmed by the thieves' sponsor himself, who informed his opponent of the fact that he commissioned the theft and of the thieves' identity. As is conventional in such matters, two young unmarried boys in the family (who are not yet part of the public performance that contributes to their family's honor) were deployed to deliver the message to the raid's victim.

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Not all raiding contests result in seamlessly amicable resolutions. Instead of ‘begging’ for the restoration of their goods, victims may set their own thieves onto the assailant, so that such thieving contests can turn into months, or sometimes years, of escalating reciprocity of assault that can lead to bankruptcy, murder and irreparable rifts between the parties.

Marketplace rumor-mills are full of cautionary tales about unduly stubborn and proud Rājput brothers who, refusing compromise, are ruined by the forces that they unleash against each other. Of course not everyone plays such ‘games’ (*khel*, as Kanjars call such thieving contests) fairly and some may use thieving gangs as a brute force to extract unpaid loans and interest or to avenge or to ‘ruin’ (*barbād karnā*) the rival. In such cases theft becomes an attack aimed at ending the relationship rather than a communicative means to restore it.⁴¹

Most often, it is Kanjars employed in such games that fall prey to their victims’ aggression.⁴² Whereas open negotiation of disputes and violence within communities is a threat to their integrity and honor, violence directed at Kanjars is not only fair, but also a means to highlight the dividing line between Kanjars and ordinary society—to underscore

⁴¹ More recently thieving has been put into a different use to ‘ruin’ opponents by planting illegal opium poppies and its derivative drugs (such as ‘brown sugar’ and heroin) into opponents’ homes and then informing the police of their possession. The law regarding possession of opium and its derivatives is punished by a minimum of ten years’ imprisonment with no bail and virtually no possibility of bribing one’s way out.

⁴² Thus, in the course of the past twenty years, twenty-two Kanjars in and around Fararpur have been murdered by nearby villagers suspecting them of thieving under their rivals’ aegis. More commonly, however, Kanjars suffer non-lethal assaults.

their exclusion. Inasmuch as violence against Kanjars is unproblematic for members of ordinary society, the same is true for Kanjars, for whom violence directed at Kādzās constitutes a categorically different, and much less grave, act than violence against their own Bhāñtūs.

Disagreements between Kanjar-watchmen and their patrons can quickly turn into violent clashes. And it is not always clear who has the upper hand in such contests. My Kanjar host, for instance, was once beaten by one of his Gujar *jajmāns*, who suspected him of burgling his house on behalf of one of his neighbors, provoking an outburst of retaliation from his *caukīdār*. Deeply offended not only by the blows of the staff, but—much more so—by the implied accusation of infidelity, my host Gopal flew into a rage and threatened his abusive *jajmān* not only with the withdrawal of his protection, but with burgling his family ‘to the last skirt.’⁴³ Within a few days he substantiated his threat by setting the *jajmān*’s motorcycle on fire, a move that I expected would certainly land him in jail. My host did not agree: ‘even if I go to jail,’ he said, ‘I will come out in two months and then you will see—I will not leave a single peanut in his stores and he knows that! He has seen what I can do, so he knows that it is better to avoid meddling with the police.’ He was right and the case did not go to the police and the court. Instead, the matter came to be negotiated through family members of the

⁴³ *Yek ghāghrā na chorke*, or ‘to the last piece of cloth.’

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defaulting *jajmān*, who, fearing my host's retaliation, shuttled between the two parties in the course of the following three months, 'explaining' to each the worth of reconciliation. The offence on both sides was grave and the resolution took more than four months of frequent exchange. The *jajmānī* relationship was restored, the *jajmāns*, as a seal of reconciliation, offering my host a horse at half of its market price.

The privacy of underhanded negotiations is respected by neighbors, who treat thieving contests respectfully, as 'internal matters' (*andar ke māmle* or *andar ke bāt*) not subject to public comment. Commissioned raids are not condemned as criminal or immoral, but, conversely, approved of as testimony to their sponsors' ability to invoke connections and mobilize force, exercise sway within his family, all without a threat to his family's public face. As one farmer explained, commenting on the dispute between the two Gujar brothers described above, 'it is an inner family matter, a matter between the brothers. It is a matter of honor. It is not for talk in the bazaar. If a man has courage and strength, he may fight for his honor and resolve his family quarrels this way [through thieving].'

5.4 SECRET AGENTS FOR THE POLICE

Employment of Kanjars is not confined to the 'informal' sphere of local politicking, but, as I have already pointed out, is an essential part of formal policing practice. Inasmuch as the informal rhetoric of secrecy constitutes an important means for concealing widespread

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employment of Kanjars from public view, the formal descriptions of Kanjars in police files constitute an important way to protect the employment of Kanjars by the police from the official gaze. The narrative of Kanjar secrecy pervades police records as much as it occupies gossip in the bazaar.

Claims to Kanjar magic and secrecy written into police reports under their supervision, belie the degree of officers' knowledge of and involvement with local Kanjars. An excerpt from the VCNB cited above, for instance, offers the following:

December 16, 1998

Together with the police force SHO C came in search of the criminal Z in relation to case #273/98 with accusation under IPC section 379 [theft]. He raided the settlement and made the arrest. He checked for the presence of the criminal X, who was not found to be present in the village. But we heard that he visited town N. His accomplices cannot be found. The entries are complete and correct.

Signed, SHO B, Lakshmipura *thānā* ...

The documents thus produced leave the reader mystified and the mystery has its purpose. And they are meant to do so. In the police, information about Kanjars is framed as privileged knowledge, or expertise. Transmitted from one Kanjar Expert to the next and masked by allusions to magic and secrecy on paper, what the police do know about Kanjars is carefully preserved through the rhetoric of secrecy, which hides an important sphere of relations not meant for disclosure.

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This rhetoric of magic in police descriptions serves an important role. ‘Kanjar knowledge’ (*Kanjar jānkaṛī*) is almost never written down because what is written is no longer hidden. Instead, records of contact with and information about Kanjars are passed down orally from one officer to the next within police stations and district police circles. A station under whose jurisdiction live Kanjars (or other similarly ‘secret communities’), a Constable and an Assistant Sub-inspector are often designated for communications with and gathering information about Kanjars. Such officers often remain in the same posting for many years (much beyond the length of term prescribed in the Rajasthan Police Rules⁴⁴), thus nurturing lasting and intimate relationships with local Kanjars, many of which last more than one generation.

These officers are usually assigned to the circle of regular inspection in Kanjar villages, and are often found in civilian clothes, chatting with Kanjars both in villages and in the bazaar. With time, some of them may acquire the status of ‘Kanjar experts.’ These are officers with extended experience in the service, who are responsible for providing help in collecting

⁴⁴ Although the Rajasthan Police Rules prescribe a maximum term of two years for these ranks, most commonly remain in their posting for many decades, if not for life. Moreover, while the Police Rules prescribe posting outside of one’s native Judicial Circle, most of the low-ranking officers are posted near their home villages. The arrangement of a convenient posting close to home is simply expected from officers in charge, such a ‘favor’ considered part of the deal in the routine purchase of positions. Employment in particular positions (in the police as much as in other branches of government service), moreover, becomes inherited, so that multiple generations of men from the same family are employed in the same or similar post. Of the sixteen Constables, Head Constables and Assistant Sub-Inspectors in the local *thānā*, twelve were well acquainted with the local Kanjars for more than ten years and four had multi-generational relationships (two of these going back three generations) with the local *birādarī*.

intelligence from and about Kanjar gangs. These experts often have long standing relationships with local Kanjar villages and their most influential members, who seek the direct protection of police officer and negotiate deals between the local Kanjar community and the police.⁴⁵ The best informers are of course those most heavily involved in thieving—active thieves or, better still, gang leaders.⁴⁶ It is under their supervision that the Kanjar ‘ethnographies’ are produced. Most of these ‘experts’ are impressively well-informed about Kanjars’ life and work, often knowing not only the details of thieving territorial arrangements, but also the peculiar details of marriage celebrations or the names of some of their clans. As I show in the previous chapter (Section 4.6), how officers relate to and what they expect from their Kanjar informers varies according to their rank. For the low ranks, Kanjars primarily serve as a source of cash. The reason needs a brief explanation.⁴⁷ For officers in the lowest ranks promotion is an extremely distant prospect.

⁴⁵ If collaboration is not forthcoming, a standard way of acquiring information consists primarily of ‘convincing’ (as one Sub-Inspector put it) some Kanjars to be informants for the police. To make sure that I understood what he meant by ‘convincing,’ one Kanjar expert pointed to a riding crop displayed centrally on his bedroom wall. ‘Hunter,’ he said, the first English word uttered that evening.

⁴⁶ This system is patterned on the system of Thug approvers established by Sleeman in the early nineteenth century under the scheme of the Department for the Suppression of Thuggee and Dacoity, which, as Bernard Cohn put it, ‘made use of informers who turned state’s evidence’ for the Thuggee and Dacoity Department (1996: 10).

⁴⁷ A fuller discussion of the politics of recruitment, promotion and transfer in the Rajasthani police force is beyond the scope of this thesis. See Jauregui’s doctoral dissertation (2010: Ch. 7) for a detailed discussion of the politics of transfer in the Uttar Pradesh police.

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According to the Rajasthan Police Rules, a newly recruited Constable must serve a minimum of seven years (or five years if he has a university degree) before he can take the upgrade examination. Fierce competition with success rates hovering around one per cent prevents most officers from as much as attempting the examination. Moreover, promotion from the post of Constable to the post of an Assistant Sub-Inspector entails more frequent transfers, most likely posting away from home, and decreased opportunity of 'field work,' which provides the most earning opportunity for officers of such standing. One retired Inspector explained:

If [you are] posted [as an Inspector] in a station, it is a big system. You have no direct area, so you will not be getting the amount. If you are in an outpost [*cauki*], you are only four persons. If you divide the area, each gets a harvest from the criminals in the area. So, it depends on the individual personnel. If I allow one person to sell illicit liquor or a lady to immoral traffic, they will pay me. The people who have gone very down to the earth, they will join hands with Kanjars: you will go for theft and I will take a cut.

Besides, recruitment at any level, even as low as the rank of a Constable, is a costly business. In southern Rajasthan the current going rate for placement on the training list (which is the first step to becoming a Constable) is 150,000-200,000 Rupees,⁴⁸ sums that drive many officers into debt in the first place and which are impossible to ever repay from the Constable's meager 3,005 Rupee salary. Thus, while officially 'at least 50% of officers below IPS [Indian Police

⁴⁸ In comparison to the 250,000-300,000 Rupee going rate of the posting in Uttar Pradesh (Jauregui 2010: 50) and the same reported of postings in the urban stations in Jaipur, such rates are thought of as reasonable.

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Service high-middle rank], and 1/3 of IPS, must be promoted from the rank immediately subordinate, rather than [be] directly recruited to start at the higher rank,' in fact a much smaller proportion of officers arrive in their positions by way of promotion (Jauregui 2010: 50). Most Constables in fact avoid promotion, pursuing instead the task of collecting *bakśiś* for the receipt of which they are, as field officers, well positioned. Kanjars can also be useful for such officers by serving both as intelligence agents and, when necessary, as scapegoats who boost their 'statistics,' leading to possible (although not necessarily likely) promotion.⁴⁹

The higher ranks, conversely, need the Kanjars' intelligence, which earns them the favor of powerful men—politicians, magistrates, merchants, smugglers, toughs, or other powerful and connected people who, if provoked, could get them transferred to the edge of the desert—on whose good will they rely to stay in, or be transferred to, a desirable (read lucrative) post. One retired IPS officer explained:

There are rules. He [Senior House Officer] should not be transferred [within] two years [of his posting]. But if there is administrative ground, the Superintendent of Police can transfer him before two years with the permission of the senior officers, like the IG [Inspector General]. So, madam, the SP [Superintendent of Police] can do any mischief, so [the administrative procedure] is a cover-up for such activities. But the IG is also posted through political influence, so everybody who is in the system has to keep political ties very strong. You can have the ties strong when you cooperate. It is a

⁴⁹ The higher the level of direct recruitment, the greater the likelihood of promotion. So, while most Constables do not rise beyond the level of Head Constables, officers hired directly as Sub-Inspectors (SIs), Deputy Superintendents (DySPs) or Assistant Superintendents (ASPs), more readily move up the ranks in the course of their careers. Jauregui observes that in Uttar Pradesh 'almost every IPS officer who starts at the level of ASP will retire at the level of DG [Director General of State Police] or IG [Inspector General of State Police]' (2010: 386).

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required, mandatory thing. So to keep our posting, we need to survive. So what is the policy, what is the example, the other principles if I do not survive? The biggest problem is to survive. Then you can go for better life, better everything. For survival, they have to follow the politicians.

Like other patronage ties, relationships with informers (which officers often refer to as ‘friendships’) are built on the principle of donorship: officers are expected to give gifts of food and clothing to their informers. One retired Inspector explained:

The police stations have no ‘secret funds’ for informers. But we need criminals to give us information [*sūcnā*] and to connect us to criminal ‘networks’ [a word he used in English]. So, we build relationships [*ristā*] with them. I don’t have money to give away, but I give food and clothes [to my informers]. We need to fill our quotas,⁵⁰ so how can I not nurture friendship [*dostī rakhnā*] with Kanjars?

Food and clothing are not merely payments used in place of cash. They are much more profoundly binding substances, ensuring not only mutual benefit, but also bonds of loyalty and trust. As one Kanjar informer put it, ‘We do not bite the hand that feeds us and we never betray the salt that has been given to us [*namak ḥarām nahī karte*].’

Kanjars who enjoy the protection of superiors in police stations become immune to the influence of the *sipāhīs*, who are, in turn, prevented from enjoying the benefits of Kanjar patronage. The *sipāhīs* have their own means to redress such matters. Their longer lasting and often more intimate bonds with Kanjars often mean that they can sway Kanjars’ allegiances to

⁵⁰ For satisfying a target percentage of reported cases resolved and offenders apprehended, which are crucial for the careers and salaries of officers.

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more senior officers or otherwise undermine bonds between Kanjars and their superiors in the station. A common practice among Constables is the ‘disclosure’ (*‘out karnā’*) of senior officers’ informers. When officers ‘disclose’ informers, they spread rumors in an informer’s village or *birādarī* that incidents of police harassment or arrests have been the result of his dealings with the senior *thānā* officers. Although the informer’s relationship generally benefits his own community, distrust spreads, which makes his work as an informer difficult, potentially rendering him entirely ineffective as a source of intelligence for the patron-officer. The relationship no longer useful to the officer is thus undone, making informers vulnerable and thus open to the petty protection that can be offered by the *sipāhī*.

The intimacy between policemen and Kanjars reveals more than the practical details of local political struggles. The particular role of Kanjars in the formal structures of state policing speaks for something much more general about the workings of modern governance and statehood at large. One Sub-Inspector described the space occupied by the ‘*secret agents*’ (a phrase he used in English), as officers jokingly call their Kanjar informers: ‘By law, the government workers [*sarkārī naukar*] and the criminals [*apradhī log*] should not have any connections [*sambandh*]. We [police officers] have to catch them, but how can we do that without knowing them or talking to them?’ The contrast between formal and informal, official and unofficial, criminal and legal, or government and society, that lies at the basis of modern

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state ideology (cf. Abrams 1988; Mitchell 1991; Scott 1998; Fuller & Harriss 2001) draws boundaries between persons and within spheres of relationships that are not, and cannot be, kept pure of each other. Those who steal and those who police, whether in Fararpur or in New York, are not members of separate organizational structures, but are necessarily involved in the same set of processes. The contradiction between the idea of the state that blindly maintains law and order for all and the observed fact that the state requires the criminal—whether as described in this essay or in the popular television series *The Wire*—produces the familiar illusion of the state’s separation from society. Much as the hidden negotiations or the thieving contests uphold the public honor of families and the respectability of Rajput ‘brotherhoods,’ it is precisely the relationships that stand in the shade of officialdom that maintain the public face of the state.⁵¹

5.5 THE WOES OF INVISIBLE MEN

For Kanjars, this secret sphere is not only a terrain where the enterprising thrive, it is also a space of vulnerability that remains largely invisible to international ‘watchdog’ organizations, ‘the public’ and ‘the rule of law.’ For the many Kanjars who do not have the ‘good end’ of such arrangements, this carries practical consequences. Those who are not under

⁵¹ A fuller discussion of the relationship between the narrative of separation between the state and society as it relates to the division between the public and sphere is beyond the scope of my concerns in this thesis and shall be discussed elsewhere.

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police tutelage are subject to ongoing predation, ‘erroneous’ convictions, or incarceration without trial or evidence. Those under such unofficial patronage are often no less vulnerable. As I write, my main informant and best friend among Kanjars (the one who taught me the Kanjar language and Wisdoms) is in prison, and has been for more than two months, having been simply ‘put’ there by the new head of police station, with whom he is not on good terms. When Kanjars disappear into jails for months at a time or are killed by their neighbors, it comes as no surprise to anyone. They are, after all, master-illusionists, ever disappearing into their ‘secret lairs’ or into ‘the jungle.’ This is exactly how one jailer responded to my question as to why seven Kanjar inmates were not accounted for in the records:⁵² ‘nobody ever knows where Kanjars are—they are always coming-and-going [*āte-jāte rahate*]. Sometimes they are here and sometimes they are not. How can I keep track of them?’ Of course what lies behind this response is a whole set of relations not meant for the official gaze of Delhi officials, the press, and anthropologists. And while the rhetoric of secrecy may for some be a ‘watering well,’ it is often a screen that hides behind it a great deal of violence and abuse.

As I already noted, police protection has meant that the Kanjars’ thieving beats are now restricted to the territory under the jurisdiction of the local patron-station. As a result, the

⁵² It is common practice for policemen to put Kanjars into jails without trial or warrant so as to extract a sum of cash for their release. Such temporary incarcerations are left unrecorded, provided the head jailer is willing to accept a ‘fee,’ usually a small fraction of what the Kanjar families will pay for the inmate’s release to the police. Inspections of prisons are virtually nonexistent, so both jailers and police officers have little fear of supervision.

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local population has been subjected to consistently high levels of predation, to which it has responded with equally consistent and brutal levels of violence. Violence against the Fararpur Kanjars peaked two decades ago. At four o'clock in the morning on 23 June 1990 some four thousand farmers surrounded the two dozen Kanjar dwellings in Lakshmipura. Armed with bamboo staffs, muskets, mallets, petrol canisters, and dynamite, the men had an ambitious aim to raze the settlement and to either kill or forever chase away all of its residents. But as the sun rose and the crowd swelled, they hesitated to move. At eight o'clock in the morning two jeeps carrying men from the local police station drove up to the settlement. The officer in charge (*thānedār*) and a dozen other policemen approached the besieged Kanjars, who were clutching muskets and canes. Calling aside the village leaders, the *thānedār* promised the Kanjars protection from the mob in exchange for a surrender of their arms, causing a split of opinions among the villagers; while some put faith in the proposed arrangement, others thought such trust (*viśwās*) in the policeman unwarranted. In the end, the elders advocating compliance with the police, persuaded the rest, and arms were handed over.

Kanjars say that the head officer then blew a whistle and the expectant crowd rushed the Kanjar settlement. They killed ten, crippled one, wounded dozens, and destroyed all but one of their homes. That morning the farmers succeeded, but only partially. A head constable in the Inspector's entourage dissented, riding off on his motorcycle to the town to make phone

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calls to the Superintendent's office. As the news spread, a number of onlookers arrived on the scene. Among these was the local Excise Commission Officer, who brought some victims to the local hospital. News of the *Lakshmipura Kāṇḍ*, the 'Lakshmipura Firing,' as the event came to be known, spread fast. Within a week Rajiv and Sonia Gandhi were on the spot, including the village in their pre-election tour of Rajasthan. A string of dignitaries followed, including local nobility and even royalty. Inquiries were initiated by the Central Bureau of Investigation, a criminal case filed in the Rajasthan High Court, and twenty-one of sixty-eight formally identified perpetrators were taken into judicial custody and released on bail shortly after. The appeal is pending in court and in surrounding villages farmers keep the canes they used on the occasion as memorabilia.

The incident continues to inform local histories; almost two decades later, stories of the event are still part of bazaar rumor and uncertainties surrounding its cause continue to provide fertile grounds for speculation, debate and proliferation of conspiracy theories. The commonly cited reasons for the attack range from a love affair of a Kanjar with a Brāhman woman in Lakshmipura proper to the tracing of a stolen sack of opium poppy seeds to the settlement. One thing, however, is certain: the attack tells us something distinctive about the relationship between Kanjars and the neighboring farmers, a relationship which has changed in the decades since Independence. As one local advocate put it,

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The relationship between Kanjars [and Dhākaṛ farmers] broke down. Hostility grew [to such an extent] that the only way [forward that the farmers could see] was a total destruction of the Kanjars. At the time, the MLA [Member of Legislative Assembly] was a Dhākaṛ, who had influence over the police. So, whatever the pretext [for the attack]—and every man in this town has his own story—the farmers took this opportunity to avenge the long-standing grudges they all held in common against the Kanjars.

Whereas family conflict has to be hidden, one can kill Kanjars if the need arises. They are, after all, a people who are not ‘like us’ and who do not matter. Shows of violence against Kanjars are not only permissible, but also desirable as performances that highlight the ‘unity’ of local communities in opposition to Kanjars. Ironically enough, during the pogrom the same farmers who have been hiring Kanjars to burgle each other’s homes made a show of ‘coming together’ as a community of men fighting side by side against Kanjars. The farmers were in fact so certain of their right to violence against Kanjars that many were surprised by investigation of the case that was launched by the central government: ‘nobody could believe,’ as one Dhākaṛ remarked, ‘that anyone would notice that some Kanjars died, I mean that anybody would pay attention to such a thing.’

CONCLUSION

Kanjar secrets proliferated in the marketplace, newspaper headlines and police files turned out to be hollow: their contents were either well-known or spurious. The mystification of Kanjars, however, is an important process that creates a hidden terrain the existence of

which is crucial for the maintenance of public life on display. Thus, what I initially dismissed as ‘mere gossip,’ turned out to be an important domain of social production. This hidden terrain of persons, relations and activities is screened with the rhetoric of secrecy that sets it apart from public life. Rhetorically separated, the secret and the manifest worlds are, just as Simmel (1950 [1906]) pointed out, intimately intertwined. The maintenance of propriety and the public quality of the manifest world rely on the existence—and continuous generation—of this secret terrain. Such mystification is not particular to India, but is a feature of the making of public societies around the world. As Shryock observed, ‘The production of identities meant to be public, that have publicity as part of their function, will create, of necessity, a special terrain of things, relations, and activities that cannot themselves be public but are essential aspects of whatever reality and value public things might possess’ (Shryock 2004: 3).

In Fararpur and elsewhere in India Kanjars and other similarly invisible people who ‘do not matter’ play a central role in life ‘on display,’ their rhetorical exclusion from visible arenas locating them in some of the innermost crevices of local life. In this chapter I have detailed the ways in which the order of ranked difference in local society prevents certain types of exchange and the ways in which Kanjars step in to negotiate family disputes between parties that cannot confront one another in the open. Theft is an important communicative means in such negotiations. By penetrating the rival’s domains, it produces a momentary reversal of

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rank difference and makes negotiations possible. I have also shown that the employment of Kanjars as 'secret agents' is not confined to the sphere of 'informal' relations, but is also an important part of state policing practice. For Kanjar thieves, police protection has meant that their raiding activities are now largely confined to the territory under the jurisdiction of their patron-station. This has exposed the local population to increased levels of their predation and provoked, in return, a proliferation of violence against Kanjars. As people who stand outside of polite society, Kanjars can be easily disposed of: the necessary outsider is also a dispensable victim.

CHAPTER SIX

EATING AND FEEDING IN THE DONOR-STATE

Every native of Hindustan, I verily believe, is corrupt.

Lord Cornwallis, first Governor-General of India 1786-1793 (Spear 1978: 88)

This chapter shifts the discussion into the arena of state politics. My reflections draw on notes on elections to the State Legislative Assembly, which took place in December 2008 at the very end of my field research. I focus on two matters: on the involvement of local people in electoral politics and the engagement of Kanjars in the electoral campaign and state politics more broadly. Reflecting on the first point, the first part of the chapter will discuss the ways in which the moral economy of donor-servant exchange structures the relationship between the government and ‘the people’ and inflects local conceptions of the state and ‘corruption,’ the state’s shadowy reflection. In the second part of the chapter I will discuss the relationship between some Kanjars and politicians and the effects that entry onto the publicly visible arena of electoral politics has on the lives of Kanjars and the community as a whole.

Over the past two decades, patronage has moved from the periphery to the center of analyses of political modernity. Once treated as peripheral to state governance—as non-modern, traditional or symptomatic of weak states¹—patron-client relations have been

¹ See Eisenstadt & Roniger (1980: 43) for an overview of this literature.

increasingly described as a central element of democratic process and state governance worldwide.² In the Indian context, patron-client relations have been noted as lying at the heart of state and democratic processes.³ The bulk of attention given to patronage in Indian state politics has come from political scientists, who have focused on formal political processes and parameters: the constitution of vote banks, voting patterns, political party formation and measurement of success, and political accountability (cf. Wilkinson 2007; Chandra 2004). Aside from a handful of recent studies (Michelutti 2004; 2008; Price & Ruud 2010; Nielsen *et al.* 2011), little effort had gone into thinking about patronage in the sphere of state politics anthropologically, that is, into understanding the culturally particular social and moral significance of patron-client relations and the ways in which these inflect conceptions and processes of democratic governance. Studies of patronage in Indian state politics have remained largely confined empirically to the formal political stage and analytically to the idiom of economics and political science: as *'the direct exchange of a citizen's vote in return for direct payments or continuing access to employment, goods, and services'* (Kitschelt & Wilkinson 2007: 2, emphasis in original).

The discussion contained in this chapter contributes to the nascent body of ethnographic studies of Indian patronage-politics in the sphere of state governance. I do not intend to produce an elaborate ethnography of Indian 'patronage democracy' or the

² Studies are too numerous to list individually, but for some recent examples, see Kitschelt & Wilkinson (2007) and Lazar (2008).

³ Manor (1997), Krishna (2002), Chandra (2004), and Wilkinson (2007).

‘donor state.’ That is work for another, much larger, project. Instead, I will provide observations of local conceptions and everyday practices of statehood and democratic governance, arguing that the politics of feeding is not just about the distribution of economic resources through which politicians effectively buy votes, as observers of ‘patronage democracies’ in South Asia (Chandra 2004; Wilkinson 2007) and elsewhere (Kitschelt & Wilkinson 2007) have argued, but rather a much less cynical and much more socially constitutive process. I will show that the formal political process is no less informed by the moral logic of donor-servant exchange than relations in other spheres of local everyday life. In so doing, I join Sahlins (1999, global reflections) and Michelutti (2004; 2008, ethnography in an Indian context) in their venture to show that (and how) the global machinery of democratic statehood is articulated in locally particular cultural idioms. I further argue that the Indian demotic ideological base is not averse to the ideology of modern statehood, as Chatterjee (1993: 237; 1998) and Madan (1997), among others, have argued, but rather inflects it in culturally particular ways, giving the globally assumed hierarchical relationship between the government and ‘the people’ a distinctly local shape.

The latter part of this chapter is concerned with the involvement of Kanjars in the sphere of state politics and the effects that their involvement has both on them and on the Kanjar community at large. For Kanjars, allegiances to politicians and political parties constitute a way to gain public recognition as having attachments to patrons. It is one of the only reliable avenues to developing a reputation as respectable patronized people.

Such recognition, which elevates Kanjars in the ranks of broader society, however, damages their standing among their own. Membership within the Kanjar community assumes positioning outside of and in opposition to ordinary society and, as such, does not tolerate dramatic rises in status. This means that Kanjars who gain (even a slight degree of) acceptance in mainstream society become marginalized in their own community and ultimately risk ceasing to be recognized as Kanjars by their own—a risk some are willing to take. Visible displays of radical departure of status are not tolerated by the community and threaten the upwardly mobile with excommunication, instances of which I discuss below (Section 6.5).

6.1 ELECTIONS AND THE POLITICS OF PROVISIONING

In November of 2008, at the end of my stay in Lakshmipura, Fararpur was in a state of excitement over upcoming elections to the State Legislative Assembly. The marketplace was consumed with speculation. Things were particularly lively this time around. Local branches of the two dominant parties, the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) and the Indian National Congress Party (Congress), were deeply divided: the BJP MLA had been losing support within his own Dhākar caste, which constitutes the local majority and the bulk of his vote bank; the local Congress caucus was too mired in conflict to decide on a candidate; major local political players were switching allegiances in a bid to end up on the winning side; both parties put forward pawn candidates in an attempt to detract votes from their

rivals; and two men disgruntled either with their own parties or the general state of 'corruption' put themselves forward as independent candidates.⁴

While most Kanjars looked on the electoral hullabaloo skeptically, for they are largely left out of it, two, Gopal and his cousin 'Raj,' were run off their feet. These men were engaged as aides in the campaigns of two different candidates (Gopal for an independent and Raj for the BJP candidate). For a month prior to the elections each spent entire days riding their motorbikes from village to village, whose residents they aimed to persuade into voting for 'their' candidates. Their work was a matter of formal arrangement and each received a modest payment for his work,⁵ but the significance of their employment lay beyond the limited material advantages that it offered. Acquisition of publicly recognized ties to politicians holds out the promise of becoming 'big men' (*baṛe ādmī*) in broader society. What they did not foresee was the estrangement they were bound to face within their own community as a result. Before returning to the movements of Gopal and Raj, I will first describe the elections.

⁴ The BJP candidate, who by that point had been MLA (Member of Legislative Assembly) for fifteen of the previous twenty years, had alienated several of his political allies, who consequently joined Congress. In his turn, the BJP MLA sponsored the nomination of two of his own associates as Congress candidates so as to undermine competition. As it was, Congress was so divided that in the end it did not manage to put forward a strong enough candidate, so that the nominee was sent in by the party headquarters in New Delhi. A number of former members of both parties and a disgruntled District Collector entered the competition as independent candidates. The Rāwat, who had been politically inactive for nearly four decades, also put his candidature forward, hoping that the memory of his noble standing would win him a seat.

⁵ Gopal received 3000 and Raj 5500 Rupees for a month's worth of work.

While crooked politicking gave grist to the marketplace rumor mills, it was the spirit of festivity that held Fararpur spellbound. As one woman put it, elections are a ‘great festival [*tyohār*], greater than any wedding!’⁶ Billboards, shop fronts and temple walls, roadside boulders, light posts and caps bore the insignia of political parties. From the early morning hours loudspeakers in the bazaar blared out echoing loops of party slogans and instructions to ‘vote for the hand’ or ‘vote for the lotus’ (symbols of Congress and BJP parties, respectively).⁷ Candidates paraded through the streets doling out leaflets, fire crackers and party paraphernalia. Excitement reached fever pitch on the day before the elections, when a minor Bollywood star descended in a helicopter provided by the Congress Party.

‘Feeding’ (*khilānā*)—the distribution of food, liquor, clothing, and money, among other things, by candidates to the electorate—is the centerpiece of electoral festivities. Election time ‘feeding’ takes on a variety of forms: public feasts at which food, alcohol and blankets are distributed; private parties thrown for persons of wealth and influence; or gifts of a sari, a plastic pouch of liquor, a blanket, a frying pan, or cash made to families or individual voters. A central subject of discussion, ‘feeding’ is the centerpiece of election-time discussion and an important measure of assessment of candidates’ worth and, as such, it reveals a great deal about local conceptions of the role of the politician, his relationship

⁶ See Banerjee’s (2007; 2008) description of election-time festivities in rural Bengal.

⁷ Electronic voting machines that were introduced across the country in 2002 have buttons with the parties’ and candidates’ symbols that can be identified by illiterate voters.

to the voters, and the popular idiom of relatedness between the government and ‘the people’ at large. People expect to be ‘fed’ by candidates during elections, and feeding events are the subject of much lively discussion in villages and the bazaar. What sort of a meal was it? Was there enough for everyone? Were there sweets? Were they cheap sweetmeats or rich, milky *laḍḍūs*? Was there alcohol? Did the candidate himself come or did he send his henchmen? Did he sit and eat with the villagers? Did he share cigarettes with the men? Electoral feeding demonstrates the candidates’ capacity to provide for their ‘own’ people (personal allies, kin, caste, ethnic, and local community, or more broadly defined ‘vote banks’), which has been observed to be the key criterion of candidates’ worth and the main expectation of politicians in office across the subcontinent.⁸ A former MLA lamented that when he first came into office, he kept his doors open to the public, but was soon overwhelmed with requests for money and jobs:

People here have very primitive thinking. They do not understand politics and they do not understand my position—that I am a government servant only. Instead, they think I am a *rājā* or a God who can give them anything they want. Their thinking is from the *rājā-mahārājā* days. This backward thinking, madam, is the biggest problem in our India, which keeps our progress behind.

Over the decades since independence the things people expect politicians to provide, the means of satisfying their demands and the demographic of politicians have changed. If previously, people approached patrons for food and cash, these days, people

⁸ On India, see Krishna (2002), Khanna (2007: 36ff), Price & Ruud (2010), and Nielsen *et al.* (2011); on Bangladesh, Ruud (2003); on Sri Lanka, Kearney (1973: 8).

increasingly demand the fruits of ‘development’ (*vikās*): government works, employment opportunities and electricity (cf. Krishna 2002). And whereas four decades ago being a Rājput in itself constituted substantial political capital, today it is personal resourcefulness (the ability to get road works in the village, to liaise effectively [*jugār karnā*⁹] with policemen, bankers or judges, or to arrange a hospital visit) that increasingly counts.¹⁰ The expectation of generosity persists notwithstanding such changes. As one Kanjar woman put it, ‘politicians must feed us. It is their duty [*dharm*]. That is how they show us that they will feed us if we vote for them, so they feed us [at elections].’ As the founder of Parliamentary Research Service, an independent policy research organization, remarks,

It is not unusual for someone to walk into the local MP’s house and say, ‘My wife is sick and I need some money to take her to the hospital’ or ‘My daughter is getting married and I need some money for the wedding.’ The MP, in many cases, takes money out of his pocket and gives for the sick wife or the daughter’s wedding. This is the feudal mind-set. The politician becomes this all-powerful person who can get things done, and reinforces the patronage system. The average Indian thinks, ‘So long as he is able to address my immediate concerns, I should vote for him rather than someone who does not pay attention to the constituency after the elections are over (Khanna 2007: 36).

⁹ *Jugār* means a fix or an arrangement by clever and often illicit means. For more on the concept of ‘doing *jugār*,’ see Jeffrey (2009: 203-05) and Jauregui (2010: 36ff).

¹⁰ Resourcefulness is often paired with the ability to wield brute force that often sidesteps the law, with the result that an increasing number of successful political candidates have long criminal histories. Thus, the number of elected Indian MPs with criminal histories has risen to 29% in 2009 from 24% in the previous elections five years ago (databases of the Liberty Institute and the Indian Electoral Commission; Banerjee & Pande 2007; Golden & Tiwari 2009). As a result, leading over the past two decades to what has been termed the ‘criminalization’ of Indian politics and the proliferation of ‘gangster rule’ (*gūṇḍā rāj*) (Centre for the Study of Developing Society 2008: 31; Price & Ruud 2010).

He further says: 'It is not about any candidate's legislative record, or whether he has performed his other functions responsibly in Parliament. ... It's about what this person has done for you, for your caste, for your street, for your neighbourhood. Has he gotten you a phone connection? Your drain cleaned? Got you train tickets? Got someone in your family a job?' (ibid.).

Public feasts held in villages and in towns at times of elections are a tradition that dates back to the earliest days of India's independence.¹¹ Although less common these days, such feasts are quite formal affairs. In poorer villages, where such feasts are still most commonly held, a standard procedure is followed: ideally, candidates themselves, but more commonly their henchmen, provide an evening meal, over which village leaders pledge their own and other villagers' votes.¹² The ultimate feast takes place on the eve of the polling date—known as the Night of the Long Knives (*kaṭal kī rāt*)—when contestants and their associates race from village to village and distribute food, plastic pouches of alcohol,

¹¹ An elections manual published only five years after India's first general elections noted that '[f]eeding the voters is a matter of very common experience' (Srivastava 1957: 328). For more descriptions of electoral feeding across the country, see Subha (1995: 77ff; in Kerala) and Vij (2010; in northern Rajasthan).

¹² The formalization of electoral feasts has been noted in other parts of the country:

tribal communities in Arunachal [Pradesh in north-east India] would [for decades] pledge their support to a certain candidate over a feast of roasted *mithun* (domesticated gaur or a wild ox) and vote accordingly on polling day. This practice had been traditionally passed down the generations. The system ... is that the most influential member of the community offers to sacrifice a *mithun* to exhibit his loyalty to the candidate or the party. Anyone from the community who joins the feast is expected to support the candidate throwing it. At the end of the meal the local leader makes a declaration and all those who have partaken of the meal pledge their support to the candidate concerned (Rana 2006: 158).

blankets, crockery, and cash in a last-minute bid to secure votes.¹³ Feeding is part of a larger spectacle of largesse staged by the candidates, who march through the towns and promise in their speeches roads, water, electricity, jobs, and better harvests, stopping just shy of guaranteeing rain to their constituencies. So, a few days after my conversation with the ex-MLA who lamented the 'backwardness' of rural people, I listened to him promise wealth, medical services and employment opportunities to an apathetic crowd of Bihāls.

The local politics of feeding is not just about the distribution of economic resources in exchange for votes, as observers of Indian 'patronage democracy' (Chandra 2004; Wilkinson 2007) have contended, but is a socially constitutive process. If candidates did effectively succeed in buying votes, the more urban and educated people, who are in the best position to receive the benefits of services and employment that the politicians are most fit to provide, would be the most active voters. But, as recent studies have shown, it is India's poorer, less educated and rural population that votes most (Yadav 2009).

¹³ 'The Night of the Long Knives' is an old electoral traditional in India, observed in rural Madhya Pradesh as early as the 1950s (Adrian Mayer, personal communication). The term has been adopted from Muslim celebrations of the festival of Muharram, in which the vigil commemorating the martyrdom of Hussein is held on the ninth evening called 'Night of the Long Knives.' The phrase also refers to other eves of major transitional events, whether before a wedding night or before the announcement of the Indian Administrative Service examination results. In the electoral context, the reference alludes to this being the final murderous battle among candidates.

Caste/Community wise	
All	60 %
Upper Caste Hindu	58 %
Hindu OBC	59 %
Dalit	63 %
Adivasi	58 %
Muslim	59 %

Note: This data relates to the last four Lok Sabha Elections. Data from the National Election Study 1996, 1998, 1999, 2004 conducted by CSDS




Table 6.1: Caste/Community wise voter turnout rates (*The Hindu* 2009: 9, in Yadav 2009)

Moreover, the logic of patronage in electoral practice does not depend solely on the elected officials' control over economic resources, which can be used to purchase the vote (Chandra 2004: 6). If the logic of patronage politics did substantially rely on economic factors, the wealthiest parties and candidates would succeed in purchasing votes. In fact, the purchase of votes with individual 'bribes' has failed consistently, so that at the local BJP caucus it was decided that less funding should be channeled into individual 'donations' to voters.

The distinction between 'gifts' (*dāns*) and 'bribes' (*ghūs* or *riśvats*), which is invoked locally to distinguish between moral and immoral transactions, demands a moment of reflection. A number of anthropologists had demonstrated the variability of local moral senses attached to transactions labeled as 'bribes' in the global narrative of 'clean governance' (e.g., Smart 1993; Werner 2000; Polese 2008). And I shall not belabor this point

here. In order to understand the morality of electoral giving, it is important to note that, much as in our own sense, in the local ideology of exchange ‘gift’ and ‘bribe’ mark opposite moral poles. The gift is a desirable and socially constructive transaction, and the bribe is deceitful, asocial, immoral, and demoralizing; gifts come ‘from the heart’ (*man se*) and bribes ‘out of helpless necessity’ (*majbūrī se*). Gifts are given without self-interest and the giver does not expect immediate return. Bribes, conversely, are made with a particular return in mind—they are in effect purchases dressed as gifts. Morally upright candidates present ‘gifts’ not in order to gain votes, but to demonstrate ‘love’ for and attachment to ‘their people.’¹⁴ ‘A pukka politician gives from the heart—he gives all the time, before and after we give him our vote, whether or not we give him our vote. That is how we voters become part of his party’s *khandān*’ (Dhākaṛ woman). Of course everybody knows that electoral campaigns are races for votes. And candidates do not need to ask for votes explicitly to have their gifts labeled as ‘bribes.’

Amidst widespread collapse of faith in politicians and state politics, India nevertheless continues to vote with enthusiasm. And for the poor rural Indians (who vote most) elections are not orthoprax ceremonial occasions, or sacred rites of citizenship (Banerjee 2007; 2008), but events at which much thought goes into the assessment and election of candidates. In this context, the performance of the donor’s role matters

¹⁴ See Mines (2005) for a discussion of the value of ‘affection’ in relations of patronage in a South Indian context.

supremely. And the ideal candidate, as we shall see, is imagined by many ordinary villagers in the image of the generous old-time *jajmān*, into whose *khandān* the voters join through eating his gifts. In the words of one young Bhil, 'A good political leader is generous, he holds nothing back from the people and his people are never hungry.' It is to such a generous benefactor that the feeding practices bind (or ought to bind) people, creating (in the ideal) voter-communities via communion with candidates-elect. 'Gifts' to the crowd must be presented publicly for it is only in public eyes, as I argued in Chapter 4 (Section 4.2), that the donor-servant bonds are substantially sealed.

The patron-status of candidates is not a given, but must be hard-won from the voters, who subject the candidates' performance to strict scrutiny. The show of proper comportment is crucial here. Candidates must display through speech, actions and bearing preeminence of rank, but not officious distance: a balance of authority over and intimacy with the people. As one woman put it, 'political leaders must be grand, but not too grand to see the little man.' Candidates who went on foot, shook hands with the VIPs and bowed to the rest with a benevolent half-wave and half-nod during their circumambulations of Fararpur town were well liked, so that an otherwise unpopular Rājput candidate, who ran the elections without a party affiliation (almost invariably a minus), but who performed the donor's act to the tee, received a surprising 8000 votes. Candidates, who, on the contrary, zoomed past the crowds in jeeps or towered over them on camels, were ridiculed or dismissed. The same criterion of a balance of superiority and familiarity is applied to the

assessment of feeding feasts, at which the candidates must, ideally, be personally present, and provide victuals to, although not necessarily consume together with, their constituents. Discussions of how much and in what manner food was presented by candidates at public feasts is not primarily an assessment of the fullness of the villagers' bellies, but an appraisal of the candidates' capacity to perform their role.

6.2 THE LAW OF THE FISHES

Election time choreography of donorship is duplicitous. Most promises remain empty, many of them in fact undeliverable. And the voters are not fooled; they appreciate perfectly well the contrast between the promises made before and the failures to deliver them after the elections. The problem with such shows is not simply in the duplicity of politicians, but in the betrayal of a dearly held ideal. The cynicism of such charades, as many ordinary people see it, lies in their mockery of norms of relatedness, to which candidates appeal and which they pervert. The sense of betrayal is often expressed with a nostalgic contrast between today's 'hungry' (*bhūkā*) politician and the mythical figure of a generous political leader who feeds 'from the heart' (*man se*) and stays true to his promise and obligation to feed and protect 'his people.' 'Once upon a time,' said an elderly school teacher, pointing nostalgically to a portrait of Gandhi on his office wall,

our Indian politicians fed the poor and the poor belonged to them, but these days politicians just buy our votes: at elections they promise the villagers all kinds of things. But when the votes are cast, they do not even open the windows of their cars to greet the people in the bazaar, and nobody can even approach their office.

The occasional politician who exhibits some of the hoped-for qualities—who gives out an occasional sum of cash, arranges employment for somebody’s son, brings presents to weddings, and presents himself occasionally before the crowds in the bazaar—is hailed as the model politician. It is such a person that some await, however disillusioned, as they vote time and again. ‘One day,’ as one elderly man said, ‘a politician will come who will give us, poor people, something.’ Most, certainly, are much less hopeful and denounce politicians—and state politics on the whole—as immoral, dirty (*gandhā*), corrupt (*bhraṣṭ*) and corrupting, ‘demonic,’ or even pornographic (Ruud 2001; Banerjee 2011). An elderly Brāhmaṇ of my acquaintance inscribed this sentiment in a classical Hindu idiom: the politics of today signal the abominable age described in the ancient texts as subject to the ‘law of the fishes’ (*matsya-nyaya*), according to which the big fish consume the small.¹⁵ ‘This is what happens these days,’ he said: ‘instead of feeding the small, the big eat them—this is [today’s] dirty politics!’ Reversing the proper moral order of exchange, today’s politician ‘eats’ instead of ‘feeding.’

In the eyes of state law and ordinary people alike Indian politicians appear as ‘corrupt’ (*bhraṣṭ*). The discourse of ‘corruption’ (*bhraṣṭācār*), as Parry (2000) and Gupta (2005) have remarked, is as ubiquitous in everyday life as in the press. Common use of the term ‘corruption,’ however, obscures the differences in the meanings attached to the term

¹⁵ For a discussion of the logic of the fish and its mention in classical Indian literature, see Peabody (2003: Ch. 1; also Parry 1994: 112-15).

by Delhi-based reporters and Transparency International analysts on the one hand and Rajasthani villagers on the other. If international watchdog organizations decry the use of state offices, regulations, institutions, and processes for private gain as corrupt, for ordinary villagers in Rajasthan, corruption means the politicians' betrayal of their duty to provide. 'We call it corruption,' explained one woman from the Leather Dyer (Regār) jāti, 'when politicians [*netā log*] eat instead of feeding the poor. They promise to give us, poor people, land, food, water, electricity, money. But they give nothing and instead they eat, eat and eat.'

While international observers condemn election-time feeding as 'bribery,' villagers lament the opposite: politicians do not give consistently and enough. If election-time 'feeding' makes candidates vulnerable to charges of 'bribery' by their opponents,¹⁶ it is their failure to feed before and after elections that is locally interpreted as improper and termed

¹⁶ Election cases brought to the Supreme Court today are as full of accusations of 'bribery' with food, alcohol and cash as they were in the first decades of the Republic's existence (Lal 1973; Dundas 1998, vol. 2/pt. 2: 8-10). Thus, over the years, election-time 'feeding' has become an increasingly clandestine affair with more and more candidates sending their henchmen on nighttime door-to-door rounds, during which they distribute food, drink and cash to individual households. The poorest families may get some sweets, a shawl, or half a liter of the cheapest liquor, and wealthy and more influential persons (members of caste and village *pañcāyats*), a bottle of store-bought whisky or even a few thousand Rupees. Needless to say, such practice sends campaign costs into hundreds of thousands and often millions of Rupees with the result that most election campaign costs far exceed the legal limit (Indian Election Commission 2009). Feeding the poor is thus a much better 'deal' (their vote, after all, is worth as much as anyone's else's). Thus, I would suggest that the relatively high rates of voter turnout among India's low and poor castes (see Table 6.1) is related, at least in part, to the high concentration of election-time feeding efforts on the poorer communities. As one candidate put it, 'these people are simple—if you feed them, they will give you their vote, and that too,' he added, as an afterthought, 'is not hard to get.'

‘corrupt.’¹⁷ At the risk of crude generalization, the ordinary commonsense of ‘corruption’ denotes the infidelity of politician’s proper role as a provider and of the broader logic of reciprocity that ought to bind politicians to their electorates. As many put it, these days the moment the votes are cast the politician hides from responsibility behind the language of ‘rights,’ ‘citizenship,’ ‘accountability,’ and the like and behind the tinted windows of his ‘Ambassador’ car. While some of those better versed in office and NGO talk, speak about their rights as citizens (Banerjee 2007; 2008), for many the global language of statehood and democracy remains a profoundly foreign ‘language of officialdom’ (*sarkārī bolī*).

Litigiousness among political rivals, with candidates leveling an increasing number of corruption charges at each other, has been pushing out election-time feeding from the public to the private arena, making candidates increasingly less likely to feed ‘properly,’ that is, to give public, personal and mutually binding feasts. These days, many resort to offering money or other ‘gifts’ in the privacy of people’s homes. Over the past decade, candidates have been deploying groups of young party members on night-time visits to individual households. The aim of such visitations is to leave families (depending on their wealth) with cash, clothes, crockery, alcohol, or even refrigerators. This, however, does not win them many votes. Such moves on the part of the politicians is interpreted as another

¹⁷ This vision of food and cash distribution as a matter of generosity and ‘hospitality’ is reflected in some early reflections on the feeding of voters: ‘Yet there may be mere ordinary hospitality [in voter feeding] with no corrupt intention and to dub even such hospitality as a corrupt practice may be too severe’ (Srivastava 1957: 328).

manifestation of their degraded condition: instead of offering ‘gifts’ (*dāns*) whose purportedly binding power is validated by their public presentation, politicians ‘buy’ votes with clandestine one-off ‘bribes’ (*ghūs* or *riśvats*) not meant to congeal their relationship to the voters, but to get the immediate benefit of a vote. Likewise, election-time feeding is increasingly perceived by the people as deceitful, asocial and immoral—as a ‘corrupt’ purchase of votes much like the ‘bribery’ of home visits. Accepting such bribes is shameful and a number of people told me that they have refused the cash and that, failing to convince them to accept the cash, the boys who brought it simply ran away in shame, leaving the money behind.¹⁸

These are for the most part exculpatory narratives. Most people do accept liquor, cash or a sari that is being offered to them. After all, why not take a thing given if, in any case, bribes do not bind. One of my closest friends in Fararpur, the wife of a young man from a Drummer family, described one such nocturnal visitation during the 2003 elections to state assembly:

I heard knocking in the middle of the night. So I thought it was Kalpesh’s boss [Kalpesh drives a van and gets called to work at odd hours]. So I opened the door and saw two young boys at the door. I recognized them—they were our neighbors. So I let them in because I thought something was wrong. They came in and at first they did not say anything and then Kalpesh and my mother-in-law woke up. And the boys put down 1000 Rupees and asked us to give our votes to the BJP. Kalpesh and my mother-in-law refused to take the money, so I went to show them out and in the hallway they thrust the money in my hands and ran off. I was happy to take the

¹⁸ Although it is more likely that many families accept the cash, their abrogation of any agency in taking it bespeak the value of particular loyalty that persists in electoral politics.

money. These politicians have lots of money—they steal people’s money—so why should I not have some too? And I still voted for Congress, as we always do in our family. How will they know? Nobody can see inside the [polling station] booth.



Image 6.1: A Congress Party supporter hands out money in celebration of victory in front of the Congress Party headquarters on 16 May 2009 in New Delhi (photo by Keith Bedford, courtesy of Getty Images www.gettyimages.com).

Such tactics fail to win many votes. Only some of the most vulnerable people, who fear violence that may befall them were they to be found as voting to the contrary, are driven to vote by such means. On the whole, such tactics not only convince few, but earn the voter’s disdain. In Fararpur, having spent approximately 150,000 Rupees on the MLA campaign in 2008, with about two thirds of this sum distributed as personal gifts, the BJP party failed to win the elections. The BJP candidate, who had won three out of four previous MLA elections, discredited himself by never delivering the promised gifts, and more recently

could not even win votes from his own Dhākaṛ caste. An entirely new Congress candidate sent by the party leaders in Delhi and for whom locals held out hope, was elected.

The unconvincing performance of donorship during elections has been increasingly, although not entirely, replaced with an act of servitude on the part of the candidates. Invoking the global rhetoric of state governance, candidates now increasingly style themselves the ‘people’s servants,’ insisting that the ‘reign of kings’ (*rājō kā rāj*) has now given way to the ‘people’s rule’ (*logō kā rāj*). In a speech, one candidate declared the following:

These are not the olden days of *rājās* and *mahārājās*. Everything is different now. The common man [*ām ādmī*] now rules. Before, the common man bowed down [*inf. dhok denā*] before clerks and politicians, but these days candidates must bow down before the common man. Now the common man is king. He has the power to give the vote-gift [*matdān*] and he has the right to demand service from *sarkār* [state, government]. The politician now serves the common man—the citizen. This is the law of our new India. Victory be to you [*jay ho!*!]

The rhetorical reversal of the donor-servant formula to place the ‘common man’ on top is plain: the common man ‘gives’ and the politician ‘serves,’ the common man has the power—he rules—and, as the new *rājā*, is to be greeted with a bow and hails of victory.

The ‘common man’ standing below the politician’s podium is not fooled by this rhetoric, for he knows all too well the reality that it belies. ‘Once they receive the vote, the politicians forget all about their big talk. They drive around in their ‘Ambassadors’ like great *rājās-mahārājās* with closed windows and it is impossible to come to their office, to ask them for anything, or even to speak to them.’ One does not have to go far from the election

rally podiums to see such choreography of superiority at play. For three days before the polling date, contestants parade through the town. Proceeding by foot, jeep or camelback with their entourages, they gently bow right and left, shaking hands and greeting the crowds with a wave of the giving palm or the superior's form of the *namaskār* greeting attended with a magnanimously vague nod of the head.¹⁹ In response, the bystanders fold into a deep *namaskār* and greet them with 'Anndātā' ('bread giver,' all-provider) or 'Jay ho!' (Victory!)—salutations traditionally reserved for *rājās*, *jajmāns* and gods.²⁰

This is not to say that 'traditional' authorities (Rājput *jagīrdārs*, village *jajmāns* or caste leaders) have retained voters' favor. In Rajasthan, where Rājputs occupied 44 percent of seats in the first (1952-57) legislative assembly (Sisson & Shrader 1972: 9), today they hold a minority of seats. Various 'new leaders' (*naṃyā netās*) have come to the front of electoral politics of northern India, where, according to one study, 54% of villagers preferred the resourceful 'new leaders,' as opposed to 15.7% who preferred Rājputs and other 'traditional' leaders as political candidates (Krishna 2002: 52). Expectations of political leaders, however, have not changed together with the demographic of leadership.

¹⁹ See Section 5.2 for a discussion of the superior's forms of comportment.

²⁰ 'Jay ho' is often uttered at the sight of a rising moon or sun, or upon seeing a king, a saint or a god. Khanna likewise notes that MPs are treated by many ordinary Indians as Anndātās, the all-providers (2007: 36). The treatment of officials as *jajmāns* and reference to them with terms like Anndātā or Mā-ī-Bāp (Mother-and-Father) has been also for some time noted within the ranks of officialdom. In 1965, for instance, Roy remarked that District Collectors in Rājasthān were conventionally thought of as replacements of rulers and referred to, much like the *rājās* of old, with the honorifics 'Mā-ī-Bāp' and 'Anndātā' (Roy 1965: 560). Lamenting the lack of professional parity in the ranks of the IAS officers more recently, Saxena, then secretary of Rural Development, bemoaned that '[t]he *anndata* and the *maibaap* culture of the bygone feudal days now pervades the interaction within the IAS' (Saxena 1998: 494).

Unlike in many European democracies, where politicians are expected to deliver *general* improvements of national health and educational services, monetary stability or economic growth by influencing overarching policy processes,²¹ in India politicians are expected to deliver *particular* benefits (cash, employment, a road to, sewerage in or electricity for a particular area, or shortcuts through the bureaucratic maze) to specific communities of ‘one’s own people’ (*āpne log*).²²

The universalizing rhetoric of democratic statehood with its cornerstones of universal suffrage, citizenship comprising individuals making rational choices, and abstract and impersonal governance by the state through its impartial representatives distances (as it is meant to distance) the elected from the electorate. The socially particularistic form of electoral campaigns, which runs counter to global rhetoric of democratic statehood, bolsters the elections, the key democratic process,²³ with the paradoxical result that the burgeoning of democratic statehood in India rests on the socially particular—not the presumed abstracted, generalized and impersonal—forms of relatedness.²⁴ The feeding of candidates goes on, but it has become hidden, increasingly assuming the more benefit-

²¹ ‘Pork barrel politics’ are certainly a feature of American as well as European democracies, where people often vote so as to receive very particular benefits, such attitudes are denounced as a corruption of the democratic ideal.

²² See Kitschelt & Wilkinson (2007: 2) for a similar contrast between citizenship and clientelism-based democratic states.

²³ Democracy, of course, involves institutions and processes other than voting, elections are still considered the cornerstone of democratic governance (Coles 2004: 553).

²⁴ See Lazar (2008: 91) for a similar observation in a Bolivian context.

based form of patronage. If the election-time performance of donorship remains merely a dance, it is a performance of the politician's expected, morally appropriate role. In contrast, sermons about the politician's subservience to the 'common man' are not merely deceitful; they are a perversion of the moral order of relatedness between those who rule and those who are ruled, between 'the government' and 'the people.' While some schooled youths, NGO activists and politicians on the stage invoke the concepts of rights, citizenship, government accountability, and the idea of a servant-politician, most ordinary villagers do not grasp or accept the logic of such terminology, the 'government language' (*sarkāri bolī*), as it is commonly known. To quote just a couple of examples:

'How can big politicians serve us, *poor people*? They do upside-down/crooked [*ultā-śultā*] talk' (woman from a leatherworker, Camār, caste in Fararpur town; emphasis mine).

'If we accept our politicians as our servants, how can we then ask them for anything? They will say: I am your servant, you are the big man, so you give us money. But what can we, *poor people*, give?' (villager from the potter, Kumhār, caste; emphasis mine).

The 'poor man' (*garīb ādmī*) that these people mention is not the 'common man' of state rhetoric. If in the speeches of politicians the 'common man' appears as the superior possessing the power to give votes and demand state-servants' services, the poor man is a supplicant, a servant, an inferior, the common designation of rank subordination across the subcontinent. A Krishna devotee, a street-beggar, a villager beseeching his advocate to give special attention to his case in court, a supplicant (of whatever caste and economic

position) at a government office, or anyone otherwise poised to receive the benefits of persons and the state—calls himself a ‘poor man.’²⁵ The idea that a state representative be styled a ‘servant’ is seen by many as degrading not only of the particular politician, but of the moral order of governance at large. So, candidates who convince their constituencies of their resourcefulness, the ability to ‘get things done’ for their castes, clans, brotherhoods, and village communities, often in ways that sidestep the law, have gained increasing popularity over the past two decades.

The petty bureaucrat who demands bribes for his work, the neglectful MP, or often the honest MLA who simply cannot deliver the expected goods via ‘clean’ means formally prescribed for their position, are derided as *kamīns* (‘workers,’ ‘servants’ or in a more general derogatory sense, the ‘low ones’). In the words of one farmer, ‘all bureaucrats eat [*khāte*] from everyone. If you need any work done and you come to his office, he will take fifty Rupees, ten Rupees, a bottle, anything at all that he can eat from you—the dog!’ Worse even, the bureaucrats do not simply eat, but eat from everyone, driving themselves further into moral depravity. The farmer quoted above continued: ‘the politicians eat what the state/government [*sarkār*] gives to the people and the bureaucrats eat from everyone—the

²⁵ In a survey conducted by the State of Democracy in South Asia (SDSA), more than ninety percent of all and eighty percent of ‘rich’ respondents presented themselves as ‘poor people,’ producing ‘a significant mismatch between people’s “objective” class measured by their income and assets and their self-perceived’ level of poverty (Yadav 2009: 33, citing the SDSA 2005 data set).

government and the people. In our Hindustan, madam, bureaucrats and politicians are the biggest Kanjars.’

6.3 THE ENCHANTMENTS OF SARKĀR

People do not confuse bureaucrats and politicians with the ‘state’—*sarkār*. If court clerks and MLAs are subject to endemic criticism of perfidy and corruption, the mysterious and omnipresent *sarkār* looms in the minds of many as the unfailingly, and indeed divinely, generous overlord (the term *sarkār* can be glossed, interchangeably, as ‘master’ or the ‘state’) on which people pin faith that they have lost in bureaucrats and politicians. Of the seventy people of different caste, economic and educational backgrounds in and around Fararpur, whom I asked to describe the identity and functions of the state, sixty-one (87%) said that *sarkār* was the source of food, cash, employment, and welfare programs.²⁶

Faith in the provisioning nature of the state is upheld with good reason. Since the earliest days of independence, the Indian government has entertained the ‘welfare state’ policies of provisioning by running extensive subsidy programs, which have sustained its popular reputation as a benefactor. Originally envisioned by Nehru as a means to ensure the greatest degree of parity of access to essential benefits of modern life (medical services, primary education, etc.) to the poorer Indians, most welfare programs appear not as

²⁶ In a study of the commonsense of democracy across India, which was published in 2006 by the Centre for the Study of Developing Societies in India (CSDS-Lokniti), the largest number of respondents from different economic backgrounds identified democracy as ‘development and welfare’ and its essential attribute as the provision of ‘basic necessities for everyone’ (cited in de Souza n.d.: 7-8).

matters of generalized social improvement, but as particular donations to ‘the poor;’ and, again, with good reason. Most social welfare available to poor villagers comes in the form of subsidies: a kilo of wheat, five liters of fuel, some fertilizer, a sum of cash to plant an orchard or to build a house, 1400 Rupees for the birth of a female child, a hand pump, a school lunch.²⁷ It is their right to obtain these subsidies, rather than their right to medical services or education, that most ordinary villagers know about and try to claim. The state quite literally feeds, providing for poor villagers, as they say, ‘*khān-pān*’ (food-drink). In Lakshmipura, when I asked what it is that *sarkār* provides, everyone invariably pointed to the hand pump that marks the village center. The school, where no meals were being provided, was not conceived of as one of *sarkār*’s benefactions (since it benefitted only the teacher who received a salary from *sarkār*). Faith in *sarkār* also makes for the prestige of ‘government employment’ (*sarkārī naukārī*), which has the status of the most desirable kind of work not only because it guarantees income, but because of direct associations with the *sarkār* that raise one’s status. However ‘corrupt’ a local bureaucrat is said to be, he is afforded a special degree of respect. Playing on this significance of government employment, my host in Lakshmipura, whom I paid for his research assistance liked to advertise me as ‘*sarkār*’ and himself as a *sarkārī naukār* (state employee).

²⁷ In 2009-10, the central government budgeted nearly 20, 000 million Rupees to be spent on subsidies to the poor. ‘Nearly half of it was for food, fertilizer and fuel. The public distribution system (PDS) that aims at distributing at least 35 kg food grain and kerosene a month to each of the estimated 62.5 million poor families in the country is sustained by this subsidy’ (One World South Asia 2011).

If the state fails to provide, the fault lies with the state representatives who ‘eat’ things provided by the state. Sixty-five (93%) respondents to my question about the lack of provisioning blamed the failures of the state to deliver on bureaucrats and politicians, whether on local, state or national levels,²⁸ who consume the resources distributed by the state. When one of the two water pumps in Lakshmipura dried up, the villagers grumbled that money for the new pump, which they were certain had been allotted for the village by the *sarkār*, was ‘eaten up’ by the *sarpānc* (head of village council). And they are not altogether wrong. India is increasingly described in the press as one of the world’s largest kleptocracies. An enormous amount of public funding is syphoned off by both elected and appointed state representatives. Wade’s (1982) ethnographic account of embezzlement in just one government sector in South India provides a good illustration of the massive scale of such diversion of state allotted resources. The many poverty relief programs organized by the state, national governments and international aid organizations fail at the level of local bureaucracy, whose officials embezzle much of the funding.²⁹ According to India’s own official current estimates, in order for one Rupee spent on development and welfare programs to reach its intended target, the government spends 3.65 Rupees, 72% of which vanishes in transit (*One World South Asia* 2011). As a result, the government has been

²⁸ Here the poorer and less literate tended to lay blame local politicians and the educated middle-class respondents (many of them themselves connected to local politicians) blamed national-level politicians.

²⁹ It has been estimated, for instance, that in the northern Indian state of Bihar, one of the most ‘corrupt’ of Indian states, 80% of food subsidized food aid to the poor is regularly appropriated by state officials of all levels (*One World South Asia* 2011).

spending an increasing amount of development money on subsidy and increasingly on direct cash payments to ‘the poor’ (ibid.). In so doing, it further ingrains its image of the donor-state.

The more generous the state welfare programs, the more starkly does the contrast between the generous *sarkār* and the greedy bureaucrat emerge. At times, this contrast makes for a glorification of the state as a sort of patron-deity that stands behind the corrupt politician. One elderly Rājput explained the difference between the moral purity of *sarkār* and the depravity of its servants as analogous to the difference between Mewar’s divine ruler Eklingjī and human kings, who have periodically driven the kingdom to bankruptcy, war and starvation:

Mewar is a great kingdom, but has it not seen privation [*dukh*] in its history? It has seen a great deal of suffering at the hands of *rājā-mahārājās*. Some squandered their wealth on women and alcohol, some fought their brothers until every head in the kingdom rolled and some kept the kingdom safe. But Mewar has stood for hundreds of years and it still stands by the will of Eklingjī [the patron-god of Mewar’s kings styled the kingdom’s ruler]. In the same way, ministers and policemen can eat all they want from the people, but they cannot destroy *sarkār*. And that is why our India is eternal.

This is a nationalist narrative, but one with a distinctive local flavor. The moral luminary of *sarkār*, which is both juxtaposed to the immoral politician, is aligned with India, ‘our India.’ The narrative, however, reverses the relationship between state and nation in stock nationalist discourses worldwide by holding up the state as the moral source of the nation, rather than the opposite.

Popular enchantment with the state, writes Kaviraj (2005), is a relatively recent phenomenon in India. Over the decades since independence,

the idea of the state has been transformed ... [f]rom an institution that was traditionally seen as a necessarily limited and distinctly unpleasant part of the basic furniture of any society ... into a central moral force, producing an immense enchantment ... [in] very different forms of 'thinking' – from the highly self-conscious thinking of theorists to the far more practical, sketchy but powerful conceptions that animate ordinary actions in the political world, the ideas carried in the minds of ordinary politicians, voters, bureaucrats, dissenters' (ibid.: 263-64).

And the more frustrating are the politicians, the more spectacular the state appears to be. Political and national communities need patrons—a pure patron that makes for an equally pure nation—no less than Kanjars. It is much easier to believe in the virtue of *sarkār* than of its representatives. One can always blame the state's failure to provide on the 'hunger' of politicians. Of course not everyone is equally enchanted and skepticism abounds.

A great number of Rajasthan's rural poor, nevertheless, maintain stubborn faith in *sarkār* and for them elections provide the only, and much cherished, point of direct communion with *sarkār*. Thus, election time, as Banerjee (2007) argues, has an air of importance verging on the sacred. She does not, however, explain either why the elections are treated as sacred or why they appear to be more sacred for the more rural, poorer and less educated Indians, who (counter to the general pattern observed in Western democracies) vote more than the urban, wealthier and educated classes. The significance of the elections, I suggest, derives from the sense of communion, albeit via the imperfect medium of corrupt political representatives, with the nation's ultimate Anndātā—*sarkār*. A

farmer I spoke to on polling day said that voting was his duty of service to for *sarkār*, which he called ‘Anndātā.’ A lawyer of my acquaintance in Fararpur mocked this ‘backward’ attitude to *sarkār*:

Illiterate villagers here think that *sarkār* is a *rājā-mahārājā* or a God [*bhagavān*], an Anndātā. They call him Anndātā! They think that *sarkār* will come and bring them bread and put clothes on their back. They don’t know who the candidates are, they don’t understand the party platforms. For them, all of this is a big worship service [*pūjā*]. They come dressed in their best clothes and prostrate themselves before politicians. For them, the MLA is king and the *sarkār* is God.

In all its middle class derision, the lawyer’s remarks point to a common local approach to electoral politics; he correctly notes that attitudes to politicians in Rajasthan are more often than not expressed in the old idiom of donor-servant ties.

Sarkār is envisioned not only as the source of material gain, but also of national identity. Electoral communion with the *sarkār* produces political communities, and this communion is orchestrated in the old idiom of donor-servant relatedness. Just like *pūjā* worship, as the lawyer notes, the election campaign is an exchange of servile reverence for largesse. Benefactions demanded of deities and political candidates are made with the gesture and promise of service on the supplicants’ behalf. The loudspeakers at election rally podiums announce the contrary—that it is the ‘common man’ who now rules—but nobody is fooled. When the results of elections were announced, the very lawyer who mocked the popular servile attitudes to *sarkār* bowed down almost to the ground and called himself a ‘poor man’ before the newly elected MLA.



Image 6.2: A Kanjar man (left) and a man from Leatherworker caste await their turn to vote (4 December 2008). The cap bears the Congress party colors and a portrait of Sonia Gandhi, the leader of the Congress Party.

The same attitude of supplication and expectation of donorship is extended to the political parties—entities that, like *sarkār*, are easier to keep pure than the politician. When asked to explain their allegiance to the Congress Party (which continues to enjoy the allegiance of most Muslims and low castes in the area), for instance, villagers normally reply that it is ‘their party’ and that they vote for it because ‘it gives to the poor’ (*garībō ko detā*): ‘we always vote for the hand (the Congress Party symbol),’ as one woman from Lakshmipura put it, ‘because the hand gives.’ Although usually villagers cannot think of any ‘gifts’ aside from the land allotments made under Indira Gandhi’s land allotment programs almost

three decades ago, they conceptualize the party as their Anndātā. The Congress Party itself has substantially capitalized on this understanding in its propaganda of provision that presents the party as a benefactor to the ‘ordinary man’ (*ām ādmī*) or indeed the ‘poor man.’ However disgruntled the village poor may be with MLAs and MPs, they nevertheless declare their exclusive party allegiance by proclaiming themselves to be ‘Congress people’ who ‘always give votes to Congress.’ Analysis of Indian political participation has indeed shown notably high rates of relatively stable party allegiance across India, and especially among the underprivileged sections of the population (Yadav 2009).

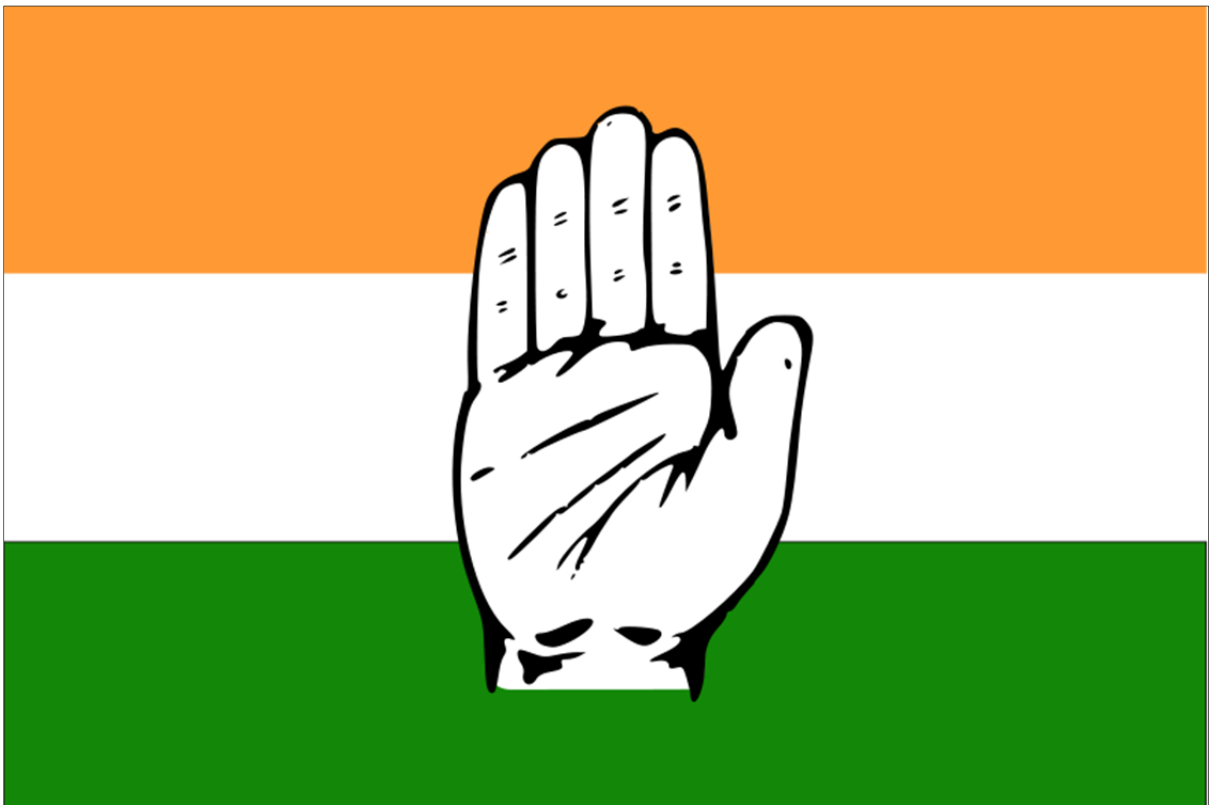


Image 6.3: The Congress Party's 'giving hand'

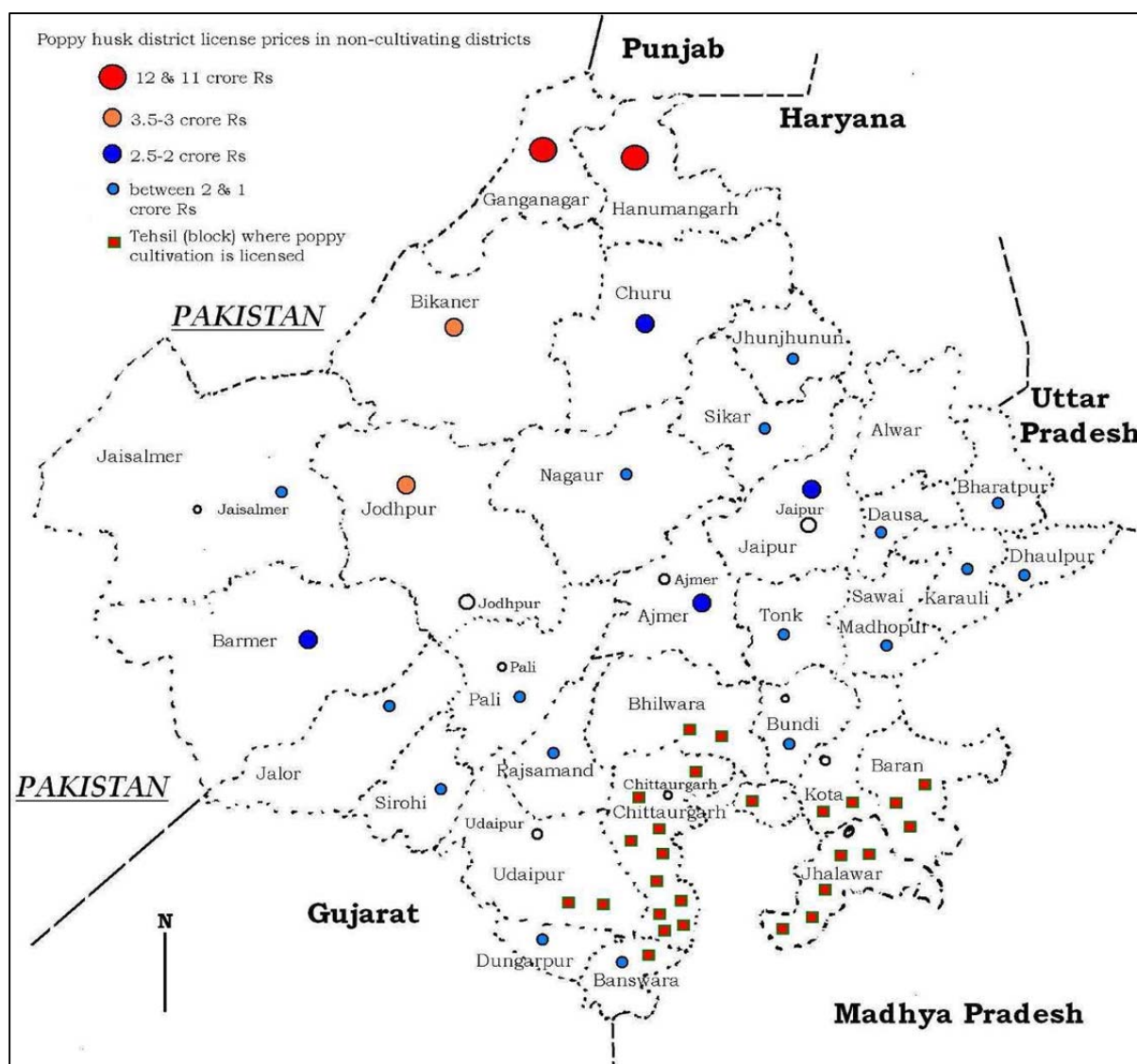
6.4 BECOMING BIG MEN

For Kanjars, involvement in the campaign holds out the opportunity to obtain publicly recognized bonds with political patrons and the consequent possibility of upward mobility within local as well as their own community. As I note at the beginning of the chapter, two Kanjars, Gopal (my host and main informant) and his 'cousin' Raj, were involved in the election campaign in the 2008 elections round. As we shall see, for them such involvement has marked their move into the publicly visible domain and the acquisition of the much coveted public recognition as men attached to patrons, and not just any patrons, but ones of enviable importance. Before turning to the discussion of the dynamics and consequences of such upward mobility, I will first briefly explain how some Kanjars get involved in electoral politics in the first place. Understanding the way in which police officers link Kanjars to politicians requires a moment of reflection on the relationship between the police and the politicians.

Local politicians exercise a great deal of control over the staff of police stations. From early days of the independence, and increasingly since the Emergency, when the police were deployed to wage war against Indira Gandhi's political opponents, the Indian police force, from the local to the national level, has been profoundly 'politicized' (Bayley 1983). Today, even relatively minor players in local politics have 'the power to transfer constables to remote parts of their districts and senior officers to undesirable districts,

protect corrupt police from criminal prosecution, and influence promotions’ (Brass 1990: 59). Dependence of police officers on political forces—what has been termed the ‘police-politician nexus’—has long been criticized as a key cause of the ‘decline of the rule of law’ and the rise of public violence, corruption and ‘criminalization’ of Indian politics (Bayley 1983: 484; Alexander 2002; Khalidi 2003; Subramanian 2007). While the press derides policemen for corruption, negligence and professional incompetence, the general public fears them as the politicians’ strong arm (Vedakumchery 2002: 261ff; Chaturvedi 2006: 1-2; Shah 2009: 18). I will return to a discussion of the politics of control over the police at a later stage. For now, it will suffice to say that police station personnel, and most directly the heads of stations, are subject to great pressure to satisfy the demands of local power brokers.

While officers can advance their careers and increase their informal earnings by attaching themselves to the most powerful political figures and parties, more often than not they are caught in the crossfire of demands that come from different, and often competing, directions. The history of SHOs in post in the Fararpur *thānā* over the past ten years shows the vulnerability of policemen to political rivalries. Fararpur is a desirable post. The policing of Kanjars and, much more significantly, the control in the area of the trade in opium poppy, which is legally cultivated, but also widely trafficked (see below), makes for plentiful opportunity for informal profits—for ‘harvesting,’ as officers say. Only two of the ten SHOs posted in the station between 1998 and 2008, however, managed to stay



Map 6.1: Opium poppy cultivation areas and license prices in Rajasthan in 2005 (de Wilde 2009: 41)

in post for the formally prescribed minimum term of two years (*Rajasthan Police Rules 2008*: 14). The average term of the SHOs in the station is 14.6 months, with three officers remaining in post for only six to eight months. A Sub-Inspector, who has been in Fararpur for more than twelve years, explained:

In-charge Sahibs [SHOs] who have not taken care to please every politician and those who have not been on good terms with the BJP (the dominant party in Fararpur), have been cut down. About six years ago we had an In-charge Sahib who refused to give men to the Congress candidate X during the elections and—Congress lost that year—but two months later he [the SHO] was transferred from here.

Tasks that go beyond the officers' formal call of duty—whether work as private guards to various 'VIPs,' serving chai to senior officers or politicians in their homes, or intimidating politicians' opponents—are a regular part of the officers' work routine. Elections are a particularly busy time. For a month before polling date the Fararpur *thānā* was mostly manned by a single office orderly (*caprāsi*). The rest of the station staff was busy performing various extra-official duties, to which they were 'distributed' by the SHO. After a fortnight of attempts at a meeting, I finally found the Fararpur SHO in the police station. Pacing up and down his office, he shouted orders into his mobile phone. I waited for half an hour (longer than I was ever made to wait in the station) and was finally called into his office. By that time, the SHO and I had been on good terms for almost four years. I met him during my pilot research trip in 2005, when he was first posted in Fararpur. While living in Lakshmipura, I made regular visits to the *thānā* and his nearby bungalow, where I met his wife and children. Pleased to practice his English and to have the company of an 'English lady,' he talked about corruption, the failings of the Rule of Law in India, the perks and (mostly) woes of policing practice; and gave me access to the otherwise restricted *thānā* record collection. He greeted me with an anxious smile and hit the buzzer. The head of a young office orderly appeared in the doorway:

'Sir?'

'Two coffees.'

‘Sir.’

How was he? I asked. How were his daughters and wife? Has he been promoted, become too big a man—a VIP—to spend any time these days in the *thānā*? He let out a tense laugh:

Everyone, madam, thinks that I can do anything, just like that [he snapped his fingers]. Yesterday the SP sahib [Superintendent of Police] told me that he needs five men as guards for some VIP [who is visiting Chittaurgarh] from Jaipur. But I haven’t got five men! Look around, madam! Where are the men? [Droplets of sweat appeared on his forehead.] I have got sixteen men here in this station. I have given two men to the ASP sahib [a visiting Assistant Superintendent of Police], twelve men are working on the elections, and one man is now in the middle of the ‘crazy king’s’ [*benḍā rājā*, referring to the Rāwat] squabbles. Now, count madam: that is fourteen men. And all I have left in the station is this orderly.

He pointed to the coffee-bearing scrawny youth who appeared in the doorway. ‘And you are right, madam. Who is on duty here now? Nobody. Who is going to make arrests? Who is going to write FIRs [First Information Reports]? Who is going to lead investigations? Who is serving the people, as our rules tells us to do, if even I am not in station?’

A Rājput with a single son and four daughters yet to be married, the SHO was particularly pressed to hold on to his post. And his game was particularly difficult in this round of elections. With the disintegration of the prior dominance of the BJP caucus, there was little certainty about the outcome of the elections or about the make-up of the power balance to come. The SHO thus could not safely ally with any one faction and hoped instead to satisfy all parties. Given the limited manpower at hand, it was a trying task, which forced him to draw on all available resources, including his ‘secret agents.’ It is in this context that, drawing on all available resources, he deployed Gopal and Raj. Gopal was

in the employ of a former District Collector who was contesting the elections independently and Raj worked on the BJP campaign. Their job was to ‘explain’ (*sanjhānā*), much as they do as watchmen (see Section 5.4), the virtue of voting for the candidate by whom they have been employed. Kanjars employed as watchmen are particularly effective as advocates of candidacy because they are personally acquainted with a great number of people, because they have the skills of persuasion, and because, if rhetoric fails, they can threaten villagers into voting.

6.5 THE PERILS AND PROMISES OF UPWARD MOBILITY

For Raj, who has been a successful police informer over the past decade, this was his second MLA election campaign and for Gopal, who had been working for the police for only four years, it was his first. For three weeks prior to polling date, when campaigning was in full swing, Gopal and Raj were run off their feet from dusk till dawn. Both were employed in the election campaign, and I spent much of the weeks preceding elections perched on the back of Gopal’s motorcycle, as he drove from one village to the next on his campaign rally, conveying the virtue of voting for ‘his’ candidate to the villagers. Most villages that we visited were those in which Gopal was employed as a watchman and they were his obvious port of call. Much work took place in the mornings and evenings, before the farmers went off to the fields and the process took quite a bit of time because, unlike most other campaigners, rather than organizing village-wide meetings, Gopal visited individual households, in the way that he usually does the ‘explaining’ as a watchman. His *jajmāns*

were receptive, as ties of Gopal's employment obliged them to pledge their allegiance to 'his' candidate. Gopal, however, took his job seriously. Not fooled by polite promises, he was intent on convincing his *jajmāns* properly. The arguments he presented in favor of his candidate are telling of things people expect (or he imagined they expect) from a good MLA.

An excerpt from a conversation that Gopal had in one Gujar household (following an obligatory opening chat about the recent deaths, weddings, harvest failures, and other recent woes) went like this:

Gopal: So, have you met the District Collector Sahib?

Gujar: No, but I heard he is a good man.

Gopal: An excellent man! He is such a good old man, he spoke to us Kanjars just like a father.

Gujar: Yes (vaguely)

Gopal: (after a pause) He is not like the [current MLA] dog, who just feeds the Dhākaṛs ... And these days he does not feed them either. Have you heard how they are all crying against him? Collector Sahib left his job because of all the corruption in the administration. An honest man has no place in the administration. He is a good man. He will have a road built to your village and he will give you electricity.

Gujar: (interrupting) Arre, brother, they all promise us roads and electricity. Why should this one be any different?

Gopal: Look at the way the [current MLA] has eaten all of *sarkār's* money, how fat he has grown! Let's see what this one can do. A new man needs a chance. And as a [former] government employee he knows how to get to *sarkār's* money.

As ever, the conversation revolved around the MLAs' capacity, failure and promise to provide. There is no way of telling whether by the end of this conversation, which went on for some time in a similar manner, Gopal managed to convince his skeptical interlocutor. Yet while the two men differed in their enthusiasm about the particular candidate, they shared the vision of a good politician as a resourceful provider.

Participation in the campaigns brings about a great transformation in the status of Kanjars thus involved. Raj has been a BJP henchman for almost a decade and over the years has acquired a visibly distinct standing from other Kanjars in Fararpur. He buys cloth from shopkeepers who otherwise refuse to do business with Kanjars. He smokes the most expensive of the cheap *bīdī* cigarettes and while most Kanjars huddle over their glasses of chai in the one stall, known locally as 'little Lakshmipura,' that serves Kanjars, he is free to drink chai (and even coffee) around town. When he hangs out in the court, as do most local men of importance, Raj does not squat in the corner of the courtyard with the rest of the Kanjars who have come for their 'dates' (*tārīkhs*) in court, but sits on the benches with other farmers. Raj cuts an impressive figure against the background of the other Kanjars clad in dirty, tattered and often ill-fitting trousers and shirts. Raj wears an impeccably laundered and pressed tunic-and-loincloth (*kurtā-dhotī*) ensemble in the style of politicians for whom he works and farmers greet him with deference in the court and the marketplace, referring to him as 'Raj,' rather than 'Kanjari,' as the rest are usually known.

Gopal cultivated the same image. Soon after he was employed in the campaign, he busied himself with cultivating a proper look. He ordered a pair of trousers and two new shirts made from the same plain blue material worn by the candidate. He assumed a graver and a more important air. Whereas previously Gopal was almost invariably home by the hour of dusk, waiting impatiently for the drinking hour to commence, he now came home late from his campaigning and attended to drinking more carelessly. One evening he even mentioned that he thought of drinking less and on another evening he returned home with a newspaper he bought in town, which he spread out nonchalantly and began to read, to the amazement of all, instead of drinking.

Such changes brought on a mixed reaction in Lakshmipura. Gopal, as his brothers observed, was becoming a 'big man' (*baṛā ādmī*) in Fararpur with his new big *jajmān*, and that meant potential benefits for the community: political protection, greater public acceptance, and perhaps even jobs. Others worried that Gopal would get above himself and become distanced from the community, and with good reason. Raj's rise in Fararpur has been accompanied by his rise above and away from the Kanjar community. Although, just like the other Kanjars Raj lives in a separate Kanjar settlement, greets guests with a customary offering of liquor and settles into a drinking circle on most evenings at sundown, he lives 'separately' (*alag se*) as his caste-mates point out in hushed tones. Over the past five years, Raj has built for himself a brightly painted two-storey house, which stands out in sharp contrast to the other rust-colored stone and adobe homes in the

settlement. He has a color TV and a very old ramshackle car, an unheard of luxury among the Fararpur Kanjars. His chai always has milk and his guests always drink the most 'clean' (fragrant and strong) liquor. While most local Kanjar children leave school after four or five years of schooling, both of Raj's sons were studying at the local college at the time of research, one working on a BA in English and another on a Master's degree in Economics. In 2007, Raj bought a small plot of land in a Leatherworker colony on the outskirts of Fararpur for 50,000 Rupees, which he borrowed from a Brāhmaṇ cloth merchant through his BJP connections. He tells his caste mates that he plans either to resell the plot at a higher price or to build a house that he would let out. In a conversation he and I had, however, Raj mentioned that he was thinking of moving into the house that he planned to build on the plot. He said that he was tired of living amidst the filth and ignorance of the settlement. Raj could not, of course, admit this sentiment to his caste-mates for thinking in terms of 'filth' or 'ignorance' belongs to the gentile realm of Kād̄zā—not Bhāṅṭū—thinking.

Such dramatic ascent in the public arena (whether through political connections, education or employment in the police) is a perilous affair for such 'VIP' Kanjars for their standing within their own community. The Kanjar ethos of egalitarian solidarity opposed to the outside world of ordinary society within assumes rigid adherence to one's *jāti*, including linguistic forms, dress, housing style, culinary habits, etc. Deviation from such caste-specific forms is understood as a betrayal of one's communal identity (*khandaṅ*) and, if too flamboyant, the deviation can be construed as a move from within to without the

caste—from being a Bhānṭū to being a Kādzā. Wearing flashy clothes, buying fancy china, building a pukka house, or having more than one dish for dinner constitutes unacceptable separation from the community. And Kanjars are quick to point out such digressions to their neighbors as ‘doing it the Kādzā way’ or ‘becoming a Kādzā.’ Community leaders who manage to maintain their respectability are careful not to flash their wealth. And so the village where Raj resides rumbles with mistrust at his show of difference: ‘Raj is a big man now,’ said one woman, ‘too big for his own *jāt*. We don’t like this. He has separated himself from his *jāt*. He dresses and speaks like a Kādzā.’ Similar disapproval sounded in Lakshmipura at Gopal’s involvement in the campaign: ‘soon he will be too big for his own kind,’ ‘soon he will be talking and eating like a Kādzā.’ The trick lies in the balancing act between maintaining the visible markers of status and keeping one’s appearances within the boundaries acceptable for a Kanjar. The maintenance of this balance is made precarious by the outsiders’ as much as the Kanjars’ own rhetoric of mutual exclusivity: in Kanjar terms, one can be a Bhānṭū or a Kādzā, but not both. So, for many upwardly mobile Kanjars, their newly acquired acceptance in ordinary society entails an almost total estrangement from their community. This happens to few, and in the Chittaurgarh and Bhilwara districts I knew of only three Kanjars who have been ostracized by their community in this way.

The perspicacious ones keep their head down, so that, unlike in most other communities, it is difficult to distinguish from appearance the rich from the poor among

Kanjars. All wear similarly tattered clothes, all live in similarly unfinished shanty houses and all have a monotonous diet. One elderly Kanjar in the neighboring district, who has been a successful money lender for almost four decades and is one of the wealthiest men not only within the local Kanjar community, but in the area at large, wears broken spectacles and broken shoes and lives in a modest one-story stacked slab house. Gopal's uncle, the man who owns most land in Lakshmipura and is one of the wealthiest Kanjars in Fararpur, appears a 'tramp' next to the younger and less discerning men like Gopal. He has very good reasons to play down appearances. Displays of superiority threaten not only with unpleasant rumor, but ultimately with very concrete exile from the community.

One Kanjar managed to rise up through the system of school and university scholarships available to children from Scheduled Castes to become a lawyer. He owns a small house in the town of Bhilwara in southern Rajasthan and has recently left his apprenticeship in court to establish himself as an independent lawyer. In his newfound life he eats mostly (but not exclusively) vegetarian meals, dresses like a middle-class man and uses his clan name instead of the name 'Kanjar' as his surname. He described his estrangement from the community in this way:

At first, I went to the village to visit my father every month, even more often. But the villagers did not even drink with me and soon my father told me not to come so often. He said that when you leave all I get is accusations—your son is a Kādzā, he is not one of us. And finally one time when I visited the village they beat up my father. And then he begged me not to come any more. Then, when I wanted to get married, it took us three years to find a wife and we ended up buying a divorced girl for 75,000 Rupees [of bridewealth]. These days I go to see my father once every one

or two years. But what is the use? He only gets grief from the villagers and other people now take care of him.

A number of other Kanjars who have gained acceptance in ordinary society, whether through political connections, education or employment in the police, have been similarly excommunicated. So, one Kanjar in northern Rajasthan, whose grandfather was appointed the head of a Criminal Tribe colony, whose father became an officer in the police, and who himself has risen in local politics to become a member of the local *pañcāyat*, has had to move away from his native village, where his family was rejected as *Kādzās*. In 1971 he bought land in northern Rajasthan and moved to establish his settlement there. Although originally from the thieving segment of the Kanjar *jāti*, no caste-peer families give him their daughters in marriage, so that his and his brothers' families are now confined to marrying the lowest-ranking Kanjars involved in prostitution, to procuring girls from poor Kanjar families or other closely related peoples (*Naṭs*, *Bāñcṛās*, *Guārs*) with exorbitant bridewealth sums (up to 150,000 Rupees).³⁰ In short, for Kanjars upward mobility means a categorical shift, for better or for worse, away from being Kanjars.

CONCLUSION

Just over a decade ago, Marshall Sahlins remarked that the political world is undergoing an 'indigenization,' that it is 'being re-diversified by indigenous adaptations to the global juggernaut' (1999: ix). Noting the different 'cosmologies of capitalism'

³⁰ See Table 4.1 in Chapter 4.

developing around the world, he argued that in different places people not only espouse radically diverse conceptions of the so-called global institutions of political modernity, but are changing the forms that these institutions take around the world (1999). The dynamics of such ‘vernacularization’ of the democratic state have been recently described in India (de Souza 2006; Tanabe 2007; Michelutti 2008; Nielsen *et al.* 2011). This chapter is an addition to this literature. I have hoped to show that the ideology of donorship is as much at play in the sphere of state politics as it is in less formal arenas of life. Elected and appointed state officials are primarily expected to provide, to enact the role of the Anndātā-donor. This expectation is articulated by voters and candidates alike and in the electoral rites of ‘feeding.’ And, as Bayart observed in the African context, the view of democratic governance as ‘a new form of access to the pleasures of eating ... from the point of view of the voters ... has to be interpreted in terms of a veritable moral economy, the significance of which goes beyond a purely utilitarian approach to the political’ (2009: xxii; also Banégas 2003: Chs. 7 and 10). The politician is expected to provide not only material resources, but to establish long-lasting personal bonds and facilitate communion with the ultimate donor—*sarkār*.

Bureaucrats and politicians almost invariably fail to provide (not just intentionally, but also because it is logistically impossible to provide for all) and are consequently subject to ubiquitous accusations of ‘corruption’—of ‘eating’ what the state gives instead of ‘feeding’ their subordinates. This sense of ‘corruption,’ however, is very different from the

definition of corruption presented to us by the global narrative of ‘good governance:’ as the use of public office for private gain. Faith lost in the politician is pinned on *sarkār*—the state—which holds the place of a transcendent god-like Anndātā in popular imagination. If *sarkār* does not provide food, employment or electricity, it is because the bureaucrats and politicians ‘ate’ its gifts. Such rosy conception of *sarkār* is certainly not the only one either in broader Indian or even regional understanding. In Fararpur, and perhaps Rajasthan more broadly, it is, nevertheless, the most common view. I also note that in the local imagination communion with this transcendent *sarkār* serves the creation of the Indian community, a nation, as a community of servants to the state. As such, the local narrative reverses the common relationship between the nation and state in nationalist discourses worldwide, locating the state as the moral source of the nation, not vice versa. More generally, I suggest that the moral economy of eating, feeding and the donor-state does not oppose the cosmopolitan order of democratic statehood, but rather inflects it in a distinct idiom, giving the globally assumed hierarchical relationship between the government and ‘the people’ a particular local sense.

In this chapter I also describe the effect of involvement in electoral politics for Kanjars. For the two Kanjar men who are thus involved in Fararpur, employment in the electoral campaign has meant a much greater degree of public visibility and recognition than their caste-mates otherwise get. Within the context of the Kanjar community, however, entry into the public sphere and (however minimal) a degree of acceptance in

Chapter Six

ordinary society signals one's distancing from one's own community. For Kanjars, upward mobility, most commonly achieved through connections to the police and, via them, to politicians, ultimately means a departure from their community: a transformation from the insider Bhāñṭū into the outsider Kādzā. As a result, being a Kanjar and having a place in ordinary society remain, as ever, mutually exclusive positions.

CONCLUSION

As with other region-specific anthropologies, the anthropology of South Asia has got its own intellectual ruts. A key rut has been the ongoing swinging between insistence on transcendent, substantive ideology as the source of social difference and the materialist response to it. I have tried to provoke a move in a direction away from cosmological abstractions and homogenizations of power and toward an approach that takes the moral logic of relatedness as a central ideological force in local society. I have argued that the formula of donor-servant relatedness is the key ideological anchor of social organization in Rajasthan, and perhaps further afield in India. The moral principles of social exchange between donors and servants form both the structural underpinnings of asymmetrical relations and their ideological base. The ideal of proper donor-servant relatedness is the key source of identity and rank and the central measure of social worth in Rajasthani society. In arguing this, I have I proposed a more sweeping shift from inquiry that is based on transcendent ideology of substances (whether Brāhmaṇical ideology of purity, the Rājput ideology of valiance and strength, or the merchant ideology of urbane wealth) to one that proceeds from ideas and ideals about social relations.

In this way, the hierarchical order is derived from the recursive application of the principles of relatedness to separate, link and rank persons and groups across the scope of Rajasthani society. The result is not a hierarchical totality but an ordered series, akin to

Conclusion

what has been articulated by anthropologists of Austronesia (Fox 1988; 1994; Fox & Sather 1996; Vischer 2009). To the Austronesianists' conception of such repeated application of asymmetrical structure I add that the asymmetrical formula of ranked relatedness is not only a structural, but also an ideological mechanism that not only gives shape to relationships, but established the parameters of value and relative rank of those involved.

I set out my argument and the basic principles of the moral economy of donor-servant relations in the introductory chapter. Arguing from the basic idea that the transfer of gifts constitutes a transfer of personal substance, I suggest that the identity of persons relies on their connections to patrons. Because the patron is the source of one's substance and character—known locally as *khandān*—the integrity of persons and groups relies, ideally, on affinity to a single patron or an identifiable and restricted circle of patrons. A diffuse and varied circle of donors transfer to their recipients an equally haphazard array of substances, making the recipients' nature fragmented, motley and unhinged. Consequently, various masterless 'beggars,' who 'eat from everyone's hand,' find themselves excluded from ordinary polite society (see Chapter 2). If the principle of particular attachment is the central force in the assessment of servants' rank, for patrons, it is the principle of encompassment that plays a key role. The transfer of gifts incorporates the community of servants into the social body of the donor. Thus, for donors, giving constitutes what is seen quite literally as the enlargement of their persons: the more people one 'feeds,' the larger is one's social person and the greater is one's rank.

Conclusion

Chapter 3 focuses on the moral logic of donor-servant bonds, which I articulate ethnographically in the context of relations between Kanjars and their patron-deities. I show how, failing to establish bonds with human patrons, Kanjars cultivate bonds with patron-goddesses, from whom the Kanjar community at large as well as each one of the community's structural segments inherits its distinct identity. Insofar as goddesses are the source of identities and distinctions between structural segments of the Kanjar *jāti*, relations to these goddesses are central to the community's internal organization. Such construction is a mutually constitutive process. Inasmuch as Kanjars inherit the nature of their patron-goddesses, the goddesses are manufactured through ritual services offered to them. The principle of encompassment is central at play here: the goddess is as big as her community of devotees. The discussion touches on the old debate about the relationship between Hindu pantheon and society. I suggest that, contrary to what Dumont argued in his study of the Tamil god Ayyanar (1959 [1953], elaborated in 1957), the Kanjar pantheon and community are not homologous, or sharing the same structure based on the purity/pollution opposition, but are related through the mutually constitutive exchange of the goddesses' gifts for the community's services.

The following chapter focuses on the principle of particular bonds to patrons as the basis of ranked difference between occupational segments of the Kanjar *jāti*. In this context, I argue that the more durable and exclusive is the reputed relationship between each occupational segment of *jāti*, the higher its relative standing in the community. Thus,

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Kanjars involved in prostitution and who entertain an unrestricted array of patrons rank lowest and Kanjar-thieves, with (actual or remembered) bonds to *jajmāns* among Rājputs, farmers and the police rank at the top.

Chapter Five moves onto a broader ethnographic level to locate the position of Kanjars in local society. Although Kanjar-thieves have patrons among Rājputs and, these days, among the police, the underhanded nature of their business leaves such bonds in the illicit and invisible sphere and Kanjars with the eputation of socially and morally loose men. Their social invisibility is a crucial aspect of Kanjars' role as *dalāls* (go-betweenes) who negotiate internal conflicts that must be kept from public view in order to preserve the respectable face of members of polite society. The chapter describes hired theft as a practice of backstage negotiation both in the 'informal' political sphere as well as in the context of state policing practice, where Kanjars are also employed. More broadly, I argue that the maintenance of society's public face depends on the ability to demonstrate adherence to proper communicative form and on the employment of hidden agents who operate in its interstices. Kanjars are outsiders who 'do not matter' in the context of polite public society. As such, they are easy, and at times necessary, victims. And the memory of the pogrom that shook Lakshmipura more than twenty years ago remains a reminder of this.

Conclusion

The final chapter moves into the arena of contemporary state politics. I argue that the conventions of donor-servant relatedness governs the people's relationship to 'the government' and 'the state' no less than it governs relationships between Kanjars and their tutelary goddesses. State functionaries—policemen, civil servants and politicians—are popularly perceived as donors, and resourcefulness and generosity are the key qualities of a politician. I also suggest that amidst widespread disillusionment with bureaucrats and politicians, rural Rajasthanis maintain faith in the 'state'—*sarkār*—which is perceived by many as the infallible transcendent donor, whose generosity is hampered by corrupt bureaucrats and politicians who 'eat' the state's resources instead of distributing them to local people. More broadly, I argue that the rural Rajasthani ideology of statehood formulates the globally assumed ranked relationship between the government and 'the people' in distinct local terms. The chapter further describes ways in which the involvement of Kanjars in electoral politics helps them to rise in local society. Those, however, who gain a degree of acceptance in local society are often rejected by their castemates and, as such, are no longer Kanjars, leaving the Kanjar name and identity confined to the illicit and hidden realm.

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FFC	'Fararpur' Fort Private Collection
FPS	'Fararpur' Police Station Records
NAI	National Archives of India

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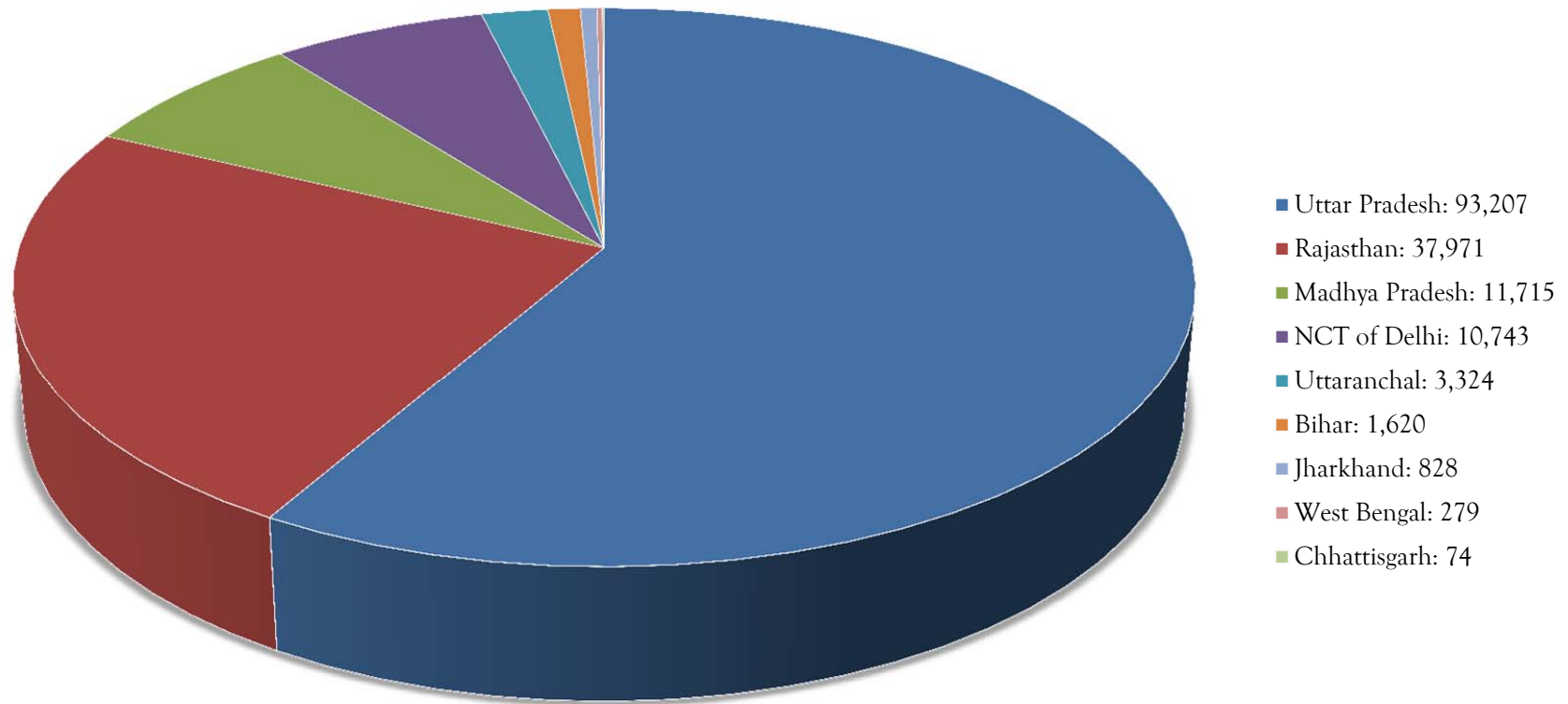
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APPENDIX I

Kanjar population and occupational statistics from the 2001 Census of India

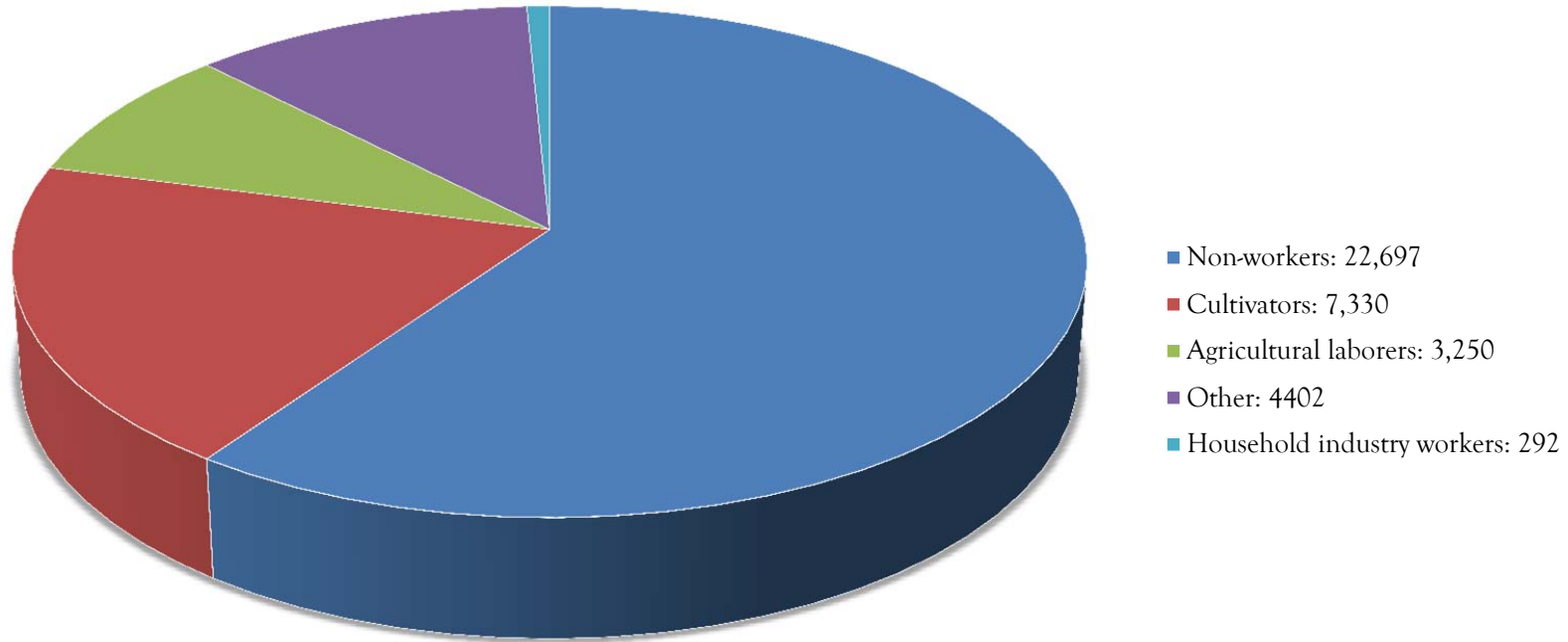
Kanjar population by state according to the 2001 Census of India



APPENDIX I

Kanjar population and occupational statistics from the 2001 Census of India

Occupations of Rajasthan's Kanjars according to the 2001 Census of India



APPENDIX II
Kanjar clans in Rajasthan

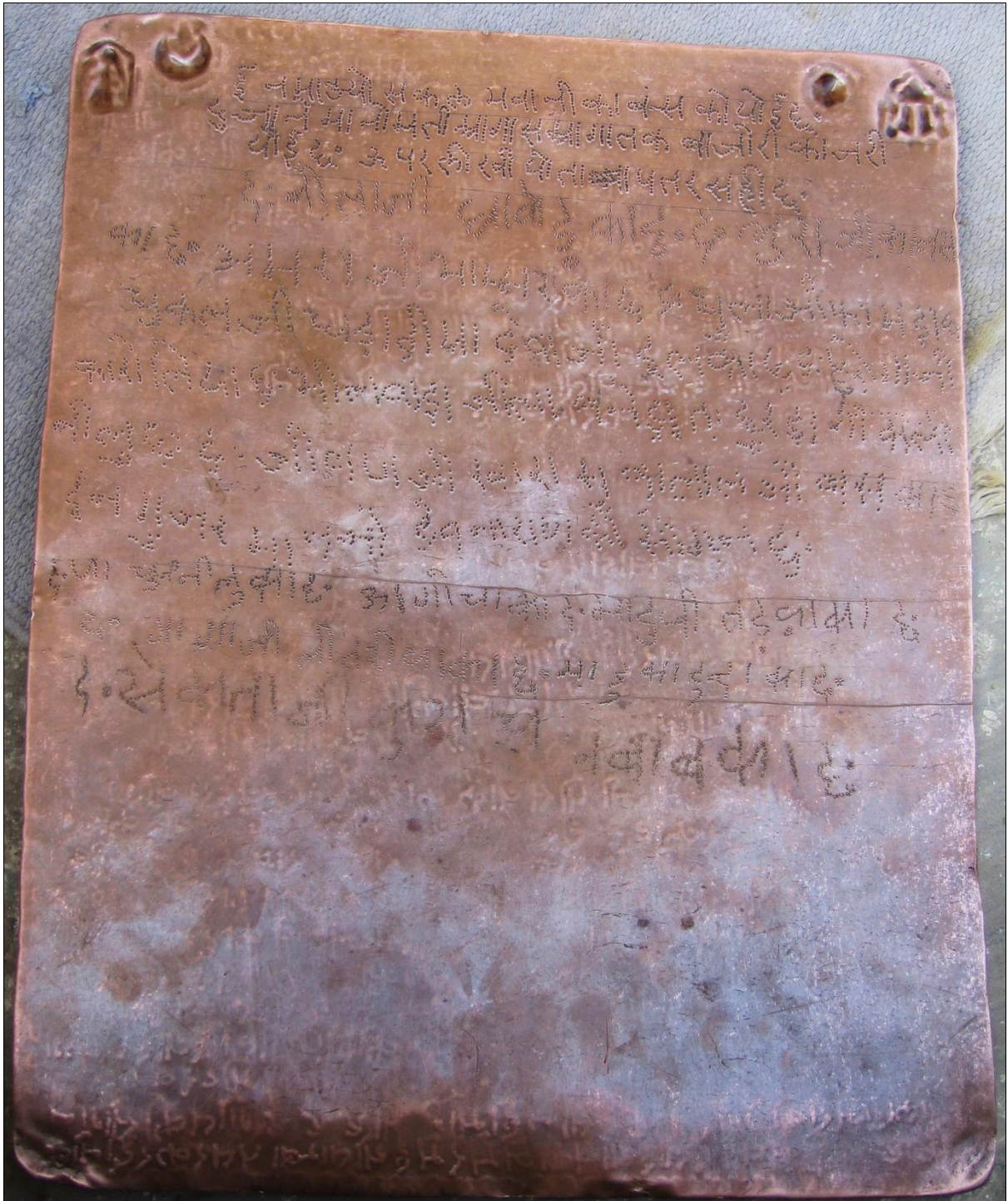
	Aḷmoḍi Mātā moiety	Āśāpāl Mātā moiety
1	Bamṇāwat	Bhartāwat
2	Bhopāwat	Gigāwat
3	Bīrāwat	Jhanjhāwat
4	Candāwat	Jīnāwat
5	Catrāwat	Kālkar
6	Citrāwat	Karmāwat
7	Cunḍāwat	Madṛāwat
8	Dāsāwat	Ramlāwat
9	Dudaṛāwat	Śaklāwat
10	Gaṇwār	Singhāwat
11	Gudaṛāwat	Singorīyā
12	Haḍāwat	Śísodiyā
13	Hīrāwat	Tsitarāwat
14	Katsarāwat	Phulaiyā Mālwi
15	Mālwi	
16	Nannāwat	
17	Rāmāwat	
18	Rāwaṭ	
19	Samlāwat	
20	Śerāwat	
21	Śuklāwat	
22	Udāwat	

APPENDIX III

Tāmbā pattar (copper letter) presented to *jajmāns* of the Boṛ Gujar patriclan Kanjar-Bhāṭṣ of the Dasāwat patriclan resident in the village of 'Gopalpura.'

Front





TRANSCRIPTION¹

[front]

Suraj

Chānd

(1) Śrī Rām jī samat: ९३८ ko ch.

Merā Bhojrāj ādā ank kā geṇā perāyā Bajorī Narāṅ Bagrā Cagalyā 𑂣𑂱 walā kī Rāṅ Bajorī Rāṅ Cōcu Bhāṭ kī cār kāroṅ ko geṇo Bhojrāj pātkī kalāl kasam Bhanārā Mātā Sārū Dev Darbār Cītrakoṭ Udaypur Māskhaṅḍ Mewār Nokoṭī Mārṅwār no sau nīnāṅwe got hatāī Ajmer mānīgī hai. Nahī mān Dev Darbār kī sogan che. Mātā Sāḍu Bhojrāj kī sogan ch. Yo tāmbā patar kardino ch. Ajmer basī jad kī Bajorī yo ī ch. Rāṅ basī ādhā ānk kī geno parayo jī kī Bajorī yo ī ch. Nahī mān to Bābā Rūpnāth jī kī sogan che. Bhināī basī jad ko Bajorī yo ī ch. Or Karam Sih rājā jī āyā ch. Bhināy kī lar gāv lāge jītanā Gujar mānjyo nahī mān to Narāṅ kī sogan ch. Kheṛā kī lār mur ṅad diyā Jāsī Nāth Kajoṅ ka beṭā potā n mānjyo or māno mathī mārpat Surajmāl kā taba patar kar dinī ch. Bhīnāth beṭī kadam su Rāmājī āyā jad ko Bajorī yo hī ch. Sahī Sih Darbār sahī Bhālā Śāhpurā basāyā Śāhpurā Jorāsī mẽ jitna gānv lage jitnā Gujar ī tāmbā patar n mānjyo n mān to Dev Nārā kī sogan h २१० gāv ko tāmbā patar h so sahī hai māk khaṅḍ Mewār Nokoṭī Mārṅwār Siglotī Madāriyā Kharī Ajmerā bajagī sāl ne Pawārā Pacwārā Bāwan Bundī Bai sā bali sāsāt ī sā kā Gujar īn manjo nahī mānto no so nanāwṅe got kī sogan h Sawāī Bhoj kī sogan ch. Bundī basī norang de Hāḍā kī Bār kī Bajorī wohī ch. Ūpar līkhiyoḍī tābbā patar sahī. So mājyo tābbā patar sakal Cokalā kā pāncā kī rajā sū ch pari dino n ch. Koṭā darbār kī bār bār. ((So sahī ch)) ko Bajorī yo ī ch.

𑂣𑂱 pāncā kī sākā w daskhat ch. 𑂣𑂱

d. Bhināy wālā Ratnā jī Poswāl kā ch. d. Cudrā wālā Kalyāṅ jī Moṭar kā ch.

𑂣𑂱 d. Sar Gāv wālā Ūgamā jī Cāṅ kā ch. d. Choṭu jī Kajoṅ jī kā ch. 𑂣𑂱 d. Śāhīpurā wālā Rām k Māl Suti kā d. Bhomā Kolī kā ch. Barlī wālā ch. D. Sīgwal wālā Lārṅwā Bhotī. Mābatā kā ch. Bādwārā wālā Bāgu jī Nīlā jī Ḍuḍī kā ch. d: Satā Wāḍiyā wālā Patah Cauhān kā ch. d. Ekal Sigā wālā Gujar Khaṭāṅā kā ch. d. Dātolāī wālā Kamarāv so Rām paṭel kā ch. d. Kanecaṅ wālā Gadaṅ Puwāl kā hai Anopurā wālā Odā kā gas hai.

d. Kīsanā jī Moṭar kā ch. Narako Rām Bacāwasī nahī mān to ९९९ got kī sogan.

९९९ got kī hai tāī gov Ajmer mẽ hai yo tāmbā patar kardino ch.

[back side]

īn bhānājyō sakal bhawānī kā baṅs ko yo ch. Dujāne māno bhatī āgās āgā tak Bajorī Kājri yo ī. ch. Ūpar līkhī yo tābbā patar sahī ch. d. Nīlā jī Ghāwoṅ kā ch. d. Bhurā jī Kālas kā ch. d.

¹ The transcription presents the text exactly as it appears on the letter, preserving all orthographic, punctuation and grammatical mistakes and deviations.

Amrā jī Bhāmarā kā ch. d. Ghulī jī kā Maṛā ch. d. Ghukal jī dhaṛā vīyā Devā jī ch. Lakāe kā Chogā jī Kāroliyā hai. Bhīlwārā jīlā Banerā v. Duraḍā Gejolī Nīlud hai. Jīvaṇ jī Khārās Bālā jī basā Jadakā hai. Īn Gujaro kā namō Dev Narāyaṇ kī sogandh hai. D: pānclog kā hai Āgocā kā d: Mādu jī Tarāwā kā hai. D: Gāgā jī Litarīwā kā hai. Mādu Kaṭundā kā d: Sewātā jī Kuśac Nabāb kā hai.

TRANSLATION

[front]

Sun

Moon

In the year of Holy Rām 938 [881 CE]

I vow by my Bhojrāj and by Bajorī and Dev Narāyaṇ and by the Bagrāwats of Cagalyā, by Rāṇ Bajorī and the forty million progeny of the Rāṇ Chōchu Bhāṭ and by the drops of Bhojrāj's minemakers. Sārū Dev, king of Citrakot [Chittaurgarh], Udaipur and Makhand of Mewār and of Nokoṭi [Jodhpur], Marwār, chased away nine hundred and ninety-nine [Gujar] clans, sending them to Ajmer. If you don't believe me, I give you the oath of Dev Darbār [Narāyaṇ]. I give you the oath of Sādū Mātā and Bhoj Rāj. This copper letter was made. Bajorī was already alive when Ajmer City was settled. Ferāyo jī's Bajorī was already alive when Rāṇ City was settled and filled the sight of a half opened eye. If you don't believe me, I give you Bābā Rūp Nāth jī's oath. Bajorī was already alive when Bhināi City was settled and when the king Karam Singh jī came. And all the villages in Bhināy were then filled with Gujars. If you don't believe me, I give you Dev Narāyaṇ's oath. And Kheṛā was filled with the sons and grandsons of Jāsī Nāth Kajoḍ, and then this copper letter was made by Manomathī Mārapat from Surajmāl. Bajorī was already alive when Bhīnāth's daughter Kadam Surāmā jī came. The king Śahī Singh settled Śahī Bhālā Śāhapurā, Śāhapurā in Jorāsī. As many villages as there were, as many Gujar copper letters were made. If you don't believe me, I give you Dev Darbār's oath. There are copper letters for 290 villages. All hundred are true. The Gujars come from Makhand of Mewār, Nokoṭi [Jodhpur] of Marwār, Sigalorī, Madāriyā, Kharī River, Ajmer, Bajāgī, Sālne, Panārā, Bāwal, Bundī, near Bālī in the Bāisā district. For those who do not believe me, there is an oath of nine hundred and ninety nine [Gujar] clans. I give you the oath of Sawāi Bhoj. Norang has settled Bundī and that is when Hādā Bār's Bajorī is. It is written above that this is a true copper letter. See this copper letter as the order of Kalco Kalā's Pacā's. [The copper letter] is from the ancient days. Bajorī is the hundred truths of the king of Koṭā.

卐 List and signatures of the clan elders 卐

S[ignature]: Posawān's son Ratan jī from the village of Bhināy. S[ignature]: Moṭar's son Kalyāṇ jī from the village of Cudrā. ♪S[ignature]: Cār's daughter Ūgmā jī from the Village of Sar. S[ignature]: Kajoṛ jī's son Choṭu jī. ♪ S[ignature]: Māl Suti's son Rām from the village of Śāhipurā. Of the village of Bārli. S[ignature]: Lārawā Bhotī from Sīgawal. Mābatā's. Ḍudī's Bāgu jī and Nīlā jī from the village of Bādawārā. S[ignature]: Cauhan's son Pahat from Satā Wāḍiyā. S[ignature]: Khatāṇā's Gujar from Ekal Sigā. S[ignature]: Rām Paṭel's Kamarāw from Dātolāi. S[ignature]: Gadaṛ Puwal's from Kanecaṇ and Odā's from Anopurā.

S[ignature]: Kiśan jī Moṭar's. Greetings to all! If you don't believe me, I give you the oath of 999 [Gujar] clans. All 999 clans own the villages in Ajmer where this copper letter was made.

[back]

These nephews have the face of the Goddess's progeny. As long as the lamp burns, Bajorī Kanjarī lives. It is written above that this is a true copper letter. S[ignature]: Nīlā jī Ghāvoṛ's. S[ignature]: Bhurā jī Kālas's. S[ignature]: Amarā jī Bhāmar's. S[ignature]: Ghulī jī Maṛā's. S[ignature]: Ghukal jī who sired Devā jī. Lakāe's Chogā jī Kāroliyā. Banerā in the Bhīlwārā district and Ḍurḍā Gejoli Nīlud. Jīwan jī who has settled in Khārās. For the names of these Gujars I give vow with the oath of Dev Narāyaṇ. S[ignature]: The elder Āgocā's. S[ignature]: Mādu jī's from Tarvā. S[ignature]: Gāgā jī's from Litarīwa. Mādu from Kāṭundā. S[ignature]: Sewātā jī from Kuśac Nabāb.

Appendix IV:

Disputes resolved by the Lakshmipura Kanjars observed between Nov. 2007 and Dec. 2008

	sponsor	cause of dispute	means of negotiation	type of employment	duration of negotiations
1	Gujar	intra-familial theft	verbal	long-term <i>caukidārī</i>	2 months
2	Gujar	land dispute	extractive theft	Long-term <i>caukidārī</i>	2.5 months
3	Dhākaṛ	debt repayment	extractive theft	one-off hire	more than 1 year
4	Rājput	debt repayment	non-extractive theft	one-off hire	3 months
5	Gujar	land dispute	verbal	Long-term <i>caukidārī</i>	6 months
6	Gujar	land dispute	implantation	Long-term <i>caukidārī</i>	More than a year
7	Gujar	debt repayment	extractive theft	Long-term <i>caukidārī</i>	more than 1 year
8	Balāī	debt repayment	extractive theft	one-off hire	5 months
9	Bhīl	debt repayment	extractive theft	one-off hire	less than 1 month
10	Rājput	debt repayment	implantation	one-off hire	more than 1 year
11	Gujar	debt repayment	extractive theft	Long-term <i>caukidārī</i>	1.5 months
12	Dhākaṛ	debt repayment	extractive theft	one-off hire	more than 1 year
13	Gujar	land dispute	verbal	Long-term <i>caukidārī</i>	more than 1 year
14	Rājput	debt repayment	extractive theft	one-off hire	