

CAN DALITS ALSO FORM A DOMINANT CASTE?

CHANGING PATTERNS OF POWER RELATIONS IN RURAL UTTAR PRADESH

(Draft of the paper to be finalized after presentation)

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The rise and political empowerment of dalits resulting in the enthronement of BSP regimes in UP since the 1990s is culmination of a process which can be traced back to the 1950s. This process has occurred at two levels, i.e. local or village level and supra-local or regional levels. Since UP consist of several regions with the villages showing different patterns of caste dominance and patterns of mobilization, it is difficult to generalize about entire state. However, on the basis of dominant trends from different regions some general patterns can be deciphered. This paper seeks to address two issues; one, changing composition of the dominant castes at the local/village level in western Uttar Pradesh, and; two, changes in the supra-local milieu in terms of social, cultural, economic and political processes. It argues that as the notion of the dominant caste is applicable to the local level or the village level, the composition of dominant castes varies from village to village or from a group of villages to another group of villages. Departing from the general notion, the paper argues that it is not only the castes which are “not so low in the social hierarchy” which are dominant castes even the “low castes” like dalits can be dominant castes. The dominance of a caste does not always depend on the place of caste in the social hierarchy. What matters is the numerical strength of the caste coupled with its economic independence, political consciousness and political consolidation in a particular locality or the area/region in determining the dominance and subordination of a caste. If favourable conditions prevail, even dalits can become dominant caste. This contention is based on the yearlong observations from some villages of western UP. Therefore, any analysis of caste dominance or any other issue needs to be situated in the context of time and space, i.e. stage in the

process of social change and region/locality where favourable conditions exist. However, since dominant caste is specific to local contexts, the dominance of dalits in the concerned locality gets diminished when placed in the context of supra-local situation. The paper also argues the changes in the patterns of caste dominance, which also include dalits' emergence as dominant caste in some villages has got synchronized with their political empowerment in the state.

The paper is divided into four sections. Section I critiques the concept of dominant caste. Chapter II discusses changes in the agrarian system in a village of western UP as a requirement to discuss changes in the patterns of caste dominance there. Section III discusses changing patterns of caste dominance in this village. Section IV situates the changing patterns dominance in the villages of western UP in the social, cultural, economic and political changes which have taken place at the supra-local level, regional/state level. Section V sums up the discussion.

I

Critiquing the concept of dominant caste

Though Srinivas developed the concept of dominant caste in his different writings, the most commonly accepted attributes of his definition of dominant caste are: its position "in the local caste hierarchy is not too low" along with its the numerical, economic and political preponderance of a caste over other castes.¹ Srinivas's argument that dominant caste "is not too low" in the local caste hierarchy restricts its usage to the high/intermediate castes and forecloses the possibility of the low castes occupying the dominant position in the context of social changes wherever they are visible. The concept of dominant caste has several limitations; it does not give any scope to autonomy/recognition of the emergence of the castes other than "not too low" in the social hierarchy to be recognized as the dominant caste; it looks at the notion of dominant castes in the local context – it overlooks as to what happens to the caste relations if they are viewed in the context of changes taking place in the political economy outside the locality of the village. Indeed, limitations of dominant caste framework are related to the modernization tradition of which it was a significant part. Like in relation to other "fragments" of the nation, this framework neglects the recognition of the subaltern/low castes.²

No doubt the concept of dominant caste has been contested in the literature (for a discussion see among others Mendelsohn 2002). But the point which concerns us that even the low castes/dalits can also

¹ In M.N. Srinivas's definition, a dominant caste is "which preponderates over other castes and which also yields preponderant economic and political power.----in the local caste hierarchy is not too low" ("Social System of a Mysore Village"); Srinivas further adds some more criterion to the definition of dominant caste – number of educated persons in the caste ("Dominant Caste in Rampura"); two more criteria were added – a) tradition of agriculture, b) readiness to use violence to promote group ends ("Caste System and Its Future").

² For a critique of modernization framework see Singh (2008).

become a dominant caste is missed in the literature critiquing the concept. However, the literature acknowledged that the dominance of the powerful has been resisted by the low castes through different ways. It does not attempt to see whether the dominance can be reversed or not. Apart from the inherited favourite framework, another major reason for restrictive usage of the term has been not to look at caste relations/politics in the context of time and space. In different areas at different times different castes can become the dominant castes. There is a need either to look for an alternative framework or to modify it in order to see if the dalits or other low castes challenge sanskritization, can also become dominant caste, etc. (for a critique of modernization in relation to caste see Singh 2008).

II

Changing Patterns of Dominance in western UP: Agrarian System in dalit-dominated village

There is no single dominant caste in western UP villages. There are 'caste belts'/'caste bastions' indicating the dominance of a particular caste in each caste belt/caste bastion, i.e., Jat belt, Gujar belt, Thakur belt, Tyagi belt, Brahmin belt, Muslim high caste belt. In their belts/bastions a particular caste enjoys dominance in the affairs of village life by dint of their "not so low" position in social hierarchy in the social structure, their relatively higher numerical strength and control on maximum land. There could be more than one dominant caste in a village but the cluster of the villages in such areas are identified as the belt of the caste which possesses these attributes – "not so low" place in social hierarchy, numerical strength and control on maximum economic resources. Dominance of the castes "not so low" is acknowledged in the discourse. What is not acknowledged or goes unnoticed is that if favourable conditions exist, even the low castes like dalits or MBCs can also be dominant caste in a particular local area. We have observed that in a group of villages in Meerut district of western UP, an important caste which constitute dalits, Jatav, have emerged as a dominant caste. It defies Srinivas's status quo notion of dominance. This section discusses that how in defiance of Srinivas' notion; dalits have emerged as a dominant caste in one such village from "dalit belt/dalit bastion", i.e. village Khanauda.

Khanauda is a medium size village in Meerut district in the western part of North Indian state of Uttar Pradesh.³ Situated in the Green Revolution belt of the state, it has witnessed the growth of capitalist tendencies in its agriculture since the 1960s. It is one of those few villages of Meerut district in which the low castes, especially jatavs, are free from the domination of the high castes, and where they have become more assertive in the last three decades. The dalits here are part of the “Ambedkarisation” process, and form a strong base of the Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP).⁴ This village shows a trend about the rise of the low castes in several villages located within the accessible distance of 15-20 Km. from Meerut city. Khanauda was perhaps founded in the latter part of the 19th century. It was a *zamindari* village; in terms of caste and class relations, the situation here was better for the low castes than their counterparts in the *bhaiachara* villages.³ On the eve of Independence almost more than 90 percent *zamindari* of the village was held by Lala Mahabir Prasad, belonging to a Bania family of Meerut known as *Pattharwalas*. It was one of the biggest families of landlords of the district [see Cooke, 1940:56]. A small portion of the *zamindari* right was shared by three other *zamindars* (landlords) – two Banias and one Jat; one Bania hailed from Meerut, another from Jansath in Muzaffarnagar district; and the Jat belonged to Bhatipura village of Meerut district. A few years before the abolition of the *zamindari* system, rights of Bania *zamindar* of Jansath was bought by three Jat families of Khanauda, which elevated them from the tenants to peasant-proprietors.

Comment [hcl1]: From here the notes are endnotes. Due to some technical problems in my laptop the first three footnotes could not be converted into endnote or vice versa. This will be rectified in the final draft.

Caste Composition

There are basically four caste groups in the village, i.e., i) the middle castes: Jats who became OBCs in 1999/2000? (of the Punjabi origin known as *Dhe* Jats),⁴ ii) the Scheduled Castes (SCs): Chamars or Jatavs or dalits, iii) the Most Backward Classes (MBCs) and Muslim Most Backward Classes (MMBCs), and iv) high castes - Banias and Brahmins. Chamars are the single largest caste in the village with 72.93 percent population, followed by the Jats. Ten other discrete castes form between 4.91 to 0.28 percent of the population (see Table 1). I shall be using dalits, Chamars and Jatavs interchangeably in this discussion.

³ I was born and brought up in this village and remained its resident till I completed my graduation in 1979 as a day scholar from Meerut college of the then Meerut University, now re-christened as Chaudhary Charan Singh University. I have been a curious observer of the processes taking place in Khanauda since my childhood. Even after migrating from my village I continue to visit Khanauda frequently during the vacation or any other occasion. On these visits I had discussions with my fellow villagers, made notes and collected data. This paper is based on several such visits to Khanauda over last many years. It is one of the villages which I investigated as part of earlier studies as well [Singh, 1995, 1998a and 1998b]. I also studied it as a part of a joint study [Pai and Singh, 1997]. Though my another study [Singh, 1992] covered mainly other villages of the district, I have made allusions to Khanauda even in it. The first formal field work in Khanauda was conducted by Sanjib Kumar Baruah [1983] for his Ph.D.

There were households of other castes as well in the village, i.e., the Sonars, *Hela* Jats, Sainis, Muslim Dhobis and Bhadbujas. But they migrated from the village within two decades following the Independence, except the Bhangis who were expelled from the village by the *patwari* belonging to Muslim carpenter caste much earlier

Table 1
The castes in relation to the number of their households and the population

Castes	No. of households		Adult population*
	Year	Year	Year
	1980	1999	1999
Middle Caste			
Jats	22(10.94)	35(8.06)	161(11.47)
The SC			
Chamars/Jatavs	131(65.17)	320(73.73)	1024(72.93)
The MBCs			
Gadarias	10(4.98)	18(4.14)	69(4.91)
Nais	2(0.99)	5(1.15)	23(1.64)
Dhinwars	1(0.50)	3(0.69)	7(0.50)
Kumhars	7(3.48)	13(2.99)	40(2.85)
The Muslim MBCs			
Dhunas	26(12.94)	17(3.91)	26(1.85)
Badhais		3(0.69)	7(0.50)
Lohars		15(3.45)	30(2.17)
Telis		1(0.23)	4(0.28)
The High Castes			
Banias	1(0.50)	2(0.46)	7(0.50)
Brahmins	1(0.50)	2(0.46)	6(0.40)
Total	201(100)	434(99.96)	1404(99.97)

Source: Figures for the year 1980 are based on Baruah [1983 :111, table 2] and for 1999 are taken from the list of the electorate of village Khanauda, block Daurala for the three-tier *panchayat* election, held on June 23, 2000. Baruah was able to collect data on 192 out of 201 households in the village. Since I was involved in the process of data collection for Baruah, I knew the caste composition of those households which were excluded from his sample. I have, therefore, added them to the list of households collected by Baruah.

* The population includes only the adult residents of the village, i.e., those who attained the age of 18 on January 1, 1999 and above. The adult members have been identified from the list of the electorate of village Khanauda for the three-tier *panchayat* election held on June 23, 2000, and their castes have been identified by me during the field work.

Unlike the *bhaiachara*, where all castes settled in a village at the same time and belonged to the same “system”, families of different castes in Khanauda came from various places, mainly at the instance of the *zamindar* – *Pattharwals* – over a period of time to settle, with the purpose to carry out different functions of the village community. Most families of Chamars tilled the land which was under self-cultivation of the *zamindar* known as the *Khudkast* and *Sir* and rendered *begar* (unpaid and forced labour) to the landlord and his staff whenever the latter visited the village, some of them were involved exclusively in cultivation.⁵ The process of outsiders’ settling in the village still continues.⁶

True to the *zamindari* background of the village, not only the Jat peasant community, the non-peasant castes - Chamars, MBCs, Muslim BCs, minority high castes - Brahmins and Banias were also the tenants of the *zamindars*. The service castes were given plots of rent-free land for cultivation in addition to carrying out their traditional occupations. All classes had to give usual *nazranas* (allowances), gifts, etc, and render *begar* to the absentee landlord, traditional elite in the village – *patwari*, *muquaddam*, *muhassal* and *mukhia*, and to the revenue staff of the landlord .

Traditional Elite

Village Khanauda was different from many *zaminadri* villages in the sense that here out of the four traditional elite/leaders two - *patwari* and *mohassal* - belonged to the low castes, e.g., Lohar (blacksmith) and Saini respectively. The *muquaddam* and *mukhia* were Jats. Life style of the *patwari* was like that of an influential person of high caste at that time. He would extract *begar* from all castes including Jats. He had expelled the *Bhangis* from the village because he found them to be polluting the village. The condition of his family, however, deteriorated by 1947; after the death of the brother of *patwari* there was nobody to look after the land. The family was left with no land after the abolition of *zamindari*. Within few years after Independence the progenies of this family joined the rank of other ordinary people. Some of them joined the traditional *jajmani* system as blacksmiths to the Jat peasants.

The posts of traditional leadership were hereditary. But there was also departure from the norm of traditional leadership, if the landlord wanted. The last *muqqadam* of the village – Hoshiar Singh was made in violation of the hereditary principle.⁷ Before him Jagbir Singh, a Jat (*Hela*) was *muqqadam* of the

village. He was deprived of *muqqadami* rights by the *Pattharwalas* because of his oppressive nature. In one of the cases of oppression he made Bholu Gadaria do *begar* without food for four days. The news of oppression reached the *Pattharwala*. He punished the *muqqadam* by snatching the *muquaddami* rights from him and making Hoshiar Singh, the new *muqqadam* of the village.

Caste-Land Relationship and Proliterianization

Chamars, who form around three quarters of the village population, control around 47.38 percent land. Jats with 11.47 percent population own around 45.30 percent land. Six of the other 10 castes share 7.33 percent land, even as 4 of them - Kumhars, Dhiwars, Blacksmiths and Badhai (carpenters), own no land. Table 2 shows that most of the landholdings of the Chamars and MBCs are below 3 acres, and those of the Jats are above 3 acres. Peasants owning less than 3 acres land – small and poor peasants, who combine working on their land with hiring out their labour power along with landless families belong to the rural poor. The owners of landholdings above 3 acres – middle and rich peasants as well as the landlords belong to the rural rich: the middle peasants depend mainly on the family labour – the proportion of the hired in labour power is much less compared to the family labour power; the rich peasants hire in more labour power than the family's; the landlords do not participate in the production process, except supervision or operation of the machinery.⁸ There is only one rich peasant – a Jat, and no landlord in Khanauda. More than 75 percent Chamars, MBCs and Muslim BCs are rural poor, even as 45 percent Jats are rural rich (middle peasants including a rich peasant). Banias and Brahmins are middle peasants. I have categorised the contractors and the milkmen also as part of the rural rich.

It also needs to be noticed that 3 landholdings of Jats in the official records are very small – below 1 acre. It may give an impression that the owners of these landholdings might be Jat poor peasants; but the reality is totally different. Owners of these landholdings are actually Jat middle peasants; these landholdings have been fraudulently bought by them from the MBC poor peasants.

Table 2

Castes in relation to the size of landholdings

Castes	No. of holdings					
	Below 1 acre	1 acre to 3 acres	3 acre to 6 acres	6 acres and above	Total	Average Land owned acres

Jats	3	4	5	11	23	7.27	167.27
Chamar s	49	22	14	5	90	1.94	174.95
Gadaria s	-	1	-	1	2	4.66	9.31
Nais	-	2	-	-	2	1.53	3.05
Dhunass	1	2	1	-	4	1.73	6.39
Banias	-	-	1	-	1	4.74	4.74
Brahmi ns	-	-	1	-	1	3.02	3.02
Total	53(43.0 9)	31(25.2 0)	22(17.8 9)	17(13.8 2)	123(100)	3.12	369.27

Source: The official book of land records , *Khatauni*, village Khanauda, Office of the *Tesildar*, Sardhana *tehsil* (administrative unit below the district), Meerut District.

(Figures in the brackets are percentages of the landholdings)

Some owners of the small landholdings are quite prosperous. Their main sources of income and occupations are non-agrarian; they are contractors, milkmen, a shopkeeper-cum-moneylender, and a government servant. They belong traditionally to the non-cultivating families; they are neo-rich who became prosperous from the 1970s onwards. They have invested money earned from the non-agricultural means into agriculture.

The official records on the size of landholdings as shown in table 2 camouflage the reality. In fact the sizes of landholdings for various castes are much smaller. Among the cultivators of all castes including Jats the process of proletarianisation is taking place. Generally the land on records is shown as joint holdings of several owners, especially in the case of the Jats and in many cases is still registered in the name of the original owner, who got it three/four generations back. Such landholdings have been divided through the successive generations among the descendents of the original allottees; for all practical purposes these are fragmented. My survey conducted in June 2000 among the Jats of Khanauda show that

the landholdings whose numbers are registered as only 23 in the official records with an average size of 7.27 acres, are fragmented into 40 holdings in reality as a result of the divisions in the third or fourth generation with average size of 4.18 acres. Out of these, 22 fall within the range of 1- below 3 acres, 11 within the range of 3 - below 6 acres and 7 above 6 acres. Unlike 4-5 years earlier, 7 persons from the families with smaller landholdings, e.g., below 3 acres, supplement their income by working in the non-agrarian sectors, which the community considers demeaning including wage labour, e.g., in factory, on tempo, on truck, tailoring and construction work. Similarly, the official records show only two joint landholdings of the Gadarias – 8.06 acres and 1.25 acres. But in practice the first landholding is divided among 4 brothers as 2.03 acres each, but recently all four of them have sold out their entire land to the Chamars and the Jats to join as landless workers in a factory in Meerut city. The second landholding is divided among three brothers each getting 0.42 acres of share. The landholding which appears as belonging to the rich or middle peasant actually is that of the poor peasants. This trend is visible in every landowning community in the village.

Even as the small peasants largely do not possess any other resource than the land, e.g., means of transportation, irrigation, etc., a large number of middle peasants are also getting deprived of their means of production one by one. Not only are their landholdings getting fragmented, even other resources are getting divided or shared by the descendents of the person, who was the original owner. Twelve tractors – 8 owned by the Jats and 4 by the Chamar middle and rich peasants are hired by all small and poor peasants and many middle peasants. Similarly, the small and poor peasants buy water from the tubewells of the middle and rich peasants.

Diversification of village economy

Cultivation, milk-economy, wage labour and business are the main components of the economy of Khanauda. It is undergoing rapid diversification. Both the rural rich and poor classes do not find a single economic sector adequate, though for different reasons. The rich and middle peasants are making investment in non-agricultural activities, i.e., milk trade, business, contractorship, particularly in the construction sector and petrol pump, moneylending, etc. Three of them are Jats, 4 are Chamars and 1 is Dhuna. Six of them own landholdings around 6-16 acres.

The rural poor sustain their economy by engaging in more economic activities than one. They earn their livelihood by working in the non-agrarian sectors for most part of the year and by selling milk round the year. However, during the harvest season they engage in the *lai* as well.⁹ Work in the non-agrarian sectors, mainly in the field of construction, is carried out exclusively by the male members of the family, while the whole family is involved in the *lai*. But rearing of buffalows for selling milk, and of other cattle is done mainly by women and children. The milk-economy involves multiple exploitation of the *bhainsias* (milk sellers/buffalo-keepers).¹⁰ Jats are the recent entrants as the wage labourers into the non-

agrarian sectors. As mentioned earlier 7 Jat individuals combine cultivation with wage labour. During last one decade even as four Chamars from the village got jobs as clerks in the UP government, one Brahmin, two Jats have joined as constables in the police and one person from Dhuna caste as a soldier in the army. The Chamars got the benefit of reservation in the government jobs. It needs to be noted that for getting the job of police constables, the bribe plays a decisive role.

Geographical location of Khanauda, e.g., within the accessible range of 15-20 Km. from Meerut city like many other villages makes available the non-agrarian employment to the rural poor, unlike their counterparts in more distantly located villages. This enables them to be free from the dependence on the landowning classes to a considerable extent. This is in addition to their numerical strength. However, this kind of freedom has unequal impact on dalits, MBCs and Muslim BCs. With rise of dalits, the cases of harassment of dalit women in this village have almost disappeared. But there are still cases of harassment of women belonging to the MBCs and Muslim Most BCs.¹¹

Arrival of the migrant labour during last one decade (late 1980s and 1990s) from Bihar and Madhya Pradesh is another significant development in the economy of Khanauda. Six Jat families employ migrant labourers on the monthly salary basis. It has replaced the original labour from the village, except in the harvesting season, which mainly used to come from the MBCs, Muslim BCs and some Chamars.

Rise of the Neo-rich families

During the last three decades of the twentieth century, two types of the neo-rich families have emerged in the village – *dudhias* (milkmen's) and contractors'. Certain families have specialised in and monopolised these vocations. Their rise show two trends: one, economic mobility of the low caste landless labourers and two, the intensity of exploitation of their fellow rural poor. They have also emerged as the main moneylenders, and buyers of land. Consider the following examples:

Example 1: Abdul, a Muslim BC of Dhuna caste who started milk trade in the 1960s, was a landless labourer and used to live in a *kuccha* (mud-walled) house. But within a few years he emerged as one of the richest men in the village, became a moneylender, came to own four *pukka* (brick-walled) houses and became a middle peasant by buying the land from the poor peasants and middle peasants belonging to different castes. He employed servants in his milk trade. He owned all paraphernalia needed for agriculture. He also emerged as one of the oppressors of the rural poor in the village: advance of loan to the *bhainsias* (buffalo-keepers) in the form of buffaloes and cash pushed them into a kind of bondage to him; the loan had to be paid in the form of milk, not cash; refusal to give milk to him resulted in the harassment of the *bhainsias* including physical assault. During the last three decades, he had beaten up a large number of the *bhainsias* or the poor people in the village. Reasons for his anger could be related to the milk trade or small issues like dispute involving his children. In case the matter was reported to the

police, he got scot free by bribing the police. On the contrary, it was the complainant who had to suffer at the hands of police. After his death his sons inherited his business. Recently, a Chamar family of *dhudhia* has also emerge in the village in the similar way and has almost replaced the business of the former.

Example 2: Expansion of public works in Meerut city and of construction work in the cantonment area provided job opportunities in the non-agrarian sectors to the landless and poor peasant classes, especially SCs and MBCs from the villages situated in the vicinity of the city. Solhu Chamar and two of his brothers joined as masons in MES (Military Engineering Service) in the Meerut Cant in the 1950s. In due course of time he became a sub-contractor employing SC and MBC laborers from Khanauda. Contractorship became his family profession passing through three generations; the whole family learnt the craft of contractorship. Their SC status helped them to get government contracts. Two of his contractor sons have bought land from the poor and small peasants and emerged as neo-rich in the village. Taking advantage of belonging to a dominant sub-caste in the village, one of them has joined the village politics. He was the *pradhan* of village *panchayat* (chief of the council) for one term (1987-1995) and following the reservation for the SCs and women by the 73rd amendment in the Constitution his wife was *pramukh*(chief) of Daurala block in the previous term (1995-2000). She was again elected as a member of the Block Development Council (BDC).

Success of these families has encouraged many others to engage in milk trade and contractorship. Apart from the above-mentioned examples, there are 3 other contractors in Khanauda; 2 middle peasant Chamars, 1 Jat middle peasant, and 3 milkmen; 1 Jat rich peasant, 1 Chamar middle peasant and 1 Dhuna landless person.

Transfer of land

Within almost two decades of acquiring the ownership of land following the *zamindari* abolition, the poor peasants started selling off their land, for they did not find it feasible to cultivate. But it was only from the late 1960s onwards, coinciding with the arrival of the Green Revolution that the process of land transfer became a continuous process. Within four decades around 42 families including 19 middle peasants had sold out their land. Table 3 shows caste-wise break-up of the land sellers and their class status after the sale. Except all Jats, 2 MBCs and 2 Muslim BCs, the SC and MBC peasants who sell out land belong to the small and poor families.

The land is mainly bought by 10-11 persons, e.g., 4 Jats, 5-6 Chamars and 1 Dhuna : i) 5 middle peasants and a rich peasant, ii) the neo-rich - 2 contractors and a *dudhia*, iii) a shop keeper and iv) individuals like a Chamar government servant (clerk).¹² In a few cases the buyers have been from neighboring villages of Dhanju, Dulhera and JalalpurUrf Jalalabad: 2 Jats and Rajput rich peasants and 2 MBC middle peasants. In the case of a MBC Saini middle peasant, a group of 8 Jat families bought land (through fraudulent means) together and then divided it among themselves.

Table 3

Caste-wise sale of land and class status after the sale

Castes	No. of h.h.* which sold land	Status of the h.h. after the sale	
		Landless	Poor peasants
Jats**	6	1***	-
Chamars	17	8	7
The MBCS	16	14	1
Muslim BC	2	2	-
Bania	1	-	-
Total	42	25	8

*h.h.= Households ** In past few years some more families have sold out land, which has been bought by dalits. I have yet to update data on.

*** This belongs to the *Hela* Jats.

Manipulation by the Rural Rich

Even as the dalits of Khanauda are protected by legal provisions combined with their growing politicization, it is the MBCs and the minority high castes – Banias and Brahmins which have now become vulnerable. Their vulnerability is reflected in the manner they become victims of the Jat middle and rich peasants regarding the usurpation of their land. Threatened with progressive fragmentation of landholdings, 4-5 such Jat families have become wary of the fact as to how to keep their landholdings intact and how to increase their sizes. One of the ways to do so is to usurp the landholdings of the vulnerable sections, by fraudulent means. These include: increase on paper the amount of money lent out

to the vulnerable groups, giving them social access, manipulating/tampering with the mortgage-document of land. Once fallen into the trap, the result is the dispossession of the gullible peasants from their land.

A Jat lawyer who belongs to middle peasant family from the village, now settled in Meerut city where he practises, owns land in the village and plays a nasty role in this process. He is the first person to become advocate from village Khanauda. He misuses his position, often in connivance with other Jat peasants including his five brothers to usurp land of the MBCs, Mulim BCs, Baniyas and SCs (till a Jat-Chamar dispute turned into a caste clash in 1992). His modus operandi is simple; one of the brothers of the lawyer or other Jats would befriend a member of the landowning target family. A kind of social interaction would begin between them: they would visit each other's house and Meerut city together.¹⁴ Invariably, the target peasant would need financial help to set up a tubewell, buy seeds, fertilizers or for some other obligation, even for extravagance. This new "friend" gives money only after the borrower signs a document mortgaging some part or whole of his land to him. Without his realizing, the target is cheated. The following cases are noteworthy:

Case 1: Nazbu, a small peasant of Dhuna caste, Muslim Most Backward Class, became the victim of fraud by the lawyer's family. Following the death of his father, he got 1.53 acres of his share of land. He was "stupid" to become a servant of the lawyer's brother Jagbir, a *dudhia* (milkman) at that time, for a salary of Rs.500/ per month. The salary was not enough for Nazbu to meet needs of his family. Whenever he needed cash, he borrowed from Jagbir, and the amount varied from Rs10-Rs.100 at a time. As soon as one year passed, Jagbir brought it to the notice of Nazbu that the amount borrowed by him including interest on it accumulated to Rs.10,000/, though there was no mention of the interest when the transaction began. Jagbir used to write exaggerated amount, which was lent informally, in his diary. He pointed out to Nazbu that his family members including his five brothers, were putting pressure on him to take the lent out money back. He knew well that Nazbu was not in a position to return the amount.

Jagbir asked Nazbu to meet his lawyer brother at Meerut court. The lawyer advised Nazbu to do the *iqarnama*¹⁵ of his entire land with lawyer and his five brothers. The *iqarnama* would be valid for three years; that means that Nazbu would lose his land to the lawyer and his brothers, if did not clear the debt within that time. But taking advantage of his ignorance, on paper *iqarnama* was shown as *benama*. Thus, Nazbu became landless much before the expiry of duration of the *iqarnama*. The entire process of Nazbu's becoming landless took just one year. It would be in order to point out that Nazbu's two brothers, who inherited equal share of land, i.e., 1.53 acres each, are also undergoing the process of proletarianisation under the similar circumstances.

Case 2: Ram Dayal's was the middle peasant family of a minority high caste, Bania. He and his wife were the first educated couple of the village. He was a BSc drop-out and his wife was under-matriculate. He

and his unmarried brother jointly inherited 12.81 acres land, which their father got after the *zamindari* abolition. Their educational qualifications made Ram Dayal and his wife uninterested in cultivation. Perhaps, education alienated them from the rural culture and made them misfit in the urban milieu as he could not get a job in any city. The land was supervised and cultivated by his brother. After the death of his brother in the late 1960s, there was nobody to look after their agriculture. Since Ram Dayal and his wife were not used to the cultivation, the income from the land declined. Besides, he was extravagant.

Meanwhile, the first MA drop-out Jat middle peasant got friendly with this family. The Ram Dayal family started borrowing from him. In this case also the middle peasant exaggerated the amount. Unable to pay the debt this family sold out 6.93 acres of land to 3 Jats (including the “friend”), to a Chamar and a neo-rich Dhuna. Only 5.88 acres of land has been left with the family, which would be divided into equal shares of three brothers.

Case 3: The father of Rishal Saini was one of the traditional elite, *Mohassal* of the landlord before the *zamindar* abolition. Following the *zamindari* abolition, he became the owner of 16.80 acres land. Rishal Saini was the only son of his father and also has one son. His landholding remained intact within three generations. Like the Bania he was also not interested in cultivation .

A dispute between Rishal Saini and a Chamar in the 1970s resulted in the intervention of two Jats who became arbiter in almost all disputes in the village, despite the presence of the elected *panchayat*. They got a compromise reached between the two parties, but played trick on Rishal Saini taking advantage of his ignorance and minority caste position; they got a blank paper signed by him, and got the content on this blank paper written by a teacher of the village school. It was shown that Rishal Saini had done *iqarnama* of his land to the Jat arbiters for seven years for certain amount. On the expiry period of the so-called *iqarnama* they filed a case in the court claiming the ownership of his land. Scared of the long-drawn legal battle, his illiteracy and minority caste position in the village he agreed for a compromise, to sell out his land to them at a throw away price; 16.80 acres land was sold for Rs.10,1600 only. These two Jat individuals also mobilized other four Jat families of Khanauda and two from neighbouring village Dhanju to buy his land. Besides, in disgust he sold some land to various castes for purpose of habitation. Within 6/7 years of the dispute, he lost his entire land and left the village as a broken man.

Some individual Chamars also fell into their trap. But they were rescued by their community and the legal provisions meant for their protection. It also ought to be mentioned that these Jat families do not tolerate, if any other community than them buys land from the MBCs or the minority high castes. Following examples are relevant in this context:

Case 4 : Naresh, a Chamar middle peasant, with 11.55 acres of land, privileged to be the only son of his parents, married second time in the early 1970s because his first wife did not bear a son. His first wife challenged his second marriage in the court. He engaged the same Jat lawyer, mentioned earlier, of Khanauda to plead his case. The lawyer told Naresh that his case was weak; the court verdict would bind him to pay the compensation to his estranged wife; but he could get the amount of compensation reduced, if Naresh did not own any land. The lawyer convinced Naresh that he could be shown as landless for the purpose of reducing the compensation, if he did *iqrarnama* of his land to some body. Accordingly, Naresh did *iqrarnama* of his 9.03 acres land for Rs.40,000 to another lawyer whose name was suggested by the Jat lawyer. Meanwhile, the Jat lawyer struck a deal about Naresh's land with another lawyer, without Naresh's knowledge and consent; he paid the amount which Naresh owed to another lawyer and got transferred ownership of Naresh's land into his name.

Naresh realised about the fraud only in 1991 when he found out that the brothers of the Jat lawyer had taken away motor from his tube-well and harvested a crop from Naresh's field. When asked about the action of his brothers, the Jat lawyer replied that now the land belonged to him as he had paid for it to another lawyer on Naresh's behalf. Naresh took it as a case of cheating. He waited for the harvesting of the next crop. This time he mobilized his community to harvest the sugarcane crop before the Jats could. It resulted in the biggest caste clash between the Jats and Chamars in Khanauda in 1992 and deployment of PAC (Provincial Armed Constabulary) there for around one week. Backed by his community, Naresh thwarted the move of Jats to harvest the crop. The lawyer filed a case in the court against Naresh. But the land is now being cultivated by the Chamar peasant and the litigation is still going on. Had the lawyer been successful in taking over his 9.03 acres land, a middle peasant Naresh would have become landless, as he had already sold out 2.52 of his 11.55 acres land to his caste fellows.

Case 5: In the 1970s, Ram Singh Chamar, a rich milkman and middle peasant bought some part of the Bania's land, i.e., 2.25 acres. Banias had already sold out 5.04 out of 12.8 acres of their land mainly to the Jats. But when Ram Singh wanted to cultivate this land, one of the Jat middle peasants prevented him and claimed that actually it was he who owned the land because the Bania had sold it out to him in lieu of the money the Bania had borrowed from him. When Ram Singh told that he had bought it, the Jat said that on paper it was his land. The Chamar moved the court which ruled in his favour. Actually, the Jat had shown the forged documents.

IV

Changing Patterns of Caste dominance in Khanauda: Decline Jats and Rise of Rise of Dalits

After the *zamindari* abolition in 1952 mainly three groups emerged in Khanauda: middle peasants, poor peasants including artisans, and the landless labourers – agricultural labourers and wage labourers in non-agrarian sectors. Caste composition of the middle peasant families was : all of the 15 Jat families; two families of the minority high castes - Banias and Brahmins ; one MBC (Saini) family and one Muslim BC(Dhuna) family. Rest of the families – MBCs and Chamars became the poor peasants and wage labourers. The MBC poor peasants combined cultivation along with the traditional occupations – carpentry, pottery, blacksmithary, hair cutting, etc.¹⁹ They became the owners of small pieces of land which they were given as *inam* (reward) by the landlord before the *zamindari* abolition. Some of the MBCs and SCs were allotted uncultivable land known as *dhahar*, which they made cultivable after clearing the *dhak patta*(jungle). Every caste was free to cultivate land during the *zamindari* period, though everybody, especially the non-Jats, was not interested in cultivation. Despite the persuasion of the *patwari* or *mohassal* to cultivate land most of them declined to do so. In fact, whoever could please the *patwari* on the eve of *zamindari* abolition either because of good rapport with him or by giving bribe to him or by being his sycophant got land of his choice. Most of the families which have land today are those which held on to cultivation before *zamindari* abolition. The following period saw the decline and emergence of different social forces. It can be divided into two phases, e.g., phase I – decline of the traditional elite and rise of Jats and , phase II- decline of the Jats and rise of the Chamars.

Phase I: Decline of traditional elite and rise of jats as a dominant caste

Absence of *zamindar* and formal deprivation from power of the traditional elite such as *mukhia*, *patwari*, *muquaddam* and *mohassal* gave rise to the emergence of an independent group of middle peasants – all Jats, a few Chamars and MBCs and Muslim BCs. One family of the traditional elite, e.g., *patwari*'s had already declined even before the introduction of *zamindari* abolition. The family of *mohassal* was rendered ineffective as it belonged to a minority MBC; we have seen in the case 3 how the descendent of this family became landless and left the village. Rest of the two traditional elite families were Jats, to which the new dominant group belongs.

Now the Jats had become the single dominant caste in the village. They dominated the village in all its aspects - economic, social and political. They remained in this position for around more than three decades, i.e., from 1950s to the 1970s. Jats also started engaging individuals from the Chamars, MBCs and Muslim BCs as agricultural labourers, i.e., *hali* or *naukar* (servants), and extracted *begar* from them. Some of them combined moneylending with farming.

Politically, with the formal introduction of adult franchise all castes and classes were given equal rights for participating in the electoral process. But it was the Jat caste which was dictating terms in the village. Jats would not allow other to caste their votes. They were able to do this despite their small number since they formed a cohesive unit and theirs was a single largest caste to have benefited from the land reforms, Green Revolution, etc. They also had maximum number of rural rich and connections in the local administration; government officials- *patwari/lekhpal*, VLW, secretary, police, election officials, school inspectors, etc, would visit them, stay with them and dine with them. Besides, an educated section emerged first among the Jats only. Despite the introduction of elected village *panchayat*, non-elected Jats middle peasants became more influential. Two of them (father of the one was *muqaddam*) started playing more decisive role in the village *panchayat*. Even if a meeting of the elected village *panchayat* was convened, these two individuals played more important role - often partisan. Not only that, whenever there was some conflict in the village one or all parties involved in the conflict would consult these individuals, rather than the elected *panchayat* representatives. There are instances when the individuals from the Jat community had disregarded the decisions of the village *panchayat*, even as those from other communities abided by it. For example, in 1972 the village *panchayat* ordered two persons accused of theft to clean the village streets. One of the accused was a Jat, another was a Chamar. The latter carried out the verdict, but the Jat defied. One of the first *pradhans* of Khanauda was also a Jat.

Phase II : Decline of jats and emergence of Jatavs (dalits) as a dominant caste

Chamars have emerged as the most influential caste in Khanauda during the last two decades. Six individuals which include 4 from the neo-rich families – 2 *dudhias*, 2 contractors, one rich peasant-cum-petrol pump owner and a middle peasant-cum-self-employed are playing domineering role in the main aspects of the village life. Besides, these families Chamars as a community also have emerged as a cohesive political unit on account of their politicisation and “Ambedkarisation”[Singh,1998a]. It enables them to thwart the domination of other castes and to exercise it over them. Chamars started dominating the village *panchayat* much before the introduction of reservation in this institution. The reservation of the post of village *panchayat pradhan* of Khanauda for the SC women following the 73th constitutional amendment has consolidated the process of Chamar dominance in the village.²⁰ No longer the non-elected Jats are invited by the non-Jats to arbitrate their disputes. It is rather 6 individuals from these dalit families whose leadership is accepted.²¹ Three of them have also emerged as politically powerful; since the 1980s the post of village *pradhan* has rotated between two of them, even as the third family has wrested the post in the recently held election on June 23, 2000. Similarly, unlike earlier period the Chamars can also prevent the non-Chamars from exercising their franchise. The first instance of this type

in Khanauda took place in 1993 when a Chamar from the village contested election for the Sardhana seat of the UP legislative assembly [see Singh,1998; 2616-2617, note1].

The *dudhias* (milkmen) among them are the main source of credit which has to be returned in kind only. During the last 4-5 years one Chamar *dudhia* has emerged as the buyer of milk from the majority of the *bhainsias*. He has become quite oppressive, especially to the individuals belonging to the MBCs, including the families which are not involved with him in the milk economy. It is pertinent to mention here the rise of a young middle peasant-self-employed boy, in his 20s, who has recently emerged as the self-appointed saviour of the people and arbiter of justice. He has won accolades of all castes including some Jats. If anybody, including his caste fellow, is found harassing/oppressing a vulnerable family or individual, this person intervenes on behalf of the victims and punishes the accused by taking recourse to violence or threat. His role is quite appreciated by the villagers at a time when they have lost faith in all agencies of justice. How he thwarted the move of some of his caste fellows to kill a person from another caste by counter-firing from his locally-made pistol, and also how he came to the rescue of a MBC person who was harassed by the above-mentioned *dudhia* are the points of frequent references in the conversation of the villagers. His conduct was appreciated by many in the village in comparison to other two political families. This contributed to the victory of his proxy – his wife, to the post of village *pradhan* in the recently held election to the village *panchayat*. It ought to be underlined here that this person first came into limelight in 1997 when the accused in a clash between Chamars and Gujars in another village of the district, as mentioned earlier, had taken shelter in this village. He, in fact, is a relative of this person. This person from Khanauda seems to have followed the footsteps of his relative with the difference that he comes to the rescue of the MBCs as well, even by punishing the person of his own caste.

IV

Situating the local dominant caste in the supra-local changes

The changes which we have discussed in village Khanauda are reflective of the general trends in western UP in the post-green revolution period. And these changes have not been sudden; they have occurred in a gradual process. Every caste and class of the village society has been impacted by these changes. Therefore, the changes in the pattern of caste dominance need to be situated in the broader context of time and space. In economic aspect, almost every caste group is dissatisfied with its traditional occupations. With the fragmentation of landholdings, depleting water table, wide gap between cost and return, growing expectation to lead a better life has become symptomatic of the agrarian crisis of the post-green revolution era. In such a situation informal economy or “footloose” labour has emerged as a significant component of the

rural economy. It is important to note that without exception every caste has joined the informal economy. This has loosened the traditional patronage and dominance.

The trends in the change of caste dominance could be witnessed even before the rise of the BSP. It was, indeed, reflected in the election of dalits or even MBCs in village pradhans in some of the villages. These pradhans replaced the traditional elites in their villages. But beyond their villages, their dominance became insignificant as members of the traditional dominant caste controlled the supra-village level panchayat institutions, blocks. Three village pradhans – one dalit, two MBCs from different villages told me how they were kidnapped and forced to vote for a Jat as Pramukh in 1980s and early 1990. The supra-village institution till then were controlled by some families of the traditional dominant caste. However, there has been remarkable change since the rise of Mayawati and implementation of the 73rd Constitution Amendment. In village Khanauda and its neighbouring villages dalits have become more influential even in the block level institutions than they were before. Arrest of powerful farmer leader Mahendra Singh Tikait a few years back is indicative of broad changes in the political economy of the region.

V

Conclusion

The changing patterns of caste dominance can be explained by Srinivas' concept of dominance. It is too exclusive communities like dalits. If placed in the context of time and space, dominant caste belong to any castes depending on the conditions prevailing in a particular village at a particular point of time in the process of progress of history. The village *panchayats*, public institutions and bureaucracy at the village level function in a partisan way. They have favoured the dominant castes or worked at their behest. Even as till the 1980s, these were the "not so low castes" or the high castes which were the dominant castes almost. Since then the situation has changed. Even the dalits have emerged as dominant castes in some areas of western UP. Existence of the sympathetic regime and rise political consciousness are among the most important factor their having become dominant castes. But dominant caste is a local phenomenon subject to the impact of the supra-local milieu.

In the village Khanauda where dalits (Jatavs) have emerged as a dominant caste during past three decades three caste groups can be identified to understand the relations of domination and subordination, i.e., the middle caste Jats, the Scheduled Castes, dalits or Chamars, and the MBCs, Muslim Most Backward CastesBCs and the minority high castes - Baniyas and Brahmins. The Chamars form almost three quarters of the village population and control maximum land followed by the Jats. But the proportion of the rural poor among Chamars is more than those among Jats. The post-Independence period has seen two phases of shift in the patterns of dominance in Khanauda – phase I: decline of the

traditional elite and rise of Jats (1950s–1970s) and the phase II: decline of Jats and rise of Chamars (since 1980).

Having benefited from the land reforms in the 1950s, especially the abolition of landlordism which enabled them to assume the proprietorship of land and Green Revolution, the Jats remained the dominant castes for almost three decades. They also monopolised the connections in the local administration - the village level government functionaries, police, election officials, the government school head master, etc., maintained contacts and liaison with them. They prevented other castes from exercising their franchise and oppressed them socially as well as economically. But from the 1980s onwards, there has been a decline in their dominance with the simultaneous rise in that of dalits. Their growing politicisation along with the process of “Ambedkarisation” and the rise of BSP projected dalits of Khanauda as a formidable political force. Identification of Khanauda as an “Ambedkar Village” in 1990-91 - a village named after Dr.B.R. Ambedkar identified so on the basis of the substantial number of SCs as its population, earmarked for the preferential treatment for development by the sympathetic regime, reservation for the SCs in the village *panchayat* through the 73rd constitutional amendment in 1994 consolidated their position. Though these factors have been present in several villages, it is only in a few villages like Khanauda that they have contributed to the rise of dalits. It has been possible because of the existence of favourable conditions in Khanauda, i.e., the legacy of agrarian relations, freedom of the low castes from the dependence on the high/middle castes due to the availability of land, any other alternative means of livelihood or accessible distance of the village from the main city and the rise of an assertive and aggressive generation of dalits. Now dalits dominate economic and political aspects of Khanauda. It has coincided with the relative decline in the conditions of Jats as a community; unable to sustain themselves on land some of them combine cultivation with hiring out of labour power, which the community usually considers demeaning.

These developments, however, have not helped other groups of low castes – the Most Backward Classes (MBCs) and the Muslim Most Backward Classes and the minority high castes like Banias and Brahmins. Placed in the most vulnerable position these castes are now, in fact, subjected to dual domination of the Jats as well as dalits. Apart from being discrete groups, they do not form a political block so as to affect the electoral politics. They are even discriminated against by the leadership of the village *panchayat* in the disbursement of public help. As they do not have the requisite connections in the local administration, they are also exploited by the educated, and functionaries of the public institutions – banks, court, *tehsils*, police stations, etc. However, sometimes Jat-Chamar conflict or intra-Chamar contradiction comes to their advantage. The constitutional provisions for the SCs, especially after the rise of the BSP places them in the better position in comparison with other vulnerable castes. However, the rise of dalits in Khanauda

does not represent a general pattern; in most of the villages they are still placed in the vulnerable position. Dominant caste is a local phenomenon.

NOTES

2. “Ambedkarisation” means growth of consciousness and impact of the ideas and life of Dr. B.R. Ambedkar on the subaltern castes, especially dalits. It started developing from the 1970s. But its genesis could be traced to the RPI movement in UP during the late 1950s and 1960s. Under the impact of the ideology of Ambedkar, dalits have been trying to carve out an independent identity of their own. The rise of the BSP is part of an ongoing process. For a discussion on “Ambedkarisation” based on the field work in seven villages of Meerut district including Khanauda [See Singh, 1998a].

3. For a comparison between the two systems [see Singh, 1992 : 9-14; for the impact of differential relations within the two system see Chapter III].

4. There are two types of Hindu Jats in western UP: *Dhes* and *Helas* [See Singh, 1992: 34, note 54]. The *Dhes* are of Punjabi origin, and *Helas* share cultural similarities with the Jats of Haryana. There are also Muslim Jats in the region known as *Mule* Jats.

5. Besides the tenants, there were two groups of Chamars – *Miter* and *Halis*. *Miter* who headed a team of 10-12 persons and had to arrange Chamars to work in the *Sir* and *Khudkast* land of the *zamindar* and to serve his revenue staff. *Halis* were those Chamars who were not given land or anything for working in the *Sir* and *Khudkast* [Singh, 1992: 34, note.52] .

6. Process of outsiders’ settling in the village still continues; a large number of the married daughters from this village prefer to settle here with their husbands and children. It seems that the absence of caste oppression in Khanauda, which exists in their in-laws’ villages, motivates them to stay in their native place. Some people refer to this village as “*Javaiyon Ka Gaon*” (“The village of the son-in-laws”).

7. All names referred to in this paper are fictitious.

8. The identification of classes is based on the Marxian framework devised by Lenin and Mao: the ownership of means of production and the proportion of family labour power engaged in the production process in agriculture vis-à-vis the outside labour power. Patnaik [1987] has given a “synthesis “ of Lenin’s and Mao’s frameworks as labour - exploitation criterion. While using Patnaik’s model elsewhere also I [Singh: 1992 ; Chapter III] observed from eight villages of Meerut district that the owners of landholdings below 3 acres are small and poor peasants, while those of landholdings above 3 acres are rural rich – middle and rich peasants and landlords.

9. The process of harvesting wheat crop for wages is called *lai* in local parlance. The foodgrains earned from it can sustain a rural poor family for a substantial number of months in a year [See Singh: 1992,

59]. The modus operandi of *lai* has undergone changes from the early 1980s, i.e., the period I conducted field work for Ph. D. and now: then the payment for *lai* used to be made in the form of sheaves – 3-4 for harvesting 100 sheaves. The size of sheaves used to be the bone of contention between the landowners and the agricultural labourers known as *lavas* (harvesters). In the early 1980s such conflict resulted in a 4 days' strike in village Tilwara Sakin. One of the outcomes of the strike was the replacement of the sheaves as wages by the fixed amount of foodgrains for harvesting wheat per *bigha* or 0.21 acre; it is also known as harvesting on contract [see Singh, 1992: 76-78].

But within one and half decade years harvesting on contract has become a predominant feature of the agrarian economy in Meerut district. Under the new system the wage rate in Khanauda in May-June 2000 was: 5 *dhadis* (approximately 25 Kgs.) of wheat and 5 *dhadis* of straw for harvesting wheat in 1 *bigha* or 0.21 acre land.

10. For significance of milk-economy in the agrarian economy of Meerut district and multiple exploitation of the milk-sellers [see Singh, 1992: 69 also 53, 56-58].

11. In fact availability of the non- agrarian employment in Meerut city has made male members of the MBC families free from the oppression of the rural rich, but not the women. For differential impact of the alternative means of livelihood on men and women from the rural poor family [see Singh, 1992 : 72-73].

12. The fact that the Chamars are also main buyers of land in Khanauda is in contrast to situation in village Palanpur of the neighbouring district Moradabad [Dreze, 1997: 144].

13 During the last three and half decades of the twentieth century buying wives has become a significant feature of several families in the region. This phenomenon had existed even earlier. Though it is more common among the low castes, there are examples even among the Brahmins and Rajputs of buying women from the marriage market, especially from Bihar, Nepal and Bangladesh. Once married into a particular caste, these women are accepted by the community as if they belong to them. The men who buy women from the market belong to poor families who are unable to find matches in their community. In Khanauda, there are seven women who were bought for marriage. They are among the Chamars, Dhunas and Gadarias.

This issue has a very secular character. The caste differences do not become hindrance. Some of them remain commodities in the real sense of the term; they can be bought from their husbands to become the wives of other men. Sister of the wife of Kundan Chamar was married to Kale Dhinwar. But she was not happy with him. Ahmad Dhuna, a Muslim BC, bought her from Kale Dhinwa. Babar Dhuna also has bought a wife; he has divorced his earlier wife, since she did not bear a child.

14. This kind of relationship is usually resented by the SCs and MBCs.

15. *Iqrarnama* and *benama* are the frequently used terms in the transaction of land. The former refers to the mortgage of land for a particular duration in lieu of the credit: if the borrower does not return the

credit till the expiry of the *iqarnama*, he loses the ownership right of his land to the person who lends money. *Benama* means the transfer of ownership right of land.

16. Some of them have graduated into crime as gang leaders. Some have joined politics. People are so disgusted with criminals in this area that any action against the latter is appreciated by them. The BJP government's action against the criminals in UP was appreciated even by its critics. The campaign style of a candidate who contested in 1991 from the Sardhana assembly seat which encompasses Khanauda as well is one of the indications of the criminal situation in the area. He campaigned with a cavalcade of 7-8 open jeeps. In one jeep he sat surrounded by two security guards provided by the state and 4-5 of his personal guards. The rest of the jeeps carried gun-totting persons with their faces covered with white sheets. The candidate rarely talked to the electorate, his motorcade in fact just passed through the main route. He, however, met a few individuals in the villages, who were supposed to be his traditional supporters. The masses felt scared and intimidated by the campaign style of this candidate.

17. *The Times India*, February 17, 2000 reported that in village Sikhaida neighbouring Khanuada, two persons of a family were shot dead in a land dispute. A dreaded criminal of this village along with six members of his gang have been named in the FIR (the First Information Report) with the police. This person is involved in several such cases and has contacts in Khanauda.

18. It must be noted that the criminals are not only divided on caste lines. Their caste loyalties also suffer due to their gang rivalries. For example, two big gang leaders from Daurala block which covers Khanauda belong to the same caste of Jats. They are involved in long-standing dispute. One of them was alleged to have murdered the brother of another, who was an MLA and also a dreaded man. Both had contested election against each other from Sardhana assembly constituency as independent candidates. Their enmity got extended to two rival parties of UP; one was a leader of the BSP and another that of the Samajwadi Party. The former and six of his supporters were attacked in Meerut court compound allegedly by the latter [See *The Hindustan Times*, April 23,2000].

19. *Jajmani* traditions in this village eroded much before the 1950s and have ceased in the 1990s. For example, the only Brahmin family of Khanauda stopped it four generations ago. Similarly, Nais' (barbers') *Jajmani* relations with Jats have not been regular. It was discontinued following a clash between the barbers and Jats in the 1950s, resumed in the 1960s and has been discontinued in the 1990s again due to a dispute. Brahmins and barbers of the neighbouring villages rendered services to Jats of Khanauda when it was not available from those of this village. It is noteworthy that in the past the barbers of Khanauda preferred to enter into a sort *Jajmani* relations with the Rajputs and Gujars of the neighbouring villages than with the Jats of their own village.

20. The 73rd Constitutional Amendment, 1994, has introduced 33 percent reservation for women in the institution of *panchayat* in India. In UP it became effective from the *panchayat* election of 1995. Though it has raised the level of women's political consciousness, in practice the women who contest election or are elected to the *panchayats* are the proxies of male members of their families. In the last *panchayat* (1995-2000), it was the husband of the veiled woman *pradhan* of Khanauda who worked as the virtual *pradhan*. She only had to put her signature whenever required. On the eve of the June 2000 *panchayat* election, when I asked the respondents of Khanauda names of the contestants for the post of village *pradhan* or membership of the BDC (Block Development Council), they mentioned the names of the husbands of those who were contesting, not the candidates'. Similarly, when the election results were declared, only the names of husbands of the contestants were mentioned as the victorious. It is necessary to point out that in one village, the campaign posters carried the names and photos of husbands of contestants as the virtual candidates.

21. Mendelsohn (2002) observes that in village Behror of Rajasthan lack of coherence among the Ahirs, decline in their economy, independence of the low castes from them have eroded their traditional authority. But unlike Khanauda, the alternative authority did not emerge from another community like the Jatavs. It has rather been provided by the individuals, of course not belonging to the dalits.

22. In the villages of western Uttar Pradesh the conflict between two individuals of different castes can result in the mobilisation of the respective castes. Sometimes the mobilisation crosses the village boundaries as well. It may be caused due to the dispute over land, women, exercise of voting right or installation of Ambedkar's statue, etc. On such occasions Chamars hold meetings, rallies and demonstrations as well as mobilise funds to pressurise the authorities.

23. In several villages oppression by dalits is also taking place, which include imposition of the reverse sanctions. In 1992 in village Gadhina of Meerut district Jats and Gujars fled the village following a clash between them and Chamars.

24. Identified on the criterion of the SCs population as the substantial or the majority, the Ambedkar villages were selected as such first in 1990-91 by Mulayam Singh Yadav government in UP. The programme was continued by the Mayawati - led BSP- SP and BSP-BJP governments; there is a false impression that the Ambedkar village development programme was started by Mayawati and not by Mulayam Singh Yadav. Under this plan a village is identified as such only for one financial year. But the work once started in an Ambedkar village would continue till its completion even after the period for which it had been selected is over. Khanauda was one of around twenty villages identified as Ambedkar villages in Meerut district for the year 1990-1991.

25. See Mendelsohn and Vicziany [1998; 162-163], Singh [1992; 142-143]. Lieten's [1996] study of seven *panchayats* in the neighbouring Muzaffarnagar district points out how panchayats have become the preserve of the dominance of village *pradhans*, even as other members are titular ('Namesake').

26. Even other studies [Lieten and Srivastav, 1991, and Dreze, 1990] observe that the IRDP benefited a large number of better-off and "ineligible" persons.

27. The case of *kanyadan* (gift to the girl at the time of her marriage) from the government in Haryana is same. The dalits were not able to avail of it, as it was mandatory to get the age certificate of the girl. The age of the girl eligible to get it should be 18 years. In the absence of authentic record, the medical officer was supposed to certify the age of the girl. The amount given in *kanyadan* was Rs.5100. But for getting the age certificate Rs.500 had to be spent on x-ray, medical check-up, apart from inconvenience caused, and time spent. These are the findings of a survey conducted by *The Guru Ravi Das Samaj Mahasabha* (The Hindustan Times, May, 17, 2000).

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