

CHAPTER - VI

Lineage and Local Community

I

In this chapter, we are concerned with the territorial structure in the Bhil social system - i.e. the framework for the grouping together of individuals by ties of neighbourhood, for the exercise of recognised authority in settling disputes, finding redress for injuries and repressing actions regarded as antisocial or injurious to the welfare of the community as a whole by the application of direct or indirect sanctions. Further we are concerned with the differentiation of individuals and groups with reference to their roles in the community-socio-economic, political or ritual, and the differentiation based on sex and age; and also with the loci of leadership in the several spheres with a view to understand to what extent they converge or diverge, in the social life of the community as a whole.

The unit of territorial organisation is a village. Bhil villages in this region are dispersed settlements consisting of a number of isolated homesteads scattered over a considerable stretch of territory. Each homestead is usually situated on its own cultivated fields within a large clearing and is separated from its neighbours by cultivated fields, patches of jungle and frequently by one or more ridges of a hill which intervenes to cut up a village into two or more isolated parts. One of the essential

features of a Bhil village is the separation of homesteads and consequently a relative isolation of the families from one another. It does not have a distinct physical identity of the type which characterizes a nucleated village where the inhabited area is restricted to a relatively small space in the centre, while cultivated fields and fallow land lie all around it. In such a village, the local community is a clearly discernible entity integrated by ties of neighbourhood and of shared experiences in the social and economic spheres of activity. Bhil villages however lack such a sharp physical identity. Ideally each householder lives on his own farm and is not forced to come into constant and sustained contact with the people of the other homesteads. In the plains especially, what is called a village, might be nothing more than a number of isolated homesteads brought under one administrative authority. In the Jhalod and Dohad talukas of Panchmahals District and the plains of Jhabua, there are villages which have more than a hundred homesteads with a population range of four to five hundred and extending over many square miles. In such villages, the people on the outer areas specially do not come into sufficiently close contact with each other to constitute a single local community. Usually one finds such villages breaking up into two or more wards or phaliyas each of which operates as a unit of territorial groupings for most significant purposes. The homesteads which are in easy communicable distances from each other come together frequently for several purposes and in course of time a sense of unity,

or of 'belonging' is fostered among the several members.

In large villages such as Bhanpur, each ward or phaliya acts independantly of the other two wards in most respects, except for administrative purposes when they have to be subservient to the authority of the Tadavi. Often it has been found that the people of a particular ward might be having far closer social, economic and ritual relations with the people inhabiting the contiguous territory even when it is under the jurisdiction of another administrative unit, than with the other wards of their own village, i.e. they form a local community across administrative boundaries.

Thus the administrative village and the local community are two different concepts which may not necessarily coincide. Villages with a large number of homesteads scattered over a very wide area tend to develop, which operate as independent entities for most purposes. It also happens sometimes, that people of two or more small villages are brought into such close relations with one another that in course of time, they might come to regard themselves as constituting a single community and each village, as constituting a phaliya of the larger group.

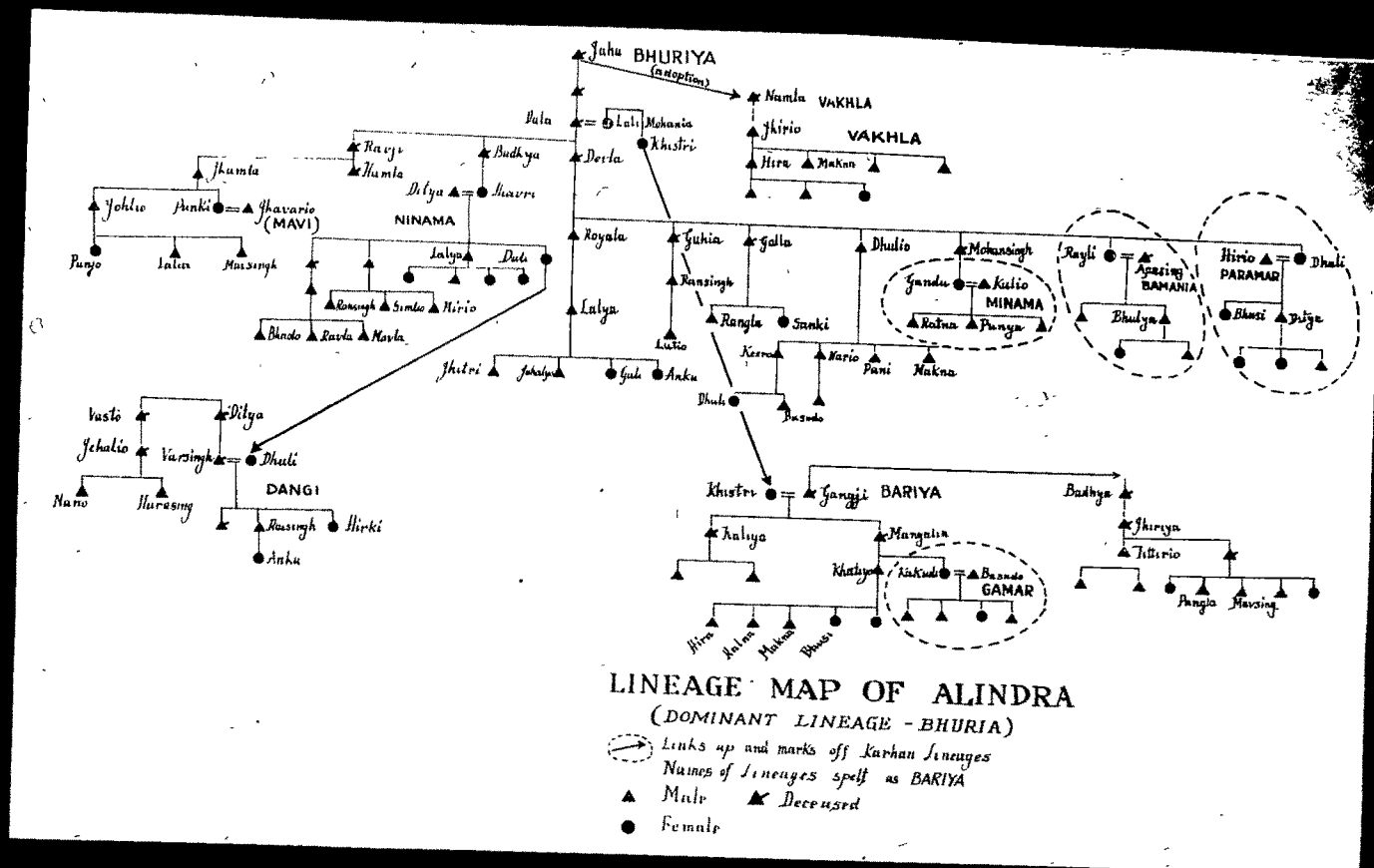
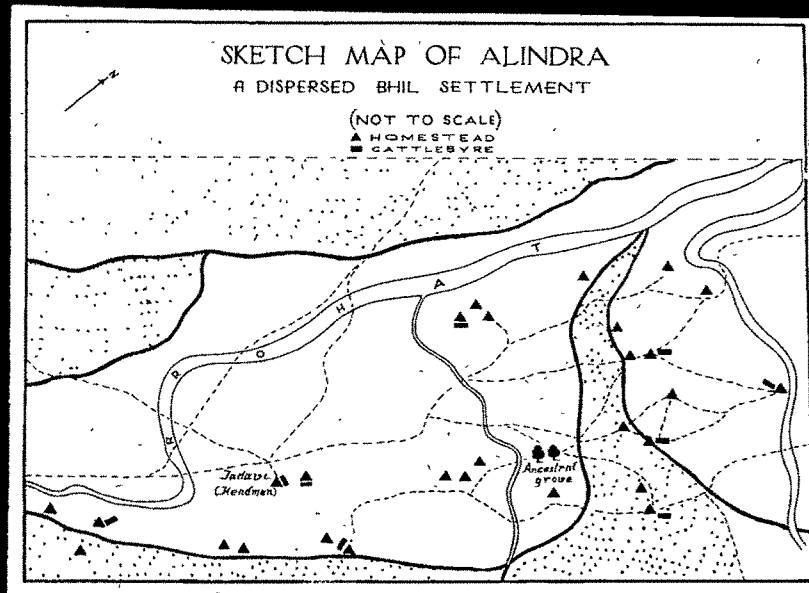
Villages in the Ratammal area however, are considerably smaller both as regards the population and in extension. There are two or three large villages such as Panam - area 4.4 sq.miles, 82 households and a population of 457 persons. But most villages in this have a range of population between 100-150 persons. Alindra is typical of

these villages with 3.0 sq.miles, 29 homesteads and 128 persons. There are also very small villages such as Pipergota with 1.7 sq.miles, 12 households and 50 persons.² Further, a larger part of the village is often an uninhabited jungle while habitation itself is relatively concentrated in about a third of the total area. So that while these villages are all dispersed settlements, the several homesteads are situated with easy communicable distances of one another.

Further the villages in these hilly areas do not have contiguous territories, particularly as regards their cultivated and inhabited portions. Each village is clearly demarkated from the others by a wooded ridge of a hill, a river or some such natural boundary and since the people of any village keep well within these boundaries, the communities are kept distinct. On the Ratanmal for instance, the villages are situated in the several valleys at the top, bound on all sides by high ridges and tablelands of a higher altitude. Alindra is on the south-eastern aspect of Ratanmal, Ehuvara is to the west of Alindra more or less on the same altitude, while Pipergota is on a higher altitude to their north. These villages on the hills are demarkated from the others by the steep slopes and faults of Ratanmal. So automatically the social space of the people in each village is necessarily restricted to within their own boundaries and to a lesser extent with the people of the other villages. Thus, in this area, the administrative village and the local community coincide to a considerable extent.

Usually villages are located near some perennial source of water such as a river, stream or spring. The several homesteads themselves are located wherever sufficient land - relatively level and free of rocks, is available and as far as possible within an easy walking distance of a river, spring or water hole dug in the dry bed of a seasonal stream. Looking at the sketch map of Alindra, we find that the valley is crossed by a river (Kohat which later joins the river Panam after a drop of about 500 ft.) and by a number of other streams (only the perennial streams are shown in the map). It may be noticed that the several homesteads tend to be grouped in the vicinity of the water sources. The need to be within easy distances from sources of drinking water, imposes a practical restriction on the dispersal of the homesteads.

Further, there is a constant threat to the person, crops and live stock of a Bhil peasant from robber bands who frequently raid lonely homesteads, manhandle the inmates and carry away their cattle and other property, escaping through the dense jungles where pursuit is almost impossible, and from the wild beasts of the jungle which raid their fields in herds to ravage the standing crops or to attack their live stock. In either event, there would be an urgent need for succour and unless it is quickly forthcoming, the victim would be unable to save any of his property at all. It is found that homesteads in these wooded valleys are generally located within a hailing distance of their nearest neighbours. The usual criterion is that when a man



shouts from the porch of his medi he should be clearly audible to the inhabitants of the homesteads nearest to him on either side. So, when in danger, he can easily summon his neighbours to his aid by shouting at the top of his voice.

There is yet another factor which tends to modify the dispersal in Bhil villages. It may be recalled that when a person marries, he frequently prefers to build his homestead near the parental one, such that there need be no abrupt break in their relations. Thus, clusters of two or more homesteads are frequently found. These clusters persist so long as the senior ancestor is alive and may continue even after his death. Looking at the map of Alindra again, we find a number of such clusters of two or more homesteads. On an analysis, it was revealed that the several householders in a cluster are close relatives. A genealogical chart showing an analysis of the largest cluster in Alindra consisting of five units, is given opposite page . It may be seen that it consists of the households of Dhulia Bhuriya, his two married sons, two married sisters of Dhulia with their children, and the two children of his deceased brother Mohansingh living with their paternal aunt. In the other clusters also a similar situation was found. Khatiya Hariya and his two married sons constitute one cluster of three homesteads, Jhumla Bhuriya, his son and his married daughter (the one who has a ghar-jamai) constitute another cluster and so on. In each case it was a closely related kingroup which formed a smaller neighbourhood group with a greater

degree of collaboration and mutual dependance in their social and economic and ~~their~~ defense needs, within the framework of the larger community. The very fact that they are relatively isolated from the rest of the community tends to confer a greater degree of solidarity and identity upon the members of such clusters. Here we do not have a situation of total dispersal, where each homestead is isolated from the others, but a modified ^{of} form ^{of} it, where three or four homesteads form a cluster with cultivated fields all around them, while the village consists of a series of such clusters dispersed over an extensive territory a situation which is found in Coorg and along the valleys of the Western Ghats.

II

A normal Bhil village in these parts consists of one or more lineages of the same or different clans. There are a large number of villages in Bohad and Jhalod taluks where the entire population belongs to a single lineage group. For instance, near Jhalod town, there are four large villages adjacent to each other, with a total population of over 2000, and all the four villages claim descent from the same ancestor, one Kalla of the clan of Sengada. Tradition has it, that several generations ago, Kalla migrated with his wife and children from a place called Onjani in Rajasthan, and founded the village Bajarnada. The other three villages were established in due course by his descendants, as they increased in numbers. There are no written genealogies and

information has to be collected from old people whose memories do not go back farther than four generations. Genealogies with a depth of six to eight generations are available and they show that most people in a village are related to each other. But these genealogies do not go back far enough to link up the four villages with each other. However, all the descendants in the four villages are bound together by the tradition if not the knowledge, that they are related to each other. In support of this, they all observe pollution when a baby is born and when a death occurs. Again the heads of the sections of the clan and the heads (patel) of the four villages have to cooperate on many occasions. Finally, all the descendants feel that they form a single lineage (nal).

However, lineages extending over four villages are indeed rare, and not to be found in the Ratamaal area. There are a few villages in this area, which consist practically of a single lineage group with a depth and extension of upto five or six generations. Pipergota for instance, consists almost entirely of a single Vakhla lineage group descended from Namla Vakhla - a foster son of the Bhuriyas of Alindra. In these villages, one finds a dominant lineage, claiming descent from the original founders of the village and therefore ownership of the entire village. This dominant lineage group is referred to as the bhaibeta (lit. children of brothers, here 'kindred') of the village. The other lineage groups in the village are the descendants of those people who in the distant past

were invited or permitted to settle in that village by the elders of the dominant lineage. These lineage groups are referred to as the karhan (lit. tenant) and enjoy only limited rights, holding their lands, in theory at least, at the pleasure of the bhaibeta. In any village are found living, a dominant lineage with one or more karhan or subordinate lineages. In Alindra, the Bhuriyas are the bhaibeta, while there are six other karhan lineage groups. In Dhuvare, Bariyas form the dominant group with three or four lineage groups forming the karhans. In Pipergota, the Vakhlas constitute practically the entire population, except for one karhan family settled in the village about twenty years ago.

In most villages, the bhaibeta possess the most fertile bits of land in large holdings, sometimes far in excess of their capacity to till. Though grass and fodder are plentiful on the Ratamal and neighbouring hills, some choice pastures are reserved by the bhaibeta for their cattle. Most of the fruit trees, such as the mango, and catechu and other economically valuable trees such as teak, mahua, and catechu in the village (excluding the forest lands which are government property), are also retained by them, ~~there~~ though sometimes such trees are situated on fields given away to the karhans.

Authority in the village is mostly concentrated in the dominant lineages and is exercised through the headmen (tadavi) who is generally the head of the senior section of the bhaibeta lineage. The headman is also the

head of the village assembly (pancha) and is assisted by one or two other functionaries who are normally drawn from amongst his kinsmen only. His decisions taken in consultation with the assembly, are final. He represents the village in all the inter-village relations.

Whenever a portion of the jungle within the territorial limits of his village, was cleared for purposes of cultivation by a karhan, the headman was entitled to be paid a head-load of fuel and a seer of salt (5 seers = 31 lbs), per 'plough'. Whenever the jungle in his village was leased by the Government to timber or fuel merchants, the latter had to pay him a royalty of Re. 1/- to 1-8-0 per each cartload of timber or fuel removed from the precincts of the village.

Negotiations for contracting an alliance or settling a dispute with a person living in another village, had to take place through and in the presence of the headmen of either village. Agreements arrived at through the headman were backed up by the local community, which was then responsible for seeing that the terms of agreement are complied with by either party. When any agreement was reached without the cognisance or approval of the headman, the parties were liable to be censured and the headman and the assembly were in no way bound by such agreements. On the other hand, such action was regarded as the flouting of the authority of the headman and through him of the local community and sanctions ranging from public censure or ridicule to fines, were applied against the offender. When the offence was serious, the tadavi could ostracise the

person concerned, by breaking off all social relations with him and refusing to participate in any social or ritual ceremonials sponsored by him or to attend any social gathering convened by him whether for whatever purpose. When the tadavi takes such a stand, it practically amounts to the ostracism of the individual concerned, since nobody else would cooperate with ~~the~~ him in any of his ventures till he makes his place with the headman and the assembly. When Raisingh Dangi misbehaved over the question of giving the Pujara (a functionary who coordinates the ritual activities of the community - usually a priest) ^{his} due share (lag) in the meat of an ancestor ^{of} ritual sacrifice, the headman of Alindra publicly declared, that he had broken with Raisingh after trying to make him behave properly. Practically everybody in the village followed suit. Nobody would go to his house, he was not invited to the annual sacrifice to the tutelary spirits of the village and when taxes were collected that year at Bhuvoro, Raisingh was totally ignored by the people of Alindra. He had come fully armed with his bow slung and arrows held ready, to show his defiance of them. Later, Royala and others laughed at this exhibition. "Does he think that we want to beat him? It is enough that we don't speak to him. He will come round by and by to apologize or else he will have ^{to leave} the village of his own accord." Only Lalya Ninama, Raisingh's mother's brother continued to have social relations with him though, even he made it clear that he disapproved of Raisingh's feud with the headman.

As the spokesman of the bhaibeta and the assembly, his decisions were final. The revenue and police authorities generally find it convenient to support the headman. No person could be settled on the village lands without the headman's approval. He could expel any member of his village, whom he considered an undesirable person.

A Member of a subordinate lineage (karhan) was subject to certain restrictions. Even in such matters as were of special interest to him only, such as an exorcision ritual to cure a sick child, he had to inform the headman and request him to be present at the ritual. When a bird or a beast was sacrificed, a specified portion of the carcass had to be given to the headman as his due (lag). Failure to give him the share was deemed an insult and invariably led to the concerned karhan being harassed and occasionally even beaten up.

Whenever a girl was married, several of her kinsmen were entitled to receive shares (dapa) in the bride price paid for her by the groom's family. Generally the several dapavalas (recipients of the dapa) reciprocate by returning it as a gift to the girl herself, in the form of a calf or some ornaments. The claims of the local community for share in the bridewealth are met by a feast given to the entire village on the eve of the marriage. Further, in the case of a karhan girl, the headman was entitled to a special share (kuvasi). His claims for the Kuvasi were based on the grounds, that he takes care of the welfare of the karhan and takes a leading part in the negotiations for

his daughter's marriage. Further, if anything should go wrong later, - the girl is ill-treated, and runs away from her husband or otherwise misbehaves, again he would have to bear the brunt of the negotiations. However, the bhaibeta were not required to pay him the kuvasi, for as the head of their lineage group, whatever functions he performs on their behalf, would be those legitimately expected of him. It may be noted however, that the bhaibeta also allow for the kuvasi in their calculations of the bridewealth to be received. This money however, is retained by the father of the girl along with his own share and the shares of the mother and brothers of the girl.

Generally, the karhans were regarded as mere tenants. In theory at least, they were excluded from having an effective voice in the management of ordinary village affairs. Further, they were largely excluded from participation in the ritual life of the community. For instance, the annual sacrifice to babadeo - the tutelary spirit of the village, was regarded as of exclusive interest to the dominant lineage. The karhans were invited to attend the ceremonies connected with this sacrifice as passive participants, but excluded from actively collaborating in the ritual. On such occasions, they would be the 'guests of the village', along with a few other invitees from the neighbouring villages. They would be fed sumptuously by their hosts on the previous night, and formally invited to witness the ritual on the following day. Portions of meat and liquor were given to the karhans after the final

sacrifice was over, to take home with them. Contributions towards the expenses on this and similar ^{other} occasions are collected only from the dominant group. However, all karhans are expected to be in a state of ritual purity, from the day previous to the sacrifice till the ritual is wound up, for ritual impurity or pollution resulting from a death, birth or sickness in the village or from sexual intercourse in any person of the village, would nullify the sacred atmosphere needed for a successful outcome of the ritual.

Thus, we have a picture in the preceding pages of a community consisting of a dominant lineage - powerful and privileged, and one or more subordinate lineages not even having full ownership rights over the land they have been holding for generations, and barred from participation in a large area of social and ritual life of the community. In such a community, one may expect to find deep animosities and frictions developing between the two groups.

III

Actually however, in practice the situation is different. An analysis of the circumstances under which the different karhan settlements took place, helps us to understand the situation. The karhan settlements in most villages seem to have taken place under three types of circumstances:-

- (1) An acute shortage of cultivable land available in relation to the size of the kindred group subsisting upon it, resulting in the migration of a segment to other villages (cf. infra p.41-43).

- (2) Internal dissensions in a village, in a lineage group or joint family, occasionally resulted in the weaker section withdrawing from the field. It may be recalled that Surpal and his father late Samla tadavi of Pipergota would not get along with each other for a long time. So Surpal went over to live with his maternal uncle who gave him some land. When Samla died, the Vakhlas of Pipergota invited Surpal to go back and to be their headman. Surpal did so, but within a year or two, it was apparent that he could not get along with the people of his village. There were a few ugly incidents, when Khuman who was really shouldering the responsibilities of the headman, accused him of shiftlessness and ^alack of loyalty to the people of his village and demanded that he should ~~req~~ relinquish his office as tadavi. Though the other members of the lineage group were quiet all along, Surpal was soon aware that if it came ~~down~~ to a show-down, they would support Khuman. So he was arranging to give up his office as tadavi and go back to his maternal uncle or to Kanjeta where Kaliya Tadavi was promising to give him some lands.

Similarly the Dangi brothers Hursing and Virsingh, were constantly at loggerheads. Neither of them had sufficient land and each wanted the other to give up his share and go to another village where good land might be available. So they became bitter against

each other, quarrell^{ed} when and wherever they met. The elders of Pipergota seem to have got tired of this state of affairs at last and told them that ~~neight~~ neither of them could stay in the village. Mursingh went over to Nansalai to live with his father's brother and Virsingh who had married Dhuli Ninama - a sister's daughter of Royala Tadavi, was invited to settle down in Alindra. His son Raisingh, again provides us with an illustration of this point. His feud with Royala may be recalled. By breaking off all social relations with him, the people of Alindra were making it very awkward for him to continue to stay in Alindra. When I was last in Alindra in 1954, I heard that he was trying to persuade Khuman Vakhla of Pipergota to permit him to settle on the land of his father at Pipergota. However, the general consensus of the Vakhlas was that they ~~did~~^{not} want a quarrelsome neighbour in their village. It may be noted however, that internal dissensions in the family or the lineage group do not always result in the dissenter leaving or migrating to another village. The other members of the local community always intervene whenever the disputes become acrimonious and bring pressure to bear upon either party to come to a compromise. Such an extreme step as migration is resorted to, only when every attempt at compromise fails.

- (3) Migrations of individuals or families, occur to other villages in response to a call for aid from a sibling in distress. Under this category, one may also include the cases of the return of a widow or divorcee to her natal group. Movements to affinal villages have taken place

when any one of the above sets of circumstances were prevalent. Such migrations are evidence of the strength of the affinal bond which always cut across lineage bonds and frequently link up individuals in different villages.

An analysis of the three villages of Ratanmal gives us three dominant lineages and thirteen subordinate lineages. Of the latter, three were established by persons who came in search of land as such and there was no previous affinity with the dominant lineage of the village where the settlement occurred. In one case, the migration resulted from quarrels between two brothers over land - Virsingh Dangi's case. All the other cases were of settlements which took place under one or the other circumstances of the third type. Three lineages were established as a consequence of uxorilocal marriage. In two cases these occurred because the father of the bride had no male issue and wanted his daughter's husband to be as a son to him (Minamas of Alindra and the Bhuriyas of Bhuvara), and in another, the bridegroom came to serve his bride's father as a hali in lieu of her bridewealth and was later asked to settle down with him only. Recently there was another instance of Namsingh of Nalu marrying the lame daughter of Jhumla of Alindra, as a gharjamai. In course of generations, this might give rise to yet another karhen group. In three other cases, it was a widowed sister who was brought back to her natal village with her sons by her brother. Land was given to her sons by their maternal uncle, who in all the three cases, was the tadavi of the concerned

village (Bamaniyas and Minamas of Alindra and Damors of Bhuvare).

In the remaining cases, invitation to go over was extended to the sister's husband himself, either because he was suffering from a shortage of land in his village of origin or from a frequent recurrence of famines and epidemics in the area. Gangaji Bariya was ill for a long time in Punako^c and it was suggested that he change the waters". Badhya who was then the headman of Alindra, their wives were sisters, invited Gangaji to live in Alindra only. Two generations later, Khatiya, a grandson of Gangaji, has invited Sasudo Gamar the husband of an only sister to live with him, as he did not want to part from her.

I have in an earlier context, discussed the cases of Reshmi and her husband Jetha of Lilavanta, who lived in Bedia for seven years, to look after the orphaned children of Reshmi's deceased brother Natha Bhura.⁴ In 1953, they were being persuaded not to go back to Lilavanta at all, but settle down in Bedia permanently. The Lahur lineage was also established in Bedia under more or less similar circumstances only, it was a brother who went to live near his widowed sister to bring up her children. Even where the karhana were totally unrelated to the bhaibeta at the time of their settlement in a village, affinal links were established during the course of two or three generations, through alliances between karhan girls and bhaibeta boys and vice-versa. Further, the affinal ties had a tendency to repeat themselves and each lineage group in the

village would be linked to the others by these repetitive ties. Thus in any village, the community consists of a dominant agnatic group, with a number of affinal lineages grafted on to them. In such a community, any sharp distinction between the dominant and subordinate lineage groups has a tendency to be softened down in practice. Often, a karhan would be a close kinsman, daughter's son, a sister's husband, or a mother's brother, with whom one should have an affectionate relationship.

Further, though the bhaibeta are dominate in theory, they are rarely so in fact. This is specially so in a village of any considerable size with a large karhan population. Due to factors of unequal fertility and industry, often the karhans are economically as stable as the bhaibeta. Quite often, the karhans are numerically and economically stronger than the dominant lineage. In Alindra for instance, the Ninamas and the Pariyas are quite as affluent as the tadevi himself. In fact, Khatiya has managed to acquire for more extensive fields than Royala even. So the latter are willy-nilly, forced to concede them greater prominence and to associate them more and more in the management of the affairs of the community. Since most important matters of common interest are discussed and the decisions arrived at in the panch comprising of all the adults in the village, the karhans have as effective a voice in practice, as the bhaibeta, in influencing the decision. Because of their links with the dominant lineage, most of the privileges and ~~rel~~ reservations of the latter

are open to them also to an extent, if not as a matter of right, at least as a matter of courtesy and goodwill. For instance, if a bhaibeta finds his sister's son grazing his cattle on his (the former's) reservations or taking some mango fruits from his tree, he is not likely to object to it. On the contrary, he would in all likelihood, be ready to share them with his close kinsmen and friends. Ties of kinship and affinity which run criss-cross through the entire community, go a long way towards minimising the sharp differences between the dominant and subordinate groups. For instance, when Royala sits smoking with Himlio Paramar or Khatiya Bariya, their relationship is not governed by the fact of Royala being the head of the bhaibeta lineage and their being karhans. They are affines and friends who have come together to talk of some thing of mutual significance or possibility just to pass the time. Whenever there should be a dispute among the people, the tadavi and the assembly will be listening to the arguments from their several friends and relatives on behalf of the parties to the dispute, who again are related to them in some way or the other - a sister's son, wife's brother, or a maternal uncle or his son. In such a case, even a bhaibeta disputant is not likely to get any weightage over the others. In fact, it is significant that while the tadavi might insist upon some of his prerogatives such as the kuvasi (headman's share in the bridewealth) and his share of the sacrificial meat (lag) on any ritual occasions, the bhaibeta do not

always insist upon their economic privileges. For instance, while some mahua trees in the village might in fact, be the property of a bhaibeta, he often takes no objection to some of his relatives collecting the flowers. Jhumla for instance, had some mahudi (mahua trees) in some of his fallow fields situated far away from his homestead. Flowers however were being customarily collected by Vasma Damar and a few other karhans. In Alindra and Bhuvoro, the karhans had been conceded the rights over mango, mahua and other timber situated in their fields, long before the Bombay Tenancy Regulations of 1948 came into force or were even heard of in this area. The general feeling was that the presence of such large trees as the mahua, mango, teak, catechu, etc. in any field has generally an adverse effect upon the crops in such fields. That being so, why should the owner of such fields be deprived of their benefits also?//In fact, clashes between the bhaibeta and others over such issues have occurred in a few villages only recently, ^{and and} ~~at~~ the instigation of some of the social workers in the area from certain ulterior political motives. Further, such clashes have occurred mostly in the multigroup villages to the east and north - those economically dominated by Kolis and Patlias. In such villages, the distinction of the bhaibeta and karhan groups are further accentuated by group-rivalries, without the kinship considerations coming in at the same time to mitigate these differences. Clashes have occurred not so much within the same tribal group, as between people of different groups.

Another factor that considerably affects the position,

is that as the bhaibeta lineage develops in course of generations, it is subject to the same process of fission as are the other lineages. Frequently, segments break away from the main group under any one of the above circumstances and migrates to another village. With an increasing resistance from the government, for the clearing of any more forest land except when absolutely essential, reserves of cultivable land in any village in these parts, are progressively shrinking. In quite a few villages, all the cultivable land is already under cultivation and fresh land may be acquired from the revenue fallow land where available, or by clearing land under forest only. So that, a situation exists in many villages, where the bhaibeta who could at one time invite and give away land to their affines or to those recommended from such quarters, are themselves in need of land, and are forced to seek it elsewhere. I had touched upon this problem in an earlier context and mentioned that Khuman who was virtually the head of the Vakhla community of Pipergota, had to go from official to official and expend much graft and influence before he could secure permission to clear a few vighas on the slope of a ridge, for cultivation. He has also taken some indifferent land in a neighbouring village on mortgage for four years, but is sufficiently confident that the owner would not be able to redeem his land at the end of that period and that he could settle one of his sons on that plot. Such situations of members of the bhaibeta lineage getting settled outside their village, are not very - uncommon.

Migrations occur under other circumstances also. The case of Surpal of Pipergota is an instance of how schisms may occur within the bhaibeta group and result in the migration of an individual or a family. One such family has gone over from Pipergota to live in Alindra, because two brothers could not agree. When Aphsing the tadavi of Bornavar died, leaving his three wives and many children, Royala was afraid that his sister Royali^{and her children} might be in danger from her step-children and persuaded her to live in Alindra rather than with the other wives and children of Aphsingh. When the two sons grew up, the Guman the elder preferred to go back to his bhaibeta while Bhulya preferred to remain with his mother, under the wing of his maternal uncle. In all these instances, we have people having a double role of a bhaibeta in the village, while being a karhan^{one} in another nearby village, where the bhaibeta are often his maternal kinsmen only. The position is none the less complicated, when such families continue to have their holdings in both the villages. A person who is a karhan in one village, goes over frequently to participate actively in certain social and ritual ceremonials in another village, as a member of their bhaibeta group. Such vertical segmentation of the bhaibeta lineages by the local community results in toning down the differences between the karhans and bhaibeta.

This however, does not imply a total lack of disputes or conflicts between the karhans and the bhaibetas.

As the area is being opened upto external economic and political influences the karhans have been made to realise that they have been exploited so far as to a considerable extent, particularly in the multigroup villages to the east and north. In recent years there is an increasing resistance in the plains to the payment of kuvasi, as an unjust extraction. Further, there has been a growing demand to have a larger participation in the affairs of the village. Pujara, an important functionary who controls and coordinates the available resources and is generally in charge, ^{of} ~~on~~ all important ritual occasions is often a karhan. Further, the headman of a ward in the larger villages, is usually a karhan and he has to work under the authority of the tadavi, who is invariably a bhaibeta. In recent times conflicts often arise as to who is more important in the affairs of the ward - the tadavi who is the hereditary head of the community and also a government official or the headman of a ward, who is non-hereditary, but whose appointment is for the lifetime of the incumbent and is come-by because of his economic standing and influence. This type of disputes however, occurs mostly in the areas inhabited by Kolis and affect Bhils only in a very few cases.

IV

In the preceding sections, some of the functions and privileges of the headman have been indicated. Briefly, he is the head of the senior section of the dominant lineage. The office normally passes on from father to son, but not

necessarily. Any person of the dominant lineage is, in theory entitled to hold it. He is also the revenue and police official in the village. In his former capacity, he is assisted by the talati (village accountant). He is used to hold his lands tax-free (valtar) under the former ^{regime} and was exempt from the levy of free labour (veth) ^{he} ~~and~~ was entitled to hunt game within his territorial limits. In addition, he was entitled to collect certain dues from the karhang in his village, and from the contractors of timber and other forest produce, operating within his jurisdiction. He had also the powers of expelling any undesirable person in his village. Even today, he is easily the most influential person in the community. If he should also be an elder and is wise, the headman wields considerable influence in the deliberations of the panch, of which he is the head (sarpanch to be distinguished from a functionary of this title found in the larger villages of Gujarat). Where the village is very big, it is split up into two or more wards and each ward is placed in charge of a phaliya patel who assists the headman (tadavi) in the maintenance of law and order in his ward.

The headman, however, is guided on all important matters by the village assembly (Panch) which normally consists of all the adult males in the village, except in the larger villages, where only the heads of different families or lineages, sit on the panch. This body is very informal in its deliberations and there are few rules of procedure. Whenever a matter of sufficient importance has to be

discussed, tadavi or one of the other elders would send for all the heads of families to come together at an appointed place and time. Usually, the venue of such meetings would be the front yard of the tadavi's residence. There would be however, no restriction on any other interested person from attending and freely expressing his opinion on any problem at hand. Proceedings are carried on so informally, that a passerby might never realise, that a serious problem was being tackled. Usually the people would gather in a semi-circular formation facing the tadavi. A few persons may be seen leaning against a fence or the bole of a nearby tree or half reclining on the ground. Two or three hookahs would be passing around from time to time. Any person who wants to talk to the assembly, raises his voice, shouts if necessary, to make himself heard. All the while, people may be whispering or talking in low tones among themselves, commenting on the several viewpoints as they are expressed or trying to formulate their own viewpoint to a neighbour, before putting it to the entire gathering. Speechmaking is not usually resorted to, as the speaker may soon lose the attention of the gathering. Another feature of such gatherings is that discussion is never direct, and sustained. A person gives out his opinion on a problem, then somebody might speak on it. In the meantime, another person would have interjected a remark on an apparently unrelated issue and the chances are that quite a number of persons would be talking of this problem, while only a few persons would be discussing the main problem, wh in low tones among themselves. However, they go back to the main problem again

and again, till some solution acceptable to all, is found. Sometimes, a very simple issue might go on being discussed for hours, intermittently with a good deal of gossip and witticism.

Subjects that might be discussed by an assembly, range from a simple problem relating to a forthcoming ancestral ritual in the village or an impending routine visit of the Memlatdar (a revenue officer in charge of a taluka), to the elopement of a married woman or the ways and means of meeting the increasing tax demands of the State government. Whatever be the nature of the problem or dispute being discussed, people are expected to keep calm and not lose their temper, - they may shout, however, to emphasise a point or jibe at each other, so long as their temper remains unruffled. When the issue being resolved, is a dispute between two persons of the same village and is likely to raise venom or bitterness, the disputants are not generally brought face to face, till reconciliation is well under way. They are tackled separately. Main objective is always to maintain harmonious relations with the community. What is important is not so much that an offender or aggressor should be punished, but that the root of the dispute itself should be removed by some compromise being achieved, so that no bitterness or rancour remains. Once the issue is decided by the panch, it is expected that it is not raised again or never even mentioned between the two parties.

Once, it happened in Alindra, that two bulls belonging to Raising and Bhulya respectively, met

accidentally at a water hole and fought. Bhulya's bull was pushed over into the water hole and broke its neck. Bhulya came to know from the evidence of the several young cowherds (gohari) that Raisingh's bull was the aggressor. He claimed that Raisingh was morally responsible for the incident and so should be made to replace the dead bull. However, Raisingh refused to comply saying, "I was not even on the spot and at no time, have I ever trained my bulls to fight. It is in their nature to fight with each other and since the young goharis (cowherds) were careless enough, to take their respective charges to the water hole at the same time, inspite of clear instructions not to mix the herds, this incident occurred. You should blame the goharis for letting two herds which habitually graze separately come together at the water hole." Bhulya appealed to the panch. The incident had ~~exi~~ excited much comment, since Raisingh was unpopular with most people of the village for his refusal to compromise on his dispute with the pujaro, and most people sympathised with Bhulya. As usual in such circumstances, only Bhulya was present and Raisingh was represented by his mother Dhuli. She was a daughter of the village and so could express herself freely, if need be. Nimlio Paramar opened the discussion, by straight away posing a question "Bhulya's bull was attacked and killed by Raisingh's bull. The question is, "to what extent is the owner of the bull responsible for its action?" The case is peculiar and we have no precedents. We old people have discussed the issue amongst ourselves. We want to have your opinions on the probelm."

Bhulya then spoke, pointing out that it was not for the first time that Raisingh's bull had unprovokedly attacked cattle. He should have taken adequate precautions to prevent such occurrences. Now Bhulya was left with only one bull when monsoon was fast approaching. "Unless he is made to realise his responsibility and gives me a bull, how can I plough my fields this time?" Dhuli was equally vehement. She denied that Raisingh could in any way be responsible for what is a mistake of the goharis. After all, who can understand why bulls fight when they meet other bulls? What can men do to prevent it?

Then the discussion waxed general. One or two persons said that Raisingh should be made to pay this time atleast. He has already brought enough discredit by refusing to comply with the decision of the panch and the tadavi over the question of lag, and then, going to the police to seek protection from his own neighbours and relatives. In fact, it was not even desirable that he should be permitted to remain in the village, &c. Royala intervened firmly to say that while he realised that Raisingh had not been behaving properly in recent times and admitting that he has flouted the authority of the panch and of the tadavi who was also Raisingh's mother's maternal uncle, still those circumstances were irrelevant to the present issue. Is he responsible for Bhulya's loss? He (Royala) for one, felt that the fault lay mainly with the goharis, and even then, only in so far as they allowed two strange herds to mix. And what could be done with those boys except reprimanding

them to be more careful in future? Royala was supported by Himlio Paramar, U Jhumla - the former tedavi of Alindra, Khatiya Bariya and by many other elders. Only the younger people felt that Raising should be made to pay atleast now, to show him that he could not afford defy his neighbours and kinsmen and bring discredit upon them, by going to the police about something that touches the honour of the community. But they grumblingly accepted the decision of the elders, not to hold Paisingh responsible, especially as both Himlio and Royala told them, that if they were still dissatisfied, they could go to the civil courts for redress and added "you will be ruined if you do so. The police will all harass you and you would soon be wishing that you had listened to us. Dont come to us for advice then."

Bhulya immediately protested that he would rather starve than go against the panch or bring discredit upon the community by taking a dispute that concerns 'one of us', to an external authority. The matter ended there, after three hours of discussion, when many other sundry issues were also discussed incidentally. Royala promised Bhulya to loan him one of his extra draught animals for use during monsoon.

But, just then they were about to disperse, Himlio Paramar and Jhirio Vekhla said that they might as well settle the other problem concerning Raisingh. "He has not been behaving as a member of this community at all, these few months. And it is not desirable that we should let things go on this way. So far, some of us tried to make him admit his mistakes before the panch and make his peace with

the tadavi by sharing some liquor with him and we would take him back as one of us again. But he has stuck to his bad ways. We should ~~not~~ now settle it one way or the other." A small discussion followed when all the main charges against Raisingh were recalled. About six months earlier, Raisingh had set up a memorial stone for his ancestors in the ancestral grove at Pipergota. A goat was sacrificed later in Alindra. Normally Khatiya, as the priest of the village, would officiate on all such minor ritual occasions and would receive a specified portion of the carcass as his lag. This time Raisingh sent Royala his share as the tadavi but refused to give any to Khatiya on the ground that he did not officiate at the ritual in Pipergota. When Royala sent his son Lalya and an aide, Kesario, to persuade him to give the lag due to Khatiya as the priest of the village. It did not matter where the ritual took place, since the sacrifice itself was offered later in Alindra. Raisingh got abusive and was beaten up in the quarrel that ensued. A panch was called and decided that while Lalya and Kesario were at fault for beating him up, Raisingh should not have tried to flout the decision of the tadavi so blatantly, when he was so clearly in the wrong. He should at least now give Khatiya his leg or at least a token of it and apologize to the panch for his earlier mistakes. But Raisingh refused to comply and further lodged a complaint at the Police Outpost at Kanjeta. Thereby he aggravated the issue. It is a matter of honour with the Bhils generally, that as far as possible, all disputes short of murder or decoity should be settled within the village by a reference to the panch, which has

the interest of the community at heart and tries to maintain internal harmony at any cost. To go before an external authority is to compromise the prestige of the community. Secondly, disputes should be settled by compromise and not aggravated by reprisals, bringing about hatred or bitterness. Those who attempt to aggravate minor issues, and take disputes before an external authority for adjudication, are held in contempt and publicly censured as one who has no self-respect or regard for the honour of his own village (ganni abru).

So Royala sternly warned his sister's daughter that unless Reising behaved himself in future, Royala himself would see that he quits the village. Even his friends at the police outpost can do nothing in the matter. The local convention has always been that once the panch of a village decide that a certain person is an undesirable element, the tadavi can force him to quit and the taluk officials usually support the panch. He said "When I invited you to settle in this village, I assumed that since you were my own sister's daughter, you would be good karhans. But I have ^{to} now regret that a Dangi ever set his foot in the village. I called you in when you were in trouble with the people of Pipergota and now your son is prepared to put us all into a Jail. Do you have any sense of shame at all?".

V

Membership of a village is of considerable significance to the Bhils. The several members are bound to

each other by bonds of kinship and shared experiences. Often there are rifts within the community. But they are regarded more in the nature of domestic quarrels to be settled amicably and are not allowed to assume serious proportions, as far as possible. Any person who behaves in a way injurious to the solidarity and prestige of the local community is disliked and censured. Recently, food was scarce as a result of acute famine for over two years. Some people of Bhuvaro killed a buffalo calf belonging to another person in the same village for food. The owner who was searching for the missing calf came upon a few people cooking meat. Since he was not aware of any game or other animal being killed for food recently, he was suspicious and on looking into the vessels found buffalo meat. The culprits tried to get away at first, saying that they found the calf dead in the jungle apparently killed by a tiger and took the carcass for its meat not knowing it belonged to him. When he accused them directly, they drove him away with blows. Makna, the owner of the calf, tried to get redress from the panch, in vain. Then the police were brought on to the scene, harassed the complainant as well as the accused, could not prove anything and went away. When I was later talking this over with a few persons of Pipergota and Alindra, they said, it was typical of the people of Bhuvaro. "They first steal from one of their own men - even a robber respects his neighbours, and then allowed the matter to go before the police. Have they any shame?" Some said that if it had happened elsewhere, the boy would have been given a calf in replacement,

by the entire community jointly rather than face the shame of such a story getting by.

In another village, there was a person who had joined hands with the forest guards and police in harassing the local population. One of ^{the forest guards} ~~his accomplices~~ notorious for graft and corruption, was arrested, and attempts were being made to apprehend his accomplices also. Though his neighbours had suffered from the nefarious activities of the informer, they did not give him up, inspite of persistent questioning by the investigating Police Officer who apparently had some inkling of the matter. They later said that though their neighbour was a scoundral, it would have been a stigma on the community, if he were arrested. When I asked Royala, why they should not have got rid of a person who meant only trouble for the community, when they could have so easily done it, Royala smiled and said, "It is a matter of honour with us. After all, people would point towards him and say "Oh, he comes from such and such a village" and probably think that all of us are like him."

Thus the members of a local community form a distinct unity, bound by ties of kinship and affinity and by bonds of collaboration and of shared experiences in the several spheres of activity. The unity of the local community as a structure is amply indicated by considerations of prestige and honour of the community as a whole - not only in its external relations, but as among the several members themselves.

But this unity may be seen more clearly in the

relations of a community with its neighbours. In disputes involving a party from another village, the matter soon assumes general importance. More than the person actually involved, the others try to ensure that their man gets a fair deal. When negotiating a marriage, the boy or girl has to be approved not only by the families or lineages directly concerned, but by the entire community. Any member has a right to declare that the proposed alliance is undesirable, since the lineage or the local community concerned is not likely to be 'good affines'. Bhils, in common with the world over, desire affinal relations only with such people as are, not impoverished or miserly, hospitable, and courteous and above all who are honest. Any person who is aware of any undesirable fact about the group with which alliance is proposed, is expected to state it, so that the proposal may be given up. It is not merely the particular family or lineage that is brought into affinal relationship with the other party, as a result of the proposed alliance, but the entire community as such. Frequent and cordial social relationships are expected and desired with the affines, and are to be reciprocated with hospitality and courtesy by all. Actually, as a result of one such alliance between two kindred groups, two villages are brought into close relationship with each other, specially among the younger people. One marriage generally leads to several other marriages with the community. A link becomes a chain.

Further, serious insult or injury to a person from an outsider, is regarded as an injury to the entire

community. For instance, Ramsingh, a Khabad of the village Nal, was married to Mithudi, a girl of Kotumbi. Galla, a younger brother of Ramsingh and a number of other young men from Nal were often visiting their affines in Kotumbi. One day, Galla eloped with Kali, wife of a Paramar of Kotumbi. After the initial furore attendant upon their action had subsided, Galla and Kali who was subsequently divorced by her husband) went over to Nal to live there. The people of Kotumbi who felt it very humiliating for one of the daughters of Kotumbi to live in the same village as the offenders who had abused so their hospitality to an affine, insisted that Ramsingh and Mithudi should leave Nal. Ultimately Ramsingh had to accept some lands in Kotumbi and settle there, in deference to the wishes of his affines.

Thus kinship and affinity cut across the clan, lineage, and family bonds to bind the entire community in bonds of cooperation and participation in common activities. Frequently they bind also two local communities. The local community is of greatest significance to the Bhil, for the sense of unity and solidarity that it inculcates among the several members of a village.

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