

Rituals and Social Political Control of Jats in Haryana during Independence Period

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Abstract

Jats have been playing a very significant role in the cultural, social and political history of northern and north western regions of Indian subcontinent. They are known for their farming skills and bravery during the war period. Jats have three major sections, viz., Hindu, Muslim and Sikh, comprising thousands of gotras. In the present paper life cycle rituals, family, status of woman, kinetic organization and Panchayat system has been studied for Jat community.

Keywords: Gotras, Jats, Panchayat etc.

Introduction

Life Cycle Rituals Birth Ceremonies

As soon as the wife becomes pregnant for the first time after marriage she is sent by the inlaws to break the news accordingly to her parents who return her with a bundle of sweets, called meetha bohiya to her in-laws. During the solar and lunar eclipses she is neither allowed to eat, nor to move or sleep, but offer prayers. She is also not allowed to see a dead being taken to the cremation ground. At the time of delivery the midwife generally a dhanki or chuhri, is called in, who makes the lady lie down straight on the floor or sit on a cow-dung cake to facilitate delivery. The birth of a son is welcomed by beating a sonorous brass thali and that of a daughter by breaking an empty earthen pot under the patnala. The mother is bathed on 31st day after delivery and the child shortly after birth by the nain. At the time of birth the mother is given light food, viz. milk and mixture of turmeric and ginger, and the child is given janamghutti, goat's or cow's milk after only once or twice feeding it on the lion's charbi (only the male child). During the Sutak period of ten to fifteen days, when mother and child remain confined to a separate room in front of which fire is kept burning (agni ka pahra) and leaves of neem (azadi rachta Indica) or siris (asasia specioea) are tied or an iron implement is kept in her cot to kept off evil spirits. The mother is impure during this period and no outsider except the midwife is allowed entry. However, with the advent of maternity services in the rural health centres and hospitals these superstitious ideas are no longer observed.

Nevertheless, ratjaga is by all means observed even now with singing the night before the 6th day after birth,

for the destiny of the child is believed to be fixed by behmata (goddess of fortune) in this night. The mother is bathed on this day, puts on new clothes and baakli or sweets are distributed in the brotherhood. The old clothes are given to the midwife. The child's paternal aunt washes the nipples of his mother and receives the ornament as gift.

Sutak is over on 10th day after delivery and the whole house is given a new coating of cow-dung mixed with pilimitti sprinkled with gangajal, earthen vessels are replaced by new ones and metallic ones are scoured with ash. The purohit performs the home (havan) and names the child. The buaa or nain washes the nipples and gets, like the purohit, her fee. The village servants present the child with toys and get their small fees. The village women come and sing, rupiyya-potras are received from relatives and friends on this day and sweets are distributed in the village and relatives. On this very day the mother, accompanied by other singing women, worships the village well or the pond. The mother's parents send peelia consisting of suits for her, other ladies in the family and toys and ornaments also for the new baby. Crescent of gold and silver is conspicuous.

One month after the birth, the mother, in new clothes, brings water from the pond or well after offering sweet, rice, barely, wheat and bajra to birds etc. and seven obeisance to it (well or pond). After this she begins the regular household work. Now she is fed on gond or sandha, prepared by her family as well as by her mother, ghee and milk. The amount of ghee may vary from 10 to 15 kg. No one will eat or drink from her hand so long as she performs this ceremony, especially when she is in Sutak. The midwife and the naain who bathes the baby and mother and washes their clothes during the maternity period, are handsomely rewarded in cash and

kind at the birth of a son. However, now a days maternity services are availed of their role and reward is reaped by the hospital nurse and midwife.

There are no special ceremonies regarding adolescents except that they are, especially the girls, kept under control. The boys are required to build their bodies by massage and exercises. By about 40 years ago they used to be married when they were adolescents but with the enforcement of the Hindu Marriage Act, 1956 and its amendment in 1976 they cannot marry unless the boy is 21 and the girl is 18. However, marriage and consummation are discussed under a separate head.

Funeral Ceremonies

Children under 7 or 8 are buried without any ceremony and the mourning lasts only a few days. The dying man is taken off the bed and laid on floor, sometimes plastered with cow-dung and strewn with dab grass (*Cynodon dactylon*). Mourning lasts for thirteen days. "Take the Jat dead of his thirteen is passed." Now nobody goes in for tonsure. The dead body is washed by the nearest relatives, clad in new garments and wrapped in shroud/s given by the females of the family and sometimes those of the agnates also. Little gold or silver (Scythian ritual). Gangajal and tulsi (*Ocimum basilicum*) leaves are put into the deceased's mouth. His widow breaks her *churis* on the bier and reserves the *pharas* (*bagri Jats*).

The corpse, clad in white coffin (red or yellow for women) is carried to the cremation ground (usually in the north of the Jat villages) by four of his nearest relatives, with its head foremost, *Ghi Saamagri*, a new pitcher full of fresh water and smouldering fire on a full cow-dung cake and a *poola* (combustible) are also carried with it. Women never accompany the funeral procession. The corpse is placed on *chitra* with its head facing the north (to the land of his ancestor, he goes), all covers except his garment and the upper most white coffin of *khaddar* are removed, the coffin is torn on the chest, shirt is unbuttoned, face is uncovered and *ghi* mixed with *Saamagri* is applied on the chest and face. Then the eldest son or in his absence any of the nearest relatives kindles the fire, drops water from right to left and back round the *chitaa* and upturns the empty pitcher on the ground in the direction of the head, and throws on of the *baahis* (longer bamboo side sticks of the bier) across the *chitaa* from south to north after touching the scalp three times (piercing the skull to facilitate a passage for the soul to depart) with a loud choking voice "O father or brother, you are gone". The cremation takes place before sunset. The nearest relatives or agnatic families bring the food, called *karwi roti* or saltless *dalya* (porridge) and urge the family of the deceased. The practice is stopped now.

On the third day after death *phuls* are collected and taken to the *Gangas* by a male member or the priest of the family. The *Jats* living within a radius of 100 miles of *Kurukshetra* generally do not observe this ceremony. Performance of various rituals by the *Maha Brahman* or

acharaj on the 10th, 11th and 12th day for the purification of the house of the deceased and his remuneration in kind and cash thereof have, under the impact of *Arya Samaj*, been stopped. In case of an issueless deceased *tehar* is observed on the 13th day, otherwise a day short of it, but by no means on Tuesdays and Saturdays or a festival falling on the day and in no case it will exceed 13 day. *Havan* is performed and the brotherhood is feasted on this day, but in case of accidental death no feast is arranged. The family priest is given grain, clothes and money on the 13th, every month upto *barsodi* or *barsi*, *chhemahi* and *barsaudi*; but the presentation of *Vaitarani dhenu* has been, by and large, stopped. The *kanagat* or *Saraddha* is celebrated, by feasting the family priest on an auspicious day between the *Poornima* of *Bhadon* and *Amavas* of *Asauj* to honour the dead ancestors of the family. A bigger funeral feasts, called *Kaj* or *Karaj*, used to be thrown for the whole village or *khapp* or *deshauri* (for all) in memory of the deceased on 13th or after a month or a year by well-to-do *Jats* but it is no longer in vogue now.

Family and Status of Women

Interestingly, almost 70 percent of the *Jat* householders were of the extended (or joint) family type in which several brothers and even cousins lived commonly together, and manage their land together even if they lived already in separate houses. However, evidence does not support daughters' and sisters' husbands were allowed to live within the enclosure. Normally, among the *Jats* the preferred arrangement for family living is to have two residences, one for the women and children, another for the men and the cattle. In case or a single house the appropriate place for women and children is the hind portion (*Saal*) or the *chauk* (court-yard), and that of the men is *deorhi* or *baithak* or *pauli* or *dhalij* beyond which no outsider or stranger is allowed to enter. The family, however, suggests lineage structure.

Sometimes the whole family continued to have their meals in common, but this often leads to quarrels among the women, and the married sons often start separate *Chuhla* and a short time after father's demise they effect a permanent partition of the moveable and immoveable property. "It is by their father that sons are united ; it through him that they trace their descent are members of the lineage and *gotra* (*got*); it is through him that they acquire rights in the moveable and immoveable property of their lineage; but it is through the women of the house that at first the agnates and then the sons are divided."

However, in addition to the role played by inter-personal relations of the wives of the sons and agnates, the factors like the Family Planning slogan "single parivar, happy parivar", economic pulls and pressures, growth of education, divergent interests of the family members, growth of population, contracting means of livelihood, growing spirit of independence and individualism, occupational mobility and migratory trends towards

towns and cities for better modern amenities have, by all means, contributed to the disintegration of the joint family system. Consequently, the feeling of respect towards elders and relatives, mutual love, fear of authority and elders, avoidance of bad company, obligation of serving the parents and other members of the family, joking between dewar and bhabhi, between nanand and bhabhi, jija and sala, jija and Sali etc., and mutual help and cooperation among families are adversely affected. Respect for age, experience and sex is generally on the wane. The Nuclear families are fastly gaining ground. The older generation, though getting pension, yet feels neglected and the younger one is, by and large, in spite of their education (bookish), a radar and rudderless ship unaware of the destination.

As a rule, previously the Jat woman did not inherit any property before the death of her husband, but the Hindu Succession Act has altered the position and now she has equal right not only in her parental but also in her husband's property. This change has, however, generated new problems, viz. straining of the sacred brother-sister relations, of nanad and bhabhi, of in-laws, of dowry and bridewealth, sometimes resulting in litigation, foeticide, sororities and bride-burning, seized of the gravity of the situation, the Haryana Government wanted to amend the Act accordingly in 1989 but for the staunch opposition of the Centre.

Be that as it may, before marriage she is dependent on her parents, after it on her husband and in old age on her sons. Indeed, she has now a say and status, though subordinate to her parents and husband, in the two families. Proverbially thrifty and frugal, not given to giggly and coquetry, firm in fixing notions of domestic life buxom equally at bed and board, abstemious and industrious in home and field, loyal and faithful to her husband and family, careful in caressing young ones and maintaining cattle, deft at churning milk and hearth, dexterous at charkha and needle, respectfully hospitable to guests and friends, last of all to dine, best counselor on all important occasions, conversant with social and religious rites and rituals, fairs and festivals; skilful in dancing and singing but never a dance use and a street singer, she is the birbani (female founder of the house), the pride of her husband and the crown of the family, even though she may be illiterate.

Kinetic Organisation and Mechanism of Socio-Political Control

Traditionally, the Jats live in the villages, many of which are considerable antiquity. Their organisation in a village is like this; some agnatic families, descended from a common ancestor, constitutes a thok, a few thoks a tholaa, a few tholaas a paana (mohalla) and the paanaas a village. The Jats and the other castes (artisans and menials) which are not considered unclean occupy the central area of the village, while sweepers, leatherworkers, weavers and the like are relegated

outskirts (preferably in the South-east) of the village or even occupy separate helmets a little distance from the village. They had been allotted separate plots each from the common land in every village but majority of them sold them and migrated to nearby towns and cities. The Jat villages were compact clusters of houses surrounded by a wall or at a hedge or a ditch (which are no longer there) as a protection against thieves and raiders, looking from far away like fortresses. There is at least one chaupal or meeting place and in some villages each sub-division or patti (and now even Harijans) have their own chapaul, where, when not working, men sit, smoke and chat as well as play cards and dice (Chauparsaar), travelers are lodged and meetings of the conventional and official Panchayats are held:

All the members of the whole body of the Jat proprietors are equal; all consider themselves immeasurably superior to the other inhabitants of the village. From an economic and political point of view, they are in the condition of using force against and putting economic pressure upon others, for the village is emphatically that of the proprietary body and the others simply live there on the former's sufferance. The Brahmins, traders, the village artisans, menials and servants, as mark of their inferiority, paid the hearth-fees or Kundi-tax unless exempted by consent or under special circumstances, to the proprietary body's conventional panchayat (now including the Jats also to the official panchayat). However, sometimes the lowest castes like chamar, chuhra, dom, dhobi, nai, teli and weaver are exempted. The non-Jats, recognizing the superiority of the Jats, try to follow the customs of the Jats, especially their marriage regulations.

Experience tells us that the village is named after the majority gotra of the Jat proprietors or after the name of the eldest known common ancestor and similarly the panas, tholaas and the thocks after some of the other earlier or successive ancestors. The members of the proprietary body are in almost all cases united by ties of kinship. In most cases the relationship between the proprietors can be traced through the thok, tholaa or patti right upto the common ancestor of the village, and the Jats are communities of clansmen, linked some times by descent from a common ancestor, sometimes by marriage ties, sometimes by the fact of a joint foundation of the villages. It is also noticed that some other Jats, viz. bhanja, bhanji, friends and even strangers from other villages were either brought on allowed to settle in the village, and are gradually subsumed in the gotra of the thok etc. The thoks, tholas and panaas by and large "operate as more or less cohesive units on ceremonial occasions, particularly births, betrothals and marriages, in court litigations and in the operation of the traditional caste panchayats, and also in village panchayat, block-smity, state and national elections. Moreover, all the units have one or more of their own hookah-smoking groups which serve as social centres where there is daily face to face contact. They act as units in cooperative economic undertakings such as money-lending, renting of land, in quarrels over land, especially village communal land.

Interestingly, the Jats have clusters of villages connected by collateral kinship and descent. Available information about the major clusters as under:

Sr. No.	Name/s of collateral gotras	Nuclear village	No. of villages
1.	Ahlawat, ole, ohtanft, Birhman	Dighal	20-25
2.	Mann, Dalal, Deshwal, Suhag/Sehag	Silauthi, Mandauthi	35-40
3.	Dahiya, Huda, Kundu & Dabas	Brona, Sanghi	80-90
4.	Shivran, Jakhar, Kadian & Sangwan	Ghimani, Ledian	100-110
5.	Gulia and Solanki	Badli, Gulia, Palam	20-25
6.	Chillar and Chhikara	-	10
7.	Rathi and Ruhil	-	20
8.	Malik or Gathwala	Ahulana	30
9.	Narwal	Ahulana Kathura	5
Sr. No.	Name/s of collateral gotras	Nuclear village	No. of villages
10.	Paur, Pauria, Phor & Pawar	Kanhaili	20-25
11.	Dhankhar	-	10
12.	Sahrawat	-	5
13.	Lathar	Lajwana	10
14.	Sindhu and Sandhu	-	15
15.	Jaglan	Israna	15
16.	Ghanghas & Lohan	Maandi	10
17.	Khatkar and Gahlaut	Jaurasi	15
18.	Antal Saroha & Mundtor	Rathdhana	15
19.	More and Khasa	Broda	-
20.	Grewal	Meham	-
21.	Virk or Barak or Khokhar	Baland & Kansala	-
22.	Rana & Chaudarana	Kandul	-
23.	Thakran	Khor (Namu)	10
24.	Dhillon and Gill	-	-
25.	Joon and Rajayan	Loua Majra	-
26.	Chahar or Chahal, Dhul or Dhal	Silani, Bhagotipur	-
27.	Nandal, Buddhwar	Bohar, Sunaria	-
28.	Sigru or Sigroha or Singhroha	Ritauli	-
29.	Punia, Tehlan	-	-

The list is by no means complete and the number of villages occupied by a gotra as I was told, uncertain, However, the nuclear village is called Tika village and the cluster, Thapa or Tapp in Karnal and the area occupied by cluster is called Khaap in Rohtak, Delhi, Western U.P. and Rajasthan. Previously the nuclear village enjoyed a leading position in the Tappa or Khaap, but now the centre of gravity has changed to the biggest village, even if the nuclear village remains as the "Turban village," the subordinate villages of a tappa or khaap used to pay a small fee called chaudhrayat to the head village on the day of the great Diwali, but it is no longer in vogue now.

Panchayat - A Mechanism of Socio-Political Control

Gone are the days when the Zaildars, Safaidposh and the Nambardar or Lambardars used to in addition to the local Panchayats, wield, as the nominated officials of the government, notable influence in this respect. The first two posts now stand abolished and the Nambardar has only the duty of collecting the land revenue. We have now separate Nambardar for the Backward Classes also. The congenial instrument of social and political authority and action among the Hindu and Sikh Jats, as the direct and indirect evidence indicates, has virtually been the Panchayat, which retain much of their authority, though unofficially and without legal force, and exist side by side with the official panchayat after independence. Village

Panchayat is a common feature with other communities also, but the conventional Khaap or area and tribal as well as the Sarva Khaap Panchayat are unique with the Jats in Haryana, Delhi and Western Uttar Pradesh. Historically, these Panchayats represent today the ancient gana, Samgha and Sarva Samgha or deshiye Panchayats or assemblies in which the select or elected decision-making body was known as Simiti and the rest as Sabha. Interestingly the modern village Panchayat represents the Simiti and the whole village, the gram Sabha.

Albeit the power and functions, which usually enjoyed biradaris' moral force for implementation, of the conventional Panchayats in which respectable and experienced elders used to amicably decide even the gravest of the grave issues, have now been given to or usurped by the elected official Panchayats, married generally by raw-heads on young shoulders, who, by and large, as experience shows, with some exceptions, misuse them and their authority, but even then the conventional Panchayats at all levels wield marked influence and power in effecting social reforms, deciding impartially cases of communal conflicts, land disputes, social misdemeanor and even murders; spread of education and swaying the political pendulum in support of one or the other. Some time back the Haryana Government with a view to earn more exchequer allowed the official Panchayats to start thekas of wine in their villages but, fortunately, due to the opposition of the gram-sabha and

conventional Panchayats the scheme ended in fiasco. However, as ill luck would have it, the ruling political parties and their leaders have been since Independence subjecting the Jat Khaaps to gerrymandering in order to weaken to hold of their respective Panchayats.

In fact, "every Jat village (is) a small republic made up of people of kindred blood who (are) as conscious of absolute equality between themselves as they (are) of their superiority over men of other castes who earned their livelihood as weavers, potters, cobblers and scavengers." The green truth, however is that "decency is the curtain of a Jat family, liberty is the wall of his village, equality is the pillar of his society, fraternity is its guardian, property is but the family farm, and honour is but his tribal totem, the peacock, and the national flag." On the role of the Jats in Indian democracy Prof. K.R. Qanungo, a noted historian, very aptly opined on the eve of Independence that "the Jats, with caste distinction, female seclusion and with democratic tendencies, erect moral structure and unprejudiced mind, are more in sympathy with modern age than the aristocratic Rajputs who have not yet discarded the medieval traits of their character, still cherishing the notion of class distinction and contempt for productive labour. If sufficiently enlightened, the Jats may carry back the Hindu society to its Vedic purity, inspring new vigour into it and preparing it for a more glorious density."

References

- [1] Hissar, G. 1892; pp. 96-98; Lewis. Op. cit., 1958, pp. 47-49; Delho, G., 1883-84, p. 69; Gurgaon, G. 1910, pp. 46ff; Karnal, G. 1883-84, p. 71; Phulkian States, G. 1904, pp. 57, 230f.
- [2] Crescent is a symbol of Lord Shiva, the chief deity of the Jats. It may also be a token of their being of the Chandravansa stock of Aryans.
- [3] Hissar, G. 1892, pp. 104d; Gurgaon, G. 1910, pp. 77ff; Delhi, G. 1883-84, pp. 52f; Karnal, G. 1883-84, pp. 80f; Ambala, G. 1923-24, pp. 528.
- [4] This ceremony is not performed in certain villages. viz. the Panchayat of V. Nangal Thakran (Delhi) prohibited the ceremony for while performing it the only son of the deceased broke down and died there and then about fifty years ago. The author came to know of it when he attended the cremation of his Samdhi (Sambandhi) – Ch. Sube Singh (85) of the said village.
- [5] In Rajasthan the people are still very orthodox and dominated by Superstitions. Two years ago the author attended the 13th of his relation at Jaipur and came to know that if the ceremony is performed by eleven Brahmans it would cost Rs. 11000/- and if by 22, Rs. 22,000/- we found the brother of the deceased in a fix and to the Choqrin of the greedy Brahmans, we performed the ceremony according to the Arya Samaj rites without any expense.
- [6] The latest known Kaj were those of the author's Dada, Ch. Harnath, of Ch. Randhir Singh's Dada in Badli Culia (Rohtak) and in V. Barhana. Cf. Appendix A also.
- [7] Lewis, op. cit., pp. 18f.
- [8] Rohtak G. 1910, p. 91.
- [9] Sirsa, S.R. 1884, pp. 160f. The Proverb goes "behin ka ghar bhai kuttaa, baap ke ghar jamaee kutta, beti ka ghar baap sartaaj katta."
- [10] Lewis, op. cit., pp. 308f.
- [11] Interestingly, Saal means the same in German as in Haryanvi dialects.
- [12] Sirsa, S.R. 1884, p. 160.
- [13] G.A. Tiemann, *Loc. Lit.*, p. 60.
- [14] The Gaagar family, headed by Ch. Giani Ram Rathi, of V. & P.O. Bhaaprauda (Rohtak) was the largest joint family of the district, which broke up in about 25 nuclear families about 1955.
- [15] Gurgaon, G. 1910, pp. 160f; Rohtak, S.R. 1881, p. 28; Raj Narain, *Lec. Cit.*, 1982, p. 2. : Sher Singh, *Loc. Cit.*, 1933, pp. 1f; Karnal, S. R. 1883, p. 72; Lewis, op. cit., 1958, pp. 23-26, 144-145.
- [16] Hissar, G. 1892, p. 85; Gurgaon, G. 1910, p. 32; Rohtak, S.R. 1880, p. 60; Lewis, op. cit., 1958, p. 18; Young Mirian, *Seen and Heard in a Pb. Vill.*, London, 1931, p. 6.
- [17] Sirsa, S.R. 1854, p. 175; Mukerji, A.B., 'Jats A study in Human Geog., in *Geog. Rev. of Ind.*, 1954, Calcutta, 16, p. 26.
- [18] Rohtak, S.R. 1882, p. 59.
- [19] *Ibid.*, p. 29.
- [20] *Ibid.*; Hissar, G. 1883-84, p. 42; Gurgaon, G. 1910, p. 170; Karnal, G. 1883-84, pp. 130f, Smith, Marian, W.; "Soc. Struc. In the Pb." in *India's villages*, ed. By Srinivas M.N.; 1955, W. Bengal Govt. Press, p. 146.
- [21] Karnal, G. 1883-84, pp. 130f.
- [22] Lewis, op. cit., 1958, p. 161.
- [23] Cf. fn. No. 48 supra.
- [24] Gurgaon, G. 1910, pp. 16af.
- [25] Rohtak, S.R. 1880, p. 28; Karnal, S.R. 1883, p. 92; Smith, op. cit., 1955, pp. 148-149; Darling *Loc. Cit.* 1930, p. 168.
- [26] Karnal, S.R. 1883, p. 42.
- [27] Cf. Lewis, op. cit., 1958, p. 115.
- [28] Karnal, G. 1884-84, p. 100. It is worth nothing that the terms Tappa or Tepa were used in ancient Iran for Thapa.
- [29] For more details on Khaaps cf. '*Institution of Marriage among Jats*'
- [30] Karnal, G. 1883-84, p. 100.
- [31] Rohtak, C.L. 1911, pp. 4f; Lewis, op. cit., 1958, pp. 2af, Beames, *Lec. Cit.*, 1869, vol. II, pp. 49-53.
- [32] B.H. Boden-Powell, *Land sys. Of Brit. Ind., Vol. II*, 1898, Oxford, p. 688; Rohtak, S.R. 1880, p. 28; Gurgaon, G. 1910, p. 168; Karnal S.R. 1883, p. 93; Smith, op. cit., 1955, pp. 149f.
- [33] Such Panchayats have been working since the time of Harshavardhan.
- [34] A Jat boy was expelled for one year from V. Madina Dangi (Rohtak) for misbehaving with a low caste girl in 1960.
- [35] Cases of land-disputes leading to murders (10 to 15) in V. Gosain Khera (Jind) in the fifties and similar number in Rathdhana near Sonipat last year were solved amicably.
- [36] It is common knowledge that such Panchayats have been exercising influence since independence in the state and national elections.
- [37] Creation of new districts and re-alignments of various constituencies as a result thereof as well as separately too, 1989, by the Haryana Govt., led by the combined Lok Dal & BJP, is the latest example of quarry maundering in Haryana.
- [38] S. Sukhwant Singh q. by Kr. Natwar Singh in his book on Bharatpur Maharaja Surajmal.
- [39] K.R. Quango, *Historical Essays*, Ch. Origin of Jats.