

C H A P T E R 1 0

From Colonial Rule to Panchayati Raj

A Study of the Changing Economy in a North Indian Village, Circa 1930–2010

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The ^{20th} twentieth century witnessed momentous transformations in India which had an impact on our villages too. Changes in colonial land settlements, unprecedented peasant mobilization for the freedom struggle and other mass movements, growth of modern transportation and, above all, the abolition of zamindari along with the introduction of a modern Constitution as well as adult franchise and the recent media and communication boom have had a major impact on the way ⁽⁻⁾ age old patterns of economic and social relations operate in the countryside now. The economic transformation brought by the 'green' and 'white' revolutions, the growing integration of the rural and urban population and the slow but historic growth of rural roads, electricity, irrigation, vehicles, agricultural machinery and literacy in the past century are hallmarks of this historic churning. No doubt, poverty, stark inequality and dearth of basic facilities persist in most Indian villages. While rural India contributes less than a fourth of India's gross domestic product, it still engages ⁽⁻⁾ ₇₀ seventy per cent of our population. The resultant maze of change and continuity in village, India thus cries out for a close look from social scientists and policy makers at the turn of the new millennium.

Existing Research

While village studies have had a rich tradition in India since colonial times, long term restudies of villages and their economic structure across generations have been scarce in the country¹. Early twentieth

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century works such as those of the Wisers in Uttar Pradesh and Slater in Tamil Nadu, which ^{have} ~~has~~ been followed up by some recent scholars have been useful in this context. Their numbers, however, are extremely small². On the other hand, recent sociological works which have analysed class, caste and power relations in villages in detail have often lacked historical depth³. Thirdly, attempts at comparing short span village reports also lead us to conflicting viewpoints in our extremely diverse continent⁴. Did the abolition of zamindari and the introduction of agricultural land ceilings after independence bring about significant changes in local hierarchies as well as agricultural productivity? Has recent liberalisation² of the Indian economy led to further 'immiserisation'² of rural labour or created fresh opportunities for many? To what extent has legislation for women's empowerment actually eroded traditional patriarchal relations among different communities? Questions such as these call for extensive restudies of several villages when the Indian countryside is going through accelerating change now.

The Context

As a small contribution in this field, the present work attempts a sketch of change in one village of western Uttar Prdaesh during the past eighty ⁸⁰ years based on a multi method approach with special focus on its changing economy. The name of the studied village is Dhantala. It is situated in the Meerut district of Uttar Pradesh at a distance of about ninety ⁹⁰ kms from central Delhi. Lying midway between the townships of Mohiddinpur and Kharkoda, this village has been traditionally dominated by Gurjar and Jat landowners. Helped by a family of sweepers that had moved from Dhantala to a slum called Aradhaknagar (in my neighbourhood in Delhi), I managed some boarding and lodging support in the said village when I visited it first, in 1989, while completing my M.Phil. dissertation on migrant labourers in my city⁵.

Dhantala's dwellings are concentrated in a central core of about 200 acres of which roughly hilly acres are residential while the rest consist of common spaces including four schools, a panchayat hall, three temples, three cremation grounds and one graveyard and two ponds. This core is surrounded by agricultural fields spread over 2000 acres approximately, especially towards the east and the south of the built up area⁶.

The residential quarters are further subdivided between varna or broader caste groups. While middle castes, including Gurjars and

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✓ ~~for~~ Kumhars live together along major lanes of the village, ^M muslims and dalits have more excluded clusters here village. Among Gurjars also, two competing factions (of ex pradhans—Bhagmal and Tekram) are concentrated along separate sides of the hamlet. Similarly, among ~~for~~ dalits, Jatavs and Valmikis have adjacent but different clusters. There are a few shops in Dhantala of grocers, artisans, etc. but almost all operate from small rooms facing village lanes from within houses.

Demography

Of the total population of 2764 in the village, in 2011, about 40 per cent were below 12 years and 13 per cent were above 60 years old. Females made up 45 per cent of the community. The principal castes and communities were upper middle castes or Gurjars and Jats (56%) and lower middle castes or Kumhars and Khatiks (11%)⁷. Among others, the dalit or scheduled castes made up ~~for~~ ^M 25% including Jatavs (20%) and Valmikis (5%), while muslims constitute approximately 10% of the population. There is only one upper caste (^Bbania) family living in Dhantala now, though in early decades there was another ^Bbania and a Brahmin family too. per cent ↑

In 1989, at the time of my first visit to Dhantala, the village had roughly the same communities in similar proportions. However, the population at that time was 2100. The rise in Dhantala's population in preceding ²⁰ twenty years was thus 30 per cent which could have been more but for the emigration of about ¹⁰⁰ hundred families to cities such as Delhi and Noida, where population has more than doubled in last three decades.

Precise estimates of numbers living in Dhantala in the early decades of the ²⁰ twentieth century could not be tracked by me. Yet, a rough estimate based on district collectorate's land records (available since 1936 in Urdu Language) and the recollections of nonagenarians like Suraj Bhan and Parmanand in Dhantala suggest that the total population of the village at the beginning of our study period was about ⁵⁰⁰ five hundred which had risen to just ¹²⁰⁰ twelve hundred by the time of independence. This indicates approximately five fold rise in Dhantala's population between 1930 and 2011.

Methods

As the aim was to chart the nature of economic changes in one village over the past century along with an account of its changing demography, a multi-method approach incorporating both historical and

sociological tools was found relevant. But any effort to combine several methods in research throws up many challenges. In this light, it would be apt to specify the methodological tools applied in the present study along with their respective strengths and limitations.

Written documents, official or personal, constitute a major source of information about the human past specially on events like wars, rulers, revolts, etc. which often attract widespread comment. On subjects like everyday life and slow changes in the economic structure of rural communities, however, archival materials rarely shed enough light. Similarly, local documents like family letters, receipts and diaries also remain inadequate bases for reconstructing the past of semi-literate communities. In the present study, some documents available with old families of Dhantala, as also the land records available from 1936, at the collectorate office in Meerut city, provided significant information on the changing economy at the local level. Yet, a comprehensive account of such history required use of oral history and field surveys too.

Among field methods, quantitative surveys, structured interviews and participant observation have been specially used by sociologists and anthropologists to understand present day social patterns. We have also applied these tools to assess the current shape of demographic and economic shifts as shown in the following sections. But in addition to personal interviews and conversations, we found the technique of group discussions and attending villagers' *baithaks* or group sittings very useful since such conversations were not only informative but also more convincing and self-corrective as villagers often shared a lot of information in these and often highlighted incorrect claims of others too.

It may also be noted here that in our attempt to combine quantitative and qualitative research methods during fieldwork, the problem of numeric estimates based on shifting oral evidence was faced. As calculating yields, price ranges wage differentials and rentals, etc. over decades in precise figures based on subjects' recall is open to lapses and constant variation, it is common amongst anthropologists to bypass numerical estimates altogether. I have tried to resist this retreat and have offered as much quantitative evidence on Dhantala's demography and economy as possible but with the strong rejoinder that these estimates can be seen only as broad indicators and not as precise reflections on concerned matters.

Besides quantitative surveys, another ethnographic tool which has been used in the present report as a mirror of changing economic

structures is that of life sketches or multiple but short accounts of substantial stretches of individual lives as narrated by subjects themselves and covering a broad spectrum of class, gender and age locations in the community. The full text of these sketches is not being presented here for want of space but when viewed in a comparative frame across generations, these life sketches become a useful lens on changing economic patterns across three generations or about eight decades. Lastly, to get a glimpse into economic changes in the previous century, the tools of oral history, including group discussion as well as individual memoirs and semi structured interviews, were found extremely useful.

Early History and Economy

Before we examine mutations in economic relations in Dhantala over the previous century, it would be useful to note the major turns in the history and material landscape of this village. Many of these are preserved in community lore while some find mention in local histories and family lore and official records also⁸. The family histories transmitted orally or noted in genealogies (called *vanshavalees*), which have been preserved across centuries by 'Bhats' (coming to Dhantala from Baghpat), give us an idea of the village's growth over time. Some elders in Dhantala also kept a record of such information and helped in reconstructing an outline of their past. Besides this, local histories of castes as well as the region around Meerut have been noted by chroniclers like N.T. Parker and Yateendra Verma too. On the basis of these sources, a sketch of Dhantala's early past can be offered⁹.

Dhantala lies in the middle of the Ganga-Yamuna doab which happens to be one of the richest agricultural belts of South Asia. However, being close to Delhi, it was frequently drawn into the turmoil of invasions and violent regime changes from the days of the Mahabharata to the coming of the British in the region in early nineteenth century. As a result, the site was resettled several times in pre-modern times. From late eighteenth century, however, a village called Rasoolpur had existed here and the same got the present name as Dhantala from early twentieth century.

Much before that, in the sixteenth century, when Rasoolpur was still to be settled, three Tyagi brothers by the name of Tarak Singh, Kharak Singh and Bijai Singh are said to have founded the villages of Tori, Kharkoda and Bijora, respectively, around the present site of Rasoolpur/Dhantala. Local chronicles also claim that the three Tyagi

brothers were recognized as the zamindars of their respective villages by the rulers at Agra and Delhi also. Similarly, Jamshed Ali and Mohammad Ali (who are descendants of the Chaudhris of Tori), also affirmed that their lineage derives from Tarak Singh whose grandsons - Kishan Shah and Ram Shah embraced Islam in the ^{17th} ~~seventeenth~~ century adopting the names of Karim Baksh and Rahim Baksh, respectively. They were recognized as the zamindars of Tori and four other villages by the Mughals¹⁰.

<Uttar> The haveli or abode of the principal zamindar or Chaudhri of the area was located in Tori which lie close to the northern boundary of Dhantala. The Chaudhris were keen to extend cultivation in their estates. However, due to disturbed political conditions and the repeated revolts of the Jats and Satnamis in the region, especially in the ^{17th} ~~seventeenth~~ and early ^{18th} ~~eighteenth~~ centuries, this did not materialize and it was only in late ^{18th} ~~eighteenth~~ century that one of the scions of Chaudhry Karim Baksh called Rasool Baksh built his abode on the site of Dhantala and attracted Gurjar shepherds by developing a water channel that exists as a dry bed to the south of Dhantala till today.

Rasool Baksh lived and died on this very site and his grave near the said channel is revered by the villagers till today. It was after this 'pir' or holy man that Dhantala got its first name of Rasoolpur. According to family genealogies available with residents of Dhantala like Khem Singh, Devraj Singh and Mahender Singh, their forefathers (going back roughly ten generations from now) started settling in Rasoolpur/Dhantala in the late ^{18th} ~~eighteenth~~ century. Thus, a family of Bhadanas (a Gurjar sub caste) living in Dhantala claim to be the eleventh generation of Parasram Bhadana who is said to have settled in Rasoolpur in Vikram Samvat 1835 or 1779 A.D.¹¹. Their scion Mahender Singh is a prosperous farmer and owner of the ration shop in Dhantala now.

However, the founding of Rasoolpur in the late ^{18th} ~~eighteenth~~ century did not bring about regular settlement initially. Right ^{19th} ~~until~~ the beginning of the ^{19th} ~~nineteenth~~ century, the region around Meerut was a bone of contention among warring Marathas, Mughals, Pathans and Jats because of which initial settlers were forced to flee ~~apparently left~~ Rasoolpur again and again. The rise of the British in the region after the treaty of Surji Arjan Gaon (1803) with the Sindhias marked a turning point in this context. Meerut soon came up as a cantonment and grew into a major market while cessation of wars in the region also encouraged more settlers to migrate to Rasoolpur. Around the same time, the zamindari of Tori and Rasoolpur was inherited by Yahya Khan *until*

(1780–1900) who was to play a crucial role in the growth of the village by encouraging new settlers to shift from cattle rearing to cultivation. Yahya Khan died in 1900 at the ripe age of 120 after expanding his estate via marriage (begetting the zamindari of Kakod from his in-laws) and by encouraging cultivation to such an extent that Rasoolpur soon became famous as Rasoolpur Dhantala because of its remarkable productivity and prosperity. Indeed, the prefix in its name also gradually disappeared and, by 1947, the village was increasingly being referred as just Dhantala or 'the abode of wealth'.

The long period of Yahya Khan's zamindari coincided with the consolidation of British rule in north India. His descendants in Tori-Jamshed Ali and Shahzada informed me that Khan's power was such that even Queen Victoria had called upon him in 1857 (along with other landed notables) to resist the mutineers. Yahya Khan is said to have remained neutral in this war and extended his estate to about 12,000 acres spread across seven villages in the second half of nineteenth century. Dhantala was one such village whose population, as recorded in the collectorate records at Meerut, grew to about 500 by the turn of twentieth century from a few dozen when Yahya had taken over from his father Ahlad Khan in early nineteenth century¹².

An important measure that helped in expanding cultivation in the estate of Yahya Khan was the fact that he encouraged some dalit families also to become sharecroppers or kashtkars of huge tracts instead of just laboring for Gurjar or Jat peasants as customary then. With this encouragement, Dhantala came to be inhabited soon by Jat and Gurjar as well as Kumhar, Muslim, Jatav and Valmiki settlers and the village's population had crossed about 1200 by 1947. Despite this increase, Dhantala had, till 1984, about 400 acres of uncultivated common land whose distribution led to a major tussle, as we shall note later.

Tardy Growth of Infrastructure

The establishment of the British administration in the region in early nineteenth century was accompanied by the introduction of the Mahalwari land settlement with its rigid tax burden and forced commercialization of agriculture. Although the growth of Meerut city and the spread of the railways was a spur to the village economy, other colonial institutions like the district hospital, canal and tubewell irrigation, electricity, modern education and legal procedures and modern mills in Modinagar and Meerut were out of reach for ordinary

villagers till recent times. Even in 1947, Dhantala had no qualified doctor or nurse, middle or primary school, electric poles or a pucca road or any motorized vehicle or even a radio set. *italics*

In this context, the country's independence proved to be a major turning point as it not only brought adult franchise, abolition of zamindari, land ceilings and elected panchayats to the village but also the first primary school, a panchayat ghar and brick lanes within a decade. In the nineteen sixties, the most significant innovation for villagers was the sprouting of the green revolution with the help of high yielding varieties of wheat and rice, specially 'Sunehra Chausanth' or the 'Golden 64' type of wheat which raised farmers' incomes as yields doubled or tripled (depending on the quantity of water and fertilizer used by a cultivator) rapidly. The road skirting the village was also metalled for the first time in the late sixties and the election of the village head through secret ballot began from 1967. *1960s* *Ghar* *italics*

Land consolidation or 'Chakbandi' of agricultural fields was attempted in the region between 1970 and 1973 but led to considerable litigation. The decade also saw the introduction of power supply in some village homes, the arrival of first tractors in Dhantala and the propagation of Prime Minister Indira Gandhi's Twenty Point Program for development as also coercive sterilization during the 'National Emergency' declared between 1975-77. In the eighties, the growth of competitive politics in the Panchayat body brought some improvements in Dhantala. The most significant of these was the allotment of three acres of land each among nearly 100 men from village commons after a major agitation organized by the landless in 1983-84. The same decade saw the launch of a milk cooperative, the final completion of the slow work on bricked lanes, the construction of pucca houses (each furnished with a hand pump also) for 16 poor families by the state (under the Indira Awas Yojna) and finally, the arrival of television for rural viewers too. Meanwhile, the construction of a separate temple was also launched near the dalit quarters of Dhantala in 1988. *1960s* *ME* *1980s* *italics*

The 1990s brought a major change in the economic policy of the state and the effects of consequent 'liberalisation' were felt in Dhantala too. A number of factories in the local industrial hubs of Modinagar and Meerut were closed while the recruitment for state jobs, especially in grade IV, came to a near halt. On the other hand, a number of new welfare schemes were announced whose implementation on the ground has been highly unsatisfactory. Among the more useful new measures were those launching subsidized rations for 'below poverty

line' (BPL) card holders, mid⁽⁻⁾day meals for primary school students under state or local administration, pensions for the physically challenged, widows and poor above 65 years in age and the strengthening of the Panchayati Raj through regularization of the five yearly elections and better and direct funding from central government for local bodies.

The last decade also saw improvements in Dhantala's connectivity with the outside world as public and private buses started touching the village directly, personal vehicles increased in the village by leaps, mobile connections arrived in 2003 and satellite television channels could be seen (by better off residents) with the help of newly launched dish TV. Pucca buildings have also come up for Dhantala's primary as well as middle school and a new Panchayat Bhavan and the run down road connecting the village to nearby towns has been relayed and ambitious schemes like the employment guarantee scheme, universal education and right to food schemes have also been proclaimed with a lot of fanfare. Their implementation on the ground, however, remains a far cry from their claims and proclamations as we shall see below.

The foregoing account of the slow augmentation of facilities and infrastructure in Dhantala may suggest that cumulative improvement, specially over the past 50 years, has taken place in the village which started as a cattle raisers' abode, about 200 years ago. But, given the long stretch of this history and the poor implementation of schemes as well as unequal distribution of their benefits, these improvements seem paltry on the ground specially, when we compare the story of Dhantala with that of villages in the more advanced states of Punjab, Haryana, western Maharashtra, etc. (not to speak of advanced Asian Countries such as Japan and South Korea). Just to recount one instance, electricity reached Dhantala in 1935 when a state tube well was installed for irrigation. Most homes today have electric connections. Yet, power lines are of little value as not only there is no supply for 12 or more hours daily but even when power is there, voltage is so low that dim bulbs, slow fans, cellphone batteries and a television is all that it supports; the farmers' dire need for adequate storage and irrigation remains unfulfilled even after 60 years of independence.

Occupational Structure

Having charted the origins of Dhantala and some of the turning points in its broader history, it would be useful to examine the changes witnessed in various sectors of the village's economy over the last century. By

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'economy' we are referring here to the production and distribution of goods and services in a community, its occupational structure, consumption patterns as also living standards across classes. For want of space, we shall focus mainly on the production side of the economy and also not dwell on the changing relations between various agrarian and non agrarian classes in the village here.

A comprehensive profile of the occupational structure of Dhantala in ^{the} early 20th century is difficult to obtain today. But the structural records and elder's recollections clearly reveal that cultivation and animal husbandry were the principal occupation of most residents while a number ^{of} craft ^{including} were catered by one or two families each. Pottery and brick making was handled by a more substantial group of Kunders from the early decades, however, in 1989 when I arrived in Dhantala for first time. In 2011, a detailed survey of household and occupation shows that out of a total work force of 837 (excluding unpaid women in peasant households), 572 were dependent on agriculture primarily, while among 265 others, including salaried employees and professionals, many had shares in family fields also. Of the 572 agriculturists, 390 were small or middle level peasants (holding less than six acres of land); 27 were richer farmers (with more than six acres) and 48 were artisans cum cultivators. Among others, twenty ²⁰ were farm workers and hundred ¹⁰⁰ non farm labourers, while 12 were landless artisans. Cattle rearing and milk selling to local diaries was common in most homes including that of cultivators. With this overhaul of the current material setting of Dhantala, we shall now turn ^h to sectoral oral remains of changes ^{that} continue in the village economy over past eight decades.

Agriculture ^{rice} ✓

With a fivefold rise of population between 1936 and 2011 and the distribution of village's vacant land to the landless in 1984, almost the entire agricultural land around Dhantala (of about 2000 acres) has been brought under cultivation. As a result, little vacant land is visible even at village's boundaries where the fields of surrounding hamlets touch those of Dhantala except for a road or a school acting as a dividing point.

Besides rabi crops like wheat and mustard and kharif types like rice and pulses, sugarcane and vegetables including potatoes are also grown in Dhantala. While canal and tank irrigation is absent, tube wells and submersible pumps have now replaced the labour demanding Persian wheels that were in use till the middle of the previous century.

As a result, while two crops a year have become a norm (except in the longer cycle sugarcane), ground water has fallen drastically since the adoption of high yielding seeds in the seventies. According to villagers, till 1970, water was easily struck at about twenty feet depth while pipes have to be dug minimum fifty feet now before water is found.

Dhantala falls in the first 'green revolution' zone of the country and kisans and kashtkars of the region deserve credit for being the pioneers of HYV crops. Many old kisans of Dhantala clearly remember how exciting it was to adopt the new varieties of wheat like the Golden 64 (Sunehra Chausanth) and Narma Roja and of rice like Lal Moonji and sugarcane called CO1148. In the seventies, modern machinery was also adopted by the bigger landowners of Dhantala such as Khem Singh and Devraj Singh. From a time when Persian wheels were the main source of irrigation in early twentieth century to the present when electric pumps number 150 in the village (including fifty submersibles), Dhantala's better off kisans have come a long way. The first tractor was bought in Dhantala by Khem Singh and Bhagmal Gurjars in 1970 and in 1989 their number was ten, while by 2011 it was fifty. On the other hand, organic farming being promoted by the administration has not found many takers. In December 2011, I was informed by a prosperous landowner, Pushpender, that for two preceding crops, he and two other farmers had experimented with organic manure in half of their fields. The manure was supplied by state's agents at a lower price than that charged for chemical fertilizers. Yet, not many have followed up on this since yields have been reportedly lower than with fertilizers and organic compost is difficult to develop in required quantity as dung is used for making fuel cakes on a major scale as the region.

Still tube well irrigation and High Yielding Varieties of wheat and rice resulted in dramatic improvements in output after 1970. Elders in Dhantala recall that in the early decades of the twentieth century, when neither the high yielding seeds nor electric tube wells and modern pesticides had arrived, crop yields were not even one fifth of what they are today and four quintals in an acre was considered a good harvest of wheat while un-irrigated patches yielded two quintals maximum. Today, even a poor farmer with low capital expects about ten quintals of wheat in an acre while better inputs bring upto twenty quintals per acre. Ninety four years old Suraj Bhan recalls that even before the green revolution, crop yields had grown from about four quintals per acre per harvest to about six quintals by 1960 because of better irrigation and electric tube wells. But the jump was faster and much more in the

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1970s seventies soon after the introduction of H Y V high yielding varieties of wheat and rice. Overall, a fivefold rise in wheat yields can be noted between 1920 and 2010 from two to four to ten to twenty quintals per acre now. But water required for the new varieties is also twice less and fertilizers and pesticides are essential. General inflation has grown one hundred and fifty times between 1930 and 2011. On the other hand, the price of wheat rose more than 200 times from ₹ five per quintal in 1920s to ₹ 1,100 in 2011.

Due to lack of space, I am not dwelling on the structure of landownership in Dhantala here. Yet, the cultivated area of the village, in 2011, was two 2000 thousand acres divided among 572 main cultivators with an average of about four acres per cultivator. However, the wealthiest farming family of Khem Singh, in the village, had about 40 forty acres while the poorest among landowners were four brothers with puny shares in the half acre family plot in the same period.

Animal Husbandry

Agriculture is commonly seen as the primary occupation of most villagers. However, the example of Dhantala shows that non farm incomes and animal husbandry are equally significant in the region's rural economy now. Indeed, besides the introduction of land ceilings in the fifties and the green revolution in the seventies, the next major change which deeply affected the economy of Dhantala was the 'white revolution' or growth of milk production and sale through the cooperative movement growing from the 1980s nineteen eighties. This revived the importance of animal husbandry which had declined in the middle decades of the 20th twentieth century but had once been the sole occupation of settlers in Dhantala. The revival was doubly beneficial since the growing demand for milk and milk products in cities in the last decades of the century put the natural resources of the village to good use while bringing some more cash to small farms which were failing to absorb the labor power of most families.

labour for Cattle rearing are, of course, highly symbiotic with agriculture as fields provide cheap supply of cattle feed while the animals yield dung for both manure and fuel. Ample space around rural homes also provides room for the livestock which is unimaginable in cities. Further, the spare time of village children can also be used in grazing and washing animals easily. The sale of hides, calves and meat also adds to the profitability of this adjunct of agriculture and many of our poor subjects stated that they earn more through dairy than farming now.

Till recent decades, however, what was lacking in this potential chain was transportation and processing link between increasing urban demand and rural dairymen. This came to the region in the form of milk cooperatives that started following the highly successful model presented by the Mother Dairy Cooperative especially after the 1970s. The most important cooperatives buying milk from cattle rears and dairies of Dhantala are Parag, Amul and Paras. In 1990, the price of milk noted by me was ₹ 4 per litre while in 2011, it was ₹ 40 for a litre of full cream milk.

10 A rough estimate of income and expenditure accruing from cattle rearing in Dhantala, in 2010, showed that while each buffalo of about ten litres milk yield per day required upto ₹ 75 of cattle feed, the sale price of its yield could go up to ₹ 300 daily in the eight odd months that it yields milk¹³. Even if we add interest on account of purchase of the animal (a good buffalo was purchased, in 2011, by Bhopal Singh in Dhantala for ₹ 70,000) and some losses due to illness and also barren months (when the buffalo is to recover its fertility after the *gabhin* or delivery and feeding phase), the sale of milk is a more beneficial occupation in the countryside than small scale agriculture of the marginal peasant with limited inputs. What adds to the profitability of cattle rearing is the sale of hides and beef as well as bones for additional income especially among the lower castes and Muslims who have benefitted more from this expanded trade in the last two decades. In fact the main road linking Hapur with Garhmukteshwar passes close to Dhantala and is dotted by many slaughterhouses exporting meat. Some men from surrounding villages also supply carcasses and livestock to these meat factories.

Unlike cattle, other animals have not been successfully raised for business in Dhantala. Although numerous attempts were made for fishing, pig rearing, poultry, etc. by villagers, frequent outbreaks of disease and death among animals, forced most such ventures to wind up quickly.

Rural Manufacturing

While agriculture and allied activities have shown some development over the previous century, the same cannot be said for manufacturing. Traditionally, Dhantala was home to a variety of craftsmen including carpenters, potters, oil pressers, blacksmiths, cobblers, etc. But as transportation and other links with the urban economy grew and greater mechanization made factory made tools, implements, cloth and oil, etc.

more attractive because of their lower cost and greater durability, the rural clientele of the former began to decline from mid ^{20th} twentieth century. Some modern tools and machinery were, no doubt, adopted by village craftsmen too. But the shortage of electricity and other infrastructure in the village has kept modern manufacturing for both rural and the urban market restricted in Dhantala. Among the few processes that have appeared within the secondary economy of Dhantala are: motor winding and mobile, cycle and tyre repair. It is worth highlighting here that the examples of rapid growth of rural industry in South Korea, Indonesia, Taiwan, etc. (besides Meiji Japan and nineteenth century Germany) indicates that the overwhelming dependence of the residents of Dhantala on low yield farm economy is not inevitable or necessary.

While traditional crafts have declined and few new manufacturers have appeared within Dhantala, in recent decades large scale manufacturing has not picked up in a big way even in towns and cities around the region. Although Meerut became a major hub for wholesale and retail trading and some towns such as Hapur, Moradabad, Khurja, etc. have been famous for crafts like printed cloth, pottery and brassware, large scale modern industry capable of employing surplus labour from villages has not grown much. The limited food processing and sports goods industry of Meerut and nearby Hapur is too meagre to offer non agricultural employment to ¹⁰ ten million residents of the district as a whole. The story of the Modi family (descended from the early 20th century industrialists Gujjur Mal Modi) who were running several factories and mills in Modinagar (including those of tyres, thread, and sugar and cloth mills) till the ^{1980s} eighties is instructive. After a heroic strike carried by workers under the left banner in the early ^{1980s} eighties, they shifted many of their businesses to Gujarat while their cloth mill was burnt and compensation ^{was} claimed from insurance by the industrialist's family allegedly after the removal of most of the machinery, according to the octogenarian Prahlad Singh, who worked in one such mill before the incident.

While manufacturing has been slack in and around Dhantala, construction has picked up both within the village and in surrounding towns in recent decades and demand for both skilled and unskilled workers in masonry, ⁵ woodwork, etc. has grown significantly while property prices have also risen remarkably including those of agricultural land. Thus, in 1900, the sale price of one acre agricultural plot in Dhantala was about ₹ ¹⁰⁰ hundred (though Yahya Khan had reportedly transferred five hundred acres of his land in Dhantala to Gopal Singh in

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lieu of ₹ 10,000 only, while another village was given away in the 1920s by a landlord in adjoining Muzaffarnagar to a money lender again, for ₹ 10,000 only, according to the septuagenarian Khem Singh). But by 1947, land prices had firmed up in the region as population had begun to rise more consistently and one acre of agricultural land could fetch up to ₹ 1,000 now¹⁴. The steepest rise in prices has come in recent decades. In 1998, Wahid Khan sold his 1.2 acre field for ₹ 1.25 lakh. By 2007, the rate of similar land in Dhantala had gone up to ₹ 10 lakh per acre while, in 2011, I was witness to the sale of a field in Dhantala at a price of ₹ 25 lakh per acre. The major factor for the steep rise in land prices of late has been the arrival of buyers from near expanding cities in the National Capital Region who have encashed lands there and purchased in villages like Dhantala that are again not too far from cities. Property dealing has, hence, emerged as a major occupation even for villagers like Pushpender and Pawan in Dhantala now.

The Tertiary Economy

While manufacturing remains underdeveloped both in small and large scale ventures in and around Dhantala, the same cannot be said of the service sector in the traditional rural economy. In the traditional rural economy, a host of services including those of the barber, the midwife, cobbler, priest, washer man, traditional healers, sweeper, etc. were available for ages. Almost all of these were low tech, family based occupation and restricted in the varna idea to specific castes. Gradually, in the twentieth century, and caste restrictions on the choice of occupations have also loosened in Dhantala, greater mechanization, modern training and better returns appeared in services offered by teachers, health workers, repair shops, flour mills, etc. Besides this, about villagers who have acquired training from vocational institutes in Meerut and Noida also commute to cities to work as accountants, lawyers, compounders, etc. while a smaller number has permanently shifted from the village to towns. A notable fraction of these professionals are from Dalit castes too and have struggled hard on the sole available rope for upward mobility namely, cheap education in government run schools and colleges which also offer some reserved seats to them as per the Constitution. We shall compare the proportion of different castes among these mobile men of Dhantala in the next section.

Besides state employees and educated professionals, another wing of the tertiary sector that has provided employment to village youth in

recent decades is the transport sector where repair shops and jobs for drivers, cleaners and suppliers, etc. has absorbed those with little education also. Similarly, the booming property market offers some options both for construction workers as well as landowners wishing to sell part or whole of their fields at much higher prices than before. Other services where both labourers and petty businessmen have found some jobs cutting across rural urban divide are hawking and roadside vends, food industry and cleaners' and sweepers' jobs.

New services available within Dhantala today include mobile repairing and recharging, electric grinding, motor winding and tool repair, etc. For others like banking, postal service, police, hospital, high school and college education, major vehicle or tool repairs, etc. the village is still dependent on towns around. On the whole, services have not been hurt as much as traditional crafts in recent times. Yet, many service providers like Dinesh the tailor and Saifi the blacksmith have to fall back on agricultural income for making ends meet and get small fields cultivated by family or hired labour or tenants.

The most lucrative profession in Dhantala today, however, is the production and sale of cheap liquor. In 2009, it was estimated, in a group discussion attended by me that, on average, liquor worth ₹ 5000 is being sold daily in Dhantala. There are three main agents who get illicit liquor costing ₹ seventeen per pouch and sell it for ₹ thirty. Some villagers are allegedly in the business of making illicit liquor occasionally within Dhantala also. The opening of thousands of authorised liquor shops by the Mayawati government in 2009, however, made bottled alcohol easily available within the village and hurt the local bootleggers pretty hard.

From Jajmani to Cash and Contract

Besides the decline of traditional crafts and services in Dhantala, the erosion of traditional exchange between agriculturists, craftsmen and service providers has been extremely significant recently. Till about 1970, Dhantala's crafts as well as services were centred on the 'jajmani' system also called 'tagbandi' locally. Under this, each craftsman or service provider was hereditarily attached to specific peasant families or 'jajmans' that were served on a continuous basis by the 'kamin' or service provider and supported in turn by the former with payment in grain at harvest ranging between half to two quintal of wheat annually (given to village barber, carpenter etc.) or half kilo or more of grain daily (to construction worker) or just a few chapattis (given to

sweepers daily) or, one meal after and some grain given at harvest (to some field labourers).

The majority craftsmen and service providers like barber, carpenter, etc. were paid through harvest payment. In addition, however, the kamin or worker could hope for support from his jajman(s) in times of crisis as also during festivals and weddings, etc. Some skilled workers like the barber could be thus attached to half or the whole village, at times, while each carpenter, blacksmith, etc. was attached to a group of about twenty odd jajman families¹⁵.

The relation between the peasant and the jajman(s) was, of course, more exploitative than reciprocal since the former were expected to show full commitment while the protection and wages expected from the latter were not only meagre but also less certain. The labouring kamins were mostly outcastes or from lower middle castes, the jajmans were typically upper middle caste farmers or zamindars. For example, Rajkali - an eighty year old ex sweepress of Dhantala, recollected that she used to clean drains and lift refuse daily from the houses of a dozen kisan households, in the middle decades of the century and was given two chapattis (with stale vegetables occasionally) in each in her second round, in the afternoon. In addition, she received up to a third or half of a quintal of wheat or millets at harvest from each patron, but was called as mid-wife during child birth, while her husband carried fire to the cremation ground after each death in the jajmans' family.

Another feature of Jajmani was that each craft or service in Dhantala was associated with a specific sub caste only and the concerned families were not supposed to take up vocations of other sub castes. Such a strong linkage between occupations and sub castes has declined sharply in Dhantala since independence even as the need for service providers like tailors, barbers and cobbler, etc. remains. Thus, Momin, whose father was a carpenter, now runs a barber's shop in the village while Dinesh, whose family had traditionally been in farming, now owns a tailor's shop. Not only have individuals departed from occupations within their varna but also moved into jobs across varnas of late. For example, Manoj is a Jatav who has completed his Ph.D and is now teaching in a college in Meerut while Ved Prakash is a middle caste gadariya who has violated all caste norms by, accepting the sweeper's job in Dhantala when it came under Mayawati's government as regular government employment with a salary of ₹ 10,000 per month. Similarly, there are number of Jatavs in Dhantala who have become lawyers, traders, etc. in the last 20 years. On the other extreme, a Brahmin from

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the village died, in 2005, labouring and eating in the temple at Kharkoda during his last days.

Another significant feature of the traditional 'rural' economy which has changed dramatically in Dhantala is the system based on barter exchange. Over the ^{20th} twentieth century and especially from the ^{1970s} seventies, cash started replacing goods and services as the medium of exchange in Dhantala. Agricultural workers are, however, still paid in grain often and specially, at harvests. But on most fields rented out by owners, dues are still repaid through simple division of the harvested crop.

It is not possible to attribute the decline of the traditional features of Dhantala's economy to a single cause. From the middle of the last century, increased mobility of both goods and men between village and city, an increase in bicycles as means of transporting small commodities, including milk, tools and grocery, etc. and some rise in the purchasing power of villagers due to the steady decline of tax and rent and, with the consolidation of the green revolution from the ^{1970s} seventies, together helped in eroding age old structures such as jajmani, barter and the rigid association between specified castes and occupations. But sharp erosion appeared in ^{1970s} jajmani relations from the 1980s only when surplus land was distributed among 110 landless men after an agitation and increased output generated by the green revolution encouraged cash and contractual transactions and better transportation and communication also gave a boost to emigration among the village's Dalits. *(Italics)*

The fact that the same services fetch a better price in cities than in the village adds to this trend and help in sustaining poor workers in city slums despite the increased cost of living there. For example, in 2009, I noted that Momin, the barber, was charging ₹ ⁵ five for a hair cut in Dhantala. On the other hand, in a Delhi slum called Aradhaknagar, in the same year, Bishen was charging ₹ ¹⁰ ten for the same job offered on a footpath on a wooden chair while in a saloon, in a lower middle class colony, the price of a hair cut was ₹ 25 then. Similar price ratios can also be seen in village and town economies in other services such as tailoring, driving, etc. Besides the sharp difference in the price fetched by a service in village and city, even the lower price is not available in villages to workers easily. Thus, in Dhantala, Momin's clients often insisted on partial or delayed payment or part cash and part goods payment often.

Thus, while jajmani has disappeared as an occupational structure in Dhantala, some of the ethos regarding clients' claims for payment according to convenience and after considerable delay still remains in the village. Growing Migration to towns is eroding this traditional craft and service economy nevertheless. In my last meeting with Momin, the village barber, in 2011, he talked at length about his plan about shifting to Meerut to work in a saloon on wages first and then to open his own saloon in the city. This, he insisted, would save him from poor delayed payments for his work common in Dhantala now.

Permanent and Periodic Migration

As the non-agricultural sector offers little income in Dhantala, many villagers seek employment like Momin in surrounding cities now. Between 1989 and 2011, about 98 families are, thus, said to have left Dhantala, restricting its demographic growth to a mere 35 per cent (from 2080 to 2704 over the same period). This is in sharp contrast to the population explosion visible in our cities and particularly in city slums¹⁶. It was further reported by Dhantala's Pradhan, in 2011, which in preceding four years 13 families migrated from the village while four came to Dhantala from outside. Of those who left the village on a permanent basis, however many visit for important family functions and festivals still.

Apart from those who have emigrated from Dhantala and return for occasional functions, about one hundred and twenty residents of Dhantala were commuting in 2011 to surrounding cities for work and returning daily. Going to Meerut, Hapur, Delhi or Ghaziabad by train or bus, in the morning, about forty of these were lower caste labourers, masons, while another forty were sweepers and peons etc. employed in private or public sector units in cities. Amongst commuters, few also happen to be clerks, lawyers and small scale entrepreneurs. The latter usually belong to the richer landowning families which employ wage labour on their lands and continue to educate their children for clerical or jobs, in banks and offices in cities, on salaries ranging, in 2010, between twenty and fifty thousand rupees per month (having risen from about two to four thousand noted by me in 1989). Many of these have taken up abodes in towns gradually. But the number of commuting Dalit lawyers, clerks and teachers commuting daily is also on the rise and stood at eleven in 2011.

Caste, Education and Consumption

About ¹⁰⁰ hundred years ago, the situation was very different as Dalits were not even allowed to sit close to upper and middle castes then. The first primary school opened in Dhantala in 1948. Now the village has two primary and two middle schools of which one is private in both categories. A third private residential middle school has been opened just outside Dhantala recently by trust run by Jat landowners who also have secure jobs in banks in Delhi. The said school has much better infrastructure and teaching discipline but charges minimum ₹ 300 as monthly tuition fees and is accessible only to prosperous families, many of whom belong to surrounding small towns like Kharkoda and Hapur rather than villages in the district. The government schools and those run by trusts inside Dhantala also have pucca buildings now. But a major contrast exists in the salaries paid to teachers there. While the former get about ₹ 2,000 per month, the latter start in the primary wing also at ₹ 20,000 approximately. Correspondingly, the private schools charge ₹ 100 to ~~300~~ 300 as monthly fees from students while the government schools teach for free and also provide meals and some finance for dress and books too. Still many parents who can afford ^{to} send their children to the former and even those who cannot appear very keen to do the same. The main reason seems to be more regular teaching and greater attention given to English in the private schools.

Literacy has ⁵ shot up from a single lettered person in Dhantala, in 1947, to about one ⁵ third of the populace in 2011 and approximately two ⁵ third in 2011. In absolute terms, of the total population of 2704 in 2011, 1724 were found to be literate. On the other hand, in 1989, out of 961 adults in Dhantala, only 372 were literate. Further, of 1724 literates in Dhantala, in 2011, 105 were graduates or professionally qualified and 32 were independent professionals like doctors, lawyers, technical staff, etc. in nearby towns. Almost all of them, however, went out of the village for work (along with 46 other clerks, accountants etc. and 35 lower grade workers employed in public or private sector units). Qualified professionals such as doctors, lawyers, etc. living within Dhantala remain small as only one 'registered medical practitioners', one veterinary doctor and three school teachers and two health workers do so, while five others come from adjoining cities to work in Dhantala in day time.

While education has improved slowly over the past half century in Dhantala, ownership of consumer durables has shown a more dramatic shift in preceding three decades. In my first visit, in 1989, I had counted ten televisions sets, fifteen two wheelers, one refrigerator and one car

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besides 20 tractors and 50 tube wells in the village. By 2011, the corresponding figures had risen to 400, 197, 95, 31, 40 and 204, respectively. Among gadgets that have nearly disappeared over the same period are radios and video cassette players while those that have grown in a big way in the village are mobiles (about 1200), satellite television (64 dishes), washing machines (58) and inverters (50)¹⁷. In the 85 Dalit households too, in 2011, there were 74 televisions, 168 mobiles, 30 two wheelers, ten inverters, two cars, fifteen satellite dishes and eight washing machines. It is pertinent to repeat here that a large number of these gadgets have been purchased second hand from marts in neighbouring towns while a few have come as dowry.

The conspicuous jump in certain gadgets and consumer durables in Dhantala (and the steep rise in the price of agricultural land, as noted before) doesn't imply that poverty had gone down dramatically in the village. While starvation and deaths due to epidemics have come down since the seventies, undernourishment and poverty still persists in about fifty families which have little land or secure income and are simultaneously caring for physically or mentally challenged members too. While 25 of these families were receiving minimal state aid in the form of subsidised ration or a paltry pension in 2011 and some owned a second hand mobile charged with a ten rupees monthly account or even a black and white television set their minimum need for food, shelter and medical care still remain largely unfulfilled as per capita income in the 50 of family of Dhantala was clearly below the rural poverty line of ₹ 21 per day in 2011.

Conclusion

Villages have been considered the mainstay of Indian society on several counts. While three fourth of India's population still lives in villages, our primary institutions such as family, religion and caste are also more firm in the countryside than in cities. However, village India is also changing rapidly now as electoral politics, increased connectivity, television and mobile phones among others transform its culture and economy increasingly. On the other hand, though much has changed in rural life, in recent decades, Indian villages have retained many old rhythms too. The pace and direction of change, of course, varies from region to region and a number of long term studies of rural relations would be required for a comprehensive understanding of this complex reality.

The paper shows that the economy of Dhantala exhibits profound changes along with significant continuities across eight decades as

recalled by three generations living in the community presently. Similar lineages, fields, shrines, dung cakes and livestock that existed a century before can be traced in Dhantala till today. Similarly, marriage customs, purda, open defecation, eating and sleeping routines and, of course, caste remains prominent in the village. On the other hand, schools, roads, tube wells and tractors and, above all, a fivefold increase in population; quickening migration and a tenfold rise in agricultural productivity since early ^{20th} twentieth century signify slow but continuous change also in the economy of Dhantala. The tardy pace of this transition, however, does not satisfy growing aspirations of younger villagers in the region. Resultant social tensions could provide a fertile ground to divisive politics with time, it is feared.

Notes

1. For exceptional long term studies of Indian villages refer Kessinger (1974), Wadley (1994) and Dreze et al. (1994).
2. Refer Wisner and Wisner (1971/1998) with a postscript by Susan Wadley. Also see Slater (1921) revisited recently by Guhan and Bharathan (1984).
3. Srinivas (1961), Beteille (1965/1971), Gupta (2005), Breman (2007) on one hand and Mendelsohn (1993) on the other.
4. For contrasting views refer Breman (1993), Leiten and Srivastava (1993) on the one hand and Jaffrelot (2003), Jeffery (1996) on the other.
5. I would like to specially thank Shri Devraj Singh, Shri Khem Singh, Shri Gautamrishi (advocate), Satyaprakash Gautam and Bhopal Singh of Dhantala for their consistent help and patience with my queries.
6. The Gram Pradhan Smt Prakash's husband Chandrabhan informed me that in native terms, the 'rakba' or total measurement of the village is estimated at 13,500 kucha bigha or about 2600 acres in all.
7. The term 'middle castes' has been used here to refer to so called 'other backward castes' or shudras including upper middle peasant castes such as Jats and Gurjars and lower middle peasant castes like kumhars, dhimars etc.
8. The land records maintained since early nineteenth century at Meerut Kachahri and the vanshavalees kept by Bhats at Baghpat and Hardwar are particularly useful in this regard.
9. Parker (1904), Verma (2003) and Kumar (1996).
10. See Verma (2003). Unfortunately, neither this book nor our villagers themselves provide exact years for the founding of these villages.
11. The modern Gregorian calendar starts 56 years after the Vikrami Samvat's year one.

12. I wish to thank here the record keepers at Meerut collectorate especially Mehboob Khan in helping me translate a few land records from Urdu for above information.
13. Poorer farmers spent no more than ₹ 20 on cattle feed generally also obtained no more than four kg milk per day while better cattle rearers spent around ₹ 100 per buffalo on feed to obtain 10 to 12 kg of milk from one buffalo.
14. Gold is reported to have been selling in 1947 at ₹ 50 per tola (ten gram).
15. Here it may be added that to some extent, the element of reciprocal loyalty and patronage between a dependent and a master in the Jajmani arrangement was similar to that seen in feudal ties of medieval Europe. However, clear differences between the two universes were also apparent as the stress on military service and land assignments was obviously absent in the latter. The concerned Jajmans in the Indian version were of course zamindar as well as kisan families and not just state appointed lords.
16. In a Delhi slum called Aradhaknagar, studied by me since 1988, for example, population grew from 490 to 1760 between 1989 and 2009 or by about 250 per cent. Delhi's population as a whole grew from about 50 to 140 lakh over the period.
17. The count of various gadgets per home was made in 2011 by two men from Dhantala separately before being compared again in my presence. I thank Pradeep Kumar and Satyaprakash for their patient work on this tedious job.

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