

Chapter 3

Fieldsite: Hinganiya and the Surrounding Villages

Introduction

This chapter is intended to provide a brief introduction to the villages in which I carried out fieldwork. Map 4 shows the locations of the four villages and important adjacent villages. The description in this chapter describes the situation up to the time of my field visit in 1987. Subsequent developments are not discussed.

Prior to administrative changes in 1982 Hinganiya village was in Bilara Tehsil of Jodhpur District. In the changes of administrative areas it was included in the newly created Bhopalgarh Tehsil. The village is located about 40 kilometres to the east of Jodhpur. Asaranada railway station, on the main line linking Jodhpur with Delhi (and, by branch line, with Jaipur), is 4-5 kilometres to the north. A network of cart tracks links Hinganiya with Asaranada and with nearby villages. A few kilometres to the south is the main highway from Jodhpur to Ajmer, Jaipur and Delhi.

Hinganiya is the smallest of the three administratively defined villages¹ in the Gram Panchayat of Kur. The other two villages are Kur itself, about 4 kilometres to the south-east, and Khokhariya, about 4 kilometres to the south. The nearest village is Kukunda, about 2 kilometres to the south-west of Hinganiya. Kukunda is, administratively, in a separate panchayat. There is quite a lot of visiting between villages and one or two-day trips to Pipar City or Jodhpur are quite common. On such trips villagers do banking, marketing or other tasks. Both Pipar City and Jodhpur are accessible by train from Asaranada, and Jodhpur is accessible by truck from Kukunda.

The economy of the four villages in the study area is based on mixed farming and herding. Pastoralism is a year-round activity, but, apart from a few irrigated hectares in Kur, agriculture is entirely monsoonal. Some irrigation, using underground water, occurs in other nearby villages.

¹ A Gram Panchayat is a village or multi-village level political division with an elected Panchayat (or council). The Panchayat is headed by an elected Sarpanch and Up-Sarpanch (deputy Sarpanch). A village, administratively defined, is the smallest area for which separate land records are kept.

Within six or seven kilometres to the east (at Ram Ravas) and to the south (at Binawas), irrigation is reasonably common.

It is important to stress that much of the description of agro-pastoral activity which follows later in this study refers to the combination of rainfed agriculture and pastoralism which occurs in Hinganiya. The situation is different elsewhere, even in patches quite close to Hinganiya. This is not to suggest that Hinganiya is, in this way, unusual. Many villages with similar lack of irrigation exist throughout western Rajasthan. An important result of the dependence on rainfed agriculture is that farmers in rainfed areas tend to be poorer, on average, than farmers in irrigated areas.

Hinganiya

There are members of five castes resident in Hinganiya. Of the so-called 'clean' castes there are Rajputs, Jats and Bishnois. The other two castes, Meghwals and Nayaks (often called Bhils), are scheduled castes. At Table 3.1 is a list of all castes present in the village. The population, in 1981 was 409 (Census of India, 1981a). In 1985/86 when I carried out a village census there were 433 residents including 29 'part-time residents'. (I will explain this term fully in Chapter 9. In essence it refers to people who move between the village and a residence at the place where they work.)

A pond which collects run-off rainwater, two underground tanks, a water reservoir and a two-room school are all situated on panchayat (common) land to the north of the village. The residential core (the *abadi*) has as its centre an open area roughly triangular in shape (see Map 5). Two sides (the western and southern) are fringed with the houses of the Rajputs. The Nayak and Meghwal huts are situated on the third side. The separation of castes into distinct areas is not completely rigid. There is one Rajput household in the middle of this area (it was established in late 1983) and the Meghwal cluster adjoins this single Rajput household. The Nayak houses extend more or less in a line on either side of this enclave.

All Bishnois living within the borders of the area administratively defined as Hinganiya, live in *dhanis*, which are hamlets dispersed throughout the agricultural fields away from the *abadi*. The single household of Jats and some households from each of the other castes also live in *dhanis*. The four households of Rajputs from the Soda clan (all other Rajputs resident in Hinganiya are Bhati Rajputs) live in a single *dhani* known as Soda-ki-dhani. Other *dhanis*, whether inhabited by a single household, or several related households, are known by the name of the household or lineage head.

Table 3.1
Castes present in
Hinganiya, Kur, Khokhariya and Kukunda

<i>Hinganiya</i>	<i>Kur</i>	<i>Khokhariya</i>	<i>Kukunda</i>
Rajput	Rajput	Rajput	Rajput
Jat	Brahman	Jat	Jat
Bishnoi	Jat	Bishnoi	Bishnoi
Meghwal	Bishnoi	Goswami	Goswami
Nayak/Bhil	Goswami	Daroga	Suthar
	Daroga	Raika	Nai
	Raika	Meghwal	Meghwal
	Nai	Nayak/Bhil	Nayak/Bhil
	Suthar		Mirasia
	Bania		
	Sadh		
	Darzi		
	Dholi		
	Meghwal		
	Nayak/Bhil		
	Harijan		

Note: Castes are listed in approximate descending order of caste ranking. Brahmans, locally, are commonly ranked below Rajputs

Generally speaking the houses of the Meghwals and Nayaks are simple huts. They are round, made of mud-brick and have thatched roofs. There are, however, a few structures made of stone and one or two comparatively substantial, albeit single-roomed, rectangular houses have been constructed. The houses of the Rajput section are quite different, and generally far more substantial. There are far more *pakka* buildings, made of stone blocks and with stone, concrete or corrugated iron roofs, although even these buildings are mostly single-room constructions. Throughout the Rajput section thatched roof huts and rectangular buildings are intermingled. Frequently individual households include separate buildings of both types, used for various purposes at different times of the year. Huts are ideal for cooking and are also preferred for sleeping in warm weather. *Pakka* buildings are ideal for storage and are much warmer in the winter.

Fieldsite

Rajput houses tend to have a fortress like appearance, with high walls at the front and often with locked doors barring entrance to the central area of the village. However, this is largely for appearance. There is rarely any wall behind the houses and access from the fields, or from other Rajput houses, is relatively simple. The symbolic aspect of this false-fronted fortress-like style of architecture is, I suggest, related to the self-image of Rajputs as Kshatriyas (warriors).

Within the triangular village centre is a thatched roof hut known as the *kordi*. This functions as a guest hut and as a meeting place. Two other buildings are known as *kordi*, a term which can be glossed as 'meeting place'. A second, more substantial meeting place is located on the perimeter of the central area in a plot adjoining the house of the ex-Thakur (ex-landlord) of the village. This open-fronted building and a separate hut nearby are considered to be the property of the Thakur and, in the period before the incorporation of the state of Jodhpur into independent India, was apparently the location of official activity. A third building at a *dhani* owned by the current Up-Sarpanch (deputy mayor) of the Village Panchayat, and located only a few hundred metres from the residential village, is also known as a *kordi*.

A small temple (dedicated to the folk-deity, Ram Devji) is situated within the village centre. Other temples and shrines are scattered throughout the village and surrounding fields.

Also in the village centre is a *chaki* (an electric powered mill) owned by one of the Rajputs. It is the only building in the village which is used for commercial purposes. There are no shops at all, although one of the Meghwals keeps supplies of bidis (cheap cigarettes made from rolled tobacco leaves) and matches which he resells. At the time of my departure in January 1986 one of the Rajputs (the son of the owner of the mill) was preparing to purchase some goods to set up a small shop.

To the north of the village, near the two underground tanks, is a two-room school building. This building was constructed during my stay in 1983, but there was difficulty in finding a teacher willing to stay and, until January 1986, the school was only very occasionally in operation. In January 1986 a new teacher took up his appointment and he was still there in August 1987. The Hinganiya school caters only for junior primary classes. Older children attend school in Kukunda (up to class eight) and those few who pursue further education travel to Jodhpur.

Electricity has only recently become available. Supply lines had already reached the edge of the village at the time of my first visit in March 1983, but no connections had been made prior to the end of my first period of fieldwork in January 1984. By August 1985 a connection had been provided to the mill, but no other connections had been approved. Several households had made 'informal' connections for

household lighting. The situation was essentially unchanged at the time of my brief visit in August 1987.

There is no system of sanitation. However, as the village is small, visits to the fields are not too inconvenient and Hinganiya, unlike larger villages, is fairly clean.

Drinking water is piped to the village. Water is stored in two large underground tanks. (The second was built in early 1983, as a famine relief project.) There is also an above ground reservoir connected to the pipe. The supply of piped water is inconsistent due partly to dependence on a very unreliable electricity supply for the pump located some kilometres away. During the extremely hot weather following the failed monsoon of 1985, the high level of demand for water for domestic purposes and livestock led to a severe, if temporary, shortage. The pumping stations were simply unable to cope with the greatly increased demand in the district. Water was brought several kilometres from excavated dams or small natural wet-season lakes (both called *nadis*) containing permanent or semi-permanent water. This water was carried in tanks hauled by camel or tractor. At this time the limited water in the underground tanks was very brackish and dirty. In 1987 the situation was much worse. The Sarpanch was, at his own expense, providing daily tank-loads of water to Hinganiya even in August.

Even after the good monsoon rains of 1983, there was a mild shortage of water during the period of hot weather which followed the monsoon. However the problem was not anywhere near as serious as that of 1985 or 1987, due largely to the persistence, for several months after the end of the monsoon, of surface water as an alternative source of drinking water for livestock.

In the drought-stricken pre-monsoon period of early 1983, a *nadi* (a pond for the collection of rainwater) was dug as a government funded famine relief project. This, filled with run-off water during the subsequent monsoon, served as a supplementary source of water (mainly for livestock), and lasted from the end of the monsoon (in early September) until early November. In 1985 it was virtually dry when I arrived in August and it was completely dry in August 1987.

Some *dhanis* are located on the pipeline and have direct access to water without the need to carry from the village by hand (or rather, by head) in pots or in water-bags carried on the backs of camels.

Prior to the building of the pipeline most water was carried from the well in Kukunda by one of these methods. Water is still sometimes obtained from the Kukunda well in exchange for an annual levy which is used to pay the well contractor. The levy is based on a fixed price per household and supplementary charges per head of livestock of various

types. The levy is charged only if water is taken in a given year, but informants claimed that use on a single occasion led to the full annual charge.

There are in fact two wells in Hinganiya. One has been there for hundreds of years,² but yields water which is completely undrinkable and which is also useless for irrigation due to salinity. This well is a substantial stonework construction. The other well is of fairly recent construction and is situated near a Bishnoi *dhani* some distance from the village. Again due to salinity the water is unusable except for making mud bricks.

There is very little information on the history or origins of the village. It certainly existed in 1662, the last year of the survey by Muhnot Nainsi (Nainsi 1968-1974). According to Nainsi it was a Bishnoi village at that time. Oral accounts of villagers claim that the original Bishnoi inhabitants abandoned it prior to it being destroyed by the Mughals.³

Kur

Kur and Khokhariya are the other two villages within the Kur Panchayat. Kur is a comparatively large village with a population of 1312 in 1981. It has several small shops, a mill, several wells, a school, a post office and even a newly constructed hospital - unstaffed at the time I left the field. It is a multi caste village.

The immediate appearance of the village suggests far greater wealth than Hinganiya. There are several quite substantial multi-roomed *pakka* houses, including the family home of the current Sarpanch (a merchant who has a business in Jodhpur where he spends much of his time) and the home of the descendant of the Thakur (landlord). Around the village are a few vegetable gardens made possible by well irrigation. The amount of irrigated land is, however, quite small. In 1981 only fourteen out of Kur's total area of 1707 hectares were irrigated (Census of India, 1981a). A few more hectares (probably less than ten) were apparently opened for irrigation between the census and 1985. These few hectares are the only irrigated land within the panchayat.

Hinganiya residents frequently visit Kur in order to obtain supplies, including rationed goods (sugar and, following declaration of famine, wheat). The Brahman who serves the Hinganiya Rajputs as a priest lives

² Oral history asserts the considerable age of the well. A reference in Nainsi's Gazetteer indicates that it was there as far back as 1662 (Nainsi 1968-1974).

³ No date was given for the sack, nor was it linked by my informants with any specific Mughal incursion. In fact The Mughals invaded Jodhpur on three occasions (in 1544, 1563 and 1679).

in Kur and also serves Khokhariya and Kur. Some other ritual specialists, including Dholis (drummers), serve Hinganiya from their homes in Kur. (A detailed discussion of caste interaction appears in Chapter 4.) The Patwari (land officer) for the Kur circle, which includes Hinganiya, has his office in Kur.

An all-weather road connects Kur with Binawas and with the paved road from Jodhpur to Pipar City.

Khokhariya

Khokhariya is between Hinganiya and Kukunda in size (population 653 in 1981). Like Hinganiya it has relatively few facilities and most goods and services are obtained from Kur. There is a junior primary school at Khokhariya. The older children travel to Kur.

The landscape around Khokhariya is, like Hinganiya sandy and barren. However there are far more trees in the area. There is a well, but no irrigation. Among the castes present are Raikas, a caste of specialist herdsman, and the village is far more oriented towards pastoralism than any of the other three villages.

Kukunda

Kukunda (population 1084 in 1981) is the nearest village to Hinganiya. Although it is in a separate Panchayat, it is frequently visited by people from Hinganiya. It has a Government Upper Primary School (Classes 1 to 8) and older children from Hinganiya study in this school. Kukunda has two shops, although much less is available here than in Kur. There is also a daily milk-truck from Kukunda to Jodhpur. As this truck carries passengers it provides an alternative to the train from Asaranada as a means for Hinganiya residents to go to Jodhpur. In late January 1986 a bus service from Kukunda to Jodhpur commenced operations.

Special Characteristics of Hinganiya

It would be wrong to over-intellectualise the reasons for choosing Hinganiya as a field site. As I have pointed out in Chapter 1, the village was chosen for a number of very practical reasons. In retrospect, however, the choice of a small village threw up a number of interesting questions. Most village studies in India have concentrated on larger villages. Typically a population of about 1000 and about twenty different castes are given as explicit criteria for the selection of a village for study. Hinganiya is much smaller and has members of only five castes actually resident. An advantage of this small size and relative caste homogeneity was that it was possible to spend a considerable amount of time

Fieldsite

concentrating on the ethnography of each separate caste (as well, of course, as examining the relationships between the castes). What emerged was a picture of 'communities', which, to a considerable extent, had different values and practices. While the village itself could meaningfully be described as a community of people with common interests, whose social life was substantially focused within the village boundaries, it is also important to recognise that much of the social life of members of particular castes was focused on interaction with members of their caste in other villages.

I believe that the importance of separation of, and differences between, castes has been obscured by the emphasis on studying larger villages with greater numbers of castes. In these cases, it is the interactions between members of different castes, and the resulting hierarchical arrangement of castes, which have been emphasised. I do not wish to dispute the importance of hierarchy, but I wish to correct what I see as an overemphasis on interactions between castes at the expense of the internal social organisation and functioning of particular castes. Both aspects are an essential part of analysis. Apart from the ethnographic significance of the differences between castes, there are some practical implications of the distinctive social organisation of various castes which are relevant to their economic strategies, including the way that they respond to drought. The question of differing forms of social structure in various castes will be discussed in the next chapter.