

# The Emergence of a New Community Festival: The Ramdev Cult and Pilgrimage in a Rajasthan Village\*

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## I. INTRODUCTION

### 1. THE AIM OF THIS PAPER

In recent years, pilgrimages to the temple or grave of Baba Ramdev are becoming popular in rural areas of Rajasthan.<sup>1</sup> Ramdev Temple is located in the village of Ramdeora in Jaisalmer district, Rajasthan, about 600 km south-west of Delhi (see Figure 1). Ramdev is a saint who lived in the fifteenth century, and has been venerated by Hindu outcastes and Muslims, mainly in the Pakistan's Sindh province and north-western India.<sup>2</sup> However, after Independence this faith spread amongst high-caste Hindus in cities such as Ahmedabad and Mumbai, and in recent years many people from rural areas of Rajasthan, regardless of their caste, also make pilgrimages to his temple. A village in Rajasthan where the author has done her fieldwork has also seen increased faith in the Ramdev cult since around 2000, and a 'village pilgrimage group' is now organized at a certain time every year. This paper will discuss the pilgrimage to Ramdeora, which has thus become an annual event in the studied village.<sup>3</sup>

Pilgrimage is a long-established religious practice and is an essential element of Hinduism. However, it is only in modern times that it has become popular. As Fuller points out, the development of the mass media and better education that have improved the ordinary people's knowledge of Hinduism's sacred centres and how to reach them, as well as the development of public transport that has made long-distance travel safer, speedier and cheaper, are important factors in the expansion of pilgrimages (Fuller 1992: 205). In other words, such factors as the discovery of holy places, the establishment of pilgrimage routes, and people having the financial resources to spare are prerequisites for the development of pilgrimages. However, even though these conditions would seem to have been met in the studied village by the early 1990s, why is it

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only now that the pilgrimage has attracted the interest of so many villagers?

A number of previous studies have identified social integration as a function of pilgrimages. In India, pilgrimages are considered to have played the role of Sanskritizing the 'Little Tradition' such as rural indigenous faiths and tribal faiths and integrating them into the 'Great Tradition' of Hinduism (cf. Cohn and Marriot 1958, Srinivas 1967). In contrast to these previous studies, the case presented in this paper is not of a major sacred centre of Hinduism. It is a pilgrimage to the temple of a saint that could be categorized as a folk belief. It may thus be expected that the function played by the pilgrimage is also different. To begin with, why does the village's group of pilgrims not go to a major sacred place, such as Dwarka, a famous holy site of Krishnaism, but rather take as its destination the temple of Ramdev who has been dubbed a low-caste Krishna?<sup>4</sup>

Bearing these questions in mind, this paper explores the significance that participating in the pilgrimage to Ramdeora has for the villagers. Although this pilgrimage is a recent appearance in village society, and has been formed apart from 'traditional' social relations in the village, such as caste and gender, the author intends to identify a point in which it functions as a festival that connects the people of village society and creates a 'community'.

The paper can be summarized as follows. In Section I, the objectives of this paper are presented, followed by a description of the political and economic situation now that the 'traditional' social structure is becoming fluid.<sup>5</sup> Section II defines what the author calls a 'village festival' and then describes changes in the festival held in the studied village. It first of all presents the kind of festival that the 'traditional' Holi was, and how it is currently in decline. It then discusses the historicity of the 'traditional' community that has held the Holi festival. Here it will become clear that the 'traditional' Holi festival is a community festival that was created in the political and economic circumstances of a certain period. It then describes how, although the Holi festival is being repudiated in the current political and economic situation, the pilgrimage to Ramdeora has made its appearance as a new annual festival.

In Section III, the author analyses the special characteristics of the Ramdev cult, which has become popular among the villagers in recent years. Here it is stated that the saint Ramdev possesses religiously hybrid qualities, and thus has the power to subsume people of different creeds, castes, social classes and genders. Finally, in Section IV, the author clarifies what it is that people seek from village festivals by exploring the word *mazā* that was used by people when speaking about both the Holi festival and the pilgrimage. Both festivals have the experience of *mazā* in common, but the Holi festival and pilgrimage differ in terms of the

principles of participation and the social structure they embody. A hierarchical relationship that centralizes power in the ruler and requires the subordination of others is embodied in the Holi festival, while the pilgrimage embodies an open relationship with significance that varies for each participant, and where nexus connecting different individuals and groups become important. By simultaneously focusing on both festivals and examining their connections with power structure in the village, it is argued that the people are constructing new social relations through the new festival of the pilgrimage.

## 2. AN OVERVIEW OF THE FIELD STUDY SITE

The village which the author named Devapur, the site of the field study, is located in the Pali district of Rajasthan, a state in the north-west of India. According to a 1998 survey, the population of the village was 1,114 in a total of 183 households and made up of 17 different castes. It is said that 300 years ago a Rajput man was awarded the lordship (*jāgīr*) by the king (*mahārājā*) and summoned various service castes to establish a domain (*thikānā*) called Devapur. In that territory the sovereignty of the feudal lord, or *thākur* was acknowledged and he exercised complete control over the domain and the people who lived there. Village society was regulated around the Rajput feudal ruling class, with a hierarchy of other castes and allotted roles (Table 1).<sup>6</sup> However, in recent years there is occupational mobility and people with economic clout are starting to emerge from the ruled classes as well.

More than half of the households in Devapur are involved in some way or another in farming, but not many households secure the majority of their income from agriculture. The average annual rainfall in this region is 472 mm, and it is classified ecologically as a semi-arid zone. There are frequent droughts and it is difficult to make a living from agriculture alone. Traditionally, people earned their livelihood from millet cultivation and migratory herding. Nowadays with the development of irrigation the main agricultural production has shifted from monsoon crops (*kharif*) that rely on rain water to dry season crops (*rabi*) such as wheat and mustard. Dairy husbandry has also developed as a result of green fodder being grown on irrigated land.

In modern agriculture and dairy husbandry water is an essential means of production, and two water-related issues now dominate agrarian relations, namely whether or not a farmer possesses a well (water ownership) and how much water is in the well that year and can be used for farming (water availability) (Nakatani 2000). Particularly since the 1990s, excessive drawing up of underground water has lowered the water table and most of the shallow wells have dried up. Many agricultural households have lost their water, and people who have no water either

TABLE 1. CASTES STRUCTURE IN DEVAPUR

		Castes	Traditional Callings	Number of households
Upper Classes	1	Rajput		
		Deora Rajput	Landlord ( <i>jāgirdār</i> )	10
		Sindar Rajput	Predecessor ( <i>bhomiya</i> )	4
		others	Farmers	3
	2	Rajpurohit	Royal priests/Political advisers	8
Other Backward Classes (O.B.C.)	3	Shami (Goswami)	Renouncers	7
	4	Daroga (Rawana Rajput)	Servants of the landlord	8
	5	Chaudhri (Januwa Chaudhri)	Cultivators	52
	6	Rebari (Raika)	Pastoralists	19
	7	Banjara (Bhat)	Transporters	25
	9	Chhipa	Tailors/Dyers	6
	8	Kumhar	Potters	1
	10	Vaishnav (Sadh)	Temple priests	1
Scheduled Castes (S.C.)	11	Meghwar (Bhambi)	Leather workers	10
	12	Sargrah (Hiragar)	Packhorse men	16
	13	Garg (Gurra)	Priests of low castes	6
	14	Bhat (Raw)	Genealogists of low castes	2
	15	Dholi	Village drummers	1
	16	Bhangi	Scavengers	2
Scheduled Tribes (S.T.)	17	Mina	Night watchmen	2
Total households				183

Source: The author's field work in 1998.

hire out their labour, or cultivate by borrowing water. They conclude a sharecropping agreement with someone who does have water.<sup>7</sup> These households maintain themselves by supplementing their income from agriculture with income earned from dairy husbandry or working away from home. Since the latter half of the 1990s there has been a rapid increase in the number of people who move away to find work. Previously, becoming a migrant worker was a temporary means for young people to earn money, but in recent years many people continue to work away from home after marriage. Meanwhile, people with water ownership, most of whom are Rajputs from the former feudal ruling class, earn a considerable income from agriculture in years when the monsoon is good.<sup>8</sup>

However, water ownership is certainly not as stable as land ownership. This is because the water level in the well does not depend solely upon the amount of rainfall, and it gets lower year by year. Farmers try boring

downwards or laterally but, in spite of the huge sums invested, there is no guarantee that water will be found and, even when it is, in many cases it contains salt. In such cases, not only is the means to cultivate their own crops lost but they remain saddled with debt. There are some households even in the former feudal ruling class of Rajputs that became poor when they lost their water. The instability of water ownership and the annual fluctuations in the amount of water available in the well give mobility to the agrarian relations in the village, and have so far prevented a bipolarisation of the farming caste. However, as water gains more and more importance, a disparity is gradually starting to be seen within the farming caste between those who possess water and those who do not. For example, one of the farmers owning water now saves the income earned from agriculture and dairy husbandry, and has opened shops selling cloth and miscellaneous goods in the Mumbai suburbs.<sup>9</sup> The emergence of farmers who have acquired this kind of economic clout has started to shake the 'traditional' order and power relationships that had the former feudal lords at their centre. In the midst of these circumstances, objections against the 'traditional' hierarchy are now repeatedly being raised.<sup>10</sup>

## II. THE TRANSFORMATION OF VILLAGE FESTIVALS

This section deals with the changes being brought to religious festivals by the political and economic changes mentioned in Section I. There are four 'grand festivals' (*baṛā tyohār*) in Devapur (Table 2). These festivals begin with *rāma śyāma*, which means a greeting to God Ram and God Krishna, where the male heads of each household in the village pay an early morning visit to the *thākūr* to offer their New Year greetings. The four grand festivals not only mark the changing seasons but also serve as milestone life events.<sup>11</sup> The festivals range from ones that are celebrated in family units, to ones celebrated by particular castes and ones celebrated by the village. This paper terms ceremonies that are collectively performed by village members as 'village festivals', because they are explicitly intended to benefit the whole village, even if some villagers do not actually participate (Fuller 1992: 129), and discusses their transformation.

### 1. 'TRADITIONAL' HOLI FESTIVAL

When the author commenced her research in Devapur in the early 1990s, Holi was the most magnificent of the grand festivals, and was the only village festival among them (cf. Table 2).<sup>12</sup> Holi is held over a number of days and consists of several ceremonies. The initial ceremony on the night of the full moon in the month of Phalgun is called *holī dahan* in which

TABLE 2. ANNUAL FESTIVALS IN DEVAPUR

Grand Festival	Name of the Festival	Date	How to Celebrate	Units of Celebration
○	Navratri	Chaitra Shukla, 1st-9th	to sing bhajans for a whole night of 8th.	Rajput caste
	Akhateej	Vaishakh Shukla, 3rd	the most auspicious day for marriage	kin
	Chaturmas	Ashadh Shukla, 14th	first ploughing at the start of the rainy season	cultivators
○	Rakkhi	Shravan Shukla, 15th	to tie a rakhi to one's brother's hand	brothers and sisters, kin and affine
	Kajali Teej	Bhadwa Krishna, 3rd	fasting and worship for a long life of one's husband	women
	Pilgrimage to Ramdeora	Bhadwa Krishna, 3rd-11th	collective pilgrimage on foot to the Ramdev Temple in Pokaran	village
	Rewari/Jaljhulani	Bhadwa Shukla, 11th	procession and bathing of the god Krishna and the god Ramdev	clean castes and unclean castes
○	Sraddha Paksh	Asoj Krishna, 1st-15th	ancestor worship	household
	Navratri	Asoj Shukla, 1st-9th	ritual for a clan devi	Rajput caste
	Dhanteras	Kartik Krishna, 13th	ritual for the goddess Lakshmi	household
	Diwali	Kartik Krishna, 15th	festival of lights	household
	Makar Sankranti	January, 14th	sun worship	household
○	Basant Panchami	Magh Shukla, 5th	ritual for good harvests	cultivators
	Shiva Rattri	Phalgun Krishna, 14th	fasting and worship of the god Shiva	women
	Holi Dahan	Phalgun Shukla, 15th	bonfire	village
	Dundh ( <i>dūndh</i> )	Chaitra Krishna, 1st	initiation rite to the community	village/caste
	Shitala Ashtami	Chaitra Krishna, 8th	worship for the goddess of smallpox	household
	Dasha Mata	Chaitra Krishna, 10th	worship for the mother goddess Dasha (situation)	household

a tree known as Holi is burned. On the next morning, the first day of the month of Chaitra, the New Year greeting of Rama Shyama is made to the *thākur*. After that, a ceremony known as *dūndh* is performed in each household to initiate children born in the past year into village society. In between these formal ceremonies that make up the Holi festival, men perform a stick dance known as 'a round' (*gher*), girls perform the *lūmbar* dance, and there are also battles such as people throwing coloured water at one another and women striking young men with sticks. As will be argued later, the ritualized mayhem of dance and battle has become an important element in the festival, bringing joy, happiness and satisfaction to people.

This section will describe the kind of festival that Holi was up until the early 1990s, based upon participant observation in 1992 and 1994, and on accounts from the village people. Here it will be made clear that Holi is an integrated festival that possesses the three ritual elements of a prayer for fertility, an initiation and an overturning of order, and also that the concepts of 'community' and 'hierarchy' are made explicit by these ceremonies.

Holi begins a month earlier, on the night of the full moon in the month of Magh, when young men from the pastoral caste (Rebari) cut down a tree from the woods and erect it in the village square. When the tree has been erected celebratory drums are beaten by the drumming caste (Dholi), and from that evening onwards the village girls sing and dance around the tree and on the paths to their homes every evening. Their song and dance expresses with the entire body the joy at the coming of spring and at the harvest, and the dancing gradually becomes more frenetic, and continues for longer, as the day of the festival approaches.

The Holi tree is set alight at a set time and by appointed people on the evening of the Phalgun full moon. The *thākur* and his male relatives (Deora Rajputs) are seated opposite the Holi tree, and the other villagers surround the square. At a signal from the drums, the fire is lit by the eldest male *bhomiṃyā* and the eldest male Chaudhri. *Bhomiṃyā* means 'person of the soil' and in Devapur it is used to refer to the Sindar Rajput. They were the rulers of this village before the advent of the Deora Rajput.<sup>13</sup> The Chaudhri are the farming caste and are said to have accompanied the Deora Rajput when the latter gained the rights of feudal lordship and moved to the village. They tilled the land for the feudal lord and played an important role in bringing prosperity to his domain. It is believed that the lighting of the fire by these two men represents the alliance of the conquering *jāgirdār* with the *chaudhri* as their right hand men and the conquered *bhomiṃyā*.<sup>14</sup>

Then the following year's abundant harvest is predicted by the direction in which the smoke rises, and young men who married that year push the burning tree over with their bare hands. It is said that a man who performs

this role will be blessed with a child within a year, and also that if a spark flies onto his turban and sets it alight, he will die within six months. In these traditions can be observed the theme that, by pushing over the tree, in other words by destroying the tree, a person acquires the sacred energy that flows from the tree. This sacred energy is a source of fertility when controlled, but a perilous energy that brings death to one who fails to control it. The *thākūr* sitting opposite the tree is believed to absorb the sacred energy and reinforce his power to protect the village.<sup>15</sup>

When the ceremony of the celebratory fire is over, the lower-caste Sargrah clear up and take the burned stump home with them. Cow dung is thrown onto the site of the celebratory fire so that it does not go out. The other people gather in front of the gate to the *thākūr*'s residence and enjoy a stick dance performed by the village men. The *thākūr* and the village elders sit in a row in front of his mansion. The village men form a large circle, in the centre of which the Dholi beat drums, and the men dance to the rhythm of the bells attached to their ankles and the sticks they clash together. One theory holds that the stick dance is a pseudo-battle. The dance, performed in relays, continues until morning and all the villagers gather in the square to enjoy it. According to a villager, 'In the past, if people were sleeping on the night of Holi the village women would go to their house and lock it from the outside, shutting them in. They would not be able to get out of their house when they woke up the next morning, and had to pay the women to unlock the house.'

The next morning male heads of all the households pay the *thākūr* a visit to offer their New Year greeting. They sit around the *thākūr*, and opium and tea are served. The families to which a boy has been born in the previous year announce that they will hold his initiation rite and invite a representative from each household to a gathering held in their own home.<sup>16</sup> Inviting people to the gathering means that the child is recognized as a member of the village. Usually the *thākūr* does not pay visits to villagers, and these are some of the few occasions that the *thākūr* attends gatherings held in villagers' homes. Concurrently with the men's gathering, an initiation ceremony called *dūndh* is held with the women at its heart. In this ceremony they take the boy to the square and, in the sacred space after the celebratory fire of the previous evening, where a pseudo-wedding ceremony is performed with the goddess Holika.

For his initiation ceremony the boy is dressed in his best clothes and waits for a drum band of the Dholi to arrive. The Dholi beating the drum leads the baby groom's bridal procession to the square. When they arrive at the sacred place, first of all the mother ceremoniously marks the child's forehead with sacred ash and red powder. Then the father carries the child and makes four rounds of the Holi fire remains. When the ceremony has been completed, they return to the residential area again led by the drumming Dholi. There tea and sweets are served to relatives, caste



members, and other guests. The Dholi are recompensed with money and goods, and they then move on to the next house holding a boy's initiation ceremony. It is held thus, in descending order in the caste hierarchy, and since it is performed individually for each infant it takes from morning until evening.<sup>17</sup>

When evening comes volunteers of the male farmers (the Chaudhri) form a group called the *gheriyā* and visit homes where a child has been born in the previous year. *Gheriyā* means a group of people who make a round and dance with sticks in Holi. They also gather around the child and sing a song praying for his/her healthy growth while striking a stick held above his/her head with another stick. Whilst the Dundh ceremony and gathering held by each family were only for baby boys, the *gheriyā* group's blessing is performed for baby girls as well. However, the number of times that the song is sung (which equals the number of blessings received) is different for boys and girls. The blessing by the *gheriyā* group signifies that the child has been recognized as a member of the village, and it gives the child a position in the village, caste and gender structure. The order in which the *gheriyā* group visits the children once again follows the traditional caste hierarchy. If one observes closely, it only visits the houses of the children who belong to what are known as 'clean castes'.<sup>18</sup> The people that are considered to be unclean form their own *gheriyā* group and perform blessings for lower-caste children.

The allotment of caste roles in the celebratory fire ceremony and the caste hierarchy in the initiation ceremony are thus clearly demonstrated. In addition, in several parts of these ceremonies, there are restrictions on the participation of castes considered to be unclean and of women, and they occupy a peripheral position. In this way the Holi festival has become a device to reaffirm to the villagers the 'traditional' structure of village society based on caste and gender.

## 2. THE HISTORICITY OF THE 'VILLAGE COMMUNITY'

This section will deal with the creation of the 'community' made explicit and reaffirmed in the annual Holi festival, and the articulated 'traditional hierarchy'.<sup>19</sup> It will then discuss the situation today, with the Holi festival in decline as these concepts lose their validity and people stop accepting them.

In Devapur, the 'village community' took on the form now spoken of as 'traditional' in the first half of the twentieth century. Prior to that, it was fluid in form with many members of the village coming and going, and a fixed 'community' did not exist. According to an elder of the Shami caste<sup>20</sup> who are considered to be the earliest arrivals to the village, the current inhabitants of Devapur can be classified into (1) the descendants of the castes who lived in the village before the advent of the Deora Rajput with

a feudal lordship, (2) the descendants of the castes that came with the first *thākur* of the Deora Rajput when the *thikānā* Devapur was established, and (3) the descendants of castes summoned by order of the later *thākurs* in the past one hundred years.<sup>21</sup> Also, according to him, many Muslims and Jains once lived in the village, but they left the village when their homes were destroyed in the great earthquake of 1848. In other words, the current 'village community' was created after they had migrated away and Hindu castes with specialized occupations had moved into the village. The Vaishnav are given as an example of a newly-arrived caste.<sup>22</sup> In around 1900 a priest for the worship of Krishna, the guardian deity of the Rajput, is said to have been summoned from a village into which *bāisā*, or a daughter of the ruling Rajput class in Devapur had married. Why was there a need at this time for a special caste to serve Krishna? To the warrior caste of the Rajput, Krishna is a war god. In most domains in this area there is a temple dedicated to Krishna next to the *thākur*'s residence. In Devapur, the roofs of the *thākur*'s residence and the Krishna temple were built with the same shape, an eyelet-hole design, making them a manifestation of the ideology '*thākur* = king = god'. The author was told that 'when having an audience with the *thākur*, people must always wear a turban and remove his shoes, just as when entering a temple' and 'every day the *thākur* had his meal after having a glimpse of Krishna'. These tangible and intangible devices to symbolize 'Hindu royalty' had been enthusiastically created between the end of the nineteenth century and the early twentieth century.

The person who promoted this transformation of Devapur into what could be called a little 'Hindu kingdom' was the 9th *thākur* Bhopal Singh. He was born in 1904, when the princely states of Rajputana had stabilized politically under British paramountcy and in an age where the princely states displayed their prosperity and power ostentatiously. In his day the *thikānā* Devapur seems to have been economically stable, given that not only were castes with specialized occupation summoned there, but also the *thākur*'s residence and the Krishna temple were being rebuilt. Such was the era in which the Holi festival acquired the form that today is called 'traditional'. The princely state system was abolished when India gained independence, and land reforms were implemented in the 1950s. Nevertheless, as the *thākur* he continued to be an important man in the village of Devapur, and up until the first half of the 1990s the 'village community' lived on through its festivals.

However, after Bhopal Singh's death in 1993, the Holi festival, as if its role had now ended, began its slow decline. As was mentioned in Section I, this was just around the time that the number of people leaving to become migrant workers increased, and when agrarian relations in the village had become fluid. In Devapur, Bhopal Singh was someone who symbolized the 'Hindu king', and it is thought that to the village his death

signified the end of an era. Before long the villagers started to renounce the 'traditional roles' allotted to their caste. For example, the leather-working caste (Meghwar) stopped disposing of dead cattle and assigned that role to the lowest-ranked Untouchable caste, the Bhangi. The pastoral caste abandoned their job of herding the villagers' cows, giving as the reason that they had no young people in the village, and at the same time also renounced their role of going to cut down the Holi tree.

The traditional division of roles thus broke down and at the 2005 Holi festival the tree had not been prepared one month before the festival. The dance which the girls used to enjoy for one month was scarcely performed. Male farmers went to cut down the tree on the eve of the festival, and the celebratory fire ceremony was held, but not many people took part. The stick dance that the men perform on the evening of the celebratory fire is meant to go on all night but, perhaps simply because there were not enough dancers, it was over after just 30 minutes. The baby boy's initiation ceremony held the next day is celebrated by individual households and so did not seem to have changed much, as compared with the decline of the ceremony held jointly by the village as a unit. Meanwhile, the overturning of order and ritualized mayhem that were the main themes of the Holi festival had been lost completely.

For example, in the early 1990s, from the morning of the day after the celebratory fire ceremony, people threw coloured water at one another in the square, the lanes, and even the houses, and nowhere was safe. Particularly fierce battles arose between young men and their elder brothers' wives. Also the *thākur* was 'attacked' by the villagers and his face and clothes dyed pink. Another sight to behold was the women of the Banjara caste chasing after the men, long sticks in their hands. The men would do their best to escape but would eventually be 'captured' and struck hard on the back with the stick. In 1994 the people were so excited that an observer simply could not distinguish whether it was a game or done seriously. However, in 2005 there was no beating with sticks. In addition to this, previously the women from the lower castes would block the main road leading out of the village, sticks in hand, for a few days either side of the festival. They would stop cars on their way in or out of the village and demand money. These were officially recognized raids by the poor on the rich people riding in cars, or on bikes or tractors.

This 'women's mischief', such as locking people who slept on the night of Holi into their homes, throwing coloured water at high-caste men, beating young men with sticks, and blocking the road to extort money, was something that was inconceivable in everyday life, but accepted in the Holi festival. It had completely vanished from the 2005 Holi festival, and the women's mayhem was nowhere to be seen. At the same time, people were saying 'there's no *mazā* in the Holi festival nowadays'. The word *mazā* indicates joy, laughter and a sense of satisfaction.<sup>23</sup> The

positive significance to people of participating in the festival is thought to be the shared *mazā* beyond the difference of caste, class and gender, and the acquirement of a sense of unity in a space that is not part of everyday life. The ritualized violence that the socially weak inflict on the strong and the overturning of order are the source of *mazā*. However, at the same time as releasing the pressures of everyday life, it also plays the role of re-strengthening the social structure. It is considered that, with the social structure that has the former feudal ruling class at its summit becoming unacceptable, people have also lost interest in the Holi festival.

A few days after the Holi festival, one of the village men told the author 'The village was split by the election of a *sarpanch*, or a panchayat delegate, held in February, and that is why the village could not become one in this year's Holi'. His words show that the villagers themselves think that fluctuations in the traditional political authority become apparent in the festival. In this election the position of *sarpanch* was reserved for 'Other Backward Classes', so the *thākur* and other members of the former feudal ruling class endorsed a man from the tailoring caste (Chhipa) to represent Devapur. However, a man from the farming caste (Chaudhri), who in recent years has gained economic clout, announced his own candidacy and opposed him, gathering the votes of the same farming caste. This meant that two candidates from Devapur were standing in the election, splitting the villagers' votes. In the end the position of *sarpanch* was snatched by the candidate from another village. This incident left its mark on people's minds in various ways. Although the celebratory fire ceremony was in fact held, the current *thākur* had secretly thought that it might not be performed at that year's Holi, as the author later learned in the course of a personal conversation with him. Also, in addition to the village's Holi tree, the farmer who stood in the *sarpanch* election erected another Holi tree in front of his house and performed his own celebratory fire ceremony. There were rumours about people who had joined his ceremony. With background factors such as the death of the previous *thākur*, changes in the economic structure, and the emergence of a new leader who opposes the traditional authority, the Holi festival is in decline and the 'village community' with the *thākur* at its summit has been lost.

### 3. THE PILGRIMAGE AS A NEW VILLAGE FESTIVAL

At the same time the Holi festival went into decline, the pilgrimage to Ramdeora started to become popular in Devapur. The saint Ramdev is called the Krishna of the lower castes, and in the past was not popular at all among the higher castes. However, the sicknesses he cured and the miracles he performed during his lifetime have become the stuff of legends and been embroidered upon, and today he attracts many believers who hope for his grace. Tens of thousands of pilgrims visit Ramdeora

yearly, but the highest concentration is in the month of Bhadwa. The festival of Ramdev's birth and the festival to commemorate his *samādhi* are during this month, and many street stalls are set up at the fair (*melā*). Special trains and non-stop buses run from Delhi and other cities of Rajasthan, and tents are erected on both sides of the road to supply food and water for pilgrims who come on foot. There is an endless stream of pilgrims on the national highway, and the local mass media in Rajasthan provide daily reports on the pilgrims.

The sacred place of Ramdeora shot to fame in 1986 when the Maharaja of Jodhpur made a pilgrimage there on foot. The Maharaja's group of pilgrims was shown daily in the mass media and drew a great deal of attention. However, in contrast to the avid media reports, in rural districts, or at least in the case of Devapur, even in the early 1990s many villagers considered Ramdev to be a god of the lower castes. The upper-caste women covertly referred to the Meghwar by the discriminatory term of *ḍherh*,<sup>24</sup> and the author heard from them the time-honoured saying, 'Ramdev gathered nothing but *ḍherh* (as believers)'. As expressed in this saying, at least until the early 1990s, that Ramdev was 'their god' was a part of the villager's awareness of him. In Devapur a small Ramdev temple was in the lower-caste residential area and had been run by a Meghwar. Even amongst the Meghwar, only a particularly devout elderly man had once made a pilgrimage to Ramdeora, and in the village temple were enshrined a statue of Ramdev, a cloth warhorse, and a flag that symbolize him, covered in dust and their colours faded.

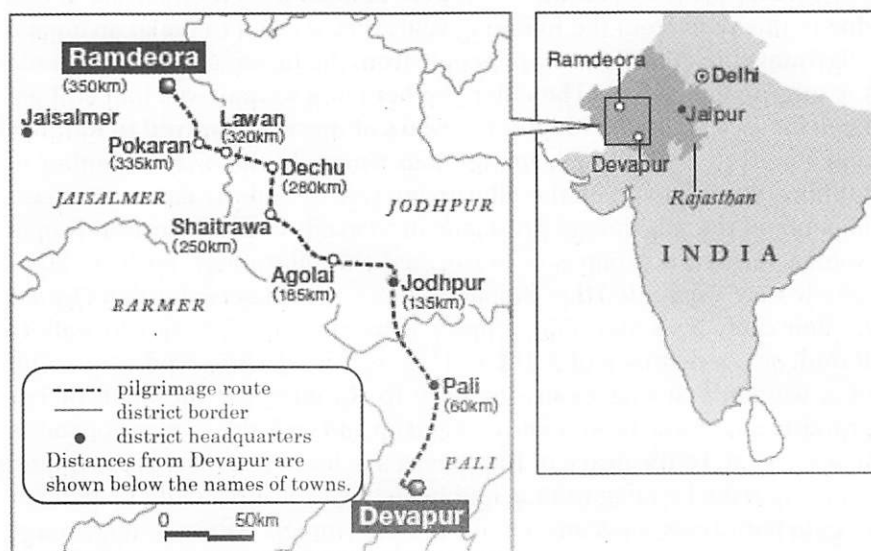
In what was an exceptional case at that time, in 1993 a family from the Shami caste was the first one other than the lower castes to go on a pilgrimage to Ramdeora. After seven daughters had been born to this family, they prayed to Ramdev and were at last blessed with a son. It was due to this that, from the following year, they started to make an annual pilgrimage. In 2000 there were people from the farming caste who made the pilgrimage on foot. The elder brothers of a woman who had still not been blessed with a child after ten years of marriage prayed to Ramdev and vowed to walk the pilgrimage four times. In this way a number of families started to go on the pilgrimage yearly, and the number of participants in the pilgrimage gradually increased. In 2002, several Rajput women formed a group and performed the pilgrimage on foot. Many people were astounded that Rajput women,<sup>25</sup> who observe *purdā* (*pardā*) in their daily lives and almost never leave their homes, should walk to Ramdeora, a distance of 350 km. However, it was achieved as a result of a woman's strong desire to pray to Ramdev for the sake of her granddaughter who was unable to stand up and walk due to some unknown illness. That, by the grace of Ramdev, a son had been born to the Shami family and the farming woman had been blessed with a child helped her to gain her family's permission for the pilgrimage. After the pilgrimage

her granddaughter did in fact recover enough to go to school and to run. These stories prompted more and more people in Devapur to go on the pilgrimage.

In 2004, a group of pilgrims was formed in the village with a wealthy male farmer playing the central role. His provision of a tractor to accompany them made it possible to transport the pilgrims' luggage, provide enough drinking water for the many people, and carry people whose legs gave out on the way, thus enabling anyone who wished to join the pilgrimage. Up until then the pilgrims had all been comparatively young and healthy, and the group had been a small one. However, elderly people and children joined the group of pilgrims in 2004, which grew to be a total of 70 people. Its members consisted of 38 adult males, 25 adult females and 7 children, and a pilgrimage on foot was carried out whereby they covered the roughly 350-km route to Ramdeora in the course of eight days (Figure 1). A large pilgrimage banner was prepared, and the group's departure was covered by *Rajasthan Patrika*, a regional newspaper. A photograph of the leader in the centre of a large group of pilgrims, garlands around their neck, was printed in the newspaper under the caption 'A pilgrimage on foot from the village of Devapur'.

The core members of the group of pilgrims were from the farming caste, but many lower-caste men and women also took part. Members of the drumming caste, considered essential for village festivals, also took part. They played their drums at the head of the group when it set out from the village and when it paid homage at the shrine, and they energized people with their shouts of encouragement during the pilgrimage. A woman

FIG. 1. PILGRIMAGE ROUTE FROM DEVAPUR TO RAMDEORA



from the lowest-ranking caste in the village, the cleaning caste (Bhangi) also joined the pilgrimage. In everyday life it would be inconceivable to touch her or share water with her, but during the pilgrimage she drank water from the same canteen, even though she did use a separate cup, and at night she slept at the end of a row in the same place.

It is really hard to walk a pilgrimage at a pace of 50 km a day. However, people said, 'The second day was the toughest but if you keep walking you get used to it on the third and fourth day and you gradually stop feeling your tiredness' and 'I can't walk to the next town but I can walk even this long distance if it is to the place of Baba Ramdev'. When their pace slows after they have been walking for a while, cries of encouragement are raised, 'Let's shout it out! Victory for Ramapir!' (*jor se bolo! rāmāpīr kī jāy!*). And the others respond 'Victory for Ramapir! (*rāmāpīr kī jāy!*)', raising one clenched fist in the air. There are several versions of these chants of encouragement, and they are also sometimes improvised on the spot (Table 3). The pilgrims keep on walking, initiating call and response rhymed chants, encouraging one another with their voices and sharing their joy as they near the place where the saint Ramdev is. The oldest person in that year's group of pilgrims was a woman who was more than 70 years old. She could barely see, and walked with a stick, her daughter leading her by the hand. The group of pilgrims showed concern for her pace and, when necessary, the men would support her from behind. The author was amazed at the zeal of this woman who had walked the whole distance in this way and, conjecturing that she must have some very important prayer to make, asked her, 'Why do you walk when it is such a hardship?' Her response was, 'I am walking with joy, you see'. It was not

TABLE 3. CHANTS SHOUTED WHILE WALKING IN THE PILGRIMAGE

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<i>bābā kanno?</i> → <i>aparō!</i> (Whose Baba ? → Ours!)
<i>darjā kanno?</i> → <i>bābāro!</i> (Whose door? → Baba's !)
<i>kursī kannī?</i> → <i>bābārī!</i> (Whose chair? → Baba's !)
<i>ek kilo ālū</i> → <i>maiṁ bābā re caṛhāū</i> (One kilogram of potato → I am going to offer to Baba)
<i>ek kilo lahsun</i> → <i>bābā derā darśan</i> (One kilogram of garlic → Baba gives you a glance)
<i>ek kilo murchī</i> → <i>bābā derā kharcī</i> (One kilogram of pepper → Baba pays your costs)
<i>ek takharī mīmgnī</i> → <i>bābā derā bīnanī</i> (A scale of dung → Baba gives you a bride)
<i>maiṁ caṛhāū peṭha</i> → <i>bābā derā beṭā</i> (I offer a sweet → Baba gives you a son)
<i>maiṁ cal chetī</i> → <i>bābā derā beṭī</i> (I go a long way on foot → Baba gives you a daughter)
<i>paīdal panthī āyā hai</i> → <i>bābāne bulāyā hai</i> (I came far away on foot → Baba called me)
<i>kilomītar āyā hai</i> → <i>bābāne bulāyā hai</i> (I walked hundreds of kilometers → Baba called me)
<i>tin jalebī tel meṁ</i> → <i>bābā baiṭhā rel meṁ</i> (Three sweets in an oil → Baba rides in a train)
<i>āyar bābā pradeśnī</i> → <i>nalā kuṇḍā bhardenī</i> (Baba has come far away → in order to fill canals and ponds)

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reaching the goal, but actually the act of walking itself that she had enjoyed.

In addition, examples of the softening or even overturning of everyday order were often seen during the pilgrimage, such as the relaxing of caste and gender restrictions and the exchange of sexually-charged jokes, and several people were heard to use the word *mazā*. *Mazā* is born from a sense of unity shared in an extraordinary space, and is thought to be experienced in Turner's 'communitas', or primordial relationships in a liminal situation (Turner 1974). The villagers clearly enjoyed the pilgrimage. The pilgrimage was free from the rivalry and squabbles with neighbours that are so common in daily life, and was an opportunity to care for one another in the midst of difficulties, and to share laughter and joy.

### III. THE HYBRID AND ALL-ENCOMPASSING NATURE OF THE RAMADEV CULT

This section considers the special qualities possessed by the saint Ramdev enshrined in the pilgrimage site of Ramdeora, and clarifies why the villagers have made Ramdeora the goal of their pilgrimage and not some other sacred site.

According to a legend of Baba Ramdev, he was born in 1404 as a son of Ajmal, the Tanwar Rajput king who ruled over the Pokaran region. Ajmal was childless but, after he went on a pilgrimage to the sacred site of Dwarka, the God Krishna blessed him with two sons. Since the younger son Ramdev suddenly appeared in the cradle where his elder brother Viramdev was sleeping, he was said to be an incarnation of Krishna. From the time that he was born he is said to have performed various miracles, helped those in trouble, vanquished demons and reformed wicked people. Baba Ramdev gathered around him devotees from all castes and creeds. He is said to have taken a living *samādhi* in 1458 (cf. Census of India 1961).

The traditional territory of the Ramdev cult extends from Madhya Pradesh to regions such as Gujarat and Rajasthan in western India, and Sind in Pakistan. Traditionally castes that work with leather (the Meghwar, Bhambi and Kamad) form the core of his devotees, and the Meghwar built Ramdev shrines in villages throughout Rajasthan. They also served as the priests of these shrines, passing on the Ramdev hymns (*bhajan*) to successive generations. This is why the Ramdev cult is known as 'the Untouchables' religion' (*dherhiyā panth*). In the sense that it keeps ritual and the participation of specialists to a minimum, stresses the direct relationship between the believer and the god, and emphasizes the role of hymns rather than scriptures, the Ramdev cult has characteristics in common with the Bhakti movement.



However, at the same time many elements of Islam can be observed in the Ramdev cult. For example, amongst the traditional Ramdev devotees, namely Hindu outcastes and Muslims, the appellations Rama Pir and Ramsah Pir are employed. The mausoleums inside the temple and in the courtyard are held to be those of Ramdev and his descendants, and are shaped like Muslim tombs. The one that is considered to be the mausoleum of Ramdev's mother is engraved with a verse from the Quran, 'All that is done is the work of God, nothing lies in the hands of man'.

Binford explains these Islamic elements from the context of the age in which Ramdev was active. According to her, in Ramdev's time Marwar was experiencing the critical cultural challenge posed by Islam. Ramdev's answer to the challenge is shown in the stories of miracles he performed. They narrate that even the Muslim conquerors believed in Ramdev, that even the pirs from Mecca bowed down to him, and that he too was a pir. In order to defend themselves and to prove the legitimacy of their faith, Ramdev's believers might have incorporated Islamic elements into the stories (Binford 1976: 127).

Khan meanwhile argues that Ramdev and his core believers belong to the Nizari school of Ismailism, which expanded in India in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries (Khan 1997: 35). However, the link with the Nizari school has been completely forgotten by the Ramdev cult of today, and it is now extremely difficult to classify the group's identity.<sup>26</sup> According to Khan, the Nizari emissaries actively adopted Hindu terminology as well as local traditions and legends in order to facilitate religious conversion.<sup>27</sup> The teaching of the Nizari sect was thus Hinduized in order to blend into the local community, and a dynamic fusion of Islam and Hinduism occurred (Khan 1997: 60-96). However, she says that it would not be appropriate to perceive this phenomenon through the term of syncretism. This is because syncretism presupposes the existence of a prototype (legitimacy). Hinduism and Ismailism should be neither identified nor mixed, but the new converts should understand that the Nizari teaching was the culmination of their own religious traditions which it encompassed, revealing deeper layers of the truth (Khan 1997: 33).

The Ismailism that developed throughout Rajasthan and was embedded in typical Hindu beliefs is thought to have been an extremely hybrid faith. Khan never uses the word herself, but the author believes that 'hybrid' is the most appropriate term to express the specific nature possessed by the Ramdev cult, having the elements of Ismailism at its core and encompassing those of Hindu-bhakti since eighteenth century.<sup>28</sup> Incidentally, Khan speaks thus of the current state of the Ramdev cult, from which links with Islam, Hindu outcastes and Tantra have been eradicated, and which has now been located in the Hindu Bhakti tradition. The ambiguities and elusiveness of the cult were gradually replaced by what could be defined as its 're-Hinduized version' (Khan 1997: 61).

Her opinion on the re-Hinduization of the Ramdev cult is considered to be historically correct. However, the author would like to add that, from the perspective of traditional devotees, the present development of Ramdev cult is reflected as the expansion of 'our religion'. This is because, the Meghwars of Devapur do not see the increasing popularity of the Ramdev amongst other villagers as the Ramdev cult being taken over by the higher castes, but rather as their own faith accepting the other villagers.

For example, in 2004, the year in which the number of people participating in the pilgrimage to Ramdeora increased amongst non-lower caste villagers, and in which the biggest group of pilgrims from Devapur was organized, the village's ageing Ramdev temple was repaired and repainted. Representatives from the Meghwar caste gathered donations from all the village households, and volunteers from the Meghwar caste provided the labour. In this way the Ramdev temple was renovated and the names of the donors were inscribed on the ceiling. Via this work the Meghwars transmitted the message to themselves and the others that the Ramdev temple is 'our temple', and reaffirmed that they are the managers of the temple and the successors of the faith. As is apparent from this trend of redefinition and reaffirmation by the lower caste, the Ramdev cult with its hybrid nature opens up the possibility of multiple interpretations, which give it the ability to encompass different groups.

#### IV. CONCLUSION

The pilgrimage group has been organized annually since 2004, the year when the author participated in it. Other than 2005, when a Rajput male served as the leader, up until 2009 members of the farming caste who own a tractor took it in turns to lead the group of pilgrims. The number of pilgrims has changed from 50 to around 70. The pilgrimage on foot first started in 2000 among small numbers of people from the farming caste, and after ten years it now seems to have become established in the village as a new annual festival. This paper will be concluded with a look back at why the pilgrimage is becoming popular whilst the former village festival of Holi is in serious decline, and why the destination of the pilgrimage is Ramdeora.

Firstly, as is demonstrated by the popularity of the pilgrimage, the modernization and increasing mobility of social structure occurring in Devapur have not led to a lack of interest in religious festivals. On the contrary, the villagers have actively created the new festival of the pilgrimage, and sought the *mazā*, in other words primordial connections, a sense of unity, and enjoyment in a space that is not part of their daily lives. It would seem that the reason why the *mazā* that can no longer be gained from the Holi festival can be got from the pilgrimage lies in the

difference between the two festivals in terms of the principles of participation and the social structure they embody.

Whilst Holi is accompanied by 'traditional roles' based upon membership of 'the village community' and caste, the pilgrimage is based purely upon the free will of individuals. There are no caste, gender or age restrictions. Whilst participating in the former means recognizing and reinforcing the traditional hierarchy, participating in the latter means exemplifying the equality of believers before god and the free choice of the individual. It may be said that, via the pilgrimage, a communal activity that presupposes new social relationships is being sought.

Secondly, it is thought that it is precisely because its destination is the temple of Ramdev, and because of the hybrid nature of the saint Ramdev, that the pilgrimage group could transcend caste and gather many participants, and, in the fragmenting village society, could unite people with different backgrounds and aims. The farmer who organized the pilgrimage group on this occasion intended to demonstrate his influence by using his own funds for a religious purpose. His ambition to acquire influence as a new leader is revealed by such actions as coming forward as a candidate in the panchayat election held a few months later, and being rumoured to have burned a separate Holi tree during the festival.

However, the pilgrims possess various different motives, ranging from those who participate sustained by *bhakti* towards god to those who seek some form of worldly gain. Some visit the temple to give thanks for a vow fulfilled while some see it as a pleasure jaunt. These varying motives represented a diversity of value systems. The said leader's intention in organizing the pilgrimage was all but displaced by the participants. The relationship between the leader and the participants was not that of a patron and followers. Some people considered it based on kinship, others on friendship, religious faith, or membership of the village.

In addition, the community experienced via the pilgrimage has flexible boundaries, and is not explicit and rigid like the Holi festival. That is why the said farmer would never succeed in concentrating authority by organizing a group of pilgrims. Nevertheless, it is true to say that, as a new leader, he served as a nexus of participants who belonged to different castes and genders, and who had differing objectives, and that he made the festival a success.

Finally, although not all of the villagers of Devapur participated in the pilgrimage, how was it able to be connected up with the other people? There was a leader in the group of pilgrims, and ceremonial roles such as flag-bearer and drummer were allotted. Just as in the Holi festival, these people participated as representatives of the village, based upon their roles. In addition, the participants telephoned their families in the village each time that they arrived in a town on the way. Neighbours summoned people who did not have a telephone in their home, and the

pilgrims' safety and current location were conveyed. Meanwhile, their families back in the village enjoyed gossiping about the tidings they had heard over the phone. All over the village people were talking about how the pilgrims were doing, and in the evening religious songs praying for the pilgrims' safety were sung in the streets. The local expression is 'to grant *sanjhī*, and they continued to sing them every night until their family members came home. Thus people who did not actually go on the pilgrimage shared partially in its time and space. The pilgrimage experience was also shared when the group of pilgrims returned to the village with souvenirs and tales of their journey.

To the villagers of Devapur, the decline of the Holi festival and the popularity of the pilgrimage just happen to coincide, and discussing them both as village festivals is nothing more than an analyst's way of looking at them. However, the author would like to point out that if *mazā*, heard in both festivals, is considered as a keyword to compare the two, the dynamism of the power structure of village society becomes clear. Table 4 charts the changes that occurred in the Holi festival and the pilgrimage. It reveals the repudiation of the 'traditional' hierarchy and the creation of new social relationships. It is noted that even though the villagers repudiate the 'traditional' festival on the basis of contemporary values, they have not become splintered but are trying to be together, sharing *mazā* via a new festival.

TABLE 4. CHANGES IN THE HOLI FESTIVAL AND PILGRIMAGE TO RAMDEORA

	Before mid-1990s	After mid-1990s
Ceremony of celebratory fire ( <i>holī dahan</i> )	following of the traditional roles allotted to the castes	renouncing of the traditional roles and the hierarchical order
Ritualized mayhem and pseudo-battle with coloured water and stick	enjoyment of <i>maza</i> through positive participation	no participation and no enjoyment
Initiation rite ( <i>dūndh</i> ) of the infant	Initiation into and celebration by the village society	initiation into and celebration by kin and caste groups
Pilgrimage to Ramdeora	worship only by a lower caste	annual formation of the pilgrimage group, enjoyment of <i>mazā</i>

These new social relationships differ from hierarchical ones that concentrate power in the hands of the top. However, these new relationships are certainly not egalitarian, nor do they repudiate caste itself. The pilgrimage shifts these differences and reveals to the participants diverse values and unity. In this way, we may safely say that the pilgrimage to Ramdeora, which connects people, serves the function of a village festival that brings a 'community' into existence.

## NOTES

1. In this paper, names and terms such as those of festivals, people, Gods, castes, places and months of a Hindu calendar are given in the generally used alphabetized transcription. The other vernacular terms follow Hindi transcription in italicized form with diacritical marks.
2. Baba Ramdev is also known as Ram Shah Pir or Rama Pir, and is considered to be both a Hindu and Muslim saint. For Hindus, Ramdev Temple is the place where he entered the earth while still alive and took *samādhi*, in other words the place where he attained a state of perfect spiritual concentration. For Muslims, meanwhile, what is housed within the shrine is the mausoleum (tomb) of Ram Shah Pir, where he was buried alive (*Census of India 1961*). This paper uses these different names depending on the views of the local people concerned. In other cases the saint Ramdev is used with a neutral meaning.
3. The arguments put forward in this paper are based on several field researches carried out in the course of 15 years between 1992 and 2006. Amongst these studies, research into the Ramdev cult and pilgrimage was mainly carried out between 2003 and 2006 by means of the JSPS Grants-in-aid for Scientific Research, FY2003-2005 B(1)15401035, 'Anthropological Research on Transformations in Urban Festivals in North and West India', Principal Researcher MIO Minoru, Professor at the National Museum of Ethnology.
4. A fairly large number of people in the studied village have been on a pilgrimage to Dwarka in the south of Gujarat. However, it is a pilgrimage made once in a lifetime, mainly by young men who gather for it. Unlike the pilgrimage to Ramdeora, the group of pilgrims is not made up of members from various castes, nor do women, elderly people or children take part in it. Nobody repeats the pilgrimage to Dwarka like many people do for the pilgrimage to Ramdeora, nor is a group of pilgrims formed annually.
5. When the expression 'traditional' is used in this paper, it refers to something that was created in the political and economic context of a specific period nearly one hundred years ago and at the same time refers to something that people today speak of as being traditional.
6. Table 1 shows the 'traditional' hierarchy that is given by the Rajput, the former feudal ruling class. In fact, the hierarchical order of adjoining castes is often reversed according to the teller. For example, there is disagreement about the order of precedence between the Rajpurohit and the Daroga, between the Chaudhri, the Rebari and the Banjara, and between the Meghwar and the Sargrah. Nevertheless, the villagers' view of the general framework is in agreement and it is categorized as 1 and 2 being the upper castes, 3 to 10 being the Shudra, and 11 and below being the lower castes. In the framework prescribed by the Indian Constitution since Independence, 3 to 10 are classified as 'Other Backward Classes', and 11 to 17 as 'Scheduled Castes and Tribes'.
7. In a sharecropping agreement made in 1998 the harvest was divided into five equal portions. One portion went to the owner of the land, two to the owner of the water, one to the person who provided the tractor and seeds, and one to the person who provided the labour for the agricultural work in general (Nakatani 2000).
8. For example, in a survey carried out in 1998, a year with comparatively favourable weather conditions, a comparison between the household with the biggest harvest amongst the households that own water and the one with the biggest harvest amongst the households that do not own water revealed an eight-fold difference (Nakatani 2000).

9. As is discussed later, in August 2004 this farmer organized a group of pilgrimage to Ramdeora and in February of the following year stood for election to the panchayat.
10. In August 2001 *samudra pūjā*, a village festival that is held once only during the reign of a *thākur*, was held after an interval of forty-six years. In this festival, after a rite for the village pond is performed by a Brahman, all the village women enter the pond to bathe. However, in 2001 a dispute arose a few days prior to the festival about the order of the bathing. A village panchayat was held, and representatives of each caste assembled for discussions. However, adjacent castes simply asserted their own supremacy. A man from the former feudal ruling class proclaimed that the festival would not be held unless it was according to the traditional hierarchy. The panchayat meeting came to an end. However, on the day of the festival, although the schedule was for the wife of the *thākur* (the *thākurānī*) to enter the pond followed by the women of the higher castes one by one, lower-caste women entered the pond first. Things became chaotic when other women too ignored whose turn it was and scrambled to enter the pond, and turmoil ensued.
11. It is said in the village that a new year begins with the coming of each major festival, and people are thought to be regenerated by the festival and enter new circumstances. For example, when a family member dies the members of that house must undertake mourning for a prescribed period of time, and restrictions are placed on meals and various other conduct. After the prescribed period has passed, the family's mourning ends with the arrival of one of the four major festivals (Nakatani 1995a).
12. For the spring Navratri, Rajput women gather in the *thākur's* house and sing *bhajans* throughout the night (*rāt jāgran*). The next day, villagers come to help out at the *thākur's* house, make vast quantities of sweets and distribute them to each household in the village. In the autumn Navatri, the author heard that in the past a goat was sacrificed as an offering to the clan goddess. Nowadays the Rajput men simply pay a visit to the temple of the clan goddess. The Navratri festivals are Rajput festivals and they are not included in the grand festivals. Thus, no formal greetings are made to the *thākur*. Rakhi is a grand festival in which gifts are sent from brothers to their sisters, and from boys to their fiances. All villagers celebrate it, but it is a festival for siblings and not for the village. For Diwali people pay visits to their elders for the New Year greetings, and each household holds a ceremony for the goddess Lakshmi. The author was told that in the past many village children came to the *thākur's* house and received sweets. However, at the time of her field research only limited numbers of children did so. Neither did she see any ceremonies held jointly with the villagers. By contrast, at the festival of Holi the tree is burned for the peace and happiness of the village as a whole, and representatives from each caste perform various ceremonial roles, their joint participation in the festival transcending caste differences.
13. According to the villagers, an ancestor of the Sindar Rajput was first given a right (*jāgīr*) over the village of Devapur by Rana Mokhal (1397-1453) who ruled over the kingdom of Mewar in the fifteenth century. However, it is said that the Sindar family did not serve the king well and the position of *jāgīrdār* was awarded to the Deora Rajput around the end of the seventeenth century.
14. The author referred to Narain and Mathur for this explanation. According to them, rituals such as the coronation ceremony of the Rajput ruler were not performed by a Brahman priest but a representative of the aboriginals, the anterior rulers

of their territories. Originally the practice might have been a diplomatic symbol of the alliance between the conquerors and the conquered. The rulers of Udaipur and Jaipur maintained this custom over a period of the thousand years (Narain and Mathur 1990: 34).

15. In the community festival, the village is analogous to the kingdom and the *thākūr* to the king, and the theme of the king protecting the lands and the people who live there is clearly expressed. For further details about religious festivals that affirm royalty, see Nakatani (1995b).
16. The person's initiation rite (*dūndh*) has a decisive role in reckoning his age. Whose *dūndh* was performed with whom in which year's Holi festival is always reminded.
17. For example, in 2006 *dūndh* ceremonies were performed for a total of 13 boys: one Rajput, five Chaudhris, one Rebari, three Banjaras, one Chhipa, one Meghwar, and one Garg. The order of performing *dūndh* basically follows the 'traditional' caste hierarchy (Table 1), but there is one exception: only the Rebari do not have to observe this order of precedence. According to the villagers, 'Long ago the Rebari appealed to the *thākūr* to be placed earlier. The reason for this was that the Rebari earn their living as herders so, if they were lower down in the *dūndh* order they would be late in taking their flocks to pasture, and the sheep and goats would go hungry. Ever since then, the *dūndh* of a Rebari boy is held first in the early morning.'
18. The 'clean castes' include the higher castes (1 and 2 in Table 1) and the Shudra (3 to 10 in Table 1). By contrast, the lower castes (11 to 17 in Table 1) are considered 'unclean castes'.
19. The words 'community' and 'traditional hierarchy' are not used amongst the people in Devapur. Instead, the author often heard the expressions 'our village or society (*hamārā gāmv/samāj*)' and 'difference between high and low based on tradition (*paramparā se ūnc nīc kā faraq*)'.
20. The Shami, sometimes called Goswami, was originally a community of renouncers who practised the austerities of the cult of Shiva. However, there was a gradual increase in members who became householders with families, and they now form the different caste groups of the Sanyasi, Dandi and Shami.
21. According to this man, the Sindar Rajput, Rajpurohit, Shami, Meghwar, Sargrah, and Mina were amongst the inhabitants of old before the thikana Devapur was established. The castes that migrated there when it was established were the Chaudhri who came with the first *thākūr*, and also the Banjara who moved into Devapur to serve at the Shiva temple near to it. Except these castes, others are all newcomers who have migrated to Devapur during the past one hundred years.
22. Vaishnav refers to a religious group of the Vishnu sect which is also called by another name, Sadh. Followers are recruited from all classes but in the Marwar region most of them are Jats. They are said to have joined the sect to evade payments to village society and taxes, rather than in order to devote themselves to religious life (Singh 1894: 99). The Vaishnav call themselves priests of the Vishnu sect and insist that they are ranked as Brahman in the Varna hierarchy, but the other communities do not accept that and locate them as the lowest rank of the clean castes (Singh 1998: 828-9).
23. *Mazā* represents pleasure, anticipation and a sense of satisfaction. There is a similar expression, *ānand* but this is used for religious joy or pleasurable delight, while *mazā* seems to include a greater element of laughter. In the context of the festival, people say that they gain *mazā* (*mazā ānā*) from mischief that is inconceivable in daily life.

24. *Dheṛh* is a discriminatory term for 'Untouchables' who process livestock carcasses, and refers in particular to the Meghwar.
25. See Nakatani (1995b) regarding Rajput women's custom of purdah and religious ceremonies.
26. The reasons that Khan identifies for why it has become difficult to classify the group include that Ismailism did not engage in mass conversions, that the emissaries took on the guise of Sufi ascetics and called themselves Pir in front of Muslims to escape from oppression by Sunni rulers, and that converts concealed their true faith via *taqiyya* (Khan 1997: 39).
27. For example, the Nizari was mainly known by the Hindu appellation of *sat panth* (lit. the 'true sect' or 'true path'), which may be regarded as an equivalent of the Arabic *din-e haqq*, the true religion. The word for a pious believer *momin* was translated as *ṛṣi*, and *pīr* as *guru* (Khan 1997:45). Not only terminology but also Hindu legends were adopted. The Ismaili concept of the manifestation of God (*mazhar*) was explained by the Vishnava theory of *avatār*, and the Imam (founder of the sect) was represented as an incarnation of Vishnu (Khan 1997: 49).
28. Binford describes the Ramdev cult as flexible enough to mix a miraculous Rajput hero with bhakti egalitarianism and also to possess Islamic elements (Binford 1976: 124), but the author think that 'flexibility', which signifies taking on different personalities depending on circumstances, is not a suitable term, because the various facets of Ramdev, as Khan argued, must be perceived as historical transformations. Ramdev's all-encompassing nature cannot be separated into different elements.

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