

Everyday Politics of Water in Village Community

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Abstract

The present paper attempts to explore the questions of access and control over water for agriculture in a village community. The key argument is that politics of water in village is a micro level, everyday phenomenon. Village community in India is essentially hierarchical in its structural arrangements and access to any resource is determined by caste-class array of the rural populace. Since, the selected village has numerical preponderance of lower castes i.e. Chamars and Pasis. Of late land ownership among them has made them conscious about their water rights. It has led to the emergence of contestation and conflict over water in a village among the lower castes and higher caste Brahmins who are in minority. Thakurs and Muslims (although are not part of village populace) are other dominating castes as they are economically and politically influential and their fields lay nearby lower caste farmers. The everyday politics of water in Nasratpur village of Uttar Pradesh reveals that dominance, resistance, conflict on the one

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hand and negotiation, support, alliance and mutual adjustment on the other, is a daily routine activity engaging all strata, higher, middle and lower caste in the process.

Keywords: Politics of water, Everyday politics, Caste dominance, Land distribution, Changing social equations, Caste conflict.

Introduction

'Politics of Water' is one of the most used phrases to understand the process of production, control, allocation and use of water amongst various groups at different levels (macro or micro, global or local and across various disciplines). 'Politics' has been defined by various scholars with various connotations. Lasswell (1936) states that politics is all about who gets what, when and how. However, politics is the complex or aggregate relationships of people in society, especially those relationships involving authority or power, any activity concerned with the acquisition of power or factors leading up to influencing something. Politics is about the control, allocation, production and use of resources and also the values and ideas underlying those activities (Kerkvliet, 2009). It embraces the network of social relationships involving power or authority, leading to competition, conflict, domination and resistance on one hand and negotiations, alliance, cooperation, adjustment on the other. 'How do the powerful secure the compliance of those who are dominated – and, more specifically, how do the powerful secure other's willing compliance?' (Lukes, 2005: 12), is the essence of politics of water.

Everyday Politics of Water

'Everyday politics' is a micro level phenomenon and is best suited to understand the access to and control over water in village society. Benedict Kerkvliet (2009) first coined the word 'everyday politics' and has stated that politics in peasant societies is mostly the everyday, quotidian sort, in his study of villages of the Philippines and Vietnam. He analysed the changing agricultural relations due to green revolution, underlying factors of a large rebellion in San Recardo and its surrounding villages, the acrimonious relationship between large landowners and their tenants and their farm

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workers, their organization structure and their negotiations with government authorities.

‘Everyday politics involves people embracing, complying with, adjusting and contesting norms and rules regarding authority over, production of or allocation of resources... . It can occur in organization but everyday politics is itself not organized. It can occur where people live and work. Often it is entwined with individuals and small groups’ activities while making a living, raising their families, wrestling with daily problems, and interacting with others like themselves and with the superiors and subordinates. Everyday politics also includes resource production and distribution practices within households and families and within small communities in ways that rely primarily on local people’s own resources with little involvement of formal organizations’ (Kerkvliet, 2009: 232). Everyday politics of resistance is the most studied form of everyday politics. Against this backdrop, the present paper aims at exploring the everyday politics of water in an Indian village. There are some relevant studies reflecting upon everyday politics of water.

Narayanan and Kamath (2012) have explored serious inequalities in the distribution of water within and between villages and observed democratic deficit of local governance in semi arid watershed of Udaipur. Unequal caste, class and power relations have aggravated the scarcity of water causing resistance by dalits in a Gujarat village, who eventually had to restrain due to dominant upper castes (Prakash and Sama, 2006). Peasants’ struggle for equitable distribution of water in government sponsored water schemes also reveals contestations and negotiations within and between villages of Khanpur Taluka and the government officials (Patankar and Omvedt, 1991) and in resistance in Baliraja dam in Sangli district of Maharashtra (Phadke, 1990; Rout, 2009).

A case study conducted in a group of eight villages in Jharkhand reveals the water sharing conflicts between head-reachers and tail-enders within the village and between upstream and downstream villages. At the time of construction of dam and canal, a local advisory committee of village farmers was formed to represent local priorities and farmers’ interests. Later, when the

construction work was completed, the same committee was converted into user group's management committee. It is important here to mention that the user group's management committee has no representative from Musahar, the scheduled caste community of the villages and it has led to complete negligence of their water rights. Therefore, conflicts over water sharing are not only water based conflicts, these are conflicts between castes, communities and villages and the farmers' organization is not able to distribute water equally in village hierarchy (Lal et al., 2006). Nevertheless, scholars argue that effectively functioning traditional farmers' organizations have been successful in managing irrigation systems in India. For instance, '*ahar-pyne*', an indigenous irrigation system in south Bihar has successfully incited the local farming community in large numbers against caste divisions and ecological obstacles for over 100 years and ensured equitable distribution of water among individual cultivators (Pant, 1998). Further, there are tanks under local management in southern India reflecting a very high level of performance Mosse (2006). Organizational and financial sustainability of Pani Panchayats is linked with equity and dominance at the level of village social structure (Thakur and Pattnaik, 2002).

Ownership of modern water extraction means (tube well and pump set) is restricted to upper caste farmers having large landholdings and the marginal farmers from lower caste groups are still not within the reach of the modern tools. For instance, in Uttar Pradesh, the backward caste communities are racing ahead of the upper castes in terms of ownership of modern agricultural implements and the marginal farmers from SCs/STs communities find ownership of mechanical water extraction devices and modern agricultural implements out of their reach (Pant, 2005).

Some of the research questions of the study are: (1) village social structure (caste-class dynamics) is decisive to water use either in common property resource or in state owned irrigation structure; (2) hierarchical arrangement of village society creates barriers to equitable distribution of benefits of state-led irrigation development; (3) effective organization of farmers may facilitate equitable distribution of water and resolve the caste-based conflicts.

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In the study village, canal, the key source of irrigation, is an outcome of state development intervention. Empirical analysis of access to the benefits of such development initiatives suggests that at the local level, social-structural set up is decisive to the distribution of fruits of irrigation development. The large and middle farmers have better access to irrigation either through tube wells or canals (Dhawan, 1982; Bardhan, 1984; Pant and Rai, 1985; Shah, 1993; Pant, 2004 and 2005).

The study attempts to articulate the phenomenon of everyday politics¹ in a village, viz., Nasratpur of Raebareli district of central Uttar Pradesh. It argues that how everyday politics emerges out of the caste-class backdrop of the village and is reflected in the forms of dominance, resistance, conflict, support and adjustments.

Some key objectives of the study are: To assess the role of hierarchy in access to and control over water for agriculture; interactions among various social groups across caste, class and gender in order to understand everyday politics; modernization of agriculture and irrigation and changing social relationships among various caste groups in the village.

Methodology

Nasratpur village in Tilo block of Raebareli district of Uttar Pradesh has been studied by covering the entire households of the village. The qualitative primary data were collected through a semi-structured interview schedule, observation, focused group discussion and oral history method and case study methods. The respondents were chosen to represent the different sections in the village. To obtain further relevant information about various developments with regard to water access and disparities, interviews of the head of the households were undertaken. Further, the secondary data was collected from Block Development office, Tehsil office, Census office and some relevant publications from the state irrigation department.

The rationale behind selecting the village was its location in the command area of the minor irrigation project at Nasratpur and social milieu of its inhabitants. Nasratpur due to its location in head reaches of the minor

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irrigation project gets water in abundance. However, being a multi-caste village with numerically preponderant scheduled caste population, it encounters the problem of unequal distribution of water leading to deprivation and marginalization of poor scheduled caste marginal farmers and conflict situation.



The Project

Nasratpur village is situated in the head reach of the minor Nasratpur which is a part of Sharda Sahayak Canal Irrigation System. Sharda Sahayak Canal Irrigation System is an outcome of Sharda Canal Project (SCP) which was commissioned in 1926 for providing protective irrigation to 15 districts of central and eastern Uttar Pradesh. It emerged from Upper Sharda Barrage located at Banbasa village of Nainital district in Uttaranchal state. However, after four decades of SCP's installation, in late 1960s, there was a dramatic spurt in demand for irrigation owing to the onset of green revolution in India in general and in the command area of Sharda Canal in particular. The study conducted by the irrigation department of UP in 1967 reveals that SCP was able to provide irrigation to only 19 per cent of its command area. Hence a new project, called Sharda Sahayak Pariyojana (SSP), was conceived and formulated in 1968 for providing canal irrigation to those unserved areas of SCP's command.

Being one of the premier river diversion-based irrigation projects of India, SSP provides canal irrigation to 16 districts of central and eastern UP. The 260 kilometer long Feeder Channel of SSP emerges from the banks of Sharda River located in Sharda Nagar village of Lakhimpur Khiri district. Five major canals, viz., Dariyabad, Barabanki, Pratapgarh, Allahabad and Haidergarh arise from the Feeder Channel that provide irrigation to lakhs of farmers in 150 development blocks of 16 districts in UP.

The state of Uttar Pradesh is endowed with abundant water resources both at surface and underground level with vast fertile tract of land; however due to its ever increasing population, the challenges being faced in mostly

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disjointed and unorganized sectoral development and management process in various use sectors e.g. drinking, agriculture, industrial, etc. The state adopted a progressive water policy in 1999 to ensure that the development and management of water resources would meet the overall development perceptions of the state. In order to achieve the objectives of the state water policy, Government of Uttar Pradesh has received a credit from IDA towards the cost of 'Uttar Pradesh Water Sector Restructuring Project' (UPWSRP) through Government of India. The UPWSRP envisaged a comprehensive programme of reforms in management of state water resources in general and irrigation, drainage and ground water in particular. Reconstruction and rehabilitation of Sharda Sahayak Canal Irrigation System was one of the major objectives under the project.

Before the beginning of the rehabilitation and de-silting task under the project, Nasratpur minor along with other minors of the area was facing acute problems of siltation leading to water logging in the fields. Villagers reported that about 50 *bighas* of land of village was waterlogged and only suitable for paddy cropping. During the fieldwork, it was observed that the reconstruction and rehabilitation activities have already been undertaken and water logging has been reduced to some extent. However, villagers have been facing other problems such as complaint of construction of small size outlets which release less water into the channels. Despite such constraints, canal water proved to be crucial for the farmers of the Nasratpur village which has numerical preponderance of scheduled caste who own very small chunks of lands ranging from less than one *bigha* to three *bighas*.

More than two-third of the total population of the village belongs to scheduled castes comprising of chamars, pasis and dhobis and out of them, majority belong to chamar community. Upper caste hierarchy of the village has been marked by the presence of Brahmins. Middle strata comprises of bhurji, murai, nai, lohar and teli. Chamars, dhobis and pasis belong to bottom of the caste hierarchy. Few households belong to mangta, scheduled tribe and they are landless.

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Both canal and tube well are used for watering the fields but mostly canal water is the key source as the village situates in the head reach of the minor Nasratpur and receives water in abundance. The interplay of caste, class and power becomes crucial in access to water from public means, i.e. canal water. Out of 81 cultivators in Nasratpur, 49 cultivators are those who are totally dependent on canal water and all of them own less than or equal to two *bighas* of land. Around 29 per cent of households use both tube wells and canal. This group comprises of big landholders from high and middle caste groups (brahmin and bhurji). Tube well is the source of water for the pasi and chamar communities since their landholdings are out of reach of canal water.² Only about 10 per cent of the households in the village were dependent on tube well. Amongst them, a brahmin household headed by a female was completely dependent on tube well and reported not to receive any water from canal. It reflects persisting gender inequality along with caste inequality in access to water from public source.

Table 1

Source of Water among Cultivators

Caste	No. of Cultivators			
	Total	Canal	Tube well	Both
Brahmins	8	-	1	7
Thakur	1	1	-	-
Bhurji	5		1	4
Murai	5	3	1	1
Pasi	8	6	-	2
Teli	1	1	-	-
Lohar	4	-	-	4
Nai	4	4	-	-
Dhobi	2	2	-	-
Chamar	43	32	5	6
Total	81	49 (60.5)	8 (9.9)	24 (29.6)

III

Village Hierarchy and Access to, Control over the Use of Water

Hierarchy appears as the single most important idea in the Indian culture that pervaded almost every aspect of village life (Appadurai, 1988) and caste divisions are seen to determine and decide all social relations (Majumdar, 1955). Similarly, hierarchy is observed to be the decisive way to have control over water and it is also a determining factor in the distribution of water among various social groups in the study village. Besides, every village has some form of land-based relations where the economic prescriptions based on caste govern the nature of relations between the owners of land and the tenants or the landless labourers. These inter-caste relations constitute a distinct economic or agrarian structure that has often paralleled the social hierarchy prevalent in a village and is seen as the basis of the agrarian social structure. There are three identifiable classes: the land owners, the tenants and the landless labourers. They are reflected as upper caste, the middle caste and the lower caste in the social hierarchy (Thorner, 1955; Gough, 1981; Beteille, 1969 & 1974). Since the village has become the site of state development interventions, this equation has undergone some changes. Abolition of zamindari system and introduction of land reforms during post-independence period reshaped relationships between landlords (traditional zamindars, rich peasants and farmers) and tillers, labourers and poor peasants. The whole process of reshaping of relationships has twofold dimensions. Firstly, land reforms provided land entitlements to the tillers and poor peasants and subsequently, this helped them in realizing their other rights including water rights. Secondly, every peasant enjoys the rights to use canal water by the state.

In Nasratpur, land distribution to lower and middle castes as 'patta' has endowed them with land ownership right. It has not only enhanced their social status in the village but land has also become a very crucial means of subsistence. It has driven the marginal farmers of lower castes to claim their share of canal water. Since ground water is privately owned, land ownership has automatically enabled the farmer to extract ground water over his chunk of land. Thus, it could be argued that land provides the right to water to any farmer.

In stratified societies like India, there is a certain amount of overlap between twin hierarchies of caste and class (Srinivas, 1976; Beteille, 1965; Bagchi, 1982) and it is evident when land ownership is viewed in terms of caste of the owner. For instance, the ownership of land is highly unequal; of the 128 households in the Nasratpur, 47 (36.7%) households are landless and 25 (30.9%) households own only less than one *bigha*. On the other hand, 8 (9.9%) households own almost one-third (29.6%) of total land and all of them are Brahmins. Further, Bhurjis comes next to Brahmins who constitute only 6.2 per cent of village populace but own 20.1 per cent of total land. It is observed that the farmers falling in category of more than 10 *bighas* of land ownership are Brahmins. Murai and Lohar, the two other intermediate castes, own lesser proportion of land in comparison to Bhurji. Chamars, despite being numerically preponderant (53.1%) own only one-fourth of the total land (25.8%). Other lower castes such as Pasi and Dhobi own land less than one *bigha* per household.

Table 2

Caste-wise Distribution of Landholdings

<i>Village Nasratpur</i>			
<i>Caste</i>	<i>Total No. of Households</i>	<i>No. of Land owning HHs</i>	<i>Land Ownership (Bigha)</i>
Brahmins	9	8 (9.9)	47 (29.6)
Thakur	1	1 (1.2)	1.5 (0.9)
Bhurji	6	5 (6.2)	32 (20.1)
Murai	6	5 (6.2)	10 (6.3)
Pasi	12	8 (9.9)	12.5 (7.9)
Dhobi	4	2 (2.5)	1 (0.6)
Lohar	4	4 (4.9)	6 (3.8)
Nai	5	4 (4.9)	1 (0.6)
Teli	2	1 (1.2)	7 (4.4)
Chamar	68	43 (53.1)	41 (25.8)
Mangta (STs)	11	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)
Total	128	81 (100)	159 (100)

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Table3*Landholdings Size and Caste-wise Distribution of Farmers*

<i>Nasratpur</i>						
<i>Caste</i>	<i>Landholding Size in terms of Bighas</i>					<i>Total</i>
	<i><1</i>	<i>1-<2</i>	<i>2-<5</i>	<i>5-<10</i>	<i>=10</i>	
Brahmins	-	-	-	5	3	8
Thakur	-	1	-	-	-	1
Bhurji	-	-	3	2	-	5
Murai	-	-	4	1	-	5
Pasi	-	6	2	-	-	8
Teli	-	-	-	1	-	1
Lohar	-	4	-	-	-	4
Nai	4	-	-	-	-	4
Dhobi	2	-	-	-	-	2
Chamar	19	20	4	-	-	43
Total	25	31	13	9	3	81

The data suggests that reforms have played a very significant role in distribution of land among lower castes. The lower castes including Chamar, Pasi and Dhobi have gained their land rights through land distribution under *patta* scheme. About 40 out of total 43 Chamars have gained land rights through land reforms. Mangta, the only scheduled tribe community in the village are landless. They have no ownership of agricultural as well as residential land. They are staying outside the village on public land owned by Gram Panchayat.

Hierarchy and Everyday Politics of Dominance, Contest, Conflict

and Negotiation

In order to understand the dynamics of control over the access to water in the village, cultivators have been classified into two social groups based on their

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socio-economic status. First social group comprises of upper and intermediate castes viz. Brahmin, Bhurji, Teli, Murai and Lohar (28.9% of total cultivating households) who own the maximum proportion of agricultural land (own 64.2% of total land) whereas second social group comprises of numerically preponderant Chamar and Pasi (63% of total cultivating households) who were landless prior to land reforms and some of them had land up to one *bigha* (own 33.7% of total land). The lower castes have been distributed land under *patta* category.

Abolition of Zamindari system and introduction of land reforms have been significant factors underlying changing landlord-tenant relationship. The intermediate caste groups are also significant beneficiaries of land reforms. The lower castes have been taken into consideration in the village primarily for three reasons: first, they are numerically preponderant; second, their water rights are crucial in view of their subsistence; and third, they have been subjugated since long and they have been dominated by upper and intermediate caste and possibilities of their insurgence and conflict situation.

Distribution of land among the lower castes including Chamar and Pasi in the village provided them land rights and it has made them conscious about their water rights too. Although it was revealed by them that they have been allotted *usar* i.e. sodic land, still they consider it important because of the fact that with improved access to water they can grow at least paddy and wheat for their own consumption. This situation has strengthened their claim of share in canal water. Being poor, most of them also perceive availability of water free of cost or fewer prices from canal for their sustenance.

Chamar and Pasi being owners of small piece of land ranging from >1 to 2 *bighas*, require lesser quantity of water to irrigate their fields and that is fulfilled by the canal water. The conflict situation sometime emerges out of socio-structural set up and is provoked by untimely and irregular supply of water in minor. Canal water is much cheaper than the tube well water. The situation gets perplexed with water intensive crops such as paddy which is the most grown crop in the village. Since they grow only two crops, wheat and

paddy, their water requirement is limited and it is sufficed by rainfall during monsoon. There is a dependency for canal water for the above reasons.

However, the group consisting of Brahmin, Bhurji, Murai and Teli uses water provided by canal and tube well equally. They revealed that insufficiency of canal water for watering the fields and the following reasons are articulated by them. Majority of the landowners in this group own big patches of land ranging from 5 to 20 *bighas*. Landowners owning land more than 5 *bighas* of land mention that there is a shortage of canal water in all the seasons. They grow multiple crops including pulses, oil seeds and vegetables other than paddy and wheat. The commercialization of agriculture is facilitated by the use of HYV seeds and fertilizers and that has also aggravated the water crisis. The untimely and irregular supply of canal water compels them to the use ground water through tube wells or pump sets. It has been observed that the big land owners use more tube well water in comparison to the small land owners whose reliance is more on monsoon.

The presence of canal water in the village has accelerated the agricultural activities on the one hand for higher and intermediate castes and on the other oriented lower caste towards subsistence agriculture. The growth of new employment opportunities with or without migration has also economically supported the village in general and poor in particular to suffice their agricultural needs along with improved access to water. The access to water cannot be separated with the phenomenon of dominance and conflict.

However, the harmful aspects of dependence of farmers on canal water can never be ignored. The major constraints of using canal water is that Nasratpur falls in head reach of the minor and has been waterlogged before the beginning of UPWSRP in 2002. Water logging of the fields has led to mono cropping of paddy in the area. The soil has become saline and less fertile due to seepage in the fields lying adjacent to canal. It was reported by the farmers that about 50 *bighas* of agricultural land was affected from it and was suitable only for paddy cropping. The productivity of wheat has reduced to a great extent. Even after clearing the silt and maintenance of canal under UPWSRP, farmers could ensure the use of such waterlogged fields by retaining the productivity of fields through manure, cow dung and crop residues.

Now, diversified cropping is practised among those who own more than five *bighas* of land constituting only Brahmins and Bhurjis as they can afford tube well water along with canal water. Poor farmers having landholdings of less than 1 to 2 *bighas* which happen to be the Chamars and Pasis mostly grow only wheat and paddy. Thus, lower castes that have been allotted land and are engaged in agriculture are still growing wheat and paddy and they assign two reasons for the same. First, according to them they have been allotted *usar* land which is less fertile and second, even if they want to grow some other crops they have to ensure water which is possible only through tube wells which they cannot afford.

Dominance and Conflict

Socio-cultural constraints, tenurial rights, and disappearance of traditional water systems have led to conflict and competition between different classes of farmers. The causes behind such conflicts are lying with these phenomena; firstly, it is evident from the study that indigenous technology required intensive involvement of manual labour leading to landlord's dependence on labourers and other poor farmers who used to work as agricultural labourers on their fields; secondly, those who did not own wells, the prime source of water, were dependent on these landlords owning wells. This mutual dependence led to formation of informal relationship between landlords and labourers engaged in agriculture and specifically in water extraction and water, and it was based lesser on competition and conflict than on mutual cooperation. This mutual cooperation emergence of exigencies, maintains the order.

Brahmins and Thakurs³ are dominant castes in the village and nearby areas. Srinivas (1966) has noted the dominant castes in rural India and found them very important to understand village social and political life. 'A caste may be said to be "dominant" when it preponderates numerically over the other castes and when it also yields economic and political power in the locality. A large and powerful caste group can be more easily dominant if its position in the local caste hierarchy is not very low' (1959: 18). Soon, he realized that education and occupation are elements of dominance too (Srinivas, 1959: 1).

Later, Oommen (1970) systematically categorized all the attributes of a dominant caste formulated by Srinivas (1959) and Dube (1968) into three categories; ascriptive-land ownership and ritual status, achieved-modern education and occupation, demographic including two aspects; quantitative numerical superiority and qualitative reputation and ability for physical aggression (Pattnaik, 1987: 344).

While looking into the attributes of dominant caste in Nasratpur, both Brahmins and Thakurs, fulfils the criteria of ascriptive-land ownership and higher ritual status, achieved-modern education and occupation and qualitative reputation for physical aggression. However, as far as numerical preponderance of Brahmins and thakurs is concerned, brahmins constitute a very small proportion (3.9%) of village population and there is only one thakur household. However their dominance is not restricted to the village boundaries alone, rather it reached in other villages also.

Scholars have observed that when there is an overlapping between caste and class, the caste conflicts automatically turns into class conflicts (Bagchi, 1982; Betteile, 1969). Domination of rich farmers of upper castes particularly Brahmins and Thakurs is a common phenomenon in the study village. Thakurs are however not a part of village populace but their agricultural fields lie adjacent to the fields of poor and lower castes like Chamar, Pasis and Dhobis. The conflict over access to water is reported by poor low caste farmers in the village.

Conflict has become a part of life due to irregular and untimely supply of water in canal. Although it occurs in both the seasons, rabi and kharif, it is more frequent in kharif season when paddy seedlings are planted in the fields. Paddy is water intensive crop and requires more water than any other crop. Two reasons can be traced operating behind such conflicts and dissatisfaction among the farmers. Farmers complained about slow force of water during the supply which leads to insufficient water. Significantly, *warabandi*⁴ is not implemented, which implies that water is distributed on first come first served basis. This stimulates power play in access to water. Upper castes who eventually own large chunks of land are the dominating groups. Illegal cutting of minor and drains, and construction of bunds by dominant brahmins and

thakurs are frequently encountered by lower castes which lead to conflict among them.

Chamar families mentioned about the domination of a Brahmin family whose one member was Ex-Pradhan of Nasratpur village panchayat. Interestingly, two factions exist among *Chamar* families which constitute the largest proportion of total population. One faction favours the Brahmin family while other faction opposes them. The group favouring Brahmin family mentioned that there is greater availability of water from canal while other group mentioned problems in access to canal water and domination of that family.

Another significant source of conflict in the village is Muslim community which though does not reside in the village but has fields adjacent to the fields of Nasratpur village. Most of their family members have been working in Arab and Middle East countries, and are economically sound due to remittances. They dominate the scene and fight with others for irrigating their fields first. Many Murai families who have land adjacent to them reported that they damage the drains and bully others not to irrigate the fields until their fields are irrigated. The reason behind this conflict is water leakage causing water logging in the fields due to mud drains. It forces them to ultimately depend on canal water and thereby on higher and middle castes since they irrigate their fields first when water is released in the minor. Chamar and Pasi caste groups mention that they have to depend on Brahmins, Thakurs and Bhurjis who own big chunks of land and get water after their fields are fully irrigated. They have to share good relations in terms of patron – client and *malik-mazdoor*. Women of their families work as agricultural labourers for the upper caste in return they receive water on request.

One police case was found to be lodged against dominance of Muslim family. Many Murai and Pasi farmers who had land nearby his fields faced the problem of pressure for irrigating his fields first. Farmers reported that he used to stop the flow of water to their fields and divert water to his fields. But after discussing with another respondent, the same issue was presented in a different way. The reason behind such issue was seepage of water in his fields

due to damaged drains which could ruin his crops. This incidence also indicates the negligence of WUAs of Nasratpur Minor. It was reported that these conflicts are not of such intense nature which can further convert into communal conflicts. However, the cause of harmony between Hindus and Muslims lies in history. Most of the Muslims are converted Muslims and before conversions they were Hindus.

Conflict Resolution: Negotiations and Adjustments

The study to resolve conflict reflects that the first preference among the farmers to resolve the conflict is through mutual cooperation while to back out is found to be the second choice. Legal action is not preferred by anyone and only one case was recorded in the village where canal is the major source of water. Farmers also mentioned that influential and powerful people intervene to resolve the conflict. Similarly, Brahmin families in the village also preferred to resolve the conflict. Technology has played positive role to avoid the conflicts arising out of water leakage due to mud drains between two farmers. The farmers have sought an alternative to the problem through technology. They use PVC pipes to channelize water to the fields.

Role of Water User's Association

Unfortunately, the study finds Water User's Association (WUA) a complete failure in the village. No one is aware about the existence of such a group in the village. The conflict is either resolved mutually or the weaker group waits for its turn. In such a condition, sometimes their fields remain unirrigated and the canal is closed. Sometimes some influential person favoured by both the groups intervenes in the matter and finds some middle path such as letting the weaker section to irrigate his fields in between. The repairing and maintenance task is not taken care of by any authority or the group. Generally, the farmers do the required possible repairing of the canal but on individual basis.

Moreover, elections for membership in WUAs has become an arena of local politics and are characterized with dominance of politically and economically powerful people who belong to dominant caste, thakurs and on reserved seats

for scheduled castes only those are supported who are in their good books. Thus, in turn, forgetting its purpose of ensuring maintenance of canal, ensuring timely and regular supply of water, fair distribution of water among all sections of farmers and conflict resolution has aggravated the problem.

IV

Conclusion

Hierarchy is found to be the basis of access to water. Higher castes are still dominant in the village social structure. Muslim community has made its presence felt due to the remittance. Higher the social, economic and political status, higher the access to education. Brahmins being the most educated in the village are pursuing other economic activities such as service or business along with agriculture. Large landholding with other economic activities and influence in Panchayat has enabled them to exercise the power.

In post-independence period, abolition of zamindari system and introduction of land reforms to an extent reshaped relationships between landlords (traditional zamindars, rich peasants and farmers) and tillers, labourers and poor peasants. The whole process of reshaping of relationships has twofold dimensions. Firstly, land reforms provided the tillers and poor peasants, entitlements to land hence making them conscious about their water rights. Secondly, since the canal was a state development intervention, every peasant now had the rights to use its water.

Social relations have also undergone change due to introduction of modern water access means. There are other underlying social structural changes promoting such changes in social relations. Earlier the relations were based on strong mutual interdependence but now these bonds have loosened their holds. Earlier the relations were based on cooperation which emerged out of inter-caste solidarity and poor caste consciousness among lower castes. Now the relations are based more on competition as every caste claims its share in state development interventions. Diminishing patron-client relationship has also affected the agrarian relations adversely.

Now the lower castes are no longer ready to be exploited by higher or middle castes and middle castes are more powerful in the study village. The relations are more contractual and formal rather than being informal and personal. Generational attachment of one family providing labour services for water and agriculture to another no longer exists. Labourers are driven more towards good wages rather than emotional bonding. Young generation is out migrating and their earnings suffices their daily needs with remittances. Out Migration has opened up employment opportunities for rural poor therefore detaching them from their age old relationships. Those who reside in village manage watering their fields either with the help of family members or with a few labourers, while those who do not stay in village have given their lands for sharecropping to other farmers and this relation between sharecroppers is formal and contractual. Eventually, high caste domination in terms ownership of land and modern water extraction devices and agricultural implements is losing its significance while on the other middle and backward castes are making their presence felt.

The empirical evidence reflects the contestation over water in day to day life as agriculture is the key economic and survival activity. Changing scenario of village on account of various state interventions for land reforms, agriculture and irrigation development has modified the land ownership based social relationship among various categories of farmers. Earlier tenants are now land owners although the size of land is quite small. Canal water which is state owned, ensures equal right to water to each farmer in the command area; making negotiations, contestations, dominance, resistance, mutual cooperation and adjustments as a part of daily routine activity.

! NOTES

1. Several studies have recorded the politics of resistance; however, the present study articulates domination support and adjustment taking place either simultaneously or at different times.
2. Some of the farmers from Chamar and Pasi communities were the beneficiaries of land distribution scheme and they have been allotted land at far off places and thus are inaccessible to canal water.

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3. Single Thakur household which does not have considerable amount of land, but asserts its dominance due to support of nearby Thakur community, which fulfill all the criteria of dominant caste.
4. Warabandi refers to turn wise distribution of canal water among farmers to ensure access to water to each farmer in the command area

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