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# PILGRIMAGE AND SOCIAL DIVISION AT A HINDU MIRACLE SHRINE IN INDIA

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## ABSTRACT

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This article considers whether shared devotion to the same deity in religious pilgrimage is conducive to solidarity across otherwise diverse social groups. It presents qualitative evidence from the author's ethnographic fieldwork on a local manifestation of Hanuman at a temple in the village of Salasar in Rajasthan, India. Starting from the theoretical premise that pilgrimage has been central to the construction of nationwide Hinduism, the article argues that while pilgrimage can indeed intensify solidarity within preexisting groups, it may also exacerbate social divisions between them as they seek to perpetuate or contest unequal socioeconomic privileges in acts of devotion. In the case discussed here, the author identifies several distinct groups who revere the deity but approach devotion from decidedly community-conscious perspectives. The most elite devotional group comprises merchants from distant cities who trace ancestry to the region of the temple and receive privileged treatment there because of their generous donations. Brahmin priests collaborate in this arrangement for their own benefit, in taking commissions for conducting rituals in the god's name to increase the merchants' wealth. Meanwhile, a second group of Brahmins, from various other lineages, is denied the lucrative career of the priests, and so they devise other services for pilgrims that do not impinge on the priests' prerogatives. And lastly, farmers and other non-merchants from the surrounding area have been attracted by the temple's reputation for wealth creation, but remain deeply suspicious of both merchants and Brahmins because of negative past experiences with them. This balkanized devotional public thus plays out rival agendas of community interest as they share in the exaltation of one deity. The article concludes that pilgrimage in a context where it is a group-mediated experience with unequal economic stakes is more likely to reinforce established social divisions than bridge them.

**Keywords:** Pilgrimage; merchants; Brahmins; social capital; India

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Since as far back as the days of the Sanskrit classics, pilgrimage to religious shrines has been reified as a central component of India's religious heritage, building a kind of national identity. From this theoretical starting point, I question the claim that pilgrimage produces social solidarity. Pilgrimage, like many shared religious activities, does indeed have the potential to inculcate values among participants, thereby transcending would-be social boundaries. However, I argue that, at least in some contexts, pilgrimage may

actually strengthen preexisting social difference, inasmuch as pilgrimage can be understood as a social performance that confirms group identity. In that case, pilgrimage may only intensify feelings of solidarity within each preexisting group, thereby entrenching boundaries between them.

To make this argument, in this article I will present empirical evidence from my ongoing qualitative ethnographic fieldwork and archival research on the social dynamics of northwestern Indian "miracle shrines," intermittently conducted since around one decade ago. My overall program of research on miracle shrines far exceeds the scope of this particular article. In the course of that broader fieldwork, I participated in, and recorded, more than 1,000 conversations, entirely in Hindi and varying in length from a few minutes to over two hours. Those conversations, from which this article is largely derived, took place with people of diverse backgrounds met at shrines and farther afield who could comment on miracle deities in northwestern India or deities elsewhere that were linked to them. I did not predetermine conversations with a fixed set of questions, nor did I ever employ research assistants. Rather, I posed questions about shrines, deities, and social conventions in accord with my on-the-spot assessment of each respondent's background and inclinations.

Among the numerous shrines of my research, this article will highlight one in northern Rajasthan that I have often visited, which is associated with a local manifestation of Hanuman called Balaji. Residing in the village of Salasar, Balaji is especially revered by three caste-identified groups: (1) Brahmins, who are in turn bifurcated into two major types, namely Brahmins from a lineage that serve as priests and Brahmins from other lineages, who are not priests, (2) Marwari merchants, and (3) Jat farmers. These several groups comprised most of my respondents by virtue of the fact that they are the dominant demographic presence at Salasar Balaji's shrine. Other groups may also make pilgrimages to Salasar, but their observable presence is relatively small. In their performance of devotion for Balaji, the main groups mentioned reproduce distinct social identities. This divided outcome challenges the theory that pilgrimage produces a more inclusive social identity. In addition, although less emphasized in this discussion, locals of various backgrounds in Salasar itself differentiate themselves from the Brahmins, who arrogate the role of representing the deity to the public.

In Rajasthan, not to mention elsewhere in India, a number of factors have contributed to a sharp rise in the popularity of shrine pilgrimage and deity worship in recent years. Among these factors are the Indian government's policy of economic liberalization, which, in promoting individual economic initiative, has led to the rise of folk deities as resources for obtaining boons of upward mobility. Another factor is Hindu nationalism, which has promoted deities such as Hanuman as representations of resurgent Hindu society (Lutgendorf, 1994). Furthermore, media promotion of deities, such as the famous *Rāmāyaṇa* and *Mahābhārata* serials of the late 1980s, has arguably spurred popular devotion (Lutgendorf, 1990). A widespread public conviction of the need to preserve some semblance of traditional society in modern, globalized India through worshipping deities such as Balaji, a symbol of untrammelled ancient morality, also informs this narrative. And, this era of increasing urbanization in India has spurred a search for efficacious rural deities, particularly in Rajasthan, where ancient morality is imagined to have remained impervious to modernity. Within this milieu, it is not surprising to see that Salasar has become a significant destination since the 1980s.

This article will proceed in two stages. I will first discuss the theoretical basis for considering social solidarity in the study of pilgrimage. Then I will consider the effect of an evolving culture of pilgrimage in Salasar over the last thirty years, to see how well this case matches the theory of pilgrimage as a unifying force in South Asia and elsewhere in the world. In discussing generalizations of pilgrimage, I would like to emphasize at the start that the performance of pilgrimage to be discussed here is grounded in modern life, rather than being simply the latest iteration of a continuous tradition, albeit borrowing some elements of preexisting practice. As I theorize pilgrimage in the case of Balaji, it must be understood as an outcome of recent societal change. Hence, I am taking a sociological perspective, rooted in ethnographic observation.

## 2. MATERIALS AND METHODS FOR THEORIZING SOCIAL CAPITAL IN PILGRIMAGE

In theorizing social solidarity in pilgrimage, I first consider the term "social capital," meaning the networks of relationships that accrue among people who share a common focus of activity. This seems apt for the shared experience of pilgrimage, too. Sociologist James Coleman (1994) brought the term "social capital" into wider use in his comprehensive *Foundations of Social Theory* (pp. 300-321). Although Coleman does not discuss Indian pilgrimage in its own right, he makes a fundamental distinction between individuals and groups—perhaps not surprising, considering his sociological orientation (p. 2ff.). This distinction is pertinent to my own study, inasmuch as in pilgrimage to Salasar we really only see group identities perpetuated, rather than individualized experiences.

As Coleman argues, we never truly make choices as individuals, since our self-interest is overdetermined by a sense of belonging to a group, which constitutes our reservoir of social capital. So, in seeking outcomes that are beneficial to ourselves, whether simply from miracles mediated by priests, as at

Salasar, or in other settings, we draw support from a social surround that privileges certain categories of people. For example, merchants in Salasar expect some ritual privileges that are not accorded to other visitors, due to their higher-profile donor status. This constitutes social capital for merchants. And the Brahmins themselves are an inherently privileged class who vigilantly maintain an insider's intimacy with Balaji. Pilgrimage to a shrine, or in broader terms, devotion to a deity, can thus showcase our obligations to the interests of the group with which we identify, even as we may believe that we arrive at a shrine because of our own needs. As it happens, in the Indian context, people typically arrive with family, friends, or business associates. Therefore, they are constrained within a social identity.

As alluded earlier, pilgrimage in India has been popularly said to engender new social networks. Looking at this phenomenon from a systemic perspective, then, Surinder Bhardwaj's research, as seen in his book, *Hindu Places of Pilgrimage in India* (1973), states that pilgrimage has been a fundamental institution in Indian life since antiquity, and has driven the pan-Indian spread of Sanskritic culture. Drawing from references to shrines described in ancient texts, such as the *Mahābhārata* and the *Purāṇas*, Bhardwaj advances the idea that pilgrimage to shrines facilitates social networks, hence shared outlooks (pp. 201-215). To this end, Bhardwaj has provided a useful model, but his mega-historical analysis of the spread of religious ideas does not really entertain the possibility of persistent social differences when people come together to worship a deity at a single place.

Keeping open the possibility of social difference in pilgrimage, I would underline Irawati Karve's (1962) writing of the interplay between social convergence and divergence in an annual pilgrimage to the shrine of Pandharpur in Maharashtra. There, devotees bring images of deified saints to the shrine of the god Vithoba. Karve finds that social hierarchies, as seen in caste and gender roles, persist alongside a broadly shared public sentiment of devotion to this god. While remarking on pilgrims' shared enthusiasm for the god as they embark on the road, Karve also sees the persistence of discriminatory practices, as in the issue of where Brahmins and Marathis may camp each night, who prepares the food, and when they eat, involving gender ideologies that separate men and women. So, different social networks in pilgrimage also plausibly delineate bounded social identities.

Diversity in pilgrimage may even give rise to outright partisan conflict. Consider, for instance, anthropologist William Sax's (1991) study of pilgrimage to Nanga Parvat, the mountain goddess in the Uttarakhand area of India. He recounts a once-every-twelve-year *yātrā*, a ritualized procession taking an image of the goddess to the mountaintop. In Sax's telling, local groups have opposing views about who gets to carry the deity, and at what points on the journey, and which route to take, almost to the point of inducing the failure of the *yātrā* itself. Not surprisingly, public ritual events, a time when socially different groups are more likely to comingle, produce a greater risk for the exacerbation of long-simmering complaints. This is reminiscent of the situation that I am documenting in Salasar.

From another angle, James Lochtefeld (2010: 123-142) has discussed the local political economy of *paṇḍās*, or Brahmin ritualists, who maintain long-term relationships with visitors to the shrines of Hardwar. The *paṇḍās* keep elaborate genealogical records of their clients, which allows them to tailor their rituals for clients' ancestors and also maintain their indispensable role in ensuring privileged pilgrims' genealogical continuity. Therefore, in considering pilgrimage, we must also keep in mind that patronage relations and economic advantage are of central importance in such arrangements, and those who do not support this protocol will be disfavored.

In the situation that I am documenting from my fieldwork, community bonds are already established before embarking on pilgrimage, so the journey simply reinforces that group mentality. Family and friends go as a corporate entity. Granted, one could contend that pilgrimage to some of the most famous Hindu pilgrimage sites in India actually builds a consensus of the nation as a network of holy places, and in that sense each individual potentially embraces a consciousness of that expanded domain. But could this actually construct a singular devotional public? I think not in many instances, considering that most Indians go on such journeys in a social bubble with only likeminded people.

So, my theoretical aim is to investigate how pilgrimage facilitates the accentuation of distinct groups. And, while pilgrimage to a miracle shrine may not obliterate social boundaries between groups, who is to say that it does not deepen some kind of social capital within the bounded group itself? Discerning this effect is what is at stake in this study. Of course, dissension between groups will persist as long as the devotional public perceives the ritual structure mediating a deity as elevating one clique, caste, or ethnic group over others. As I will discuss in the following section, differing socioeconomic statuses are at the core of accommodations and contestations over pilgrims' participation at shrines, since those who have an economic interest in devotion to a deity will resist challenges to that system.

## 3. DISCUSSION OF SALASAR BALAJI AND THE PERSISTENCE OF SOCIAL DIVISION

Salasar Balaji's temple exemplifies the social effects of a strongly entrenched priestly hierarchy. The Brahmin priests state that they oversee charitable activities, such as providing free meals for the local public on some occasions and overseeing a *gośālā*—a refuge for neglected cows—under merchant patronage. However, these benevolent actions do not altogether erase the perception among locals that these Brahmins have greater economic resources than others, due to opportunities that come with their service to patrons. Moreover, there is a major distinction between more privileged devotees, such as merchants or *baniyās*, arriving from cities throughout India, and those pilgrims who come, often on foot, from the surrounding countryside—largely non-elite Jat farmers and some others of non-mercantile backgrounds. The upshot of such a distinction, not to mention a division within the local Brahmin community itself, is a somewhat balkanized devotional public, although they broadly agree on the efficacy of Balaji himself.

As I alluded earlier, the Brahmins of Salasar are actually a diverse group, consisting of (1) those who have the hereditary right to represent Balaji—the *pujārīs*, or priests—and (2) those who pursue a Brahmin livelihood by some other means. The priests, who belong to the Dadhich clan, trace their lineage to a local woman who was the sister of a *sant*, or religious hermit, named Mohan Das. According to the priests' story of Balaji's appearance, as also told in local handbooks, the *sant* was a devout worshipper of Hanuman.[1] One day, in 1754 CE, the god appeared in front of the home of the *sant*'s sister in the guise of a mendicant seeking a meal, but the sister initially was too busy to feed him, so the mendicant departed. Realizing that this was Hanuman himself, Mohan Das pursued him and persuaded him to return to his sister's home. This sequence of events is much repeated in murals and other depictions in the vicinity of Balaji's temple, reminding visitors of the close relationship between the priests and the deity.

The narrative continues that a Jat farmer then fortuitously discovered an image of Hanuman in a field. The image was soon appropriated by the local Rajput king, and, through a series of miracles, eventually installed in a shrine at the present site. In recognition of Mohan Das's faith, Hanuman deemed that he, as Balaji, would henceforth be worshipped at this site in the visage of the *sant* himself rather than in his familiar simian form. Moreover, he added, the *sant*'s descendants through his sister, who had married a Dadhich, would have the exclusive right to mediate the god to the public. Hence, this image was at some point painted to appear as a large bearded face (with not much indication of a body), resembling the bearded *sant*. The Brahmins periodically repaint it, and the original appearance of the underlying image is not really known.

From this story, we can see that there are potential benefits in belonging to Balaji's priestly class. The temple itself, which has been greatly expanded in the last 25 years as a result of donations from devotees—primarily merchants—is essentially the domain of the priests and their privileged guests. The priests' young sons play in a room in the back, while the men sit in an alcove as they watch the coming and going of devotees. Certain devotees, typically merchants, often approach the priests for advice on business or other life concerns, and they even call them at all hours by telephone for similar guidance. The Dadhich women are rarely seen in public, except at a few ritual events, so social solidarity in the temple setting comprises male Brahmins and their favored male patrons.

Most devotees state that the Brahmins perform various special rituals at the temple for their *baniyā* patrons in return for generous patronage. These rituals, ostensibly following standard Sanskritic practice, nonetheless adapt that tradition to emphasize Balaji's local cultural significance, which the merchants highly value, since they trace their descent to this region. For instance, *cūrmā*, a Rajasthani sweet, is the preferred offering to the god, more so than standard pan-Indian sacralized substances, and devotional songs are sung in a Rajasthani style with local vocabulary. This happens in the temple on most evenings, after the *āratī*, or devotional service, has been completed. Anyone may join in the singing, but for the most part it is local Brahmins, especially the Dadhiches, who know the words and vigorously lead, thereby cementing their connection with the deity.

The Brahmins of the Dadhich clan oversee many of the shops surrounding the temple, by agreement with the temple's administrative committee. They rent these spaces for miniscule fees that were supposedly set long ago, when prices were much lower, and they sell religious articles, food, and other items at contemporary prices geared to upscale urban visitors. It is said that if they transfer the right to rent a spot to someone else (potentially a non-Brahmin), then the new renter will have to pay the current rate, which is much higher; this supports the retention of businesses in the hands of their traditional operators. Further from the temple, Salasar has a market that is oriented to local needs, but the pilgrimage industry is the real center of economic activity, and is obviously central to the Dadhich clan. This kind of caste solidarity is not unusual in

[1] Babb (1999: 3-8) fully recounts and analyzes this story, although he does not address Salasar's subsequent history or present-day situation.

the Rajasthani context, but I wish to emphasize its continued entrenchment in the context of large-scale pilgrimage to Salasar.

The dominance of the Dadhiches in the pilgrimage industry is evident in the prosperous-looking homes that they have built in the heart of the village. As local property owners, the Dadhiches, and to some extent other groups who own land, have benefited from the sharp rise in property values with the influx of pilgrimage. During my time in Salasar, I was shown new condominium developments incongruously situated amidst desert scrub at the edge of the village. This new construction capitalizes on merchant devotees' interest in establishing residences where they can stay during their regular visits to the temple. They make those visits to maintain their upward mobility, as ensured through special ritual services that they commission from the Brahmins. Pilgrimage as an economic undertaking, both for pilgrims and those who serve them, thus reverberates throughout Salasar.

Meanwhile, the non-Dadhich Brahmins, whom I often encountered in Salasar Balaji's temple, had generally moved to Salasar from the surrounding region after the establishment of Dadhich supremacy. They have consequently had to negotiate a livelihood acceptable in Brahmin society that does not impinge on the domain of the Dadhiches. Some have taken up Ayurvedic medicine or other business pursuits, and others have found an economic niche in leading pilgrims at the temple in daily sing-along musical recitations of *Sundarkāṇḍ*, the part of the *Rāmāyaṇa* epic that describes Hanuman's famous exploits. It is said that reciting this chapter will bring good fortune to participants, so this daily recitation for pilgrims has become popular in Balaji's temple, in line with the overall expansion of Hanuman-centric worship in much of Indian public life within the last thirty years. These non-Dadhich Brahmins receive fees in return for leading these recitations, which are targeted to moneyed merchants. The non-Dadhich Brahmins thus remain distinct from the priests in the way they cater to pilgrims.

Although all devotees are officially welcomed in Salasar Balaji's temple, Jats and other non-elite visitors grumble that the Brahmins give special privileges to the moneyed faithful. An example would be letting favored devotees, locally called "VIPs," into the temple through a special short-cut entrance during festival days when the entry line is long. Throughout the inside of the temple, silver and gold plaques with inscriptions indicate donations from devotees, predominantly listing two addresses, one local and one in a distant city. Such inscriptions unambiguously point to the regime of urban mercantile patronage that dominates this temple. The local address indicates the donor's ancestral home in the area, while the distant urban address refers to their current abode. Such inscriptions point to patrons' commitment to attaining the miraculous assistance of this deity.

It is thus a common perception in the surrounding region that Salasar Balaji's temple is particularly popular among affluent merchants, even though people of average means, hopeful of good fortune, do come in even greater numbers. This viewpoint of privilege at the temple arises from the observation of its sumptuous transformation in the last 30 years due to mercantile patronage. The temple was rather small and less visited until around 1990, when the merchants, also commonly known as Marwaris, because of their origin in this part of India (Marwar historically being part of Rajasthan), started to more emphatically acclaim Balaji as a superlative provider of miracles. The Marwaris had been leaving this part of Rajasthan for greater economic opportunities in cities across India since colonial times, but in recent decades they have found new interest in Balaji and certain other folk deities as lineage protectors.[2] This seems to be the latest iteration of a longstanding Marwari preoccupation with Rajasthan as their cultural homeland, now updated as a celebration of local manifestations of the gods Rama, Krishna, and Hanuman, in line with the rise of Hindu activist, discourse focused on these deities across India since the 1980s.

Marwaris' heightened reverence for Balaji and similar Rajasthani folk gods of miracles has prompted them to form numerous exclusively Marwari devotional organizations for these deities within the last 30 years, in cities with well-established Marwari communities. Since the start of my research, I have attended many largescale devotional song events or *jāgraṇs*, hosted by such groups in their cities. The execution of these activities, involving lavish decorations, famous singers commissioned for the occasion, and even dramatic reenactments of Hanuman and other deities, makes clear that Marwaris value an aesthetic of all-out splendor, anticipating that the deity they revere promises a prosperous life. Moreover, Marwaris' status as generous patrons in Salasar itself substantiates their rhetoric that the deity is the root of their prosperity.

Marwaris had long been known for promoting business associations and philanthropy in cities such as Kolkata and Mumbai, but that tradition morphed into a more definitively religious idiom in the 1980s. Since that time, Marwaris' deity-centered organizations have arguably assumed primary responsibility for hosting largescale Marwari-centric social events, based on shared devotional activity, throughout their pan-Indian urban diaspora. These grand devotional events seem to have largely superseded the more secular family-and-

[2] Although never mentioning Balaji, Hardgrove (2004: 247-284), discusses the Marwari affection for another folk deity, Rani Sati, in this part of Rajasthan, and the way that this devotion substantiates the Marwari idealization of themselves as being descended from Rajasthan.

business occasions of former times. Thus, a trajectory of increasingly emphatic Marwari identification with shrines such as Salasar can be discerned in social developments in recent decades. If one were to ask what motivates Marwaris to remain so committed to Rajasthan, it is also useful to note that they have a pervasive reputation among the native populations in their adopted cities for being miserly and insular in their thinking, which their romanticized Rajasthani past counters with a narrative of premodern dignity (Hardgrove, 2004).

I will round out this discussion with a look at the ethnic group known as Jats. These devotees, from a wide area of northwestern India, have been drawn to Salasar by stories of Balaji's efficacy in miraculously bringing wealth to merchants. I often had the opportunity to stay in Jat-dominant villages during fieldwork, in addition to conversations with Jats in Salasar itself. Interestingly, rather than making financial donations, as is typical of merchants, Jats demonstrate their faith through public physical acts, such as walking on foot for many kilometers to Salasar and then performing repeated prostrations on the road leading up to Balaji's temple. They do this as a demonstration of faith so as to induce miracles from the god. The Jats typically feel alienated from both the Brahmins and Marwaris, due to their perception of those two groups' economic collusion and Jats' exclusion from such privileges. Jats are also suspicious of moneylenders, such as Marwaris, who allegedly charge harsh rates to farmers in need.

An example of Jat ambivalence towards Salasar's ritual regime is the allegation brought up by some Jats that the image of Balaji in Salasar is a "duplicate" foisted on the public, while the real one, which is of course much more efficacious, is kept in a sunken niche open only to high-paying visitors. The priests deny this allegation, and in all likelihood, the real situation may not be the way Jats make it out to be, but the story illustrates Jats' sense of grievance. From such narratives, we can say that preexisting social boundaries may be reproduced in the context of public pilgrimage. Notwithstanding their alienation from the priests and their patrons, the Jats have adopted Hanuman, and locally Balaji, as a representation of Jat identity itself. Jats describe themselves in heroic, manly terms, much like Hanuman himself, which no amount of discord in Salasar will undermine.

A Jat ethic of physical culture, symbolized by all-powerful Hanuman, is seen in their famous zest for athletics, military service, and in long-distance pilgrimage on foot to sites such as Salasar.[3] By contrast, Marwaris always arrive from their distant cities by vehicle. During the Navaratri festival in the fall season, Salasar becomes a display of Jat physicality, as thousands of foot pilgrims, mostly young men hoping for miracles for success in education, employment, and other aspirations in the near future, converge on this temple to make wishes to this most esteemed manifestation of Hanuman. Or, they repay vows made earlier to walk here as a demonstration of faith in return for a wish that has already come true. During the festival, the Marwaris and Brahmins are present, but spend much of their time in the temple and in their rest houses, rather than colorfully demonstrating their faith on the streets like the Jats. Hence, different groups create space for their respective group identities in performances of devotion.

Furthermore, at the time of Navaratri, Jat villagers organize committees dedicated to setting up roadside shelters with food for the main *yātrā*. This level of social organization is in effect an extension of the activism that is already pervasive in Jat life, as witnessed in their much-publicized campaigns in Haryana, Rajasthan, and elsewhere, to win a more advantageous position in government-instituted caste reservations or affirmation action. In this era of heightened public devotion for miracle deities, worshipping Balaji essentially provides an alternative means to government programs for obtaining a better future. And so, from Jat pilgrimage and preceding vignettes, I suggest that social solidarity is indeed an important factor in pilgrimage to Salasar, and it tends to reenforce self-consciously distinct group identities.

## 4. CONCLUSION

From this study of pilgrimage at a single temple, I suggest that social solidarity accrued in pilgrimage does not really coalesce in some kind of organic, unhindered way. Rather, it is produced within, is shaped by, and reinforces preexisting social relationships. In the Indian context, as elsewhere, the configurations of social capital are diverse, and so this article cannot claim to represent all varieties of pilgrimage, but only one instance where social groups are already well defined. A plausibly different model of social identity in pilgrimage could be exorcism temples—common in Rajasthan—many of which are dedicated to manifestations of Hanuman, too. At those temples, people tend to approach the deity less with an awareness of group identity but rather out of some dire personal need arising from spirit-induced stress. In that kind of situation, one's group identity might be less consequential than one's personal relationship to a charismatic medium who may be orchestrating the exorcism.

[3] Although no scholar has yet specifically discussed Jat pilgrimage to Salasar, Chowdhry (2013) has nonetheless given much attention to Jats' embrace of physical culture and other aspects of a masculinist ideology.

As Salasar's priests tell us, Balaji simply does not treat problems of demons and ghosts, hence no exorcism can take place there. And, as the priests underline, no mediums—potential rivals in providing divine ritual services—are allowed to perform any sort of exorcistic activities in Salasar. Hence, ritual privilege is maintained in Salasar, and this informs social stratification. Marwari merchants give money as their preferred mode of devotion. But others, such as the Jats, perform their devotion in physical terms that sustain their ideology of social solidarity in their own way. And, as noted earlier, the Brahmins themselves do not constitute a single group but also divide between priests and non-priests, each of which maintains a separate economic domain. With these kinds of divisions in mind, I have argued that in this case the performance of pilgrimage strengthens preexisting group boundaries of identity.

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