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Cultural and Structural History: Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries

In the period 1760 to 1790, the British in India had to find means by which they could control the territories and the people who had become their subjects. In the middle of the twentieth century, it is hard to realize how quickly and with what little experience the British devised a system of colonial rule. In a few years, the British in India changed from being a trading company—whose officials were mainly devoted to keeping commercial accounts, inspecting trade goods, and directing and negotiating with their Indian brokers and employees regarding trade matters—to having to rule 40 million subjects in the Andhra Coast—the Northern Circars, acquired in 1766—Bengal, Bihar, and Orissa, for which they took administrative responsibility in 1765. Throughout British rule in India, natives of Britain never accounted for more than 0.25 percent ✓ of the vast population of the subcontinent.

The central questions continually faced by the British in India were how to develop a political-military system they could use, leaving much of the actual day-to-day functioning of the government in Indian hands, and how to devise successful means of supervising the activities of these Indian subordinates.

The first problem the British faced was the collection of revenue. — They needed a secure financial base to support their armed forces, their own administrative costs, and the costs of their commercial activities. The British started with the principles of assessment and collection of revenue that the Mughals had developed in northern India. The first British effort was to find individuals who would be responsible for the payment of the land revenue, assessed on the basis of what previously,

under Indian rule, had been collected from local areas. The responsibility for payment of revenue rested on a whole series of individuals and groups whose rights were variously based. Some revenue payers based their rights on conquest or on clearing the land, others on royal grant; others were tax farmers who had rented from the government the right to pay the revenue for the difference between what they collected from tillers and intermediaries and what they were obligated to pay to the state.

The first major decision, which became one of the bases of British revenue policy, was made in Bengal in 1793 when approximately 3,000 individuals of widely diverse rights and varied origins were by law made the *zamindars* (landlords) of Bengal. The British, only partially comprehending the significance of their decision, treated these *zamindars* as if the legal rights they established were like those of English landlords, including the right to sell, mortgage, and transmit through inheritance the titles to their lands. The sole responsibility of the *zamindars* was prompt and full payment of the revenue demanded by the government; failure on the part of a landlord to pay led to the sale of his lands to another landlord who claimed he could pay the revenue. The legal change involved was considerable, because it completely ignored the previous relationships among tiller, intermediaries of various kinds, and the state.

Until the coming of the British and the establishment of their rule in India, control of land was much less significant than control of people who worked on the land. In pre-British times, the land controller was a controller of people. Land, of course, was crucial to the social order: one needed land to support followers who, in turn, were needed to protect one's interests against other land controllers and the state. As discussed above, the pre-British military system was partially based on the need of the state to use the followers of local land controllers for its own army and of the local land controllers to have enough power to collect their share of the produce from the tillers. The British developed a military system directly under their control, recruited, trained, organized, and paid for by (and for) the state. They could therefore eliminate all organized local military power within the domains of the local land controllers. Although local land controllers still maintained "strong-arm men," either members of their lineages or employees, they could be used only within their own lands and did not pose a threat to British domination. In every area the British brought under control, they forced the disbandment of local military forces and systematically destroyed the forts and fortified houses of local land controllers. Unlike their predecessors, the British monopolized all legitimate use of force; and although, in actual functioning, landlords continued to use direct force to maintain

their revenues and keep internal foes and the tillers in subjugation, this exercise was extra- or at best quasi-legal. With land becoming an entity that could be bought, sold, and frequently sold for arrears of revenue and, with the tie between local military forces and land control broken, a new set of relations between the person or group designated as the landlord and the state, on the one hand, and between the tillers and new kinds of intermediaries, on the other, began to develop.

Another factor that began to affect the rural social structure under the British was the expansion of agricultural production for sale in markets. In some respects Indian agriculture has always had a commercial component. India has supported cities and craft production, courts and luxury consumption, as well as a range of service functions, both rural and urban, all requiring food and raw materials derived from agriculture. In pre-British times, grain had to be supplied to cities and towns for both the military and the government. A wide range of other agricultural products, such as sugar, tobacco, and spices, were sold widely. Cotton and jute products were needed for weaving, indigo and other agricultural products for dye stuffs. Under the British, the commercial component in Indian agriculture increased markedly by the end of the nineteenth century. Some of the increase was in plantation agriculture, such as tea and coffee production. The direction of plantations was in the hands of British owners; the profits went to British firms. Cotton in western India was grown for export to supply British mills. Grains, such as wheat grown in the Punjab, were exported to Europe and distributed to Indian markets. Rice production rose in the Delta regions of the south, and sugar became an increasingly important product in northern India during the nineteenth century.

Economic historians continue to debate the effects of this commercialization of India's agriculture and the question of who derived benefit from the expansion of agriculture in the nineteenth century. Some claim that all the benefit and profit went to the British, who were exploiting the Indian agriculturalists. In fact, some argue that changes in the agrarian structure devastated the countryside, leaving the tiller prey to small groups of rapacious landlords who drained everything from the land. It has also been argued that Britain was using India primarily as a market for British manufactured goods, mostly cotton textiles manufactured in England, and that the British destroyed the widespread craft industries of the countryside. This destruction caused the rise of landless laborers, resulting in a large pool of cheap labor that eventually depressed the income of all the agriculturalists.

The question of what happened to the agrarian structure of India, both in terms of its social and its economic organization, has just begun

to be studied empirically, with the quantification necessary to an understanding of what happened, distinct from what people thought had happened. No single set of generalizations can cover the complex changes that took place. It is more than likely that in different regions there were different patterns of change, depending on the nature of land control, the local ability to increase land under cultivation, the nature of the tax structure that the British established in different regions, and the regional potential for the development of cash crops. The nature of the rural social structure under the British has been further obscured by the British administrators' involvement with the legal structure of landholding and their constant attempts to regularize or change relations that were centered on land by law and administrative regulation. Historians have tended to follow the British records, focusing on questions of changing policy and law in the study of the land structure of nineteenth- and twentieth-century India and assuming that the legal categories, such as *zamindar* (landlord), *pattidar* (co-sharer in a corporate body that stands as the landlord), and *ryot* (peasant proprietor), defined groups or strata in the rural society. Similarly, in legal categorization of various tenants, it has been assumed that the origin of the tenant made significant sociological differences.

In the latter part of the nineteenth century, there was also great concern about the social origins of those who obtained the legal rights as landlords. Everywhere except in southern India, it was assumed that there were ancient aristocrats who, by royal ancestry or long-term status, traditionally had been overlords of the soil. There were also traditional cultivators and other groups, such as merchants, writing castes, and Brahmins, who, although they may have been part of the rural social order, did not have landlord or cultivating rights. Much legislation, particularly in the Punjab and in Bombay, was concerned with the "protection" of the ancient aristocracy and the cultivators.

Stated in sociological terms, the legal categories of landlord and tenant and the kinds of landlords or the assumed origins, ancient or parvenu, are less important than an understanding of the local pattern of political control and dominance and the actual distribution of control of the product of the soil. In most parts of India, including the south, where there was supposed to be small-scale peasant proprietorship (*ryowari* ownership), much the same pattern in distribution of the legal rights of land ownership was characteristic of the late nineteenth century in India. At one end of the scale in the distribution of legal rights was a small group of landlords having the legal rights over a third to a half of the lands and, at the other, a very large group of landlords holding rights over the rest of the land.

For example, in Madras Presidency in 1892, 804 landlords "owned" 38 percent of the land, but only slightly less than 3 million others had landlord rights over about 61 percent of the land.¹ What does the distribution of land rights in this situation actually mean? How different are the social structures of villages that are part of large estates held by one holder and those in which there are many holders? Are the villages of small holders richer or poorer? Are villages where there is one landlord, usually living in a town, more egalitarian? Is there a different pattern of political structure at the village level in the two situations? We do not know the answers to these questions.

It has been assumed, but not demonstrated quantitatively, that there are marked differences between villages dominated by powerful landholders and villages made up of small peasant proprietors. From the studies of anthropologists during the 1940s and 1950s, it seems that there is not necessarily any significant difference in social, political, and economic structure in the two situations if one takes the perspective of the village and the villager rather than that of the city and town, or the large-scale landlord and the administrator and politician. In the late nineteenth century, as in the middle of the twentieth, the understanding of the social, political, and economic structure of rural society was based, not on a distribution of legal rights, but on a whole series of other variables: the size of the village, the number and kinds of castes found in it, the relation to transportation and marketing facilities, the crop pattern, the presence or absence of large-scale craft production, and the ecological niche occupied by the village. These variables seem to affect the structure of villages more than whether the landlord rights are vested in one person or many.

Who were the powerful landlords, where did they live, how did they control their lands and the people on them, and what was their style of life? These landlords tended to be urban-dwelling, and although they maintained a house, or houses, within their estates, they tended not to be present within their areas. They collected their share of the income from the land in various ways. In Bengal, as well as in some other regions, a system of intermediary landlords grew up. The revenue demanded by the state in Bengal, Bihar, Orissa, and eastern Uttar Pradesh was fixed in perpetuity by the British. In these areas, those who held the position of tiller or supervisor of tillers often had their rents fixed, not by law but, by custom. Various other limits were set on the amount that cultivators had to pay to those with the legal status of landlord. In return for a fixed annual payment, the landlords often sold to others

¹ B. H. Baden-Powell, *Land Systems of British India*, 3 (Oxford, 1892), 142.

the right to collect the rents, either for a period of time, or absolutely and in perpetuity. They were thus freed from any responsibility, effort, or expense in the collection of the rent and the payment of the revenue to the state. In turn, these intermediaries often sold all or part of their rights. In other instances, landlords employed agents to collect rents and to forward the rents to their headquarters.

In most areas where there were large-estate landlords, no matter whether they collected their share of the income through agents or through formal or informal sale or lease of their landlord rights, the crucial questions were who had actual control and dominance over the tillers, and how was the income from agriculture divided. Some British officials, many urban-based Indian nationalist leaders, and historians, often visualize a situation where one landlord, and perhaps his relatives and employees, lord it over a multitude of depressed, spiritless, rent-racked "peasants," all of whom are at a severe level of poverty and powerlessness in the local social and political system. There were undoubtedly some places where this was the situation; however, in many or most places, it was not. Very often, no matter what their legal status, rural groups were the actual controllers of the tillers. In some places they were the descendants of the previous land-controlling lineages. Although their legal rights may have been sold off, as they frequently were in the nineteenth century, they still controlled the tillers and retained considerable land, at fixed rates as permanent tenants. Often these former holders were in a very good position, because of their numbers and their control over the tillers and others in the village, to fend off and often immobilize the powerful landholder, who faced the choice of a continuous *sub rosa* kind of warfare in the villages, or coming to some kind of compromise with the established controllers of the tillers of the soil. It was this latter course that seems most often to have occurred.

✓ In most of India and through much of the nineteenth century, both agricultural production and prices paid for agricultural produce rose; the amount of income derived from agriculture therefore increased. Although in some parts of India the revenue structure was adjusted every ten years to account for the rise in prices, and in much of India the pitch of the revenue demand was generally high—frequently as much as 50 percent of the value of the assumed production—nonetheless, there seems to have been relative prosperity in much of rural India until the last decades of the nineteenth century, when the agricultural population increased to the point where available land was fully occupied.

In the large *zamindari* areas there were two or more levels of land and cultivator control: the level of the large *zamindars* who were absentee landlords, a level of their employees or subholders, and a level

in which there were large permanent tenants or small landlords who had effective control over others in the rural social structure. In every part of India from the late nineteenth century and until the present, it is the substantial peasant, the man who may have had 20 to 100 acres under his control, who was and is the key figure in the social structure rather than the very big *zamindar* or "royal" personage with *zamindar*-like rights over a territory or domain.

Frequently, through kinship and marriage, these substantial peasants were linked in lineages or segments of caste groups, and their kin and caste mates lived in surrounding villages. They were often in a state of enmity toward their fellows and competed for economic and social status with them. But they could unite in opposition to the landlord and his agents and could continue to dominate those lower than they in the caste hierarchy. Professor M. N. Srinivas has called such groups dominant castes.² Dominant castes are castes within local areas that control much of the land, have fairly large numbers, and are relatively high in the caste hierarchy. In the twentieth century, their rural dominance has been buttressed frequently by their connection to local administrators and to local political leaders and through taking advantage of new educational opportunities leading to urban incomes, part of which flows back into the rural areas.

These castes exercised and continue to exercise their dominance in a number of ways. They control others in the villages through structured systems of dominance, such as the *jajmani* system, in which land and its products are redistributed in return for services, both ritual and non-ritual. But it is the land and the land controller who are at the center of the redistribution. The dominant castes frequently have direct control, through monopoly, of access to land for cultivation and building. The relations between the land controller and the actual land user are not only contractual but often involve leader and follower relations in local political matters. The dominant castes can use their control of land to bind others to them as followers. Frequently, the land controllers, or dominant caste, provide credit both in cash and in seed grain for food to others in the village. The land controllers frequently exercise judicial functions in settlement of local disputes among those below them in the village. Their dominance, in the final analysis, is based on and can be exercised through their application of violence in the form of beatings, crop cuttings, and physical dispossession of land and houses. Given their better access to the local police and local officials, the dominant caste can usually be assured of relative immunity from legal sanctions on the part of local officials.

² M. N. Srinivas, "The Dominant Caste in Rampura," *American Anthropologist*, 61 (February, 1959), 1-16.

Almost half of the land area of pre-Partition India was known as the Princely States, not administered directly by the British Crown in India but nominally the domains of princes and chiefs. The 562 Princely States, which covered 45 percent of the land, included 24 percent of the population. The states varied greatly in their size and importance. The largest was Hyderabad, and other important ones were Jammu and Kashmir, Mysore, Gwalior, and the larger states of Rajputana. Much of central India, Gujarat, and highland Orissa was divided into many small states. There were some differences in agrarian structure among the Princely States, as in British India. There were many Royal Estates in the larger Princely States, and there was a tendency within the Princely States to continue to use land as prebendial domains in order to reward service to the state and to pay salaries. There was also usually a connection between the land controllers and the royalty, with a tendency for kin and caste fellows of the royal family to be land controllers. In effect, the pattern in the Princely States was an extreme form of the pattern found in British India.

Since the beginning of the nineteenth century, when Charles Metcalf, a British official attached to the Mughal Court in Delhi, described Indians as living in "Village Communities" which "are little Republics, having nearly everything they want within themselves, and almost independent of any foreign relations,"³ a well-developed picture of the nature of the Indian village has spread widely. In this view, the village was economically self-sufficient, producing the goods and services it needed and consuming what it produced. There was division of labor among the cultivator, the artisan, and village servants based on shares of the agricultural product. There were few, if any, landless laborers.⁴ The village, with a council (*panchayat*) made up of the elders of the village directing its social and political life, was assumed to be self-governing and self-regulating. This view of the idyllic premodern Indian village is a myth. No systematic evidence has been brought forward to support these assumptions about the village, and most who hold this view of the Indian village continue to quote and refer to the same few reports by early British officials, such as Metcalf, and a few travelers.⁵ Three in-

³ Originally written in 1830 and quoted by Percival Spear, *Twilight of the Mughals: Studies in Late Mughal Delhi* (Cambridge, 1951), p. 117.

⁴ See Surendra J. Patel, *Agricultural Labourers in Modern India and Pakistan* (Bombay, 1952), pp. 32-34.

⁵ For a discussion of the myth, see M. N. Srinivas and Arvind Shah, "The Myth of the Self-sufficiency of the Indian Village," *Economic Weekly*, 12 (1960), 1375-78; Louis Dumont, "The Village Community from Munro to Maine," *Contributions to Indian Sociology*, 9 (1966), 67-89; and Dharma Kumar's careful study of agricultural labor in southern India in the nineteenth century, *Land and Caste in South India* (Cambridge, 1965).

Intellectual-cultural strands have gone into the myth and its perpetuation. The first is the romantic and evolutionary myth of some of the British officials, who, early in the nineteenth century, saw India as they wished to see their own past—gentry surrounded by happy peasants. Grafted onto this, in the middle of the nineteenth century, were notions about the evolution of society from communal property-holding groups to private ownership; since India was backward, it clearly must have had this older form of property-holding organization and society. The second strand is Marxist, which again emphasizes the organic unity of the interrelationships of hand weaving and hand tilling. Marx believed that British imperialism would inevitably destroy this kind of society and economy and that the destruction was a necessary stage in the development of Indian society.⁶ The third strand in the development and maintenance of the myth is contributed by Indian nationalists. They saw pre-British India more or less idyllically, with happy peasants and craftsmen in their villages, with no strife, no poverty, no domination by landlords, and on the verge of industrial development based on the craft industries. It was British imperialism and its goal of exploitation of the Indian masses that account for the poverty and landlord domination of the rural social structure we see in the twentieth century.

The only way we can learn something about the structure of Indian villages in the early nineteenth century is to study actual villages on the basis of surviving revenue and other records. There are extant only a few detailed, published accounts of particular villages at this time. The most complete is that by Thomas Coats, an East India Company surgeon who collected material on the village of Lony, outside of Poona. His description of the village was based on work done in 1819, two years after the area came under British control. Table 8 is an enumeration of the population according to occupation, in July, 1819.

Most obvious is the heavy dependence on agriculture for livelihood in the village, with 81 percent of the population directly dependent on it (hereditary cultivators, 39 percent; cultivators on lease, 29 percent; Mahars, who acted as agricultural laborers, 8 percent; hired servants and slaves, who were also agricultural laborers, 5 percent). There were eighty-four families of cultivators (all of the Kunbi caste) of which 50 had either proprietary or customary shares of the land. The Kunbis were clearly the dominant caste in the village in terms of numbers, landholding, and the fact that the village *Patels* (headmen) were Kunbis.

Thirty-five families, all of whom were owner-cultivators, were of one lineage, that of the headmen. They claimed to be descendants of

⁶ For Marx on India, see Daniel Thorner, "Marx on India and the Asiatic Mode of Production," *Contributions to Indian Sociology*, 9 (1966), 33–66.

TABLE 8
The population of Lony, July 1819

Occupational group	No. of families	Males	Females	Children	Total	Percent-age of population
Hereditary cultivators	50	55	73	89	217	39
Cultivators on lease	34	54	56	52	162	29
Brahmans, priest and accountant	3	6	5	10	21	4
Carpenter	1	1	1	2	4	1
Washerman	1	1	2	...	3	1
Barber	1	1	2	...	3	1
Potter	1	1	1	4	6	1
Silversmith	1	1	1	2	4	1
Dresser of idols	1	1	1	2	4	1
Water carrier	1	1	1	2	4	1
Shoemaker	2	3	3	...	6	1
Watchman (Mahar)	13	16	16	16	48	8
Mohammedan sacrificer	1	1	1	3	3	1
Jain shopkeeper	3	4	8	9	21	4
Marwari shop- keeper	2	2	2	...
Police servants	3	4	3	4	11	2
Mohammedans	4	4	6	7	17	3
Hired servants	...	11	11	2
Slaves	8	8	7	3	18	3
Total	130	175	187	203	565	—

SOURCE: Thomas Coats, "Account of the Present State of the Township of Lony," *Transactions of the Literary Society of Bombay* (London, 1823, reprinted 1877), p. 194. Paper read February 29, 1820.

the original land settlers. Those Kunbis who cultivated on lease did so on the lands of the proprietary Kunbis. They appear to have been highly mobile and "when they find that they can subsist elsewhere they quit the village."⁷ Most of the Mahars and all the hired servants and the male slaves were landless agricultural workers; approximately 30 adult males were exclusively landless workers. In the 1950s, G. S. Ghurye and his students did a restudy of Lony and found that the population

⁷ Thomas Coates, "Account of the Present State of the Township of Lony," *Transactions of the Literary Society of Bombay* (London, 1823, reprinted 1877), p. 242.

had more than doubled—to 1,400 persons, of whom only 45 were landless workers.⁸

In terms of occupational structure, ten of the caste households in the village counted by Coats were hereditary servants of the village (*Balatadors*); these were the carpenter, washerman, barber, potter, silversmith, dresser of the idols, water carrier, shoemaker, and Mohammedan sacrificer. In addition, there were two other hereditary servants, an ironsmith and a ropemaker, who were not residents of the village. These servants provided necessary goods and services in return for the use of land and fixed annual payments in grain from the cultivating households. The three Brahman households provided priestly service, and one of the households also supplied the keeper of records of the village. There were five households of merchants, three Jain from the Karanatic and two Marwari.

One interesting aspect of the description of Lony, in relation to the idea of the self-sufficient village, is the degree of cash indebtedness in the village; 68 of the 84 families of cultivators were in debt for Rs. 14,532, or about Rs. 211 per indebted household. The debts were held locally by shopkeepers or Brahmans.⁹ The debts were incurred, according to Coats, to pay for weddings, purchase cattle, or buy food. In addition to cash debts, about a quarter of the inhabitants were in debt to their neighbors for grain or fodder. Land sales were also "not infrequent."¹⁰ The village had a school with classes in reading, writing, and arithmetic that was attended by children from the headmen families, the Brahmans, and the shopkeepers. Coats was surprised, however, that many of the villagers had a considerable knowledge of the leading events and history of their own country and he thought they were better informed than the lower classes of Great Britain. Coats also noted that the villagers were very fond of traveling to temples in the area at the times of annual fairs, where, after making their offerings and receiving *prasad* (sanctified food), "They saunter about the crowd, converse with acquaintances that come their way, listen to story tellers, look at jugglers and tumblers, and finally purchase what they may be in want of together with sweetmeats and toys for such of their family or friends as have remained at home."¹¹

Unlike many of the villages of upper India that were dominated by lineages or clans spread over a number of villages or were part of little kingdoms, Lony seems to have been politically self-contained. The Patel or village headmen held office directly under a government grant (*wa-*

⁸ G. S. Ghurye, *After a Century and a Quarter* (Bombay, 1960), p. 14.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 226.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 242.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 219–20.

tan), which defined the duties, rank, ceremonies, and perquisites of the holders. The duties of the headmen were to collect the government revenue, encourage people to settle in the village (a considerable amount of the village in the early nineteenth century appears to have been cultivable waste), punish minor crimes, and settle disputes among the villagers. There was also a *kalkarni* or record keeper, who was a hereditary government servant as well; he kept measurement of the fields, lists of holders and their rights, and a list of all the inhabitants and their dues to the government.

The picture we derive of one Maharashtrian village in the early nineteenth century, at the advent of British rule, shows a high degree of monetization, involvement, at least in the surrounding region, some mobility on the part of the nonpermanent cultivators, fairly specialized governmental functions of headmanship and record keeping under the government, land sales, a considerable amount of indebtedness and commerce, with five shops for a village of 500, and no craft production other than for agricultural tools, shoes and leather goods, and pottery for domestic consumption.

Unfortunately, we do not have in published form any similarly detailed descriptions of other villages from this time period. There are, however, some occupational statistics for selected districts at roughly the same time. In Bihar District, in Bihar, Francis Buchanan collected statistics from local officials and other knowledgeable men in the area. At the beginning of the nineteenth century, Buchanan broke down the population into four categories: gentry, who comprised 26 percent of the households; plowmen, 63 percent; artificers (craftsmen), 8 percent; and traders, 3 percent of the population.¹² W. H. Sykes, statistical Recorder of the Bombay Presidency in the 1820s, estimated that, for the northern part of Maharashtra, at least "three quarters of the population are directly engaged in agriculture."¹³ In the District of South Konkan, on the basis of a census taken by Pelley in 1821, approximately 150,000 of the adult males in the population of 202,000 were found to be directly engaged in agriculture, and about 12,000 in craft activities, such as blacksmithing, saddle making, tailoring, weaving, stone cutting, basket making, and copper- and goldsmithing.¹⁴

¹² Montgomery Martin, *The History, Antiquities, Topography and Statistics of Eastern India* (London, 1838), Appendix of Statistical Tables, p. 1.

¹³ W. H. Sykes, "Special Report on the Statistics of the Four Collectorate of the Dukhun, under the British Government," *Report of the Seventh Meeting of the British Association for the Advancement of Science*, VI (1837), 266.

¹⁴ Calculations based on tables in Durgaprasad and Bibhavati Bhattacharya, "Report on the Population Estimates of India, 1820–30," *Census of India*, 1961, pp. 161–64.

EARLY NINETEENTH-CENTURY URBAN STRUCTURE

India in the early nineteenth century, as today, had a significant urban component. It is, at this time, however, impossible to make any reasonable estimates concerning the distribution of rural and urban populations in early nineteenth-century India. The first problem relates to the size of the Indian population before 1872, when the first census of all India was completed. The census of 1872 found a total of 203 million persons in India; subsequently, demographers and officials of the Census of India have demonstrated that this estimate was too low and that at this time the population was more probably in the range of 250 million.¹⁵

The earliest attempts at estimating the population in India in the nineteenth century were those of Walter Hamilton in his work, *Geographical Statistical and Historical Description of Hindustan and the Adjacent Countries*, vol. I, which was published in 1820. Hamilton's estimate of a population of 134 million was based on a close study of East India Company records and the few published accounts of particular parts of India that were then available. Robert Montgomery Martin estimated the Indian population in 1838 to be 200 million.¹⁶

Martin, later quoting an official East India Company estimate, put the population of India in 1855 at 172 million.¹⁷ Both Martin, in 1855, and Hamilton, in 1820, gave lists of cities in India with population estimates. Hamilton listed 27 cities with a total population of 4,250,000, or 3.2 percent urban, and Martin listed 42 cities with a population of 5,100,000, or 3 percent urban. Neither of these lists is in any sense complete for even the important cities, let alone all other population centers that could be considered, which were, in some sense, urban.

Europeans consistently underestimated the rural population of India in the first half of the nineteenth century. Rural habitations were and are scattered over the countryside; estimates based on land records consistently underrated the actual number of people, because British estimators were mainly concerned with landholders. Early observers greatly overestimated the populations of the larger cities. Indian cities constantly struck the European observer as very crowded and congested, because the streets were narrow, with buildings right up to the

¹⁵ For a discussion of the population estimates and census, see Kingsley Davis, *The Population of India and Pakistan* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1951), chap. 4 and appendix A.

¹⁶ Robert Montgomery Martin, *Statistics of the Colonies of the British Empire* (London: W. H. Allen, 1839), p. 294.

¹⁷ Robert Montgomery Martin, *The British Colonies* (London: London Printing and Publishing, 1850), p. 502.

edge of the street; markets and pilgrimage places always seemed thronged and swarming with people. Banaras was thought to be India's most populous city in 1820 by Hamilton, who gave a figure of 600,000 for its population. His estimate was based on Lord Valentia's estimate published in 1809, in turn based on an estimate by the Indian *Kotwal* (Chief of Police), who clearly inflated his count to impress his employers with the magnitude and difficulties of his office. James Prinsep, British Mint Master in Banaras in the 1820s and an early Sanskrit scholar, conducted two counts of the population of Banaras in the mid-1820s; one, based on a register of houses kept for tax purposes, came up with an estimate of 181,000 persons, with roughly another 22,000 in the suburbs, or a little over 200,000 altogether. He also carried out a count by caste and occupation based on first-hand investigation and the estimates of the heads of various castes and trades. This count came to 155,000. Prinsep thought it should include an added 26,000 for children not estimated and for visitors and unavoidable omissions, bringing the count to approximately 180,000.¹⁸ With an underestimation of the urban population and no accurate statistics for either urban or rural, it is impossible to state what the size of India's urban population was in the early nineteenth century.

In 1881, the census estimated that 9.3 percent of the population in India was "urban"—that is, living in places of 5,000 inhabitants or more. It is reasonable to think that the situation in the early nineteenth century was not much different from that at the end of the century. Industrialization was barely beginning, although there had been increases in the major cities through the nineteenth century with the centralization of various administrative and commercial functions in the port cities and the provincial capitals. A very crude estimate, then, for urban population in the early nineteenth century would be 6 to 9 percent. In 1961, 18 percent, or more than 70 million persons, were counted as urban.

The number of people counted as urban in the early or the late nineteenth century is much less important than the nature and consequences of urban living in India at that time. India, of course, has a long tradition of urban ways of life. In India, however, as in other pre-industrial societies, living in a city and following an urban way of life mean something different from living in a highly industrialized economy and society. In the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, cities performed four major functions: economic, as a center for marketing, trade, commerce, and craft production; military, frequently as military centers, with forts or walled areas for defense purposes; political, as centers of political

¹⁸ James Prinsep, "Census of the Population of the City of Benares," *Asiatic Researches*, 17 (1832), 470–98.

life where chiefs and rulers or their officials had their courts; and finally, religious, sometimes as sacred centers containing concentrations of ritual specialists, scholars, and devotees. No matter what the origin of the city historically, most of these functions were found together, although one or another of them might dominate at any particular time. Most of the major northern Indian cities and many of those in southern India owed their origin to political considerations, that is, the location of the regional chiefs or rulers in the city. This can be seen clearly in the shifts that occurred during the eighteenth century. In the seventeenth century, Dacca in East Bengal was the leading city in Bengal; it was the provincial capital and had at least 50,000 military and civil personnel connected with the government.¹⁹ This number of people alone would account for the city's growth when one thinks of the services required in terms of food supplies, building, entertainment, clothing, and equipment. Typically in the history of Indian cities, a ruler wanted to put his physical stamp on the city by constructing imposing and beautiful buildings for public, domestic, and ritual use. In Dacca the great builder was Shaista Khan. In addition to its administrative functions, Dacca was the center of a considerable textile industry that drew European merchants. Both the court and the Europeans stimulated the development of the textile industry that, in turn, affected general trade patterns, making Dacca a center for internal as well as overseas trade and creating a need for banking and other services.

In the beginning of the eighteenth century, the capital of Bengal was shifted by Murshid Quili Khan from Dacca to Murshidabad on the Hugli River north of Calcutta. There was an important textile and trade center nearby, at Kasimbazar. With this political shift to Murshidabad, Dacca, although it remained an important commercial center, lost its preeminence as a city to Murshidabad. In turn, by the middle of the eighteenth century, again accompanying a political shift, Calcutta, the British capital of the Bengal Presidency, supplanted Murshidabad. In 1822, Calcutta had 180,000 people, and it was estimated that another 100,000 entered from and returned to the nearby suburbs and villages every day.²⁰

By the beginning of the nineteenth century, the three European-founded ports—Calcutta, Bombay, and Madras—were becoming the major cities of India, a distinction they continue to share, particularly for commercial and industrial functions. European interests in general, and British interests in particular, were initially responsible for the develop-

¹⁹ Abdul Karim, *Dacca: The Mughal Capital*, The Asiatic Society of Pakistan Publications, 15 (Dacca, 1964), 29.

²⁰ Bhattacharya, *op. cit.*, p. 234.

ment of these cities. Efforts were made in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries to attract Indian craftsmen into the cities. In Calcutta, there was already a village of weavers; in Madras, there was also interest in having weavers and other textile workers settle in the city. In Bombay, which developed early as a shipbuilding center, great efforts were made to attract Parsi builders from Gujarat. Throughout the eighteenth century, the port cities tended to be settled on a caste basis, and, like other Indian cities, much of the local government was actually in the hands of caste-based groups living in their own quarters, *mohallas*. Characteristic of the port cities, and soon to be characteristic of those up-country cities with any major governmental functions, was the difference between the Indian and the European parts of the city. Up-country, the European quarter usually was on the outskirts of the city, where government offices, courts, and frequently the military cantonment were often established. Europeans built large, low, open houses with pyramidal roofs—bungalows, a word we still use, which is derived from *bangala* or “from (or of) Bengal.”

Indians in the new cities initially continued to build the kinds of houses that had been characteristic of urban architecture in the north under the Muslims. They were substantial houses of two, three, or sometimes even five or six stories of masonry, with a few windows and an unadorned facade, built right up to the lane or next to the street. Inside the house was usually an inner courtyard or a walled courtyard, with a small garden where much of the life of the household took place. If the family consisted of shopkeepers or traders, the front part of the house was also used for commercial purposes. Later, in the nineteenth century, Indians inside the city began to adapt the European-style bungalow to their own use, frequently making it several stories larger. The bulk of the Indian population lived in mud and thatched houses in and around the city. Often a large house of a substantial family, well kept and with elaborate gardens, would be close to squalid quarters for servants and “hangers on.”

Something of the internal structure of cities in the early nineteenth century can be learned from Table 9. The data in the tables must be interpreted with great caution because of the way in which the census was taken. In three of the four cities—Banaras, Bareilly, and Anusphahr—the census categories of occupation were based mainly on caste. Only in Dacca did the observers systematically try to obtain actual occupations from within the broad categories of caste. The least reliable data are those in the categories attempting to separate actual cultivators, landlords, or agricultural laborers from the general category of “service,” which was used in all four censuses as a catchall phrase. Service in-

TABLE 9
Occupational Structure of Four Indian Cities 1820-30 *
(Number percentages have been rounded)

	Banares 1827	Bareilly 1822	Anupshahr 1830	Dacca 1830
Population	180,000	66,000	8,000	67,000
Households	30,400	13,160	1,710	16,255
Religion Hindu	144,000 (80)	40,000 (60)	6,200 (78)	31,500 (47)
Muslim	36,000 (20)	26,000 (40)	1,800 (22)	35,500 (53)
OCCUPATIONS				
Landholders Public Service	28,000 (17.4) ¹	2,500 (19.0) ²	270 ² (15.7) ²	2,962 ² (19.0) ²
Cultivators and Laborers—Medium castes	25,200 (16.4)	2,600 (19.8)	100 (5.8)	3,343 (20.7)
Cultivators and Laborers—Low caste	3,000 (2.0)	400 (3.0)	200 (11.7)	189 (1.2)
Weavers etc.	12,100 (7.9)	1,220 (9.3)	130 (7.5)	748 (4.6)
Carpenters/Blacksmiths	4,000 (2.8)	320 (2.8)	50 (2.9)	243 (1.5)
Craft—other	8,000 (5.2)	1,050 (8.1)	45 (2.7)	770 (4.8)
Trading and Banking	11,300 (7.4)	750 (5.8)	310 (18.0)	761 (4.7)
Food Processing	13,600 (8.8)	1,180 (8.9)	90 (5.4)	3,459 (21.4)
Retail sale of food				
Personal service	9,200 (6.0)	1,300 (9.9)	120 (7.2)	297 (1.8)
Barbers, washermen, servants				
Ritual specialists	22,000 (14.3)	500 (3.8)	140 (8.2)	130 (0.8)
Scribes, clerks, teachers	9,500 (6.2)	900 (6.8)	100 (5.9)	76 (0.5)
Transportation	2,500 (1.8)	80 (0.6)	60 (3.5)	105 (0.7)
Entertainers	3,800 (2.5)	260 (2.0)	30 (1.7)	357 (2.2)
Other	2,700 (1.8)	100 (0.8)	65 (3.6)	2,815 (17.1)
	153,700 +26,300 (child)	13,160	1,710	16,255

1 Figures based on individuals.
 2 Figures based on households.

SOURCES:

Banares: James Prinsep, "Census of the City of Benares," *Asiatic Researches*, XVII (1832), 470-98.
 Bareilly: Robert Thomas John Glyn, "Enumeration of the various classes of population and handicrafts in the town of Bareilly in Rohilkhand, formerly the capital of the Rohilla government," *Transactions of the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland*, I (1827), 467-84.
 Anupshahr: "The Town and Neighboring Country of Anupshahr" in Durgaprasad and Bhattachari Bhattacharya (eds.), *Report on the Population Estimates of India (1820-1830), Census of India (1861)*, pp. 283-84.
 Dacca: Bhattacharya, *Op. Cit.*, pp. 285-327.

cluded people who worked for the government as clerks and lower officials, were employed by landlords as agents, were hangers-on of large households, or were employees of commercial houses and assistants in shops. On the basis of the materials, it is impossible to sort the category "service" into reasonable groupings. The large category "other" is, in Dacca, a reflection of the better quality of the census, because it included a large group of households whose occupation was listed only as "householders." These may have been households in which there was no obvious means of support and, from the little data given on household composition, it might be inferred that these were households of elderly people. There was also great difficulty in grouping the various occupations and castes. In Banaras, more than 200 separate castes and occupations were listed, and almost 200 for Bareilly and Dacca. In each case, the names and occupations listed in the separate censuses were often different, so that some guesswork went into the development of the categories and the assigning of the specific caste and occupation to each of the major categories.

Even with unreliability of data and analysis built into the tables, some ideas about urban social structure can be gained. The distinctive character of each of the cities can be seen. Banaras, the great shrine city of India whose major activity was as a ritual center, contained a large number of ritual specialists, 14.3 percent of the total. Anusphahr in the present Bulandshar District of western Uttar Pradesh on the Ganges was, in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, an important commercial center for trade in indigo, a vegetable dye much in demand in Europe. Because it was located at a crucial crossing of the Ganges, it was also an important bathing place for regional pilgrimages. Its commercial and ritual significance is reflected in the fact that 18 percent of the households were engaged in trade and banking, and 8.2 percent were ritual specialists. Both Banaras and Anusphahr were essentially Hindu cities; the important local Raja was Hindu. In western Uttar Pradesh, in the late eighteenth century, Bareilly was an important regional capital of a Muslim dynasty, the Rohillas, that controlled a good deal of territory immediately east of Delhi. This is reflected in the relatively high percentage of Muslims in the city, 40 percent in a region in which no more than 15 percent of the population were Muslim.

Bareilly had just begun to decline as a royal center, but the presence of royal power could be seen in the large number of craftsmen and those engaged in personal service. Dacca, which had flourished in the late seventeenth and much of the eighteenth centuries as a textile and marketing center, had begun to decline sharply in significance by 1830. Henry Walters, who was responsible for taking the Dacca census, esti-

mated that the population there had declined by 50 percent in a sixteen-year period.²¹ Walters attributed the drop to the East India Company's decreasing investment in cloth and other manufactured goods, starting as early as 1801. Of the three cities, Dacca had the fewest craftsmen, with Bareilly having three times as many craftsmen as Dacca, and Banaras having twice as many.

Overall, though, a pattern of a very large number of upper caste persons—Brahmans, Rajputs, Kayasthas, and Muslims—living off agricultural lands or government and private income does emerge. With the exception of Anupshahr, the number of identifiable untouchables was low. In each case, there were also specialized agriculturalists, such as Mali and Koeris, living within the cities and apparently engaged in market gardening. The city included much agricultural land, generally on the outskirts, but one can speculate that there were open areas that were farmed, even in more populated parts of the cities, as in the case of smaller towns and cities today.

There were several life styles in the cities of the early nineteenth century: cosmopolitan, local, and regional. Banaras, in some senses, was at the same time the most traditional and the most cosmopolitan of Indian cities. There was a strong Maharashtrian group in the city, many of whom were self-imposed exiles from Maharashtra after the breakup of the Mahratta confederacy, coming with their fortunes and pensions to live out their lives in Banaras. Many of the temples that mark the river front of Banaras today were financed by Mahratta princes and their Brahman preceptors. There were 3,000 Bengali Brahmins in Banaras in 1827, many of them scholars and priests, others working as clerks and officials of the British. The Muslim community of Banaras was split between a large number of weavers and landed groups. Muslim weavers, Julahas, were the largest single community in the city; most lived in close proximity in a few *mohallas*. The other large Muslim groups were deposed or exiled members of the royal families from Delhi and Lucknow, many of whom still had considerable income and property elsewhere. Frequently, important landlords from all over India maintained houses or palaces in Banaras and spent part of their time in religious activities in the city. In Banaras traditional Brahmanical life styles existed simultaneously with cosmopolitan Persianized life styles of the Delhi court and the local cultures of eastern Uttar Pradesh and western Bihar.

²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 326.

Urbanization, Education, and Social and Cultural Change

Changes in urban social structure and life styles in India did not develop in the cities, such as Banaras, Bareilly, and Dacca, which in terms of the size of their population remained static or declined during the nineteenth century and diminished in importance as cultural, intellectual, and commercial centers compared with the great port cities of Calcutta, Madras, and Bombay. Banaras, which had a population of 180,000 in 1827, had increased to only 223,000 by 1891, to 266,000 by 1941 and to 489,600 in 1961. Calcutta, however, grew from around 200,000 in 1820 to 744,000 in 1891, 2,108,000 in 1941, and 2,927,289 in 1961. Madras, which was thought to have between 200,000 and 300,000 people at the beginning of the nineteenth century, grew, from 425,000 people in 1891, to 800,000 in 1941, to 1,729,000 in 1961.

Population growth of the port cities, particularly Calcutta and Bombay, was based on the beginning of large-scale industrialization in the middle of the nineteenth century in the cities and surrounding areas. Cotton textiles in Bombay and jute manufacturing in Calcutta were important industries by the middle of the nineteenth century. In both cities, port facilities and attendant functions also grew rapidly during the nineteenth century. Madras, Calcutta, and Bombay developed into

✓ major educational centers with the establishment of the university system in 1857. Governmental functions also increased, with Calcutta as the capital of the Presidency of Bengal as well as of British India. Madras and Bombay were also presidency capitals. The administrative functions of the cities provided large numbers of jobs for lower officials as well as for lawyers, agents, and others concerned in their private capacity

with government action. The port cities were the headquarters of a wide range of British firms engaged in industrial management, banking, and commerce, all employing large numbers of Indian subordinates.

The structural changes implied in the development of the port cities, in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, and of the transportation, commercial, and industrial centers, were not felt until later in the nineteenth century. But by the third and fourth decades of the nineteenth century, the process of cultural change that historians and sociologists subsume under the concept "Westernization" had begun for small but significant groups in the cities. Authors use the terms "Westernization" and "modernization" carelessly, sometimes interchangeably, to cover all kinds of changes experienced by the Indian population in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. I use the term "Westernization" to cover broad-scale cultural changes—values, ideas, and life style—modernization in the nature of social relations, stratification, and basic economic structure. It is clear that modernization in the sense of structural change and Westernization in the sense of cultural change are linked and fused processes. People's thoughts about what they are doing, and their justifications for it, may be as important as changes in structure in understanding change in India. Above all, it should be kept in mind that it is Indians we are talking about when we discuss change. The origin of a steel mill, historically, may clearly be an aspect of Western technology, and the changes it will bring in the life style and social relations of those who work in it are examples of modernization and Westernization. But to the Indians, the origin is less important than their own creative cultural and social adaptations to the situation. Little has been borrowed: few of the cultural and structural changes that have taken place in India are not distinctively Indian, no matter what their source. Modern technology and ideas can be utilized by a traditional culture, and traditional ideas can be of great use in a modern culture.

The introduction of printing and modern communication media affords an illustration of the complexities of modernization and Westernization and their relationship to what might be termed the redefinition of traditional culture. Printing in Indian languages was introduced largely by Western missionaries who wanted to make the Bible and Christian tracts widely available as part of their efforts to convert the Indian people to Christianity. In the early nineteenth century, the East India Company's government also encouraged printing and publishing to facilitate administration. As seen earlier, Indian vernaculars and literatures were highly localized and often limited to particular groups, so that, before publishing materials in the Indian languages, efforts had to be made to standardize the languages. In addition, once Indians became printers,

individuals and organizations began to publish for their own interest and not for the interest of the state or the Western missionaries.

There was little control over what could be published, particularly over religious literature and creative writing. Although literacy was low in India in the nineteenth century, still there was, in absolute numbers, a large reading public that took to reading published works, whose distribution was, of course, many times wider than that of manuscript books and pamphlets. Many of the materials published in the nineteenth as well as the twentieth century related to traditional culture and values. Texts, stories, fables, accounts of rituals, religious guides, and lives of religious figures were and are published in huge quantities in India. People who never before had access to the ideas and ideals of Hinduism now do. The major religious reform movement of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries in northern India—the Arya Samaj—was closely tied to education and printing in Hindi. In the twentieth century, education and, consequently, literacy have greatly expanded in India; lower-caste groups have now become literate. Westerners tend to think that education is a way of modernizing a society, and in some respects it is if the content of the education and what people read after they have become literate are based on assumed Western values of achievement, individualism, rationality, and empiricism. Certainly many college-educated Indians are exposed in a variety of ways to Western thought. But it is an open question whether those who have received a primary school education that equips them with literacy in the standard language of their region are similarly exposed to Western values.

In Senapur, a village where I did field work in 1952, some of the Chamars, the Untouchables, were literate and did read. But they read versions of sacred stories that stressed traditional values. One Chamar in particular, a young school teacher, was well versed in the traditions of Hinduism, all of which he had learned from reading. Traditionally, Chamars have been prevented from learning, in any formal way, about the tenets and practices of Hinduism. Brahman priests do not serve them. Under Vedic law, Chamars are supposed to be mutilated if they hear the Vedas, and they were barred from entry into temples. In the last 100 years, a religious movement called the Siva Narayan sect, which has a few temples in major cities, such as Bombay and Kanpur, became very popular among the Chamars. In many villages, Chamars have a *mahant* (leader) of the sect who holds regular prayer meetings and rituals at which the sayings of the founder of the sect are read. The trappings and symbols used are traditionally Hindu. Many of the leaders and some of the members of the sect owe their identification and participation in

the sect to urban experience. In the cities, Chamars have attended the temples of the sect and have been exposed to teachers and proselytizers for the sect. In a very real sense, literacy and urban experience, supposedly sources of change toward modern and Western structures and values, have become for the Chamars a source of values and behaviors which were, to this point, denied them and which are traditionally Hindu in content. The institutions, technology, and skills that we think of as leading to Westernization and modernization can often lead to traditionalization.

For some groups in Calcutta, Bombay, and smaller cities, though, there were, by the middle of the nineteenth century, the beginnings of cultural change. Individuals such as Ram Mohan Roy, Dendranath Tagore, Henry Derozio, Iswarchandra Vidyasagar, and others of the educated and English-using community of the Bengalis, for example, began to try to incorporate Western religious ideas and modes of thought into their understanding of their own culture. They were often obsessed with the direct criticism of the British officials and missionaries of some practices associated with Hinduism and they wished to change some of their own customs, such as early marriage for girls and the burning of widows on their husband's funeral pyre.

It is difficult to summarize the ideas of these early Bengali writers and thinkers in the first half of the nineteenth century and to isolate precisely what was new, what general, and what idiosyncratic. Through much of their writing, however, several themes constantly recur. The basic theme for these new intellectuals was that they were living in a new era and a new dawn was breaking; they felt that they were living in a renaissance.

Central to the new ideology and culture these men were trying to create was the goal of purifying Hindu thought and culture. They wanted a Hinduism, based on the Vedas and the Upanishads, which stressed thought and belief, not practice, and which eschewed worship and ritual at temples and the use of images. Many of these practices were criticized by Europeans as idolatrous. The Bengali thinkers sought to integrate Western ideas, rationality, monotheism, and individuality with their religious views. The search to reconcile the ambivalence inherent in their adaptation of Western thought led to the idea that the "new intellectuals" were between two cultures. Individually they sought to resolve the tension they believed to exist between Western and Indian thought.

Another major theme was the rediscovery of the past of India, in which Indians had once lived in a golden age after which degradation had set in. This golden age turned out to be like Western culture of the nineteenth century, with rationality, monotheism, simple democratic

customs, equality of men and women, and a level of technology higher than that characteristic of mid-nineteenth-century India. The fourth major theme was that there could be a conscious and self-directed reform of the society and culture of India. I think the idea that individuals could analyze their own customs and religion and then consciously set about changing them, with social ends in mind, was an innovation in Indian culture. The great reformers of the past—the Buddha, Sankachariya, the Bhakti poets—were largely concerned with man's relation to the supernatural. They had essentially otherworld concerns, and the social consequences of their ideas were almost by-products.

Later in the nineteenth century, other themes began to emerge in the ideology of Western-influenced elites in the cities: ambivalence toward and, finally, rejection of the British. Early writers and thinkers, such as Ram Mohan Roy, and even later cultural nationalists like Bankim Chandra Chatterjee saw and deemed worthy of emulation great virtues in individual Britishers and in British culture and society: honesty, integrity, courage, and physical strength. As British attitudes of racial superiority became more pronounced in the latter nineteenth century and as official policies were increasingly framed to the disadvantage of the Western-influenced elites, an increasing dislike of the British as colonial exploiters and a more positive view of Indians themselves became characteristic of the new ideology. Coupled with the cultural nationalism emerging from the search for roots in their own past was the tendency of Indians to become more provincial in their views. Identification with regional traditions, gods, and heroes began to replace the more abstract glorifications of Hindu thought and the Hindu past.

In recent years, historians have tried to connect the cultural and intellectual changes that developed, particularly in Calcutta, with structural changes in Bengali society. Thus far, no single line of analysis has proved adequate to understanding the developments in Calcutta from the middle of the eighteenth century until the beginning of the twentieth century. The families of the Western-influenced elites, although within Bengali upper-caste society, were diverse in origin. How they made their money varied, how they maintained their social and economic positions varied, and, to a large extent, even their styles of life varied. A few things can be said of their origins, though, which seem to hold for a large number of the important Bengali families of the period.

No matter what their place in pre-British Bengali society, those families who became important in the early and middle nineteenth century show a connection with the British in the form of an ancestor who served as a *banyan* (broker) for the Company, or for an individual Englishman, or for someone who served as a judicial or revenue official. Income de-

rived and, more important, information from any connection with the British could then be turned into successful commercial or land-acquiring activities. The secret of economic success in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries appears to have been the ability to diversify one's activities among landholding, private commercial, and proto-industrial activities, government-connected commerce, such as military contracting, and the liberal professions, particularly law and teaching.

Early access to and use of new educational opportunities also seem to be crucial in this group of families who became important in Calcutta life. The Hindu College, founded in 1817 as a joint effort by some British officials and wealthy Bengalis, provided an education in English for most of the important families, who realized that success could be achieved through a knowledge of the English language. The founding and maintenance of the Hindu College brings one again to the paradox of reversal and intertwining of "modern" and "traditional," both characteristic of social change in India.

It is conventional in the picture of early nineteenth-century India to oppose two figures viewed symbolically as the extremes regarding modernization in that era: Ram Mohan Roy, the great modernizer, who wanted to direct Hindu and Indian culture toward a Western model, and Radha Kant Deb, who is looked on as the defender and upholder of the status quo and traditional society. Yet it was Radha Kant Deb and his father, who played a key role among the Indians, who founded the Hindu College, which was based on the financial help of many of the leading landlords and Rajas of Bengal rather than on the urban-based "new wealth." The Debs have been regarded by historians as the archreactionaries in Calcutta society, the upholders and defenders of Hinduism in its traditional form against Ram Mohan Roy and his followers in the Brahmo Samaj. The difficulty in examining the relationship and antagonisms between the advocates of a new Hinduism and Indian society and the traditional defenders lies in the fact that both the Debs and Ram Mohan Roy participated, in a sense, in a new intellectual environment in which voluntary associations, petitions, public meetings, published tracts, newspapers, and periodicals were the battleground of dispute. In the dispute, the real traditionalists—the pandits, the illiterate and semiliterate masses—were not even aware of what was happening. Much of the argument was among a small number of the citizens, and the terms of discourse for both "modernists" and "traditionalists" were new.

In the long run, it may have been the educational institutions—particularly the Hindu College, the Calcutta School Book Society, and the Calcutta School Society—that did more to shape the new culture of Calcutta than did the more spectacular religious reform societies like

the Brahmo Samaj. The committees and societies needed to support and run the new educational institutions were a structural departure in the society. In the Calcutta School Book Society, Hindus and Muslims, landlords and merchants, government employees and pandits joined in a common cause bound by a mutual social goal rather than by ties of territory, kinship, or allegiance to a patron, as was characteristic of older forms of organization in India. The notion of the voluntary association was widely accepted by the middle of the nineteenth century. There were landholders' associations, associations for social reform, such as the Poona Sarvajnik Sabha, and by the end of the nineteenth century, literary and scholarly associations. These groups were small in membership, some were ephemeral, but there was increasing experience on the part of the Western-influenced people in Indian society with organizational activity that was in contrast to traditional kinds of groupings and that had different aims.

POLITICAL CHANGE

The single most important structural change that took place in Indian society between the end of the eighteenth century and the present relates to the political system and the institutions and attitudes connected with it. The British in India monopolized the legitimate use of force. As we have seen, previous government rule was partially based on the utilization of local and regional military power to further the ends of the central government. No previous government had the technological and bureaucratic skills necessary to develop a military system, with legitimate force at their disposal, that could ignore others in the society. This monopolization of legitimate force at the governmental level would not have been possible if the legitimacy of British rule had not been largely granted by elites within the society. British rule, like previous Mughal rule, was legitimate by the right of conquest in the eyes of significant groups in the society. To the majority of the population in the nineteenth century also, British rule was legitimate, since they were the *raj*, the ruler. That the granting of legitimacy by the Indian population was not always total can be seen by the widespread revolt that started with the Bengal Army in 1857. In large parts of Uttar Pradesh, western Bihar, and some parts of central India, significant numbers of the population joined with army troops to overthrow British rule, rallying around the symbols of dispossessed eighteenth-century rulers: the Mughal Emperor in Delhi; the last of the Peshwas (the Maratha rulers), Nana Sahib; the Rani of Jhansi; and local rulers, such as the dispossessed Talukdars of Oudh. Later in the nineteenth century, there were other much smaller-

scale movements of this kind in which local people bound by primordial ties of locality, kinship, or religion revolted against the authority and legitimacy of the British government.

In the late nineteenth century, members of the small Western-influenced urban elites gradually began to argue for a larger share in the management of the British state in India. Their arguments were borrowed in part from European nationalist movements and based on ideas of the right of self-determination; they were based in part on a claim to equality of jobs access in the administration of the state, because many of the Western-educated Indians had ability equal to that of British civil servants. The movement was also based in part on a heightened sense of the educated Indian's understanding of his culture and his past. Increasingly this small elite group gained organizational experience, in voluntary associations, in local self-government at the district level, through advisory capacities at the policy-making level of the provinces, and on appointed or selected councils.

The first generation of Indian nationalists, such as Surendranath Banerjee, Ferozshah Mehta, and G. K. Gokhale, argued for more self-rule following the ground rules established by the British Raj within the authoritarian bureaucratic structure of government. The early nationalists debated and reasoned with their rulers. They believed in the reality of British values: reason, the effectiveness of marshaling information, and argument to achieve political ends. The British were receptive, though more so at home in Parliament than in the office of the British rulers in India, and gradually began to expand the franchise and to elevate the responsibilities of councils.

The early nationalists began their campaigns at a time when economic, educational, and social changes that had their beginnings in the middle of the nineteenth century were taking root. The number of English-educated was infinitesimal compared with the population of India, but the number of graduates of Indian universities and colleges grew with each decade. The opening of the elite British-manned Indian Civil Service to Indians in the 1860s turned out to be a source of great frustration. Few Indians were able to qualify for appointment, although they had the prerequisites, because the entry to the service was manipulated by the British rulers to the disadvantage of the Indian applicants. Indians with good degrees from Oxford, Cambridge, and the University of London found themselves unable to achieve the higher academic ranks in Indian universities, because the chairs in many subjects were reserved for Britishers. Experienced and well-trained assistant magistrates and collectors, no matter what their credentials and knowledge, had to defer to much less experienced and more junior British officials in the manage-

ment of the districts, for the youngest and newest British recruit to the Indian Civil Service in effect outranked any member of the lower civil services, composed of Indians.

The building of a large railway network in the second half of the nineteenth century was the basic factor in the integration of the Indian economy and its incorporation into world markets. The well-being of the Indian peasant became increasingly tied to world markets in wheat, jute, cotton, and rice, as Indian agriculture, which always had a commercial component, became increasingly commercialized, not only in plantation crops of tea and coffee, but also in crops grown by the substantial peasantry.

Modern large-scale industrialization in cotton textiles and jute milling, as well as smaller-scale industry related to the railways, grain, and sugar mills, and the provision of some consumer goods within India developed largely through European capital and managerial ability, with little attempt to incorporate the Indian business communities into the modern industrial economy. Banking became almost a preserve of the British. Some Indian financiers in Bombay and Ahmedabad were successful in the textile industry, but even they felt forced to rely, in the nineteenth century, on British technological and managerial skills.

Throughout the last decades of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth, the perception grew of the gap between the capabilities that members of the educated Indian elite felt they had and the role they were allowed by the British rulers in the economy and political life of their own country. In the beginning of the twentieth century, the nationalist elite itself became split in ideology, goals, and views on how the goals could be achieved. The older leadership felt that the more rationalist and gradual approach through acquiring more and more self-rule from the British would be successful, because they still granted to the British government the legitimate right to rule India and still accepted the British evaluation of the Indians as not ready for rapid entry into self-government. Other younger leaders began to advocate more radical approaches to self-rule. They wanted to involve a broader spectrum of the Indian people in the movement, and they approached the masses by using traditional Hindu symbols and heroes and summoning a more vigorous Hindu reaction against foreign rule. Terrorist groups devoted to acts of revolutionary violence began to form in Bengal and Bombay. This terrorism was met by repressive measures on the part of the British government, which, in turn, heightened the prestige among Indians of those jailed for revolutionary activities. The call for a wider incorporation of the Hindu population into the nationalist movement and the frequent use of Hindu nationalist symbols in the revolutionary activi-

ties had the effect of alienating large numbers of Muslims who felt they would be disadvantaged in a Hindu state.

Increasingly, the British looked on both the moderates and the radicals as part of a conspiracy rather than as the expression of legitimate Indian strivings for self-government and independence. The British constantly pointed out that the leaders of the nationalist movement and most of its participants represented only a small fraction of the society and were only furthering their own self-interest. The British justified their rule by attempting to picture themselves as the true protectors of the Indian people, the peasants. Meanwhile, the British strengthened their ties to the powerful landlords and the princes who, they argued, were the natural leaders of the Indian people—a people accustomed to despotic rule. The British, with the development of a wider franchise, tried to make the constituencies communal; that is, Muslims, in effect, would vote for Muslim candidates, Hindus for Hindu candidates. The rationale was that it would protect the rights of minorities; the effect, intended or not, was to heighten the difference between communities and afford the opportunity to increase animosity between groups in the society. In 1905 there was a burst of political activity on the part of Indians, particularly the Bengalis, over the partition of the province of Bengal, which the British government maintained was too large. The area consisted of the provinces of Bengal, Bihar, Orissa, and Assam. But instead of separating the non-Bengali-speaking areas and leaving East and West Bengal as a unit, the British split the Bengali population between two newly created states, one predominantly Hindu and the other Muslim. The articulate and effective Bengali leaders saw this as furthering the British policy of "divide and rule" and punishing their opposition to British rule. There were widespread disturbances, mass meetings, and acts of terrorism. In addition, the Bengalis attempted a boycott of British goods for the first time and called for the establishment of their own educational system and for the production of the goods they needed themselves.

Bengal was reunited in 1911, by which time the imperial capital had been shifted from Calcutta to the newly built New Delhi. The agitation over Bengal was important because it confirmed in some of the leaders their belief that only through direct action would they achieve self-rule and eventual independence and that they needed social and economic philosophy and plans as well as the political goal of self-rule. The differences in ideology and methods that grew out of the partition of Bengal led to a split in the Indian National Congress, the organization that had provided the overall forum for Indian nationalism. With the coming of the First World War in 1914, the movement quieted down,

because the British government in India sought the cooperation of the nationalists and implied that, with the successful completion of the war, many of the nationalists' demands would be met.

In 1914 Mohandas Gandhi, a Gujarti English-trained lawyer who had gone, in the early twentieth century, to South Africa after a brief attempt to establish a law practice in India, returned to India. In South Africa, Gandhi found that his countrymen who had migrated there as laborers and shopkeepers lived under severe legal and social disabilities. It was there that Gandhi first used his methods of nonviolent noncooperation with the government in order to secure the legitimate redress of the Indians' grievances. On the whole, he was quite effective, and his success became widely known in India. In 1914, when he returned, he did not plunge immediately into nationalist politics; rather, he toured India, surveying the situation and getting acquainted with his homeland and the nationalist leadership. In 1917, he began to move into a position of leadership in the movement. Gandhi recruited into the nationalist movement and his following many of the individuals who were to lead India to her freedom: the Nehrus, Sardar Patel, Pant, and many of the provincial leaders.

The Indian National Congress, the most important nationalist organization, radically changed its character and nature between 1917 and 1921. During this time, there were widespread disturbances, agitations, and campaigns culminating in the noncooperation movements of 1920 and 1921. The arena of conflict with the British government shifted from Westernized leadership in the coastal areas of Bombay and Bengal inland to less cosmopolitan leadership in the Punjab, Bihar, and Uttar Pradesh. Congress was successful in these areas not only in recruiting the Western-influenced elites who were smaller in number, proportionately, and more integrated into the rural societies than their counterparts on the coast but also in bringing three other crucial groups into the movement: the commercial classes of the towns and cities, the small but significant urban working class, and, most crucial, the substantial peasantry and the small landlords in the Ganges Valley, the key controllers of the countryside, with whom they formed an alliance.

In the 1920s and 1930s the British encouraged their allies, the larger landholders and princes, to enter politics and, through them, tried to control the mass of the population. But, as it became clear in 1937, when there were elections under the Constitution of 1935, the British and their Indian allies did not have control of the mass of the people. It was Congress and the nationalists who were able to control effectively the local power holders, who continued throughout the nineteenth century to wield power over the great mass of the local populations.

In the 1930s, the Muslim League, which was founded in 1906 and tended until the 1930s to be a small party advocating the interests of the Muslim population of India through the small Muslim elite classes of successful lawyers and landholders, began to grow spectacularly. Until the 1930s, the Muslim League's policies had been directed toward protection of Muslim rights. They tended to side with the British, who incorrectly charged Congress with merely expressing Hindu nationalism. In the early 1930s under the prodding of younger Muslim intellectuals and cultural nationalists, the Muslim League adopted the policy of seeking independence for a Muslim state, Pakistan, to be made up of the predominantly Muslim areas of the northwest. The Muslim League's greatest period of growth was after the elections of 1937, when their leaders were able to point to the fact that Congress's control meant essentially that Muslims were politically disadvantaged.

Throughout the 1920s, 1930s, and early 1940s, the British government carried on, at home, a long series of negotiations with representatives of all the major interests in India, nationalist and other. Administrative changes came rapidly after 1920, with an increasing number of Indians recruited for the higher civil service and officer ranks in the Indian army opened to Indians on a wide scale. At the provincial level, under the Government of India Acts of 1921 and 1935, increasing political participation of Indians as elected representatives developed, with Indians heading many of the branches of government.

The Indian National Congress government elected in 1937 resigned in 1939, and the Congress Party leaders, opposing any cooperation with the British, were jailed in 1942 during the Second World War and released at the end of the war. In the face of the mutiny of part of the Indian Navy late in 1945 and widespread civil disorders in 1946, both communal and directed against the British, the British Labor Government announced that India would become independent on August 15, 1947. After much negotiation, it was also announced that the country would be partitioned into Pakistan and India, a demand that the Muslim League had made its price for accepting independence.

India and Pakistan achieved independence in the summer of 1947 in the midst of large-scale movements of peoples: Hindus and Sikhs moving out of the West Punjab and Muslims moving out of Uttar Pradesh and East Punjab. There was widespread rioting and killing at the time of partition and after. The movement of peoples and killings spread to Bengal late in 1947 and in 1948. In addition, India and Pakistan fought a short but bitter war over Kashmir.

The two newly created states of India and Pakistan faced great difficulties, political, economic, and social. Large populations of refugees

had to be absorbed; older and anachronistic political entities, represented by the princely states, had to be integrated. Since 1947, India and Pakistan have evolved in different political directions: India as a parliamentary democracy, and Pakistan with a strong central government that for the last ten years has been essentially a single-party dictatorship under Ayub Khan, a general of the Pakistan Army. As great as the problems faced by the new states were and continue to be and as close as disasters of many kinds have been at times, both India and Pakistan have developed stable and viable government structures. In a real sense, India and Pakistan were the first of the new nations, and although we continue to think of such as a "new nation," a full generation in both societies has come of age and has begun to see colonialism as a historic incident in a long history. Each country now legitimately thinks of itself politically as an "old nation."

Indian Social Structure and Culture: Introduction

Discussions of Indian society and culture always begin with a statement about the complexities and diversities actually found in India today. The most frequent statement made about India is that it is a land of "unity in diversity." It can be seen from the preceding chapters that the diversities flow from the geography and history of India, from the differing economic bases of its society, and from the differential rate of long-standing changes. In India, as in many "traditional" societies, there is a process of incorporation of change, in which one aspect of society or culture is not entirely replaced by another but in which change often leads to additions instead of replacements. Any single statement that an anthropologist or sociologist may make about India is subject to a counterstatement. If one says that residence is virilocal, someone else quickly points out that, in Kerala and in some parts of Assam, inheritance, even today, tends to be through the mother's line and a male goes to live with or is closely associated with the family of his wife.

Statements that are statistically valid, however, can be made about aspects of Indian social structure. Inheritance of rights and property is through the male line. Most Indians are socialized in households where there are adults in addition to their own mothers and fathers. Statistical statements can be made about the nature of village structure, caste, family, local political structures, urban middle-class families, and so forth. The range and variation in institutions or clusters of social relations can be noted or described.

Much of what follows is a description of the major aspects of Indian society of the last twenty years, and some suggestion of how the major

aspects of the society and culture are changing. To understand contemporary Indian society and culture, one begins, not with a statistical or even normative picture of the institutions and values, the social relationships, and the expected behaviors, but with the underlying assumptions that seem to pervade the culture.

Most observers of Indian society, I think, accept Louis Dumont's view that, when one penetrates the bewildering proliferation of social forms and cultural expressions in India, he finds that most relations and most values come down to a question of hierarchy. One can find that there are no peer relations in the family. The father is dominant over his sons; males are dominant over females; older brothers over younger. This stratification is frequently symbolized in the forms of address and reference found in the kinship terminology in the family. An older brother may address a younger brother by name, but a younger brother addresses an older brother by a kin term. Few behaviors in the family indicate an equality. A boy rises when his father comes into the room. He stops talking. If he is smoking or eating, he stops. He does not speak until spoken to. The hierarchy spreads from the family into families who claim descent from a common ancestor and who are in the same lineage. Some families, because they are descended from a younger brother, are slightly lower in social status than other families within the lineage. Genealogical as distinct from chronological age determines formal behavior among members of a lineage. For example, when two members who know they are of the same lineage meet, they immediately determine their genealogical relationship so that they may use the right behavior and form of address in formal situations. Members of lineages are tied to other lineages through marriage, but, by and large, marriage within the marrying groups of a caste does not establish peer relations between the two families who have established marriage ties. Generally speaking, the boy's family, by accepting a girl from another family, establishes a higher status within the marrying group than the family that gives the girl. When a member of the girl's family comes to visit at the household of the boy, he is made to feel that his status is lower than that of the family he is visiting.

Greetings also symbolize the hierarchy central to the social structure. In northern India, there is a range of gestures and phrases that is appropriate to one's status and to the status of the person being greeted. A person of lower status, whether that status is based on caste, age, or genealogical connection, is the first to greet the person of higher status. The greeting may be a salute, like a gesture with a slight bow, or a greeting using both hands, palm to palm, in front of the body. The height of the hands in front of the chest, the lower part of the face, or the forehead,

is adjusted to the status of the person being greeted. A person of lower status frequently adds an honorific title to the phrase of greeting to a higher-status person. The grammar of salutation and return salutation graphically symbolizes the hierarchic relations between individuals and groups.

One's position in a seated group is another symbolization of the hierarchic nature of social relations. The principal article of furniture used for sitting or reclining is a cot (*charpāī*) made of rope strung on a wooden frame. There are higher- and lower-ranking ends to the cot. The foot of the cot, where there is small, tight webbing as in the main part of the cot, is lower than the head or high-ranking end. If four or five people are sitting on or near a cot, one can quickly see the formal relations among them. The eldest person, with membership in the highest-ranked caste group in the area, sits in the highest-status place at the head of the cot and the others are graded down from this position, either sitting on the cot or sitting or squatting on the ground around it.

It is easiest to see hierarchy in the social realm, but it has cultural expression in the great concern felt by most Indians about *pollution* and *purity*. People, many materials, objects, and social states are ranked on a continuum from purity to pollution. Polluted states can be transmitted from one object or person to other objects and persons. Some persons can pollute pure things or purify polluted things. States of pollution and purity may be permanent or transitory.

The purity-pollution continuum may be illustrated by the hierarchy involved in the categories of food and the processing, giving, and receiving of food. It is possible to think of food in five categories. Raw food—that which is given as gifts or as part of wages—can be given by anyone to anyone. It can be considered either the purest of food or neutral. With the next three kinds of food—that fried in oil, that boiled in water, and food of either category from someone else's plate (*garbage*)—who has done the cooking and handling, either in serving or presenting, makes a great difference in the degree of purity or pollution. Food cooked or fried in oil (*pakka*) by a Brahman can usually be eaten or accepted by anyone. Food cooked in water can be eaten only by someone of one's own group or someone who accepts an inferior status to that group. Garbage, the leavings on the plates of others, is usually taken only by very low-status persons. The final food category includes carrion and feces. Both are considered to be highly polluting. Some low castes eat carrion beef—now eschewed even by those who, a few generations back, ate it—and the grain found in the feces of animals. In addition to the relative purity and pollution of the five major categories of foodstuffs—raw, cooked in oil, cooked in water, garbage, and carrion and feces—

there are several other kinds of food. In some respects, the purest food of all is *prasad*, that which has been offered in a ritual fashion to a sacred object, such as the representation of a deity in a temple, and then is taken and distributed for consumption.

Food within any category may range widely in its purity. Generally vegetables and grains are purer than meat. Within the meat category, the range is from eggs (the least polluted of "meats") through fish, chicken, goats and sheep, wild pork, domestic pork and, finally, water buffalo and beef, the most polluting of all meats. Some vegetable foods are considered "stronger" than others. For example, for the Havic Brahmins of Mysore, onions and garlic, the food that resembles meat in color, such as pumpkins, radishes, tomatoes, and carrots, are considered inappropriate to Brahmanical status and are less pure or more polluting than other vegetable foods.¹

Human beings, too, can be in relative states of purity or pollution. Some people, usually termed *Untouchables*, are thought by others in the society to be in a permanent state of pollution. In northern India, they are not literally untouchable, that is, one is not automatically polluted by their touch; but in certain situations and in relation to certain substances, particularly food and water, their touch can be polluting.

A person belonging to an untouchable group within a village is not allowed to go into the area within a higher-caste person's house in which the *chula* (the small earthen stove) is located. This area is usually distinguished by a fresh plaster of mud and cow dung. Similarly, in most situations, a high-caste person does not accept cooked food or water from a person defined as an untouchable, because the water or food would transmit the pollution permanent and inherent in the person of the untouchable. In southern India, in the past and in rural areas today, the touch of an untouchable was polluting, and under certain circumstances some untouchables literally had to be kept at a distance. Any person, however, can be in a state of pollution or impurity. The period can range from a few hours to many days and can be of differing intensity. A woman who is menstruating or a man whose father has died can be polluting. In the case of a father's death, the state of pollution may last up to a month, and the touch of the mourner may be as defiling as that of an untouchable.

In southern India, where concerns about states of pollution and purity are somewhat more intense, three states of purity are ritually recognized:

¹ Edward B. Harper, "Ritual Pollution as an Integrator of Caste and Religion," in Edward B. Harper (ed.), *Religion in South Asia* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1984), p. 155. The whole article is an excellent discussion of the concept of pollution and its effects on behavior of a southern Indian Brahman caste.

ritually impure, ritually pure or normal, or lacking ritual status. One is usually in a state lacking ritual status, that is, one is working in the fields or going about his usual activities. To become ritually impure or to have pollution, one must engage in "a ritually defiling act or . . . have contact with a source of pollution."² For example, one must have been touched by an untouchable or have come into contact with a defiling substance, such as human feces. Becoming ritually pure is necessary in order to carry out rituals. Under most circumstances, bathing puts a male into a state of ritual purity. However, the act of bathing and getting into clean clothes is in itself, as described by Harper, a very complicated affair:

To become *madi* (ritually pure) a person must have a complete bath, including pouring water over the hair, and the water should be drawn from a pure source by a Brahmin who is not in *muttuchettu* (ritually impure). If cotton clothing is worn it must have been washed by someone in *madi* (a state of ritual purity) and to remain in a state of *madi* (ritual purity), the wearer must not touch any cloth which is not *madi*.³

Another underlying fact in Indian society that must be grasped is that India is a group-based, not an individual-based society. Most action and behavior in which an individual Indian engages are in relation to and mediated by the various groups to which he belongs. Most of these groups are ascriptive; one is born into them. The judgments made of his actions by himself and others are in relation to the groups to which he belongs. The groups can be viewed as the circles of an onion, with the center circle being the family, which, for a male, usually means the household in which he grows up and to which his bride comes when he is married. Even if he does not live in a household with his father, brothers, and other male kin when he is an adult, to others, this group is still his family. The family to which he belongs is related genealogically to other families who live close by, and although at times their relations may be antagonistic or even hostile, the tie binding a small number of families, related through the male line, is significant. As a working or landholding group, the families have ritual obligations to one another. A larger number of families may be tied in a lineage: a group of males, in most parts of India, who recognize descent from a known ancestor. For upper landholding castes in much of India, this may be an important tie, and such a lineage may extend over dozens of villages creating an important political and social unit.

² *Ibid.*, p. 152.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 153.

A male grows up recognizing kinship, real or fictive, with other males who are part of his *biradari* (local caste group), which may or may not coincide with the lineage. The *biradari* is the basic unit of the caste system. It is exogamous in that one always marries outside of his *biradari* and considers the males in it of his own age his brothers, the women of his age his sisters, older men as fathers, and older women as mothers. Marriage within the *biradari* would be considered incestuous. The *biradari* is the functional level of the caste system. It may have a head who is recognized as able to act for members of the *biradari*; it may jointly own some property, such as large cooking pots, tents, or ritual objects; it may have formal machinery of government and social control. The membership of a particular exogamous section of a caste, the *biradari*, is fairly easy to determine. Members have a face-to-face knowledge of each other and extend kin terms to each other. The members of a *biradari* establish marriage ties with other such units that form a much wider circle of recognized caste fellows and potential mates and cognatic kin. This unit is called the *jati* in northern India. It is endogamous; often it is named, has a myth of origin, and sometimes a sacred spot or temple. It also has shared stories and legends about its history.

On occasion, leaders of various *biradaris* meet to determine rules concerning behavior or adjudicate disputes that arise between members of different *biradaris* within the *jati*. Enforcement of regulations or judgments made by leaders of the *jati* is left to the *biradaris* usually, but since the *jati* eventually controls the right of any member of a *biradari* to marry and since he must marry out of his own *biradari* into another one in the *jati*, a threat by other *biradaris* to prevent marriages into a recalcitrant *biradari* can often be used to control the behavior of its members.

The *biradari*, the exogamous section of a caste, and the *jati*, the endogamous section, are the functional levels of a caste system from the point of view of its members. But there are two other levels recognized by Indians and observers of the caste system. Within broad regions—the Upper Ganges Valley, for example, there are *jatis* all roughly of the same status, often with a general name applied to them, such as Lohar (carpenter) or Ahir (cattle herder). These *jatis* follow the same traditional occupation and are lumped together as a caste (*jat*). This is not a functioning group but a caste category, much as we might say someone is lower middle class—a very general description. Often when two strangers from different parts of a region meet, they identify themselves by one of these caste category names. Finally, there are ideological categories in the system called *varnas*—the Brahmins, Kshatriyas, Vysayas, and Sutras. These four categories include all but the untouchable castes. The *varnas* set a very broad explanatory framework, laying out duties

and rights and characteristics that members of the *varnas* are assumed to have. The *varna* categories also are important, as we shall see, when a caste tries to change its status, because its members claim membership in one of the two top *varnas*: Brahman or Kshatriya. Sociologically, in terms of determining group membership, it is only the *biradari* and the *jati* that are important. These, in sociological terms, are groups, since they have a concrete reality and a known or knowable membership and structure.

For most rural Indians, about 80 percent of the population, an identification with a village is also important, and for upper- and medium-rank castes this identification represents an important loyalty and allegiance. Most males spend the majority of their lives in one village. Even when someone moves away to a city or to another area, he maintains ties with his natal place. Although his ties to his family, his extended kin group, and his lineage, his *biradari*, and his *jati* are crucial, he also identifies and has a series of structured relations with members of his village who are not of his family lineage and *biradari*.

The social ties that one is born with set obligations, rights, and duties. An Indian frequently submerges his individual concern with the concerns of a group. His identity is determined by group membership; the ties are there and continue to be there after he dies. The ties are not equally or continuously operative but are situational and contingent. One's immediate situation determines which tie should be emphasized, which identity is crucial, which action affects the group. Rural Indians are constantly engaged in quick and minute shiftings of ties and identities, depending on current situations. Often the ties and identities conflict; when a brother quarrels with a brother, a *biradari* member quarrels with a *biradari* mate and seeks help in another *jati* in the village, or a village splits into contending factions. The ties cross-cut and ramify. Although, theoretically, there should be a hierarchy of allegiances and values, with the family being primary, the activities of daily life blur the ideal allegiances.

Underlying the social and cultural system, then, are the attributes of hierarchy, purity and pollution, and group-based ties. With these attributes in mind, we now can turn to an examination of the structure and institutions of Indian society, with the caveat once again that every statement about any aspect of Indian society is subject to qualification.

INDIAN SOCIAL STRUCTURE AND CULTURE: FAMILY

In the past, social scientists and other writers on India wrote as if there were only one kind of Indian family: a joint or extended family. The characteristics of this ideal joint family were summarized by Irawati

Karve in the following terms: "A joint family is a group of people who generally live under one roof, who eat food cooked at one hearth, who hold property in common and who participate in common family worship and are related to each other as some particular kind of kindred."⁴ These characteristics define the Indian joint family. During intensive study of Indians by sociologists and anthropologists, however, a number of questions have arisen about the prevalence, nature, and direction of change in Indian family structure.

In two recent and important papers, Pauline Kolenda has surveyed and analyzed a wide range of data gathered by anthropologists on family structures in India.⁵ She has shown that there is a wide range of regional, caste, and perhaps, economic differences in the kind of family structure found in India. The older categories of *nuclear* (a family or household consisting of a man, his wife, and their children) or *joint* household (made up of three generations: a grandfather, grandmother, their son or sons, their wives, and children) or *collateral joint* family (two or more brothers, their spouses, and children) are too simple to encompass the actual range of structural type found among families in India. A further complicating factor is that families exist through time. A nuclear family can become a joint family if, when the sons grow up, they decide to remain together; a collateral joint family (two or more brothers or cousins) can turn into a full three-generation joint family. Similarly, a joint family can break into constituent nuclear families. Anthropologists following Meyer Fortes's work on West Africa now recognize that most family systems have a development cycle with a regular pattern of buildup and breakdown in structure going on all the time. The fact of the family development cycle has made it very difficult with anthropological data, which tends to report family forms at a particular time, to assess any direction of change in the Indian context. We do not know whether or not the joint family system is breaking up or if there are more nuclear families now than there were in the past, as we do not know how many of a particular type there were at any particular place in the past. I think most anthropologists assume that there may not have been any statistically significant change in family types in the recent past.

⁴ Irawati Karve, "Kinship Organization in India," *Deccan College Monograph Series*, 11 (Poona, India: Post-graduate and Research Institute, 1953), 10.

⁵ Pauline Kolenda, "Region, Caste and Family: A Comparative Study of the Indian 'Joint' Family," in Milton Singer and Bernard S. Cohn (eds.), *Social Structure and Social Change in India* (Chicago: Viking Fund Publications in Anthropology, 43, 1968), and "Regional Differences in Indian Family Structure," in Robert I. Crane (ed.), "Regions and Regionalism in South Asian Studies: An Exploratory Study," *Monograph and Occasional Paper Series Program in Comparative Studies on Southern Asia*, 5 (Duke University, 1967).

To grasp the nature of family life in rural India, which to some extent is the predominant model for all India, one starts with a household. The minimal operating definition of a household for much of India is those who share the food of a single hearth. Usually, this means a grouping, other than individuals who live alone, of at least an adult male, an adult female who is his wife, and their children. When this unit is more complex, kinship is usually traced through the male line, although in Kerala, among some castes, it is traced along the female line, and in some parts of southern India where cross-cousin marriage and uncle-niece marriage are permitted, ties may be through both lines. The household, then, can consist of a variety of kin groupings.

Sharing of food, no matter which kin groupings are involved, usually includes joint holding of property, whether land, a house, furniture, tools, or goods. The property may be considered joint and all males may have a potential share in the property, but its use tends to be vested in the head, usually the oldest male. His authority, theoretically, is absolute over the property, and presumably, he makes the major decisions regarding actions of members of the household.

Except in Kerala and in some castes in southern India, the males grow up in the villages and houses of their fathers. Females who come in as spouses for members of the household grow up elsewhere, but usually not a great distance away. By Western standards, marriage of girls takes place at a relatively young age. Even when a girl goes through the marriage ceremony at the age of eleven or twelve, the marriage is not usually consummated until she is fifteen or so. The age of marriage for girls in India is rising at present.

Early marriage for girls serves a very obvious function, particularly if the girl is moving into a household in a caste or region that has the tradition of joint households. She comes in at an early age, gets socialized to the norms and values of her husband's household, and is less independent than a woman who marries at a later age. Socialization to the values of the family she marries into is important in terms of one of the structural strains built into this kind of family structure. The ideology in a joint household system is to make the tie among the males of a particular generation strong. The brothers must form a tightly knit group if the family is to remain joint. The development of a strong tie to a wife may endanger this, because the husband might put his tie to his wife above his tie to his brothers. Customarily, there is considerable social distance between husband and wife at the formal level. Husband and wife do not call each other or refer to each other by name or kinship terms but by the relationship to their children. Hence, a wife is referred to by her husband as the mother of so-and-so, her eldest son, if she has

one. The use of the eldest son's name also symbolizes one of the main functions of the wife—to provide male heirs to continue the family line. A wife does not eat with her husband, who eats alone or with other adult males in the family. Only after she has served him his meal does a wife eat with the other women of the household and with siblings and cousins. The small child is likely to be cared for by a number of adult women; in addition to his mother, his father's mother, his father's brother's wife, or the wife of one of his own older brothers. As an infant, for all but nursing, a child is handed around. All who are not burdened with other responsibilities take a hand with the care of the young child. Slightly older siblings and cousins, particularly females, take a major share in watching, playing with, and caring for the child. In an Indian village, a typical sight is a girl, at least eight or nine years old but not yet married out of the village, carrying a small sibling on her hip almost everywhere she goes. The child, then, in earliest years, grows up in an environment including a number of parental figures and a number of siblings. Even in a nuclear household, it is likely that the child, from an early age, is cared for by relatives or neighbors, so that structurally, although his household may not have more than a mother and father in it, the culture of the joint household pervades the early years of the child.

The pervasiveness of the joint family culture, of course, is facilitated by the nature of the house itself. In a climate in which there is little need for shelter during the day, except during the rainy season, the house by itself is not necessarily the locus of many activities that Westerners think of as taking place in the house. Many Indians, at least the males, sleep outside, bathe outside, and spend their leisure time outside. Many household tasks, such as preparing and grinding grain, also take place outside. The house is used for storage, as a kitchen, as a place in which women sleep, and as a place in which men and women have sexual relations. Other than these, activities for men and some for women take place on the veranda and in the space in front of the house, which is the main locus of family activities.

It is usually thought that the joint family is essentially a social form associated with the rural segment of a traditional society and found among landholding groups. This relationship would seem to follow if the data from the Ganges Valley are taken as typical. The traditional landholding groups, such as the Rajputs, Bhuminars, and Jats in the Ganges Valley, are our point of reference. In other parts of India, however, this is not generally the case. The Marathas of western India, some of the landholding groups of Bengal, and many of the landholding groups of southern India do not emphasize the ideology of the joint family and the extension of this ideology into corporate lineage segments. A military

tradition rather than landholding as such may be the crucial variable in determining which groups emphasize the joint family ideology.

Landholders and military groups are not the only ones for whom the joint family is economically functional for keeping property together and, providing a pool of labor and supervisory personnel. The joint family is a highly functional form of organization for artisans and merchants as well.

In artisan groups, in both villages and towns, joint family living is found. I. P. Desai, who carried out a study of family types and functions in a small Indian city, found considerable variation among artisan groups in relation to the degree of jointness in their family structure.⁶ Blacksmiths had low degrees of jointness and potters had relatively high degree of jointness. Other artisan and service groups in the sample Desai studied were too small to indicate anything about the distribution of family types. It is clear from logical analysis, though, that artisans, if they need a labor pool or pooling of tools, capital, or materials for their work, find a joint family functional.

Among merchant groups, Desai found a fairly high percentage of families with a high degree of jointness. Again, for merchants who need to concentrate capital or differentiate business specialties, the joint family seems to be functional as well. In the past and in the present, the family firm is one of the principal means of carrying on business in India, even for very extensive operations.

When one views the functions of a joint family, rather than mere co-residence as the criterion for establishing jointness, it seems that the joint family is highly functional for business groups even when members of the family live widely scattered over India. Brothers or cousins, in effect, act as agents of family business in different cities and towns but still operate with a common purse and with a common decision-making locus for their business activities. It is often argued that a joint family—is antithetical to the development of business and entrepreneurial activities. It has been assumed that, in a family system that allows members to have a claim on the family purse and an automatic share in the property of the family, a situation might develop in which a few members would be burdened with the support of many inactive members. In reality, this does not seem to happen. Rather the males of the joint business family form a corporation, have mutual trust, and have the advantage of a pool of capital.

One of the most persistent social science theories is that modern education, industrial employment, work in the free professions, and white-

⁶ I. P. Desai, *Some Aspects of Family in Mahura: A Sociological Study of Jointness in a Small Town* (New York: Asia Publishing House, 1964).

collar employment deal a death blow to an extended family system. The theory evolves from assumptions about the nature of the history of the Western family, where it has been assumed that, at some time, in Western Europe and Great Britain, there was a large extended family system that broke apart under the impact of the commercial and industrial revolutions. Recent work by social historians has cast considerable doubt on the theory. Recent research seems to indicate that the nuclear family, certainly as far back as the Middle Ages in England, was the predominant type. It has been assumed that structurally, because of spatial mobility, and ideologically, because of the development of modern education, economic opportunity, and the growth of individualism inherent in modern cultures, the joint family could not survive and that, particularly in modern urban settings, nuclear families would predominate.

What evidence there is concerning the Indian family under modern urban conditions does not lead to clear conclusions. The most complete study of the Indian family under modern conditions is that of sociologist Aileen D. Ross.⁷ Through questionnaires and case studies, she studied 157 individuals, mainly of high castes—Brahmans constituted two-thirds of her sample and middle-rank castes, Okkaligas and Reddis the remaining part—in Bangalore, Mysore, which is a large city with a significant amount of modern industrial activity. The sample is biased in favor of those in the modern segment of the economy and does not include any of the working-class population of the city. Ross used a very narrow definition of jointness in her study, relying on household composition as the main criterion, but Desai tried to include a wide range of factors in establishing his criteria for jointness. Ross's data show that, at the time of her study (the late 1950s), 37 percent of those interviewed were living in joint households and 40 percent had grown up in joint households.⁸ It is impossible to tell, since there are no comparative or historical data on the groups from which these urban dwellers were recruited, whether these percentages represent any change brought about by urban living or by variations, in time, in the pattern of the distribution of family types in Mysore. It can be seen, though, that a significant number of educated middle-class families in a modern Indian city live in joint families.

There is much anecdotal evidence, in the form of casual observations and in novels, such as those of R. K. Narayan and Ruth Jhabvala, that even in the modern cities and in highly educated classes engaged in modern occupations, both the structure and the ideology of the joint

⁷ *The Hindu Family in Its Urban Setting* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1961).

⁸ Calculations based on data in *Ibid.*, pp. 36, 37.

family persist. Most middle-class urban families support relatives in their households for long periods of time, as dependents or while they attend school or look for work. The family in the city is a center of freely given assistance for rural relatives. Similarly, income derived from urban employment, even from long-established urban families, is often remitted to the families still living in the villages. Property held in the village is still considered joint property, shared with the family living in the city. Sometimes a pattern is consciously worked out among brothers holding some property in a village, in which one or more brothers and their families remain in the village to work and manage the family property, while other brothers seek their fortune in business or government service in the cities. Although some brothers may establish long-term residence with their families in cities and towns, they still consider themselves part of a joint family located in the village, with children from both village and town spending long periods of time with their father's brothers' families.

The ideology of the joint family often persists in unlikely situations. Myron Weiner, a political scientist, found in his study of opposition parties and their structure that groups in parties frequently have the authority pattern of a joint family in which the group leader is treated as the head of a joint family.⁹ In a wide range of situations, the ideology, the culture, and the feeling tone of the joint family seem to persist and affect many situations long after the structure of the joint family has disappeared.

⁹ Myron Weiner, *Party Politics in India* (Princeton, N. J.: Princeton University Press, 1957), p. 238-39.