

Unit 3.2

CASTE SYSTEM IN INDIA

The Indian Caste System has unique features among the systems of social stratification. It is, in fact, the significance of Caste that more than anything else characterises India. Every Hindu necessarily belongs to the Caste of his parents and in that Caste he inevitably remains. The word, '**Caste**' is of Portuguese origin '**Casta**' means lineage or race.

Several studies have been done on the Caste and different scholars have defined 'the Caste' in different ways. Some of the important definitions can be given as below.

According to **Ketkar S. V. (1909)** **A Caste is a social group having two characteristics**: one, membership is confined to those who are born of members and includes all persons so born and two, the members are forbidden by an inexorable social law to marry outside the group. The author, instead of giving clear definition, prefers to give the characteristics of caste, because he thinks that, this can give clear identity to the caste.

Hocart defines caste as "merely families to whom various offices in the ritual are assigned by heredity."

Senart, a French scholar defines caste as a "corporation in theory at any rate rigorously hereditary, equipped with a certain traditional and independent organization, including a chief and a council, meeting on occasions in assemblies of more or less plenary authority and joining together at certain festivals; bound together by common occupations, which relate particularly to marriage and to food and to questions of ceremonial pollution".

According to **Bougle**, caste arose from the idea of hereditary specialization. Professions become the obligatory monopolies of families- to perform them is not merely a right but a duty imposed by birth on them. Personal status, according to Bougle, is determined by the rank of the group to which one belongs to; hence inequality is also a product of caste system. The spirit of caste reigns in a society different groups of which the society is composed repel each other rather than attract. One caste tries to isolate itself, makes every effort to prevent its members from contracting alliance or even from entering into relations with neighbouring group.

Bougle (1958) explains that, the **caste as hereditarily specialised and hierarchically arranged groups**. The author has given **three characteristics of the caste system: hierarchy, hereditary specialisation and repulsion**.

The concept of caste system, according to **Berreman**, is one that composed of ranked groups. Each group is a firm entity, named, bounded and self-aware and culturally homogenous. Because interaction between different group is limited and that within a group is more intense, the member of a group tend to share distinctive cultural characteristic. The caste system thus contributes to cultural pluralism.

Opler Morris (1950) also states that, a short definition of caste is not satisfactory, so it is more illuminating to talk in terms of the characteristics of caste. He further states that, " Caste is hereditary and endogamous. It regulates social intercourse, is graded in rank and has an assembly or a governing body which regulates its of" internal affair".

Ghurye (1961) also has stated in similar way. According to him, a caste refers to hereditary membership, caste councils, hierarchy and endogamy as the important features, besides that, the author also refers to the restrictions on feeding and social intercourse, lack of unrestricted choice of occupation and civil and religious disabilities.

Herbert Risley defines caste as “a collection of families or groups of families bearing a common name; claiming a common descent from an ancestor, human or divine; professing to follow the same hereditary features; and regarded by those who are competent to give an opinion as forming a single homogeneous community”.

Theories of Origin of Caste

The origin of the Caste System could be understood more clearly through the various theories propounded by different scholars. These theories differ from one another.

Divine origin theory

Most of the religious authorities, Shastras and Puranas have advocated the divine origin of the caste system. Four 'Varnas' or four Castes have emerged from the different parts of Brahma's body. "The 'Brahmin' was born from his mouth, the 'Kshatriya' from his arms, the 'Vaishyas' from his thighs and the 'Sudra' from his feet". It considers caste as a naturally determined organisation of social functions and explains the membership of an individual in particular caste in terms of 'Karma' and 'Dharma' doctrine.

According to 'Karma Doctrine', a man is born in a particular caste because of his action performed in his previous incarnation. If he had performed better actions, he would have been born in a higher Caste. He was born in that Caste because he deserved to be born. According to 'Dharma Doctrine', a man who accepts and lives according to the dharma is rewarded, while the violation of dharma is punished. If a man observes the rules of dharma, he will be born in his next birth in a high and rich-caste and if a man violates the dharma, he will be born in a low and poor caste.

This traditional theory has been criticized on three counts. First it attributes the origin of human beings as four Varnas to a divine being and thus considers it as a supernatural phenomenon which is biologically wrong. Secondly, it treats four Varnas as four castes, which implies that caste system and Varna system are all the same. This conception is wrong. In this regard M.N. Srinivas holds that the idea of caste as the four-fold division of society represents a gross oversimplification of facts. The real unit of caste system is jati denoting an endogamous community with more or less defined ritual status and occupations traditionally linked to it.

Thirdly, the tracing of the origin of caste to miscegenation is also misleading. It is possible that some castes have been formed as miscegenation, but it is not correct to say that all the castes have been formed due to miscegenation.

Brahmanical Theory

According to **Abbe Dubois** (1857), the caste system originated and developed in India because of 'Brahmins'. 'Brahmins' imposed severe social restrictions on 'non-Brahmins', especially on the 'Sudras', to preserve their purity. They gave themselves a higher status in the "Brahmanas" and in other books and declared all others as inferior to them. Sudras were classified as most inferior to anyone else. **Ghurye (1961)** supports 'Brahmanical Theory'. He believes that, the role of Brahmin was vital in the origin of Caste System in India.

However, Hutton has made scathing attack on the Brahmanical theory of the origin of caste on two counts. First, it is not possible to accept this theory unless it is confirmed that Brahmins must have got the political power to implement such a scheme. Second, such a deep-rooted social institution, like caste, could hardly be imposed by an administrative measure. Of course, both the arguments of Hutton appear to be illogical because Kshatriyas have ruled over the land through the entire period of history and furthermore imposition of superiority over others by the Brahmins may not be possible through administrative measure.

Racial Theory

According to this theory, propounded by **Herbert Risley** in his book *The People of India*, racial differences and endogamous marriages led to the origin of the caste system. According to him caste system developed after emigration of Aryans from Persia. The migrant 'Aryans' had their own ideas of ceremonial purity. They considered the original inhabitants as inferior to them. The 'Aryans' were essentially 'Patrilineal' in nature, while local population, whom they conquered was matrilineal. Therefore, they 'married with the daughters of the aborigines but refused to give their daughters to them. The children of such marriages had to be assigned the lowest position in the society and were called as 'Chandals'. Thus, the origin of 'half-breeds' group', as well as the feeling of racial superiority ultimately became responsible for the origin of the Caste System in India.

Risley has referred to **six processes** in the formation of Castes. They are, change in traditional occupation, Change in Customs, Migration, Preservations of old tradition, Enrolling oneself into the rank of Hinduism and, Role of Religious enthusiasts. These all ultimately, according to the author, have developed the Caste System in India.

Ghurye's View:

G.S. Ghurye also traces the origin of caste system to race. He has associated caste system with Brahmanic system. The system originated in the Gangetic plains due to the conquest of the Aryans. According to him, the conquered race began to be considered as Sudra. The Sudras were excluded from all religious and social activities of the Aryans. The Aryans did not allow them to participate in Indo-Aryans social activities. According to him "the Brahminic variety of this Indo-Aryan civilization was developed in the Gangetic plain". Ghurye believed that it is this multiplicity which has resulted in the formation of castes and sub-castes. In this regard, he adds, "the various factors that characterize caste society were the result in the first instance of the attempts on the part of the upholders of Brahminic civilization to exclude the aborigines and the Sudras from religious and social communication with themselves."

Criticism:

Racial theory cannot be accepted as the exclusive theory of the origin of caste system in India. Caste system should not be confined to India. It should be found in all such societies which have experienced the conquest by other racial groups. Secondly, it is quite natural that whenever two or more distinct races come into contact, some sort of segregation results. But this may not always lead to untouchability. Thirdly, the practice of hypergamy may be a reasonable factor contributing to the formation of caste system. But this is not the sole reason. If we relate the origin of caste exclusively to the race, it will neglect many other possible factors.

Occupation Theory

Nesfield (1885) believes that, 'the origin of Caste has nothing to do with the racial affinity, but it mainly due to functions or occupations. The skill of occupation was passed on hereditarily from generation to generation and because of practicing the same occupation over a long period of time, "Occupational Guilds" came into existence, which later on came to be known as Castes.'

The author: explains how the Brahmins were classified as highest status, that, the 'Brahmins' were specialised in the occupation of 'sacrifice and hymns and rituals'. Since sacrifices were very important in the social life of the people, 'Brahmins' became the most important and respected people in the Society. Thus, every occupation became hereditary and through which the Caste System into existence.

In support of his theory, Nesfield cited the example that the occupation of artisans working in metals is ranked higher than basket makers or some other primitive occupations which do not involve the use of metals.

However, this theory is not free from criticism. The line of attack is that occupation is not the sole basis of causing caste differences. Wide variations are also marked in respect of the position of agricultural castes which are rated lower, they are regarded as relatively higher and respectable in North India.

Ketkar's Theory

Ketkar S. V. (1909) believes that, 'the origin of Caste was from early tribes and the psychological prejudicial tendencies of human beings.' According to the author, there were numerous tribes living in different parts of India. Many of these tribes were in struggle with each other on the issues like, boundaries, kidnapping a girl from other tribe etc. Because of such conflicts, people avoided other tribes in marriage and social relations and confined social interaction in all respects to members of their own tribe. Thus, the author's view is that, the castes originated from the tribes.

Senart's Theory

Senart (1930) gives historically parallel explanation to support the origin of caste. Senart finds certain similarities in the three systems: 'Indian, Greek and Romans'. All of the three are the Aryans and their civilisations are oldest one. There are many similarities in the social relations, social practices and customs among these three systems, just as in India, there is a custom that, after marriage, a woman transfers from her gotra to that of her husband's, the same custom existed in Rome. Also, just like caste panchayats in India, there exist similar councils in Rome and Greece. On the basis of these comparisons, Senart says that, the Caste is the normal development of ancient Aryan Institutions.

Hutton's Theory of 'Mana'

According to Hutton (1961), 'mana' is a mysterious impersonal power attached to individuals, objects and places. Wherever the belief in 'mana' prevails, a corresponding belief in the value of taboo as protective measures is also to be found. Taboos were, therefore, imposed on commensality, intermarriage, social interaction etc., to save the members of one's tribe from the mana of the other tribe. The restrictions on sharing food with others and having contact with them are based on the belief that, these food and contacts may be infected with the dangerous soul matters of strangers. Thus, Hutton says that, people believe in 'mana', which ultimately created the Caste System in India.

The theory of 'Mana' has been criticized on the following ground. India is not only country where the belief in 'Mana' existed. But in no other parts of the world, it created the caste system. Hence, the belief that the theory that 'Mana' produced caste system appears to be misleading.

Broken Men Theory

Ambedkar B. R. (1946) argues that, the 'Shudras' were originally king and in the later period they became slaves. The author writes that, "The kings belong to the 'Shudra' group. The Shudras were one of the 'Aryan' communities of solar race. The 'Shudras' ranked as the 'Kshatriya Varna' in the 'Indo-Aryan' society. There was a time when the 'Aryan' society recognized only three 'Varnas', namely, 'Brahmin', 'Kshatriya' and 'Vaishyas'. The 'Shudras' were not a separate 'Varna', but a part of the 'Kshatriya Varna'. There was a continuous feud between the 'Shudra' kings and the 'Brahmins', in which the Brahmins were subjected to many tyrannies and indignities. As a result of the hatred towards the 'Shudras' due to their tyrannies and oppression, the 'Brahmins' refused to invest the 'Shudras' with the sacred thread. Owing to the loss of the sacred thread, the 'Shudras' became socially degraded, fell below the rank of the Vaishyas and came from the fourth 'Varna'".

Slater's theory

A theory of the origin of caste which combines both functional and racial origins has been put forward by Slater in his Dravidian Elements in Indian culture. He emphasizes the fact that caste is actually stronger in Southern than in Northern India, and suggests that caste arose in India before the Aryan Invasion as a result of occupations becoming hereditary and marriages being managed by parents within the society of the Common craft because sexual maturity developed early and trade secrets were thus preserved. As a result of magic and religious ceremonies also, exclusive occupational groups were built up, marriage outside which became prejudicial and contras to practice. The Aryan invasion had the effect of strengthening the tendency to associate difference of caste with a difference of colour and of strengthening also a tendency for castes to be placed in a scale of social precedence. He also maintains the existence in the Pre-Aryan society of India of an order of Priest magicians.

Hocart's Theory

Quite a different origin for caste is argued by Hocart, who apparently regards the whole system as originating in ritual. According to him, the basis of the caste system is two –fold – descent and sacrifice. Of the two, sacrifice is the essential one; descent is merely a qualification which at times may be dispensed with for even a boy of non-sacrificial lineage can be admitted to royal, priestly or farmer rank by going through the initiation ceremony appropriate to that rank as a result of which he is reborn as a member of the particular rank. Every son of a Brahmin is born of his father but he is also born of the sacrifice, and so is every Kshatriya and Farmer. Hence, such expressions as “the twice born, first born of ritual”. Castes are merely families to whom various offices of the ritual are assigned by heredity. Since rank depends upon certain qualifications, a family can lose its ranks by losing its qualifications, i.e., observance of rules which go with certain offices.

Pillai argues that caste is neither based on political grounds as advanced by the Europeans, nor it is based on divine dispensation as is believed by the orthodox Hindus. The political basis of caste in the presumed invasions of India by the Aryans, and enslavement of the original inhabitants. As there is no historical or traditional or archaeological evidence to establish an Aryan invasion, the development of caste on a political basis should be discredited as it is much more based on mistaken interpretation of certain terms used in a single hymn in the Vedas. Hence, Pillai thinks that in the absence of any other evidence, it can safely be stated that Jati or **caste originated with the totem and maintained by prohibitions on inter dining and inter marriage.**

According to **Evolutionary theory**, the caste system did not come into existence all of a sudden on at a particular date. It is the result of a long process of social evolution. A number of factors played their part in the development of the present caste system. Among these factors we may enumerate the following ones:

- (i) Hereditary occupations;
- (ii) The desires of the Brahmins to keep themselves pure;
- (iii) The lack of rigid unitary control of the state;
- (iv) The unwillingness of rulers to enforce a uniform standard of law and custom and their readiness to reorganise the ranging customs of different groups as valid;
- (v) Belief in re-incarnation and the doctrine of karma;
- (vi) Ideas of exclusive family, ancestor worship, and the sacramental meals;
- (vii) Clash of antagonistic cultures particularly of the patriarchal and the matriarchal systems;

- (viii) Clash of races, colour prejudices and conquest;
- (ix) Deliberate economic and administrative policies followed by the various conquerors particularly by the British;
- (x) Geographical isolation of the Indian peninsula;
- (xi) Static nature of Hindu Society;
- (xii) Foreign invasions;
- (xiii) Rural social structure.

Characteristics of Caste System

Caste refers to the socially distinct endogamous groups which are simultaneously separated and connected with each other through three basic characteristics such as- separation regarding marriage & contact, division of the labour in each of the group; which represents a particular profession and finally, hierarchy, (which ranks the groups on a scale dividing them into high and low endogamous group or high and low castes). However, within the changing situations caste has adapted to various features like less rigid structure, having link with political power and variation in the segmental division. Here are all the characteristics features of the Caste System based on various changing patterns presented below: -

- 1) **Ascriptiveness-** A person's caste was determined by birth. Caste membership could be taken away, by other caste members, for 'violation of caste rules. Marriage was also restricted to members of the same caste.
- 2) **Endogamy-** Marriage within a group is termed as endogamy. It indicates the marriage pattern of the members of caste within their own caste only. As the inter-caste marriage are prohibited within the caste system.
- 3) **Division of Society-** Indian society is socially stratified into various divisions largely based on the Caste. There are various castes having a well-developed life pattern established according to their caste.
- 4) **Hierarchy-** It simply entails the ranking pattern of people's according to their caste statuses within the society, which is determined by the notions of purity and impurity within the occupations, are ranked from higher to lower positions. It indicates or represents a ladder like pattern of caste ranking where pure caste is ranked at the top whereas the impure caste placed at the bottom of the ladder. For example, As Brahmins performs the ritual and various other religious practices along with teaching, so their occupation considered to be of purest form; hence they are placed at the top while Sweeper whose occupation is comprises of cleaning and scavenging, is placed at the bottom within the hierarchical system because of impure occupation.
- 5) **Commensality-** Castes placed restrictions on eating and drinking with members of other castes. Actions like accepting food and drink took on a pure/impure caste value depending on the caste of the person within the hierarchical system. The commensality restrictions on a caste usually were an indicator on how they ranked in the social hierarchy.
- 6) **Socio-Economic Interdependence or Association-** Each caste exhibit a particular traditional occupation associated with their caste, which they cannot change over time. So, each caste has to depend on various other castes for their survival, as a caste is only associated with one or two occupations only, whereas they need various other products and services to fulfill their needs which they can only get by associating with the other castes. For example, Baniyas are engaged in business, sometimes (like during marriage, birth etc.) need to perform rituals which they can only perform by

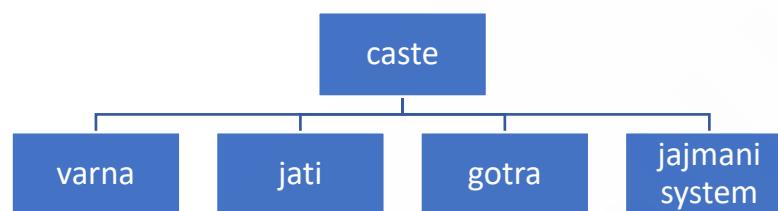
associating with the Brahmins, as they have the expertise of priesthood, ritual performing and of teaching.

7) Purity and Impurity- It's one of the most important feature of the caste system. As endogamous groups or castes are ranked according their ritual purity and pollution based on their terms of deeds, occupation, language, dress patterns and form of food as well as the food habits. For example, liquor consumption, consuming non-vegetarian food, eating left-over food of high castes, working in occupations like lifting dead animals, sweeping and carrying garbage etc. are considered to be impure.

8) Distinction in Customs- As each caste composed of distinct way of living life i.e. having its own customs, form of language or speech and dress code or pattern. As the high caste use the pure language (use literary words), whereas, the low caste uses the local language (admixture of various words).

The main features of caste system according to Ghurye are i) segmental division of society ii) hierarchy, iii) endogamy, iv) association with a hereditary occupation, v) restrictions on food and social intercourse, and vi) civil and religious disabilities and privileges enjoyed by different sections of the society (Ghurye 1950: 50).

Structural Components of the Caste System



1) Varna: Caste system as a hierarchy, divides the entire Hindu population into four main groups which are referred as Varna's (a Sanskrit word meaning 'colour'); Varna's which also exhibit Pan-Indian hierarchy are such as

- i) Brahmins- which are referred as priests, who were entitled to study the holy books (Vedas), perform rites and rituals for themselves and for others and are obliged to observe the sacraments and as they have ritual performing occupation; are on the top of ranking system.
- ii) Kshatriyas-are the warriors or the kings, who were commanded (by tradition) to protect the people, give gifts to the Brahmins, offer sacrifices to gods and dispense justice to the people (as judges or kings) generally have the second spot on ranking or hierarchy level.
- iii) Vaishyas- are the merchants or businessman's, who were entitled to do the work like lending money and trade related activities; having the third position on the ladder like hierarchical system.
- iv) Shudras-are referred as the artisans and workers, who were the labour class and their only job was to serve the other three castes and having the last position within the ranking system. Outside the proper Varna system, at the very bottom are the Untouchables, labelled thus by the British's, because a high-caste person had to go through an elaborate purification ritual after touching such a polluting person. Members of the three upper or highest Varna's are referred as 'twice-born' because they have gone through a ceremony entailing spiritual re-birth.

2) Jati: The Indian anthropologist M.N. Srinivas wrote in early 1950s; that "the real unit of the caste system is not one of the four Varna's, but the Jati, which is a small endogamous group practicing a traditional occupation and enjoying a certain amount of cultural, ritual and judicial autonomy."

As the Jati is the small endogamous group having a kind of autonomy, are restricted to particular areas and not having the Pan-Indian impact. There are about more than thousands of Jati in India; they all represent a hereditary profession or occupation or craft and have the long-standing commitments with the other Jati within the area as well as a special place in the ritual-regional hierarchy. Most Jati are relatively small, but some are large and internally differentiated groups with asymmetrical alliance patterns between lineage segments. Practical function of the Varna system is mainly to make it possible for the members of the local Jati's to locate themselves in relation to the Jati's in other parts of the country; additionally, it represents abstract hierarchy and value system.

And as stated by M.N. Srinivas, every region has its own dominant Jati, as concept of Jati is highly localized. For example, In Haryana Brahmins are the element of joking.

According to M.N. Srinivas, principles of dominant Jati are represented through- largest land holding, numerical preponderance (highest in number), and most literate & economically prosperous and on the last are the first to make use of | English, education & of new occupations. If all the four conditions are satisfied then the Jati is referred as the dominant one.

3) **Gotra:** Gotra refers to the structural form of the clan; and exogamy of the endogamous group is defined through the Gotra. It's one of the most important principle for the endogamy within the group.

4) **Jajmani System:** The Jajmani system is the system of exchange of goods and services between the members of different castes. It is an important institution that developed during the medieval period and continued till modern times in the rural society. It is the traditional jati-based division of labour in Indian villages in which lower castes performed various functions for upper castes and received grain in return. It consists of a set of traditional rules about the exchange of products and services between the members of different castes. In other words, each caste has specific commitments towards the others. In fact, the jajmani system is a system of economic, social and ritual ties among different caste groups in a village that bound them together.

There are two terms- 'Jajman' (patron) and 'Kamin' (client) that are popular in North Indian villages under Jajmani system. As this system is found all over India, the terms used for jajman and kamin are different in different regions. The term 'jajman' comes from the Sanskrit word 'yajamana', meaning 'sacrifier' (as opposed to 'sacrificer'): 'he who has a sacrifice performed'.

According to **Harold Gould**, Jajmani system is: An inter- familial inter-caste relationship pertaining to the patterning of super ordinate- subordinate relations between patrons and suppliers of services.

Yogendra Singh says that a system governed by relationship based on reciprocity in inter-caste relations in villages is Jajmani system.

Ram Ahuja says that the durable relation between a landowning family and the landless families that supply them with goods and services is called the Jajmani system.

The first anthropologist to provide a full description of it was **W H Wiser** who studied a village in the Hindi region and wrote about in a book titled The Hindu Jajmani System. Wiser considered the system to be one of great antiquity and traced its origins to the laws of Manu. William Wiser coined the term 'Jajmani System' to denote client-patron dyadic relation.

However, Wiser's assumptions were refuted by the political scientist, in 1993 on an extensively researched paper entitled, 'Inventing Village Tradition: The Late 19th Century Origins of the Jajmani System'. He wrote: "I argue that the jajmani system is of relatively recent origin and is essentially a feature of the Gangetic plain". He pointed out that the system became popular only in the latter half of the 19th century.

Two forces of change converged to facilitate the emergence of jajmani: **the first** of these was the **growing partition of zamindari and bhaiyacharya villages into individual holdings**; the **second** was the **mounting pressure on landholders to offer significant incentives to village artisans to retain their services**. Mayer seems to assume that all over the Gangetic plain, all land in villages was owned either by a body of agnatically related males (bhaiyacharya or biradri), with the result that artisans and others served the entire village and not the households of individual landowners.

Gould (1987) says that the caste system differentiates people into endogamous clusters of joint families in terms of occupational specialization and standard of differential ritual purity. As a result, the attitude of social avoidance becomes a major aspect of village life. But, the requirements of community living, especially where there is an advanced division of labour, are that a certain degree of functional integration be achieved and maintained. The jajmani system, which is a non-pecuniary pattern of economic interaction, accomplishes this task and facilitates the exchange of goods and services without violating the connubial, commensal, and occupational exclusiveness.

Gould (1987) further says that the jajmani system binds the families in a manner comparable to the kinship ties. A particularistic set of relationships is established between families of different ritual occupational status. It affords assurance of indefinite durability, stable provision of essential services and observance of host of kin-like diffuse obligations. Gould observes that jajman-kameen networks are not confined within a given village but radiate into the "local culture" because no village has a full quota service caste and must, therefore, utilize appropriate families in nearby village. Each purjan will normally have several jajmans. The formal payments for the services rendered are in terms of certain quantities of grains per six months apart from other informal exchanges.

Unlike Beidelman (1959), who explicitly equates the jajman with "exploiter" and characterizes the system as "feudal", Gould (1987) emphasizes that the system does not rest upon a simple dichotomy between rich and poor rather it arises from a religious dichotomy between pure and impure. It is often the mutual wish of the jajman and kameen to practice certain rituals and a way of life necessitating the avoidance of impurity. He also asserts that the system cannot be exploitative where the jajman and the specialists are of approximately equal status or the specialist, who is providing the service, is better off than his client.

Ishwaran holds the view that it is a system in which each caste has a role to play in a community life as a whole called as "aya" in Mysore in South India; each caste plays a role consisting of economic, social and moral functions. The jajmani system essentially operates at the family level. The landowning family has its jajmani ties with one family each from Brahmin, Barber, Carpenter, etc.

D.N. Majumdar has cited the example of a Thakur family (of Rajput caste) in a village in Lucknow district in U.P. which is served by as many as families often castes for the lifecycle rites. As for example, at the birth-feast of a child, the priest presides over the ceremony of 'NainSanskarana', Washerman washes dirty clothes, Barber carries messages, Goldsmith provides the gold ornament of the new-born, Blacksmith provides iron bangle, Pasi provides 'patal' (leaf-plates) for taking food, Carpenter provides wooden tool on which the child was kept for the ceremony. The Potter provides jugs for keeping cooked vegetables and drinking water; scavenger cleans the place after the feast.

Louis Dumont in his book "Homo Hierarchicus" has mentioned this system as the system corresponding to the prestations and counter-prestations by which the castes as a whole are bound together in the village, and which is more or less universal in India. According to him, it is the basic form of the division of labour in traditional India.

CHARACTERISTICS OF THE JAJMANI SYSTEM:

1) Relationships under Jajmani are Permanent: The more striking and essential feature of the jajmani system is that it ensures the availability of certain essential services to farmers. Thus, on account of this system certain individuals or groups of them needed for assistance in agriculture or to meet the essential requirements of the agriculturalists stay permanently in the villages. Thus, a village is able to function as a relatively self-sufficient unit. It is on account of this system that if any Kamin leaves a village he provides for his substitute.

2. Jajmani is Hereditary: Second major feature of jajmani system is its being hereditary. According to N.S. Reddy, the rights of jajmani jobs are considered to be proprietary. These are passed on to sons from his father and in case of separation of brothers these rights are also split among them. If someone has no son but only a daughter jajmani rights pass on to the husband of the daughter. However, jajmani rights are not equally distributed among families. For example, an ironsmith may be giving service to 30 families, whereas another may have only 10 or less clients. Moreover, with the increase in the number of male members in a family jajmani rights are split among them and this leads to reduction in the number of clients. On the other hand, if there is rapid increase in the members of jajman families, the number of clients may grow.

3. Goods against services: Another important characteristic of jajmani system is that instead of receiving cash payment against his services, the Kamin is paid in kind, that is, he receives grains like wheat, rice, etc. Thus, under jajmani system the relation between jajman and Kamin is not that of employer and employee, as is the case under the capitalist system. In fact, in return for the services of Kamin, jajman is anxious about the needs and welfare of the Kamin and furnishes him goods he needs most. The relationship between jajman and Kamin is not purely economic but is a human relationship. Accordingly, jajman takes full responsibility for the welfare of Kamin and Kamin serves jajman with devotion and dedication. Jajman not only provides Kamin with food but also gives him clothing and residential accommodation. The amount of grain given to Kamin depends upon the nature of services rendered. In his study of jajman system in Rampur, Oscar Lewis collected following data regarding the amount of food given for each kind of work:

No.	Caste	Nature of Service	Compensatory Rights
I.	Carpenter	Repair of Agricultural Implements.	One mound food grain in a year. 2.5 seers of food grain at the time of harvesting
II.	Ironsmith	-do-	-do-
III.	Potter	Provision of earthen vessels and odd jobs during marriages.	Food grain according to the value of pots and grains according to situation and capacity at the time of marriage.
IV.	Sweeper	Removal of Filth, Making Gobar Cakes, Stringing Beads.	Two meals per day. As much food grain as he can carry at the time of harvest. More food grain at marriages
V.	Shoemaker	Assistance in agriculture. Removal of Carcasses.	1/20 of produce and skins of dead animals

As can be gauged from the above mentioned list, kamins get enough food to meet their personal requirements. That is why they prefer payment in kind rather than in cash. However, these days there is a tendency to substitute by cash payment the payment in kind.

4. Peace and contentment: According to W.H. Wiser, a significant feature of jajmani system is a peace and contentment which is provided to villagers. The kamins of a jajman feel a sense of security. They are free from the worry of finding employment to make both ends meet. As the nature of the tasks they have to perform is well known to them in advance, they feel great mental peace and are well

prepared for these tasks: and this saves them the botheration of adjustment. However, the picture is not altogether rosy. There are quite a few instances in which kamins are exploited and given too little for their services.

5. Difference in the scope of work: Under jajmani system the range of activity of different kamins is not uniform. It is not necessary that a certain Kamin should work only for a single family or even a single village. If the nature of his work or activity is such that he can effectively cater to the needs of two or three villages, there is no provision in jajmani system against such an arrangement. For example, a family needs the services of a barber once or twice a week and these, too, for an hour or so. Naturally, therefore a barber can easily cater to the needs of a dozen or so families. He can even work in more than one village. Another factor which restricts or widens the spread of one's activity is the nature of demand and supply. If a village is prosperous, it may have one or more shopkeepers but if the village is small and demand of goods is low, there may not be one exclusive shopkeeper in that village. We do not find shoe makers in every village. S.S. Nehru studied 54 North Indian villages and found that only in 18 out of these there were shoemakers. Potters were in 30% of the villages and shopkeepers only in 16%. Ahirs were found in 60% and Brahmin, barber and ironsmith and Teli were found each in 40% of the villages. From the above points it is clear that not every type of Kamin is to be found in every village. In the absence of a particular Kamin people perform that task by themselves or go to other village for it. For example, residents of a village may get their hair dressed from a neighbouring village.

ADVANTAGES OF THE JAJMANI SYSTEM:

The main advantages of the jajmani system are as follows:

1. Security of service

- As mentioned earlier, the professions in jajmani system are hereditary; and are, therefore, permanent and fixed. The sons of kamin do not have to look for jobs; they get jobs as a matter of birth right.

2. Economic security

- In jajmani system, jajmans look after each and every need of their kamins. Thus, a kamin enjoys economic security.

3. Close personal relations

- Jajmans and kamins are related to each other by heredity and long tradition, their relationship is intimate and personal. They know each other very well and are, therefore, sympathetic to the needs of each other. Their relationship is not purely economic or professional. As a matter of fact, their lives are interlinked.

DISADVANTAGES OF THE JAJMANI SYSTEM:

However, jajmani system is not free from faults. Like caste system it was of great value in the past but has now degenerated into an instrument of exploitation and discrimination. As Oscar Lewis has pointed out in his study of jajmani system in Rampur village, whereas in past it was based on personal relationship, it has now become an instrument of exploitation of kamin by jajman. In jajmani system, the kamins are treated as inferior and lowered. In fact, the word kamin itself means lowly or inferior. D.N. Majumdar and colleagues found in their survey of the villages that the conditions of kamins are miserable and the upper castes subject them to great harassment and trouble.

Is the Jajmani System Exploitative?

There is no agreement among anthropologists as to the exploitative nature of Jajmani system. Some anthropologists like Thomas Beidleman, and Barnouw hold that the system is basically exploitative in as much as the rich land holding castes take servicing castes tend to get underpaid for the goods/ services supplied and are often forced into servicing the jajmans.

However, some other anthropologists like Pauline Kolenda, Harold Gould and David Pockok disagree with the view that the Jajmani system is exploitative. Ram Ahuja in his book, 'The Indian social system' lists several arguments in support of the second view. These are,

- (a) there is an element of interdependence, not exploitation, in Jajmani system. For example, the Kamins render a range of services which the Jajmans help their Kamins on many social occasions without necessarily receiving any service or goods,
- (b) the Kamins are not forced to sell their goods or services only to a single jajman or only to a particular group of upper caste families. They are free to offer their services to a wide range of clientele in the village.
- (c) Both the Jajman and Kamin bring any infringement on either side to the notice of caste councils which mediate and
- (d) Traditional norms and expectations bind the jajmans to be paternalistic and benevolent to their Kamins since the system does not operate exclusively in an economic context. It forms the cultural set up of rural India.

Decline of Jajmani System

The Jajmani system has been on the decline ever since the rural economy underwent changes introduced by the British. The process of transformation of the rural economy and its socio-cultural milieu is a continuous process. It has picked up momentum particularly after independence. We may list out the several factors responsible for the weakening of the Jajmani system.

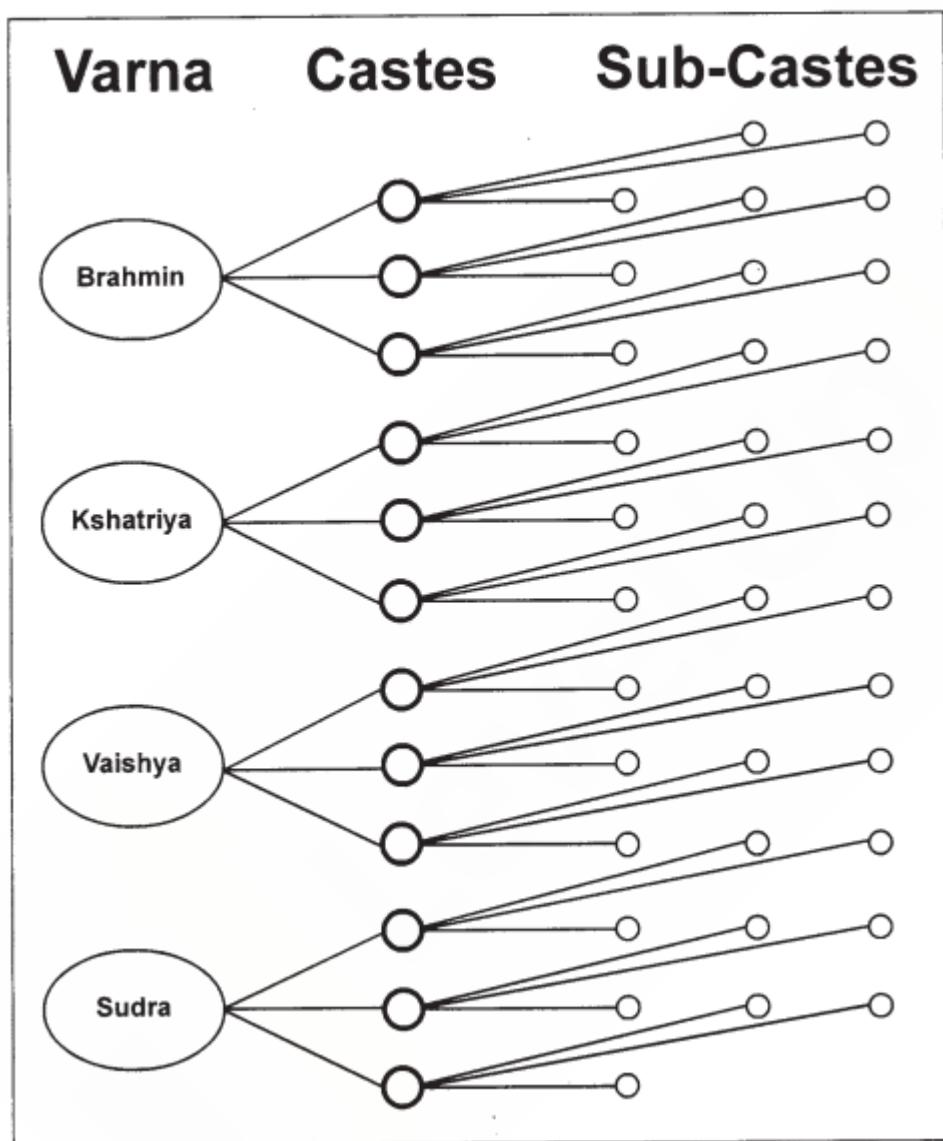
- a) Monetisation of the economy,
- (b) Emergence of commercial attitude,
- (c) Establishment of banks, co-operative institutions in rural areas
- (d) Integration of rural markets through means of transportation and the market assistance programmes of governmental agencies.
- (e) Migration of occupational groups to urban centers in search of better economic opportunities,
- (f) Availability of factory-made goods in the countryside,
- (g) Political awareness and organisation among backward classes and scheduled castes.
- (h) Weakening of the association between castes and occupations.

Case studies

E.B. Harper, an American scholar, studied the village Totagadal in Karnataka and showed how the Jajmani system there involves two types of economic transactions: the Jajmani system of traditional nature and Malnad system, which occurs between the Jajmanis and artisans characterised by each payment. He says that the Jajmani system is disintegrating into the Malnad type of economic relations in Indian villages.

K. Eswaran (1962) studied Shivapura in Karnataka and published his book, "Tradition and Economy in Village India." He explores the exchange system of the village as Aya. According to him, the Aya is the unmeasured and unconditional gifts and reflects the motive of sharing one's possessions with others. In the legal sphere, traditional Aya system recognizes rights of individuals, groups and of the community in the sphere of politics. The Jajman, whether of street, village, or community, get leadership and headship automatically. He finds a close correspondence of 'Aya' system with the Potlach ceremony

VARNA AND JATI MODEL OF CASTE



A great deal of confusion has arisen out of the indiscriminate use of the word caste to denote both Varna and Jati. Varna is not the same thing as Jati. Varna represents the four-fold division of the society while Jati represents the smaller groups existing in society which the authors of the Dharmasastras seek to derive from one or other of the four varnas. **Manu distinctly says that there are only four varnas, Brahmana, Kshatriyas, Vaishyas and Sudras while he speaks of about fifty Jatis**, such as Ambastha, chardala, Dravida, Yavana etc.

According to G. S. Ghurye, around the post – Vedic age that is between 600 B.C to 300 A.D, the concept of Varna – dharma or code of conduct of different Varnas was consolidated and elaborated. During the post – Vedic age, the practice of untouchability also took deep roots, being associated with people carrying on menial occupations, which involved handling animal and human waste, animal hides, dead bodies and other 'polluting professions. These people were the lowest of the lower groups and the

term Panchama or Antyaja was applied to them. They were considered to be outside the purview of the Varna system. However, in reality they formed an integral part of the Varna system. Therefore, the Chaturvarna (four Varnas) model itself had gone changed by addition of one more hereditary occupational group and strictly speaking became 'Panchama Varna'.

According to Manu many castes or Jatis were produced by a series of crosses first between members of the four Varnas and then between the descendants of these initial unions. Secondly, many castes were formed by degradation from the original Varnas and account of non-observance of sacred rites. They are called Vratas. The Vrata Brahmins were known as Bhrijakantaka, Avantya, Vatadhana etc.

The caste system is an all-India phenomenon of which the varna model provides an all-India macro-structural scheme. In other words, the varna model only provides a framework within which the innumerable variations of castes throughout India are found. According to Srinivas (1962: 65) the varna-scheme is a 'hierarchy' in the literal sense of the term because the criteria of ritual purity and pollution are at the basis of this differentiation. Generally speaking, the higher castes are also the better off castes, and the lower castes are generally, the lower classes. However, this association between caste and class is not always true. A caste can be ritually high but ranked lower in the local caste hierarchy because this hierarchy is determined by secular factors like economic, political, educational status also. Thus, one of the most striking feature of caste system, as an actual reality has been the vagueness in the hierarchy, especially in the middle rungs. The varnas are four and the Jatis are numerous.

In modern India one there are about 2500 Jatis which are more or less subsumed into the Varna categories. Jatis not Varna constitute the basic unit of the traditional caste system. The four Varnas are ranked in a particular order whereas the Jati ranking is both more ambiguous and more flexible, as M.N Srinivas has observed.

Srinivas states that the Varna scheme has certainly distorted the picture of caste but it has also enabled ordinary men and women to understand and assess the general place of a caste within this framework throughout India. It has provided a common social language, which holds good in all parts of India. This sense of familiarity, even when not based on real facts leads to a sense of unity amongst the people (Srinivas 1962: 69). Thus, the Indian society (by which we basically mean the Hindu society) has been full of changes and improvisations. It is the varna frame which remains more or less constant while castes vary from region to region.

Jatis have not grown as a result of divisions and sub-divisions within a set of four original Varnas. Rather, as Mrs. I. Karve has argued, **Varna and Jatis have coexisted as two different and related systems for at least 1,000 years** "Historically". Mandelbaum writes "**the Varnas of the early texts were like open classes than like fixed social strata**". The Varna model says Yogendra Singh "**is in reality a cultural framework of caste as a pure category. It lays down formative principles without having much to do with actual processes of structural and functional variations in the reality of the caste system**".

Theoretically, caste system is rooted in the Varna division of society. In real life caste or Jatis are divided into hundreds of hierarchically ranked endogamous group. The Jati system is an empirical order, verifiable by direct observation of caste ranking and other familiar distinctions. The Jati system is not uniform. It varies from region to region. Dumont according to Lannoy, regards two systems as homologous and to have interacted to each other.

<u>Varna</u>	<u>Jati</u>
1. The four Varnas represent only broad all – India divisions	1. Jati refers to the collection of endogamous families inhabiting a region. For examples, Vokkaliga, Kurubas are found only in Karnataka. Bumihars and Thakurs are generally found in Bihar and UP.
2. According to the Varna model Harijans (scheduled castes) fall outside the caste system.	2. In reality, Harijans also form a jati or several jati's having long standing economic, social and even ritual relations with other upper caste or caste Hindu jati's, which fall into any of the four Varnas.
3. In the Varna model, there is no confusion about the place of each caste group in the hierarchy. The Brahmins are at the top, followed by Kshatriyas, Vaishyas and Sudras, in that order.	3. The position of the various jatis in the hierarchy is not always clear. For example, Reddys in Andhra Pradesh and Vokkaligas in Karnataka cannot be exactly placed as Kshatriyas. There is no clear agreement as to which of the jatis should be regarded as Kshatriyas and which as Sudras. Some castes or jatis like Lingayats do not fit anywhere in the Varna model, though they are forward jatis.
4. The Varna system assumes that the hierarchy of the four Varnas is uniform throughout India.	4. In reality, the relative positions of the jatis vary from region to region across the country. For example, the position of Yadavs (which is a dominant jati in Bihar) is not uniform in the North. Again Lingayats, who occupy a prominent position in the social hierarchy of North Karnataka, do not enjoy the same position in neighbouring Andhra Pradesh.
5. In the Varna model, the position of each Varna is fixed and not subject to change.	5. Jatis are not static with regard to mobility. Many jatis have over the years improved their position or moved upwards in the social ladder. For example, the toddy tappers jati variously called as Idigas in Karnataka, Izhavas in Kerala
6. Varna is only a reference category	6. Jati is the operational category.
7. Varna is a macro – level concept	7. Jati is a micro – level concept.
8. In the Varna model, the ranking is purely based on ritual or religious considerations, with the priestly class at the top.	8. The various jatis in a region are ranked with respect to secular factor like economic and political power. The ritual or religious consideration alone does not determine the position of a given jati in most cases

DIMENSIONS OF REGIONAL VARIATIONS

Caste as a regional reality can be seen in the different patterns of caste-ranking, customs and behaviours, marriage rules and caste dominance found in various parts of India. For the sake of clarity, we are going to explain the dimensions of regional variations in terms of three aspects: caste structure and kinship; caste structure and occupation; and caste structure and power.

CASTE STRUCTURE AND KINSHIP

Caste structure is intimately related to the kinship system amongst the Hindus in India. The sole reason for this relationship lies in the endogamous nature of caste system. Caste is basically a closed system of stratification, since members are recruited on the criteria of ascribed status. In other words, an individual becomes a member of a caste in which he or she is born. Thus, it is an ascribed status. Even

if there is social mobility in the caste system through the process of Sanskritisation, urbanisation, etc., it is only a positional change rather than a structural change. A person remains the member of his/her caste irrespective of his/her individual status. Any movement in the structure occurs in the social mobility of the caste group in the local hierarchy of the society, which is only a shifting of its position from one level to another.

Kinship is a method or a system by which individuals as members of society relate themselves with other individuals of that society. There are two types of kinship bonds. One is consanguinal and the other is affinal. Consanguinal ties are ties of blood such as, between mother-daughter, mother-son, father-daughter, etc. Affinal ties are ties through marriage, such as, between husband and wife, man and his wife's brother, etc.

Kinship in India is largely an analysis of the internal structure of the sub-caste. Sub-caste is the largest segment of a caste and it performs nearly all the functions of caste like endogamy, social control, etc. For example, the Brahman caste has several sub-castes like, the Gaur Brahmans, the Kanyakubjis, the Saraswat Brahmans, etc. It is these segments of the main caste of Brahmans, which form the effective functioning group within which social interaction, marriage etc. takes place. However, these segments are also subdivided and have a regional connotation too, like the Sarjupari Brahmans of North India are those who originally lived beyond the river Saryu or Ghaghara. The effective caste group is the caste population of a single village while the effective sub-caste group within which marriage and kinship takes place is composed of the people belonging to the region around the village having several scores of settlements. Due to the practice of endogamy and restriction in social intercourse a person marries within the sub-caste group, or at the most caste group in India, which extends generally, beyond the village to a larger region.

Kinship system found in various parts of India differs from each other in many respects. However, generally speaking, we can distinguish between the kinship system in the Northern region, the Central region and the Southern region. North India is in itself a very large region, having innumerable types of kinship systems. This region includes the region between the Himalayas in the North and the Vindhya range in the South. In this region a person marries outside the village since all the members of one's caste in a village are considered to be brothers and sisters, or uncles and aunts. Marriage with a person inside the village is forbidden. In fact, an exogamous circle with a radius of four miles can be drawn around a man's village (Srinivas 1955: 12).

Hypergamy is practised in this region according to which a man takes a wife from a clan which is lower in status to his own clan. That is, a girl goes in marriage from a lower status group to a higher status group within a subcaste. The effect of this hypergamy and village exogamy is that it spatially widens the range of ties. Several villages become linked to each other through affinal and matrilateral links.

In his study of the Ramkheri village in Madhya Pradesh, Adrian Mayer (1960) not only described the Rajput caste and other sub-castes of the village but also the region around it as well. The clans, lineages, and kutums are all part of the internal structure of the caste at the same time being part of the kinship organisation. These groups are all the time increasing and branching off with time. The organisation of family in the northern region is mainly patriarchal and patrilocal. The lineage is traced through the male, i.e. patrilineal system is followed in this region. It is patriarchal because authority lies with the male head of the family and it is patrilocal because after marriage the bride is brought to reside in the house of the bridegroom's father.

Generally, in most of the castes in the north such as the Jats, an agricultural caste of South Punjab, Delhi and Haryana the "four-clan" rule of marriage is followed. According to this rule,

- i) a man cannot marry in the clan to which his father (and he himself) belongs;
- ii) to which his mother belongs;

- iii) to which his father's mother belongs; and
- iv) to which his mother's mother belongs (Karve 1953).

In this region a person avoids marriage with kins who are related to him or her five generations on the mother's side and seven generations on the father's side ideally. However, in reality as discovered by Mayer in his study, these rules can be broken in some cases.

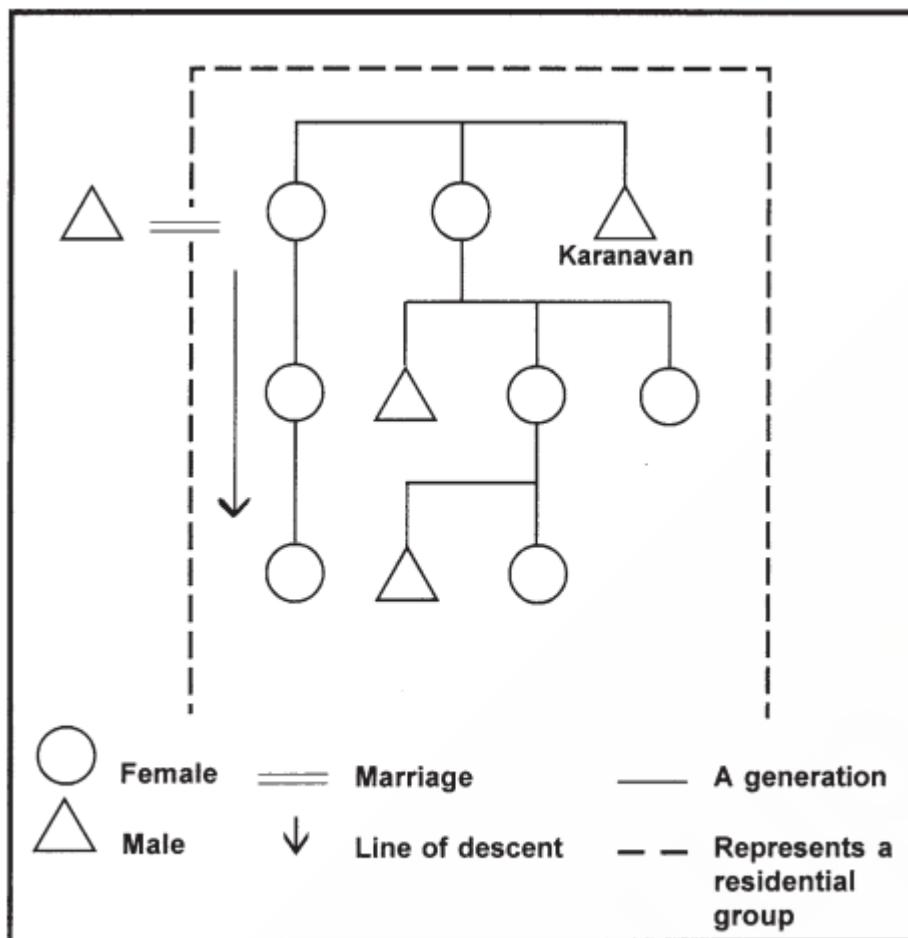
In the northern region, therefore, marriage with cousins, removed even by two or three degrees is viewed as an incestuous union. In most parts of this region, as mentioned earlier, village exogamy is practised by most of the castes, especially the Brahman, Kshatriya and Vaishya castes. This rule is known in Delhi, Haryana and Punjab, as the rule of Sassan.

In Central India which includes Rajputana, the Vindhya, Gujarat, Maharashtra and Orissa we find the general practice of caste endogamy. Hypergamy is most characteristic of the Rajputs of this region and village exogamy is also found in this region. However, in this region especially in Gujarat and Maharashtra amongst some caste communities we find cross-cousin marriages being practised. Here there is a tendency for a man to marry his mother's brother's daughter. But marriage with the father's sister's daughter is taboo. The preference for a single type of cross-cousin marriage seems to move away from the taboo of marrying cousins of any class in the northern region. Thus, in many ways this preference suggests a closer contact with the practices of the southern region.

The Southern region comprises the states of Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh, Tamil Nadu and Kerala where the Dravidian languages are spoken. This region is distinct from the northern and central regions of India in the sense that here we find basically **preferential rules of marriage**. Here a man knows whom he has to marry while in most areas in the north a man knows whom he cannot marry. Most of the parts of the Southern region except some, like the Malabar, follow the patrilineal family system. Here also we find exogamous social groups called gotras.

The difference between the exogamous clans in the north is that a caste in a village is held to be of one patrician and therefore, no marriage is allowed within a village. In the South, there is no identification of a gotra with one village or territory. More than one inter-marrying clans may live in one village territory and practise inter-marriage for generations. Thus, the social groups, which are formed due to this kind of marriage pattern in the South shows a centripetal tendency (of moving towards a centre) as against the centrifugal (of moving away from the centre) tendency of social groups found in north Indian villages. In the South, a caste is divided into a number of gotras. The first marriage creates obligations about giving and receiving daughters. Hence, within exogamous clans, small endogamous circles are found to meet inter-family obligations and a number of reciprocal alliances are found in South Indian villages.

Apart from castes, which are patrilineal in the southern region, we also find some cases, such as the Nayars of Malabar district who follow matrilineal system of kinship. A typical Nayar household is made up of a woman, her sisters and brothers, her daughters and sons and her daughter's daughters and sons. Amongst the Nayars, property passes from the mother to the daughter. But the authority even in this system lies with the brother, who manages the property and takes care of his sister's children. Husbands only visit their wives in this system. The Nayar matrilineal house is called a Tharavad. Nayar is a broad category of castes of which not all of them follow the same kinship system (Dube 1974: 26)



A Tharavad

The relationship between the caste structure and the kinship system is so intertwined that we cannot understand one without understanding the details of the other.

CASTE STRUCTURE AND OCCUPATION

All over India today we find that caste restrictions are not as meticulously observed as they were some decades ago. The hereditary association of caste with an occupation used to be a very striking feature of the caste system. It was so much a part of the caste system that some sociologists even argued that “caste is nothing more than a systematisation of occupational differentiation” (Srinivas 1965: 1-77). In fact, it can be said that caste was a system, which ensured an occupation to everyone, and therefore it was a method to control competition between social groups in the economic sphere.

However, as Srinivas says, the occupational aspect of the caste system would have broken down completely in the context of a growing population, if not for the surplus population in all occupational categories like artisans, traders, servicing castes falling back on agriculture. Traditionally agriculture was a common occupation for all castes and Brahmins, Kshatriyas and even Vaishyas have been dependent on agriculture.

A caste is considered to be high if its characteristic way of life is high and pure and it is considered to be low if its way of life is low and polluting. By the term ‘way of life’ we mean whether its traditional occupation is ritually pure or polluting. For example, the occupation of the Brahman Priest is ritually pure while the traditional occupation of a leather working caste like the Chamar of U.P. is considered to be ritually polluting.

But the remarkable aspect of caste system is that the presumed hierarchy of ‘way of life’, which includes diet, occupation, etc. does not often correlate with the observed order of caste ranking found in several regions of India. For example, in spite of the trader castes being vegetarian (which is considered to be ritually higher) in Rampura, a village of Mysore, they are ranked ritually lower than the non-vegetarian peasant castes of the same village (Srinivas: 1955).

Another discrepancy between caste occupation and ritual ranking is that washing, sweeping and such other activities are done by everyone but when the members of the caste whose traditional occupation is to perform those activities do it, then it is considered to be polluting. Thus, it is the traditional association of a caste with an occupation, which determines its rank in the local caste hierarchy (Mckim Marriot 1959).

In the association of caste structure with a hereditary occupation the “jajmani system” forms the framework. The jajmani system is a system of economic, social and ritual ties between different caste groups in the villages. Under this system some castes are patrons and others are service castes. The service castes offer their services to the landowning upper and intermediate castes and in turn are paid both in cash and kind. The patron castes differ from one region to another depending on the socio-economic and political status of the castes. For example, the Rajput, Bhumihar and Jat are the patron castes in the North and Kamma, Reddi and Lingayat in the South.

The service castes comprise Brahman (Priest), Barber, Carpenter, Blacksmith, Water-carrier, Leather-worker, etc. Thus, to understand regional variations we have to know something about the ownership of land, the land tenure status and adherence to the jajmani system. These economic organisations depend a lot on the caste structure and regional topography and vice versa.

There is a congruence between high caste status and land ownership. At the top of occupational hierarchy stands a group of families, which control and own most land rights in the village/region. They also belong to the caste occupying the highest rank. Next in the hierarchy would be estate managers, landowners of relatively smaller size who are drawn from the castes who occupy a position next to the highest-ranking castes. Smaller tenants and subtenants occupy the middle ranking caste groups. Finally, labourers are drawn from the lowest ranking caste (Such association between caste and class rank and traditional occupation has been mentioned by such sociologists as Ramkrishna Mookherji and Andre Beteille 1966).

The tendency of land ownership by the high castes serves to maintain and re-impose the existing caste hierarchy. However, with the changing times, impact of colonial rule and the consequent introduction of western education, this general association of higher caste with higher class (in terms of ownership of land, wealth and power) has been disturbed (Beteille 1966:3).

However, in spite of these changes the ritual criteria of caste ranking remain important. Although even in the ancient times it was not all-important, as secular criteria of wealth and power of which land ownership is an important aspect did determine the status of a caste. The early nineteenth century account of Abbe Dubois, a famous French philosopher, who travelled extensively in South India, exemplifies this aspect very clearly when Dubois (1928: 23) stated, “thus the caste to which the ruler of a country belongs, however low it may be considered elsewhere, ranks amongst the highest in the ruler’s own dominions, and every member of it derives some reflection of dignity from its chief”.

When we observe the regional patterns, we find that in the plains of Uttar Pradesh, two or more cultivating castes coexist. There is also the presence of a large number of scheduled caste groups, which have a numerical preponderance in the population. They generally constitute the labour force in this region. Caste groups are many and are heterogeneous in nature. There is a lack of uniformity in ranking and therefore, the caste structure is not well defined as is found in the southern regions.

In Bengal, as Andre Beteille reports, the Hindu population did not have the Kshatriya and Vaishya Varna. There was a large assortment of groups at the bottom known collectively as Chandala or Asprishya, who were technically exterior to the four-fold varna scheme. Traditional Bengal had five categories of Brahmins—Saptasati, Madhya deshi, Rarhi, Barendra, and Baidik. Of these the last three have had a recognisable and significant identity and an eminent position in the social hierarchy of Bengal. At the other end of the caste ladder (the only two which were found in Bengal) were the Sudras. Sudras were also in turn divided into 'clean' and 'unclean' castes based on their hereditary occupation (Beteille 1977).

In Orissa, as reported by Bailey, in his study of Bisipara, an Oriya hill village, the Warrior castes owned most of the land and combined soldiering with farm management. The outcastes, referred to as 'praja', were their servants. The other castes, including the Brahmins were in a position of economic dependence and political subordination to them (Bailey 1966:122-127).

As compared to the north, in the district of Tanjore, we find a clear-cut hierarchy existing in the caste system with Brahmins as land-owners. The Hindu social structure is clearly demarcated between the Brahmins, the non-Brahmins and the Adi-Dravidas. The Brahmins are the landowners; the non-Brahmins are the tenants, sub-tenants service giving castes while the Adi-Dravidas generally constitute the category of landless agricultural labourers (Gough 1966:90).

CASTE STRUCTURE AND POWER

Central to caste system are caste panchayats and leadership. These power structures are highly formalised in certain caste groups and informal in others. The panchayat literally means a group or council of five. In a village it refers to a group that presides over, and resolves conflict, punishes people transgressing customs and launches group enterprises. It must be remembered that the village panchayat is quite different from the legislative use of the term panchayat. The usage, after the Constitution (73rd Amendment) Act 1922, refers to a statutory local body, formed through elections, vested with legal powers and charged with certain governmental responsibilities. In certain villages traditional caste panchayats and leaders are still a powerful means of control. The democratic panchayat with legislative powers and traditional panchayat may overlap in certain regions.

Regional caste structures, in part, account for variations in their respective power structure. It is important to know what qualifies caste for regional dominance. According to Srinivas (1966), a caste is said to be dominant when it is numerically the strongest in the village or local area and economically and politically exercises a preponderating influence. The status of a dominant caste appears to rest on such criteria as

- i) the control of land and economic resources;
- ii) numerical strength;
- iii) a relatively high ritual status in the caste hierarchy; and
- iv) educational status of its members.

The above factors combine to place a particular caste group in a position of political dominance. A near monopoly of management rights in local resources (usually agricultural land) and control of the same gives the group an ability to control the lives of the others. Numerical strength alone may not place a group in a bargaining position. It needs an economic power base to backup its strength. Once economic rights are in possession, however the size of a group does become important. The control of resources by members of a dominant caste lead in turn, to making decisions for others, which constitutes real dominance.

Regional variations that account for dominant caste can be explained by

- i) the degree to which a single large land holding caste controls a set of dependent castes,
- ii) rigidity of caste ranking,
- iii) the existence of two or more dominant caste groups in a region.

Studies from various parts of India suggest that dominant castes do not exist everywhere. Areas where a landowning group has been able to establish itself in proportionally large numbers, and yet maintain distinctive character (by strictly regulating marriage and descent) that dominance has been possible. Local power flows mainly from land, which is the main source of wealth. Power is safeguarded if it is confined to a unified and numerically preponderant caste group. Numbers alone do not guarantee power. Caste groups numerically preponderant, but with divided loyalties, creating disunity, may not wield power. It is only when a caste group becomes politically united that it becomes a political force. This is very important because in the new democratic political system where every vote counts the numerical preponderance of a caste group gains an additional meaning. Power may also accrue to a jati, when its members have effective connections with the power of the village panchayats.

In regions where religious groups and tribals are intermixed and no single caste possesses enough land, power or numerical strength, in such a condition, there is bound to be dual or multiple domination in a region.

The Regional Dimension of Power

After a discussion about the features of dominant caste, let us see how they present themselves in the regional context. Let us illustrate with examples, the correlation between caste and power structures. Karve (1953), in her study of the Malabar Coast has pointed out certain distinct features present in a region.

The order of dominance among castes parallels the order of caste rank. The exclusive nature of high-ranking castes is further reinforced by ritual notions of purity and pollution. High ranking Brahman castes of this region possess landed wealth, power and control, besides the traditional right to perform rituals; they also have right to religious learning and worship at temples. Subordinate castes are obliged to worship according to their ritual prescriptions and they do not have the right to religious texts like, the Veda, Upanishad, etc. Their economic and political subordination further enhances the dominant position of high-ranking castes. Organisation of ritual and temple services, concentration of land holdings correlates caste rank with secular power and promotes consistency in the total hierarchy of inter-caste relations. In regions where caste and power hierarchy overlap there is a definite concentration of power, wealth and land invested with high-ranking caste groups. Correspondingly ritual sanctions reinforced the superordinate status of upper caste groups and subordinate status of the lower caste groups. Thus, this correlation leads to the minimising of disputes.

Regions, which do not reveal a major correlation between caste and power structures, are characterised by certain features very different from the earlier example. Caste ranking may not be clear-cut and may promote disputes about caste ranking and status within the hierarchy. Caste groups of equal rank may be constantly disputing over their mutual positions in the hierarchy, resulting in dissent and dispute over ranking. Such conflicts get consolidated over a period of time resulting in formalised factions within the caste groups. Factions may promote disputes between them. Lack of clarity in caste ranking results in a diffused power structure, with no single caste group wielding economic, political and ritual clout. The Coromandal region of South East coastal India validates the above arguments.

In the districts of Punjab, Haryana and parts of U.P., especially in the upper Ganges districts, middle ranking castes such as the Jat, Ahir, Kurmi, etc. wield substantial amount of power and hold positions

of dominance. The agricultural castes wield substantial power, and are numerically preponderant in some of these regions.

Political and economic interaction among castes in this region, however, forms a somewhat imperfect hierarchy as political and economic power is diffused. Ritual and secular power may not coincide everywhere. The region is marked by a lack of rigid stratification of castes, lack of concentration of political and economic power in a single caste group, resulting in the diffusion of political power.

DOMINANT CASTE

The concept of 'dominant caste' was propounded by M.N. Srinivas. It was for the first time appeared in his essay on the social system of a Mysore village. While constructing the concept, perhaps Srinivas was unconsciously influenced by African studies on the dominant clan and dominant lineage. Srinivas developed the concept in his study of Rampura village which is a little away from Mysore city in Karnataka state. Srinivas, in fact, wanted to give a comprehensive study of Rampura.

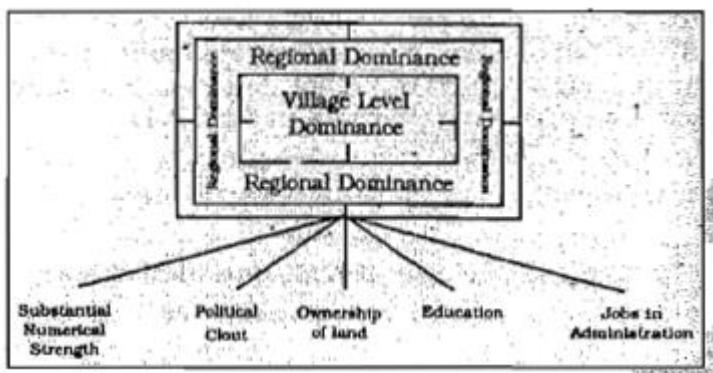
To write down the details of the village he had gone to Stanford for writing down a monograph on Rampura. But there by a strange quirk of fate all the three copies of fieldwork notes, processed over a period of eighteen years were destroyed when a fire took place in his Stanford office. Everything was destroyed for Srinivas. Whatever he remembered about Rampura, later on came in the form of ***The Remembered Village (1976)***. Srinivas worked in Rampura in 1948.

A caste is dominant when it is numerically preponderant and also wields economic or political power and occupies a fairly high position in hierarchy. These castes are **accorded high status and position** in all the fields of social life. The people of **other castes look upto them as their reference group** and try to imitate their behaviour, ritual pattern, custom and ideology. In this way, the **dominant caste of a particular locality plays an important role in the process of cultural transmission in that area.**

Srinivas says that the existence of dominant caste is not particular to Rampura only. It is found in other villages of the country also. For instance, in Mysore villages, Lingayat and Okkaliga; in Andhra Pradesh, Reddy and Kamma; in Tamilnadu, Gounder, Padayachi and Mudaliar; in Kerala, Nayar; in Maharashtra, Maratha; in Gujarat, Patidar; and in northern India, Rajput, Jat and Ahir are dominant castes.

Traditionally, numerically small castes owning land in rural areas or wielding political power or inheriting a literary tradition were able to dominate the villages. Srinivas has provided historical reasons for the power exercised by the traditional higher castes. He says that the traditional high castes had influence because of western education and the benefits which they conferred. **Earlier, numerical strength of a caste was not much important.** But with the coming of adult suffrage and the reservation given to scheduled castes and scheduled tribes, numerical strength has assumed importance and the leaders of the dominant castes help the political parties to secure votes.

But the traditional forms of dominance have not entirely disappeared and neither has dominance shifted fully to the numerically strongest caste, there is no doubt, however, that there is a shift and this transitional phase is marked by inter-group tensions. But what is significant from our point of view is that in many parts of India there are castes which are decisively dominant.



In 1966, he reviewed his earlier definition which runs below: For a caste to be dominant, it should own a sizable amount of the arable land locally available, have strength of numbers, and occupy a high place in the local hierarchy. When a caste has all the attributes of dominance, it may be said to enjoy a decisive dominance.

Characteristics:

1. Economic and political power:

The power of a particular caste lies in the owning of land. The caste which has larger portion of the land in the village wields greater power. First, his agricultural income increases. The size of the land is also related to irrigation.

In case of larger landowning and adequate irrigation facilities, naturally the yields of the caste man increase. Second, the larger landowning caste also provides jobs to the landless farmers and marginal farmers. Such a situation renders the super-ordinated landless labourers as the 'servants' of the large landowning caste. These castes also apply modern techniques of agriculture such as chemical manure, improved implements and new patterns of cropping.

Yogendra Singh (1994) observes that the social anthropologists have found the presence of dominant castes in most of the south Indian villages. The basic determinant of a dominant caste is the superior economic status, especially in land.

In the south Indian villages, for instance, Brahmin and Okkaliga are dominant castes. "The Havik Brahmins in village Toltagadde in Malaud area of Mysore and Smarth Brahmins in the Kumbapettai village in Tanjore (Tamilnadu) have been observed to be dominant castes. Okkaliga are dominant in the village Rampura, Wangala and Delana studied in Mysore."

Putting his analysis of dominant castes, Yogendra Singh observes: An interesting common factor which plays a very significant role in the dominance of these castes in the villages ... is their superior economic status, especially in land. Brahmins in Toltagadde have ownership of all cash crop land; Kumbapettai Brahmins traditionally controlled all land; Okkaligas in Wangala; and Delanas control more than 80 per cent of land; Rajputs in Senapur, eastern UP control 82 per cent of land in the village; and the Vaghela Rajputs in Cassandra village in Gujarat have control over all the land in the village. In all these villages the degree of dominance of these castes is high.

Higher education is also accepted by the big landowning castes. Administrative jobs and income generated in urban areas have also given economic power to these caste groups. Besides economic power, namely, agriculture and jobs in administration, the big landowning castes have increased their prestige and power because of their role in Panchayati Raj. Srinivas says that "the introduction of adult franchise and Panchayati Raj has resulted in giving a new sense of self-respect to the villagers". Srinivas argues that the economic and political power which has come to the big landowning castes has thus enhanced their power status.

2. High rank in caste hierarchy:

Normally, the caste which is traditionally higher in the caste hierarchy enjoys the status of dominance. The Brahmins and the Rajputs have traditionally been dominant in the villages. The Brahmins have at the top of the caste hierarchy and they officiate at the religious festivals and rituals of the village. The Rajputs have been the feudal thakurs in the village. They have traditionally occupied larger portions of the village land. The economic and political power, thus, in the village has given the dominant status to the Brahmins and Rajputs.

Recently, the criterion, namely, economic and political power, has undergone a change. The reservations made for scheduled castes, scheduled tribes and women have given a new attribute to the concept of dominant caste. As a result, power has passed into the hands of numerically large landowning peasant castes. Some of the scheduled castes, who are numerically strong and also, take advantage of the new educational and other opportunities, available to them have also gained economic and political power.

The high rank in the caste hierarchy has now gone in favour of those castes which have benefited from their reserved status. Now, the traditional higher status in the hierarchy no more remains an attribute of a dominant caste.

3. Numerical strength:

Before the advent of modernisation and development, numerical strength did not have any strength of the dominance of a caste. Recently, numerical strength of a caste, assumes importance because of the vote bank created by adult suffrage. The castes which have larger number of voters, naturally, determine the fate of a candidate contesting elections. What is called these days as caste-war is actually the importance of a caste to determine the fate of a candidate.

Now, a caste is dominant not only in single village. It extends to a cluster of villages. A caste group which has only a family or two in a particular village but which enjoys decisive dominance in the wider region will still count locally because of the network of ties binding it to its dominant relatives.

What is equally important is that others in the village will be aware of the existence of this network. Contrariwise, a caste which enjoys dominance in only one village will find that it has to reckon with the caste which enjoys regional dominance.

4. A sizeable amount of the arable land:

Normally, in India's villages, smaller number of big landowners occupy larger portion of land. In other words, the caste which has larger portion of village land wields power. The big landowners, thus, are patrons of the bulk of the poor villagers. In villages, those castes which have larger portion of land enjoy power and prestige. Srinivas says that landownership is a crucial factor in establishing dominance.

He observes: Landownership confers not only power but prestige, so much so that, individuals who have made good in any walk of life tend to invest in land. If landownership is not always an indispensable passport to high rank, it certainly facilitates upward mobility.

The concept of dominant caste is important for the following reasons:

- i) Study of dominant caste is necessary to understand power equations in a village society. It explains the rural society in more pragmatic terms as compared to Indological or Marxist perspective.
- ii) Dominant castes also plays an important role in resolving disputes, and not only dominant castes but non-dominant castes also approach them.
- iii) According to Srinivas this concept is central to understanding all aspects of village society.

- iv) Due to dominant position in rural society, they control the rural economy in various ways and means.
- v) Dominant castes play a greater role in the process of modernisation
- vi) Gardener reviewed that “dominance” should not be conceptualized in the form of caste only.

As there are four basic levels of dominant castes:

1. The ruler
2. The regionally dominant caste
3. The locally dominant caste
4. The village level landed pattern of dominant caste.

Role and influence of dominant castes

The dominant castes are found to be socially influential, politically powerful and economically exploitative. In different provinces, districts and villages, different dominant castes are found to be influential.

1. Dominant Castes as “Models” of Sanskritization

In the process of sanskritization, the dominant castes act as “reference groups” or as points of reference. Dominant castes set the model for the majority of people living in rural areas including, occasionally, Brahmins. The dominant caste such as Patidars, Lingayats and some Vellalas, for instance, have undergone a degree of Sanskritization. As a result of their Sanskritization, the culture of the area over which their dominance extends experiences a change. The Patidars have become more Sanskritised in the last 100 years or so, and this has had effects on the culture of all other groups in Kaira District in Gujarat. The Lingayats and Vellalas in South India also have a Sanskritised style of life, and from a much older period than the Patidars.

2. The Dominant Caste in a Village acts as a Watchdog of a Pluralistic Culture and Value System

Traditionally, the elders of the dominant caste prevented the members of one caste from taking over the hereditary occupation of another caste whose interests would have been hurt by an inroad made into their monopoly.

Ex.: It is learnt from “the Census of India Report for 1921 that when Ahirs [cowherds] of North India decided to call themselves Kshatriyas and donned the scared thread, their action roused the wrath of the dominant higher castes.”

M.N. Srinivas has stated, that in North Bihar such an instance resulted in violence and the matter was taken to law courts.

3. Role of Dominant Castes in Political Life

During the recent years the political influence of the dominant caste has considerably increased. By making use of freedom, democracy and universal adult franchise the dominant castes have become politically strong and powerful. They have very good representation in assemblies and in the parliament. With the introduction of the “Panchayat Raj System” these castes have extended their area of influence even in villages, taluks, and districts. Political power has given them an opportunity to strengthen their political position and economic strength. They have used the political instructions to obtain for their caste members, particularly for young men and women, good education and prestigious jobs.

4. Rivalries and Conflicts between Dominant Castes

Every state has more than one dominant caste. These castes are always engaged in rivalries and conflicts for securing political power and economic opportunities. For example, such conflicts and rivalries are found between Vokkaligas and Lingayats in Karnataka, Reddys and Kammas in Andhra Pradesh and so on. The lower and the unprivileged castes including the so-called untouchables have now realised that they are getting exploited at the hands of these dominant castes. This awareness has made them organise themselves politically. The “Bahujana Samaj Party” headed mostly by lower caste leaders, is becoming popular in states such as U.P. Bihar, Punjab, and Madhya Pradesh. It has given tough opposition to the leadership of the dominant castes and won a couple of assembly and parliamentary seats during the recent elections.

5. Dominant caste secures economic benefits to its members and followers.

6. Dominant caste monopolizes important administrative officers in the village. The headman of the village is almost always a member of the dominant caste.

Criticism:

i) Land ownership pattern has now changed after land reforms and abolition of jamindari system and hence big landowning has ceased to be a determinant factor of dominant caste.

Andre Beteille very rightly observes: The powerful families in the past were the big landowning families. These included the principal Brahmin families among non-Brahmins, the Maratha family. Today political power whether in the village or outside it is not as closely tied to ownership, of land as it was in the past. New bases of power have emerged which are, to some extent, independent of both caste and class. Perhaps most important among these is the strength of numerical support.

D.N. Majumdar, who conducted the study of Mohana village of Uttar Pradesh in 1958, observes that the Brahmin and the Thakur were the dominant castes in Mohana. But, at a later stage, he finds that the dominance of the Thakur group has begun to be shaken up, ever since the legal removal of its economic pillar the jamindari system which was the strong medium through which it held the various other castes in a position of economic subordination... But Majumdar also finds that with the abolition of jamindari, much of the economic power of the Thakur is retained. He says that “with their wide money lending business they still are a powerful group”.

ii) **Majumdar** does not consider numerical strength as a decisive factor in the formation of a dominant caste. Historically, “Indian villages probably never exercised majority rule or accepted majority verdict. The feudal India did not compromise with numerical strength. Besides, alone-Brahmin, a sadhu, a jamindar, alone social worker each has exercised more influence than a numerically preponderant community in the village”.

Majumdar denies the idea that scheduled castes and scheduled tribes, though; having numerical strength may occupy a status of dominant caste. According to him, “the backward classes, scheduled castes preponderate in many villages, even a particular caste like the Lodha or the Pasi may be numerically the largest caste in a village, but authority and importance may attach to the few upper castes families, or to the jamindar family, i.e., the social matrix of India village”.

iii) According to **S.C. Dube**, it's not caste as a whole, but there are some dominant individuals who prevail.

iv) Srinivas says that a dominant caste always tries to do good to its members and its followers. This may not be true always. The concept ignores presence of interest groups – of landed and nonlanded, of well-to-do and poor, and of educated and illiterate.

CASTE CONTINUITY AND CHANGE

CASTE AND CONTINUITY

Caste, as you already know, is by definition a closed social system whose membership is acquired by virtue of birth. Rules of endogamy and restrictions on social intercourse between castes help to maintain the insularity of such groups. From a purely Brahmanic or Sanskritic view, it appears as if this system is rigid and closed. However, when we examine historical data ranging back to the Vedic period we find, that in reality there existed a lot of flexibility. Social mobility with the gain of economic and political power was always present. Historian, K.M. Pannikar (1955) believes that in Indian history, the Nandas were the last true Kshatriyas (around 5th Century B.C.), and since then all the so-called Kshatriyas have come into being by usurpation of power by the lower castes who acquired the Kshatriya role and social position.

Caste system is, therefore, a dynamic reality with a great degree of flexibility in terms of internal structure and functions. To examine the continuity of caste system and its reasons, we need to keep in mind this high degree of flexibility of the system. Social mobility has been an important feature of caste system.

CASTE AND SOCIAL MOBILITY

Before discussing the caste and social mobility, let us understand what is meant by social mobility. Social mobility refers to the process by which individuals or groups move from one social status to another in the social hierarchy. Social mobility can be either upward or downward. Upward social mobility is one where the individual or group moves from a lower status in the hierarchy to the upper. Downward mobility is when a person or group moves from a higher status to a lower one in the hierarchy. Caste has been considered to be a closed system of stratification. However, in reality no system can be absolutely closed. In fact, social mobility has always been present within the caste system.

When we talk about caste and social mobility we are essentially dealing with the processes of social change in Indian society. Sociologists observe that in spite of the closed nature of caste system, there have been changes in caste hierarchy and its norms from time to time. For example, the culturally accepted practices during the Vedic period of Hinduism became a taboo in the periods that followed. Some of these practices were that Vedic Hinduism was magico-animistic, Vedic Brahmins drank soma (liquor), offered animal sacrifice and ate beef. These practices were prohibited later but they continued amongst the lower castes (Singh 1973: 6).

Caste mobility as a process of social and cultural change has been explained by Srinivas in his concept of Sanskritisation. The widespread social and cultural process called Sanskritisation is a process where a low Hindu caste changes its customs, rites, rituals ideology and way of life in the direction of high and frequently twice-born castes. This has paved the way for mobility to occur within the caste system. With the advent of the British, the opening up of frontiers by means of roads, and railways and economic opportunities cutting across caste barriers increased the process of caste mobility.

Besides Sanskritisation, another major agent of social change was Westernisation. Westernisation includes the influences, which swept over India during the British rule bringing in the ideologies of secularism, egalitarianism and democracy. The new opportunities in education, economy and polity were in theory caste free and open to all. No one could be denied access to them by reason of birth in a particular caste, sect or religion. However, no social change can bring about total change of a society. Therefore, we find that the traditional social organisation exemplified by the caste system has undergone several changes yet continues to exist in Indian society performing some old and some new functions. Now let us examine caste and the ritual sphere.

CASTE AND THE RITUAL SPHERE

The notions of hierarchical gradation of caste groups drawing legitimacy from religion and the concept of purity and pollution have changed with the passing of time. The structural distance between various castes, has been defined in terms of purity and pollution. Corresponding to the caste hierarchy are hierarchies in food, traditional caste occupation, and styles of life. Endogamy and social restraints regarding commensality and free interaction between different castes in the local caste hierarchy were clearly defined and ritualised.

As Mckim Marriot (1955) noted in his study of the Kishan Garhi village in U.P., the exchange of food and drink between different castes was patterned within the framework of the jajmani system. The pattern related to who will eat with whom, who will give kaccha food (i.e. food cooked in water) to whom, and who will receive it, who will give only pacca food to whom, and so on. Thus, interaction between castes was highly ritualised prior to the impact of Westernisation.

During the last few decades, as a result of the forces of modernisation, the ideology of caste has become less pervasive in an individual's day to day life. Caste rituals have become increasingly a personal affair, rather than public due to changed circumstances of living, forces of industrialisation, and urbanisation. Place of residence and food habits are influenced more by an individual's workplace and occupation than by his or her caste or religion. In a city a person generally does not ask the caste of a cook who serves in a restaurant. A person who might be a Brahman by caste may work in a shoe factory, and so on.

Harold Gould in his study of the rickshawallahs of Lucknow (1974) observed that the rickshaw pullers whom he studied belonged to different castes. While working they interacted with each other without observing any caste restrictions. However, when these rickshaw pullers went back to their homes in the evening they observed all the ritual practices of their caste. Their kins belonged to their own caste and they married within their own caste. This example illustrates the point that in workplace the caste norm are set aside but in personal family life the caste norms exerts itself.

In this sense, out of the Caste Continuity and Change two main features of caste system identified by Max Weber (1948), namely, commensality and connubium, the commensality aspect has disappeared but the connubium, i.e., caste and kinship and marriage link, yet survives in spite of all other changes. The ritual aspect of caste is confined to the personal sphere.

CASTE AND THE ECONOMIC SPHERE

The ideology of caste prescribed specific occupations for specific caste groups, which had a specific place in the social hierarchy. The vocations of the upper castes were considered to be the most prestigious while the occupations of the lower castes, especially the untouchables were considered to be polluting and defiling.

The advent of the British saw new economic opportunities flowing out, and reaching the masses. The opening up of plantations, development of towns and cities laid the basis for economic development, which intruded into the functioning of the caste system. The growth of money economy enabled economic relations to be governed by market conditions as opposed to inherited status. Certain caste groups flourishing in the wake of new business opportunities invested their profits in land. Because of land reforms like, Permanent Settlement, introduced during the British rule, land came into the market and thus ceased to be tied to caste.

The breakdown of the traditional economic system and the emergence of lower caste groups in economic rivalry rather than cooperation undermined the Brahman dominance found in Tanjore, Tamil Nadu. This has been attributed to the changing village structure from a closed stationary system to that of a relatively open system. The closed system was characteristic of feudal economy resulting

in cooperation between ranked castes in ways ordained by religious ideas. An open system is one, which is governed by secular law under the influence of market economy.

The Jajmani system, which was a hereditary patron-client relationship, with the worker traditionally tied to his master, lost most of its insularity. Market economy, daily wages, and hired labour eroded steadily into the functioning of the traditional jajmani system.

Let us look at the changes that have occurred in the traditional, subsistence village economy which due to the impact of mercantilism becomes part of the larger national economy with an example from a village study conducted by F.G. Bailey (1955) of an Oriya village called Bisipara. The village Bisipara in Orissa witnessed changes due to the coming of land into the market as a result of certain economic forces set in motion by the British rule. The progressive extension of the economic frontier by which we mean the increasing contact of the villages with the cities due to the introduction of better means of transport and mass media, the impact of outside influences that have reached the villages as a result of market economy, brought migrant labour and factories to bear upon the village economy and sources of income were not confined to land and agriculture alone. A person participated as an individual in commercial economy. The village witnessed a breakdown of the traditional, economic organisation in which there was division of labour and division of wealth according to caste.

Bailey noted that the changed political atmosphere under the British disturbed the traditional caste hierarchy and the power structure of the village. He wrote, "the ultimate seat of political power moved outside the village. At the same time, redistribution of wealth upset the political structure inside the village. Division of wealth no longer followed the same lines as caste division" (Bailey 1955: 146). However, Bailey also maintains that although there was an internal reshuffle of positions, the caste system continued to order political relations between the groups concerned and to reflect their economic status. Thus, in this sense, in spite of the tremendous changes that caste had undergone, it continued to exist.

Another important way in which we can see the continuity of caste is that when the new forces of socio-economic, political and educational changes came, it was the already powerful, wealthy upper castes, such as the Brahmins, Rajputs and the Vaishyas who benefited initially from these changes. The Brahman sections responded first to English education and therefore, benefited from political and administrative power (Kothari 1970: 9). The same pattern is visible in the commercial sector too. The great business houses like Birlas, Dalmias, etc., belonged to the traditional commercial castes. In banking the castes like the Chettiar of South established themselves in the modern systems of banking and commerce which was an extension of their traditional occupation.

CASTE AND POLITICS

A system of social stratification such as the caste rests upon the unequal distribution of power between status groups having definite positions in the prestige hierarchy. In any social strata the upper echelons face the problem of how to maintain their positions which they and their ancestors at one time achieved against the more socially disabled segments of the population. To maintain their position of superiority the higher strata must be able to control the mechanism of coercion. How was this possible?

The political system of the **pre-British** India was characterised by clear territorial changes marking off the territory of one chieftain or Raja from the territories of the other. These boundaries constituted effective barriers between people living under different chieftains. At the village level caste panchayats and caste councils functioned as the local governing bodies and provided a self-sufficient image to the Indian village. Such a political system imposed severe limits on extension of caste ties. Here the cultural and political boundaries overlapped with each other.

The British rule set the castes free from the territorial limitations inherent in the pre-British political system. It is widely held that civil and penal codes introduced by the British over the sub-continent of India in 1860 took away the power exercised by caste panchayats. The British had also introduced a new principle of justice wherein all men were equal before law and that the nature of wrong is not affected by the caste of the person who is committing it and by the caste of the person against whom it is committed.

Many sociologists undertook political analysis in terms of caste and traced the political development of caste through time, and the alliances of certain castes against certain others to gain political power. According to them, the advent of democracy and decentralised politics in the form of the three-tier Panchayati Raj system saw politics carried down to the grassroots level. Caste became a prominent variable in electoral politics. The demands of organised party system in politics have brought about a coalition of castes. Sub-castes and sub-divisions in sub-castes can find an active field of engagement in village politics. The introduction of democratic decentralisation and universal suffrage protected the interests of the backward classes (which include the scheduled castes, scheduled tribes and other backward classes) in education, employment and political life, against the dominance of the traditionally powerful castes.

The coming of market economy, the decline of the traditional economic systems (a good example is that of the decline of Brahman hegemony in Tanjore), caste-free occupations and mobilisation of caste groups have all resulted in the decline of the traditional political role of castes. Yet, we find that caste retains its political significance.

This is evident, for example, in the case of the political mobilisation of caste groups in Madhopur, U.P. by Morris Opler. In this village, the ranks of Noniyas, the salt-makers and Chamars, the leather-makers joined hands in opposing the locally dominant upper caste Thakurs. Thakurs were the Rajput landlords and the traditional dispensers of justice of erstwhile masters of the lower castes of this village. Thus, caste, which was a dividing factor, reshaped itself in the new circumstances to form a unifying factor. Not only for political gains but for material welfare and social status also, caste alliances came to be established.

It is very clear now that caste as a dynamic reality of Indian society has accompanied changes and, in the process, has continued to survive the onslaught of time. The characteristic of adaptability to forces of change has been a feature of the caste in the past and it continues to remain its main characteristic even today. This pattern of change therefore, constitutes an element of continuity of this system.

The changes introduced during the British period and post-independent India have witnessed the changing functions of caste and how it has continued to exist as a social institution unique to India. In this section we discussed how in spite of accommodating to social change through a long period of Indian history, especially during and after the British rule, caste has continued to exist.

CASTE AND CHANGE

We have seen that in spite of the varied forces of change, caste has continued to adapt itself to the new circumstances and remain a significant part of Indian society. Here we are going to examine the changes that have come about in the caste system itself. In the above section on caste and rituals we have mentioned how some major aspects like the notions of purity and pollution, commensality, the jajmani system and rituals connected with it have declined. Untouchability has been legally abolished and declared a punishable crime under the Constitution of India. Thus, change has come about in caste system and its practices at the ideological level. But besides the ideological level, it is at the structural i.e. organisational level, as well as at the level of its functions, that major changes have come about. In the following sections we are going to examine some of these changes in caste system.

FROM A CLOSED SYSTEM TO AN OPEN SYSTEM

Indian society has undergone tremendous social change, as mentioned earlier, due to the impact of the British rule. Caste being part of the Indian society too has, therefore, experienced change. Society has moved from a relatively closed system to an open system. A closed system has been described as one in which elements like caste, class and power are combined together. In other words, this system is based on "cumulative inequalities" where higher caste implies higher class and consequently higher power. An open system is one in which inequalities of caste, class and power are dispersed. In this case a person can be of lower caste but belong to upper class. This system has more avenues for social mobility open for the lower castes and classes in terms of employment, education, economic enterprise, politics, etc.

The caste system as a closed system of stratification in pre-British India does not mean that there was no social mobility possible at that time. We have already clarified that change was always an aspect of the continuity of this system. Another point is that no system can be either absolutely closed or absolutely open. So, in what way can we talk about change now? The change in the caste system today is due to the forces of modernisation set free by the British. Another force of change is our adoption of parliamentary democracy and giving ourselves a constitution, which seeks to secure to all its citizens justice, liberty, equality and fraternity (Preamble of the Constitution of India). One of the major consequences of introducing parliamentary democracy was that every Indian adult above the age of 21 (and since the Elections in 1989 voting age has been reduced to 18 years) has the right to vote his or her leader to power. Since, every individual vote counts it is imperative for a leader to get the allegiance of the people. In this sense numerical power and caste identity has become very important.

The modern political system, new market forces, development of science and technology has had several repercussions on the traditional caste structure. The association between elements of different kinds of land-ownership, political power and status based on caste is slowly giving way to status achieved through education, new occupations available due to the opening up of new economic opportunities, higher income, and so on.

In his study of **Caste, Class and Power Changing Patterns of Stratification in a Tanjore Village**, Andre Beteille (1966) wrote that earlier (i.e. in pre-British period) education was a virtual monopoly of the Brahmins who dominated this area. But at the time of his study, the educational system had become far more open, both in principle and in practice. Many non-Brahman and even untouchable boys attended the schools at Sripuram (the village studied by Beteille) and the adjacent town of Thiruvaiyur. Because of this education the non-Brahmans and the Adi-Dravidas (the lowest castes) could compete on more equal terms with the Brahmins for white-collar jobs. It helped them to participate in the political affairs more equally with the Brahmins.

According to Beteille in the towns and cities white-collar jobs were relatively caste-free. Non-Brahmins from Sripuram could work as clerks or accountants in offices at Thiruvaiyur and Tanjore along with the Brahmins. Within the village land had come into the market since, due to several factors, some of the Brahmins had to sell their land. This enabled the, non-Brahmins and even a few Adi-Dravidas to buy it. Thus, as land came into the market, the productive organisation of the village tended to become free from the structure of caste (Beteille 1966: 3). Beteille had come to the conclusion that in a way changes in the distribution of power was the most radical change in the traditional social structure. He said that the traditional elites of Sripuram, Comprising the Brahman landowners, had lost its grip over the village and the new leaders of the village depend for power on many factors in addition to caste. There had come into being new organisations and institutions, which provided new bases of power. These organisations and institutions were at least formally free of caste. All these changes in effect altered, if not weakened, the role of caste in the political arena (Beteille 1966: 16). Keeping in mind this perspective, let us now examine the relation or link between the institution of caste and modern politics in India at a wider level than the village.

CASTE IN MODERN POLITY

Unlike the European experience, political democracy in India did not emerge as a natural development of ideas, values and technologies. In fact, the notion of political democracy was adopted by the national leaders to serve the people of India in the best way possible. Thus, the values and attitudes, which went with this form of polity, had to be inculcated in its people. We see that the new political order is universal in constitution and in principle rejects the demands of caste. However, in practice it has accommodated a variety of interests, in addition to those of caste. Caste has, in fact, come to terms with the democratic political process.

Political conflicts can almost be seen as conflicts between caste groups or caste alliances. The beginning of political consciousness on caste lines is evident in references made to caste sabhas or caste associations. The reason for this development can be seen in the fact that politics being a competitive enterprise, its purpose is the acquisition of power for realisation of certain goals. This is possible through identifying and manipulating the existing, as well as emerging alliances.

Politics has drawn caste into its web for organising support and in articulating the needs of the masses. Different parties and movements mobilise different social status groups as resources for their political objectives. Thus, even today we often hear of candidates being selected for political parties on the basis of caste. The caste provided for organised party politics a ready-made system of segments, which could be used to marshall support. Liberal education, government patronage, and an expanding franchise have been major factors that have penetrated the caste system. Discontent and exploitation prevailing within the caste groups provided a basis for organising caste factions and alliances. Thus, modern politics found an ongoing vertical network of caste and made the structure of caste a political vehicle.

According to Rudolph and Rudolph (1967: 11), caste has in its transformed state, helped the Indian masses (of which nearly 70 percent live in the villages) make a success of representative democracy. It has fostered the growth of equality by making Indians less separate and more alike. Indians are becoming less separate in the sense that due to the electoral system numerical strength i.e., the number of votes, as mentioned earlier, makes a lot of difference in power. Thus, it is in the interest of large majority of castes to come together to achieve their political goals. In this process, caste associations and caste federations are formed.

Formation of caste federations refers to a grouping together of members of distinct endogamous groups into a single organisation for common objectives. One of the most active caste federation is the Kshatriya Sabha of Gujarat. It dates from 1946 and includes several jati-clusters of the region, notably the Rajputs, Bariyas and Bhils. It was not only a caste community but was also a political community. The Sabha had made use of new avenues of politics and promoted Rajput leaders. The federation welcomed all jatis who followed the Rajput model in their life style. Even the poor landless and Muslim Rajputs (Rajputs who converted to Islam) were taken into their fold. The founder of the sabha believed that Kshatriyas were a 'class' and not just a caste. To prove this point many of the rich, aristocratic Rajputs would even go to the extent of having a common meal with the Bariyas and Bhils. With numerical strength they gained political importance and influence (Kothari 1970: 30-70).

The relationship that caste bears to politics can be best understood in terms of three types of political mobilisation discussed by Rudolph and Rudolph (1967) which exemplify different phases of political development in India. These three types of political mobilisation are i) vertical, ii) horizontal and iii) differential.

i) **Vertical mobilisation:** This is a process in which political support is acquired by the traditional notables, such as the erstwhile Rajas, feudatory landlords, locally dominant caste elites and so on. This is possible in a society organised and integrated along caste lines having mutual dependence and where legitimacy of traditional authority still survives. Due to their traditional authority the notables

are able to get the support of their dependents, socially inferior groups in the traditional manner where the local Raja or landlord used to protect and promote the interests of his 'praja' i.e., the subjects and in return gained their loyalty and deference. Rudolph and Rudolph (1967: 24) maintain that vertical mobilisation remains a viable strategy for dominant classes and castes until dependents, tenants, and clients become politicised enough to be mobilised by ideological appeals to class or community interests and sentiments.

ii) Horizontal mobilisation: This is a process in which popular political support is marshalled by class or community leaders and their specialised organisations. As the term horizontal indicates, the solidarity among classes and caste groups such as provided by the caste federations introduces a new pattern of cleavage by challenging the vertical solidarities and structures of traditional societies.

The major difference between this form of mobilisation and vertical mobilisation is that here the agent of mobilisation is the political party rather than the local notable. Here political parties appeal to voters directly as individuals or indirectly through the organised groups to which they belong. Direct appeals to individual voters may emphasise ideology or issues, on the one hand, or community identification through caste, on the other. This mobilisation is possible only as long as internal differentiation has not developed and caste communities are by and large homogeneous, cohesive and their interests are still diffuse and varied.

iii) Differential mobilisation: This process takes place when the changes that caste has and is undergoing carries it beyond the traditional ascriptive definition. These changes include internal differentiation or fission, and integration of several caste groups in caste federations and associations i.e. fusion which express the shared interests, symbols and norms of these castes. It also brings out the caste from its village home that it does not remain rooted to the village social structure alone.

We can explain the differential mobilisation through the example of the Rajputs of Rajasthan. The Rajputs were the rulers, feudal lords, court retainers of princely states before Independence. At that time they formed an association called the Kshatriya Mahasabha which initially represented all ranks within the community. In 1954 a new caste association was formed called the Bhooswami Sangh.

This new association brought into open the conflict between the "small" Rajputs whose modest landholdings had to be supplemented by income from service under the princes and jagirdars. These princes and jagirdars, however, had in most cases dismissed them from service with the advent of the land reforms after Independence. Thus, when the rich and powerful Rajputs refused to protect the interests of the "small" Rajputs, they formed the Bhooswami Sangh. This sangh took up the task of protecting the interests of the "small" Rajputs. Political parties, at this time, were quick to capitalise on these class and ideological differences within the Rajput community. This example illustrates the process of differentiation that occurs within the caste community and is used by the political parties.

CASTE ASSOCIATIONS

Caste associations are defined as "paracommunities which enable members of castes to pursue social mobility, political power, and economic advantage" (Rudolph and Rudolph 1967: 29). Caste associations resemble in many ways the voluntary associations or interest groups found in industrially advanced societies. However, caste associations or paracommunities are distinct in many respects from voluntary associations; as well as from natural associations like caste out of which they have developed.

The caste associations are more like the voluntary associations at the organisational level than the traditional caste structures. It has offices, membership, incipient bureaucratisation and legislative process that can be seen through conferences, delegates, and resolutions. But, unlike the voluntary associations, caste associations are characterised by a shared sense of culture, character and status, which gives it solidarity not found in voluntary associations.

The functions of caste associations are diverse. It serves the Indian society by both levelling the sacred and hierarchical caste order and also replacing it. It initiates and manages the efforts of the lower castes to become twice-born, to don the sacred thread which symbolises higher ritual rank and culture. This is clear from the case of the Nadars of Tamil Nadu, a low caste of toddy tappers, who through the efforts of their association, the Nadar Mahajana Sangam formed in 1910, acquired not only higher status but a modern organisation to serve their needs.

According to Kothari (1970: 115), some of the objectives of this association are

- i) To promote the social, material and general welfare of the Nadars
- ii) To take practical measures for the social, moral, and intellectual advancement of the Nadars
- iii) To start schools and colleges for imparting western education to Nadar children and to help poor but deserving pupils belonging to the community with scholarships, books, fees, etc.
- iv) To encourage and promote commercial and industrial enterprise among the members of the community.

These and several other objectives of this caste association and caste associations in general, reveal the significant contribution that these organisations provided to their communities.

We see that the paracommunities or caste associations contribute to fundamental structural and cultural change in Indian society by providing an adaptive institution in which both the traditional as well as modern features of society can meet and fuse.

Caste is losing the functions, norms, and structures it once had and acquiring new ones to suit the new demands and condition of the people. (Rudolph and Rudolph 1967: 103).

FUTURE OF CASTE SYSTEM

Yogendra Singh has talked of two hypotheses pertaining to the future of the caste system in India:

- (i) **Mode of production hypothesis**
- (ii) **Caste resilience hypothesis**

According to the 'mode of production' hypothesis, supported both by the Marxist (A.R. Desai) and non-Marxist (Kingsley Davis) sociologists, caste is declining. According to Kingsley Davis, the evidences of the decline of caste are:

- (1) Noticeable loosening of commensal restrictions and toleration of violation of food taboos;
- (2) Increasing tendency to ignore inter-marriage barriers or increasing number of inter-caste marriages;
- (3) Increase in occupational mobility;
- (4) Total weakening of caste councils;
- (5) Weakening of jajmani system;
- (6) Decreasing influence and dominance of upper castes on lower castes;
- (7) Gradual removal of untouchability; and
- (8) Growth of social mobility.

Kingsley Davis foresees the possibility of transformation of caste into class through adaptive changes under the impact of industrialisation.

The caste ranking contains an explosive class character. He holds that a couple of dozens of castes hold the monopoly of economic resources, political power and available educational and cultural facilities. It will not be possible to abolish caste hierarchy and caste system without adopting basic changes in the eco-nomic structure.

According to ‘caste resilience’ hypothesis, industrialisation, growth of technology, westernisation and other democratic institutional spreads tend to activate and enlarge rather than restrict the process of caste functions. These also contribute to its (caste’s) organisational mobilisation, rationalisation and fusion of ranks. M.N. Srinivas (1964) states that whereas caste mobility in medieval India was based on fission, in modern India it takes the form of fusion of caste segments.

In this process, the nature of caste no doubt undergoes some transformation but it would not be true to assume, that castes change their character. Caste system as such is not altered. Andre Beteille has also supported the thesis of caste resilience. He has referred to evidence for emergence of new caste-like structural forms (professional and occupational groups) which are rigid in structure. He has maintained (1965) “The changes in political and economic systems are not likely to lead to disappearance of castes. The castes of the future will no doubt carry the marks of the caste system”.

A small section of Indian population, comprising the educated elites, probably powerful but numerically insignificant, desires that caste system ought to go. For a vast majority of the Indian population, especially the Hindus envisaging a social system without caste is impossible. Caste is part of their social identity and existence.

The joint family and caste system provide the individual in our society some of the benefits, which a welfare state provides in the industrially advanced countries. Caste stands for a certain amount of cultural homogeneity. However, it has its evil and exploitative side which has not been perceived by the majority of the people, especially the upper castes. It is essential to remember that nothing effective can be achieved unless and until the people themselves are made to realise the unjust nature of caste system. The principle of caste is so firmly entrenched in our political and social life that everyone including the political leader appears to have accepted tacitly these very principles.

The coming of modern means of communication has increased the ‘horizontal stretch of caste’. Far-flung caste groups are able to interact and communicate with each other and find commonalities and shared interests to form clusters and this has resulted in the increase of caste solidarity within a region.

One effect of universal adult franchise is the strengthening of caste consciousness. Political parties are at pains to select candidates who have a social base, usually drawn from the locally dominant caste groups. It is obvious that the eradication of caste is a distant reality, despite the indications to the contrary.

As long as caste performs the functions of a welfare state in India and provides for the common bonds of kinship ties, political groups and alliances, it can be assured of a continued existence in modern India.

SANSKRITISATION, MODERNISATION AND WESTERNISATION

Though the Indian Society which is based on caste system is often regarded as “closed society”, it is not altogether changeless. Within the framework of the caste itself, some kind of mobility is observed. The socio-cultural changes that has taken place in India can mainly be categorised into these processes namely; **Sanskritisation, Westernisation and Modernisation**. These three process reflect an attempt on the part of Indian masses to achieve some amount of mobility both within and outside the framework of the caste system.

SANSKRITISATION:

The term Sanskritisation was introduced into Indian Sociology by Prof. M.N. Srinivas. The term refers to a process whereby people of lower castes collectively try to adopt upper caste practices and beliefs, as a preliminary step to acquire higher status. Thus, this indicates a process of cultural mobility that took place in the traditional social system of India.

Definition of Sanskritisation

The definition of Sanskritisation was given by M.N. Srinivas in his "Social Change in Modern India" published in 1971. It means "a process by which a low caste or a tribe or other group changes its customs, rituals, ideology, and a way of life in the direction of a high and frequently, twice born caste." The process seems to be associated with the role of local "dominant caste"

Originally, Srinivas used the term Brahmanization to denote this process. However, when he was confronted with other models for emulation, he gave up the term Brahmanization in preference to the term sanskritisation.

Sanskritisation may result in the erosion of cultural autonomy of the women folk which includes erosion in the freedom to choose life partner and prevalence of a rigid sexual morality, changes in family structure include a movement towards a joint family and the concomitant stronger authority of father, monogamy, a stronger caste organization with increased tendency of outcasting. Also, a rigid commensality prevails along with change in food habits outlawing beef and pork eating and consumption of liquor, more emphasis is placed on the acquisition of higher education, adoption of dowry practices instead of bride price.

Srinivas has further explained that political and economic factors have affected the process of sanskritisation. With the establishment of British rule in India the lower castes got more opportunities to sanskritise themselves and subsequently raise their social status because the new rulers and a new political order were not socially involved in the dynamics of caste hierarchy.

Analysis of the Process of Sanskritization

An analysis of the process of "Sanskritization" would reveal to us the following aspects.

1. **Sanskritization as a process of imitation:** "Sanskritization" denotes a process in which the lower castes try to imitate life-styles of upper castes in their attempt to raise their social status. The process seems to be associated with the role of local "dominant caste". Though the lower castes for some time, imitated Brahmins they soon shifted it towards the local dominant caste which in most cases was a non-Brahmin dominant caste.
2. **Sanskritization indicates the process of upward mobility.** In this process, a caste is trying to raise its position in the caste hierarchy not at once, but over a period of time. It would take, sometimes, a period of one or two generations.
3. Sanskritization indicates **only positional change**. Mobility that is involved in the process of Sanskritization results only in "positional changes" for particular castes or sections of castes and need not necessarily lead to a "structural change". It means while individual castes move up or down, the structure as such remains the same.
4. Sanskritization is **not a new phenomenon** as such. M.N. Srinivas writes: "Sanskritization has been a major process of cultural change in Indian history, and it has occurred in every part of the Indian sub-continent. It may have been more active at some periods than at others and some parts of India are more sanskritised than others; but there is no doubt that the process has been universal"

5. The castes which enjoyed higher economic and political power but rated relatively low in ritual ranking went after Sanskritization for they felt that their claim to a higher position was not fully effective. The three main aspects of power in the caste system are the ritual, the economic and the political ones. The possession of power in any one sphere usually leads to the acquisition of power in the other two. But Srinivas opines that inconsistencies do occur.

6. **"Economic betterment is not a necessary pre-condition to Sanskritization, nor economic development must necessarily lead to Sanskritization.** However, sometimes a group [caste, tribe] may start by acquiring, political power and this may lead to economic development and Sanskritization. Economic betterment, the acquisition of political power, education, leadership, and a desire to move up in the hierarchy, are all relevant factors in Sanskritization, and each case of Sanskritization may show all or some of these factors mixed up in different measures."

7. **Sanskritization is not necessarily confined to the castes** within the Hindu community, it is found in tribal communities also. Example, The Bhils of Western India, the Gonds and Oraons of Middle India, and the Pahadiyas of Himalayan region have come under the influence of Sanskritization. These tribal communities now claim themselves to be Hindus, for their communities represent some caste groups within the fold of Hinduism.

8. The process of Sanskritization serves as a "reference group". It is through this process that a caste group tries to orient its beliefs, practices, values, attitudes and "life-style" in terms of another superior or dominant group, so that it can also get recognition. Since this term was made applicable by M.N. Srinivas even to Kshatriya, Vaishya and Shudra models (in addition to Brahmana model), it has greater relevance to function as a "reference group".

9. Sanskritization **does not take place in the same manner in all the places.**

10. The British rule in India provides a favourable atmosphere for Sanskritization to take place. Political independence has weakened the trend towards this change.

11. Significant developments in the realm of material culture have accelerated the process of Sanskritization. Industrialisation, occupational mobility, mass media of communication, spread of literacy, advent of Western technology, improvement in the transportation system etc., have speeded up the process of Sanskritization. Introduction of parliamentary system of democracy and universal suffrage have also contributed to the increased Sanskritization.

12. Sanskritization has often been construed as a kind of protest against the traditional caste system. Sanskritization is a type of protection against the caste system in which the status is ascribed or predetermined. Lower castes which are disillusioned with their predetermined statuses and impressed with the higher statuses accorded to the upper caste, naturally desire to go up in the status hierarchy.

Criticism

1. Yogendra Singh opines that "Sanskritization fails to account for many aspects of cultural change in the past and contemporary India as it neglects the non-Sanskritic traditions". Observing the truism of Yogendra Singh's comments in one of his studies in a village, Mackim Marriot observes that, we cannot establish that the process of sanskritization always takes place by replacing or removing the non-Sanskritic rituals. "Sanskritic rites are often added on to non-Sanskrit rites without replacing them".

2. Dr. D.N. Majumdar comments that it is wrong to assume the process of Sanskritization as a universal process observed throughout India. In his study of Mohana, village in Uttar Pradesh, he observed a strong exception to this assumption. In this village, as he noticed, the lower caste people do not have any urge or inclination to imitate the "life-styles" of Brahmins or any other dominant higher caste of

that region. If a cobbler wears Tilak (or Vibhuti), dhoti and the sacred thread and follows some of the customs of higher castes, nobody recognises him as an upper caste man.

3. When we try to interpret certain changes that have taken place in the field of social mobility in the light of Sanskritization, we face certain paradoxes. According to Dr. Srinivas, political and economic forces are normally favourable for Sanskritization but the “policy of reservation” a politico constitutional attempt to elevate the status of lower castes and backward class people, presents here a different picture. Theoretically, the policy of reservation must be supportive of Sanskritization. But paradoxically, it goes, against it. Those who avail themselves of the “reservation” benefits have developed a vested interest in calling themselves “dalits” or “scheduled caste” people. They want to enjoy the benefits of “reservation” permanently

4. “As suggested by Harold A. Gould, often the motive force behind Sanskritization is not of cultural imitations per se but an expression of challenge and revolt against the socio-economic deprivations.”

The prime motive-forces behind Sanskritization is this factor of repressed hostility which manifests itself not in the form of rejecting the caste system but in the form of its victims trying to seize control of it and thereby expiate their frustrations on the same battlefield where they acquired them. Only then can there be a sense of satisfaction in something achieved that is tangible, concrete, and relevant to past experience. If the lower castes rejected the caste system out of band before acting out their hostilities to it by trying to master it they would be left with a hollow sense of non-fulfillment, a sense that they never successfully attacked and conquered the thing in terms of which their ideals, their aspirations, their frustrations, in fact their whole perception of life, were formed. Besides this, it is doubtful that they could structure their hostilities and aspirations in any other way as yet because of the very fact that they have remained throughout recorded Indian history illiterate, cowed prisoners of the caste system. Their perception of alternative forms must by definition be dim and indecisive.

Yogendra Singh writes: “Sanskritization is thus a cultural camouflage for latent interclass and inter-caste competition for economic and social power, typical of a traditional bound society where traditionally the privileged upper castes hold monopoly over power and social status. When the impact of the external forces like political democratisation, land reforms and other social reforms break this monopoly of the upper castes, the cultural camouflage of Sanskritization is thrown away, in favour of an open conflict with the privileged classes based on nativistic solidarity.”

Case study

Brahmin model

For example, the Lingayats of Karnataka belonged to different castes before they embraced Saivism. After accepting Saivism they adopted the customs of Brahmins. Likewise, the Smiths of South India who call themselves as Vishwa Brahmins today have adopted the Brahminic way of life. The Koris of Eastern Uttar Pradesh were originally non-Brahmins. However, the Brahmins whom the Koris served loyally recognised the latter as Brahmins. Once the Koris got recognition as Brahmins, they acquired the customs and social practices of Brahmins. Now they refuse to accept even water from the Brahmins, considering themselves purer than the Brahmins.

Kshatriya model

Gulzars or Marathas of Maharashtra were Sudras. Sivaji belonged to this caste. As Sivaji came to power, he went through a religious rite of transition into Kshatriyahood. Along with Shivaji the remaining Gulzars or Marathas became Kshatriyas. Since then, adopted Kshatriyas way of life.

The Kayasthas of Uttar Pradesh served as scribes to Moghuls and British rulers. They were a low caste in the twelfth century but by the nineteenth century they became Kshatriyas. But Kayasthas in West Bengal remain to be Sudras.

To cite another example the Khatri in Punjab were Sudras. They patronised the local Brahmins. As recipients of benefits, the Brahmins conceded to the claim of the Khatri to the status of Kshatriyas.

In Medieval South India, certain families of Maravars in Tamil Nadu acquired wealth by serving the rulers. All such families formed as a group and started practicing endogamy and separate identity and higher rank i.e. Kshatriya.

The Noniyas of Eastern Uttar Pradesh were salt maker and earth mover their status was low, just above untouchables. In the second half of the nineteenth century and during the Second World War some of them made money as contractors on government roads, bridges, and public works. They found an organisation and imitated the way of life of Kshatriyas. They labelled themselves as Chouhan Rajputs.

Vaishya model

Kanbis of Gujarat were peasant cultivators. In 1931, they officially changed their caste name to the more honorific Patidars and emulated the way of life of the dominant caste of Rajput. As times changed Vaishyas became the dominant caste in Gujarat. As a result, Patidars emulated the way of life of the dominant caste of Vaishyas. Today they rank themselves with the Vaishyas.

WESTERNIZATION

The concept of Westernisation introduced by Prof. M.N. Srinivas seems to be much simpler than the concept of Sanskritization. Like Sanskritization, this term is also of great help in analysing the socio-cultural changes taking place in India for the past 250 years. M.N. Srinivas has used this term mainly to refer to the impact of British rule on the Indian society. Srinivas has also tried to use this concept in a general manner to refer to the impact of the West on the non-western societies.

Definition of the Term

“Westernisation” refers to the “the changes brought about in Indian society and culture as a result of over 150 years of British rule and the term subsumes changes occurring at different levels-technology, institutions, ideology, values.”

Main Features of the Process of Westernisation

1. Westernisation compared to Sanskritization is a simpler concept. As already made clear, it explains the impact of Western contact (particularly of British rule) on the Indian society and culture.
2. Some Main Areas Affected by Westernisation: The process of Westernisation, according to M.N. Srinivas, mainly refers to the changes that took place in some main areas such as technology, institutions, ideology and values.
3. “Westernisation is an **inclusive, complex, and many-layered concept**”: Westernisation, education and “life-styles” had a great impact on Indians daily life. The Western influences made them drop out some of their traditional customs, accept many of the new practices and make a compromise between the old and the new in some other areas of life. Example: Urbanised Indians dropped the practices of sitting on the floor to eat food served on dining leaves. They became accustomed to dining tables, Chairs, stainless steel utensils, spoons etc. Indians made use of various instruments of modern technology such as motor cars, printing press, sewing machines, typewriters, water pumps etc.
4. The form and pace of Westernisation of India varied from region to region and from one section of population to another (Srinivas 1985): For example, one group of people became Westernised in their dress, manners, speech, sports and in the gadgets, they used; while another absorbed Western science, knowledge and literature, remaining relatively free from certain other aspects of Westernisation. For example, Brahmins accepted the Western dress habits and educational system

and also used gadgets such as radio, television, car, telephone etc. But they did not accept the British diet, dancing, hunting and such other habits. This distinction is, however, only relative and not absolute.

5. According to Srinivas, Westernisation pervades political and cultural fields also. He writes: "In the political and cultural fields, Westernisation has given birth not only to nationalism but also to revivalism, communalism, "casteism", heightened linguistic consciousness, and regionalism. To make matters even more bewildering, revivalist movements have used Western type schools and colleges and books, pamphlets and journals to propagate their ideas."

6. Westernisation may speed up the process of Sanskritization: According to Srinivas, "the increase in Westernisation does not retard the process of Sanskritization. Both go on simultaneously, and to some extent, increase in Westernisation accelerates the process of Sanskritization. For example, the postal facilities, railways, buses and newspaper media, which are the fruits of Western impact on India, render more organised religious pilgrimages, meetings, caste solidarities, etc. possible now than in the past."

7. Preference of the lower caste people towards Westernisation? At present, the lower caste people feel that it is easier and more advantageous for them to elevate their social status through: Westernisation" than "Sanskritization". Through sanskritization they could only imitate the upper caste people and their life-style to enhance their social esteem or respectability. Whereas Westernisation provided a wide opportunity for the lower caste people to attain equality on par with the upper caste people in important areas such as education, profession, politics, financial matters, etc., Westernisation helped them to withstand and resist the dominance of upper castes especially in the fields such as education, government jobs and politics. Hence, there is a greater trend towards Westernisation than Sanskritization. The extent, effectiveness, tempo and the urge towards Sanskritization, seem to be diminishing giving place to the process of Westernisation.

EFFECTS OF WESTERNIZATION

1. Westernisation brought about immediate changes in the main areas, namely, Technology, Institutions, Ideology and Values.
2. Westernisation provided inspiration for a number of social reform movements such as the Brahma Samaj, Arya Samaj, Sri Ramakrishna Mission, Theosophical Society, Sarvodaya.
3. Westernisation provided inspiration for the freedom movement. Western ideas and values also inspired a number of freedom fighters to fight against the British imperialism.
4. Westernisation has led to a new style of life. The western influences made Indians imitate the Western way of life and culture in several respects.
5. Westernisation has also brought about some negative effects. It made Indians to imitate the West indiscriminately. In this process of imitation, they blindly imitated and picked up the deficiencies, vices, and evil practices of the Western people.

Limitations

Some Comments on its Limitations Scholars have also criticised the concept of "Westernisation". Some such critical remarks are recalled here.

1. The concepts of Sanskritization and Westernisation primarily analyse social changes in "cultural" and not in "structural" terms. This denotes that these terms have a limited range of application and use.

2. "Srinivas" model explains the process of social change only in India which is based on the caste system. It is not useful for other societies".

3. Further, Srinivas equates Westernisation with the British impact on India. But, Yogendra Singh points out that this is too narrow, since after independence the impact of the Russian and American versions of modernisation has considerable. Further, for many new elites in India, as also in the other new states of Asia, the term Westernisation has a pejorative connotation because of its association with former colonial domination of these countries by the West. He states: "It is, therefore, more value-located than term modernisation which to us appears a better substitute."

4. It is also commented that the Western model which Srinivas has praised has its own contradictions. The Western model sometimes conveys values that are contrary to the ones such as rationalism, humanitarianism, equalitarianism, etc. In this context, mention can be made of the facts of Western life such as racial prejudice, colour segregation and exploitative nature of the Western economy, etc. These facts contradict humanitarian ideals, equalitarian principles and rational outlook on life.

Finally, it can be said that the twin concepts of Sanskritization and Westernisation introduced by M.N. Srinivas in explaining the cultural changes that are taking place in India, do have their own importance. But the basic question is this: Do these twin concepts explain cultural change with all its ramifications? Are they inclusive and universal enough to provide a satisfactory explanation to all the major cultural changes that have taken place throughout the country? According to Yogendra Singh, only the concept of "modernisation" can provide a satisfactory answer to these questions.

Impact of Westernisation on sanskritization

According to Srinivas westernisation influenced Brahmanism itself. One finds that a Brahmin will marry his girl before puberty and if he failed to find a boy before that age, it was believed that he has committed a sin. But today under the influence of Westernisation he will not marry his girl before the age of 18. Widow remarriage, which was not thought of earlier is now becoming common and today a Brahmin even thinks it absurd to shave the head of a widow. Monogamy is still considered most suitable.

Srinivas points out that the expanding means of communications like postal facilities, railways, newspapers and periodicals, etc., which are the result of the western technology given fillip to pilgrimages, religious propaganda, and caste and communal congregations. Srinivas says, "Sanskritization means not only the adoption of new customs and habits, but exposure to new ideals and values which have found frequent expression in the vast body of Sanskrit literature, sacred as well as secular." To quote him again, "the development of communications carried Sanskritization to areas previously inaccessible and spread of literary carried it to groups very low in the caste hierarchy. The introduction by the British of western political institutions like parliamentary democracy has contributed to the increased Sanskritization of the country." Thus, Westernisation has considerably helped in the spread of Sanskritization.

But in many ways Westernisation has come in conflict with Sanskritization as well. It was under the impact of Westernisation that the Brahmins adopted the diet and dress of the westerners. They began to get English education. The Brahmin caste, which was the superior most one is now in a dilemma. The British found that the village castes and traders were near to them in food habits or more adaptable to their ways of living and thus went nearer to them than the Brahmins. Thus, in the eyes of rulers those engaged in trade were more important than the orthodox Brahmins. Gradually some of the Brahmins began to accept British type and kind of diet was nowhere to be seen even many Brahmins discarded sacred thread. For health reasons many Brahmins do not hesitate to take raw eggs and such medicines, which they know have been made from various organs of animals. Cigarettes and liquor are now used in some cases. The Brahmins have also given up their old occupation and instead they have taken up new ones. They now go beyond the seas to serve. Previously they were opposed

to taking to medical profession as that meant touching the bodies of scheduled castes and also dead and impure bodies. Now we find Brahmins who have taken the medical professions.

But whereas the Brahmins have taken to Westernisation, non-Brahmin castes are still taking to Brahminic customs, traditions, rituals etc. Thus, Westernisation has its effects and impact on Sanskritization. But there is something strange in the phenomenon, namely the role of untouchables. The untouchables have been occupied by other three castes. In spite of the fact that the tribals and others have been accepted in the fold of Hindu society, the untouchables have socially not been accepted and they have been kept out. It may be concluded with the words of Prof. M.N. Srinivas when he says that, "the consequences of existence of the occasionally conflicting, pressure of Sanskritization and Westernisation provide an interesting field of systematic sociological analysis."

TRIBE-CASTE CONTINUUM

F.G. Bailey (1960) and Surjit Sinha (1965) proposed the concept of tribe-caste continuum in Indian context. In fact, Indian ethnographers were grappling with the problem of discriminating between tribe and caste. Sir Herbert Risley (1891) was the earliest ethnographer to point out that it was difficult to "draw a demarcating line between tribe and caste" because many tribes have caste features. Later J.H. Hutton (1931) also expressed similar opinion when he was dealing with the data on caste and tribe in India.

According to Max Weber, when an Indian tribe loses its territorial significance, it assumes the form of an Indian caste. In this way, the tribe is a local group whereas the caste is a social group.

Anthropologists have differed on the question relating to tribe and caste. According to Ghurye tribal people are backward Hindus differing only in degrees from the other segments of Hindu society. This is because many tribes have been seen following Hindu religious practices in their very crude form.

According to N.K Bose there are many similarities in customs between tribes and castes and they are interdependent. Marriage within the clan is forbidden both in the tribe as well as in the caste. Both generally don't encourage marriage outside the group. And also, both tend to maintain their group identity.

In caste individuals generally pursue their own definite occupations because functions are divided under the caste system. In the tribe individuals can indulge in whatever profession they prefer as there is no fixed relation between them and occupation. Members of a same tribe have to pursue different occupation because they are a society within themselves. These points of differences and similarities between caste and tribe led to confusion about definition of the terms. Also, there were some populations which fulfill the criteria for both of the terms.

However, the demarcation between tribe and caste continued to be an unsolved problem till 1959. In 1960, F.G. Bailey in his book "Tribe, Caste and Nation" solved the problem of differentiation of a tribe from a caste in the most acceptable way by proposing tribe-caste continuum. Redfield (1941: The Folk culture of Yucatan) was the first anthropologist to explain the concept of "continuum". Following this concept, Bailey, (1961) proposed the concept of tribe-caste continuum.

According to Bailey, "**tribe-caste continuum is a polar ideal type of construction, which implies that no known society precisely corresponds to the description of the extreme ends, but all fall near one end or the other of the poles or in between**". There is neither pure tribe nor pure caste; **pure tribe and pure caste exist only in ideal terms**. Ideal tribe and ideal caste cannot be treated as separate entities, but as opposite ends of a single line or continuum.

Bailey's argument is that a caste society is hierarchical while a tribal society is segmentary and egalitarian. But in contemporary India both caste and tribe are being merged into a different system which is neither one nor the other.

Particular societies can be located at different points along the line, some near to the tribe, others close to the caste.

Although it is important to note that when Bailey talks of tribe-caste continuum, he talks of it in strictly socio-political sense. According to him the social structure and political system are most easily affected by the neighbouring communities and can change to a system which suits them in the best way.

This continuum can also be understood as a result of interaction between Redfield's little and great traditions. Here Jati or caste can be taken as a part of great tradition while tribe as a part of little traditions. the presence or references of tribes like Khasis and Bhils in the epics and texts of the great traditions like Mahabharata and Ramayana etc go to prove that despite their general isolation the tribes did maintain, though occasionally cultural contacts with the larger Hindu society. The absorption, into great tradition, of several traits from little tradition because of occasional contacts is also responsible for the tribe-caste continuum.

Surjit Sinha's Studies

(i) Surjit Sinha, a disciple of Redfield, tried to understand the tribe-caste continuum on the basis of social structure and culture. It is similar to Redfield's concept of folk-urban continuum.

The tribal end is characterized by the following demographic and social structural features:

- a. It is isolated in ecology, demography, economy, politics and other social relations from other ethnic groups.
- b. It can be viewed as autonomous and disconnected from the great tradition of Indian civilization.

In contrast, the **caste end is characterized by** the following demographic and structural features:

- a. It is typically connected, in ecology, demography, economy and social relations with other ethnic groups.
- b. It can be viewed as interdependent and connected with great tradition within Indian civilization.

Surjit Sinha explains it with the help of his study of the tribals. There are millions of tribals in India. All of them are not pure tribes.

There are tribes like Bhumij, Gonds and several other tribes in Central India. They were originally egalitarian. But they imitated the way of life of Rajputs. In this connection, they reorganized their clan system. They created new myths to justify their Rajput ancestry. They changed their marriage rules, adopted Rajput economic, social, political and religious life. They appointed Brahmin priests to officiate their religious rituals and practices. They contracted alliances with the Rajputs in Uttar Pradesh and Rajasthan. They established States and became their rulers. Thus, certain tribes became castes.

Surjit Sinha then considers the lower castes. Many of the lower castes, according to Sinha, share several tribal elements, which are as follows:

- a. Emphasis on equality in social behaviour within one's own ethnic group.
- b. Considerable freedom of cultural participation for the women.
- c. A value system little burdened by particular asceticism.
- d. Similarity in the supernaturalism of the lower castes and tribes wherein the pantheon primarily consists of local gods.

The Gonds in Bihar and Jharkhand:

The transformation of a tribe into a caste is subsumed in the wider phenomenon of the absorption of that community into Hinduism. The different communities of Gond in Bihar and Jharkhand can be seen at different stages of assimilation. Their movement on the tribe-caste continuum scale may be viewed as the common process of transition taking place in India.

The fact that the Gonds are not bound to a particular area or territory that gives them the character of caste. The extent of their cultural approximation differs from each other. The Gond of Ranchi and Palamau are placed nearest to the tribal end of the tribe-caste continuum scale. They stand between two competing traditions in the region they inhabit. They are influenced by, on the one hand, the Hindu caste and on the other hand, by Munda, Oraon and other tribal groups. They are clearly inclined towards the 'little tradition' of Hinduism. A large number of Hindu deities are worshipped. They participate in almost all Hindu festivals. Hindu rituals at birth, marriage and death are imitated. This indicates their glide towards Hinduism. One finds the influence of Hinduism stronger in Singhbhum.

They immigrated to that area from Orissa and they were under the strong influence of Hinduism there. Their worship pattern reveals that they are deeply impressed by Hindu religious patterns. Unlike in Ranchi and Palamau, the Gond of Singhbhum enjoy the status of a lower Hindu caste at whose hands water may be accepted even though this is not explicit.

The Tripura tribes

Long ago, some Bodo speaking tribes belonging to the Indo-Mongoloid stock, such as the Tripura, Riang, Jamatiya, Noatia and Kuki got themselves settled in Tripura. Tripura chief Chhengthung Fa after subjugating other tribes, established his authority to rule over them. He assumed the title of Maha Manikya and left a line of rulers belonging to Manikya dynasty to rule over Tripura. This marked the beginning of the state formation process in Tripura. In the absence of any written language in Tripura, the Raja started using Bengali language. Sanskrit written in Bengali script was used for inscribing legends on the coins. These developments suggest the presence of Hindu influence from the early phase of state formation in Tripura. It meant the establishment of Bengali and Sanskrit as the languages of the Tripura people in their predominantly tribal society. In all probabilities, Brahmins declared the Raja as a descendant of the famous Lunar dynasty of Kshatriyas.

The kings of Tripura were recognized as Hindu kings connected with the 'great tradition' of Indian civilization. In Tripura and outside they built a number of famous temples of Hindu gods and goddesses. According to royal proclamations, the Tripuras were to be called as Tripura Kshatriyas. Besides worshiping their own traditional deities, they also began worshiping Hindu gods and goddesses and celebrating Hindu festivals.

Tribes like the Jamatiyas, Riang and Noatias were not of equal social status. The Jamatiyas who served as soldiers generally, were better off than the others. Later on they adopted the system of settled wet-rice cultivation and turned out to be successful farmers. The Noatias were not treated as Tripur Kshatriya initially. Their advanced section was included in the Tripur Kshatriya by an order of the king. This order also stipulated that as and when the backward Noatias achieved progress, they would be admitted into the Kshatriya fold.

This account shows the movement of the Tripura Tribes from the tribal pole towards the caste pole along the tribe-caste continuum axis. The king patronized and insisted the integration of the Tripuras into the Hindu fold.

TRIBALISATION

Evidences of the phenomenon now called as ‘tribalization,’ are also available. The traditional aspect of tribalization is defined by K.S. Singh as ‘acceptance of tribal mores, rituals and beliefs by incoming communities.’

Nihar Ranjan Ray suggests a broad-based assimilation process affecting vital aspects of religious beliefs and rituals and social practices of the immigrating communities of the Aryans. It is assumed that the various totemistic and animistic beliefs of the Aryans are the results of their emulation of the culture of the autochthons, i.e. the Adivasis. Ray finds out a lot of rituals and practices, such as the worship of ‘village gods’ (Gram Devata) where the Brahmin priest has no role, whereas worshiping of ‘village gods’ in open spaces is strictly forbidden in Brahminical injunctions.

K.S. Singh suggests that acceptance of tribal mores is easier for the middle and lower segments of the caste hierarchical order. They move in search of land or to offer their services to their tribal masters. This process does not affect the Brahmin and other high-caste people.

